

Brendan Bartram

Attitudes to Modern Foreign Language Learning

Insights from Comparative Education



ATTITUDES TO MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Brendan Bartram



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Chapter 1

Introduction: Attitudes to language learning

By way of introduction, this chapter opens with an examination of English attitudes to modern foreign language learning. The rather bleak picture that emerges is compared with that in two other English-speaking countries, namely Australia and the USA, where attitudes appear remarkably similar. Comparisons are then made with Germany and the Netherlands, where a rather different attitudinal climate seems to prevail. This overview is followed by a discussion of what the book aims to achieve by making comparisons in this field, and, finally, the structure and research context underpinning the book are outlined.

English attitudes to language learning

Modern foreign language learning (MFL) continues to be a controversial item on the educational agenda in many countries, particularly in parts of the world where English is spoken as the first language. There still appears to be a very widespread perception that English speakers are poor linguists, in terms of their attitudes, their motivation to learn and their levels of achieved competence. Such views are frequently expressed in the media and elsewhere:

The British are notoriously bad at foreign languages.

(Haughton 2002: 1)

Americans' incompetence in foreign languages is nothing short of scandalous.

(Panetta 1999: 1)

Although innate national inabilities cannot be to blame, 'there is something that looks very like a national indisposition' (Leighton 1991: 51) to language learning. A national survey carried out by *The Times Educational Supplement* eleven years after Leighton's research offers nothing to indicate

that the situation in England has changed:

Across all schools, the greatest obstacle to expanding language learning is seen as pupil attitudes.

(Ward 2002: 6)

Other and more recent UK surveys and reports (including the government's own *Language Review* – DFES 2007) have added to concerns by revealing a steep decline in the numbers of pupils taking national qualifications in foreign languages at fourteen, sixteen and eighteen. Widespread negative attitudes to MFL are often held responsible for this decline in language study, which sees a situation today where only one in twenty progresses from GCSE to A Level. Stables and Wikeley (1999) paint a very bleak attitudinal picture and find little evidence to talk of anything but 'a decline in attitudes to languages' (p. 27). Their research revealed that French and German were the least enjoyed school subjects and therefore, perhaps not surprisingly, the subjects that pupils would be most keen to drop if given the option. This negative view was attributed in part to pupils' perceptions of subject utility, a concept which seemed firmly allied to employment benefits in pupils' eyes. Stables and Wikeley discovered that 'neither French nor German was rated highly in this respect' (*ibid.*: 29). This view seems consistent with the findings of a European languages survey carried out by the European Commission (2001), which confirmed that the perceived connection between languages and improved employment prospects is not particularly strong in the UK.

Young (1994a) found the attitudes of French learners in her survey to be overwhelmingly negative, precisely because of 'the low importance accorded to French in future employment' (p. 120). As one pupil put it:

I don't like it . . . it's all right for the people that are going to take up a career like courioring or something like that and be a courier or an airline pilot, but not for the people who don't really want it . . . It's a waste of a lesson.

(Young 1994a: 113)

This perception of a lack of utility is striking and may no doubt contribute to negative attitudes among some students. Lack of enjoyment also emerges as a key factor, however. Gruneberg and Sykes (1994), for example, carried out research among undergraduate students on non-language degrees. They investigated the students' attitudes to their school experiences of MFL in terms of enjoyment and ease of learning, and found that they were

generally dissatisfied with their language learning past. Fifty-five per cent of them stated that they had not enjoyed learning languages, while more than a third admitted to finding them very difficult. This picture of pupils struggling with language learning is certainly borne out by Saunders (1998: 65), who detected 'worrying trends in the declining level of performance in Modern Languages', and the findings of inspectors, who have noted that 'pupils make less progress in MFL in Key Stage Four than in most other subjects' (Dobson 1998). The views of one languages teacher, expressing her opinion on pupils' perceptions of MFLs in Scotland, may resonate with many MFL teachers in England:

They perceive languages as difficult, nit-picky and a pain in the neck.
(McPake *et al.* 1999: 55)

Modern foreign language learning attitudes in other English-speaking countries

Similar concerns are reflected in other English-speaking countries: an Australian national survey came to the conclusion that society there was 'in general apathetic towards languages education' (Australian Council of State School Organisations 2007: 8). Davies (2008: 1) comments further on the decline of MFL in this country and suggests that 'Australia's weakness in foreign languages comes from widespread problems of attitude'. The 'Group of Eight', an association of Australia's leading universities, released a policy paper in 2007 in an attempt to address what is widely considered to be a national crisis in foreign language education. It cites steep falls in the numbers of pupils taking languages at schools and universities, along with an accompanying reduction in the number of languages offered at tertiary level – from 66 to 29 in the decade up to 2007. Such views are echoed by a number of American commentators too – Reagan (2002) discusses the systematic marginalization of MFL in the US, while Acheson (2004) identifies a range of factors responsible for generating what he sees as widespread negative language learning attitudes. These issues will be further examined in the next chapter.

The reasons for these rather grim scenarios in these particular English-speaking countries may of course differ hugely, and the intention here is not to suggest that the UK, US and Australia share uniform modern foreign language (MFL) contexts, policies and approaches. However, they do appear to share common attitudinal problems towards the study of MFLs, and this

situation raises a number of questions about English-speaking attitudes to MFL and how they compare with attitudes elsewhere. Although the book does not draw on original empirical evidence from Australia and the USA, the MFL contexts there will be examined partly in an attempt to determine the extent to which common contextual issues in the English-speaking world might be implicated in the 'language malaise' referred to above.

Modern foreign language learning attitudes in Germany and the Netherlands

Outside the English-speaking world, the Netherlands and Germany are two countries which offer intriguing contrasts. It could be argued that the Dutch occupy the opposite end of the language-learning stereotype spectrum, in that they are often regarded as a nation of 'superior foreign language learners' (De Bot 2004: 1). The fact that Dutch is not a widely spoken language tends to support the view that the Dutch have a strong instrumental motivation and positive attitudes to MFL.

Germany constitutes an interesting comparative counterpoint, at least in terms of common perceptions – a nation perhaps less linguistically inclined than the Dutch, but more proficient than English speakers. Leighton (1991: 51) appears to support this perception of a midway German position, when he compares the bleak language-learning scenario in Britain with that in other countries:

The situation contrasts with that of most of our neighbours: Scandinavian and Dutch, and to some extent German.

German and Dutch attitudes to MFL have hitherto received scant attention in the literature. The few studies that do exist appear to contrast to a large extent with those on English-speaking attitudes, generally suggesting that attitudes are distinctly more positive. This view clearly resonates with common perceptions, and much of the reading indicates that a greater appreciation of the utilitarian dimension of MFLs in both Germany and the Netherlands is the key to more positive attitudes, overriding even a relative lack of enjoyment (Chambers 1998, 1999; Piepho 1983; McPake *et al.* 1999). However, this relatively strong instrumental orientation may apply quite specifically to attitudes to English. Hoffmann (2000) offers an explanation as to why this might be the case:

It should be remembered . . . that the learning of English for Europe's schoolchildren is different from learning any other foreign language because of the presence of English in their environment in the form of pop songs, the youth and drug cultures and, most importantly, television and the Internet.

(Hoffman 2000:14)

Some evidence for this is offered by Chambers' (1999) study of motivation, which revealed that German attitudes to French did not seem quite so markedly positive when compared with attitudes to English, a finding which may account for the declining uptake of French in many German schools (Bittner 2008). This situation appears to be mirrored in the Netherlands, where much has recently been made of a decline in interest in French and German (Willems 2003; Oonk 2009).

Aims of the book

Many studies have demonstrated the significance of attitudes as a key motivational component in foreign language learning. While attitudes towards learning in any field may rightfully be seen as important, their centrality in language learning elevates their significance, given the unique nature of language acquisition and the process of 'acquiring symbolic elements of a different ethno-linguistic community' (Dörnyei 2001: 47) that language learning necessarily involves. 'Imposing elements of another culture into one's own life-space' (*ibid.*) and the learner's willingness to allow this to happen will clearly be determined to a large extent by his/her attitudes. Based thus on fundamental assumptions about the role of attitudes in language learning, this book has a number of aims. The first of these is to describe and understand the nature of these attitudes, and the second is to identify and explore commonalities and variations in attitudes towards MFLL in general and to learning French, German and English in particular among groups of teenagers in three European countries. Examining and comparing attitudes to particular languages is still an area that has received relatively little attention in the field, an issue identified a number of years ago by authors such as Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993: 59):

Many of the research studies carried out in the last thirty years have focussed on pupils' attitudes towards . . . languages in general, rather than

on the differences between pupils' attitudes towards various languages.

Thirdly, investigating pupils in a range of national settings should make it possible to do a cross-cultural comparative analysis which affords a deeper understanding of the factors that influence language learning and their relative importance in different cultural contexts. This aspect has likewise received little attention in the literature, even though Gardner (1985), whose work on attitudes and MFL is considered seminal, points to the very question of whether and how attitudes 'may differ across cultural communities' (p. 172) as being worthy of further exploration. An examination of pupils' perceptions of attitude determinants may thus help to refine our understanding of the ways in which educational and social variables articulate with attitudes in different settings. Finally, the book aims to consider what language learning lessons might be learned from this analysis of pupil attitudes, and indeed, which countries may particularly benefit from these 'learnings'.

Research context

The book examines the results of a qualitative survey of the attitudes of pupils at six mixed comprehensive schools in England, Germany and the Netherlands from a social constructivist perspective. A total of 408 volunteers at two schools in each country participated in an initial word-association task after which smaller subsets generated written accounts. This was followed by a final group interview stage (for a detailed description of research methodology and considerations, see Bartram (2006a)). The sample size and composition, together with the essentially qualitative nature of the enquiry clearly preclude the drawing of definitive generalizations from the data, though it is hoped that the selection of schools and pupils who are arguably representative of the wider national pictures may support the relevance of the findings beyond the immediate educational settings. Nonetheless, it should be remembered throughout that the findings remain tentative, and also that the findings from the English pupils cannot necessarily be interpreted as representative of English speakers in the US and Australia – though there may of course be similarities. The study's exclusive reliance on the perspectives of pupils at six schools, and its sole concern with the influence of contextual attitudinal variables can clearly tell only part of the story, even though some (e.g. Young (1994b: 75)) would suggest that the focus on

environmental factors is arguably more important than individual variables.

Despite these limitations and caveats, the book offers a rich and descriptive account of the pupils' attitudes towards learning German, French and English, and the ways in which these are constructed. Furthermore, the presence of features replicated in data across the breadth of contexts provides support for the particular importance of certain variables, and fresh insights into the interplay between attitudes and educational and social factors are offered. The study also contributes to the theoretical understanding of the nature of language attitudes, and advances a model to explain the potential relationship between their constituent elements.

Structure

Chapter 2 looks at the problematic nature of educational comparisons and outlines the curricular and cultural contexts of MFL in England, the USA, Australia, the Netherlands and Germany. This is followed, in Chapter 3, by an examination of the complex and multidimensional notion of attitudes, drawing chiefly on work from the field of social psychology. Chapter 4 investigates the wealth of educational literature exploring the nature of language learning attitudes and the influences brought to bear on them by educational variables. This is followed by a review of language learning literature that focuses on the sociocultural attitudinal dimension and field of influence. The final chapters examine the findings from the survey described above, looking first at attitudes to the particular languages (French, German and English) and subsequently at the nature of pupil attitudes in each national setting. The following questions guided the investigation.

1. What is the nature of the pupils' attitudes to the educational dimensions of learning French, German and English in each country?
2. To what extent do educational factors (teachers/schools/national educational policy) influence the pupils' attitudes to learning each language in each country?
3. How can the pupils' attitudes to the sociocultural dimensions of learning each language in each country be described?
4. To what extent do sociocultural factors influence the pupils' attitudes to learning each language in each country?
5. How similar are the pupils' attitudes to MFL within and between the three countries?

6. What judgements can be made about the relative significance of educational and sociocultural influences on pupil attitudes to MFL in each country?

The final chapter reflects on the above questions, considers what has been learned about attitudes and language learning, and evaluates potential lessons, recommendations and national 'beneficiaries' – who might benefit from what has been learned, and how?

Chapter 2

Comparing: Issues and contexts

This chapter begins by examining the reasons for undertaking a comparative investigation and considers how our understanding of educational issues is aided through such enquiry. Such endeavours are not without their challenges, however, and the various methodological factors that often call into question the validity of comparative studies are explored in detail. Alongside methodological issues, questions still remain as to the ‘meaningfulness’ of comparisons – if educational and societal contexts are fundamentally different, are comparisons worthwhile and can any workable lessons be inferred? In an attempt to answer these questions, the chapter concludes by reviewing the organization and cultural context of language education in the five countries being considered.

What can be gained from educational comparison?

One justification for international comparative study relates to the notion that ‘comparison is actually essential to educational progress’ (Alexander 2001: 27). Moreover, examining language education and attitudes elsewhere may lead to a better understanding of some of the issues surrounding the apparently problematic Anglophone relationship with languages, as discussed earlier. Grant (1999: 139) supports this advantage:

Comparative education can render a particularly useful service by providing a background of contrasts against which to examine our own problems.

Phillips (1999: 18) reiterates this potential benefit and discusses how an examination of alternative scenarios can serve to identify new possibilities and produce ‘new perspectives on those issues which can be of enormous benefit to our understanding of them’, thus helping to refine our understanding of educational phenomena. Sharper insights into such phenomena

may also contribute to developments in educational policy and practice (Phillips 1999; Crossley and Watson 2003), highlighting the link with the meliorist potential of comparative studies (Phillips 2000). Though the practical recommendations which emerge from comparative research may provide a sound rationale in themselves, it would also be fair to argue that 'the development of an increasingly sophisticated theoretical framework in which to describe and analyse educational phenomena' (*ibid.*: 98) is an equally worthy justification.

Broadfoot (1999: 21) further identifies the usefulness of comparative study in shedding light on 'the internal dynamics of education systems and how these influence the idiosyncratic effects of educational practices in any particular context'. She goes on to make specific mention of comparative studies of learner attitudes as an important element within the educational process, enabling us 'to understand the various building blocks of learning, not just issues of educational delivery' (*ibid.*: 27), and arguably provides a further justification for the book's focus.

The importance which the discipline of comparative education attaches to the link between sociocultural backgrounds and educational issues is another feature that sits well with this investigation, which explores the interface between context and attitude. Michael Sadler's much quoted thoughts strike a chord in this respect:

In studying foreign systems of education we should not forget that the things outside the school matter even more than the things inside the schools, and govern and interpret the things inside.

(Sadler, in Higginson 1979: 49)

Crossley and Watson (2003) also refer to this important connection, suggesting that comparative approaches can help us better understand the relationship between education and society. This is clearly a justifiable pursuit in all educational research since comparisons are 'a fundamental part of the thought processes which enable us to make sense of the world' (Phillips 1999: 15). Investigating phenomena against a breadth of backgrounds additionally allows judgements to be made about the generic nature/cultural specificity of educational issues (Alexander 1999) and again adds to a more nuanced understanding of complex topics.

The comparative challenge

Clearly, then, there is much to be gained from comparative enquiry. However, the results of such studies are often compromised or called into question by a number of challenges. Some of these are methodological in nature, and relate to the validity of the investigation. It was precisely an attempt to address this issue that influenced the choice of Germany and the Netherlands as countries for comparison here. First, they are both countries in which I have several years' experience of working in language education. Furthermore, as a graduate of German and Dutch, my language skills and 'cross-cultural capability' (Jones 2001: 10) were instrumental in enabling me to negotiate access to the settings and to interact directly with the research participants. These experiences and skills are important in several ways. First, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notion of the 'human-as-instrument' has important implications for the trustworthiness or 'validity' of qualitative research. Since the researcher is the key interpreter of meaning, and also the 'principal data collection instrument' (Anderson and Arsenault 1998: 123), it is important that he or she is able to filter out cultural confusions and misunderstandings if the research findings are to be regarded as in any sense trustworthy. The potential for such pitfalls in comparative research across cultures and languages is of course heightened. My linguistic and cultural familiarity in all three countries should at least have gone some way towards sensitizing me to cultural discrepancies and confusions, and thus to enhancing the credibility of the findings, though there is of course no absolute guarantee of the fit between the researcher's interpretation and the participant's meaning. The danger of routinization should also be acknowledged, given that familiarity can potentially lead to research 'blind spots'.

Sample

Another criticism sometimes levelled at qualitative comparisons concerns the size and nature of the sample under study, and again, corresponding questions of validity. These questions are clearly important ones, and Mason (1996) is surely justified in suggesting that 'qualitative research should produce social explanations which are generalizable in some way, or which have a wider resonance' (p. 6). Though initially it was the intention to select one school from each country, it was decided that two might go some way towards striking this 'wider resonance' that Mason refers to. Choosing two

schools in each country additionally allowed 'local' comparisons to be made first of all. This helped to support the credibility of findings from each country by encouraging questions to be asked about emerging differences and similarities. Silverman (2005) supports this view, noting that 'the qualitative researcher should always attempt to find another case through which to test out a provisional hypothesis' (p. 179).

Increasing the number of schools from three to six still rules out any generalizable claims, of course, but ensuring that the schools selected were as representative of the wider school population as possible lends some weight to the 'releatability' (Bassey 1990) of the findings. Alexander (1999: 158) echoes this, arguing that 'any one school or classroom can tell us a great deal about the country and education system of which it is a part', if rigorous and sensitive research procedures are adhered to. The notion of purposive sampling is thus clearly an important consideration here. Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 45) refer to the fact that it 'increases the likelihood that variability common in any social phenomenon will be represented in the data', while Schweisfurth (1999: 216) adds that it is precisely by making such controlled choices in sample selection that the rigour of research is strengthened. Bryman (1990) too challenges the common but perhaps somewhat spurious assumption that research based on individual cases will only provide access to a narrowly uniform and unrepresentative understanding of reality:

within a case study a wide range of different people and activities are invariably examined so that the contrast with survey samples is not as acute as it appears at first glance.

(Bryman 1990: 90)

Selection of schools

As indicated above, it was essential to establish clear criteria for the selection of schools to strengthen any claims that could be made concerning the validity of the findings. If such claims are to be made, then demonstrating that the schools chosen are not exceptional or unusual but fairly typical of the national picture is vital. The idea of a 'national picture' is of course in itself something of a questionable notion in the twenty-first century, as countries like the Netherlands, England and perhaps post-reunification Germany in particular struggle with questions of regional, social, cultural, ethnic and

economic diversity. Such circumstances highlight the importance of an interpretative approach to examining attitudes, in that it acknowledges that attitudes will inevitably be socially situated. Deciding on what constitutes 'typicality' is thus something of a contentious undertaking, but 'safe criteria' can perhaps be found by examining to what extent a school's socio-economic composition and levels of achievement reflect national patterns. These 'objective' criteria were thus used as a basis for identifying schools that could be described as representative of the wider school populations, though such claims necessarily remain tentative.

The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) provides extensive information on English schools in the form of inspection reports, and these seemed a useful starting point in the process of selecting English schools. Green Bank High (all school names have been changed to preserve confidentiality) was identified as a fairly typical school – a mixed eleven-to-eighteen comprehensive school in Staffordshire, with a roll of around 1,200 pupils. OFSTED (2002) described the school's attainment on entry and socio-economic background as in line with the national averages, though the number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and on the special-needs register was below the average.

Red Brick Lane School, another large, eleven-to-eighteen co-educational comprehensive school with a roll of around 1,200, was also deemed to be typical of many other English schools. Located in the West Midlands, the school draws its pupils from a mixture of council and private housing. The proportion of pupils with special needs was described by OFSTED as being slightly below the national average (2003), as was the number of pupils for whom English was not their home language. The attainment of pupils on entry and on leaving the school, however, was described as reflective of the national average. Both schools share thus a number of common features which are arguably typical of the wider school situation.

Comparing 'like with like'

The diversity of secondary schooling in the Netherlands meant that particularly careful thought had to be given to school selection. The freedom of ideology guaranteed by the Dutch constitution (Hendriks and van de Bunt-Kokhuis 2000) means that schools can be founded to cater for a variety of educational and religious interests. Broadly speaking, however, Dutch secondary schools offer three main types of education, preparing pupils for

different vocational/academic pathways. Some schools focus exclusively on one of these tracks while others combine them within the same institution, though they are taught as separate programmes for separate groups of pupils. These schools are the most similar in type to English comprehensive schools and as such represent the best choice for comparative purposes – the need to compare ‘like with like’ as far as is possible being one of the central tenets of comparative educational study (Grant 1999: 132).

With this in mind, it was also important to choose schools which would be similar in other important respects. The two schools chosen, of roughly similar size to the English schools, are both situated in towns in the province of North Holland, around 20–30 km south of Amsterdam. Both towns are similar in terms of population to the towns in which the English schools are located. The Dutch ministry of education does not provide information on the socio-economic intake of particular schools, though the national inspection service does provide information on achievement levels. Figures for 2000 show pupils at Rembrandt College and Vermeer College achieving at levels which are more or less in line with the national average for the relevant educational pathway in national examinations (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2001).

Having selected comprehensive schools in England and the Netherlands, it was clearly important to identify similar German schools. One immediate issue here was the relative scarcity of this type of school in Germany, where a selective tripartite system is still widespread (Kron 2000). Their existence depends on educational policy in each of the nation’s sixteen Federal States, each of which has responsibility for the organization of schooling. In some states, such as Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, comprehensives are virtually non-existent. This immediately ruled out choosing schools in the whole of southern Germany. The state of Hessen in central Germany, however, has a much larger number of schools organized along comprehensive lines in the same way as the Dutch schools, in that the three key types of academic and vocational secondary education are combined within the same building. Pupils are generally allocated to one of the three tracks after a period of one or two years at school.

It might be argued that comprehensives or ‘Gesamtschulen’ are thus untypical of the national German picture and that selecting such schools somewhat compromises any comparisons – the untypical in Germany being compared with the very typical in England and the Netherlands. Though this may be true to a degree, choosing schools of the more mainstream types in Germany would be even more problematic, since this would mean

comparing a ‘narrower’ group of German pupils at specifically academic or vocational institutions with a more ‘cross-sectional’ group of pupils in the Netherlands and England in particular. Choosing German comprehensives thus has the key advantage of allowing a much wider range of pupils – and a correspondingly more representative sample of Germans – to be included in the study.

The two German schools selected for the study, Rhein Schule and Donau Schule, both have rolls of around 1,000, making them similar in size to the English and Dutch schools. They are both situated in Hessen, in towns to the north-east of the industrial city of Frankfurt. All six schools therefore share the geographical similarity of being located in semi-urban settings, close to the important conurbations of Birmingham, Amsterdam and Frankfurt. The similarly central geographical location of all six schools was also important in that this meant none of the schools was located near to national borders. Consequently, proximity to other language communities could not be regarded as a significant or ‘distorting’ influence in any of the schools. The educational authorities in Germany do not provide details on school achievement or socio-economic intake, thus making it difficult to demonstrate the schools’ typicality in these respects. This again makes choosing German comprehensive schools important since they at least ensure a more representative sample in terms of ability and interest range.

The pupils

The study is based on fifteen- to sixteen-year-old language learners, for several reasons. First, learners in all three countries will have experienced at least four years of compulsory language education at this age, by which time it seems reasonable to expect pupils to have developed attitudes to MFL. Secondly, given that much of the research was to focus on the students’ self-interpretation of their language learning experience, younger pupils might have been more likely to lack the maturity of reflection required and the ability to articulate their perceptions. Thirdly, and significantly from an English perspective, it is at this age that rising numbers of students in England decide to end their language studies. In each country, care was additionally taken to include roughly equal numbers of boys and girls from across the ability range in an attempt to gain balanced insights, though this was occasionally compromised by the number and gender of pupils volunteering.

Data collection

The pupils themselves are clearly central to this work – it is their attitudes that constitute its focus, with educational, social and cultural factors serving to illuminate their formation. The data collection instruments and procedures chosen all needed to be sufficiently flexible yet robust to do justice to the complexity of the notion of language attitudes and to accommodate the pupils' own insights and perspectives in a way that would not advantage one national grouping over another. These requirements suggested the need for a multi-stage enquiry using a variety of methods to access pupil interpretations from a number of angles and to make a progressive focusing of meaning possible. As Morrison (1996: 1) observes:

If we are to understand a social situation with a degree of confidence this suggests that we use several conceptual, methodological and analytical lenses . . . it also suggests the need for multiple iterations of data to catch multiple interpretations of what is taking place.

Three key methods were used in the study to 'catch these multiple interpretations', with each method yielding data to inform and refine the next stage of the enquiry. The first instrument, a word association task, was chosen in order to establish key attitudinal features among the chosen school communities. This first stage enabled key emphases to be identified among a total sample of 408 pupils across the three countries. Subsequent analysis fed into the second stage, where 210 pupils were asked to produce written accounts to provide detail on areas of interest and significance that emerged from the first stage. This second stage thus served to highlight and add depth to the emerging insights. The final stage consisted of 14 group interviews, where provisional findings were probed, developed and refined.

The tasks were translated into German and Dutch, before being checked by native-speaker teachers in Germany and the Netherlands to ensure accuracy, clarity and currency of expression. Careful attention was also paid throughout the research to ensuring linguistic and conceptual equivalence (Osborn *et al.* 2003) in the translations in an attempt to preserve the validity of comparisons. Though logistical difficulties prevented whole-class trials in Germany and the Netherlands, colleagues assisted in finding a small number of Dutch and German teenagers willing to complete the task and provide feedback.

The threat of bias

Bias in all research can of course compromise findings in a number of ways. One particular concern regarding this study centred on nationality, given that the German and Dutch pupils may have felt inclined to comment favourably on questions about 'English' to me as an 'English' researcher and guest in their schools. This is part of a wider problem facing educational research, in that it raises questions about 'ecological validity' – the extent to which the research process captures the reality of the situation being investigated. However, it remains difficult to see how the research process could ever be completely neutral and devoid of effect on those being investigated – 'the observer cannot . . . be neatly disentangled from the observed in the activity of inquiring' (Schwandt 1994: 128). From the constructivist angle underpinning this particular enquiry, such effects are in fact an integral part of the insights produced, as Pring (2004: 44–5) suggests:

The world researched is affected by the research itself; our knowledge is a 'construction', reflecting the world, not as independent of our deliberations, but as something constructed by them.

Though this may be disputed by some, it could be argued that the effects of 'reactivity' have been mitigated to some extent by using a range of different instruments and by explicitly appealing for honesty while assuring confidentiality. Interacting with the pupils in their own languages also enabled a sense of rapport and trust to develop more quickly than may have been the case if dependent on interpreters as intermediaries, and this may have been an important factor in eliciting honest views. Corroboration from the literature has also helped to dispel the idea that researcher nationality was responsible for the more positive attitudes towards English revealed by the findings.

It is therefore hoped that the considerations outlined above have not only contributed to the research being conducted in an ethically responsible manner, but that they have also supported the robustness of the research procedures described and, in turn, the overall credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, which will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. Despite the methodological rigour outlined above, however, some questions still remain unanswered – can comparisons yield meaningful lessons? Are there contextual issues specific to particular settings that would impede the transferability of ideas that appear to 'work' in one country, regardless of their soundness *per se*? Can feasible recommendations thus be made? These are

clearly significant considerations, and it is at this point therefore that the social and educational MFLL contexts in the countries concerned will be examined.

Language learning contexts

When looking at the ways in which education systems might influence attitudes towards MFLL, the causality conundrum rears its head: are attitudes towards MFLL and its place in the education system influenced more by the wider views of society on language learning, or does the education system itself mould these social views through the status it grants languages via the school curriculum? Young (1994b) refers to the importance of the wider social world, describing how 'a society which values foreign language learning may communicate its importance through the status accorded to foreign language learning in the education system' (p. 48) Alexander (2001: 157) and, explaining how examining 'the presence and the extent of foreign language teaching' in a school curriculum can reveal the nature of social views and attitudes. This link between society and attitudes towards languages is clearly an important one. Oskamp and Schultz (2005: 132) describe this connection, stating that 'the overall cultural context within which we live can provide a set of assumptions and salient "facts" which determine the attitudes we will develop'. Many authors (Young 1994a; Chambers 1999; Williams and Burden 2004) link this wider sociocultural context directly to language learning. Chambers, for instance, refers to the fact that language learners will enter 'the learning situation with positive or negative attitudes derived from the society in which they live' (Chambers 1999: 44).

Where a society's attitudes to MFLL are perceived as being generally positive, Young (1994b) discusses how the individual's need for self-esteem may provide the link between high social status for language learning and positive attitudes – 'if foreign language learning is accorded high status by society, a desire to learn in order to gain the esteem of others and increase one's own self-esteem may be generated' (p. 47). Negative social perceptions may equally prevail, however, for a whole host of reasons, with a negative impact on attitudes. Whether society's views are more influential in terms of attitude formation is perhaps an impossible question to answer. The most that can be concluded may be that the relationship between society and education in this respect is one of mutual influence. Whatever the exact nature of this relationship, it is true to say that a language's status in education will

certainly influence how learners engage in the learning process, as Dabène (1997: 22) describes:

Le statut d'une langue a un effet direct sur les attentes et les attitudes des apprenants, et par conséquent sur leurs conduites d'apprentissage.

(The status of a language has a direct effect on learner expectations and attitudes, and consequently on their learning behaviour.)

At this point, it is thus appropriate to examine MFL provision and the status of languages in the countries relevant to this study.

Modern foreign language education in Germany

MFL in Germany would appear to be enjoying support from the highest level, with such prominent figures as former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder 'encouraging a greater emphasis on the importance of language learning, in particular learning English from the first years of school' (Eurydice 2005: 2). Though education policy in Germany is largely determined at state level, the political importance attached to MFLs translated into the national policy of ensuring that all German primary schools offered languages by 2005. National legislation is also in place governing other aspects of language education. A first foreign language is compulsory for all pupils between the ages of ten and eighteen, with a second language taken from the age of twelve. Though the amount of time devoted to language teaching varies between states and at different ages, it is interesting that the German government specifies that 24 per cent of teaching time should be allocated to MFLs for thirteen-year-olds (Eurydice 2005). This is clearly a generous time allocation, and reflective of the importance attached to languages by the German curriculum. It also suggests that languages are held in high esteem by German society, bearing in mind Alexander's comment above, and this is a view supported by Bliesener (1998) who argues that this explains why 'multi-lingualism has really always been a feature of German schools' (p. 24).

The German Ministry of Education clearly prides itself on this situation. In its review of the OECD 2001 *Education at a Glance* report, which highlights Germany's above-average time allocation for languages, the Ministry comments on how this reflects 'the great importance which is attached to learning foreign languages in Germany' ('Die Verteilung der Unterrichtszeit

auf die verschiedenen Fächer weist auf die grosse Bedeutung hin, die das Erlernen von modernen Fremdsprachen in Deutschland hat') (Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der BRD 2002). The Ministry further underlines the significance of languages in education in official documentation, commenting:

das Erlernen von Fremdsprachen ist in Schule . . . ein wesentlicher Bestandteil des Bildungsgangs des Einzelnen geworden. Das Lernziel der Zukunft ist dabei auf Mehrsprachigkeit gerichtet. Grundsätzlich sollten möglichst viele Schüler zwei Fremdsprachen lernen, und für höherwertige Abschlüsse sollten die Anreize und Möglichkeiten verstärkt werden, drei und gegebenenfalls noch mehr Fremdsprachen zu lernen.

(Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der BRD 1994: 3)

(learning MFLs at school . . . has become an essential ingredient in the education of the individual. Multilingualism is the learning aim of the future. As many pupils as possible should automatically learn two foreign languages, and for higher-level courses, incentives and opportunities should be enhanced to allow for the study of three or more foreign languages.)

The high status enjoyed by languages in the German curriculum was similarly observed by Chambers (1999: 169), who comments on the early introduction of MFLs, their compulsory status and the generous time-tabling arrangements.

Some authors have argued that making MFL compulsory may do more harm than good. Gardner (1985: 89), for example, refers to research studies which indicate that 'forcing students to learn a second language can rapidly create feelings of failure and that such feelings could generalize to unfavourable attitudes towards learning the language'. This may be true in the case of particular pupils, but the compulsory status of MFLs in Germany suggests if anything a growing educational appetite for an MFL diet. This can be seen in the demand for secondary schools in particular which offer bi-lingual streams and foreign language instruction in particular subjects, e.g. history taught through French, geography lessons in English, etc. Kästner (1993) described the growing demand for this type of education in Germany already over a decade ago, with more than 140 schools offering such programmes by the early 1990s. Though English dominated, 57

of these schools provided education through French, with other schools offering Spanish, Dutch, etc.

Modern foreign language education in the Netherlands

MFL provision in the Netherlands shares a number of similarities with that in Germany. Languages are already commonly taught in the lower years of primary education, where English is prescribed as the first foreign language. It becomes compulsory from the age of ten, and is taught throughout secondary education to the age of seventeen. A second and even a third foreign language may be studied from the age of twelve, and pupils opting for post-compulsory upper secondary education must study at least one foreign language beyond the age of seventeen (Eurydice 2005). Though this underlines something of a national educational commitment to MFL, which is often attributed to Dutch recognition of the minority status of their own language bolstering a national perception of greater need for MFL (Willems 2003) and the nation's historical reliance on foreign trade (Wardekker *et al.* 2003), it is interesting to note the overall amount of time allotted to learning languages: government regulations indicate that 14 per cent of teaching time should be allocated to languages at thirteen, dropping to only 9 per cent by the age of sixteen, marking something of a contrast with the German situation. However, this disguises the large amount of indirect MFL education taking place in growing numbers of schools that offer bi-lingual streams and subject instruction through the medium of foreign languages, as in Germany.

Hendriks and van de Bunt-Kokhuis (2000: 280) describe language teaching in fact as 'one of the main issues nowadays and policy-makers in the Netherlands stress that in secondary education more attention can be paid to foreign languages, especially French, German and English'. They go on to talk of the growing national commitment to promote the learning of German in particular, describing a number of educational agreements with Austria and Germany to this end. In spite of the enthusiasm of these authors, concern is expressed elsewhere that language education is in deteriorating health in Holland. The media made much of a joint letter issued to the Dutch government by the French and German ambassadors to the Netherlands, bemoaning 'the decline of foreign language education in Dutch secondary schools' ('de verschraling van het vreemde-talenonderwijs aan de Nederlandse middelbare scholen') (Veilbrief 2002: 26). Their letter was prompted by dwindling numbers of pupils opting to study French and

German in particular in upper secondary and higher education, and blames the apparent demise on educational reforms, along with growing public perceptions that languages are for the less able. The emergence of the term 'pretpakket' ('fun package') to describe the type of upper secondary leaving diploma which includes a substantial language element is offered as evidence for this dip in language interest and status, and again calls into question the nature of the relationship between languages, education and society.

It is interesting to note that the British and American ambassadors did not join in the debate, perhaps not surprisingly, however, given the relative health of English education in Holland, which might in part be attributed to the fact that English is the only foreign language compulsory across the secondary sector. This point too underlines the importance of exploring attitudes to learning particular languages, rather than language learning in general.

The status of languages in German and Dutch society

Having discussed the relatively high status of languages in the German and Dutch education systems, it is perhaps unsurprising that the literature indicates a higher status for MFL in Continental European societies. While several authors have commented on the rarity of MFLs in the UK environment as playing a key part in their low status, the conspicuous presence of MFLs is held responsible for their relatively higher status in other European countries. McPake *et al.* (1999: 19) refer to this very issue while highlighting the huge challenge facing MFL education in Anglophone countries:

Continental students' out-of-school exposure to a modern language is often self-initiated since it reflects their own perceptions of their needs, enthusiasm and interests and hence their individual identity is engaged at a level of intensity that could not reasonably be expected to be equalled in contexts where the exposure to the language occurs almost entirely at school.

The authors argue that a greater awareness and understanding of the importance of languages in educational and professional contexts is a key factor in producing this higher status, which also ties in with a greater sense of commitment to European citizenship. Though one might question how generally this greater sense of European identity is shared within and between

EU countries outside the UK, it is worth noting that the status of MFL in a country such as Germany seems firmly allied to an acknowledgement of its (geographical) place within a united Europe, where multilingualism is regarded as being of great significance in both cultural and economic terms (Schröder 1996).

While there may be some legitimacy in talking of the general status of MFL in any society, it must also be remembered that this status may vary at the level of particular languages within a cultural community. The reading suggests that English enjoys an almost universally high status across Europe. Hoffmann (2000) explains that a range of diverse factors have conspired to elevate the standing of English in the Netherlands and certain other countries in particular:

In Scandinavia, Belgium and the Netherlands, the English language has acquired a higher profile than anywhere else in Europe, due to their relatively small size and their dependence on international trade and collaboration; and also . . . to the predominance of sub-titled rather than dubbed English programmes on their television channels.

(Hoffman 2000: 8)

She argues that English has not yet perhaps reached this status in Germany, but her acknowledgement that 'German is particularly susceptible to the influence of English in the areas of lexis as well as grammar and semantics' (*ibid.*: 11) seems to imply that using English accrues a number of prestige advantages in German society. Such advantages might not necessarily be offered by French in the Netherlands and Germany or German/French in the Netherlands. Discussing the standing of French across Europe, for example, Gosse (1997: 159) refers to a range of cultural, political and historical associations which have brought about a decline in the language's status:

Le français a beaucoup moins les faveurs du public européen qu'auparavant et l'hégémonie de l'anglais n'en est pas la seule responsable. L'image dont il est porteur repose essentiellement sur des considérations historiques, politiques et culturelles.

(French finds far less favour with the European public than before and the hegemony of English is not solely responsible. The image which it carries is based essentially on historic, political and cultural considerations.)

Gosse comments on the elitist and traditional image which surrounds French, an image which may be partly responsible for negative attitudes among learners in some countries. It is interesting that she also refers to the hegemony of English, and it is again conceivable that attitudes to this language are more positive because of a range of hegemonic processes that have resulted in the international dominance of this language. Phillipson (1992) discusses the ways in which economics, politics and cultural practices have helped to assert and maintain the dominance and status of the English language. Though some would argue that these powerful influences are not inherently threatening (e.g. Crystal 2003), others like Phillipson suggest that these processes represent forms of linguistic imperialism. Such a notion may again lead to the privileging of positive attitudes to English, while its effect on other languages may be more adverse, potentially resulting in their marginalization (Pennycook 1995), a process which may be accompanied by a demotion in attitudes as well as status. Van Oostendorp (2002) provides an interesting critique of these arguments in relation to the Dutch situation, though appeals by his compatriot van Dam (2009) and others to remove French and German from the school curriculum to allow an even greater concentration on English seem to support them.

Modern foreign language education in England

Though compulsory between the ages of eleven and sixteen from 1988 to 2004, learning a foreign language in England is now only a statutory requirement at Key Stage Three (ages eleven to fourteen). This change has seen what is for many an alarming drop in the number of pupils entering national exams at sixteen – from 68 per cent in 2004 to 44 per cent in 2008 (Stewart and Ward 2009: 1). Plans are currently afoot for MFL to be offered at primary level by 2010. Schools have the power to decide on whether a second language should be taught and how much time should be given to language learning. The differences with Germany and Holland are immediately striking here, in terms of the late entry of MFLs into primary education, the relative brevity of compulsory language learning, and the lack of national regulations concerning a second language and time allocation. Once again, one is reminded of Alexander's (2001: 157) comment on the messages communicated by 'the presence and the extent of foreign language teaching' in a school curriculum.

Though England has a number of specialist language colleges at secondary

level, they differ from the German and Dutch schools in that there are fewer of them (currently around 350) and in that the specialist element is usually expressed via additional language learning opportunities (e.g. Russian, Japanese) rather than through using languages as the medium of instruction for other subjects (Eurydice 2005; Dickson and Cumming 1996). While some authors would claim that 'the introduction of compulsory foreign language learning in secondary schools has enhanced its status as a school subject' (Dickson and Cumming 1996: 29), others have been critical of the inclusion of MFLs among the foundation subjects in the National Curriculum, arguing that this automatically demotes rather than enhances their status as compared with the core subjects. Hawkins (1996) concurs with this view, and is particularly critical of the relatively late start and the implications this has for learning MFLs:

Another unique aspect of our subject . . . is that, alone among the foundation subjects, it is not introduced until Key Stage Three. Furthermore, we choose to introduce it at the onset of adolescence, when empathy . . . gives way to self-consciousness and insecurity.

(Hawkins 1996: 17)

He levels further criticism at the government's strategic inactivity, and alludes to the current secondary school scenario, where MFL is dominated by French owing to nothing more than historical accident:

The present distribution of languages in the secondary school owes nothing to planning or to estimates of individual or national needs. It is a position into which we have drifted, and in which we now seem to be locked, by considerations of teacher supply.

(*Ibid.*: 18)

Moys (1996) points out that the National Curriculum since its introduction in 1988 has at least guaranteed that everyone must learn a foreign language, marking a significant improvement on the past, though he acknowledges it has generally made the study of a second foreign language less feasible, a point noted also by Saunders (1998) and Dickson and Cumming (1996), as subjects compete for time within the crowded curriculum. The limited time available for language learning in most schools calls into question the feasibility of achieving the grand aims contained in much of the rhetoric surrounding the National Curriculum for languages, which talks of MFLs

promoting 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, key personal transferable skills and thinking skills' (Williams *et al.* 2002: 507). The problem of time availability is acknowledged by Dobson (1998: 20):

An important issue in all schools is the amount of time available for MFL and its distribution, particularly in those schools where the time available for one MFL (usually 10% or about 150 minutes per week) is split between two MFLs.

Reflecting once more on Alexander's comments, it is difficult to avoid concluding that the educational commitment to languages in England appears less than that in Holland and Germany, and that the curricular messages here will to some extent influence pupils' attitudes to MFL. The historically recent decision to lower compulsory language learning to fourteen may be a sign that the 'lingering public perception that languages are the preserve of the academically gifted' (Henry 2001a: 28) is again gaining ground in England in the face of increasing numbers of reports and studies suggesting that a languages-for-all policy has done little to improve attitudes and motivation. If this perception is indeed growing, it is interesting to compare the apparently prevalent Dutch view that languages are an easy option, as discussed above! The contrast here underlines yet again the need to explore the social dimensions to attitude formation.

The status of languages in English society

Though some may again question the extent to which the status of language learning can be generalized across a whole society, the reading reflects a wide consensus on the nature of this status within the UK, as outlined in the introduction. Saunders (1998: 65) talks of a national 'indifference to modern languages' while McPake *et al.* (1999) and Watts (2003: v) refer to 'a climate of negativity' surrounding MFLs in Britain. Interview data from Watts' research lead her to speculate that English awareness of this negative climate may depress 'national' motivation, operating almost as an English self-fulfilling prophecy. Chambers (1999: 83) ascribes the low status of languages to Britain's geographic isolation:

In the context of an island nation, it is possible that pro-French/German/Spanish etc, attitudes may be outweighed by apathy, ignorance or in some

areas negativity. This will do little to enhance the individual's perception of social pressure to perform.

This 'lack of shared motivation within our society' (McPake *et al.* 1999: viii) is argued by some authors to be the result of the demotivating effect occasioned by an acknowledgement of the international status enjoyed by English. Hawkins (1996: 18) discusses how our increasing recognition of this status has lulled us into a national 'acceptance of monolingualism', which in turn affects our attitudes to MFL, as McPake *et al.* (1999: 19) point out:

. . . if the population of a country generally allows itself to develop a mind-set which perceives monolingualism as the norm (especially in English), this is less than conducive to learning other languages.

Leighton (1991) refers to the ways in which history, geography and modern technology have conspired to create a general perception that language learning in Britain is superfluous. He describes how this perception is 'buttressed by attitudes rooted in Victorian imperial supremacy, sheltered by our island situation and given a spurious validity by the use of American language in modern technology' (Leighton 1991: 51). Though the extent to which this statement is true is debatable, it is certainly likely that the relative rarity of foreign languages in the English environment does little to bolster their status. Court (2001) and Leighton (1991) refer to such issues as media voice-overs in English during foreign interviews, the internet reinforcing British 'complacency by spreading English as a world language' (Court 2001: 1), the lack of interest in non-English-speaking film and music, etc., while other authors such as Vasseur and Grandcolas (1997: 221) comment on the simple fact that:

en Angleterre on entend rarement parler d'autres langues sauf si on habite une région avec une forte population d'émigrés.

(foreign languages are rarely heard in England unless one lives in an area with a high immigrant population.)

As discussed earlier, it is interesting to remember in this connection the relatively low status accorded to MFLs in the English school curriculum, which may of course be a symptom or a cause of social perceptions of status.

Modern foreign languages in Australia and America and their social status

MFLs in Australia are generally referred to as LOTE – languages other than English – and although there is no national system of education in this country, LOTE are included as one of the eight key learning areas specified by the federal government. The lack of a unified national system makes it somewhat difficult to describe the state of MFL provision in Australia, given the considerable variation that exists between states. However, by the government's own admission, only half of all Australian pupils study a foreign language (DFAT 2008), and the amount of time they spend on MFLs during their school careers is less than in other OECD countries (DEEWR 2002). That said, the government has long been an advocate of MFLs in the Australian curriculum, with a number of policies introduced over the years to promote language learning based on beliefs in the social, cultural and economic importance of MFLs. Such policies have variously been aimed at the promotion of European, Asian and indigenous Australian languages, a good example being the current 'National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program' which began in 2009, and will fund Australian schools to the tune of sixty million dollars (DFAT 2008). These policies have resulted in a situation today which sees a wide range of languages taught in primary and secondary schools across the nation as a whole, though as suggested above, the picture varies significantly across the Australian states and territories. Some schools are highly committed to MFLs, and have LOTE specialist status (International Bureau of Education 2006) while others offer pupils short-term MFL courses at some point during their time at school. Japanese is currently the most widely taught language, followed by French and German (DEEWR 2002).

Policies, however, have been unable to deliver a more robust national commitment to languages, and the government acknowledges that despite its policy efforts and funding provisions, the state of language education in Australia remains poor, as described in the introduction. Social, cultural, political and demographic factors are cited by the Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) as obstacles, and parallels are drawn with the UK and USA. Though some refer to the poor relationship between boys in particular and MFL (e.g. Carr and Pauwels 2006), the consensus view highlights the negative impact of the widely held assumption that English is enough and of Australia's geographic isolation (Group of Eight 2007). The government is equally aware of this, and admits that 'changing this situation must focus on changing attitudes'

(DEEWR 2002: 2). To this end, plans are underway to create a new national policy framework accompanied by a comprehensive national promotion strategy by 2012.

The MFL context in the USA shares a number of similarities with that in Australia. Since it is a country without a national system, MFL policy here is also left to the individual states. Cook (2007: 1) argues that this reflects what he sees as the lack of 'a fundamental national commitment to foreign language training and education' in America, though others point to the existence of some federal legislation that supports language teaching, including, for example, the 'Goals 2000: Educate America Act' of 1994. Dutcher (1995: 4) argues:

This legislation encourages student achievement by the development of recommended goals and standards in the core subjects. Foreign languages are included in the core subjects.

This legislation led to the establishment of a national standards framework for MFL, focusing mainly on pupils in Grades 4, 8 and 12, produced by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in conjunction with the US Department of Education (ACTFL 2008). Despite this achievement, however, most commentators appear to agree that the above 'legislation has been implemented inconsistently' (Dutcher 1995: 13) and that national funding provided for MFL is inadequate (Inman 1995; Cook 2007).

Given that MFL policy is thus a state concern, as in Australia, there is considerable variability across the country. Forty states require secondary schools to *offer* at least two years of MFL to pupils though student take-up is not compulsory, and Inman (1995: 4) argues that only '27 states have embraced languages as part of their core curricula'. Dutcher's survey from 1995 showed most MFL taking place between Grades 9 and 12, with Spanish the most commonly learned language (28 per cent), followed by French (11 per cent) and German (3 per cent). Around 6 per cent of primary schools had begun teaching MFLs to some degree and eleven years on, Cook (2007) suggests that this has increased by 10 per cent, the secondary picture remaining much the same. A press release issued by the US Department of Education in 2006 in fact revealed that only 44 per cent of American high school students were enrolled in foreign language classes.

As suggested in the introduction, much of the reading on MFL in the US seems preoccupied with the perception of a national languages crisis. This

view appears to be based on a number of factors, ranging from the national budgetary constraints already mentioned, the lack of federal involvement, shortages of qualified teachers, to persistent tendencies to see MFL as an elitist and therefore peripheral educational concern (Inman 1995). The crux of the crisis, however, seems to relate to the American sociocultural context, and the way in which this appears to undermine MFL motivation and attitudes, as referred to earlier, and resonating thus with the English and Australian situations described above. Schiffman (1996: 247) singles out American ethnocentricity, describing how this results in 'antipathy to any expanded role for "foreign" languages in American life' and how 'allied perhaps to xenophobia, racism and other unsavoury attitudes, it does not wish to tolerate something that it sees as dangerous, untrustworthy, expensive, perhaps even un-American' (*ibid.*). Acheson (2004: 42) argues strongly that this situation negatively predisposes American pupils to MFL:

Just as their society has taught them to view culturally different people in a negative light, it has taught them to depreciate the foreign languages they are studying.

He makes a strong case for suggesting that a number of other factors have conspired to aggravate this attitudinal situation, discussing how American acceptance of English monolingualism in particular, coupled with geographic isolation from the rest of the world and other language communities, have resulted in cultural and linguistic superiority complexes that inhibit American attitudes to MFL. Such views are supported by Reagan (2002), Gass and Selinker (2001) and Wiley (2007), suggesting that little has changed in this regard since Gardner (1985) discussed factors responsible for the low status accorded to MFL by American society. Key among these, he argued, were such issues as generally negative attitudes towards immigrants and the melting-pot ideology which have elevated the status of English and negated the relative importance of foreign languages. Some have argued that such feelings have been heightened by the post-9/11 climate, which on the one hand has highlighted the need for more linguists in the face of national security issues, yet at the same time has increased mistrust of difference (Modern Language Association of America 2007). The 'National Security Language Initiative' launched by George Bush in 2006, with its definition and promotion of 'critical need foreign languages' (mainly languages spoken in countries where terrorist threats are perceived to exist – Arabic, Farsi and Pashto, the language of the Taliban)

would certainly seem to support these claims. Since its introduction, many US school districts have received generous grants ‘to increase the number of Americans learning foreign languages critical to national security’ (US Department of Education 2008).

Having provided an overview of the language learning contexts in the five countries, a number of points relating to the questions raised earlier must now be acknowledged. First, it would not appear unreasonable to compare language attitudes in the chosen countries. Despite the differences, there are educational similarities that justify comparisons – MFLs are common components of the secondary curriculum in all five countries, with national/state frameworks suggesting or directing time allocation, common standards, curricula, etc. For all this, however, the fundamental difference in sociocultural context cannot be ignored. MFL attitudes in the three Anglophone countries here appear to be ‘hampered’ precisely by having native English-speaking populations, widespread acceptance of monolingualism and a degree of geographic isolation; this contrasts significantly with the situation in Germany and Holland, where national appetites for MFL appear much healthier. This difference is clearly of huge importance and must be explored very carefully later on, especially when considering what lessons – if indeed any – English-speaking countries might learn from these two particular Continental European countries. Before this, however, it is important to understand the basic concept of attitudes (Chapter 3), before proceeding to a detailed exploration of the various ways in which educational and societal factors influence attitudes (Chapters 4 and 5).

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Chapter 3

The Concept of Attitudes

The notion of attitudes in language learning rests on a long research tradition, which is matched by an equally broad range of contexts. Different studies have focused on the role of attitudes in first language, second language, (modern) foreign language and bi-lingual teaching and learning contexts. Though the debate concerning the potentially divisive nature of these different terms is an important one (as acknowledged by Beaumont and O'Brien (2000: xii)), the current study chiefly concerns itself with attitudes in the modern foreign language context, given that German, French and English are designated as MFLs in the relevant national policy documents. Positioning the study within the 'MFL' context is therefore merely a reflection of these common local designations and not an attempt to contribute to or express support for the maintenance of these divisions within the field.

Discussing language attitudes in general, Baker (1992) explains their research appeal as lying partly in the accessibility of the concept itself. As an everyday, familiar notion, 'this common terminology allows bridges to be made between research and practice' (Baker 1992: 9). He goes on to acknowledge the value of attitudes in providing an important social research route to access 'indications of current community thoughts and beliefs, preferences and desires' (*ibid.*). Interest in attitude research can also be explained by wide acknowledgement of the relationship between attitudes and successful learning (Gardner 1985: 4), although this connection is contested by some researchers. Oller and Perkins (1980), for example, discovered no direct correlation between second-language proficiency and learner attitudes. In spite of the generally acknowledged importance of attitudes, however, there is much disagreement on their precise nature, their constituent components, classification and their status as a 'free-standing' concept in the field of language learning.

A comprehensive definition of attitudes is offered by Allport (1954: 45):

A mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response towards all subjects and situations with which it is related.

Most definitions, however, stress the central idea of an evaluative response towards the subject or situation. For example, Gardner (1985: 9) defines attitude as:

an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent.

Similarly,

An attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour.

(Eagley and Chaiken 1998: 269)

Ajzen (1988), who approaches attitudes from a social-psychological perspective, echoes this in describing attitude as 'the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing the particular behaviour of interest' (p. 117), and in doing so clearly links attitude with behaviour. This connection between attitude and behaviour has provided the basis for much enquiry, focusing on the relationship between attitude and performance/achievement. Much of this research has in turn examined the bivariate relationships between attitude and language proficiency by gender, by school type, by age, etc. (e.g. Wright 1999; APU 1985; Clark and Trafford 1995) Although this relationship clearly represents a rich seam in terms of interest and value, it will not be examined here. Comparative measures of performance in many subjects admittedly provoke much interest in the current educational climate, but they are particularly difficult to produce with any real validity, perhaps especially so when it comes to measuring performance in foreign languages across cultures, though attempts have been made with some success (see Milton and Meara 1998).

Moreover, the connection between attitude to language learning and performance may not be as uncontentious as it at first sight appears, since attitude does not necessarily translate into observable behaviour or performance. Gardner acknowledges that 'attitudes are related to behaviour, though not necessarily directly' (Gardner 1985: 9), while theorists such as Fazio (1990) and Tesser and Shaffer (1990) strongly object to the inclusion of behaviour within a definition of attitudes. Baker (1992) even highlights the danger of using behavioural observation as a mechanism for measuring language attitudes, warning that 'to ignore the accumulated experiences that are captured in attitudes and concentrate solely on external behaviour

is unjustified' (p. 16). In his own definition, he nonetheless makes an explicit link between attitude and behaviour:

Attitude is a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behaviour.

(Baker 1992: 10)

Chambers (1999) provides the following definition:

Attitude is taken to mean the set of values which a pupil brings to the FLL experience. It is shaped by the pay-offs that she (sic) expects; the advantages that she sees in language learning. The values which a pupil has may be determined by different variables, such as the experience of learning the target language, of the target language community, experience of travel, the influence of parents and friends, and the attitudes which they may demonstrate and articulate.

(Chambers 1999: 27)

Chambers' definition has much to offer here, in that it locates attitudes clearly in the context of language learning, and acknowledges the social, cultural and educational factors which may influence them. The social dimension to attitude formation is particularly significant, since 'attitudes to FLL are not confined to the FLL classroom' (Young 1994b: 15). Oppenheim (1992) also emphasizes the importance of the social world in relation to attitudes:

Attitudes are acquired or modified by absorbing or reacting to the attitudes of others.

(Oppenheim 1992: 178)

The constituents of attitude

Baker (1992) discusses a tripartite attitudinal structure, consisting of cognitive, affective and conative constituents. The cognitive element refers to those aspects of attitude related to thoughts and beliefs; the affective component concerns aspects related to feelings and emotions, while the conative part is associated with those aspects of attitude which connect with

behavioural intention. He acknowledges that varying tensions may exist between these components. Beliefs about the importance of language learning may not, for example, translate into actual language learning behaviour, while a positive cognitive component may belie a negative affective component. For instance, someone may believe that there is value in learning German even though she has a personal dislike of the learning process.

The three elements included in Baker's conceptualization are united 'at a higher level of abstraction' (Baker 1992: 13) where they form the single construct of attitude. This hierarchical model of attitude, with cognition, affect and action at its base seems to be the model most favoured by social psychology (Rosenberg and Hovland 1960; Ajzen 1988; Oppenheim 1992; Böhner 2001). Again, the inclusion of the conative element could be challenged as a potential weakness in the model with reference to MFLL, given that the link with behaviour may be less evident.

Cargile *et al.* (1994) reflect a similar three-part attitudinal model, and discuss how the affective and cognitive components may dominate depending on an individual's experience of a particular language. When confronted with a perhaps unfamiliar language spoken by an unfamiliar culture, the individual's attitude is more likely to be dominated by an emotional or affective evaluation, since knowledge of the language and associated culture may be minimal or non-existent. This situation may be reversed with learners who already possess knowledge and distinct beliefs about the language they are learning, resulting in a more cognitively conditioned attitude. With regard to the behavioural component, Cargile *et al.* (1994: 222) refer to the commonly held belief that 'the cognitive and affective components . . . combine to predispose people toward certain behaviours' but interestingly suggest that the directive strength in language contexts may be much weaker than such influences as prevailing social norms and the individual's character.

Young (1994b) too echoes a tripartite structure in her examination of attitudes, but includes a different set of components in her model of motivation in the context of MFLL. In common with Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, Young excludes the conative aspect from her concept of attitudes, which is built on the notions of needs, goal and desire. In her model, she distinguishes between the different motivational states of orientation, attitudes and motivation itself. Needs and goal unite to form the orientation state, which itself is subsumed within the attitudinal state in combination with desire. The additional concept of drive is added to distinguish the motivational state, which clearly marks out action as distinct from attitudes.

Young takes learner needs as a starting point in her definition of the attitudinal state. These needs may vary in nature and intensity, and will thus influence the learner's formulation of a goal to meet these needs. The goal itself will subsequently be filtered by the strength of the learner's desire. This model, like Gardner's socio-educational model, has the key advantage of excluding the drive element – the ultimate effort (action) expended by the learner to satisfy the needs – from the concept of attitudes. It is clear from the literature that the inclusion/exclusion of action/behaviour within a definition of attitudes is a matter of debate. Given that this study is not concerned with pupils' performance in MFL or their classroom behaviour, but more with the nature of and influences on their attitudes, Young's model is clearly attractive. Her needs-based definition of attitudes, however, contrasts with Chambers' more values-based definition (above), while Gardner's definition also highlights the central role of beliefs and values within attitudes.

Attitudes and motivation

Most of the above studies have been primarily concerned with the broader field of motivation in MFL, and all agree that attitudes are a major constituent of the motivational process. In spite of this, there appears to be much uncertainty about the exact nature of the relationship between the two, both terms often being used interchangeably, as though they are more or less synonymous. Ellis (1985) makes much of this confusion, as does Young (1994b) in her re-evaluation of the motivational process. Crookes and Schmidt (1991) echo the same critique, describing the failure of much language attitude research to provide a clear distinction between the two concepts as a key weakness in the vast field of attitude research which is dominated by social-psychological perspectives. Chambers (1999: 26) points out that a widely acknowledged distinction still evades us:

Research into motivation and foreign language learning reflects some difficulty with the distinction between motivation and attitude.

He draws on the work of Schiefele (1963), who defines motivation as a combination of motives and attitudes. Attitudes in Schiefele's view represent an individual's more stable, underlying disposition towards learning a language, whereas motives are the more immediate factors in a given situation which guide behaviour in a particular direction.

Baker (1992), in a similar sense, distinguishes between attitude and motivation by focusing on the difference between object and goal. He describes attitudes as object-specific, focusing therefore on the relationship between attitude and its referent object, but aligns motivation directly with goal-oriented behaviour. We therefore once again see a distinction between the cognitive and affective components on the one hand (attitudes), and on the other, the action component which links into behaviour and thus the wider aspect of motivation.

The classification of attitudes

Even with a broad conceptual distinction between attitudes and motivation, the concept of attitude in the context of MFL still requires further categorization. Gardner and Lambert (1972), as key pioneers in MFL motivational research, identify three categories of language-learning attitudes – those which relate to the target-language community, those relating to learning a particular language, and those relating to language learning in general. Researching attitudes to learning French in Canada, Gardner and Lambert found that attitudes to the target-language community had the most significant bearing on learner attitudes. Some researchers (e.g. Chambers (1999)) have pointed out that Canada's special socio-linguistic situation is bound to elevate the importance of the role played by attitudes towards the target-language community in language learning, since learners in this context are more likely to have contact with members of that community, unlike learners of French in other national contexts, such as England or Germany. Lukmani (1972) in her study of Bombay English learners also found that attitudes to the target-language community were of little significance, in that learners felt they were learning a culturally neutral international lingua franca.

Gardner (1985) discusses classifying attitudes towards MFL in terms of the two broad categories of social and educational attitudes, a classification consistent with his socio-educational model of language learning. Within this model, his view of motivation, and of attitudes within this, is based on the notions of instrumentality and integrativeness. A language learner who possesses integrative attitudes, in Gardner's view, will have positive attitudes towards learning, since this constitutes a desire for social alignment with the target-language community. In a sense, the learner will thus be socially motivated to continue through the language-learning process. This type of

learner contrasts with an instrumentally motivated learner, whose attitudes are conditioned by the outcomes of the learning process – achieving a qualification, the perceived status that achievement will confer on the learner, enhanced career prospects, etc.

This classification of attitudes, and indeed motivation, in the context of MFL has been extremely influential, though far from uncontroversial. Young (1994b: 31) criticizes this ‘dichotomic vision’ as being too simplistic and also somewhat ambiguous. Deci and Ryan (1995), sharing similar reservations, propose a slightly more nuanced model which sees motivation as a four-stage continuum from extrinsic to intrinsic orientation, marked by certain thresholds through which a language learner may progress. The subtlety of this model is clearly a strength, as is the underlying notion of the language learner potentially being in a state of orientational flux, rather than necessarily falling into one of two sharply divided categories. Nonetheless, the model is still fundamentally centred around the notions of instrumentality and integrativeness.

Baker (1992) too questions the usefulness of this classification when applied to attitudes on the grounds that the classification is more conceptual than empirical in origin:

The two orientations are not necessarily opposites or alternatives. Both are capable of existing within an individual at the same time.

(Baker 1992: 35)

McPake *et al.* (1999) also express certain reservations about an over-reliance on notions of integrativeness and instrumentality, particularly when looking at attitudes to MFL in UK contexts. Their research focused on MFL learners in upper secondary schools in Scotland, which context arguably shares a number of similarities with the English one. In their view, there is little to support the importance of these two social-psychological constructs in the Scottish MFL situation, which also finds alarming and increasing numbers of pupils opting out of language learning at sixteen. Though it could be argued that this situation in fact offers strong support for the direct relevance of both the orientations, McPake *et al.* nonetheless point to a wave of research which locates key attitudinal influences in the context of the classroom, drawing on the work of Nikolov (1998), who looked at MFL and motivation in school children in Hungary. He observed:

Children between six and fourteen years of age . . . were more motivated

by classroom practice than by integrative or instrumental reasons.

(Nikolov 1998: 49)

Dörnyei (1998) echoes this view:

The main focus has shifted from social attitudes to looking at classroom reality, and identifying and analysing classroom specific motives.

(Dörnyei, 1998: 125)

In support of their argument, McPake *et al.* refer to the work of Oxford and Sheerin (1994), who investigated the attitudes and motivation of learners of Japanese in American high schools, and found that more than two-thirds of them had reasons for learning Japanese that could not be accommodated by integrative or instrumental notions. The pupils' reasons for learning included such diverse factors as the intellectual and personal challenge, enjoying a sense of elitism and gaining cultural insight or access to a secret code (McPake *et al.* 1999: 27). It could be argued, however, that some of these reasons might be described as having an underlying instrumental or integrative flavour – gaining access to a secret code or a sense of elitism could be seen as instrumentally inspired, for example.

Despite the criticisms that could be levelled at the reasoning here, Oxford and Sheerin's views suggest that Gardner's paradigm does have certain inadequacies in explaining the subtleties of language orientations and attitudes. At the same time, however, it seems difficult to exclude the importance of factors located outside the classroom. An examination of attitudes from both educational and sociocultural perspectives would thus seem to allow for a broader analysis of the complex interactions between the factors involved.

Attitude determinants

By classifying attitudes to language learning on the basis of sociocultural and educational 'determinants', we are clearly focusing almost exclusively on contextual variables. In doing so, it is important to be aware that a host of individual factors may be equally influential in attitude formation. Young (1994b) mentions a number of such factors, including personality, cognitive style, intelligence, aptitude and learner age. Student ability is also widely recognized as a significant variable influencing attitudes (Burstall *et al.* 1974; Oller and Perkins 1978). Clark and Trafford (1995), in their study

on gender-based differences in attitudes towards MFL (gender itself has often been highlighted as a key variable), refer to ability as an important attitudinal determinant:

The considerable divergence between very positive, enthusiastic pupils and the more reluctant, sometimes negative pupils seems to correspond largely to ability.

(Clark and Trafford 1995: 316)

There is much to support this view in the literature, though one key conundrum is of course the question of causality – are positive attitudes responsible for fostering ability and achievement, or does ability naturally give rise to positive attitudes? Crookes and Schmidt (1991) discuss this problem, acknowledging that ‘achievement might actually be the cause instead of the effect of attitude’:

Successful SL [second language] learners might tend to acquire positive attitudes towards both language learning and the target language community as a result of doing well, whereas relatively unsuccessful learners might acquire negative attitudes.

(Crookes and Schmidt 1991: 474)

It seems sensible to conclude that there is some form of cyclical relationship here (Gardner and MacIntyre 1993), though the exact nature of the causal relationship remains perhaps more problematic.

Some studies (Gardner and Smythe 1975; Jones 1950) have investigated the relationship between age and language attitudes, often coming to the intriguing conclusion that ‘attitudes towards learning a second language become less positive with age’ (Gardner 1985: 44). The relationship between attitudes and intelligence has likewise provoked much interest, and remains a contested route of enquiry, partly because of issues surrounding the reliability and feasibility of measuring intelligence and separating linguistic performance from (innate) ability.

Much recent research has turned to examining MFL and key motivational constructs that vary at the level of the individual. McPake *et al.* (1999) refer to three significant theories centred around notions of expectancy and value, attributions and self-efficacy. The first notion here concentrates on the part played by the individual learner’s own expectations of the language-learning process, and the value attached to success. Attribution theories

focus on the factors to which a learner may ascribe success or failure, while theories of self-efficacy explore the relationship between learning and the maintenance of an individual's self-concept. Despite the significance of such individual variables in attitude formation, such factors will not constitute the focus of attention in this study. Important though they clearly are, it seems fairly safe to assume that such factors will vary from individual to individual in all (school) communities, whether they be in England, Germany, Holland or wherever. Baker's (1992) research also supports the significance of contextual variables:

Attitude appears more strongly connected with the environmental variables than individual attributes.

(Baker 1992: 68)

Environmental variables, i.e. educational and sociocultural influences, can reasonably be expected to be more consistent across particular school communities in particular countries, though the impact of these variables on the individual may, of course, be experienced differently. The consistency of these environmental variables, their influence on attitudes to MFL and the extent of commonality across national communities thus form the basis of this comparative study. This twofold categorization of environmental influences on attitudes to MFL will subsequently be used as a basis for examining the nature of these determinants. Before this, however, it is necessary to establish a broad overview of what the reading reveals about the nature of learner attitudes to MFL, and how these may be described.

Chapter 4

Attitudes to Modern Foreign Language Learning and Educational Influences

The reading indicates that a number of educational factors are of significance in influencing learner attitudes to MFL. These can be grouped into three broad categories for the purposes of analysis, though they will inevitably overlap to some extent: teacher-related influences, school-related influences and influences at the level of national/state curriculum policy on MFL.

Teacher-related influences on attitude

There seems to be little doubt that a teacher's role is hugely important in influencing how pupils feel about MFL. Chambers (1994) concludes that the teacher plays a key part in the motivational process, a view that he confirms in later studies:

Again and again, the teacher is named as the reason, for example, why they like/dislike German, why their learning experience has improved/deteriorated. The teaching methodology, the textbook, the computers available count for little if the teacher-pupil relationship is lacking.

(Chambers 1999: 137)

Wright's research (1999: 207) clearly seems to support Chambers' findings:

[T]eachers are viewed by pupils as being influential agents in the forming of learners' attitudes.

This view is in fact echoed in many studies, such as Nikolov (1998), Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993) and Clark and Trafford (1995). The importance of the teacher in influencing language attitudes perhaps has to do with the unique nature and challenges of MFL. As mentioned earlier, language learning makes special demands of the learner, requiring him or her to adopt 'foreign' behavioural practices and to perform these behaviours quite conspicuously in front of their teacher and peers, precisely at a time in their

lives – puberty – when self-consciousness and self-image are often sensitive issues. It seems therefore only natural that students need to feel they can trust their languages teachers. If this is not the case, it is unlikely that they will be positively disposed towards the learning situation. Aplin (1991) noted that dislike of teachers was a key factor in accounting for pupil dropout from language classes, while Stables and Wikeley (1999) noted that pupils were far more concerned about who would be teaching them languages than any other subject:

[I]nterviewees were asked whether it mattered to them which teachers would be taking subjects in Year 10 . . . references to modern language teachers far outweighed references to those in any other subject area.

(Stables and Wikeley 1999: 29)

The same finding emerges from Fisher's study, in which 'several pupils volunteered the view that the teacher in MFL lessons was even more important than in the other subjects' (2001: 38). Given the importance pupils attach to their teacher, then, it may be no coincidence that the attitudes of English pupils to MFL appear to be as negative as many suggest. The chief inspector of schools pointed out that 'there is less very good and more bad teaching in languages than in any other subject' (Henry 2001b: 28). Results from the 'A Taste for Languages at School' (ATLAS) project (2002) similarly suggest that only 40 per cent of GCSE pupils are satisfied with the way they are taught languages. The same theme also emerged in Watts' (2003) study which examined the reasons for the decline in MFL take-up in higher education. Such views, however, beg leading questions about the definition of criteria for good and bad teaching. Furthermore, it would be dangerous to assume that 'bad teaching', however defined, necessarily equates with negative learner attitudes. Chambers (1999), for example, notes how German pupils often exhibit positive attitudes towards learning English in spite of language teaching which he describes as often being 'rather sterile and unimaginative' (p. 10).

Clark and Trafford (1995) found that teachers themselves shared pupils' views on the importance of the teacher–pupil relationship, with teachers in their research claiming it to be 'the most significant variable affecting pupils' attitudes towards languages' (p. 318). Gardner and Lambert (1972) also acknowledge the bearing of teacher personality on pupil attitudes, while Lee *et al.* (1998: 58) observe that 'pupils rely heavily on their teachers and place great trust in them'. The way in which the teacher teaches is thus likely to be

very significant in the formation of the teacher–pupil relationship, though different teaching practices and styles will of course be perceived very differently by pupils, depending on their own individual learning styles and preferences. This may mean that poor relationships inevitably sometimes develop, because of mismatches in this respect, and that these mismatches might be responsible for moulding pupil attitudes. Particular aspects of teaching methodology and their influences will be discussed later under school-related factors, though teacher use of the target language in the MFL classroom is worthy of attention at this juncture.

Use of the target language

Once again, there appears to be little agreement on the relative merits and demerits of teachers' and pupils' use of the target language in the classroom. In his study of pupil perceptions of German in the classroom, Neil (1996) concludes that pupils felt positively about target language use, a view shared by Chambers (1994). However, language inspectors in England have commented on pupils' disinclination towards this practice:

The target language is much used by teachers but more in Key Stage Three than in Key Stage Four, and many pupils in both Key Stages are reluctant to use it.

(Dobson 1998: 1)

This reluctance on the part of many pupils may translate into negative language learning attitudes, and prompts Lee *et al.* (1998) to call for 'some aspects of currently accepted practice in foreign language teaching . . . to be questioned in the light of the need for a clearer view of pedagogical issues and an appropriate methodology' (p. 65). Stables and Wikeley (1999) echo this view, stating that 'pedagogical innovations, notably target language teaching . . . have done nothing to improve pupils' self-images as language learners, and may have done the reverse' (p. 30). The authors offer an intriguing explanation for this, suggesting that target-language use may serve to undermine the pupil–teacher relationship by underlining the power differential – the teacher's likely superior language competence contrasting sharply with the learner's inferior and more limited ability.

Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993: 93), who looked at pupil attitudes towards French, German and Spanish, also found that 'most pupils disliked

listening to their teacher talking in the target language'. Vasseur and Grandcolas (1997) explain this reaction by referring to the communication difficulties which arise as a consequence of this method. They suggest that the teacher's ability to maintain communication with language learners is vital, and will be compromised by overuse of the target language, especially in the early stages of learning. This breakdown in communication theory clearly ties in with Stables' and Wikeley's ideas on how the target language may adversely affect the pupil-teacher relationship. It is also borne out by the findings of Kent's (1996) research in Scotland which highlighted excessive use of the target language as a major source of pupil demotivation. Kent explains that the Scottish pupils in her study identified the language teacher as having two roles – that of explicator and of interlocutor. While the use of the target language was seen to serve the second function well, pupils felt that it severely undermined the first. Kent concludes that the resulting difficulty in grasping explanations via the target language and the frustration which followed fail to promote positive engagement with MFL.

School-related influences on attitude

Clearly, there are strong indications that the teacher is a key educational influence on pupil attitudes. To explore this role in more depth, it is useful to examine pedagogical issues surrounding MFL learning and teaching, and the impact they have on pupil attitudes. Specific pedagogical practices may of course be determined by individual teacher preference, ability or training, though decisions on pedagogy are often made at school departmental level or even dictated by the style or demands of national curricula. What follows is a general examination of MFL classroom practices and their bearing on attitude.

Some have argued that pedagogy plays a very small part in influencing pupils' attitudes to MFL, particularly when pupil attitudes are already negative, and that attempts to improve teaching practices in a bid to improve attitudes are bound to fail since pedagogy in itself is not enough to override negative attitudes:

[D]e tels efforts ne pourront réellement porter leurs fruits que si, parallèlement aux améliorations didactiques, les attitudes des élèves envers la langue à apprendre sont favorables.

(De Pietro 1994: 90)

([S]uch efforts will only really bear fruit if improvements in teaching are accompanied by favourable pupil attitudes towards the language being learned.)

Such views, however, stand in sharp contrast to the wealth of literature which suggests that what happens in the classroom is extremely influential (e.g. Nikolov (1998), Clark and Trafford (1995) and Dörnyei (1998)). The latter explores the interplay between classroom dynamics and pupil motivation in some depth, 'identifying and analysing classroom specific motives' (p. 125). Stipek (1996) also strongly asserts the important connection between classroom reality and pupil motivation:

Study after study demonstrates that although students bring some motivational baggage – beliefs, expectations and habits – to class, the immediate instructional context strongly affects their motivation. Decisions about the nature of the tasks, how performance is evaluated, how rewards are used, how much autonomy students have, and myriad other variables under a teacher's control largely determine student motivation.

(Stipek 1996: 85)

Lesson activities

The above quotation indicates that a huge variety of pedagogical issues will variously influence attitudes. In their research in England, Lee *et al.* (1998) randomly listed twenty-five different lesson activities commonly used in the MFL classroom, before asking pupils to tick which activities took place in their own MFL classes, and which ones they liked or disliked. The results showed that lessons were 'characterised by a fairly standard range of processes' (Lee *et al.* 1998: 24), including such activities as copying from the board/book, working with partners, groups and textbooks, answering questions, listening to explanations and tapes, repeating, doing language exercises, etc.

When examining how pupils rated the different activities, Lee *et al.* (1998: 27) were struck by the fact that 'pupils have no strong sense of either liking or disliking the great majority of things they do in the modern language classroom'. Activities which generally proved more popular included pair and group work, while the most unpopular activities included reading out loud, vocabulary tests and copying from the board/book. These findings

can be compared with those of Chambers (1999), who found that playing games and watching films were additional favourites among pupils, while learning vocabulary and verbs were generally disliked. Though Lee *et al.* do not attempt to link their findings with pupil attitudes directly, the image that emerges is of pupils who seem generally uninspired by the teaching and learning activities they are engaged in. This image is confirmed later in Lee *et al.*'s research, where pupils ranked languages among the most unpopular school subjects, a result borne out by Stables and Wikeley (1999), and also by Aplin (1991).

When exploring the reasons for the particular subject rankings, Lee *et al.* (1998: 50) observe that 'in all subjects, pupil preference was based on classroom experience', suggesting once again that the pedagogical diet received by some pupils is doing little to improve their attitudes towards MFL. Aplin's (1991) research would again seem to support this. He examined the attitudes of pupils who had decided to abandon their language studies at sixteen, and identified a dislike of language learning activities as a key factor in their decision making. Pupils felt that many of the activities in their MFL lessons were not enjoyable and lacked practical value. Largely similar results were revealed by the ATLAS project (2002). The views that other subjects are more interesting, more useful, more enjoyable and less difficult emerged as important themes in this large-scale national research project.

Another issue revealed by the ATLAS project was the largely negative experiences that pupils had with oral work. This may in part be explained by general issues discussed above associated with communicating in the target language; however, pupils participating in the study made particular mention of the panic and embarrassment experienced as a result of oral work, and anxieties created by the demands of pronunciation, accuracy and fluency which were all made worse by 'being put on the spot when the teacher asks you to speak in class' (ATLAS 2002: 3). This same phenomenon was noted by Court (2001: 28–9) in her research on boys learning French. Court suggests that boys are especially prone to a fear of embarrassment, explaining that they might be 'embarrassed at having to produce strange noises in the presence of girls' and also of 'sounding foolish in front of male peer groups'. The increased risk of embarrassment for boys has to do with the fact that language learning is at variance with dominant constructions of masculinity among adolescent males, she argues. This construction is particularly undermined in the MFL classroom which offers more potential for embarrassment 'because there are so many more opportunities to get things wrong' (*ibid.*: 29), especially when having to engage spontaneously in unprepared speaking

activities. This is partly why some boys prefer writing activities, Court argues, as 'writing does not involve an element of spontaneity' (*ibid.*: 32). The extent to which girls associate speaking activities with embarrassment was not explored in Court's study, given her focus on boys, but it seems logical that some girls may have similar experiences. Whether gender is significant here or not, the inevitable role of some oral work in MFL means that the effect on attitudes of such anxieties are unlikely to be encouraging, and the skill of the teacher to defuse these feelings is highlighted.

Lee *et al.* (1998) come back to the possibility that the communicative approach, working often within a framework that isolates particular features of grammar and vocabulary within potentially disconnected units of learning, may be equally to blame for negative attitudes, as it may lead to pupil frustration:

Some of them imply that they are aware of things going on behind their work which they cannot grasp. They may unwittingly be describing the effect on them of representative current approaches to modern language teaching with its emphasis on chunks of language met in the context of a topic.

(Lee *et al.* 1998: 59)

Grenfell (2000: 26) discusses how this 'fragmented' approach is often exacerbated by 'results-driven game-playing' which sees many schools in England, sensitive to their league-table positions, adopting modular MFL curricula in an attempt to secure higher subject grades. He suggests that the compartmentalized approach to content and assessment found in many modular schemes militates against the cumulative and interconnected nature of language learning, and that the larger free-standing coursework elements can be manipulated by schools to ensure better results. Such 'political' concerns, Grenfell argues, conflict with setting in place solid linguistic foundations, and the lack of such foundations may only further exasperate pupil learning and attitudes to learning.

Further exasperation may arise from language teaching methods which emphasize rehearsal and repetition. Clark and Trafford (1995: 320) found that such techniques are a fundamental aspect of language learning, and yet they may add to pupils' frustration. Pupils of both sexes 'expressed frustration about the repetitive nature of their language learning experience' and felt that 'languages placed a greater demand on them in terms of concentration' (*ibid.*: 321) as a result.

Vasseur and Grandcolas (1997), who looked at the way French is taught in the UK, are particularly critical of the overemphasis on repetition which they observed in English schools and suggest this does little to promote positive orientations to learning French:

La langue, c'est des automatismes: on n'analyse pas, on répète, on s'ennuie. Les conséquences pour l'élève sont multiples: il lui est difficile d'exercer activement ses capacités de compréhension, de transférer ses connaissances d'une unité d'enseignement à l'autre.

(Vasseur and Grandcolas 1997: 222–3)

(Language is a set of automatic responses: they don't analyse, they repeat, they get bored. The consequences for the pupils are many: it is difficult for them to actively develop their comprehension skills and to transfer their knowledge from one session to another.)

It seems reasonable to assume that these factors may contribute to the formation of negative language attitudes among some pupils. Using a range of methods and approaches may thus be one way to minimize the potentially damaging effects of excessive repetition, and Clark and Trafford's findings certainly suggest that variety in language teaching and learning 'seemed to have a profound effect on pupil attitudes' (1995: 322), although they do acknowledge that the methods used may once again be less influential than the teacher's personality:

Given the importance of the teacher/pupil relationship which emerged as such a salient and recurrent theme . . . it may be that the arrangement of teaching groups is less significant than the quality of the interaction and the ability of the teacher to inspire and motivate pupils.

(Clark and Trafford 1995: 322)

Nonetheless, many authors have continued to identify school and classroom factors as major influences on pupil attitudes in MFL contexts. Kent (1996) found, for example, that teaching arrangements were often responsible for demotivating language learners, and cites such factors as an over-reliance on worksheets, teaching in mixed-ability groups and the amount of teacher time taken up with maintaining discipline as key culprits. Discipline problems in MFL lessons may be a potential consequence of pupils' struggle with concentration, as acknowledged by Clark and Trafford (1995). This

phenomenon was also noted by Henry (2001a), who discusses the 'undertow of reluctance' among language learners in Britain. She not only acknowledges that MFL lessons are often prone to discipline problems, but that the consequences of these problems are particularly counterproductive in language learning:

Disruptive behaviour has a disproportionate effect on language lessons, where attentive listening and working in pairs are essential ingredients.
(Henry 2001a: 15)

McPake *et al.* (1999) similarly highlight pupil dissatisfaction with individualized approaches to teaching, whereby pupils are often left in pairs to study worksheets as the teacher moves around the class monitoring individuals, with limited whole-group supervision. Pupils felt that worksheets were particularly problematic with regard to revision. The pupils in Kent's (1996: 11) study were particularly critical of the excessive use of worksheets and provided detailed insights into their reasons, not least among which was the fact that they felt worksheets did little to promote their deep learning, given their focus on task completion which was often 'at the expense of encouraging long-term learning'. An additional problem may be the delay between completing one worksheet and moving on to the next, which may be responsible for pupil frustration or loss of interest. Kenny (2002: 29) refers to this problem:

One of the issues with worksheets is getting round to mark them so that pupils go on to the next thing because they have shown that they have understood.

Again, it seems reasonable to assume that learners' attitudes to the nature of the activities they engage in during MFL lessons will influence their attitudes to MFL. Indeed, Mahjoub (1995), investigating language attitudes in Belgium, found there was a direct correlation between university students' experience of learning German at school and their attitude towards German, though this again raises the conundrum of causality – does a negative attitude towards the language unfavourably predispose learners towards the learning situation or vice versa? This situation leads Mahjoub (1995: 79) to conclude that 'die Möglichkeit einer gegenseitigen Beeinflussung darf nicht ausgeschlossen werden' ('the possibility of mutual influence cannot be excluded'). Again, however, it seems difficult to deny that the nature of learning and teaching will have an effect on learner attitude.

The role of information and communication technology (ICT)

One important innovation in MFL education is of course the increasing use of technology-supported learning. Chambers (1999: 38), like many others, feels there is evidence 'to support the view that ICT has much to contribute to the enhancement of the foreign language learning experience', and discusses how the opportunities it affords for individual engagement and flexible learning have a positive impact on pupils. The internet in particular brings a whole new motivational dimension to language learning through its ability to create explicit links between MFL theory and meaningful practice in real-life contexts. Lee *et al.* (1998: 39) remark:

Immediacy, accessibility of materials and native speakers in the target language country, use of the keyboard rather than the pen, of the screen rather than the exercise book and textbook contribute much to the learning of real life skills and to the enhancement of motivation.

There is indeed a wealth of literature (e.g. Wringe 1989; Austin and Mendlick 1993; Beauvois 1998; Fischer 1998; Leahy 2000) which extols the virtues of ICT in the MFL classroom, based on a belief in its ability to create and sustain motivation. This belief would also seem to be held by education authorities in Britain, who realize that ICT may be able to improve what are often taken to be predominantly negative attitudes to modern languages. Availability of ICT resources is thus key, and much investment would be needed to ensure wider access for all learners, many of whom appear very keen – 67 per cent of the pupils taking part in the ATLAS project (2002), for example, felt that too little use was made of ICT in their language lessons. Chambers (1999) reiterates this need, but points out that the UK situation compares relatively favourably with the general scarcity of ICT facilities available to MFL learners in Germany. An article by Kenny (2002: 15) on ICT and languages suggests that this need for improved ICT facilities has at least been acknowledged at state level:

Languages have been identified by the Office for Standards in Education as an area that needs more [ICT] support.

Using ICT may even reduce the inhibitions some pupils have about speaking a language in front of their peers, and thus minimize any associated negative feelings. Kenny refers to staff perceptions of improved pupil behaviour in a

school which has invested heavily in ICT, describing how 'staff have found that pupils are more willing to practise pronunciation in the language lab or in the computer room than in the classroom situation when they are much more aware of other people listening to them. (Kenney 2002: 29).

Though these motivational benefits are not in dispute, ICT might not always be responsible for creating more positive attitudes. Leahy (2000), for example, discusses cases where email projects have produced a demotivating effect on learners, particularly when frustration has resulted from lengthy delays in receiving responses from foreign partners. Furthermore, as ICT becomes an increasingly ordinary aspect of daily life for young people, it is conceivable that the novelty value and the associated motivational effect may wear off to a degree. Writing several years before the ICT invasion into MFL, Wringe (1989) anticipated this possibility, predicting that 'the time will come when the computer is as much taken for granted as the black-board or even detested as the tape recorder' (p. 145). Leahy (2000), in her research into student attitudes towards ICT elements in advanced German classes, also discovered that some learners were rather critical of too much emphasis being placed on technology in the language classroom at the expense of language skills, and exhibited a rather wary attitude towards the medium. As she observes:

Learners can be quite conservative in their outlook towards teaching and learning methods, and this needs to be taken into consideration.

(Leahy 2000: 16)

Though such wariness may possibly apply more to older learners such as the university students participating in Leahy's research, whose familiarity with ICT may not be as thorough as that of today's teenagers, the point still remains that ICT does not necessarily have equal and universal appeal to all language learners, and might thus occasionally have a negative impact on attitudes. Wringe (1989: 144) reiterates this negative potential, particularly in cases where a teacher's overenthusiasm for ICT may lead to it being used inappropriately and ineffectively.

The textbook

Once again, there is a wide diversity of opinion on the ways in which the foreign language textbook may influence pupils' perceptions of language

learning. Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993) found surprisingly few pupils commented on the significance of the textbook in the research they carried out into pupil attitudes as part of the Oxford project, a six-year longitudinal investigation. Dörnyei (2001), looking at factors responsible for demotivating language learners, found the same, though this may of course indicate a high level of satisfaction with the textbooks used.

Several authors provide strong evidence that textbooks can be a very important influence on attitude, however. In his 1994 study of motivation, Chambers found that German learners in years nine and twelve felt that the textbook was the second-most important aspect of their language learning experience after their teacher. Chambers finds further support for this view in his 1999 comparative study of learners in England and Germany, which once again reveals that pupils in both countries rate the textbook second only to teaching. In her research on attitudes in Northern Ireland, Wright (1999) explored pupils' perceptions of factors which determined their attitudes towards MFL and similarly discovered that the textbook emerged as the second-biggest influence in terms of in-school factors, and the third-biggest influence overall. Given, then, the importance that pupils seemingly attach to texts, how exactly they influence pupil attitudes towards the language is an interesting question. Löschmann (1998) discusses how the choice of themes, the representation of the target-language communities, the nature of the exercises and the selection of pictures included in textbooks, etc., may create or maintain stereotypical perceptions of the language and country, which themselves may often be negative. This negative stereotyping may then impact adversely on pupil attitudes towards learning the language. Löschmann even goes as far as to suggest that textbook publishers might even deliberately exploit such stereotypical portrayals:

Lehrbücher müssen verkauft werden, deshalb kommen sie gar nicht umhin, bestimmte Erwartungsprogramme von potentiellen Käufern zu erfüllen, die nicht selten auch stereotype Vorstellungen enthalten.

(Löschmann 1998: 11)

(Textbooks have to be sold. Consequently they cannot afford not to recognize potential customers' expectations, which are often based on stereotypical ideas.)

Stroinska (1998) also refers to the potentially harmful attitudinal effects of ill-selected materials based on over-simplified representations of the

target-language country and people. The issues surrounding pupils' views of these aspects and their relationship with attitudes are clearly quite complex, however, and will be examined in more detail later on. Stroinska's views on this issue are shared by Smith and Dobson (1999), who extend their criticisms to the 'pragmatic, transactional emphasis which has pervaded so many course materials' (p. 99). Textbooks based on such principles, which sit alongside curricular notions of consumerism and employability, they argue, often alienate pupil interest by offering little scope for the development of personal, social and cultural aspects.

In terms of textbook usage, while Kent (1996) identifies an insufficient use as a demotivating factor, others, such as Clark and Trafford (1995: 321), have found evidence to suggest that some teachers rely too heavily on books, and that their influence on attitudes in such circumstances may not always be positive. They found many pupils keen to do 'less book stuff', though this may be symptomatic of pupil dissatisfaction with an over-reliance on any one method and the resulting lack of variety. As discussed earlier, variety in language learning seems to be particularly appreciated by pupils.

Returning to Kent's (1996) study, a range of other issues associated with textbooks was perceived as being partly responsible for a disinclination towards MFL. These issues include textbooks being out-of-date, of poor quality, and containing material which is perceived as dull and irrelevant. Even worse, some pupils felt the textbooks used were inappropriately pitched, a finding echoed in Fisher's study, where pupils mentioned the 'patronising and babyish' nature of the books (Fisher 2001: 37). Several pupils commented that insufficient availability of textbooks at school meant they were not allowed to take them home and felt that this additionally hindered their learning and motivation.

Grenfell (2000) acknowledges that textbooks may have a significant impact on MFL, and raises another interesting issue with regard to content and structure. He discusses the ways in which textbook publishers have attempted to respond to some of the concerns mentioned above, but in doing so, may have produced new problems. He comments:

Much has been done in the past decade or so to produce lively, attractive language-learning materials, which are fun for pupils. However, in some cases this has led to a tendency to view language learning as a game.

(Grenfell 2000: 26)

If this is the case, it may be that some pupils come to adopt a less serious

attitude towards their MFLL, and that 'this may be what lies behind the loss of momentum in learning in years ten and eleven' (*ibid.*: 26).

Assessment

Many commentators refer to assessment playing a part in the development of positive attitudes towards language learning, though the relationship between assessment and a positive outlook on learning in any field is likely to be similar. Chambers (1999) asserts the significance of this relationship in language learning, and suggests that language learners have a particular need to be aware of the progress they are making. He feels this places a special responsibility on teachers to satisfy this need through clear feedback, though again this may be true of all learning situations. It is conceivable, however, that language learning, with its demands on learners to perform 'foreign' behaviours that may challenge their social identity, particularly during the emotionally vulnerable adolescent years (as previously discussed), might elevate the significance of supportive assessment and feedback. Wringe (1989) supports this appeal for adopting a sensitive approach towards MFL assessment:

If we are not to alienate the majority of our pupils . . . it is important that tests should not be presented as a threatening experience, with sanctions of ridicule and loss of face for those who do not do well.

(Wringe 1989: 38)

Aplin (1991: 11) identified negative pupil reactions to poor marks as a key reason that pupils no longer wished to continue with languages beyond the age of sixteen. He discovered that 25 per cent of the boys and as many as 36.25 per cent of the girls who participated in his research were negatively 'influenced by low scoring in tests' in languages. Aplin thus argues that negative impressions of progress lead many pupils to adopt negative attitudes towards language learning. Consequently, he advocates a move away from norm-referencing types of assessment in languages towards graded objectives and approaches which reward and facilitate pupil achievement. The importance of pupils gaining a sense of achievement in language learning is further underlined by Gardner (1985: 92), who concludes that 'greater feelings of accomplishment promote relatively more positive attitudes' and that achievement influences attitudes more than attitudes influence achievement. In this respect, ICT may prove its usefulness once again, allowing

'simple testing which will provide immediate feedback to students on their achievements' (Kenny 2002: 29).

A different perspective on the way in which assessment can have a bearing on attitude is revealed in Fisher's research, where some pupils commented on the narrowing effect assessment may exert on the curriculum. Though the reductive effect of assessment-driven curricula has been discussed by many (e.g. Kelly (2009)), it is interesting to hear this echoed in the comments made by a pupil in Fisher's study (2001: 37), which shows how the 'teaching-to-the-test' syndrome may be perceived by some pupils as educationally short-changing them. It is conceivable that this perception of assessment may do little to encourage pupils to adopt a positive attitude towards MFL:

They teach you to pass the exam and don't teach you what the actual syllabus is meant to teach you. So, like, they won't teach you certain tenses which you should use, because you can get away with using other tenses.

The amount of assessment may also be significant, and it is worth restating that an overemphasis on testing was identified as a particular reason for disaffection with language learning among the pupils taking part in the ATLAS project (2002).

School exchanges

School exchanges are part and parcel of the language learning experience for many pupils today, and it seems permissible to assume that this particular school experience will in some way impinge on pupil attitudes. Much of the literature indicates that participating in exchange programmes has a strongly beneficial impact on language learning and pupil attitudes towards the process (e.g. Court 2001). Thornton and Cajkler (1996), in their study of year-ten pupils' attitudes to German, found that 'visits to the target language community contribute not only to positive attitudes in younger learners but also to perceptions that language learning is accessible' (p. 39). They also report that pupils from schools which organized exchanges perceived language learning as less difficult than pupils at schools without programmes. Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993) similarly observed this positive influence. They noted that the attitudes of pupils who had experienced the target-language community were significantly more positive than those who had not, in several respects. Such pupils generally expressed greater enjoyment of language learning, perceived it as easier and were quicker to recognize its usefulness.

Fisher and Evans (2000) offer further evidence of the effects of exchanges. They conducted a study involving year-nine pupils at three English schools participating in French exchanges, and were specifically interested in gauging the effects the visits had on pupils' acquisition of French and their attitudes towards the people and learning the language. In order to determine the effects, pupils completed a number of language tests and attitudinal questionnaires both before and after their visits to France. The results certainly seem to suggest that exchanges have a strikingly positive impact on pupils: Fisher and Evans found that pupils' attitudes towards French people were markedly more positive on return, and that pupils' use of French had improved in a variety of ways. They were able to handle a much greater range of linguistic structures and vocabulary, felt more confident about speaking French and had made particular gains in their listening and writing skills. As a result, the writers claim to have established 'a definite link between learning and exchanges' (Fisher and Evans 2000: 15), and certainly there appears to be ample evidence of this, though the question could be asked as to whether improvements in linguistic competence as a result of participation in exchanges automatically equate with improvements in attitudes towards language learning. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that such improvements would be accompanied by a deterioration in attitudes; it may also be the case that pupil awareness of their developing ability to engage in successful communication abroad bolsters their sense of achievement and in turn their attitudes to learning the language, as previously discussed.

Some authors have less favourable views of the effects of exchanges and visits, however. Gardner (1985) argues that visiting the target-language country does not automatically guarantee positive language learning attitudes:

It is unlikely, however, that simply partaking in an excursion programme will produce positive attitudes.

(Gardner 1985: 86)

He suggests that only when the exchange or excursion includes a significant amount of active communication with native speakers in the target language is there a chance of benefits emerging. For pupils who resist communication, the effects might not necessarily be positive:

There was a significant decrease in attitudes towards learning French for the low contact group.

(*Ibid.*: 87)

Many of the above findings are also no doubt based on pupils' enjoying positive experiences abroad. Where this is not the case, negative attitudes may be engendered. In her research on Belgian attitudes towards German, Mahjoub (1995) found a direct correlation between negative experiences of visits to Germany and negative attitudes towards learning the language, although this once again gives rise to the question of influence direction: if pupils are already negatively disposed towards the language, it is at least conceivable that they might transfer these negative feelings to the country and their own experiences there. Whatever the case may be, it is interesting to note the findings of De Pietro's (1994) research which looked at language attitudes among French, Bulgarian and Swiss teenagers. The French-speaking Swiss pupils in the study had generally had more direct experience of visiting Germany (partly as a result of the country's proximity) than had the French and Bulgarian pupils, and yet their attitudes towards learning German were noticeably more negative. Interestingly, they found German harder, less enjoyable and rated their ability more negatively than the other pupils. This clearly underlines the importance of other educational and sociocultural factors which have a bearing on attitudes, and reveals that visits may not always yield the attitudinal benefits claimed by some. Nonetheless, of all the Swiss teenagers in De Pietro's study, the 10 per cent with the most negative attitudes towards learning German had never visited the country!

School ethos

Many of the factors described above will combine to form a particular 'school ethos' on language learning, the cumulative effect of which may of course be greater in terms of its overall impact on pupil attitudes than any one element. Young (1994b) comments that:

the whole ethos of the particular school in which the individual is educated will be of the utmost importance in the formation of attitudes and aspirations in general. The perceived role of education, the attitudes of the staff, the status of the foreign language within the school, all contribute to the individual's orientational, attitudinal and motivational state.

(Young 1994b: 87)

McPake *et al.* (1999) identify such issues as use of the target language, resources, exchanges, teaching methods and arrangements, time-tabling,

etc., among the elements which make up the school ethos on languages. It would seem logical to assume, then, that where the school language ethos is positive, language attitudes are also likely to be positive. An article in *The Times Educational Supplement* looking at the state of languages in Britain's schools seems to lend some weight to this argument. Having identified attitudes as a key concern in most schools across the nation, survey results showed that 'pupil attitudes were not as big a problem in schools which gave a high priority to the subject' (Ward 2002: 6). The schools in question were, however, thirty of the country's specialist language colleges: pupils attending such schools may have opted to attend because of a desire to specialize in MFL and would thus be likely to have positive language orientations in the first place. Nonetheless, the learning climate surrounding languages can logically be seen as an important influence on attitudes. In addition to the influence of immediate school factors, other aspects of education which determine the content of the school MFL curriculum and its possible status within the school must now be examined.

The curriculum

Several studies have examined pupils' attitudes towards the content of the MFL curriculum. In their study of the MFL decline in Scotland, McPake *et al.* (1999) cite pupil dissatisfaction with the curriculum as a key culprit in the alleged demise. They found that Scottish pupils in their study identified two main advantages in MFL – learning how to communicate with foreigners and learning about foreign cultures. In analysing the reasons for pupil dissatisfaction, McPake *et al.* found that pupils felt their curricular diet did little justice to these advantages, and was more focused on developing the pupils' abilities to talk about themselves. The authors used the term 'self-orientated curriculum' (McPake *et al.* 1999: 53) to refer to this notion, and go on to discuss the reasons why many pupils were uninspired by learning how to describe themselves, their appearances, hobbies, interests, families, friends, homes, etc. One reason has to do with the pupils' own notion of themselves as language learners and users; McPake *et al.* found that pupils' instrumental orientation led them to value transactional language skills more, as this gave them a greater sense of learning which they could apply in the future; talking about themselves in a foreign language had little value for pupils since they were unable to relate to any long-term benefits here, and this in turn caused many of them to dislike MFL at school.

Alarmingly, as many as 70 per cent of the pupils in McPake *et al.*'s research found their MFL curriculum intellectually undemanding, a perception which is unlikely to give rise to positive attitudes. This statistic finds support in Kent's (1996: 22) research, also carried out in Scotland. Kent describes how the content of Standards (equivalent to GCSEs in England) was generally perceived as 'intellectually humiliating and lacking stimulation'. Other authors (e.g. Fisher 2001; Watts 2003) have suggested the situation in England (and indeed the USA – see Jiraffales (2007) – and Australia, where the often brief exposure to language learning limits curricular breadth) is not much different. Milton and Meara (1998) come to similar conclusions in their research which compared levels of language competence among German, Greek and English fourteen-year-old pupils. Concentrating on vocabulary, the authors found that English pupils' MFL vocabulary levels were significantly lower (between a third and a half) than their counterparts' in Greece and Germany. Though the authors concede that other factors partially explain the difference (amount of tuition, etc.), they conclude that 'the learning targets set by the national curriculum and the GCSE exam are very unambitious' (Milton and Meara 1998: 74). This is suggestive of an unchallenging curriculum, which once again may impact adversely on attitudes, and is also reflected in the findings of the ATLAS project (2002: 2) – 'the "basics" are not considered interesting and that is all you do up to GCSE'.

OFSTED has also criticized the 'uninteresting and irrelevant syllabuses' (Ward 2004b: 1) that dominate English MFL curricula and has blamed these for the increase in the number of schools deciding to remove languages from the core curriculum at Key Stage Four in response to perceived dissatisfaction among pupils. Maun (2006) makes the same point somewhat more forcefully:

Today's GCSE students are 16 years old. They have passed the age of sexual consent, they can marry with the permission of their parents, some are already parents. And what is a GCSE exam board's idea of an appropriate coursework topic? 'My ideal school uniform.'

(Maun 2006: 32)

Vasseur and Grandcolas (1997), looking at French teaching in England, paint a similar picture, and echo some of the points made by McPake *et al.* (1999) above. They found that English pupils in their study perceived the French curriculum as being about little more than preparation for an exam,

divorced from the real world of communicating with and finding out about French speakers:

La langue 2 n'est souvent pour eux qu'un objet décontextualisé, une matière académique pour laquelle ils doivent réussir leur examen.

(Vasseur and Grandcolas 1997: 221)

(The second language is often just a decontextualized object of study for them, an academic subject which they have to pass an exam in.)

In some senses, this may seem surprising, given the content of the National Curriculum for MFL in England. Though McPake *et al.*'s description of the Scottish 'self-orientated curriculum' applies equally in England, it is difficult to deny that a great deal of curricular space is cleared for transactional or situational language learning, confronting pupils with realistic contexts in which they practise 'real-life' communication. Thornton and Cajkler (1996: 39) list some of these 'simulated service encounters: buying sandwiches and ice-cream and tickets; consuming drinks; paying for petrol; buying presents; booking into the campsite; booking into the hotel'. Though such content aims to remind pupils of the practical utility of language learning and thus appeals to the more instrumentally orientated, there is some question about the extent to which this focus has narrowed the language-learning experience and in turn the curricular challenge for pupils, as intimated by such authors as Kent and McPake *et al.*, etc., above. Pupils in Fisher's study (2001: 37) were particularly vocal about their desire for a curriculum based more around their interests, expressing contempt for 'things involving flat tyres' and similar topics!

Though this might seem to suggest that the 'self-orientated curriculum' described above holds more appeal for the English pupils in Fisher's study, it might also be the case that the pupils are expressing a desire for a curriculum which more effectively engages their intellectual and emotional life-worlds than the topics on pets, house and hobbies, etc., that feature prominently in the MFL GCSE syllabuses. Thornton and Cajkler (1996) allude to this very issue, pointing out that 'foreign language study should allow students to make a greater sense of the world rather than just survive on visits to alien territory' (p. 39). Grenfell (2000: 26) echoes these views and explains the alienating effect of such curriculum content that 'rarely connects with their [the pupils'] intellectual curiosity and individual self-expression':

Pupils order meals they are not going to eat, plan journeys they are not going to make . . . There is often little of themselves, of their own worlds in much that passes in the name of communicative language teaching these days.

(Grenfell 2000: 24)

In Holland, curriculum reforms which narrowed the MFL experience in upper secondary education have similarly been blamed for a decline in pupil attitudes. Concerns to broaden the secondary curriculum led to many subjects, including MFL, being divided into two parts – a compulsory first part and an optional second – in a bid to allow a broader mix of subject combinations. The language content in the compulsory first part was necessarily reduced, in some cases amounting to nothing more than the study of business texts or listening practice. Since the curriculum reforms, the decline in pupil attitudes has been accompanied by declining numbers of pupils opting to study French and German in particular in upper secondary and higher education. Willems (2003: 80) suggests that ‘especially German, of late, has seen a tremendous fall in interest’. So many pupils have in fact expressed dissatisfaction with the ‘boring and useless curriculum’ (Veilbrief 2002: 26) that Dutch education ministers have decided to review and restructure MFL provision at this level.

So far, then, a range of educational issues and the ways in which they variously bear on pupil attitudes towards MFL has been examined. There is wide agreement on the paramount importance of teacher-related factors, from personality to teaching style and use of the target language. The impact of wider school-related factors has also been investigated, focusing on the influence of particular lesson activities, the use of ICT, textbooks, assessment and participation in exchange schemes. This was followed by a discussion of the relationship between curriculum policy and attitudes. Though the significance of these wide-ranging educational factors has been demonstrated, they form only one set of contextual influences on pupil attitudes. It is the remaining set of environmental influences – the sociocultural influences – which will form the focus of the next chapter.

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Chapter 5

Sociocultural Attitudes and Influences

The 'sociocultural' catch-all constitutes something of a challenge in terms of specifying particular variables and their possible classification. Cargile *et al.* (1994) 226) refer to the range and scope of factors within this domain:

Superimposed upon any immediate social situation are several other factors affecting language attitudes, and these can be characterised as 'cultural' . . . More specifically, they include the political, historical, economic and linguistic realities that exert a large influence over the process of language attitude formation.

(Cargile *et al.* 1994: 226)

The multiplicity of factors involved here, as indicated above, and the interconnections and overlap between them, almost suggest that distilling discrete sets of variables may not be possible. Certainly, attempts to quantify the exact significance of particular influences could seem somewhat questionable. However, there is no denying that certain areas of sociocultural influence are particularly important when examining the formation of language attitudes. For the purposes of analysis here, these areas will be reviewed within three broad domains. As with educational influences, however, there is inevitably a degree of overlap between categories, given once again the complexity and interconnectedness of the social world. The categories in question will be labelled as follows and examined in turn in this chapter:

- the learner's close social environment;
- the learner's experiences and perceptions of the target-language speakers and communities;
- the perceived social status of the languages learned.

The learner's close social environment

This grouping of factors includes those immediate social influences surrounding the learner, which have been identified by commentators as having an important bearing on language attitudes. They include parents, family, friends and peers.

The role of parents

There appears to be little doubt that parents are a most significant influence on the general development of their children's attitudes (Chambers 1998; Barton 1997; Phillips and Filmer-Sankey 1993) and that they 'can influence students' perceptions of foreign languages' (Court 2001: 36). Oskamp and Schultz (2005: 126) comment that 'a child's attitudes are largely shaped by its own experience with the world, but this is usually accomplished by explicit teaching and implicit modelling of parental attitudes'. Young (1994b) refers to some of the many ways in which parents exert this attitudinal influence, such as 'through discussion, by encouraging participation in foreign language exchange programmes and excursions, helping the child with homework, encouraging the child to read material written in the foreign language and by making the target language country the destination for a family holiday' (p. 85). Gardner (1985: 109) concurs with the view that parents 'are the major intermediary between the cultural milieu and the student', and categorizes parental influences on language attitudes on the basis of two roles – the active and the passive role.

The active role involves the ways in which parents may interact with their children with regard to language learning, and can be further categorized as negative or positive. A positive active role would involve parents monitoring their child's progress in language learning, showing interest and encouraging/rewarding success. A negative active role would involve a range of discouraging behaviours, from openly belittling the importance of MFL to favouring other areas of learning over languages. The passive role concerns parents' attitudes to the second-language community. In Gardner's view, a positive parental disposition towards France/French speakers, for example, would support the integrative orientation of a child learning French, while a negative attitude would inhibit this. Gardner concludes that the passive role is of particular significance, and that even though parents may be generally supportive of their child's efforts, latent negative language attitudes held by

parents will undermine the effects of positive encouragement.

In earlier research, Gardner (1975) even goes as far as to suggest that there is a relationship between parental attitudes towards MFL and the level of language proficiency achieved by the child:

[R]elationships between the parents' attitudes and the students' orientations suggest that the students' orientation grows out of a family-wide orientation and consequently . . . the degree of skill which the student attains in a second language will be dependent upon the attitudinal atmosphere in the home.

(Gardner 1975: 239)

Though this may seem a rather grand claim, on reflection it seems fairly safe to conclude that positive (parental) encouragement to learning in any field will lead to statistically higher levels of achievement. Parents may of course be quicker to encourage their children if they themselves have a background in language learning. Gardner explores this aspect too, and refers to research by Jones (1950), who examined attitudes to Welsh in Wales, and found that the attitudes of pupils whose parents had no knowledge of Welsh were significantly more negative than those whose parents had at least some knowledge. In his more recent study of attitudes in Germany and England, Chambers also discusses the role of parental language knowledge. Though he makes no direct association between parental knowledge and the extent to which attitudes are positive, he does point to 'a tendency for [German] pupils to feel more encouragement, the higher the level they perceived their parents' English competence to be' (Chambers 1999: 89), suggesting once again the significance of Gardner's theory (see also Bartram (2006b)).

Young (1994b) develops this idea by elaborating on the connection between parental attitudes and approval, illustrating yet again the complex nature of parental influence on attitudes:

Supportive, encouraging parents who value FLL and communicate this to their children may initiate the motivational process by indicating a route leading to the attainment of esteem via FLL.

(Young 1994b: 48)

The fact that some (e.g. Ward (2003)) suggest that this is unusual in English-speaking countries, where many parents do not see the importance of language learning and generally fail to communicate a sense of

encouragement in MFL to their children, may be a key factor in explaining the lukewarm attitudes referred to in much of the literature.

Even though it seems logical to assume that parents who do have some MFL knowledge and interest will in some way positively influence their children's attitudes, this may not always be the case. De Pietro (1994), for example, looking at attitudes towards German and Germany in Bulgaria, France and French-speaking Switzerland, found that pupils whose parents had no knowledge of German ironically had more positive attitudes! Wright's (1999) study on attitudes to French in Northern Ireland also revealed that pupils consistently perceived parents and family as the least influential factors on their attitudes. True though this may be, it does not of course rule out their significance altogether, and the potential discrepancy between actual and perceived influence must again be allowed for.

Friends and peers

Wright's study also suggests that pupils perceive the influence of friends and peers on their attitudes towards MFL to be rather limited, leading her to argue that 'it would seem . . . the peer group is not exerting the overriding influence that it is commonly seen to do among adolescents' (1999: 202). However, this stands in sharp contrast to the wealth of studies that identify friends and peers as major influences on pupil attitudes (e.g. Oskamp and Schultz (2005); Bartram (2006c)). Harmer (2007) discusses how the need for peer approval is particularly strong among adolescent learners, overriding the need for teacher and even parent approval. Young (1994b) echoes this view, commenting:

Learner perceptions and experience of peer attitudes concerning school, education, foreign language learning in general or the learning of a particular language in question may exert considerable influence on the individual's own FLL orientation, attitudes and motivation.

(Young 1994b: 86)

Taylor (2000) finds further support for the importance of peer-group attitudes in her investigation of pupil participation in language exchange programmes. Having observed a certain reluctance among many pupils in general (and boys in particular) to take part in exchanges, Taylor considered how participation might be increased. With regard to the possible incentives

that emerged from the research, pupils stated that they would be more willing to take part if more of their friends expressed interest, suggesting again the power of peer-group influence. This influence might make itself felt in a number of ways. Classroom dynamics and the individual attitudes of particular pupils towards others may have some bearing on how pupils are disposed towards the learning process. A Hungarian pupil in Dörnyei's study into the causes of demotivation, for example, provides an excellent description of how inter-group conflict might negatively influence pupil attitudes towards MFL:

There were quite a few of them [group members] that I didn't like. I always felt embarrassed in the English classes because my English wasn't very good . . . I always felt that the others were laughing at me. I didn't like being in that group.

(Dörnyei 2001: 153)

Echoing points examined previously, Walqui (2000) discusses how such teenage peer pressure often works against success in language learning and how it may produce negative attitudes precisely because of the performance element involved which may engender feelings of embarrassment or insecurity:

In second language learning, peer pressure often undermines the goals set by parents and teachers. Peer pressure often reduces the desire of the student to work towards native pronunciation, because the sounds of the target language may be regarded as strange.

(Walqui 2000: 3)

Several studies suggest that 'the pressure to conform to the norms of the peer group in order to secure esteem of other group members' (Young 1994b: 47) sometimes finds pupils rejecting languages. O'Reilly-Cavani and Birks (1997), for instance, identified peer-group pressure as one of the key reasons for pupil demotivation and negative attitudes towards learning French in their study centred on schools in Glasgow. Barton (1997) echoes Court's (2001) research, suggesting that adolescent boys are particularly susceptible to peer pressure and the need to assert their emerging sexual identity. She argues that the influence of peer attitudes towards MFL largely explains boys' relatively poor performance, when compared with girls':

Making clear one's sexual identity and appearing 'one of the lads' is, it seems, foremost in the male adolescent mind and is often achieved by appearing disinterested and boasting of missed homework. Given the essentially cumulative nature of language learning . . . such entrenched peer group pressures can only spell disaster if they result in inadequate commitment and self-discipline.

(Barton 1997: 12)

Kissau and Turnbull (2008) note the same phenomenon in Canada while Court (2001) points again to the cumulative demands of language learning and discusses how 'hard work and commitment are incompatible with an anti-schoolwork construction of masculinity' (p. 34). Though the focus is on boys here, it would seem logical to argue that a mix-gendered anti-language learning peer culture may also operate in certain contexts.

It is worth noting that studies illustrating the potentially destructive effects of negative peer-group attitudes on MFL, particularly in English-speaking contexts, outnumber studies where positive group attitudes influence more positive orientations. It might, however, be the case that the influence on attitude is in a sense superficial. The social pressure to appear to conform with prevalent group attitudes, as suggested by the above studies, can clearly influence pupil behaviour and performance, but might ironically mask an individual's 'true' attitude. In her research on attitudes towards learning German, for example, Mahjoub (1995) noted that social pressure of this kind may be a reason for the discrepancy between true attitude and behaviour. Given the possibility of a dislocated relationship between attitude and behaviour, then, we are reminded of the essentially private nature of attitudes, and of the potential unreliability of using exam results and observing classroom behaviour as attitudinal indicators. This dichotomy between socially conditioned behavioural display and privately held attitudes may also go some way to explaining why the pupils in Wright's study (discussed above) perceive peers as relatively insignificant influences.

The learner's experiences and perceptions of the target-language speakers and communities

Alongside immediate social influences, writers identify pupils' experiences of and attitudes towards the target-language speakers and communities (TLCS) as important influences on attitudes towards MFL. The work

of Gardner and Lambert (1972) is regarded as seminal in this particular field. The importance of attitudes to the TLCS is central to their notion of integrative motivation in MFL. They argue that a negative attitude toward the TLCS will undermine a pupil's orientation towards MFL in view of the fact that 'the language student must be willing to adopt appropriate features of behavior which characterize members of another linguistic community' (Gardner and Lambert 1972: 14). For this reason, the authors elevate the status of integrative motivation over instrumental motivation, and claim that the extent to which learners identify with and have positive attitudes towards the TLCS will impact on the success of language learning:

If the student's attitude is highly ethnocentric and hostile, we have seen that no progress to speak of will be made in acquiring any aspects of the language.

(Gardner and Lambert 1972: 134)

In learning situations where pupils' views of the TLCS are predominantly negative, the authors argue that the work of the language teacher is practically doomed, thus asserting the importance of this sociocultural factor over educational influences, and identifying attitudes to the TLCS as the most important variable in MFL acquisition. Salters (1991) concurs with this view, arguing that the classroom has far less influence on attitudes than the learner's experiences and perceptions of the TLCS. Gardner restates the significance of this role in later research (e.g. 1975, 1985), emphasizing the important connection between language as a 'salient characteristic of another culture' (Gardner 1985: 146) and positive attitudes towards the other culture as a virtual prerequisite for successful learning. The reading indicates wide support for these views, and this is perhaps not surprising when one again considers that 'unlike other subjects, the central objective of language learning is direct contact with people, people belonging to a different race and culture' (Barton 1997: 13).

The connection between positive attitudes to the TLCS and MFL success has also been discussed by O'Doherty (1975) and the APU (1985), who noted that English pupils learning French who expressed a desire to meet French people consistently achieved higher scores in school assessments. In a similar vein, Dörnyei (2001) comments on the demotivating effects of negative attitudes towards the TLCS:

If learners develop negative attitudes towards the L2 speakers, this

undermines the social dimension of their L2 motivation complex.

(Dörnyei 2001: 151)

Such views are echoed by Muller (1997: 211) who discusses the interdependence between MFL and attitudes towards the language speakers, talking of 'une relation d'interdépendance qui existe entre représentations de la langue et représentations du groupe de ses locuteurs' ('an interdependent relationship that exists between the image of the language and the image of its speakers'). Young (1994b) likewise describes the interconnectedness of language learning and foreign culture, and concludes that 'attitudes towards the language itself, its speakers and culture become systematically involved in FLL' (p. 71). She adds that a sense of anomie – a feeling of being socially dislocated from one's cultural circumstances – may cause some MFL learners to experience a particularly strong need to identify with the TLCS, thus sharpening their integrative motivation. This may indeed be an important individual variable in language learning, particularly when one considers the sensitive relationship between adolescence and identity.

Though some learners may thus develop increased motivation in MFL as a result of a desire for contact with and positive attitudes towards the TLCS, other learners may find that the process of language learning undermines their social identity and is then perceived as a form of cultural threat. This reaction might then generate negative attitudes towards the TLCS, and in turn a negative orientation towards MFL. Schulz and Haerle (1998) discuss this notion in their research on American learners of German, describing how some 'employ their natural tendency to stereotype in order to accommodate an overabundance of input and reinforce their own socio-cultural identity' (p. 115).

It seems permissible to suggest that many of the above studies seem to assume that learners enter the classroom with ready-formed attitudes towards the TLCS. Though this may apply to some or even many, it seems equally reasonable to assume that some pupils will form attitudes towards the TLCS on the basis of their school MFL experience. De Pietro (1994: 103) acknowledges this possibility, while Löschmann (1998) discusses how the language classroom can be a fertile breeding ground for stereotypical portrayals of the TLCS. These portrayals may vary in the extent to which they are positive or negative, but are likely to be subsequently used as a basis for attitude formation:

[D]ie komplizierte und komplexe Welt des Zielsprachlandes, mit der sich Fremdsprachenlerner und –lernerinnen konfrontiert sehen, unterstützen die Tendenz, sich bestimmter Stereotype zu bedienen oder sogar selbst Stereotype zu bilden.

(Löschmann 1998: 10)

(The complicated and complex world of the target-language country, with which MFL learners are confronted, supports the tendency to resort to certain stereotypes and even to create stereotypes.)

He discusses how the choice of themes dealt with, the ways in which the people are represented in pictures and texts, the nature of exercises and even teaching strategies (e.g. role plays which require learners to take the part of a German driver, pupil, father, etc.) might sustain or create positive/negative stereotypes and attitudes. If the importance of positive attitudes towards the TLCS is as important as the above studies suggest, then this clearly has implications for the ways in which countries and their speakers are represented in the classroom.

Increasingly, however, direct contact with native speakers of other languages is a fairly common experience for adolescent language learners, and this may of course provide them with a more substantial impetus for attitude formation. The literature certainly suggests that young people increasingly expect contact with the TLCS to be part of their language-learning experience, and are often disappointed when only limited access is possible. Aplin (1991), for example, identified minimal contact with the target-language country and speakers as one of the key reasons for demotivation among teenage language learners, and the resulting low numbers of language students beyond the age of sixteen in the UK. Fisher (2001), also looking at the reasons for poor post-sixteen MFL recruitment, identified the same issue; 72 per cent of the learners in her study felt that a greater cultural emphasis in their pre-sixteen language learning would have aided their motivation to continue MFL beyond sixteen.

Several authors point to the positive effects of contact with the TLCS. In De Pietro's (1994) study of German, for instance, the pupils with the most negative attitudes were those who had no contact whatsoever with the country or its people. De Pietro noted that attitudes towards the TLCS became more positive the more contact the pupils had; even those pupils whose only personal experience was having a penfriend demonstrated more positive attitudes than those without. De Pietro (1994: 99) concludes:

Il semble donc bien que les contacts réels avec le pays rendent les représentations qu'on en a plus positives.

(It seems then that any real contacts with the country make one's image of it more positive.)

Much of this direct contact may take the form of holidays and school exchanges. Though De Pietro's study implies that increased contact leads to more positive attitudes, this may not always be the case, and some authors point to declining attitudes towards the TLCS after exchange visits in particular. Chambers (1999) observes that this applies more to younger pupils (aged eleven to fifteen), whose attitudes to the TLCS seemed to become more negative, the more experience they gained of France and Germany. He noted the opposite with older pupils (fifteen to seventeen), however, which may have to do with increasing confidence and more secure self-identities in later adolescence (see Schulz and Haerle above). The relatively small sample involved in Chambers' study makes it difficult to draw any firm conclusions, however. Research by Dekker *et al.* (1998) also shows that Dutch pupils had more positive attitudes toward the English than towards the Germans or French in spite of the fact that far more of them had visited France and Germany!

Other authors have pointed to similar findings. Löschmann (1998), for example, identified a decidedly more negative attitude towards Germans among English students after study trips to the country. Students were asked to complete pre- and post-visit questionnaires on their attitudes towards Germans. Interestingly, Löschmann noted that more students attributed negative characteristics to the Germans on their return than before the visit. The percentage of English students who described Germans as loud, arrogant and self-opinionated was 74 per cent, 52 per cent and 9 per cent respectively (pre-visit). After their study trip to Germany, the respective percentages increased to 77 per cent, 59 per cent and 46 per cent. Stroinska (1999) acknowledges that the phenomenon of declining attitudes towards the TLCS after a period of contact is not unknown: 'exposure to other cultures may sometimes only strengthen negative attitudes and induce the process of stereotyping' (p. 56). Coleman's (1996) large-scale survey of language students in the UK and Europe similarly indicates that learners generally hold strong stereotypes, and that 'these stereotypes are not weakened at all by residence in L2land; if anything they are strengthened by such residency' (p. 100).

Byram (1999: 62) provides an intriguing explanation for the decline in attitudes towards the TLCS in such circumstances, claiming that it is often

the result of insufficiently developed intercultural communication skills. He argues for the MFL curriculum to create more space for the development of 'intercultural competence'. In this way, teachers would explicitly address attitudes and preconceptions about the TLCS and teach their pupils how to 'decode' correctly the contrasting forms of social behaviour, for which he argues they are generally unprepared, and which often lead them towards negative misinterpretations and attitudes. Once again, if positive attitudes towards the TLCS are as important an ingredient in MFL as suggested by Gardner and Lambert, then Byram's argument here raises some important points.

As discussed earlier, however, some authors (e.g. Wright (1999)) do question the extent to which attitudes towards the TLCS are significant in MFL. Chambers (1999), for example, questions their importance in a country such as England, where access to the TLCS is less immediate than in bilingual Canada or Continental Europe. Though access to native speakers may be generally more difficult in countries like the UK, the USA and Australia, it would perhaps be wrong to assume that limited direct experience of the TLCS means that pupils do not form attitudes towards them, particularly in light of Löschmann's comments above about classroom practice and attitude formation.

In view of the generally acknowledged importance of attitudes to the TLCS indicated in the reading, then, it seems appropriate to examine at this juncture the nature of English, German and Dutch pupils' attitudes to the English, German and French-speaking countries and peoples.

German attitudes towards the target-language speakers and communities

It is interesting to note that the literature reflects less of a concern with German attitudes towards their immediate European neighbours than with their attitudes towards immigrants and asylum seekers (see Noack (2002)). Such concerns may be influenced by Germany's past and concerns about rising xenophobia since reunification. The few studies which do examine the issue, however, reflect a generally positive picture. Chambers (1999), for example, explored the attitudes of German secondary school pupils towards the French and the British, and noted that 76.9 per cent of fifteen-year-old pupils in 1992 and 61.5 per cent of seventeen-year-old pupils in 1994 (the same cohort two years apart) viewed French people positively. Looking at Chambers' findings for younger pupils confirms that positive perceptions

outweigh negative perceptions with regard to the French, though – alarmingly – each age group reflects a less positive attitude towards the French in Chambers’ follow-up research two years later. Though he makes no attempt to investigate this further, he raises the question of whether it may be the case ‘that they no longer like their French lessons and/or their French teacher and transfer this mindset to all things French’ (Chambers 1999: 112). This may of course be the case, and once again we are reminded of the complex and multidirectional influences which exist within the language learning scenario.

Looking at German attitudes toward the British in the same study, Chambers is able to state that the German ‘pupils are more positive about the British than they are about the French’ (*ibid.*: 113) but observes the same decline in positivity when interviewing each age cohort two years later, though the dip is less marked than in attitudes towards the French. The author questions whether the slight decline in attitudes may have to do with the learners’ developing critical awareness, but again makes no attempt to investigate the pupils’ own explanations here. He also questions the extent to which attitude towards the TLCS is influential on MFL motivation, given that attitudes towards the British seem to become less positive on the one hand and evidence that there is ‘maintained and even enhanced enthusiasm for learning English’ (*ibid.*: 115) on the other. It is possible that Chambers is aligning English here too rigidly with Britain, since, as Gosse (1997: 157–8) points out:

L’image de la langue [anglais] est fortement liée à celle de ses locuteurs et de leurs sociétés. Pour l’anglais, les Etats-Unis ont en grande partie éclipsé la Grande-Bretagne dans ce domaine.

(The image of the language (English) is strongly linked to that of its speakers and their societies. In the case of English, the United States have largely eclipsed Great Britain in this respect.)

In light of the above, it is important to remember that attitudes towards languages such as English in particular may be influenced by perceptions of a much wider target-language community. It is worth noting that Chambers consistently identifies Australia and America as the most appealing destinations for German pupils in the same study, and that this positive association might play some part in the positive orientation towards learning English which he identifies among the German pupils.

Taking a broader view, Dobler (1997) examined a range of survey data

from Germany over a number of years in an attempt to build a more general picture of German attitudes towards other countries. Concentrating on a wide selection of secondary sources, Dobler aimed to describe attitudes, but makes no attempt to account for their origins. The picture which emerges from his study seems to bear out Chambers' findings, with Germans reflecting generally positive attitudes towards both the British and the French. Dobler focuses in particular on the trust dimension of attitude towards other countries, and observes that the French seemed to be consistently more trusted than the British across a range of surveys conducted over a sixteen-year period from 1980 onwards. When looking at the younger generation, however, a somewhat different picture emerges, with more positive attitudes being expressed towards the British than towards the French, as in Chambers' study:

[I]n the whole of Germany, young people (aged 15–24) . . . are more trusting of the British . . . Students expressed by far the highest level of trust in the British.

(Dobler 1997: 162)

Dutch attitudes towards the target-language speakers and communities

Studies on Dutch attitudes towards the Germans, French and British all reflect similar patterns. A large-scale national study carried out by Dekker *et al.* (1998) demonstrated a remarkable consistency in attitudes across pupils of different ages and school types. In the first part of the study, the authors examined pupil attitudes towards the TLCS by asking them to rank countries against certain priorities. First, pupils were asked to rank them in terms of their general appeal. Secondly, they were asked to consider which country they would be most inclined to move to if they were forced to leave Holland. The third question invited them to consider which nationals they would be most keen on having as neighbours. The answers to each question reflected the same overall hierarchy, with Germans receiving the poorest ratings, followed by the French and then the British, leading the authors to conclude that 'het enige land waarvoor een meerderheid van de respondenten een positieve houding heeft is Engeland' (Dekker *et al.* 1998: 15) ('the only country towards which the majority of the respondents have a positive attitude is England').

To gain a more detailed insight into perceptions here, the authors

invited pupils to ascribe adjectives from a list to each country and nationality. It could be argued that by providing the adjectives for the pupils, the authors were possibly steering them towards selecting prevailing stereotypes. Nonetheless, the results reflect the same patterns. The majority of Dutch pupils regarded the Germans as overbearing, materialistic, arrogant and warmongering, while a slightly more flattering picture emerged of the French, and a far more positive picture of the English. Pupils were additionally asked to volunteer which emotions were evoked by each country and people. The results reflect the exact same hierarchy once again (*ibid.*: 23).

These results also place them in line with previous research carried out by the same authors in 1993 and 1995. The one departure from *Dekker et al.*'s earlier research is the more negative attitude towards France and the French, which the authors speculate may relate to negative publicity on French criticism of the Dutch policy on drugs on the one hand, and French nuclear testing on the other, both high-profile issues at the time of the research. Earlier research from 1995 carried out in Holland by Müller and Wielinga suggested that the French were viewed more positively, though the results concerning Germany reflected the same negative views:

[D]ie Einstellung gegenüber Deutschland und den Deutschen – verglichen mit den anderen EU-Ländern – [sind] am negativsten und zugleich am kohärentesten.

(Müller *et al.* 1995: 172)

(The attitudes towards Germany and Germans – compared with the other EU countries – are the most negative and at the same time most consistent.)

Table 5.1 Dutch pupils' attitudes to the TLCS

Emotions	Positive (% of respondents)	Negative (% of respondents)
Germany	18	34
France	29	28
England	37	5
The Germans	17	32
The French	24	25
The English	38	4

Dutch attitudes towards the respective TLCS certainly seem to mirror attitudes towards learning French, German and English, which could thus be interpreted as evidence to support Gardner and Lambert's view that attitudes towards the TLCS influence attitudes towards language learning. The British appear to be held in high regard and attitudes towards learning English seem correspondingly positive, as discussed in earlier sections. The more negative attitudes towards the Germans and French likewise correspond to less positive attitudes towards learning these languages in Holland, particularly German. An acknowledgement of such widespread negative attitudes towards Germany has prompted a range of educational initiatives aiming both to promote the teaching and learning of German in Holland and significantly 'to reduce prejudices against Germans' (Hendriks and van de Bunt-Kokhuis 2000: 282), clearly an issue of some concern in itself.

Though Dekker *et al.* (1998: 37) declare an interest in the origins of pupil attitudes, they do not address this aspect in any detail in their study, and conclude that associations with the Second World War still cloud pupil perceptions of Germans. The adjectives pupils selected (overbearing, materialistic, arrogant and warmongering) might suggest that this assumption is correct, but it is important to bear in mind that pupils were again selecting words from a list rather than actively producing them. Nonetheless, studies from several other countries have suggested that attitudes towards Germany are adversely affected by lingering negative associations. De Pietro's (1994) study of Bulgarian, French and Swiss teenagers shows remarkable similarities with Dekker *et al.*'s study in relation to attitudes towards the Germans and the English. While a decidedly positive picture of the English emerged from each national grouping, the Germans were consistently described as 'violents, guerriers, envahissants, barbares' (p. 98) ('violent, war-mongers, invaders, barbarians'). The fact that the vocabulary items were volunteered by pupils in this study also makes it more difficult to argue that respondents were steered in their choice by the research approach here.

Mahjoub's (1995) findings from Belgium also show many similarities, with students in her study expressing more positive attitudes towards learning English and French (rating these two languages as more attractive, more useful and less difficult than German). In her investigation of attitudes to Germans, a familiar picture emerged, with learners volunteering once again a range of lexical items with war connotations (fascist, war-like, extremist, aggressive), leading Mahjoub to conclude that attitudes towards learning German are very much connected with learners' negative views of Germans and Germany (Mahjoub 1995: 77).

Attitudes towards the target-language speakers and communities in English-speaking countries

Given that France and Germany are distant geographic neighbours for the USA and Australia, it is unsurprising that little scholarly attention has been directed at the nature of American and Australian attitudes to these two countries and their inhabitants. Furthermore, the current world situation inevitably sees a much greater focus on American and Australian studies examining attitudes towards such issues as political, military and economic involvements in the Middle East, rising immigration and Islam. Nonetheless, there are some indications of 'national' views towards other countries. As was discussed in detail in Chapter 2, several American commentators have pointed to what they see as generally negative US perceptions of foreign countries. Some would suggest that images of France in particular suffered a significant setback there in the wake of widely reported French disapproval of US military intervention in Iraq, which resulted in widespread anti-French feeling, and perhaps found its most visible manifestation in the re-dubbing of 'French fries' as 'freedom fries'. It would of course be difficult to gauge to what extent such views have actually impacted on attitudes towards learning French in the States, though a common-sense view might be that it is unlikely to have enhanced motivation. Whatever the case may be, the French would appear to be more highly thought of in Australia. A national survey of attitudes entitled *Australia and the World* carried out in 2008 by Hanson showed that the French were the second-most respected world nation (after Great Britain) of the 17 countries which respondents were asked to rate. Interestingly, Germany did not figure among the 17 countries included in the survey, an omission which in itself perhaps raises – and even answers – questions about Australian attitudes to Germany.

Closer geographic, historical and economic ties between Britain, France and Germany perhaps explain the much larger number of studies looking at UK attitudes towards these two Continental neighbours. McPake *et al.* (1999), for example, investigated whether the negative pupil attitudes which they identified towards the MFL curriculum in Scotland were reflected in similarly negative attitudes towards the TLCS, yet reported that this was far from being the case. Similar findings emerge from O'Reilly-Cavani and Birks' (1997) study of Glasgow pupils learning French. Though the pupils' enthusiasm for learning French was questionable, their attitudes towards the French were generally quite positive, though the authors noted a considerable ignorance about French life and culture among the pupils. Lee *et al.*

(1998), who looked at pupil attitudes in English schools, likewise noted generally positive attitudes towards both the French and the Germans.

Positive attitudes towards both nations were also observed by Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993: 103), who commented that 'in general, pupils were found to be well disposed towards the country and people of the language they were learning'. Chambers (1999) noted the same generally positive attitudes towards the French and Germans among pupils in his study, though attitudes towards the French seemed somewhat more sympathetic among fifteen- to seventeen-year-old pupils. Contrasting with his findings, however, Phillips and Filmer-Sankey noted that those learning French were less keen on contact with the French than learners of German were with Germany. Nonetheless, the authors noted a significant improvement in attitudes towards the French following visits to France, underlining the important effect that direct contact may have. They also identified gender differences as significant, with girls in general expressing more positive attitudes towards the TLCS than did boys. Interestingly, the boys in their study were found to have more negative attitudes towards France, accompanied by similarly negative attitudes towards learning French. This strikes a chord once again with Court's (2001: 7) study:

It is inevitable that boys will have more negative attitudes towards language learning than girls because social norms dictate that being a good language learner is commendable for girls but 'unmanly' for boys.

Taylor (2000) observes the same phenomenon among boys in her study, as do Williams *et al.* (2002), who explain this intriguing gender split on the basis of pupils' perceptions. In interviews with pupils, the authors were able to establish that French was regarded as a feminine subject, and thus of more appeal to girls, while German was seen as more masculine. Despite the gender difference, however, Williams *et al.* still noted that 'students exhibited a stronger liking and desire for German' (p. 520). Leighton (1991) is not surprised that boys in particular may lean more towards this language, bearing in mind that France is a country 'which is associated with feminine fashions, fine perfumes and wine – hardly the things to inspire the adolescent male' (p. 52).

Thornton and Cajkler (1996), in their English study of pupil attitudes towards Germans found that 'the majority of learners have an empathy with German people' (p. 37) and that 'views of the German character were overwhelmingly positive' (p. 38), providing thus more evidence of positive

English perceptions of the Germans. Yet elsewhere, other authors talk of generally declining attitudes towards Germany. Földes (2001), for instance, refers to a rise in anti-German feeling in Great Britain during the 1990s, arguing that associations with the Third Reich still contaminate national attitudes. Sammon (1998) echoes this in his large-scale study of attitudes towards Germany among British and Irish pupils. Around 2,000 pupils were presented with an alphabetical list of 25 characteristics and asked to tick which traits they felt were typical of Germans. Sammon subsequently analysed the findings, having categorized all the characteristics as either positive, negative or neutral. The picture which emerged is a rather negative one, with 'arrogant' and 'nationalistic' the qualities most selected by pupils. Sammon explains this negative image by referring to diehard war associations and the possibility that German behaviour may be culturally misinterpreted as arrogant because of different socio-behavioural patterns in the British Isles. Whatever the case may be, it is worth noting that pupils who had visited Germany and who were also learning German gave the most positive responses (Sammon's study included four categories of pupils – those who had visited Germany and were also learning German – group A; those who had visited Germany but were not studying the language – group B; those who were studying the language but had never been to the country – group C; and those who had neither visited the country nor learned the language – group D). This leads Sammon to stress again the positive effects of visits and exchanges, given that group A's responses were so much more positive than group D's (most negative).

Reflecting on Sammon's findings, it could again be argued that providing vocabulary items steered pupils towards stereotypical choices, and that Sammon's classification of qualities (e.g. 'easy-going', 'serious', 'conservative' and 'emotional' all classified as neutral qualities) does not necessarily correspond to the pupils' own interpretations, perhaps compromising the validity of his results to some degree. It is certainly interesting to note that his findings are closer to the Dutch and Belgian findings discussed above, which all relied on similar data-collection techniques, than to the findings of the other English and Scottish studies referred to here. Though Sammon's results suggest a generally less positive attitude towards Germany than do the other studies, it should also be borne in mind that half of the pupils in his sample were not in fact learning German, a point which contrasts with all the studies above, and which may have affected the apparently more negative outcome.

UK studies examining the relationship between attitudes towards Germany and France and learning French and German thus suggest a

more differentiated picture than those which emerge from Holland and Germany. This may be indicative of a number of factors – of a less deep-seated cultural bias against Germany in particular; of a greater ignorance about our European neighbours in general; or simply of a much greater diversity of experience of and contact with French and German people. There is also some indication that gender plays a greater part in the English attitude scenario. Given the acknowledged complexity of the social world and of attitudes within this world, it is not surprising that a more fragmented picture emerges. By the same token, it is perhaps all the more surprising that the reading indicates a more uniform pattern among German and Dutch attitudes, though this again may merely indicate the strength and prevalence of national stereotypes in these countries.

The perceived social status of the languages learned

While immediate social influences and perceptions of the target-language communities can thus be seen to influence language attitudes, certain other social elements also have some bearing on attitudes towards MFL. These influences can all be regarded as in some way connected with the status accorded to MFL by society at large – ‘the larger social and cultural contexts of second language development which have a tremendous impact on second language learning’ (Walqui 2000: 2), as discussed previously. Research suggests that the roles played by the media and youth culture are significant in this respect, as are general social perceptions of the usefulness and difficulty of MFL.

The media and youth culture

The origin of teenagers’ perceptions of language status raises a number of questions about the nature of social influences, and it would appear that images portrayed via the media and youth culture are of particular significance. Oskamp and Schultz (2005: 133) describe how the media play a part in shaping attitudes in general:

By selecting, emphasising and interpreting . . . they help to structure the nature of ‘reality’, . . . which in turn impels the public to form attitudes.

In a sense, the media can be seen as an important element of youth culture. Young (1994b) provides us with an indication of the various sub-elements (perhaps with the notable exceptions of sport and football) that might be included within this notion, describing youth culture as:

[A] non-specific term usually deemed to include music, fashion, cinema and television. There are variations in youth culture between societies and different sections of those societies. Yet certain aspects of youth culture such as popular music and television transcend all classes and cultures, at least within a European context.

(Young 1994b: 247)

Osborn (2001: 128) echoes this view, referring to the 'internationalisation of adolescent peer culture'. Several authors refer to youth culture as a significant influence on attitudes towards MFL, and Young (1994b) explains how this is partly responsible for positive attitudes towards learning English in particular:

The idolizing of popular music artists and movie stars is a common phenomenon among adolescents. Given that many of these stars are from English-speaking countries, a positive association between the person and the language spoken or sung by that person may occur, which may in turn influence attitudes towards the learning of English as a foreign language.

(Young 1994b: 247)

Woodward (2002) and Gosse (1997: 158) reiterate this point, Gosse adding that recent technological developments, such as the advent of the internet with its English-language bias and appeal for adolescents, have done much to secure the high status of English abroad. Again, it might be argued that such developments undermine the perceived need for MFLs among English-speaking teenagers, while raising their importance for Continental teenagers. McPake *et al.* (1999) cite the specific example of Dutch teenagers in this regard:

In Holland, . . . less time is spent in learning a modern language at primary school than we spend in Scotland. Yet Dutch children who go to secondary school have learnt at least half of their modern language outside the school system – they pick it up from music, magazines, films, television.

(McPake *et al.* 1999: 19)

The pupils themselves certainly seem to agree on the importance of youth culture as an influence. The study by Berns and de Bot (2005) of 2,000 fifteen-year-old teenagers in Germany, France, Holland and Belgium offered further substantial evidence of this, with the majority of teenagers claiming media and technology to be the key influences on their learning of English, far outweighing the perceived importance of their classroom learning. Given the important attitudinal connection between pupil perceptions of the TLCS and MFL as discussed earlier, the media portrayal of speakers of English, German and French would thus seem to be of particular importance. In her research on the reasons for the decline of language learning in England after the age of sixteen, Watts (2003: 15) identifies a general 'climate of negativity' surrounding MFL. Interestingly, all the subjects she interviewed felt that this climate was 'dictated largely by the negative portrayal of "Europe", "foreigners" and "all things foreign" in all aspects of the British media and particularly in the popular press' – a point which resonates again with issues discussed earlier in relation to the USA.

Many have singled out the particularly stereotyped and negative portrayal of Germans in the British entertainment and information media (Benkhoff 1999; Krönig 1999; Tenberg 1999). Theobald (1999: 36) cites examples of British television programmes where typical Germans are presented as 'goose-stepping Nazis, and arrogant, humourless, domineering little Hitlers', and Ballance (1992: 24) refers to film research showing that 'Germans were four times more likely to be portrayed negatively as they were positively'. Though there are arguably more positive portrayals of Germany elsewhere in the media, questions about the influence of such portrayals on English teenagers' attitudes towards learning German inevitably arise. Across the North Sea, Dekker *et al.* (1998) directly attribute the negative attitudes of Dutch pupils towards German and Germany to negative media coverage.

Perceptions of utility

Another key social influence on language attitudes is associated with perceptions of usefulness. Though some authors have argued that such perceptions are only of significance in relation to adult motivation (e.g. Gosse (1997)), the vast majority of research suggests that the utility factor is equally important when looking at the attitudes of younger language learners. Dabène (1997) comments that the usefulness of a language is often specifically defined in economic/career terms, a prominent theme emerging from the

literature. This is illustrated by research carried out in England by Lee *et al.* (1998), which showed that most pupils felt learning languages was important (with 72 per cent of respondents describing language learning as definitely important) precisely because of the professional link:

The message that pupils have received most clearly about the importance of learning a language is rather utilitarian in tone. References to the social and cultural advantages of learning a language are fewer than might have been expected or wished.

(Lee *et al.* 1998: 44)

Though Lee and colleagues seem to express slight dismay at the more evident instrumental rather than integrative orientation among the English pupils in their study, the results nonetheless suggest that the pupils concerned generally saw the relevance of language learning. When we look at other studies in the British context first of all, we find that several would seem to suggest that British pupils are in fact reasonably convinced that learning a language is useful. In the APU survey carried out in 1985, 52 per cent of the pupils surveyed described learning French as useful, compared to only 18 per cent who did not, while Fisher (2001: 36) notes:

Most pupils in this study were aware already that many sectors of society viewed MFL as important. At GCSE level 69% believed that the business community valued foreign languages.

The commercial usefulness is once again evident here, and is borne out by Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993), who examined perceptions of usefulness attached to French, German and Spanish. Findings from their study also suggest that there are more pupils who perceive languages as useful than those who do not, and that the three languages are seen as equally useful, the only exception to this view being that of fourteen-year-old boys, who felt that German was of more benefit. The authors argue that this partly has to do with some boys' perception of German as a more 'masculine' language and one which they may thus be more inclined towards. In accounting for their perceptions, the professional utility of languages was again highlighted by pupils, particularly with regard to German, which 'was viewed as important in industry and commerce' (*ibid.*: 101), while French was seen as more useful for holiday and travel purposes.

Some authors argue that 'more able' pupils are more likely to see learning

MFLs as useful with regard to career aspirations, whereas pupils of lower ability might not. Clark and Trafford (1995: 320) discuss this association between ability and perceived usefulness, and provide the following comments from a less able pupil as an illustration of this:

. . . if you want to work in France, you need a language but if you don't want to do anything with it, it just seems like a waste of time.

It might, however, be argued that 'more able' pupils will more readily identify/seek the relevance of any area of learning, and that Clark and Trafford's conclusion is thus self-evident in a sense. Whatever the case may be, much of the reading indicates – as outlined in the introduction – that pupils in Britain are generally far from convinced of the value of MFL, in spite of the above findings, which might not be as conclusive as they appear at first sight. For instance, even though Fisher suggests above that many pupils in her study felt MFL was useful, this was not enough to motivate them to elect to study a language beyond sixteen, and the pupils in Lee *et al.*'s study still rated languages as the least popular school subjects. Kent (1996) discusses how pupils in her study perceived their MFL lessons as irrelevant, and draws on pupils' comments about the uselessness of much of the language learned (e.g. vocabulary such as 'pencils', 'rubbers', etc.), while O'Reilly-Cavani and Birks (1997) similarly conclude that pupils question the relevance of MFLs. McPake *et al.* (1999) suggest that pupils are able to see the long-term potential of languages, but the short-term benefits evade them. Court (2001) and Lamb and Fisher (1999) argue in a similar vein that English pupils generally fail to see the relevance of MFL and offer this as a reason to explain negative attitudes towards language learning. The same picture emerges from Williams *et al.*'s research (2002), and even Watts (2003), who states that learners see some importance in MFL, notes that 'the notion of English being enough' (p. 5) was often expressed. She comments that 'the apparent strength of English as a world language' (p. 15) was perceived as undermining the usefulness of learning languages, a point discussed earlier in relation to many English-speaking contexts, and reflected once again in the comments of a pupil interviewed by Woodward (2002: 1):

What's the point of wasting time learning a foreign language when everywhere you go, people speak English? You might as well bring back Latin.

Conversely, the ATLAS project (2002: 4) found 'little support for the idea

that students think “English is enough”, though it must be borne in mind that half of the pupils participating in the focus-group interviews in this study attended specialist language colleges and can logically be expected to demonstrate more positive attitudes towards language learning.

Stables and Wikeley (1999) present perhaps the gloomiest evidence with regard to pupil perceptions of utility. Their findings contrast sharply with those of Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993) and of Lee *et al.* (1998), whose studies show that the majority of pupils are aware of the professional usefulness of MFL. Stables and Wikeley (1999: 29) point out:

In both sets of interviews, a strongly utilitarian view of subject importance emerged: important subjects were needed to gain employment. Neither French nor German was rated highly in this respect.

Interestingly, the authors noted that English, Maths and Science were regarded as being the most important and useful subjects – the three subjects which make up the core of the English National Curriculum. Court (2001: 21) comes to the same conclusion:

Not only can students see maths and English as important to their future lives but they can see them as essential to their lives at the moment. French, on the other hand, does not seem to have the same sort of status.

Again, one is reminded of Alexander’s comments, discussed earlier, which raise questions about the way the structure of the school curriculum communicates messages of subject status to pupils. It might be argued that the core/foundation curricular division partly explains these differences in perceptions here, though it does not of course explain why pupils elsewhere have more positive perceptions.

Trying to account for the contrasting British perceptions that emerge from the literature in this regard is difficult. Perhaps some schools/teachers/parents have been particularly successful in communicating their own perceptions of the usefulness of MFL. Given the huge range of educational and sociocultural factors which would seem to influence language learning, however, perhaps the most that can be said is that such influences may be differently clustered in different settings, producing clearly different attitudes towards learning languages and different impressions of their utility. There is even some suggestion in the literature that gender may be significant in terms of explaining differences in perceptions of usefulness. Reflecting

more generally on the data presented in the literature above, the picture which emerges might not in actual fact be as dichotomous as appears. As already discussed, several of the studies which suggest that pupils do see the point of MFL also show that the same pupils are not sufficiently persuaded of the usefulness of MFLs to continue studying them or even to prefer them over other subjects. The apparent anomaly here could thus be suggestive of a degree of impression management – pupils trying to respond to researchers in the way they feel they ought to. Either way, it would seem that British pupils are not uniformly persuaded of the benefits MFL will bring them.

Moving away from English-speaking contexts, studies looking at Continental European pupils reflect very different impressions of usefulness. Young (1994a), for instance, describes French pupils as being twice as likely as English pupils to see language learning as beneficial. She supports this with figures in later research (Young 1994b), where 79.5 per cent of the French pupils in her study express the view that languages are important for employment, compared with only 51.5 per cent of the English pupils who participated. It should, however, be noted that the French pupils were mainly referring to English, the special status of which has already been discussed, while the English pupils were specifically referring to French, which has already been identified in certain other studies as being perceived as less useful than German in career terms by some pupils. Interestingly, Young also discovered much greater variability between the English schools in her study than between the French schools, where perceptions of MFL utility were reasonably uniform, suggesting once again a more fragmented British picture.

With regard to Dutch perceptions, Dijkgraaf (2001) does not dispute the usefulness attached to learning English in the Netherlands but argues that the Dutch see very little point in learning German, again highlighting the importance of examining attitudes towards individual languages. An article in the *NRC Handelsblad* (Anon. 2003) talks of French also succumbing to growing perceptions of redundancy in the Netherlands, where the recent and rapid growth of bi-lingual schools with English streams is matched by only one school with an equivalent German stream and none at all nationally for French.

As for German views, Chambers (1999) suggests that German pupils are more easily persuaded of the usefulness of language learning in general, and posits this as a key factor in explaining their increased MFL motivation. He argues that widespread social perceptions of the usefulness of MFL in Germany have resulted in higher curriculum status and more generous time

allocations, factors which conspire to foster more positive attitudes in a kind of virtuous language learning circle. In his view, the higher level of perceived utility is therefore particularly effective in conditioning positive attitudes in Germany, while the lack of utility attached to English perceptions of MFL results in the picture presented above. He argues that this places an increased onus on British language teachers to inject language lessons with as much enjoyment as possible to offset the resulting motivational deficit. Stables and Wikeley (1999: 31) identify the same challenge:

English pupils need really to be aware of a need to succeed with languages. This continues to present a significant challenge to modern language teachers in the British context.

Despite the teachers' best efforts, it would seem from the evidence discussed so far that British pupils do not, however, associate language learning with high levels of enjoyment. Some of the education-related reasons for this lack of enjoyment were explored earlier. In an attempt to examine this issue from another angle, it is useful at this juncture to explore the ways in which pupil perceptions of difficulty, perhaps derived from wider social views, may influence and explain their attitudes towards MFL.

Perceptions of difficulty

In a sense, it could be said that perceptions of difficulty operate at two levels – first, at the level of the individual as a result of his/her own subjective evaluation of personal experience and secondly at the level of wider society. In this latter sense, perceptions refer to current views in the social world about the nature of language learning, mediated perhaps by the media, youth culture, education or the learner's immediate social environment. In individual cases, it may be that one level of perception significantly overrides the influence of the other, or that the two levels merge. No attempt will be made here to examine the interface between these two levels or their relative importance. What is important here is to examine the nature rather than the exact origin of these perceptions – how difficult do teenagers perceive MFL to be and what might the effect of these perceptions on their language attitudes be?

The literature provides a fairly clear answer to these questions in the British context: language learning is hard! Stables and Wikeley (1999) found that

the majority of pupils in their study felt language learning was difficult and 'not offset in many cases by the belief that the effort is really worthwhile' (p. 30), underlining the lack of perceived usefulness discussed above. Such views are borne out by a number of studies. Chambers (1994) describes how 'modern languages retain in the perception of some pupils their image as something difficult and not really necessary' (p. 14), while Clark and Trafford (1995), Court (2001) and Mansell (2003) reiterate that pupils see MFLs as more demanding than other school subjects particularly because of the need to concentrate more carefully and consistently – pupils talked about the difficulties incurred by temporary losses of concentration in MFL classes, an issue which they felt was less problematic in other school subjects. Pupils in Kent's (1996) study expressed the view that it was harder to get a good grade in languages than in other subjects precisely because of such demands.

Pupils in Fisher's (2001) study make the same point. Fifty-nine per cent of learners 'found foreign languages to be the most challenging subjects in the curriculum' (Fisher, 2001: 35), with around a third of all pupils using the words 'hard' or 'difficult' to describe their experience of language learning. Because of this, pupils expressed the feeling that only excellent academic pupils would do well in MFL, a view which contrasts with pupil perceptions in Holland, where pupils refer to language-based sixth-form courses as 'fun courses', indicating that languages are viewed as an easy option, as previously discussed (Veilbrief 2002).

A variety of reasons are offered by the literature to explain why English pupils associate MFL with difficulty. Returning to Fisher (2001), curriculum organization may be partly to blame. Fisher explains that the demands of the National Curriculum mean that little time is available for languages, and where a second foreign language is taught, the amount of time per language is further reduced. She argues that this reduction in teaching time inevitably slows progress and may exacerbate the idea that it is difficult to progress in MFL. She is also critical of the nature of the MFL curriculum and refers to the 'dash through a heavily prescribed, vocabulary-driven curriculum' (*ibid.*: 35) as adding to pupil difficulties.

Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993) provide a more detailed examination of the reasons that pupils perceive particular languages as difficult, some of the reasons clearly resonating with Fisher's evidence and Court's research (2001: 26). French was seen to be the hardest language to learn, and pupils referred to having problems with the grammar, gender, spelling, vocabulary and not least of all pronunciation:

[T]here was a growing feeling among the French learners that the French accent was hard to reproduce and that it was embarrassing to try to pronounce French words.

(Phillips and Filmer-Sankey 1993: 111).

Pupils commented on the lack of MFL experience at primary level, the fact that language learning was intrinsically difficult, being taught through the target language and having a 'bad teacher' as key reasons for their difficulties. By comparison, German and Spanish were seen as less difficult because they were easier to pronounce, though many pupils talked of their struggles with German grammar. Leighton (1991) suggests that the dominance of French as first foreign language in England is chiefly responsible for creating widespread perceptions of language learning as a difficult endeavour. He refers among other things to the fact that French is a particularly complex first language to tackle, with its complicated grammar, eighty-one verb paradigms, etc., and made all the more difficult by virtue of its non-cognate status with English, giving it thus very different sound and speech patterns. He contrasts the English experience of initial language learning with that of pupils in such countries as Germany and Holland, where pupils learn English as their first foreign language – a language strongly related to their mother tongues, and one reason perhaps that German and Dutch pupils (who, according to Dijkgraaf (2001), also identify French as being particularly difficult) perceive MFL as being easier.

Reflecting on the discussions above, it would seem that although writers may disagree about the extent to which variables relating to the immediate and wider social environments impact on attitudes, there is very wide agreement that sociocultural factors are significant, and there are some indications that sociocultural variables may be even more important than educational factors. This question will be discussed further in the conclusion (Chapter 8). Before considering any conclusions, however, the next chapter provides an overview of the survey's findings on pupil attitudes.

Chapter 6

Attitudes to Learning German, French and English

The three sections of this chapter explore and compare the nature of the pupils' attitudes to learning the three languages included in the research study. The findings for each language are presented separately in an attempt to provide the language-specific detail that several authors have identified as lacking in most research to date (as discussed in the introduction), and which may be of benefit to readers with specific interests in German, French or English only. A combined analysis of all three languages would inevitably have compromised much of this detail, perhaps obscuring certain features more relevant to particular languages. Each of the three sections opens with a general examination of attitudes, followed by a more detailed review of the educational and sociocultural dimensions. Chapter 7 then provides an analysis of findings per language, along with an examination of the wider patterns emerging from an inter-country comparison.

Responses from the Dutch and German pupils are included in English translation. Where it is helpful, the pupils' own annotations from stage-one data (using the +, – and = symbols to indicate whether they meant their responses to have a positive, negative or neutral connotation) have been included for the sake of clarity. The stage-one sample for German consisted of 60 English and 59 Dutch pupils. Note that the tables show response numbers rather than pupil numbers.

Attitudes to learning German – general

Numbers and examples of responses to the 'learning German' prompt are shown in Table 6.1 below.

As the table shows, pupil attitudes appeared constructed around notions of difficulty, usefulness and enjoyment, and therefore pupils were asked to reflect on these ideas in their accounts. The English and Dutch pupils revealed a mixed picture that confirmed and illuminated the stage-one data. Around half of them talked of enjoying learning German, some despite the difficulties experienced – an important finding which suggests that difficulty

Table 6.1 Responses to 'Learning German'

Category	Example English responses	Example Dutch responses
Difficult	12 – Confusing; complex	7 – Really hard; the grammar is really difficult
Easy	0	3 – Easy; doable because it's like Dutch
Not enjoyable	6 – Boring; don't like it	15 – Boring; really stupid; gives me no pleasure
Enjoyable	17 – It's cool; I enjoy it; good – I think you should learn to speak another language; like learning it	17 – I think it's nice – I notice that I'm getting the hang of it more and more
Pointless	10 – Irrelevant; waste of time; a waste of education; should have learnt Spanish because most people go to Spain	4 – Not necessary; you can speak English there instead of the German you've learned; it's enough to know English
Useful	3 – Good for later life; may come in handy	7 – Useful for later; good – a lot of countries speak the language
Indifferent	11 – Not bothered; neither happy nor unhappy about it	4 – ok=

is not necessarily associated with a lack of enjoyment, and which nuances the stage-one data above:

German is an enjoyable subject. I think that having a German GCSE will be an advantage. I do however have a bit of difficulty with German. (English boy)

When I'm doing German I find it quite hard. But I actually like being able to speak it. (Dutch girl)

For others, however, their sense of enjoyment seemed allied to their perception of German either being useful or easy. As also noted during the interviews, more Dutch pupils suggested German was easy for them, often because of its similarity to Dutch ('it's not very hard because it's a lot like the Dutch language'). Several English (10) and Dutch (14) pupils commented in their accounts on the ways in which German was useful, mostly pointing out its merits with regard to future employment and travel:

It would be useful if I was to go to a German-speaking country in the future for work experience or a holiday (English boy).

This comment typifies quite well the feeling of many of the English pupils – those who acknowledge the usefulness of the language appear to locate its utility *beyond* their present (cf. McPake *et al.* 1999). When interviewed, James from Green Bank explains how attitudes may hinge on the perception of this future utility:

If you think, 'what I'm doing later on in life doesn't need German so it doesn't matter how well I do. Even if I fail GCSE, I'm just going to forget about German.' But if you know you need it afterwards, you'll put more effort into learning it.

For several Dutch pupils, however, regular visits had already provided more occasions for use in their lives so far, and proximity may be key in this regard:

I think German's a useful language because it's next to our country and I sometimes go there. (Dutch boy)

These themes were present throughout the interviews, where proximity

was felt to have particular significance for several Dutch pupils in that visiting German-speaking countries, even if only in passing, was seen as almost inevitable:

Interviewer: And do you think you'll go to Germany, Austria and Switzerland much later on?

Tineke: No, but you pass through them on the way to other countries.

Sien: You're bound to go there some time.

For all this, 13 English and 9 Dutch pupils wrote about an unenjoyable learning experience. For several of these, difficulty played no small part in this. Two boys explain:

I wish I found German easier, because if I did, I would take it to A level, but as it is, I'll be glad when my GCSE is finished and I don't have to learn the hardest subject on my timetable anymore. (English boy)

I don't like learning German because it's hard, especially the cases. (Dutch boy)

One pupil referred to a greater perceived need to concentrate – 'it's a subject that needs a lot of paying attention to' (echoing Clark and Trafford (1995)). For others, boredom and a perception that German was of little use dominated the English view in the accounts and interviews alike, with several pupils suggesting that moving to Germany would be the only incentive for them to want to learn it. During the interviews, the perceived lack of utility was constructed around a number of common understandings – the absence of German in the learners' daily lives, its lack of connection with career and future ambitions (cf. Dabène (1997)), its inferior utility when compared with 'holiday' languages like Spanish and Italian, and the view that 'English is enough' (cf. Watts (2003)).

Interestingly, several of the Dutch pupils who disliked German conceded that it could still be useful, often again because 'Germany is Holland's neighbour'. None of those interviewed questioned its usefulness and only four expressed some doubts in their writing. Several explained how their original decision to choose German over French was based on strategic thinking, and this element of choice may be important in explaining more positive attitudes among some Dutch pupils:

I chose German because I want to go onto HAVO and then you have to have an extra language. I didn't choose French because that's harder.

I initially chose German to get rid of French.

It is interesting to note that the Dutch learners who commented on the choice element here all demonstrate positive attitudes to German. Five of the few English pupils in the sample with previous experience of both French and German and who therefore were in a position to choose between the two at GCSE also discuss similar reasons for choosing German, and interestingly, like the Dutch pupils, exhibit positive attitudes to the language:

One of the main reasons I took German was because I found French too complicated but I enjoyed the German language. (Green Bank pupil)

Eight other English pupils bemoan the lack of choice that was available to them and which resulted in them having to take German. Perhaps not coincidentally, six of these revealed more negative attitudes towards the language (cf. Gardner (1985), who refers to negative attitudes resulting from MFL imposition), though not to language learning in general, with several referring to an interest in Spanish or other languages.

With regard to the affective dimension, only pupils at the Dutch schools (in the accounts and interviews) comment on how their aesthetic appreciation of the language has led to a positive attitude, while several learners in both countries discuss how a negative aesthetic evaluation is responsible for their negative attitude, as the following extract from a Dutch interview reveals:

Interviewer: Why do you think German is a stupid language?

Anne: Well, I think it's a harsh language. When you speak it, I think it sounds horrible.

Interviewer: So because you don't like how it sounds . . .

Anne: I think it's a stupid language!

The comments made by one English girl – 'it's a very manly and kind of not very pleasant language . . . and I'm not really putting a lot of effort into learning it because I dislike it' – are also interesting in this respect, and resonate with Williams *et al.*'s findings (2002), while the rather different aesthetic interpretation that 'German people sound gay all the time' responsible

for one English boy's negative orientation is suggestive of Court's (2001) study.

Before moving on to explore the pupils' attitudes towards the specific educational and sociocultural aspects of learning German, it would thus be fair to say at this stage that English and Dutch attitudes share many points of similarity, though impressions of usefulness appear more divergent.

Attitudes towards the German teacher

Stage-one data revealed that the English pupils in particular seemed broadly satisfied with the teaching skills and personalities of their German teachers. In the data from stage two, the teacher was in fact the most mentioned educational 'element' by both the English and Dutch pupils. The importance attached to the teacher was also noted by Chambers (1999) and Wright (1999), as discussed previously. Twelve English and 5 Dutch pupils referred to positive attitudes towards their German teacher:

The teacher who we have for German has influenced me a great deal and has encouraged me to work hard at the subject to achieve the grades I am capable of. (English boy)

The teacher is quite strict but teaches really well. I feel I'm learning a lot this year. (Dutch boy)

For some, however, such positive influence is not enough to sway a negative attitude:

I find the teacher is very motivated by the language and she tries to convey this enthusiasm onto us, but many aren't interested – most of my friends share the same opinion as myself and find German boring. (English girl)

Common Dutch criticisms from stage-one data were reiterated in the accounts, with 11 pupils commenting on the negative attitudinal impact. The remarks of one girl are fairly typical in this respect:

I don't get on well with my teacher and therefore I don't like the lessons. My classmates generally feel the same about her, which doesn't of course help the atmosphere.

Data from the interviews were consistent with results from the first two stages, and pupils in both countries were keen to stress the importance of teachers who are able to maintain order and provide clear explanations. One Dutch pupil describes why she feels the teacher is the most important influence on her attitude:

. . . because we have a very good teacher, he can explain everything really well, and he keeps your attention, so it's, if you've got a nice teacher, it's just fun and you're more interested in it.

Some of the English pupils were especially critical of the effects of frequent changes of teacher, and while discussing punishments given out by their German teachers, some offered a particularly intriguing insight into how teacher behaviour might reinforce the lesser curricular standing of German in their eyes (cf. Hawkins (1996)). Darren comments:

It's like the teachers know that German isn't like a good subject; like with English, Maths and Science, if you ain't doing the work or anything, the teacher will have a right go at you, you know, they'd keep you back at the end of the lesson and say like 'You really need to pull your socks up to get a good grade to get a good job', whereas in German if you mess about, they're just . . . (shrugs). It's like it's not like it's life-changing.

Attitudes to other school-related factors

In order to build a more detailed impression of learner attitudes, other school-related elements of the learning experience will now be examined in turn.

Using the target language

Given the importance attached to communicative teaching in currently endorsed methodology, this prompt was included to gain some idea of pupil attitudes to this approach. The responses from the English pupils reveal a rather fragmented picture, with comments focusing on the difficulty involved and the extent to which this was (not) enjoyed. Perhaps the most interesting finding to emerge was the fact that several pupils disliked using the target

language because they found it embarrassing, as also noted by Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993):

Not good for shy people.

I don't like it because I think I'll get laughed at.

Another pupil who professed to enjoy it is perhaps also hinting at the 'discomfort' experienced by classmates, when commenting that it leads to 'a lot of distractions from other members of the group'. These comments were made by both girls and boys, suggesting that oral inhibitions are not necessarily the preserve of boys, as claimed by Court (2001) and Taylor (2000).

The Dutch pupils' responses showed some similarities with regard to difficulty though many pupils referred to this aspect being 'fun', explaining that 'you learn a lot from it', and that more use should be made of the target language – a view also expressed by some of the English pupils during the interviews, who speculated that few opportunities for oral practice may be a reason why some make less progress:

I don't know if it's the same in your group, but like in our group, we don't get spoken to, we just get sheets with it on, and it's like, put it this way, you don't know it unless somebody speaks it to you. It's like in one of the other groups, their teacher just does their lesson in German, and they respond to it, that's probably why they're in the top group . . . (Jane, Red Lane)

German lessons

Despite the pupils' general appreciation of their German teachers and their teaching skills, a more negative picture emerged when the focus was switched to the actual lessons. The stage-one responses can be categorized as follows:

Though many English pupils simply opted for 'boring' to define their experience of lessons, it is interesting to note the very varied and specific criticisms offered by other pupils, some of whom indicate that a positive attitude to learning the language is thwarted to some extent by the focus of the lessons or classroom behaviour (cf. Henry (2001b)). The comment by a Red Lane pupil that German lessons 'are really good but I'd never say!'

is particularly intriguing, in that it hints that openly admitting a positive attitude may be at variance with the prevailing peer culture.

In their accounts, lessons were the most mentioned educational aspect after the teacher, and English pupils highlighted the importance of good teacher–pupil relationships and an atmosphere conducive to learning. A Dutch girl underlines the importance of variety, a key theme from stage one, also highlighted by Clark and Trafford's research (1995):

The German lessons are always really nice because of the variety of things we do in the lessons. Sometimes we watch German films, at other times we practise listening or reading or writing.

This same theme was stressed in the interviews with the English pupils, some of whom felt that their diet of similarly structured lessons ('we pretty much know what we're going to do every lesson', 'it's boring, there's no variety') did little to support positive attitudes. Greater use of ICT could potentially help deliver the lesson variety many pupils desire, and it is worth noting that stage-one data from both countries showed almost unanimous interest in increased ICT integration in German classes, though many of the Dutch pupils already appeared to make much use of computers. They also appeared generally satisfied with their other learning resources, of which the English pupils were particularly critical, often questioning their relevance and referring to the age and the poor condition of the materials used ('awful – most info and books are written before 1990', 'so old it's unbelievable'). During the interviews, some English pupils were also critical of an over-reliance on worksheets (as also found by Kent (1996)). Lisa's comments suggest that this has contributed to her increasingly negative attitude towards the subject:

Like in year 9, I really liked German, because the teacher we had, she really interacted with you, she didn't give out sheets much to be honest, she got you one-on-one . . . working together really . . . I'd rather do that, I'd rather work as a class as well. Sometimes it's all right doing sheets, but like these sheets, they don't teach you nothing.

In their accounts, several Dutch and English pupils referred to the negative impact of lessons on their attitudes. Though one Dutch pupil is particularly critical of the lessons, she still maintains a positive attitude towards the language:

Table 6.2 Responses to 'German lessons'

Category	English responses	Dutch responses
Boring	22 – Dull; very boring	13 – Unbelievably boring; dull
Critical	21 – It's mostly writing – rubbish; don't learn enough vocab; I don't see a point in them; some students mess about because they don't like languages; too early in the morning	16 – No good explanations; don't do much; chaotic; we generally don't achieve our objective; we don't do anything in the lesson – she's never there; our class is very noisy
Indifferent	10 – ok=; so so	15 – all right=; ok=
Enjoyable	16 – Fast paced+; can be rewarding; are really good but I'd never say! Gives me a better understanding of English; sometimes fun	25 – Fun; nice; lot of variety; useful; nice with videos; peaceful lessons; always follows the same pattern+

We're not making any progress and his lessons are completely hopeless. I think his lessons are useless, but I do like the language.

One of the English pupils attributes his (and others') negative attitude precisely to the way lessons are conducted, however:

Perhaps my view would change a little if it was approached by teachers in a different way, as from my experience German lessons are really quite boring and dull. This is probably because it's a difficult subject to teach interestingly, and this is the main reason why a large percentage of children don't enjoy it. (English boy)

Another with similar sentiments accounts for the apparent discrepancy between positive attitudes towards the teacher and a more negative attitude toward lessons:

My attitudes towards learning German are influenced by the lessons and how boring they are, the teachers are quite good but they don't really do enough fun activities.

One pupil goes as far as saying that 'school lessons are the things that influence me most' and explains how a concentration on written work makes her lose interest and enjoyment, yet this does not detract from her positive attitude towards learning, as she describes how 'it is nice to be able to speak a language other than English' and that she 'would like to be able to speak the language fluently'. It would appear that for some pupils, a very positive attitude towards language learning in general may override more negative classroom-based experiences.

Assessment

A prompt on the assessments used for German was included in order to gauge pupils' attitudes to this important aspect of learning. Eleven comments from English pupils indicated that learners saw the benefits of their assessments though 22 comments focused on the level of difficulty. Other responses (27) focused on the over-frequency of testing and the stress that pupils felt this placed on them, while others criticized the variability of challenge. Pupils at Red Lane School raised a number of interesting

assessment issues during the interview. One issue related to the lack of 'formal' assessment of German during their school career, which seems partially responsible for constructing Mike's view of German as a relatively unimportant subject (cf. Hawkins (1996)):

Yeah, but like you do a SATS for Maths, but you don't do one for German, so you don't think like, 'Oh, this is important'.

Though testing in previous years may thus have appeared less formal to some pupils, the GCSE assessment seemed to dominate the whole curricular experience for other pupils (cf. Kelly (2009)), who seemed aware of the possible dichotomy between examination success and linguistic achievement. Several pupils complained of too many lessons spent rehearsing past papers, and though this may be useful in terms of making the grade, as Dave says, 'we've been taught to pass the exam really and not learn the language', echoing Vasseur and Grandcolas (1997), and most strikingly Fisher (2001). And although pupils felt assessment via coursework was easy and enjoyable, some pupils, like Lisa, felt that 'at the same time you're still not really learning'.

The Dutch pupils volunteered 61 responses, 22 of which again concerned the level of difficulty. The positive responses (18) related to the varied nature and usefulness of the assessments, while other pupils (13) criticized the perceived lack of variety ('always the same thing dished up'). Though many of the English and Dutch pupils appear to find German assessments difficult, then, it would seem that more English pupils have a wider range of concerns about testing.

Attitudes to the wider curriculum

The issues identified above all relate to aspects of education that might arguably be seen as more dependent on individual teachers and the school. The content of the GCSE curriculum and the amount of time devoted to the delivery of this curriculum can be regarded as issues subject to a greater degree of national control via requirements set out in the National Curriculum framework, though this does not apply to the Dutch schools which have more autonomy in these respects. Prompts on both these items were included in the word association task in order to form some impression of pupil attitudes to these wider curricular issues, and the influence these exert.

With regard to the number of teaching sessions available for German

(2 hours of German a week), an almost equal number of English pupils were satisfied and dissatisfied. Twenty-seven pupils indicated that an appropriate amount of school time was devoted to learning German but 28 disagreed (though interestingly, 15 of these felt too little time was available – cf. Dobson (1998)). In this respect, one Red Lane pupil again alludes to the perception of a negative German-learning climate among peers:

There could be more lessons, but I don't think the others would approve.

Of the 57 responses from Dutch pupils (3–4 hours per week), only 19 felt that an appropriate amount of time was spent on German lessons. The vast majority (35) felt that too much time was spent learning German, contrasting with the 13 English responses above, though the difference in hours allocated should be noted.

'English attitudes towards the content of the German curriculum appeared particularly negative, with difficulty emerging again as a key attitudinal construct, and the criticisms the pupils make of the curriculum may go some way towards explaining this difficulty. The criticisms offered are also reminiscent of Fisher's description of 'the dash through a heavily prescribed, vocabulary-driven curriculum' (2001: 35). Although few pupils refer to the curriculum in the accounts, those who do underscore some of the criticisms regarding relevance (cf. Ward (2004b)):

I also think the GCSE course should be made so that you are taught things you would actually need when you are in a German-speaking country and not just pointless topics. (English boy)

During the interviews, the English pupils drew on this perceived lack of relevance as a key factor in constructing negative orientations. Pupils became quite animated when discussing the pointlessness of lessons focusing on car breakdowns and filling up with petrol (cf. Thornton and Cajkler (1996); Grenfell (2000)). Dave provides another example:

The subjects we get, they're just weird topics, like 'My dream house' – I mean, I really will just go up to a German and say 'Look, this is what my dream house is!'

Such reservations about usefulness were accompanied and perhaps exacerbated by a strong impression of German isolation within the curriculum as

a whole, as the following exchange between Lisa and Mike reveals:

Lisa: . . . but it's also like 'cos it doesn't link with other subjects, it's like completely on its own . . .

Mike: Yeah, like Science sometimes links with Maths, and sometimes English links with History, and it's like sometimes all a chain. But then with German, you've just got German there by itself, I mean, what's that?

Perhaps as a result, the view that German is of 'low priority' within the curriculum (cf. Hawkins (1996)) and that it should either be optional or that pupils should have more say in which language they learn, as mentioned earlier, pervades the English interviews and reports:

more language courses + oportunities (sic) should be available in school, not just German. A whole variety should be set up for us to choose from if we wish.

These sentiments are echoed by 4 Dutch pupils, who suggest that other languages could be more usefully taught (e.g. Spanish) or given more time (English). Though the findings indicate that the Dutch pupils are perhaps less satisfied with the amount of German, more of them appear happier with the content of the curriculum than the English pupils, and despite criticisms, with some pupils experiencing a lack of interest, the largest number of Dutch responses here are positive, suggesting that these particular pupils are more satisfied with their curricular diet than are the English pupils (though these numbers must admittedly be treated with some caution as previously discussed). Comments made by Karin at Rembrandt College appear rather typical, and her enjoyment of the curriculum topics covered appears to hinge once again on a positive perception of relevance:

Yes, they're really good topics, things that relate to us, kind of . . . Things that you'll use German for.

Curricular choice

As the above suggests, the perceived usefulness of curriculum content may be an important factor in constructing positive attitudes. However, the

pupils' own ability to decide whether or not to access German within the curriculum would also seem to be an important issue, as their comments indicate. The emergence of this idea in stage-two data was therefore probed in more detail during the interviews. Several of the English pupils, like Darren below, spoke plainly about resenting having no choice but to take German, and how this adversely affected their attitude (cf. Gardner again (1985)):

'Cos the fact like you've been forced into it, so like you don't really want to do it.

Some of the higher-stream Dutch pupils felt that having no choice about learning German was justifiable given the minority status of their mother tongue and the proximity of their larger neighbour, while lower-stream pupils who had been given the option of French and/or German justified their choice differently on the basis of enjoyment, difficulty, grades and family preferences but all agreed that not having had a choice would have made them feel differently about German:

Karin: Well, that'd be different, because then you'd *have to* do it. It wouldn't have been your choice any more.

Aad: It's good that you're allowed to choose between two languages.

When asked what difference opting for German would make in terms of their attitude, George's response from Green Bank was typical:

Well, I find that, if you chose to do it, then you've condemned yourself to doing something, so you've got to do it. You've got to get on with it.

For some pupils, then, the extent to which the organization of the curriculum allows access to language choice appears to be important in influencing the direction of their attitude, and even a limited choice may mould an accepting rather than rejecting orientation.

Sociocultural attitudes and influences

Attitudes to Germany and the Germans

The pupils produced a range of responses to the items 'Germany' (shown below in Table 6.3) and 'German people':

Despite a relatively small number of rather disturbing negative responses, it is gratifying to see that a much greater number of pupils feel it is inappropriate to be drawn into generalizing here, though some may be reticent about making negative comments. This impression was reinforced by the interviews with the Dutch pupils in particular, who were unusually silent when their views on the Germans were solicited. This may also explain why the Dutch attitudes revealed here appear more positive than in Dekker *et al.*'s study (1998). Many of those who do comment arguably seem influenced to some extent by both positive and negative social stereotypes prevalent in England and the Netherlands. Negative war associations are relatively few, however, and this finding contrasts sharply with Sammon's (1998) study of British and Irish teenagers. Though there clearly are negative comments here, many of these do not suggest deep-rooted xenophobia – as many as 8 of the negative English responses to 'German people' concerned the perceived hairiness of Germans, for example, and as such, the generally positive English attitudes are in line with other studies (cf. Thornton and Cajkler (1996), Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993)).

In the accounts, Dutch and English pupils refer to positive attitudes towards learning German and towards the Germans, echoing many of the positive comments above. One English boy talks of his interest in German-speaking Switzerland, and though he has never visited the country, he feels that 'the thing that has influenced me the most was the desire to be bilingual and so able to communicate freely during a visit to Switzerland'. For some of the English pupils who display rather negative attitudes towards the Germans (7), two still enjoy learning the language, and only one boy comments that his negative view of the TLCS directly affects his language learning attitude:

I don't really like Germany or German people very much so this influences my opinion quite a lot because I find German people annoying.

In the interviews, the English pupils discussed the Germans and revealed generally rather negative attitudes towards them, though they centred on football and sun-bed rivalry on Spanish holidays rather than deep-seated

Table 6.3 Responses to 'Germany'

Category	English responses	Dutch responses
Neutral	22 – Haven't been so can't pass judgement	16 – Never been
German people (negative)	4 – Sleazy men; fat people; miserable supermarket workers	0
German people (positive)	6 – Efficient; liberal; very friendly people	1 – nice people
War	6 – Hitler; hate Germans for what they did to Jews	0
Language	2 – I would like to go there and speak what I've learned	1 – I think the language is fun
Aspects of the country (negative)	5 – Crap and dirty; don't like the place; want to rule us not by war but by us joining Europe	16 – Not a very appealing country; nothing nice about it; not very nice weather; stupid country
Aspects of the country (positive)	19 – Nice sausage; beautiful scenery; would love to go; I like the country and people	30 – beer+; beautiful country; go there every year; BMW and Mercedes+

disdain. The extent to which such views influenced their attitudes to learning the language provoked disagreement among the pupils. The higher-stream pupils felt that their views of the TLCS did not affect their language attitudes, but middle- and lower-stream pupils disagreed. Lisa, who would have preferred to learn French, explained that it may even work both ways:

It does, yeah, 'cos we think they're like boring as well, probably because we know the language is boring; it's like I know I keep saying it, but because I like French, I feel all the people who speak it must be artists and everything. But German, you think 'Oh God!'

The Dutch pupils seemed reluctant again to discuss their attitudes to the Germans, but those who did suggested that their negative view of them was not a positive influence on their language attitudes. Given their apparent discomfort, it was decided not to push them to elaborate any further. In the accounts, however, the Dutch pupils who describe their attitude towards the Germans as negative all display a similarly negative attitude towards learning the language, yet some again concede that their efforts may eventually pay off. The remarks of one Dutch girl are fairly typical in this respect:

In my prejudiced view, the Germans are still beer-swilling sausage eaters. But I'll carry on learning German as you never know when it might come in handy.

Sociocultural influences on attitudes

Since the media are often claimed to make a significant contribution to the development of attitudes towards other countries and peoples, it was felt that a prompt on 'the way German people are portrayed on television/in films' (see Table 6.4) may yield some interesting insights. Though a few English pupils were unsure or refused to comment again, only 9 felt Germans were portrayed fairly or in a positive light. The remaining 59 responses suggested that the media present a very negative view of the Germans, as Theobald (1999) has previously suggested.

This prompt interestingly attracted the largest number of total responses from the English pupils and there appears to be broad agreement that the Germans fall foul of the English media. The remark of one pupil provides food for thought:

Table 6.4 Responses to ‘the way German people are portrayed on television/ in films’

Category	English responses	Dutch responses
War associations	10 – Nazis; Jew haters; dictators; always in war films; murderers; war films – very unfair	5 – a lot of people are still seen as Nazis; usually as filthy Huns
Generally negative/ stereotypical image/qualities	49 – as enemies; as evil; nasty and mean; fat and hairy; dodgy fashion; bad sense of humour	29 – beer bellies; prats, stupid, aggressive, miserable

Usually portrayed in Nazi roles e.g. *Indiana Jones*, *Allo Allo* – odd that you don’t see them in other situations.

Of the 7 English pupils who commented on the media in their accounts, it is interesting that 6 felt that the media in no way influenced their perception of the Germans. This lack of influence was ascribed to a lack of media coverage, which seems somewhat at odds with the responses given in stage one. This might suggest that the pupils are aware of stereotypical media associations (‘I think we’re given a bad image of them to be honest’ – English pupil) but feel that actual information reporting is rather more limited. One girl discusses how a greater media representation could be beneficial to language learning:

I feel if German music was around, it would be an easy way for children to learn the language cuz (sic) song lyrics these days are very catchy.

Another girl describes the negative effect of her perception of German invisibility in the media/youth culture domain on her attitude towards the language:

There are few pop stars, TV shows, films, etc. from Germany so I don’t think there’s much incentive to learn the language.

It is ironic that the only English pupil to comment on how television enhances her attitude to German refers to media exposure when abroad:

When I go on holiday to Spain, I always find a German channel on the television. I watch it if I'm in the apartment and try to translate it to my family.

The responses from the Dutch pupils reveal some similarities. One pupil felt that the Germans were fairly inconspicuous in the Dutch media, a point which may account for why as many as 18 responses of 'don't know' were offered to this item; it may also be that some pupils again felt uncomfortable about suggesting that Dutch media treatment of Germans is often less than complimentary (Dekker *et al.* 1998). In their accounts, 7 Dutch pupils discuss how the media have had a positive impact on their attitudes, often because of the availability of German media in their daily life (cf. Young (1994b)). One girl explains how listening to German pop music means learning German has much appeal for her, supporting the suspicions of the English pupil above, while another adds:

I'm also motivated to do well in German by the German media, because you want to understand what they're saying of course.

Conversely, 11 pupils discuss how they dislike and actively avoid German media, often because of an aesthetic rejection of the language. Two Dutch girls comment:

I can't stand German television and pop music, mainly because I think the language is ugly.

I can't stand the sound of German pop music, and this does influence the rather stuffy image that I have of German.

Another girl attributes her negative attitude towards German directly to her disinclination towards German music:

Personally, I think German pop music is ridiculous, and because of this I haven't got much respect for the language.

This constitutes a major difference between some of the Dutch and English pupils: the English comments suggest that the scant media exposure is

regrettable, while several Dutch pupils feel that the greater media exposure in the Netherlands actually erodes their attitude to the language, though this is clearly not true for them all. It is worth noting that most of the Dutch pupils who reject the German media also discuss not enjoying learning German, and that their negative subject orientation might be transferred more generally to other associations with Germany (cf. Chambers (1999)). In the interviews, however, Dutch pupils with rather more positive language attitudes also referred to their disinclination towards the German media, though this may simply be an issue of ease, as Aad revealed when talking about the internet:

If there's a text [in German], I can read it, but I wouldn't go looking for a German website if I can find one in Dutch or English, that's easier.

Whatever the case may be, it is encouraging that the English and Dutch pupils' own judgements of the TLCs appear more positive than the predominantly negative impression they feel the British and Dutch media present. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that such negatively perceived media portrayals will do much to enhance positive attitudes towards learning German, and it may even be the case that the very negative attitudes of some Dutch and English pupils towards the Germans/learning German might be exacerbated, if not constructed, by these images.

Close social environment

As discussed earlier, parents, family and friends can exert a powerful influence on language learning attitudes (Barton (1997); Phillips and Filmer-Sankey (1993)). Stage-one data revealed that half of the English pupils in the sample felt positively encouraged by their parents. Though this is a very encouraging finding, the data also reveal much parental indifference (cf. Ward (2003)). The Dutch data show more positive responses overall which may be symptomatic of the fact that almost all the Dutch pupils' parents had some foreign language knowledge, thus lending weight to Gardner's (1985) argument on parental influence and their linguistic role-model potential.

In their accounts, 12 English and 7 Dutch pupils commented very favourably on their perceptions of their parents' attitudes. Pupils talked about their parents helping with homework and pointing out the future career

benefits of knowing German, though one English pupil is clearly aware that his parents feel German has little status in the curriculum:

My parents think it's good if I do well in German but don't class it as really important compared with my other subjects.

This impression was reinforced in the English interviews where some pupils discussed their parents' strong disapproval of them truanting in Maths lessons, though a blind eye was turned for German, 'because it's German, it doesn't matter'. Other parents, however, would seem to have successfully communicated their own educational regrets to their children, with positive attitudinal benefits:

My parents try to encourage me to learn the language as well as possible as it is something they regret not working hard at. (English boy)

One pupil explains how 'the thing that has influenced me the most was my parents. Because my mom speaks German, I knew I had that support at home'. Many of the Dutch pupils echoed similar points during the interviews, where recognition of the utilitarian benefits their parents derived from speaking German (business, travel) reinforced their own views on its usefulness. For one English girl, however, an awareness of positive parental attitudes towards German has done nothing to 'interest me in any way', though she mentions an interest in learning other languages.

Two Dutch and 7 English pupils refer to explicitly negative parental attitudes. The comments here suggest that some parents actively discourage their children because of a perception of German as useless or less useful than other subjects/languages, while an English girl who dislikes German hints that a lack of parental language skills does little to counter her negative orientation:

None of my family speaks German so I suppose this doesn't help.

A Dutch boy with a clear dislike of German explains how his parents feel similarly, adding that they would never visit Germany as a result. For other English and Dutch pupils, however, an awareness of negative parental influence is not enough to adversely affect their own appreciation of the language, suggesting that parental influence can be tempered by other factors:

My parents don't like German, but that won't change my opinion. (Dutch girl)

Peer attitudes

When asked to respond to their perceptions of their friends' attitudes towards learning German, the picture was almost unanimously negative, suggesting that pupils in both countries share understandings of an anti-German-learning peer culture, as previously alluded to. This perceived negative climate may well be responsible for depressing attitudes to German, given the power peer pressure exerts on teenagers (Young (1994b); O'Reilly-Cavani and Birks (1997)). This impression was confirmed by some of the English pupils in the interviews, who pointed out the perceived social consequences of resisting the prevailing culture:

But the problem is, if you do well in years 7, 8 and 9 [in German], you don't fit in – that's the problem.

Others agreed that German somehow carried an elitist 'boffer' image, that marked them as 'uncool', because if you do German 'they kind of look differently at you'. The response patterns to this item are certainly closer to many of the educational/sociocultural prompts than are the responses to the prompt on perceptions of parental attitudes, which may indicate a stronger association between peer influence and language learning attitudes.

Many of the Dutch pupils agreed German was generally not seen as 'cool', but felt this applied to most subjects, and were insistent that the negative views of peers were *not* influential on their own attitudes (echoing Wright's study (1999)), though Anne from Vermeer College acknowledges how such views might influence the way in which some pupils choose *to display* their attitudes (i.e. via their behaviour) rather than their actual nature:

Anne: No, it doesn't influence you, because if you like it, and the others don't, then you still like it! You might pretend you don't but . . .

Interviewer: You might pretend you don't . . . how come?

Anne: There are people who think that the others will think they're weird, but you still like it yourself.

These findings are corroborated by data from the accounts. Fifteen English pupils refer to negative peer influences, their comments echoing the themes from the stage-one data. One of the pupils reveals:

I believe that my classmates influence me a tiny bit because their sometimes negative attitudes influence how much I learn.

Others refer to a common perception among peers that German is of little use, boring or too difficult to persevere with, impressions confirmed throughout the interviews, particularly among the pupils who had no choice about learning German ('there's quite a few people in my class, and they'd be like, "Well, German, yeah, what a waste of time"'; 'Like, a lot of people like me, I see German as a doss lesson, I'm never gonna use it').

Nonetheless, some pupils do mention positive peer influences in their reports. Most of these talk of positive effects of helping each other out in class and at home, though this does not necessarily reflect a positive attitude to the language, while others – some of the few to have previously done both French and German – explain how peer considerations were central in guiding their language choice. One girl explains that she chose German 'because my friends chose it and it makes the lessons more enjoyable', and another adds:

All my friends shared my feelings and took German so I finally decided to take that language at GCSE.

This theme was discussed at length during the interviews, where those English pupils able to choose once again reiterated the importance of choice in its own right, from a social point of view ('you're more likely to go to a lesson with five or six of your friends') and linked the positive social context with a more positive attitude towards the learning situation:

I don't think you can look forward to a lesson without knowing you've got someone you like there.

This appeared to be particularly important for the boys, who agreed with Maria's analysis that 'it's all one big friendship group and it does seem like 'cos one of them's done it eight of them have done it'. Pupils from both English schools also agreed that German was generally of more appeal to boys (cf. Williams *et al.* (2002)) a view shared by several Dutch pupils in the interviews, though more were adamant that gender was not significant in

determining choice. Interestingly and perhaps significantly, those pupils who had chosen German (in England and the Netherlands) exhibited more positive attitudes to learning and perceived more positive peer attitudes.

Wider social attitudes

Pupils were asked to respond to 'what most English/Dutch people think about learning German'. In England, the vast majority of responses pointed to the pupils' perception of learning German being of little use or interest in most people's eyes (cf. Saunders (1998); Watts (2003)). One pupil expresses her disdain for a perceived anti-language-learning culture:

They think the same that English people think about all languages – 'all the foreigners can learn our language' – disgraceful.

The pupils who commented on social attitudes in the written accounts all referred to similarly negative perceptions, confirmed once again in the interviews, mentioning that it was not regarded as useful or necessary, and was seen as being of less value in employment terms than the core National Curriculum subjects (cf. Lee *et al.* 1998). Some pupils were again appalled by this, a reaction which for some led to greater motivation to learn German:

Not many people in England can speak German, so this influences me to be someone who can.

Another pupil who describes her own attitude as negative, however, suggests that her awareness of such widespread attitudes in society only further demotivates her:

I feel that the fact that many English people can only speak English doesn't help when trying to encourage people to learn German.

A boy from Red Lane recognizes the same phenomenon, though his own attitude is unaffected:

People in England find it a waste of time cuz (sic) they think we were born to be English not German. I feel this lowers peoples (sic) believes (sic) in what they can do in German.

More Dutch responses indicated that learning German was viewed as useful ('it's your neighbour, so you have dealings with it'). As many as 16 were unsure, which may again signify that some pupils were reticent about (negative) generalizations. Fourteen responses related to negative attitudes in wider society. Some of these related to war, and were echoed in some of the accounts and interviews, where pupils felt that the older generation was still more negative about German for this reason. The data thus suggest that pupils in the Netherlands and England similarly perceive generally negative social attitudes towards learning German, and it is worth pointing out the broad alignment between pupil perceptions of media portrayals, peer attitudes and the views of wider society. Shared understandings here may conspire to construct negative attitudinal influences in both countries, overriding the more positive influences of parental attitudes and the way the pupils are taught.

Attitudes to learning French – general

The word association sample for French consisted of a total of 175 pupils (58 English, 59 Dutch and 58 German students). As was the case with the sample for German, some pupils contributed only one response, others several, and for this reason it is important to remember that the numbers below represent responses, not pupils – and that they serve only as a fallible indication of emphases within the data. Numbers and examples of responses to the 'learning French' prompt are shown in Table 6.5 below.

As shown, data from stage one suggested that many pupils in all three countries find French a difficult language to learn. In the interviews, pupils from all schools discussed the difficulties involved in writing, the constant battle with remembering vocabulary and the particular demands French made on their concentration, which was felt to be more than in other school subjects (cf. Clark and Trafford (1995)):

You've gotta like give your 100% concentration for the whole lesson, 'cos like, in another lesson, you switch off for a couple of minutes and it's all right, but in French . . . (Gary, Red Lane)

The result of these challenges for some of the Dutch and English pupils in particular was that French became boring, and John from Green Bank chooses an evocative comparison to explain this effect and to suggest that the experience may eventually improve:

Table 6.5 Responses to 'learning French'

Category	German responses	Dutch responses	English responses
Difficult	17 – complex language; not that easy at all; harder than English	14 – difficult language – especially the grammar	10 – too hard; tricky with verbs; confusing – too much to learn
Easy	4 – find it easier than English; easy	3 – I learn it quickly and it's not so hard	0
Pointless	2 – don't need it; not exactly useful	1 – not necessary	9 – pointless; waste of time; no need really when it is shown English is more popular
Useful	3 – helpful; it's important because French is spoken in many countries	3 – handy when you can communicate in France	6 – useful if you go to France; could be useful in later life
Not enjoyable	10 – don't like it; not much fun; boring (7)	20 – stupid because I don't like the French language; boring (10)	27 – don't enjoy it; crap; stupid; boring (20)
Enjoyable	27 – good – it's a lot of fun; I like learning this language because the pronunciation is beautiful!; it's a lot of fun speaking it	19 – really beautiful language; nice because it's a lovely language	12 – enjoy it a lot, lovely language; it's a nice language to learn; cool; it's good to know another language
Indifferent	4 – ok=	3 – ok=	5 – ok=

I suppose it's boring now, but if we did learn it fluently, it'd be good 'cos then we could do a lot more things to have fun . . . I mean, you have to do a boring bit of everything to get . . . like learning the rules of games isn't fun. When you get a board game, you have to learn the rules. It's boring, but when you get playing it's good.

Despite fairly similar perceptions of difficulty, more German pupils appear to enjoy French, as demonstrated by the above table. These findings are corroborated by the accounts, in which the majority of German pupils (25, cf. 12 Dutch and 9 English pupils) refer to enjoying French and echo many of the positive points shown in the table. Many of the German (21) and Dutch (12) pupils admit to finding French difficult to learn, however, suggesting once again that difficulty does not always equate with an unenjoyable learning experience. Some English pupils acknowledge this too:

I don't mind having to learn French in school as I do find it quite enjoyable. I feel it's quite a hard language to learn though.

For other pupils, however, the level of difficulty experienced is the key reason for their lack of enjoyment, as Manon reveals during an interview at Vermeer College:

I just think it's really hard and I can't speak it, understand it or write it so I don't like it.

For those who enjoy it, however, as suggested by the stage-one data, enjoyment for many is allied to a positive aesthetic evaluation of the language. This is confirmed in the accounts, where 8 German and 4 Dutch pupils reveal how their affective response underpins a positive attitude:

I enjoy learning French because I love the sound of the language (German girl).

French is one of my favourite subjects . . . I think it's one of the world's most beautiful languages. (Dutch girl)

The interviews provided further corroboration, though interestingly only for the Dutch and German pupils again. Yet for one girl at Donau Schule, her

positive evaluation was not enough to compensate for the level of difficulty experienced:

I think that the language is totally cool, but I don't enjoy learning it. The words are really hard and the grammar isn't so easy either.

The usefulness of French is underscored by 19 German, 17 Dutch and just 8 English pupils in their accounts, and throughout the interviews too. For some of the Dutch and German pupils, French still has importance as a 'world language', but most refer to usefulness in the context of travel and future careers. Several of the Dutch (and some German) pupils indicate that a perceived lack of English skills in France serves to heighten its usefulness:

It's an important language because French people don't speak English, and you might have to communicate with a French company later on.
(Dutch boy)

In their accounts, 15 English, 10 German and 6 Dutch pupils question its usefulness, though several refrain from a complete dismissal:

A basic knowledge is handy for holidays, but compared to English, it's not really that useful. (Dutch boy)

I don't enjoy French because for one thing it's too hard and for another I'm not sure it's of any use for me. The only thing would be on holiday.
(German boy)

I feel that French is not that useful because most jobs will not require French on a daily basis. Having a second language like French could be very useful though because many countries speak French. (English boy)

It is important to note that the doubts of the pupils who thus question its utility appear to focus chiefly on current usefulness (cf. McPake *et al.* again (1999)); that long-term advantages are conceded by some, and that such misgivings do not necessarily negate enjoyment. With the exception of the one English boy above, however, all of these pupils are German and Dutch. The majority of the English pupils who describe French as pointless appear to struggle to identify any purpose or pleasure at all, many expressing this view in no uncertain terms:

I'm learning French now and it's difficult and useless, I'm almost certain I won't need it for the rest of my life! So why should I learn it now? (English girl)

Overall, the English pupils thus appear to be the most negative, providing the largest number of negative and the smallest number of positive views. The Dutch pupils seem rather more positive though they are unable to match the overwhelmingly positive German attitudes. It is interesting to note that an aesthetic appreciation of French seems important in constructing generally positive attitude towards French for some pupils in all three countries, particularly among German and Dutch girls, while a negative aesthetic evaluation sometimes has the opposite effect for other pupils. Usefulness emerges again as an important theme, and though difficulty also pervades the pupils' comments, it often fails to detract from enjoyment. Initially, it was thought that the German responses might seem so much more positive because of the sample composition, i.e. no lower-stream pupils (*Hauptschüler*) are included because French is not offered at this level. Several authors (e.g. Clark and Trafford (1995)) have suggested that attitudes correlate positively with ability, and this seemed a plausible explanation for the apparent discrepancy here. On closer examination of the English and Dutch responses, however, there was no evidence to suggest that the responses of lower-stream/set pupils were more negatively patterned. A more detailed examination may thus help to identify a more credible explanation.

Attitudes towards the French teacher

Stage-one data showed the German pupils in particular as being rather critical of their teachers' skills but more positive about their personalities. This might indicate that an appreciation of the teacher as a person is not always enough to compensate for wanting teaching skills, and this is certainly suggested by Karin, a pupil interviewed at Rhein Schule:

Admittedly, she is nice, but she just can't maintain order.

In the pupils' accounts, 10 German learners exhibited positive attitudes towards their French teachers, several describing them as key influences on their attitudes (cf. Wright (1999)):

I think our French teacher is super, learning with her is great fun because she's laid-back. For example, she's often shown us slides of her trips to France and even made crepes with us. That's really cool, not having to swot all the time. (Girl at Rhein Schule)

During the interviews too, several German pupils described the teacher as the most important attitudinal influence at school, mentioning the ability to explain, create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere and relate to pupils as the most important qualities. In the Dutch and English accounts, 8 pupils from each country reflect similar views:

My attitude at school is greatly influenced by my teacher. Between lower and upper school I changed teachers, since I changed I have started to enjoy it much more. (Boy at Green Bank)

The teacher at school influences me because her lessons are good, so it's never a long and boring lesson. (Girl at Vermeer College)

The interviews offer further confirmation. Some of the Dutch pupils explained how their decision to choose French over German was in fact based on their teacher's approachable nature and ability to explain, and the English pupils agreed that the teacher can be a key influence, as Liz reveals:

Liz: The more friendly the teachers are, the more you can like it.

Interviewer: So the teacher can influence your attitude?

Liz: Yeah. If they're like really boring and go on for ages. But if they're friendly and help you more, you like it better.

For one Dutch boy, however, the positive influence of a 'nice teacher' appears rather limited:

I don't enjoy learning French even though the teacher is really nice.

Some German and Dutch pupils comment rather more critically in their accounts, echoing points from stage one. Yet for one of these pupils, her negative attitude towards the teacher does not affect her learning enjoyment:

I think it's a shame that our French teacher makes the lessons so boring, as you can never look forward to them. I often feel under-challenged in her classes. But for all that I enjoy learning French! (German girl)

Further criticisms emerged during the interviews. Several Dutch pupils voiced concerns over their teachers' ability to explain but the German pupils again offered a wider range of criticisms, mentioning dry delivery, the ineffective use of games in lessons, a lack of discipline, homework which often went uncorrected or received inadequate feedback, and a lack of informal assessment during lessons which made some feel that their progress remained unmonitored. The only criticisms from some of the English pupils were that a native French teacher hardly ever spoke French to them, and that 'the language teachers in general are quite different to all other teachers' because 'they, like, separate themselves', a point which will be examined later.

The very large number of positive responses (and the correspondingly smaller number of negative responses) from the English pupils this time (there are no negative comments at all in the English accounts) is particularly interesting and suggests that the predominantly negative English orientation towards French revealed above is unlikely to be the result of their perception of poor teaching or a personal dislike of the teacher, thus echoing De Pietro (1994) who questions the potential teachers have to influence pupils' attitudes to MFL. Leaving these differences aside, it would seem that there is broad agreement on how pupils like to be taught, with many comments echoing the sentiments expressed in the previous section.

Attitudes to other school-related factors

Using the target language

Though many pupils at all six schools claimed to enjoy using the target language, the German pupils appear the keenest to make more use of it. Greater reluctance was evident among some of the English pupils, for some because they felt it prevented them from following what was happening in the lessons (cf. Vasseur and Grandcolas (1997)) and, as with the responses to German, only English pupils admit that they find speaking the language 'embarrassing' and 'worrying', an issue which again preoccupied only English pupils during the interviews. Pupils talked about feeling

nervous and lacking confidence, as Liz's explanation reveals, reminiscent of Gardner's (1985) comments on the challenging performance element involved in language learning:

It's sort of worrying 'cos you can make a fool of yourself, you know, with your accent and stuff 'cos you have put on a French accent.

Separate English responses to 'speaking French' underlined this sense of embarrassment (absent in the Dutch and German responses) and the lack of enjoyment again (as noted also in the ATLAS project (2002)). The level of difficulty experienced does not appear to detract from a positive attitude for the German and Dutch pupils, whose stage-one responses suggest that speaking and listening are no easier for them than for the English pupils. When questioned during the interviews, several Dutch and German pupils felt that oral practice was in fact the best thing about learning French, as Kees' and Karin's comments demonstrate:

Just talking together, and in front of the class, because you learn from the others then, if they're speaking as well, so you do learn. (Kees)

The fact that we speak a lot, we don't write a huge amount, so we talk a lot, read a lot, and so on. (Karin)

The findings give rise to two questions that would be worthy of further exploration: first, the extent to which it would be legitimate to argue that the reticent attitude towards speaking shown by some of the English pupils can be explained in cultural terms, and secondly, the extent to which such reluctance influences a more negative learning attitude.

French lessons

The responses here indicate that French lessons are enjoyed by fewer English pupils, which is somewhat surprising given their positive comments (above) on how they feel they are taught. This impression re-emerges in the accounts, where several suggest that the sessions fail to engage them:

I feel that if we are going to learn French then the lessons need more fun activities and subjects. (Green Bank girl)

The Dutch pupils find themselves once again in an attitudinal midway position, and their accounts reflect the divided picture which emerged at stage one, with some pupils rather critical of their lessons and others much more positive. Boredom appears to be a chief criticism:

The lessons are hardly interesting and don't motivate you, which results in negative reactions from the pupils. (Boy at Rembrandt College)

The French lessons always make me drowsy. (Girl at Vermeer College)

The more positive pupils also reflect familiar themes, as one girl comments:

The lessons are really very varied and original. For example, we watch French videos and sing French songs – this makes the lessons nice and not boring.

As already highlighted, the importance of variety in lessons was stressed by pupils in all countries during the interviews. The German pupils talked positively about lessons which were not always based on 'the book', and talked of enjoying songs and games, so that lessons were not just 'stress where you have to learn but give you a bit of a break as well' (Anna, Donau Schule). When asked if they would change anything about their lessons, many of the Dutch and English pupils were quick to mention the need for more varied activities, something that might partially account for their apparently more negative attitudes.

Assessment

Pupils across all schools expressed similar experiences of difficulty with regard to their French assessments, yet the English pupils demonstrated the most negative attitudes, the Germans the most positive. The English pupils are the only ones to suggest that they are overtested and to mention a general dislike of tests and the emotional impact ('scary', 'worries people'). This may again reflect what some have described as an overemphasis on assessment within the National Curriculum.

During the interviews, some of the Dutch pupils referred to the size of their assessments, which several felt to be rather daunting, and talked about the pressures of revising long wordlists and multiple grammar points for the same test. Some of the German criticisms also focused on wordlists which

Table 6.6 Responses to 'French lessons'

Category	German responses	Dutch responses	English responses
Unenjoyable	16 – don't learn enough so it's no fun; the head-teacher doesn't provide enough resources; could be more interesting and varied	18 – never any aim; too much reading and writing; takes a long time before we do anything; not enough grammar; we don't do anything	40 – disrupted by idiots; when we have substitute teachers they don't know what they're doing; useless; could go on more important subjects
Enjoyable	19 – well organized; lot of fun; good and effective	13 – we can work independently; nice atmosphere; productive	13 – cool; get involved+; challenging+; fun; not enough!!
Useful	8 – advantageous for later; useful; need it in other countries	0	0
Indifferent	11 – ok=; all right	11 – ok=	5 – alright= (sic)
Mixed	2 – interesting but not always	7 – sometimes nice, sometimes very dull	7 – sometimes fun, sometimes boring

had to be committed to memory, often seemingly for the sake of it, in the view of some pupils like Rina from Rhein Schule:

Well, I think the vocab, you know, when you learn it, you learn it off by heart, but you just forget it again because we just learn lists, there's sort of no context, like the test on the EU, and I just forget it straight after, I learn it all specially for a test, and then I forget it.

Some German pupils also felt that French was assessed more than other subjects, and that this contributed to their impression of French as a more demanding school subject, especially when the challenge of assessed work seemed so much greater than classroom-based work:

[W]hen we do exercises in school, I think it's great that I've grasped it, then we have the assessments, and I just sit there and can't understand a thing. (Tinka)

This fit is clearly important, and pupils with more positive attitudes from all six schools point to the importance of the match between learning and assessment, variety of format, balance and amount of content, and clarity of purpose.

Visits and exchanges

Though caution must again be exercised with regard to interpreting the figures here, the English pupils distinguish themselves by displaying the largest number of negative responses to visiting France (and indeed to the country itself in some cases), though many learners in all three countries identify the linguistic, cultural and social benefits that trips and exchanges offer. The German pupils are conspicuous in this respect, contributing the largest number of positive comments and reiterating these ideas in their accounts. One girl at Rhein Schule discusses how her difficult experiences on a trip yielded positive attitudinal benefits:

A few years ago we went on a visit to Paris. At the time, I couldn't understand a word. That was an incentive for me to learn French.

The Dutch pupils similarly express much enthusiasm. In their accounts and

interviews, learners discussed their enjoyment of a 'work week' in Paris, where they were given a range of tasks and assignments to use their French in practical situations to great linguistic and motivational benefit, though this and other visits served only to demotivate other Dutch pupils who only managed to improve their English. One boy explains:

I've been to France a few times – I think nearly everyone could see I was a tourist and they spoke to me in English – that's why I think it's not important to learn.

The higher number of negative responses from the English pupils has to do with a range of factors, though a lack of experience may not be key among them since a large number of pupils from each national sample had already visited France. For some, finance appears to be an issue, perhaps reflecting the greater expense that crossing the Channel still involves, and more mention fears of experiencing language difficulties, or their dislike of the country. In the interviews, some pupils also mentioned the fact that previous visits had convinced them that English was so widely spoken (especially at Euro-Disney, where some had been on several occasions) that French was unnecessary, and this had cemented common understandings of French being of little use. An exchange trip had, however, transformed the view of Jason from Green Bank School, who talked with great enthusiasm about how the experience had made him 'more confident to go out into the world and use languages':

Yeah, you can see an area where you'll be able to use it, you know, it's not just a classroom subject which you have to learn.

This was in fact the firm view of several pupils interviewed at both English schools, who explained that 'if you've been to France, you'll like it more than people who are never going to go or have never been' (as noted by Fisher and Evans (2000)) and again that 'it gives you a purpose to learning it, it's not just a subject', underlining the positive attitudinal potential visits have for some pupils.

Attitudes to the wider curriculum

Once again, more of the German and Dutch pupils appeared satisfied with the amount of curricular time devoted to French, whereas the majority

of responses from the English pupils indicated that French takes up too much time. This is particularly ironic, given that the German and Dutch pupils have in actual fact more lessons each week (generally three or four, compared with two or three in the English schools). It may be that the lack of enjoyment and usefulness associated with learning French (as evident throughout many of the other English responses) leads many pupils to see time spent on the language as equally unnecessary and therefore too much; it might also be that the place of French as a foundation subject within the National Curriculum, and the accompanying demotion in status that this accords languages sends a hidden curricular message to pupils that learning French is less important. It is certainly worth noting that only English pupils make unfavourable comparisons with other curriculum areas, in particular with the 'core' (and perhaps therefore higher-status) subjects:

Too much – I would rather do maths or English or science. (Green Bank pupil)

A lot compared to other lessons. (Red Brick pupil)

Pupils across all six schools in the three countries appear rather divided on the actual nature of the French curriculum. The English pupils refer more frequently to their difficulties, while a significant minority in each country find the curriculum somewhat dull. During the interviews, several German pupils reiterated that less time should be devoted to grammar practice and more to life and civilization topics. When asked for their views on the topics that were covered, pupils generally agreed that they were interesting and relevant:

There are actually some interesting topics which are interesting for young people, for example about what you want to be, or friendship and so on, I think you can basically get more involved than with topics that don't mean anything to you. (Tinka, Donau Schule)

Much was also made of the teacher's ability to mediate the curriculum, as it was felt that even interesting topics could be made to seem dull, depending on how the material 'is put across', according to the pupils. This would certainly tie in with earlier criticisms made by the German pupils about their teachers. It is particularly interesting to note that curricular choice emerges as an important theme in the written accounts, with 11 of the German pupils commenting positively on the fact that they were able to exercise choice in

whether or not to opt for French in the first place. For many, this was an instrumental choice in that it opened up wider educational routes later on, offered a chance to discard subjects seen as less interesting or useful, or even to stay in the same class with like-minded peers:

I chose French because I would have had to do e.g. art otherwise. I also chose it because one of my best friends didn't want to do French on his own.

Regardless of the motivation behind the choice, having a choice again seems valued by the pupils. It is even possible that the educational choice afforded by the German curriculum might be one of the key factors in explaining such generally positive attitudes. This issue was therefore followed up in the interviews, where these impressions were corroborated. Several pupils agreed that their friends' interests had indeed been a key factor in guiding their choice, as Theresa explains:

Well, first I thought the language was interesting, and my other friends, they were all going to do it as well, so I didn't really want to be left on my own, so . . .

When asked how they might have felt if French had been compulsory, their responses were revealing, and suggest that having the ability to choose may well have a positive influence on attitudes to the language:

Magda: I don't think we'd have enjoyed it as much then.

Theresa: I agree.

Margret: I mean having to do it, that's totally different from being able to choose it, but when you know that you've chosen to do it yourself, and you're not that good, or you go through a bad patch, then you know you've chosen it yourself, but if you've *had to* do it, then you're more inclined just to blame the teachers and so I think it's good that we can choose it.

In the Netherlands, the pupils offered the fewest criticisms and the largest number of positive remarks, with several pupils suggesting that a positive affective attitude conditioned their general attitude to the course. During the interviews, they agreed it was inevitable that some topics would be of more appeal to certain individuals but that, in general, the topics covered were interesting for them, enabling them to survive when in France, thus

satisfying their utilitarian needs, but also deal with issues which concerned them, their lives and France itself.

Like the German pupils, several of the Dutch pupils used the accounts to comment positively and indeed similarly on having had the choice to take French or not. Again, their choice was often based on a spread of factors which were discussed during the interviews, ranging from their family's views, their impression of the teacher, friends' views, their grades, their verdict on how useful French was and their affective response to the language. And importantly, pupils at both Dutch schools expressed the view that having the freedom to choose the language affected their attitudes:

If you have a subject, like if you *have to* do French, for example, and you're no good at it, you don't get it, then you won't feel much like doing it, but if you've chosen it, you'll enjoy it more. (Hans, Rembrandt College)

As for the English pupils, criticisms often focused on the perceived lack of relevance and use (cf. Grenfell (2000); Ward (2004b)). This is a prominent theme in the English pupils' accounts, in which several comment on the GCSE course being 'pointless and boring':

Another reason why French lessons bore me is that we don't learn about anything that really interests me, and if we did I think I would be less sceptical about learning it. (Red Brick boy)

When interviewed, pupils from both English schools spent much time making similar criticisms, and had trouble identifying any positive curricular features. Its irrelevance was mentioned repeatedly, and pupils joked about the likelihood of conversations with French speakers on such topics as the contents of their pencil cases. Given that a large proportion of the language learned at GCSE is based on situational *use*, however, the pupils were asked why this was not felt to be *useful*. From the discussions, it emerged that this was part of the problem as they saw things – learning to use language for very specific situations limited their view of its wider usefulness. And visits to France had confirmed this impression among some pupils, whose comments suggested that a narrow focus on language in specific situations had not helped them develop an idea of the transferability of language between situations. Pupils were quick to point out that this was a result of the curriculum, and not their teachers – John and Hayley illustrate this important distinction in the following interview extract:

John: I think we're taught really well; it's just the things we're being taught are not very good. I mean, we are being taught – we're remembering it – but it's just being pumped into us – the wrong things we don't need.

Hayley: I think it's pointless to learn stuff like that. We don't need it.

The lack of curricular relevance was heightened by a common perception of the broader isolation of languages within the school curriculum, as already identified in the case of German, and this was offered by some pupils as a reason to explain 'why the teachers get separated sometimes' as 'they've got nothing in common with the other teachers'.

A wider cultural view of the language was also referred to as an important omission from the curriculum, as also found by Fisher (2001). Some felt this could be achieved by a greater school commitment to trips abroad, and by developing the cultural dimension to the curriculum. Edward felt this was a lesson he had learnt from his experience on a school exchange to France:

[T]he French don't just learn – well, the school which I visited – don't just learn the language itself, they learn a bit of the history about it and why people do things, um, you know, in your country. They know more about the places and what customs are in the places and that obviously helps to explain why people say things differently to other people. So that helps with the learning, like, the culture, which gets you into the language.

And many agreed that this would be a welcome addition:

It would be good to know what they do in real life, like, not just pretend voices on a cassette tape.

However, lack of choice appears to be the most important issue for the English pupils in their accounts, with as many as 21 of them framing their concerns within a discussion of curricular imposition. Some pupils attribute their negative attitude directly to this imposition:

The thing that probably most influences me is that I was forced to do French and because I am quite a strong-willed person and don't like being forced into things, I refuse to let myself learn French. (Red Brick boy)

Time and time again, the English pupils express the view that they should

have been able to decide whether to choose French or not, resenting the imposition. The following pupil's comments are reminiscent of those made by 16 others in their accounts:

I think the students should be able to have their say on whether they want to learn French or not. I don't think it should be compulsory. At the end of year 9 you should have a choice. (Red Brick boy)

Such concerns are often linked to shared doubts about the specific utility of French (cf. O'Reilly-Cavani and Birks (1997)) rather than to a negative attitude towards language learning in general. As many as 12 of the above pupils echo this idea, often suggesting that learning another language such as Spanish would be preferred because it is perceived to have greater relevance to their lives:

To me, I think learning a language is useful but learning French is pointless. Personally, I'd rather learn Spanish – I'm not planning to go to France and it just doesn't interest me. (Green Bank girl)

I want to learn Spanish because my hope is to work as a holiday rep and I think Spanish would be more appropriate (sic). (Green Bank boy)

The importance of this issue was likewise reflected throughout the interviews at both schools, the same points permeating the discussions. Pupils suggested once again that not having a choice adversely affected the motivation of some pupils:

John: I think a lot of people feel, well, they've got to do it, so they might as well get on with it.

Tracey: Yeah, and they don't really try.

Sue: Yeah, 'cos like we didn't really have any choice in whether we wanted to do it or not, so we've got to do it.

One boy suggested that 'taster courses' in three languages at the start of secondary school would be welcomed, and would provide a reasonable basis for pupils to make an informed choice on which language to study. The pupils repeatedly located the advantage of choosing in attitudinal benefit – 'you'd be more open to the language if you'd chosen it rather than just being given it':

Sue: I think you've got no excuse then not to like it, have you?

Tina: Yeah, 'cos you chose it.

Just as curricular choice may be an important factor in constructing the more positive attitudes of the German and Dutch pupils in the study, it would thus seem permissible to argue that a lack of choice in learning French may go some way towards explaining the relatively more negative English attitudes, and that the nature of the curriculum itself has important attitudinal implications.

Sociocultural attitudes and influences

Attitudes to France and the French

Stage-one data indicated that most pupils in all three countries have positive attitudes towards the country, though the German pupils again display the largest number of positive associations, the English pupils the fewest. Responses to 'the French' suggested that the pupils' attitudes towards the country are not simply transferred to the speakers of the language – only the German students appear to have similar attitudes towards the country and its speakers (cf. Dobler (1997)). In their accounts, none comments negatively, while as many as 12 display positive attitudes towards the TLCS, often discussing their desire to visit or positive previous experience. One pupil explains the effect of first-hand experiences on her attitude:

After the French exchange, the language became much more interesting for me. I was really impressed by the country, the scenery and the climate are great. My host family was incredibly nice and generous, it was just great. I celebrated my birthday there and they were so kind to me.

The German pupils interviewed were similarly positive, though were quick to point out the need to refrain from generalizing. Some also felt that the individual's attitude to the TLCS could influence attitudes to language learning 'because if you don't like them, you don't want to learn the language'.

The Dutch and English responses indicated that attitudes to French speakers are much more negative than towards the country, outweighing the number of positive responses offered. Though it is again gratifying that several pupils in each country stress that it is wrong to generalize, many

more pupils appear to have little trouble. Both the positive and negative generalizations were based on personal characteristics. The negative comments appeared particularly varied and severe, which is perhaps all the more alarming given that they outnumbered the positive associations in the case of the Dutch and English pupils. This pattern is reflected in the accounts, where only one Dutch girl demonstrates a positive attitude towards the French, while 8 write rather critically. One boy explains, for example, how his negative attitude towards French at school 'was only made worse by my experiences with French people'. The interviews confirmed these impressions, though some pupils were again more wary of generalizing. One girl suggested that her attitude towards the French undermined more positive influences at school:

[B]asically at school, learning [French], they're always positive about it and you do want to learn it, but then you go to France yourself, and they're always so negative towards you . . . they make no effort to try and understand you.

In the English pupils' accounts, several pupils elaborate on their negative attitudes, occasionally admitting open prejudice ('I am prejudiced as I don't like French people, on the whole they just annoy me'), though this does not translate into negative learning attitudes for two of these pupils, who still enjoy their lessons. For a pupil interviewed at Green Bank, however, a negative attitude to the French does little to motivate his learning:

I think the people have a lot to do with it as well, like, the people from the country that you're learning the language, 'cos, I don't know about anybody else, but I always find the French quite hostile towards the British and it kind of discourages you from learning the language.

The media

Pupil responses to media views of the French suggested that learners in all three countries perceive negative treatment, with large numbers of pupils describing stereotypical and negative portrayals. Though there are pupils in each country who profess to be unaware of how the French are portrayed, it is interesting to note the large number of Dutch pupils in this group. This may be the result of scant media attention, as implied by one pupil; it might

also suggest that some pupils feel uncomfortable about acknowledging the occasionally critical media treatment of the French in the Netherlands (Dekker *et al.* 1998). Whatever the case may be, the large numbers of negative associations – most pronounced among the English pupils – seem unlikely to be conducive to constructing positive attitudes towards the TLCS, though the pupils' direct responses to the TLCS seemed more positive than their perceptions of the media portrayals. The perceptions of Frenchmen as 'gay', evident in several responses offered by German and English boys, resonates with perceptions of French as a feminized language (Court 2001).

In the written accounts, 13 German pupils discuss how French media appear to have crossed over into their interest domain, and comment on their enjoyment of French pop music and television. One boy alludes to the utility effect:

Knowing French can be really useful – on television and in music there are more and more French songs.

Many of the Dutch pupils (14) also refer to the media in their accounts. Five pupils comment on positive influences, their remarks resonating with some of the German pupils':

You're most influenced by friends and the media – there are quite a lot of nice French songs these days and if you want to understand them you have to know the language. (Dutch boy)

Despite the availability of French media in the Netherlands, several pupils talk of actively avoiding exposure because of a personal dislike, as was also the case with regard to German for some of the Dutch pupils. Though this would appear to be part of a more general anti-French attitude for some of the pupils, for others it might suggest nothing more than 'there's never anything good on that French channel' (Dutch boy).

The 10 English pupils who refer to the media in their accounts all suggest that no influence whatsoever is exerted over their attitude. As one boy explains, 'the media/television and music doesn't influence me at all because in England we don't get much French music', yet it may be precisely this commonly perceived lack of media exposure/influence that affects their attitudes and undermines the utility of French in some pupils' eyes (cf. Leighton (1991)). One English girl illustrates that this may well be the case for her:

I don't need French to understand music or anything so I don't need it at all!!!

And yet for Gary, one of the pupils interviewed at Red Lane, even the rarest exposure to French on television seems to have a positive motivational effect:

. . . like sometimes on the news, when there's been something going on in France, and they show someone speaking French, and like every now and again you say 'I know what that word means' . . . it does sort of give you a little sense of achievement.

The close social environment

Pupil perceptions of their parents' attitudes follow a similar pattern to many other stage-one items – the German pupils appear to have chiefly positive perceptions, and this may be a key factor in explaining the positive attitudes displayed to the other items – Gardner (1985) indicates that positive parental encouragement is a major attitudinal determinant in language learning. In their accounts, 15 German pupils describe their parents' attitudes as influential and refer to positive perceptions in line with the stage-one data. A girl from Donau Schule recounts the positive impact of family attitudes:

A relative is always raving about French and has often been to France. His stories about his visits made me curious about the language and the country right from the start.

A boy at the same school discusses a more direct influence, highlighting the utility dimension once again:

My parents influenced me with the argument that it would be useful later on.

Pupils reiterated the same themes during the interviews, where none felt anything other than positive parental encouragement stemming from shared understandings of French as a useful and aesthetically pleasing language. The Dutch pupils were also aware of positive parental attitudes. In their accounts, several talked about encouragement and help with homework (cf. Young (1994b)), others indicated the effect of a positive role model:

My mother is a big influence on me, she's studying French at the moment.

Interview data corroborate these findings, though they also present evidence of Dutch parents in a negative passive role, following Gardner's (1985) typology, whereby negative parental attitudes towards the TLCS are passed on to their children and translate into negative attitudes towards learning the language. In the case of Susanne, however, whose parents 'can't stand the country', her own positive attitude remains very much intact, reminding us that some, if not many, pupils may be resistant to parental influence, whether negative or positive.

The English pupils offer the fewest positive responses and the largest number of negative and indifferent comments on this item, which could be seen as supporting Gardner's general stance on the power of parental influence, given the patterns so far revealed by the comparisons. Several of the negative responses indicate that some parents fail to recognize the value of learning French, questioning its usefulness compared with other languages or subjects. Such responses are again more pronounced among the English pupils. The accounts confirm this rather mixed English picture. Six pupils believe their parents' attitudes to be a positive influence, as some clearly illustrate, echoing some of the German pupils' remarks:

My family always want the best for me even in French. My mom never ever saw the point of it until it was to (sic) late but now she seems to want me to do the best in life and never give up. French is a good place to start because she always hated it but now she's always trying to help me which is great. (English girl)

I am influenced a lot by my family to do well and stick at learning French because they say 'it will come good one day' and this influences me to try hard and do well just for my parents. (English boy)

Some pupils felt that their parents had no bearing on their attitudes, however, often because of their parents' inexperience with the language ('My parents and family don't influence me much as they both only speak English'), though it may be this lack of parental familiarity that fails to foster positive attitudes in some pupils. Another pupil, however, discusses how his attitude remains negative in spite of much parental encouragement:

My mum has always thought French should be taught as she herself has an A* GCSE in it which she got through night classes. I have been given lots of reasons why I should learn French but none seem important to me.

Other English pupils discuss openly negative parental views which are often associated with reservations about the usefulness of the language and its low curricular status. One girl explains:

Neither of my parents have ever used French after leaving school and in their opinion learning it is a waste of time when we could learn a subject which we will benefit from. I agree with them.

For other pupils, such parental reservations are again specifically restricted to French and not language learning in general ('My parents don't much care for French and like me think we should learn Spanish or German'). Some of the pupils interviewed also raised the issue of negative parental attitudes to the TLCS, and though none of them admitted this applied to their own parents, several felt strongly that an anti-French orientation would almost certainly be transmitted to children and affect their language attitudes.

Peer attitudes

Pupil perceptions of their friends' attitudes to learning French showed a much more fragmented picture. The responses differ markedly from their perceptions of their parents' attitudes, with pupils in each country perceiving a more negative picture. For all this, the German pupils reveal yet again the most positive perceptions. This is confirmed in their accounts and interviews, where some discussed the motivating effect of peers with positive attitudes, though others acknowledged that French was not universally popular, often because it was seen as being less useful than English or of little value altogether.

Their comments on peers are often linked to a discussion about choice, which as mentioned previously, may be a significant factor in constructing the generally more positive German attitudes – learning French has not been imposed upon them, and though choice for some may have been a limited one, it has allowed some personal freedom in the considerations involved in subject selection, thereby perhaps avoiding the potential resentment and concomitant negative attitude that imposition may create in some

pupils, and that may even translate into a prevalent negative group culture (cf. the English pupils below). One German girl refers to how peer considerations influenced her choice:

One reason I took French was my friends – if some or none of them had chosen it, I probably wouldn't have either.

The same theme can be identified in several of the Dutch accounts. One girl provides a clear example, and illustrates how for her avoiding disruptive peers was a key factor in her decision making:

My classmates chose German, so that's why I chose French – a nice class without any disruptions.

There are in fact frequent references in the German and Dutch accounts to agreements with friends to study French, and such social considerations may thus be very important, partly because they may help sustain motivation:

My friends also really like French and we often learn it together, so that keeps us motivated. (Dutch girl)

When questioned during the interviews, however, many of the Dutch pupils appeared keen to deny that social considerations were an important factor in their decision making, though their comments might have been driven by a fear of appearing to lack a strong sense of individualism (particularly in front of their peers in a group interview situation), arguably an important issue among adolescents and indeed in Dutch society. For all this, others did acknowledge the positive effects of learning French with their friends and how 'I want to do my best to enjoy it more when everybody else in the class likes it' (Henny, Vermeer College).

Despite the positive comments above, some Dutch pupils refer to negative peer attitudes in their accounts, reflecting feelings that emerged in the stage-one data. Interestingly, all 5 of these pupils exhibit generally negative attitudes towards the language. One girl graphically hints at a potentially influential negative climate in her class:

My friends and classmates all think it's pretty crap to learn, so I don't really get any positive ideas from them.

Such feelings also emerged from the interviews, though pupils felt that negative peer attitudes were more attributable to the boredom endured in the lessons than to a general view of the language being of little use:

I think they want to learn it, but they just think the lessons are boring, most of them. I mean, I've never heard anybody say 'Yes! French!' (Janet, Rembrandt College)

As for the English pupils, only one pupil in the stage-one data suggested that her friends/classmates perceived anything positive in learning French (cf. similar results from the Scottish pupils in O'Reilly-Cavani and Birks' study (1997)). This negative impression is corroborated by the interviews and by the 10 English pupils who refer to peer attitudes in their accounts, none mentioning positive perceptions. Once again, the perceived lack of utility is a dominant element in the pupils' shared reading of French:

My friends also dislike learning French and believe, with me, that it's pointless.

Another comments on negative peer attitudes and links these with the choice dimension:

A lot of my classmates and friends say there is no point in doing French unless you want to go and live there, which I think is true, that's why I think we should have more choice incase (sic) we wanted to go somewhere else like Spain!

The pupils' impressions of their peers' views in all six schools are clearly more negative than the individual attitudes evidenced by pupil responses to the other prompts. This points, in the case of the English pupils perhaps most clearly, to a perceived anti-French-language-learning culture. This has also been noted in previous research (see Bartram (2004)), and may be important in the social construction of the relatively more negative attitudes displayed by the English pupils in this study, and to a certain extent among the Dutch pupils.

Attitudes to learning English – general

Stage-one data from schools in Germany and Holland showed a remarkably similar and positive picture, as illustrated in Table 6.7 below with responses to ‘learning English’.

The data show that the vast majority of pupils from both countries find learning English enjoyable, useful and relatively easy. Even some of the pupils who indicated they found it difficult or unenjoyable expressed the idea that it was worth persisting with their efforts. Two pupils make this very clear:

I don’t really like English at school, because of the grammar, as I find it hard. But because English is a world language, it’s practically a ‘must’ to be able to speak it. So it’s very useful to learn it. (German girl’s account)

You know you need it, so even if you can’t stand the homework or something, you know you have to do it, just for yourself, not for school or anything. (Dutch girl – interview)

The awareness of the status of English as a world language is explicitly referred to by many pupils in both countries. During one interview, a Dutch boy explains how recognition of this status and its effects may be key in constructing the positive attitudes shown towards English, and the generally less positive attitudes he perceives towards French:

English has just ended up having a position, I mean, if French had been a ‘big language’ straight from the start, always on TV and stuff, then maybe it would have been different, maybe we would have thought that English was really hard and French was a lot nicer, I don’t know.

In their accounts, not a single German pupil failed, in fact, to mention the usefulness of English (cf. Chambers (1999)). For the Dutch pupils too, this was the most mentioned feature. Usefulness was often related to common readings of its world-language status, its importance for travel, its widespread use in technology and the media, and, not least of all, its role as international lingua franca. One German boy sums up how indispensable English is for him:

Table 6.7 Responses to 'learning English'

Category	German responses (59 pupils)	Dutch responses (57 pupils)
Difficult	9 – learning English is quite a challenge, but I'm glad I can learn it	3 – find it hard
Easy	8 – actually quite simple to learn; simpler than German	9 – fun and easy; not very hard and most of it you know already
Useful	19 – learning English is important for the future; world language; you always learn something new and you need it for your whole life! Important, as it's spoken all over the world	10 – important (world's first language); nice – because it's a world language it's nice to learn; you know a lot of it already but it is useful
Enjoy	30 – it's cool; fun being able to use it	38 – enjoyable; super good; I enjoy it
Not enjoy	7 – shit . . . but you have to do it because it's a world language	4 – crap; a bit too easy; not enjoyable

English influences us in almost everything (PC, TV) and it would be really bad if you couldn't speak this language – it would be a major gap in your education.

A Dutch boy explains how English as a lingua franca is already a practical reality for him:

I've got a few friends in Spain, Poland and England that I speak English to so it really is very useful to know it.

Another Dutch pupil discusses how his awareness of the importance of English for his future career serves to enhance his current motivation to learn:

I feel I ought to be able to speak good English, that's why I always revise seriously and thoroughly when I have an English test, and because my English isn't that good, I always put a lot of time in. English will be very important for me later, so I do have to learn it very well.

It is interesting to note the perception of some Dutch pupils that learning English at school is almost simply a question of adding to skills they feel they have developed already through outside influences ('most of it you know already', etc.), suggesting the powerful influence of media exposure, as discussed by McPake *et al.* (1999) in relation to Dutch pupils. The pupils' responses to 'the English language' and 'my attitude to English' corroborate this very positive pattern. Though difficulty was more prominent among the German responses again, there were many more suggesting the opposite. This was confirmed in their accounts, where many more pupils talked of finding English easy (14, some of these because 'we're confronted with English words in daily life'), and even those who mentioned difficulties often referred to enjoyment. Fifteen Dutch pupils also referred to English as an easy language. One girl suggests that language distance is a factor in this ('some sentences are easy because they're like that in Dutch too – related to English'), while others refer to exposure as key:

Well, I wouldn't say that English is completely simple, but it's used a lot in the media and so on, and that's why I think most people think it's easy. You kind of grow up with it. (Dutch girl – interview)

As was the case with the German pupils, the Dutch pupils who refer to experiencing some difficulties with English also refer to its utility and enjoying the experience.

Common understandings of the usefulness and status of English are thus reiterated throughout the German and Dutch accounts, and indeed throughout the interviews, where pupils confirmed the dual-edged utility of the language: not only was it seen as useful in the reality of their present via media and youth culture but it was regarded as indispensable for their professional and 'recreational' future. When asked if this perception of usefulness heightened enjoyment of learning English, the German pupils appeared in little doubt:

Anja: Definitely.

Katja: It makes it more interesting.

Steffi: It gives you a reason to learn it, just for yourself . . .

Interviewer: And if it was less useful, would you enjoy learning it less?

Achim: Yes, a bit, yes.

Several pupils highlight additional affective reactions as reasons for liking (and also in a few cases disliking) the language. A boy at Donau Schule offers an insight into his positive affective associations:

I enjoy English because it sounds really professional when you can speak fluent English.

But as the following interview extract shows, aesthetic appreciation, at least for the Dutch pupils concerned, appears subordinate to the utilitarian dimension in influencing their attitude:

Interviewer: So most of you don't think it [English] is a particularly beautiful language?

Several: No.

Interviewer: Does that mean you don't enjoy learning it?

Saskia: I wouldn't say that, it's got nothing to do with how beautiful you think it is, I mean English just sounds a bit like Dutch and German.

Mike: It's about needing it.

Attitudes appear thus remarkably similar and positive in both national

settings, with the currency English offers emerging quite strongly as an important theme.

Educational attitudes/influences

Attitudes towards the English teacher

Many of the pupils in both countries expressed great appreciation of their teachers, valuing their personalities and also their professional skills, among which the ability to explain, motivate and maintain interest and order appear key once again. One German boy at Rhein Schule suggests that the teacher may be central in shaping his attitude:

Whether English is enjoyable or not I think depends mainly on the teacher teaching the subject.

Nonetheless, relatively few German and Dutch pupils referred to their teachers in their accounts, but most of those who did echoed many of the above sentiments. One Dutch girl hints at the influence she feels teachers can have over her attitude towards learning the language:

Because I'm not good at English, I don't like it. But we've just had a new teacher so I'm hoping that the lessons will improve, I might start liking it then.

However, one German girl with a very positive attitude to the language feels this is very much in spite of her teacher:

I don't like my English teacher, she sometimes doesn't know the words or sentences herself, and then she's trying to teach us a foreign language! That's not good.

A boy from Rhein Schule attributes his negative attitude directly to his teacher:

I don't really enjoy English much as we've got such a stupid teacher.

As for the way they are taught English, many pupils demonstrated much enthusiasm. The ability to incorporate variety and different media into

lessons, to explain clearly and sufficiently and to use the target language are highlighted again as important skills by pupils in both countries, which many of their teachers appear to possess:

We had one teacher who just used the book, we only did what was in the book, and that was that, but the one we have now is really good and talks a bit first, about the topic and so on, he gets you to take part more in the lessons. (German boy – interview)

Steffi: Herr Schmitt teaches English in a really interesting way, not boring at all.

Achim: Varied.

Steffi: Yeah, varied . . . he does fun things as well, not just 'work'.
(pupils at Donau Schule)

However, a large number of responses suggest that this is far from the case for all pupils and many criticisms are expressed throughout the data, some of which highlight perceived weaknesses in some of the aforementioned skills, as well as issues of perceived victimization, a preoccupation with fault-finding in assessing work and frequent changes of teacher. With this in mind, it is interesting to reflect on the very positive picture which emerged from the initial attitudinal findings above – it would appear that the rather negative attitudes some pupils display towards their teachers might not greatly influence their overall attitude to learning English (as Chambers (1999), also observed in his study of English learners in Germany.)

Attitudes to English lessons

Responses here revealed a rather divided set of impressions in both countries. In their accounts, some of the German pupils highlighted the lack of oral practice during lessons, though others identified aspects they enjoyed, such as reading and discussing literature for young people (several learners in both countries commented favourably on the use of readers in their lessons). Others highlighted the influential nature of lessons:

The fact that I enjoy English is partly because of the lessons, in fact mainly – the lessons are varied and interesting.

During the interviews, pupils reaffirmed and illustrated some of the previous criticisms, however. Some German pupils talked critically of lessons which consisted of little more than correcting homework, others complaining of a lack of stimulation:

I think the lessons are really boring, I don't know . . . you just can't get involved much . . . It's just all really dry, you read a sentence out and have to answer a question on it, it's quite boring.

For one Dutch boy, too, (typical of the majority of pupils from all four schools in his desire to use the target language as much as possible) a positive attitude is maintained very much in spite of the lessons, in his view:

The way it is taught is really boring and uninteresting. We don't get the chance to speak enough and the workbook is confusing. And yet it could be so great.

Several of the Dutch pupils referred to lessons in their accounts, mentioning how a positive attitude hinges on the nature of the lessons and the quality of explanations in them:

It depends mostly on how the lessons are taught and how the teachers explain – I think that's the most important thing, that you get good explanations.

This issue came strongly to the fore during the interviews with the Dutch pupils, where learners from both schools were keen to stress that their experience of the lessons was probably the chief educational influence on their attitude, though some with misgivings still managed to maintain positive learning attitudes.

Visits/exchanges

The stage-one responses left little doubt that the vast majority of German and Dutch pupils are extremely keen to visit English-speaking countries – as many as 71 German and 61 Dutch responses indicated a positive attitude towards visiting the US or UK. Many gave particular reasons for their attitude, referring to social/cultural advantages ('you learn how to get on with

people who speak a different language'; 'nice to get to know other countries'; 'gives you a lot, new experiences') and to the linguistic benefits. The learning benefits were also stressed by some pupils in their accounts, while others expressed a particular preference for America or Britain:

England definitely but not America.

I'd much prefer to go to America just because of the culture because the Americans have a very different way of life from us.

The Dutch responses echoed similar themes and some pupils referred to previous experiences that may perhaps have influenced their attitude:

Last summer we spent two weeks touring round Scotland – the best holiday I've ever had.

There were some negative responses from German pupils (7 in total). A few were somewhat deterred by the prospect of 'communication problems' while others were apparently influenced by political considerations ('George Bush and Tony Blair'). Looking at the responses overall, however, it would seem fair to say that the Dutch and German learners' attitudes to visiting the target-language countries are similar and overwhelmingly positive.

Attitudes to the wider curriculum

In terms of the amount of curricular time available for English, the majority of responses from Dutch pupils (45) indicated that this was sufficient. Many of the German responses (32) indicated that the balance was right, and while some felt there were too many English lessons (6), there were many more responses (21) from pupils who felt that an insufficient amount of time was available, perhaps an indication of just how positive the attitudes of many German pupils are towards learning English, given that some of them already have up to five lessons a week.

Attitudes towards the content of the English curriculum were broadly similar in both countries. Several pupils appear to find the content unstimulating, unchallenging or even perhaps too focused on grammar and writing, but many more appear satisfied. In the written accounts, the 5 German pupils who mentioned the curriculum all had criticisms that

underscored the points above. One German girl commented on curricular relevance:

English at school in Germany should be more relevant to life.

Some of the Dutch pupils voiced similar concerns, bemoaning topics on 'crime and alien creatures' because such themes were of limited utilitarian value:

[I]f I go to England and get the chance to speak to English people, I don't think that my English book will be of any use. (Saskia, Vermeer College)

Some of the pupils felt that the educational intentions behind such topics were to 'teach us as many words as possible', but felt that this resulted in learning words 'that you'll never need', suggestive once again of the utilitarian nature of many pupils' attitudes. When pressed on what constituted more appealing alternatives for them, pupils from both Dutch schools suggested more 'modern and useful' themes 'which appeal more to young people', and issues of current affairs. Having more curricular choice, also with regard to the selection of reading materials, was further identified by pupils in both countries as desirable:

Interviewer: So you'd like to choose nicer topics, what is a *nice* topic?

Max: Your own choice, for example being able to choose the topics yourself.

Ton: That'd be great fun.

Leo: Yes, and if you like it, it's easier to talk about it. (Pupils at Rembrandt College)

Some German pupils mentioned their enjoyment of specific cultural topics relating to English-speaking countries, and it is interesting to reflect that several English pupils criticized the absence of such topics from their MFL curricula. During the interviews, pupil opinion was further solicited on the compulsory nature of English within their curricula, since data from the first two stages had suggested that this may have important attitudinal implications, particularly with regard to French and German. In the case of English, however, such 'imposition' seemed to trouble the pupils little, their comments underlining its unquestioned place in the school curriculum and its utilitarian value once again:

It has to be, it's the recognised world language, you have to be able to speak it. (German boy)

I think that everybody would choose it even if it wasn't compulsory because they know that they'll need it later. (Dutch girl)

Sociocultural attitudes

Attitudes to English-speaking countries continue the positive theme in both countries. Though there are some negative responses from the Germans, several which appear politically motivated, attitudes in the main appear positive and seem to be influenced by a mixture of social stereotypes, previous experience and the appeal of America, mentioned by a number of pupils and underlining the exposure to American youth cultural influences in both countries (cf. Young (1994b); McPake *et al.* (1999)). Pupils comment positively on the TLCS in their reports, and one German boy explains how meeting an American had even transformed his negative attitude towards learning the language. In addition to his comments below, he drew two thumbs-down symbols followed by an arrow and a thumbs-up symbol as a graphic representation for this positive attitudinal shift:

My mother's friend married an American and lives with him in the USA. Sometimes they come over to us and when they're here it's quite good fun because they sometimes bring a friend and he only talks English which makes it really interesting.

Such comments are borne out by the pupils' responses to English speakers in the word association task. Though several pupils in both countries may have less positive attitudes to certain groups of native English speakers, it seems that there is at least one group (i.e. Americans *or* British at least) to whom they are positively inclined. One German girl illustrates this quite plainly:

I don't like the English because they can't behave in hotels. They eat like pigs and lie drunk by the pool all day. However, America does appeal and I'd like to travel there.

With this in mind, it would seem fair to say that attitudes to the TLCS are

thus predominantly positive, and in line with Dekker *et al.*'s findings (1998) in the Netherlands and Dobler's (1997) in Germany. This may explain why so many pupils expressed a desire to visit English-speaking countries and, following Gardner's arguments on the significance of attitudes towards the TLCS, it may also partially explain why the German and Dutch pupils have so far demonstrated such generally positive attitudes towards learning English. In the interviews, pupils in both countries explained that cultural attitudes were a likely influence on their language attitudes. One German boy with a positive attitude to both explained how a negative attitude towards the TLCS may inhibit a positive orientation towards learning the language:

I think when it's sort of in your head that England is a stupid country and that the English are stupid, then you think . . . you think why should I even dare to destroy the picture I have in my head . . . or really get to know them?

On the other hand, positive cultural attitudes may support positive learning attitudes, as a pupil at Rembrandt College comments:

I do think that if you like the people, then you're more interested in the language, maybe for holidays, you want to speak the language a bit . . .

The wider range of native English-speaking groups also widens the pool of speakers with whom learners might identify in a way that is not available to learners of French or German, where the French and Germans are the largest and most associated speakers of these languages; where attitudes to these groups are negative, no alternative speaker groups are immediately obvious (judging by the pupils' comments, as few refer to the Swiss, Austrians, Belgians, Canadians, etc.). This increased possibility of positive identification for learners of English may be one factor in explaining why attitudes to learning English generally appear more positive.

Sociocultural influences: the media

Though some pupils clearly perceive the TLCS to be portrayed stereotypically or negatively, some of their comments convey a sense of dismissal, suggesting that some learners' attitudes are resistant to the influence of such portrayals. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the majority of

pupils in both countries feel that the British and Americans fare well in their media.

In the pupils' accounts, the media and their influence emerge as perhaps the most important issue for the vast majority of pupils (cf. Hoffmann (2000)). Twenty-five of the Dutch pupils and every German pupil comment in fact on the important effect the media have on their attitude towards learning English. It would appear that the connection between English and modern youth culture in the forms of pop music, the internet and television/film is key in this regard, and dovetails with positive learning attitudes and behaviour. A German girl explains, for example:

When I listen to songs, they're usually in English, and I think it's really great when I can translate some of the lyrics and understand what they're singing about.

A Dutch girl provides a slightly more detailed account of media influence:

I think that TV, music and other media have influenced me a great deal to learn English. Even when I was seven I used to watch BBC1 and 2 and translated songs into Dutch. This gave me a very large vocabulary for my age, and soon enough I was only watching BBC1.

The remarks of another girl are not unusual when she explains that 'music has influenced me the most because there's such a lot in English'. For some pupils, exposure to English via the media is even perceived to be more influential or indeed effective than school, engaging their interests and providing immediate and regular opportunities for use in their daily life, thereby enhancing its perception as useful (cf. McPake *et al.* again (1999)):

These days you can learn English from songs as well, in fact learning English this way is often much easier. (German girl)

The teachers, lessons etc. haven't influenced me to want to learn English. The reason I'm good at English is the Internet. I'm always on English sites and I take part in games on a server with more than 2,000 English people, so I speak English with them then, and I want to know it better to be able to communicate with them better. (Dutch boy)

Songs and television influence me because I watch some English

programmes on TV or listen to songs and I want to be able to understand them so English is important for me. (German boy)

The lessons don't influence me, I just learn it in everyday life, games, TV, music. (Dutch boy)

For another Dutch boy, media exposure from an early age seems to have led to a fascination with learning the language:

Even when I was small I watched English cartoons and played English games. Through this I learned difficult and unusual words. Even when I say or write something (in Dutch) I translate it into English (in my head). If I don't know a word or come across one that I don't know, then I look it up.

During the interviews, pupils elaborated on how positive identification with English-speaking media idols further added to this influence (cf. Young (1994b); McPake *et al.* (1999)). Time and time again in fact, the pupils refer to the importance of the media in the construction of their attitudes towards English, and it is certainly worth noting the perception of some pupils that the media appear to be the motor of their positive orientations. The broad alignment in response patterns between pupil perceptions of media portrayals and influence, and their own attitudes to the TLCS is also worth highlighting, and though it would be questionable to argue that there is a direct causal relationship between English media exposure and pupil attitudes, it seems permissible to suggest that there is certainly an association here.

Close social environment

As regards the pupils' perceptions of their parents' attitudes towards them learning English, the picture is unequivocal in both countries – not a single response indicates that their parents or families feel learning English is anything less than indispensable. No pupils suggest that they are unsure what their parents think, and none indicates that some might be indifferent. Forty-four German pupils offer very positive impressions of their parents' views – the following comment is typical:

My parents naturally think it's very good – they say it's a part of a general education. Besides, it's the world language.

Forty-eight of the responses from the Dutch pupils echo similar sentiments, while another 14 comments underline the perceived usefulness of English:

USEFUL!!!! English is just handy. (Girl at Rembrandt College)

It's a world language so . . . very important (Boy at Vermeer College).

The 27 other responses from the German pupils also highlighted the fact that parents are convinced of the usefulness of English:

They think it's good, you have to know English because it's a world language and you need it in many professions. (Boy at Rhein Schule)

They think it's very good because languages are the gateway to the world. (Girl at Rhein Schule)

Without English you can't do anything. (Boy at Donau Schule).

The pattern of stage-one findings is confirmed in the interviews and the written accounts. Two pupils hint at the positive effects on them of observing the consequences of their parents' lack of knowledge:

I see it with my father – he can't speak a word of English. I think that's a real shame and he regrets it as well. (Girl at Rhein Schule)

My parents can hardly speak any English because they didn't have it at school, and now they have real problems, e.g. with computers. (Boy at Donau Schule)

A boy at Rhein Schule discusses how his parents had told him that 'when you have English, you should make sure that you pay attention and learn good English, you're bound to need it your career'. This experience would seem fairly common to the pupils, and it may be that the learning behaviour of family and parents in this respect creates a powerful influence:

My cousin goes to evening class once a week for English. My father has also had to improve his English because he needs it for his job. (girl at Donau Schule)

I'm also influenced by my family because they speak good English and have to use it a lot in their jobs. (girl at Vermeer College)

Peer attitudes

As for their perceptions of peer attitudes, a different picture emerges, though still a largely positive one. Overall, stage-one data suggested that pupils feel their friends and classmates have positive attitudes towards learning English. The negative responses to this item came from pupils in the lower (VMBO and Hauptschule) streams, lending some support to Clark and Trafford's (1995) argument that negative attitudes are associated with lower ability. The German pupils who commented on positive peer attitudes in their accounts were again from the higher streams, while those with more negative impressions were from the lower stream. One pupil offers an interesting insight, suggesting that his negative attitude may be more associated with a general anti-school attitude and with a peer culture that asserts such attitudes:

You don't always feel like English and all this learning; you don't want to be seen as a swot either.

However, several pupils in these streams also made many positive comments, and responses to other items have not shown a negative slant among the lower groupings. This may indicate that there is perhaps more consciousness of a negative learning culture among lower-ability groups, though such a conclusion can only be tentative.

When discussed further during the interviews, the more negative attitudes of certain peers were explained in a variety of ways. German pupils from across the ability range felt that certain pupils (mainly boys) adopted a 'cool' identity, in which demonstrating an anti-learning attitude was central, though pupils in both countries were otherwise emphatic that gender was not a significant attitudinal influence as far as English was concerned. Others talked of positive attitudes diminishing with age (cf. Chambers (1999)), but the explanation most pupils agreed on (though not unanimously) centred

on aptitude and ability: those experiencing the most difficulties were likely to be more negative. While some disputed this, and in doing so confirmed the need to be wary of equating difficulty with a negative orientation, most felt this to be the likeliest reason, though all the pupils present at interview were admittedly speculating about peers rather than offering direct insights into their own attitudes. The Dutch pupils were particularly keen to stress the negative impact of assessment in this respect:

You've got kids who get bad marks, and I don't think they like English. There are kids, they never get a pass grade, you revise for two, three hours, and they never pass. I don't think they go, 'Yes, we've got English!' (Mike from Vermeer College)

Pupils also agreed that predominantly negative peer attitudes would influence their classroom *behaviour*, but not necessarily their *attitude*, highlighting thus the validity of excluding the conative element from attitudinal models, as discussed earlier. Karsten from Donau Schule comments:

For instance, if nobody in the class liked English, I would never be the only one to come forward and say, yes, English is super, even if I thought so.

However, the pupils agreed that the majority of their peers felt very positively about English, partly because it was commonly understood as 'cool' given its linkages with media and youth cultural interests again, and partly because of its utilitarian value once more, as the following exchange illustrates:

Frans: I think that all pupils agree that English is an important subject.

Mike: That you need it.

Frans: Yes, that you need it, you need it later on.

Saskia: Yes, everybody uses English.

Wider social attitudes

When asked to respond to their perceptions of German/Dutch society's attitudes to learning English, a markedly positive reading emerges in both countries. The large number of positive responses confirms the dominant impressions gleaned so far of positive attitudes built on a belief in the currency and utility of English, impressions which were again confirmed by

the interviews. In the written accounts, the German and Dutch pupils who discuss societal attitudes to English only refer to positive perceptions. The comments of a boy at Donau Schule appear typical, and underline once more the link between English and youth culture:

Learning English in Germany is really very popular, I feel, as it's the language of young people.

A girl at the same school indicates that learning English has become an integral and unquestioned aspect of life in Germany:

I think it's just taken for granted in Germany that everybody learns English, because everybody has to, so I've never even really thought about whether I want to learn this language or not.

Her comments are powerfully echoed by another girl at the school, who seems almost to equate a lack of English knowledge with social disadvantage:

Learning English is just a totally normal part of life in our country. People who can't speak it are seen as outsiders.

These attitudes appear to be bolstered in the Netherlands by a high level of exposure to the language, and a shared perception of greater need given the minority status of Dutch, as suggested again by Hoffmann (2000) and supported by some of the pupils' comments here. As one boy points out:

Dutch people don't think negatively about English because they know themselves that they need it for work and other things.

Having thus presented a detailed overview of the pupils' attitudes to MFLL and the factors perceived to influence them, the next chapter will now attempt to draw out the important themes underpinning these comparisons by language and by country.

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Chapter 7

Modern Foreign Language Learning Attitudes in the Three Countries

Chapter 6 examined the attitudes of pupils in the three countries towards learning German, French and English. What can be concluded about attitudes to each language and what the findings reveal about language attitudes within each country? This chapter aims to explore the nature of language learning attitudes within each national context in order to identify similarities and differences, and, in the process, it attempts to account for these with reference to the cultural and policy frameworks in which they exist.

Attitudes to German

It would seem that there are many similarities in the overall attitudes of the Dutch and English pupils towards German. The experience of learning the language appears a rather mixed one for many of the learners in both countries. Many find it enjoyable, though others do not; many find it difficult to learn, though others have fewer problems, and the Dutch are quick to point out that the similarity between Dutch and German is key in this regard. For pupils who find learning German more challenging, however, difficulty is not always associated with a lack of enjoyment, and this needs to be borne in mind when examining the stage-one data in particular, where difficulty emerged as a prominent theme. Some pupils in both countries discuss how their affective evaluation of the language affects their attitude, but the notion of usefulness appears as the central construct in many attitudes, and it is here that attitudes diverge. Though some pupils identify extrinsic reasons for persisting with German, many English learners question its utility whereas the Dutch pupils appear more convinced of this, even when they admit to not enjoying their learning experience – a phenomenon barely noted among the English pupils that may well be related to the geographical proximity of Germany for the Dutch students.

The notion of choice emerges as a significant issue: several Dutch and English pupils in a position to choose German over other languages reveal positive attitudes and positive perceptions of peer attitudes, not least of all

because of social considerations, while several of those forced to continue with German (mainly in the English schools) are critical of this lack of choice, demonstrate negative attitudes and seem more likely to perceive an anti-German peer culture.

With regard to more specific educational factors, there is tentative evidence that more English pupils have positive attitudes towards their German teachers though more negative attitudes overall, which perhaps indicates the strength of other more negative influences. Whatever the case may be, pupils in both countries appreciate and dislike similar characteristics in their German teachers, among which the ability to establish rapport and explain effectively appear key. Attitudes to lessons appear broadly similar, with variety in lessons emerging as a valued feature in both countries. Learning resources receive criticisms from the English pupils particularly because of their age and condition, but both nationalities comment on the need for more relevant and varied resources. Assessment appears to be a particular issue for the English pupils, some of whom feel it undermines learning and positive attitudes. The same can be said of the curriculum, which is identified by English pupils as key in eroding the subject's perceived utility and their attitudes in the process.

Outside school, pupils in both countries identify parental support, though this perception appears somewhat clearer among the Dutch pupils, whose parents also have more MFL knowledge. Both nationalities also indicate the presence of an anti-learning culture in their German classes (which may be tied to wider attitudes towards school), and the English pupils are particularly explicit in this respect – and indeed with regard to the perception of prevalent negative attitudes towards learning German in wider society, which may in turn be exacerbated by negatively perceived media portrayals of Germany and the Germans in both countries. Though the Dutch pupils arguably benefit from direct access to German media in their daily environment, several Dutch pupils appear to reject these influences because of a negative attitude towards the language. The pupils' own attitudes towards the TLCS generally appear more positive than the media portrayals, though a number of pupils in both countries appear to have rather negative attitudes towards the Germans.

In terms of assessing the relative significance of educational and social influences on attitudes, it is interesting to note pupils' own interpretations here. In the Netherlands, all the pupils interviewed felt that factors *outside school* were more influential, and that the central attitudinal construct was once again their perception of how useful German was. Karin and Femke

from Rembrandt College explain how this far outweighs considerations of *inside-school* factors and they link utility with the notion of choice yet again:

Karin: I didn't choose German because I've got a nice German teacher, or because I thought the German lessons were more fun, because I liked French as well. I just like German, and I'll use it more than I'll use French.

Femke: Yeah, and for me, because we go to Germany more often and so on, we also go to Austria on holiday . . . it's quite useful.

The English pupils, however, all agreed that *inside-school* factors were more influential. For some, curricular imposition was highlighted again, as too was a curriculum that appears only further to erode perceptions of the subject's utility, despite their teachers' best efforts:

Lisa: I think the main influence is that we *have* to learn it, and then the way we're taught it, we don't get taught the things we're actually gonna use.

Despite this apparent disagreement between the Dutch and English pupils on the weight of educational and social influence, perceptions of utility occupy an important place in the attitudes of both nationalities. However, the nature of social experience in the Netherlands may be more conducive to perceiving greater German utility, given its closer geographical connection and the easier access to the country and its language which this affords. This may in turn bolster attitudes to the curricular experience of German, which itself appears to meet the pupils' utilitarian expectations. These may then be indulged via the choice afforded by the organization of the curriculum. The added perception of strong parental support may strengthen the pupils' attitudinal basis, making them slightly less 'vulnerable' to negative peer and societal attitudes and, indeed, to any negative attitudes towards teachers and school. The apparently weaker perceptions of utility among the English pupils, perhaps also constructed/maintained by geography, make increased compensatory demands on the curriculum which it appears not to meet in many pupils' eyes. This basis, perhaps further weakened by less robust perceptions of parental support, may leave pupils more open to the influence of wider social attitudes, to views of the TLCS, and – not least of all – to the perceived shortcomings of their learning experience, perhaps all the more so when this experience is an imposed one. It may thus be the case

that the pupils have identified the differently balanced relationship between education and society in the two countries and the implications this has for their attitudes: the Dutch pupils may be right in interpreting social factors as the key influences on their attitudes; for the English pupils, however, the social context raises the educational stakes much higher, perhaps magnifying curricular deficiencies and their attitudinal effects in the process.

Attitudes to French

The findings suggest that it is possible to talk of a consistent comparative hierarchy in pupil attitudes towards French: the German pupils appear to show the most positive attitudes towards learning the language, followed at some distance by the Dutch and then the English pupils, who consistently appear more negative. More German pupils describe French as enjoyable, despite the fact that they appear to have as many difficulties in learning the language. As noted with attitudes to German, however, difficulty is not always associated with a lack of enjoyment, and the German pupils demonstrate this relationship very clearly throughout the findings. Aesthetic considerations appear responsible for both negative and positive attitudes among pupils in all three countries, but perhaps particularly among the German pupils, who, along with the Dutch, rate French far more highly for its usefulness than do the English pupils, who appear the least convinced of this, and whose negative attitudes often seem predicated on a lack of perceived utility.

There are similarities in attitudes towards educational aspects of the pupils' French learning experience, with generally positive attitudes shown towards their teachers in particular. The English pupils exhibit conspicuously positive attitudes towards their teachers and the way they are taught, yet appear to have the most negative attitudes towards learning French overall, which may indicate that teacher influence is less powerful than other variables and impressions of utility. Curricular criticisms are common across the sample, though a particular lack of relevance appears further to undermine an appreciation of subject utility for the English pupils again. Educational choice is once more seen as an important issue, and the data suggest that access to choice may be significant in constructing the more positive German and Dutch attitudes, while lack of choice may have the opposite effect on English orientations. The way in which choice articulates with social considerations relating to peers is also important, and illustrates the subtle interface between educational and social factors, by revealing how

curricular imposition/choice differently impacts on peer-group dynamics and attitudes.

Though peer attitudes are perceived as most negative among the English pupils, perceptions of parental and family attitudes are more positive, though still less so than among the Dutch and German pupils. Media influences are generally seen as limited but there may be room to argue that greater exposure to French media has benefits for some of the German and Dutch pupils, while its absence in England brings no attitudinal gains. Media treatment of the French appears rather negative in pupils' eyes in all three countries, particularly so in the Netherlands and England, where negative perceptions of the French are also far more pronounced, and may thus be important in partly explaining the more negative Dutch and English attitudes towards the French, and – following Gardner's argument – towards learning the language.

The pupils' own assessment of the factors most affecting their attitudes serves to reinforce the above. Though the English pupils agreed that perceptions of utility were probably the single most important factor in the construction of their attitudes, inside-school factors were again considered to be more influential than outside factors – perhaps again because, as they see it, school has the most direct potential to shape their views on the usefulness of French, but fails via the curriculum, both in terms of content and the social implications of its organization. Unlike the English pupils, the Dutch and German students found it difficult to agree on whether educational or social factors were more influential. In the end, all pupils suggested that both sets of influences were equally important, and comments from Margret at Donau Schule show perhaps the significance of the positive *détente* between educational and social factors:

Well, I couldn't really decide, I think it's just important, when I'm learning it [French], that I have a good teacher, that I actually do learn something, but I also think that my friends . . . I mean, I've got my own opinion of course, but somehow it gives you a better feeling when your parents and friends somehow agree, I mean see things the same way as you.

Attitudes to English

It seems clear that attitudes towards learning English among the Dutch and German pupils are both very similar and very positive. Many pupils

talk of enjoying their learning experience, and find English easy to learn. Even pupils who experience some difficulties concede that these do not necessarily detract from enjoying the experience or identifying the benefits of learning. Their enjoyment is bolstered by an aesthetic appreciation (particularly among some of the German pupils), and by virtual unanimity on its usefulness, both in their lives at present and for future travel, communication and career purposes. These shared and dominant perceptions of usefulness pervade the pupils' responses and remarks, and appear to be underpinned in no small measure by a common understanding of the prominence of English in the various youth media, which many pupils describe as the key influence on their attitudes, overriding the importance of educational influences which are less prominent in the students' reflections. Where they are mentioned, attitudes are generally positive, though in both countries there are several serious and similar concerns with their teachers, the balance of lesson activities, the scope for oral practice and curricular content. When asked during the interviews to reflect on the relative significance of influences inside and outside school, the pupils powerfully confirm these impressions:

On holiday and so on, people speak English, and you're influenced by that, on campsites or wherever, you soon realize that you need it. I mean, you learn English at school in the lessons, OK, but for the rest . . . I think influences outside are more important. (Frans at Vermeer College)

Well, English at school is naff, because we . . . you know, but when you're on holiday somewhere and you meet foreign people that you can communicate with in English, that's really good. And English is everywhere, when you watch TV, it's all in English, everything's in English. It's everywhere around us. (Axel at Rhein Schule)

The findings thus suggest that the pupils' strong convictions regarding the usefulness of English, combined with and perhaps constructed by perceptions of almost exclusively positive parental, peer and societal attitudes, far outweigh any concerns some might have regarding aspects of their school-based learning experience of English and that, for the majority, positive educational experiences of learning the language join with other social factors to create a virtuous attitudinal cycle.

Modern foreign language learning attitudes – the English pupils

Reflecting on the above, it is now worth considering what the findings reveal overall about the nature of the English pupils' orientations. Much has clearly been made of negative English attitudes towards language learning in the literature, and as far as French and German are concerned, the findings here suggest little to counter this view. Though there are pupils with clearly very positive attitudes, many more pupils at both schools appear not to enjoy their learning experience and to find language learning difficult. Perhaps most significantly, a particular difficulty is identifying the relevance of learning either language, a theme which permeates all datasets. Though some learners do acknowledge there may be future benefits (conceived of in terms of business or travel), the utilitarian value of MFL is repeatedly questioned by pupils, underlining the predominantly instrumental nature of their attitudes. The lack of connection with French and German in their day-to-day lives, something noted by the majority of the pupils, is perhaps one reason that they look to the future for learning incentives. The fact that few find sufficient reasons appears to undermine their attitudes further, as their instrumental needs are left unsatisfied.

The findings do not, however, suggest that the English pupils have predominantly negative attitudes towards language learning *per se*. Throughout the data, there are expressions of interest in learning other languages, perhaps most frequently Spanish, often because this language has meaning and relevance in their lives already through family holidays, for instance, or because of more realistic expectations of visiting Spanish-speaking countries in the future. It is also worth noting that some pupils obliged by school to learn French express a preference for German and vice versa; though this may simply be an expression of disenchantment with their current experience, it highlights one of the key themes to have emerged from the study – the notion of choice.

Language learning for the vast majority of the English pupils in the sample has meant the compulsory learning of either French or German. The inability to express and accommodate their preferences is offered by the pupils as a key reason for their negative attitudes, and the study provides several examples of pupils who would have preferred to learn another language, usually because of a perception of its greater utility. For some pupils, this lack of choice seems to evolve into a sense of resentment, which may in turn help construct a peer culture that rejects language learning. In

the case of French, this may be exacerbated to some degree among boys in particular because of feminized associations incompatible with some boys' constructions of male identity (see Bartram (2006c)). Perceptions of this negative peer culture, revealed by the data, may thus create and/or sustain negative attitudes, or at least inhibit the display of positive attitudes among certain pupils.

Though some (Nikolov 1998; Dörnyei 2001, etc.) have argued that classroom practices hold the key to language attitudes, the findings here suggest that other contextual influences may be more significant. The English pupils appear on the whole satisfied with their French and German teachers, offering more praise and fewer criticisms than the Dutch and German pupils, though the sample size here makes definitive conclusions difficult. It would nonetheless be difficult to argue that the quality of teaching explains the English pupils' largely negative orientations. This also seems oddly at variance with their more negative attitudes towards the lessons and the activities included in them. Part of the reason for this may be found again in their lack of conviction regarding the usefulness of French and German – the lack of value attached to the endeavour in many cases may frustrate the development of positive attitudes. The other part of the reason may be related to the wider curricular context of their MFL education. First, the non-core nature of languages in the English school curriculum appears to support the pupils' understandings of French and German as subjects of lesser standing and importance. There are also indications that associated implications of the foundation categorization, such as the late entry of MFLs into the curriculum and less formalized assessment procedures, strengthen such perceptions. Further reinforcement is found where pupils perceive that teaching staff have accepted the lesser importance of MFLs and communicate this via their behaviour, in terms of sanctions for non-attendance, non-completion of homework, and by adopting an approach that emphasizes qualification achievement over linguistic mastery.

The content of the MFL curriculum appears to be particularly significant in explaining the pupils' negative attitudes. As the findings reveal, the English pupils offer a range of criticisms here. Many of these centre on their inability to relate to the purpose of learning, and there are numerous examples of pupils who question the relevance of the topics which make up their MFL syllabuses. Though these often focus on functional elements with obvious utilitarian implications, the narrowness and specificity of the learning situations involved serve only to strengthen further the pupils' perceptions of MFL offering limited benefits. The perceived isolation of

MFLs within the curriculum as a whole adds to this perception of languages as educationally peripheral and unimportant.

The findings additionally suggest that certain social factors may be equally responsible for the construction and/or maintenance of the English pupils' attitudes. The stage-one responses indicate that around half of the pupils perceive their parents as having very encouraging attitudes, the others divided between those whose parents appear somewhat indifferent to MFL in general, often seeing languages as less important than other subjects, and those who see French and German as not important at all. In spite of the many apparently positive parents, the overall picture here is much more negative than among the Dutch and German parents, suggesting that the larger number of less positive parents may be a factor contributing to the more negative English attitudes (see also Bartram (2006b)). The almost exclusively negative perceptions of peer attitudes may, however, be more influential, particularly in the case of French, as discussed.

The pupils' reading of wider social attitudes to learning French and German appears similarly negative, and the view that knowing English reduces the need to learn these languages is often expressed. Media representations of the French and Germans, almost unanimously perceived as negative, add weight to this wider social negativity (cf. Watts (2003), who also refers to a climate of negativity surrounding MFLs in Britain). The pupils' own views of the TLCS are more mixed, though it would be fair to say that views of the French are particularly negative. How and the extent to which these perceptions of media representations, wider social views and individual attitudes to the TLCS influence one another would be difficult to determine and perhaps impossible to untangle. That they do influence teenage attitudes seems a safe conclusion, however, and the negative flavours involved would appear to do little to support more positive orientations or compensate for the perceived curricular failings.

The pupils' views of the TLCS may be taken as some indication of their integrative attitudes, and further evidence can be found in their responses to the stage-one prompts concerning visits to France and Germany. Though the numbers involved here preclude any firm conclusions being drawn, it is worth noting the broad alignment between the more negative attitudes towards the French and a lesser enthusiasm for visits to France, as compared with more positive attitudes towards the Germans and a greater enthusiasm for visiting Germany. A comparison with responses from the Dutch and German pupils to the same items suggests that the English pupils are the least enthusiastic about visiting the target-language countries, and though

this may simply reflect the narrower set of integrative possibilities for the English pupils (compared with the correspondingly broader options for foreign learners of English, as discussed), it might also hint at the greater ethnocentricity of these English pupils, particularly in light of negative media influences on English society (as discussed by Tenberg (1999)). Whatever the case may be, it does reveal less integratively conditioned attitudes, following Gardner's (1985) theory. The combination of unfulfilled instrumental needs and lower integrative orientations may thus unite to explain the more negative overall patterning of the English pupils' MFL attitudes.

Modern foreign language learning attitudes – the German pupils

The findings suggest that the English pupils' attitudes contrast most starkly with the German pupils'. Though there are, of course, rather negative German learners, on the whole they demonstrate far more positive attitudes towards English, and only to a slightly lesser extent, French (cf. Chambers (1999)). The German learners appear to associate language learning with a higher degree of enjoyment, in spite of experiencing fairly similar levels of difficulty with regard to French. Their aesthetic evaluation of both languages, in particular French again, is also more noted throughout the data, and is often associated with positive learning attitudes. This suggests that the affective dimension of attitudes has a greater importance for the German pupils, and that their more positive affective response to language learning supports their greater intrinsic enjoyment.

Perhaps the most striking difference, however, relates to the pupils' perceptions of utility. Though these appear to be the central influence on the German pupils' attitudes, as was indeed the case with the English pupils, they perceive learning English and French to be of much greater value, and both languages are rated highly for their usefulness. In the case of English, even the few pupils who find learning the language unenjoyable concede that knowledge of English offers them a range of advantages. These are related to future benefits (mainly careers and holidays) but also to opportunities for use in their lives at present (cf. McPake *et al.* (1999)). Many pupils refer to the ways in which their knowledge of French, and English in particular, allows them to pursue their interests in technology, films and music on a daily basis. This clear identification of current and future benefits appears

to support the pupils' positive instrumental attitudes in a way that contrasts sharply with the English pupils' attitudes.

Though pupils in both countries appear thus to define the importance of language learning in principally instrumental terms, more immediate short-term and more convincing longer-term perceptions of utility appear to sustain positive language learning attitudes among the German learners. These attitudes would also appear to be supported by a host of social factors. The pupils' perceptions of their parents' views are almost exclusively positive – not a single pupil indicates that their parents regard learning English as anything other than positive; in the case of French, only two pupils appear to be aware of parental indifference.

The pupils' perceptions of peer attitudes, however, represent something of a departure from the general pattern so far shown, as learners suggest that many of their friends view language learning indifferently or in a more negative light. This is certainly truer of French than of English, and such views are still outnumbered by more positive perceptions, yet it is interesting that they perceive their friends' attitudes to be more negative than the data actually reveal. This same phenomenon was noted among the English pupils whose perceptions were admittedly far more negative, as described. It may be that the pupils have been somewhat misled by the classroom behaviour displayed by their teenage peers. There are certainly indications throughout the findings that some pupils are wary of being considered 'a swot'; that displaying positive learning attitudes may make 'fitting in' difficult, and that 'being cool' sometimes demands adopting non-conformist behaviours. Reading such behavioural cues may thus have led some pupils to erroneous conclusions about the true attitudes of their peers, and this highlights the potential pitfalls of using behavioural observation as a tool in attitude investigation.

The more positive pattern is resumed when other social factors are examined. The pupils' perceptions of wider social attitudes are generally positive (cf. Schröder (1996), who discusses the central place of languages in German society), especially with regard to English, and the media in particular are seen as providing a powerfully positive language-learning impetus, as mentioned above, acting as a bridge connecting French and English with youth cultural interests. Though English media influences dominate, the German pupils acknowledge the positive influence on their attitudes, and this is again in stark contrast to the English pupils, who talk of the complete absence of media influences, and are sometimes left to speculate that their attitudes would improve if languages featured more prominently in the

media. The way in which the German media portray French and English speakers is felt to be more mixed, however, and the pupils discuss an awareness of stereotypical and negative representations among far more flattering portrayals. These more commonly perceived representations may feed into the German pupils' own attitudes towards the TLCS, which, as mentioned, are overwhelmingly positive, and are matched by a keen desire to visit the target-language countries. This is suggestive of a much higher level of integrative motivation among the German pupils, whose positive attitudes appear to be built on a solid instrumental and integrative foundation.

The robustness of this attitudinal foundation appears to compensate for a number of more negative 'micro-attitudes' to their educational experience. Though they appear to like their language teachers, the German pupils are highly critical of the way they are taught, much more than the English pupils, and yet they exhibit more positive attitudes towards their lessons. The teachers are also blamed sometimes for negative attitudes towards the curriculum, of which there are a number of criticisms. But the strength of the pupils' convictions regarding the usefulness of MFL appears to override these concerns and acts in a sense as a kind of attitudinal filter, reducing the influence of more negative elements.

It is also worth remembering that though many German pupils criticize their teachers' delivery of the curriculum, the curriculum itself is described in more positive terms, partly because it is recognized as useful, and for some because it is interesting in cultural terms – many pupils express their enjoyment of readers, novels and life and civilization topics relating to English- and French-speaking countries. The English pupils are more critical precisely because the curriculum is perceived to lack relevance and cultural interest.

The English pupils were also critical of the lack of language choice available to them. For the German pupils, however, being obliged to learn English seems to have little effect on their attitudes, chiefly because its recognized utility accords it high curriculum status (cf. Hoffmann (2000)). French, on the other hand, is seen in somewhat different terms, and the organization of the German curriculum allows the pupils freedom of choice here. As discussed, this is not always a wide-ranging choice, but the pupils are allowed to decide whether to continue the language or not from fourteen onwards. In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that the German pupils' attitudes to French are more positive than the English pupils' – the German pupils have selected French, the English pupils, by and large, have not. It is conceivable, however, that the simple matter of having choice exerts a

positive influence on the pupils' attitudes, and this is certainly borne out by the data and by the pupils' own interpretations here, from both points of view – compulsory language learning may engender feelings of resentment if unaccompanied by a firm belief in language utility; optional learning of the same language may inhibit resentment and the development of more negative attitudes.

Modern foreign language learning attitudes – the Dutch pupils

The findings seem to place the Dutch in something of an attitudinal mid-way position between the English and the German pupils: like the German pupils, they distinguish themselves by revealing overwhelmingly positive attitudes to English, but like the English pupils, their attitudes to French and German are rather more negative. The findings show that the Dutch pupils enjoy learning English more than they enjoy French and German, and that English is more valued by the pupils for its usefulness. The connection between utility and positive attitudes is thus highlighted yet again. Although the Dutch pupils see French and German as less useful than English, they still appear to attach more importance to these languages than do the English pupils, however. This is especially the case for German, which some pupils still regard as an important subject even though they do not enjoy learning the language.

The pupils define the usefulness of language learning in similar ways to the German and English pupils. In the case of English, their comments mirror those of the Germans, as they point to its current usefulness in their daily lives via the access it grants to youth culture and media interests, and its future utility in professional and recreational terms. The Dutch pupils also stress its importance for them as a lingua franca, enabling them to communicate with people from other countries who, they recognize, are unlikely to speak their mother tongue. The other two languages are regarded as less useful, because they offer fewer benefits – they have less lingua-franca potential; are seen as less important in career terms, and though they do provide access to French and German media/youth culture, these are much less favoured than English-language equivalents. In the pupils' eyes, the utility of French appears most restricted, whereas German has greater significance for several reasons: German-speaking countries like Austria and Switzerland are easily accessible and common holiday destinations for the pupils and their

families, and Germany itself is seen as an important neighbour with whom contact is almost inevitable, in terms of business or simply as a gateway out of Holland to other travel destinations.

Like the German pupils, the Dutch learners appear to find English easier than French, a fact unsurprising in itself given English's cognate status. German is felt to be more difficult, however, despite its closer linguistic relationship with Dutch, though again less difficult than French, and the pupils' enjoyment of learning the three languages follows the same hierarchy as their perceptions of utility and ease, with English in first place, followed at some distance by German, and then French.

Aesthetic considerations would also appear to have some bearing on the Dutch pupils' attitudes, particularly with regard to French and German (for the German pupils too, affective responses to French were noted much more than those to English). The reason for this may lie once more in the utility of English – the importance pupils attach to it appears to lessen the need to form other kinds of judgement about the language. In the case of French and German, however, which all lower- and middle-stream pupils are allowed to choose between from fourteen, and which are seen as less useful, as described above, additional selection criteria become significant – affective reactions thus appear to provide these for the Dutch pupils. This was particularly evident in their written accounts, where affective responses to English were absent, but frequent with regard to French and German.

Language choice would similarly appear to be an important issue for the Dutch pupils. Like the German pupils, none questions the compulsory nature of English given its status and usefulness, but choice is allowed and valued by pupils in the middle and lower streams, whose comments and responses suggest the attitudinal significance of having choice, as was noted among the German pupils. The higher-stream pupils who are obliged to learn all three languages appear (in the main) to accept this situation and justify the importance of MFL by referring to their minority home-language context – though they may have reservations about the usefulness of French and German, the wider utility of these languages still surpasses that of Dutch. The language choice allowed to many of the Dutch pupils may then be one reason that their attitudes appear more positive than the English pupils' attitudes to French and German. The lower utility they ascribe to French, however, may partly explain why their attitudes to this language are more negative than the Germans pupils'.

With regard to educational influences, the data again suggest that the teacher might not be the most important attitudinal influence. Many pupils

are satisfied with their MFL teachers, but, as with the German pupils, there is a sizeable number of criticisms regarding teachers of all three languages (more than among the English pupils), though there are more pupils who seem to enjoy their English lessons than there are who enjoy German and French lessons (least enjoyed). Additional criticisms are levelled at the curriculum, more so again for French and German, and many of these centre once more on relevance, though their dissatisfaction appears less pronounced than the English pupils'.

It is also interesting to note that the data reveal a consistent hierarchical pattern, with more favourable evaluations of the pupils' English learning experience, followed by less favourable responses for German and then French. That these positions are in line with the Dutch pupils' own 'utility rankings' for the languages suggests two possible conclusions – that utility forms the basis of the pupils' macro-attitude towards MFL, and that this macro-attitude may accordingly influence micro-attitudes to the MFL experience. This influence may sometimes be offset by the competing influence of other variables, however, leading to micro-attitudes occasionally at variance with the broader macro-attitude (as with the English pupils' attitudes to their French and German teachers), yet the overall macro-attitudinal pattern appears to remain intact.

As for outside-school influences, the Dutch pupils' perceptions of attitudes to MFL around them show a more varied picture than was the case with the English and German pupils. The vast majority of Dutch parents are perceived as having positive attitudes to all three languages, and the pupils may be supported in this view by their awareness of their parents' own MFL knowledge, which is much greater than among the English and German parents. Their perceptions of positive parental attitudes to French and German would not appear to influence greatly the pupils' own attitudes to these languages, however. With regard to peer attitudes, the findings echo both the German and English data, though there are differences. Peer attitudes to English are felt to be generally positive, as was the case with the German pupils, for example. However, like the English pupils and unlike the Germans, they perceive far more of their friends to have negative attitudes towards French and German (though such perceptions are still more numerous among the English pupils). There are also indications that French has feminized associations, as previously discussed in relation to the German and English pupils. Perceptions of wider societal attitudes mirror this division between positive views of English on the one hand, contrasting with more negative views of German and French on the other, and

references to (a lack of) utility are frequent here. Peer and societal perceptions are also more in line with the Dutch pupils' own language attitudes, which may be suggestive of their greater influence.

The Dutch pupils' views of the TLCS reflect the same hierarchy noted before, with predominantly positive attitudes towards English speakers but less favourable views of the Germans and then the French. The Dutch discrepancy between more positive views of France on the one hand and far more negative views of the French on the other is interesting, however, and suggests again that although variables may combine to push attitudes in a particular direction, the macro-attitudinal standpoint is sometimes at variance with its constituent micro-attitudes.

An examination of the Dutch pupils' views of how the media represent the TLCS reveals the same hierarchy of largely positive portrayals of the English TLCS down to the particularly negative treatment of the French. This may again indicate that media influence on language attitudes operates via their capacity to mould views of the TLCS, though it should be noted that the Dutch pupils' own views of the TLCS (as was the case with the German and English pupils) were more positive. The findings here may in any event be taken as some indication of the Dutch pupils' stronger integrative attitudes to English, which may help to account for their more positive overall orientation towards the language, as was evident among the German pupils. The fact that the Dutch pupils exhibit almost equal enthusiasm for visiting all three countries appears something of a conundrum, however, in that the German and English responses to this item were more in line with their attitudes to the respective TLCS. This may simply suggest that the Dutch pupils are keener or more experienced travellers (more of the Dutch pupils in the sample had visited the target-language countries); it may even indicate a 'latent' integrative orientation hitherto undeveloped, perhaps because of insufficient opportunities to make contact with native speakers on their visits so far, something which several pupils mentioned.

At this point, then, a number of important questions need consideration – what can be concluded from these comparisons, and what potential lessons present themselves? The following chapter will thus conclude the book with an exploration of these issues.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Lessons

At this stage, it is worth considering what conclusions can be drawn from this comparative analysis of pupils' attitudes to MFL. This chapter begins with an examination of what has been learnt about pupil attitudes in each national setting, before moving on to a consideration of what has been revealed about the general nature of language attitudes and the relative significance of educational and sociocultural influences. Finally, a number of recommendations and lessons arising from the study will be discussed and evaluated.

Modern foreign language learning attitudes in the three countries

To begin with, it is useful to review the pupils' attitudes to the educational and sociocultural dimensions of MFL in each country. Similarities within and between the three countries will be highlighted in the process. Starting at the English schools, the pupils' attitudes appear to be marked by a lack of conviction regarding the usefulness of French and German, and this seems to be a key contributor to the negative attitudes shown by many of the pupils. These perceptions are strengthened at school by a curriculum which they see as lacking relevance, and by wider curricular messages that conspire to cast language learning in a peripheral role, as also argued by Phipps and Gonzalez (2004). The lack of choice pupils have with regard to which language they learn appears to be implicated in the development of negative peer cultures, sustained perhaps by the perceived negativity of the wider social climate in England. Mixed parental attitudes towards MFL (noted also by Ward (2003)), combined with negative societal attitudes, MFL media invisibility and widespread unfavourable impressions of the TLCS all appear to contribute to the unfulfilled instrumental and low integrative attitudes many of the English pupils reveal towards French and German. Even given this background, however, it is important to remember that there are English pupils in the study who still maintain very positive attitudes towards

French and German, and that many exhibit positive attitudes towards learning other languages.

The German pupils appear to be highly motivated language learners. There is evidence of much intrinsic enjoyment, while strong perceptions of the current and future usefulness of languages support the pupils' instrumental attitudes. Furthermore, positive evaluations of the TLCS attest to highly integrative attitudes that reinforce the positive picture. Generous MFL time allocations within the curriculum may further support pupils in their view of languages as important, views which are strengthened by wider German society (as argued by Schröder (1996)), reflected here in the pupils' positive perceptions of parental, peer and social attitudes. English appears at the centre of this positive attitudinal hub, and though French follows closely behind, there may be attitudinal 'negatives' that are hidden from the research by the nature of the German curriculum. Though the pupils appear to appreciate that the curriculum allows them to decide whether to choose French or not, the findings here hint at the more negative attitudes of pupils (particularly boys) who deselect French at fourteen, and were therefore excluded from the sample. This contextual difference is therefore very important in that it may have skewed the largely positive attitudinal picture that has emerged with regard to French among the German pupils. An exploration of attitudes among a wider German school population including both kinds of pupil would thus be a recommendation for future research.

The Dutch attitudinal picture would appear to have two different sides – one part shows extremely positive attitudes to English, the other reveals a more negative overall impression of attitudes to German and French, German often emerging slightly more favourably than French. With regard to English, Dutch attitudes resonate strongly with German attitudes – the pupils reveal highly instrumental and integrative macro-attitudes, underpinned by a firm belief in the language's utility. These beliefs are supported by the social environment in which the pupils live – an environment characterized by the use of English in the media, in youth culture, in careers, and by positive parental, peer and social attitudes. The strength of these positive influences appears to compensate for the more negative micro-attitudes some pupils display towards aspects of their school-based English experience.

The less positive picture that develops with regard to German and French would similarly appear to relate to the learners' environment, which asserts the utility of English high above that of the other two languages. As a result,

German and French form a smaller presence in their lives and offer fewer utilitarian advantages. This often frustrates the fulfilment of instrumental attitudes while more negative attitudes to the TLCS may be responsible for reducing their integrative orientations. Prevalent perceptions of negative peer and societal attitudes also appear to override the more positive influence of parental attitudes. This attitudinal background may be a reason why the pupils display more critical micro-attitudes to aspects of French and German at school, especially when these languages are generally felt to be more difficult and offer less advantage. For some, however, affective evaluations exacerbate (and occasionally compensate for) these perceived shortcomings.

Given that the Dutch pupils have access to more choice in language learning, and that they too appear to appreciate this and echo similar attitudinal benefits associated with this, it is interesting that their attitudes to French (and German) appear more negative than the German pupils'. One reason may be that choice, for those Dutch pupils allowed it, is often between French and German, rather than between French/German and a non-language subject, as was the case with the German middle-stream pupils (*Realschüler*). The result of this may be that more pupils with negative attitudes towards languages (apart from English) are present in the Dutch sample, whereas such pupils were more easily able to opt out of French in Germany, leading perhaps to a more negative skewing in the data, as already described above. Once again, this highlighted the same limitation.

Intriguingly, the data also hint that the Dutch pupils' predominantly positive attitudes to English may in some way contribute to their more negative attitudes towards French and German. Given the prominence of English in their lives, the pupils have almost appropriated the language as an aspect of their own culture – some pupils feel that it is legitimate to criticize the French and Germans for their poor English skills and express the view that knowing English reduces the need for other languages. In this sense, the Dutch pupils have aligned themselves with the English pupils (cf. Cenoz and Jessner (2000), who discuss ownership issues relating to the spread of English in Continental Europe), with perhaps similar attitudinal consequences for French and German, and this may partly account for this division in attitudes in Holland, as noted by Willems (2003).

Modern foreign language learning attitudes: educational and sociocultural influences

With regard to both the theoretical nature of language attitudes and the contextual factors that influence them, a number of conclusions emerge from the study. One conclusion is that language attitudes are, to use a term employed by Phipps and Gonzalez (2004), super-complex. Throughout the study, the pupils discuss the range of beliefs and the varied influences and experiences which are perceived to have affected their attitudes. We see how particular influences are paramount for some pupils, unimportant for others; how affective considerations are key for some, yet insignificant for other pupils. These findings remind us again of Cargile *et al.*'s (1994: 215) comments:

Attitudes about language are not a singular, static phenomenon. Rather, they affect, and are affected by, numerous elements in a virtually endless, recursive fashion.

This description acts as an important proviso to the findings and conclusions, in that it reminds us that attitudes are not fixed entities subject to regular patterns of influence – they are often contradictory and in flux. Attempts to draw out wider patterns are therefore made with due caution, and the study's foundation on interpretative principles would appear justified, in that this fluidity is respected and accepted as part of the nature of attitudes within the social world. The multi-directional stream of influence can be expressed in the following diagram which aims to convey some idea of the complex interplay between the key sets of contextual variables.

The model shows that micro-attitudes to the particular elements of language learning influence each other. They are themselves influenced by a host of factors which merge to form a larger composite macro-attitude to language learning which, in turn, may also influence the nature of the micro-attitudes as part of a dynamic, multi-directional complex.

With this fluid model in mind, it is worth considering other tentative conclusions. Looking at attitudes in general, the findings from these learners suggest that beliefs relating to language utility may be the most important factor directing their attitudes. Where these convictions are strong, learning attitudes seem to remain positive, even in the face of more negative competing influences such as the level of difficulty experienced, a negative affective attitude, negative micro-attitudes towards aspects of the learning

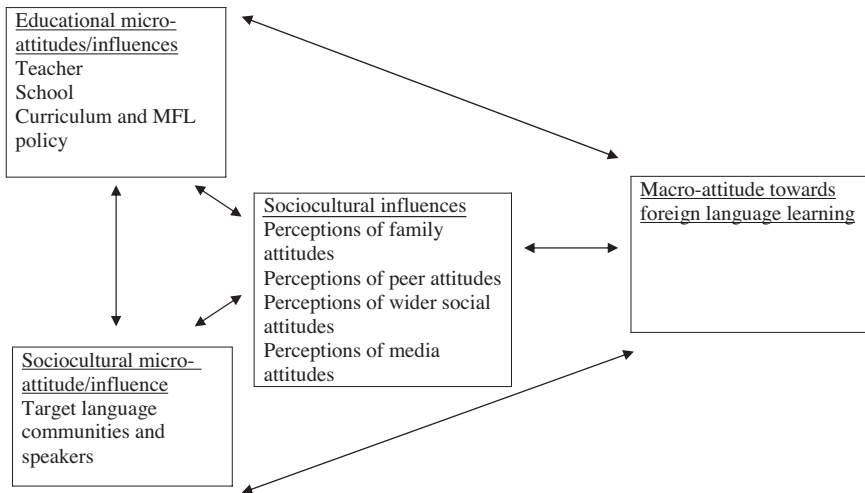


Diagram 8.1 Model of educational and sociocultural influences on the macro-language learning attitude

experience, or indeed negative social perceptions. Where beliefs in language usefulness are weaker, attitudes appear more open to influence from affective impressions and factors from the educational and sociocultural environment surrounding the pupils. Reflecting on the attitude models discussed previously, this therefore suggests that the cognitive dimension is perhaps more significant than the affective with regard to the formation of language attitudes, given the primacy of the pupils' beliefs over their emotional responses, as also argued by Cargile *et al.* (1994). The affective component appears sometimes to perform a useful ancillary function in guiding decision making with regard to language option selection, as was noted in the case of the German and Dutch pupils. With regard to the inclusion in the model of the conative element, the study provides some evidence to support the views of Gardner (1985) and Young (1994b), in suggesting that this behavioural dimension should perhaps be excluded. Evidence of the potentially difficult relationship between attitudes and behaviour is seen throughout the study in the disparity between the pupils' interpretations of peer attitudes and the actual attitudinal insights they reveal in the data. The following diagram could thus be used to illustrate the relative importance of the two key attitude dimensions emerging from the study.

Returning to the notion of utility which appears to be such a central

attitudinal construct in all three countries, it would seem that a ‘commodity view of modern languages’ (Phipps and Gonzalez 2004: 2) dominates. This may reflect the instrumental approach underpinning language teaching in the Netherlands, Germany and particularly in England, where MFLs are increasingly tied to functional discourses that see ‘the overriding purpose [of language learning] as the acquisition of a skill to enhance employability’ (*ibid.*: lxi). This approach may encourage pupils to reject learning that lacks an obvious utilitarian dimension (cf. the pupils from Vermeer College, who pour scorn on topics such as ‘aliens’ because they are seen as ‘unnecessary’).

In a sense, however, the findings here suggest that this ‘commodity view’ may well support positive attitudes towards English among the Dutch and German pupils, who link knowledge of the language with credible career aspirations and improved access to youth culture. Yet pupils in all three countries have more difficulties making this connection with regard to the other languages they learn, and it would be fair to say that attitudes to these languages are perhaps consequently more negative, though the degree admittedly varies between contexts. Given that MFLL offers so much more than ‘job skills’, and that some pupils appear to devalue language learning precisely because they question this utilitarian rationale, an approach which centralizes the humanistic advantages of MFLL in terms of personal development and intercultural understanding may be more effective in producing positive MFLL attitudes. This may be particularly true in England, and indeed in Australia and America, where geographical isolation and the ‘anti-everything-foreign culture’ (referred to in the literature and in the findings by some of the English pupils) might further erode the immediacy of foreign language utility. An increased cultural dimension to the curriculum (particularly in England, and also perhaps in the US and Australia) and

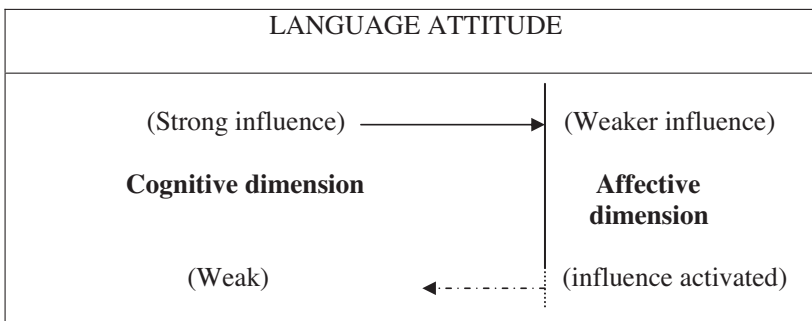


Diagram 8.2 Language attitude model

a reconceptualization of the role and position of MFL in education are therefore important though challenging issues for consideration and further study. Efforts in this domain may even contribute to a wider attitudinal shift that alters the instrumental/integrative balance in favour of the latter.

Lessons for modern foreign language education

This last point brings us clearly back to the curriculum, and it is worth restating that despite a number of criticisms, the German and Dutch pupils express a greater satisfaction with their MFL curricula (which appear to be based on a broader cultural view of language learning) than do the English pupils, who often remark on the lacking cultural dimension (cf. Fisher (2001)). In fact, the study suggests that the curriculum may be a more important educational influence on the pupils' attitudes than the teacher, marking a difference here with studies such as those of Chambers (1999) and Clark and Trafford (1995). That the teacher plays a central role in the pupils' language learning experience in all six schools cannot be denied, nor can the fact that the teacher remains a key influence on the MFL attitudes of some pupils, but the data suggest that this influence may be less powerful than others. In the case of the English pupils, for example, the micro-attitudes to their teachers are perhaps the most positive shown in the study (offering some potential lessons perhaps to language teachers in Germany and Holland!), and yet this would not appear to have influenced associated micro-attitudes (e.g. attitudes to lessons) or their more negative overall macro-attitude. The German and Dutch pupils display more negative micro-attitudes to their teachers and the way they are taught, yet reveal more positive overall macro-attitudes to MFL.

It is certainly true that micro-attitudes to the curriculum are more reflective of the pupils' overall MFL macro-attitudes, though this association must of course be treated with some care. It is interesting to remember some of the English pupils' comments in this respect, however, which reinforce this idea of curricular over teacher influence, ideas which resonate also with Fisher (2001) and Ward (2004b):

I think we're taught really well; it's just the things we're being taught are not very good. I mean, we *are* being taught – we're remembering it – but it's just being pumped into us – the wrong things we don't need. (John, Green Bank)

The organization of the curriculum appears important too, and it is worth noting that only English pupils comment on their perceptions of MFLs as isolated within the school curriculum, and this may feed into their perceptions of MFLs as peripheral and less important. This is an area that requires further research, and ways in which MFLs could be more effectively, meaningfully – and perhaps more prominently – integrated into the wider school curriculum are similarly worthy of consideration. In this respect, current developments in content and language-integrated learning (CLIL) are of particular interest, given the potential of CLIL to connect wider curriculum areas to MFLs (Coyle *et al.* 2007).

Choice in language learning emerges as another important curriculum-related conclusion/recommendation. Though this appears to be of little import with regard to English, for the reasons discussed, it seems to have important attitudinal implications with regard to other languages in all three countries – where choice is available, pupils appreciate the chance to choose the language of most appeal to them and make a decision which allows them to better accommodate the cognitive and affective dimensions of their attitude (i.e. their beliefs about the usefulness of the language and their aesthetic evaluation of it). Importantly, it also allows them to factor social considerations into their decision making. This combination may to some extent reduce the antagonism which might arise from enforced learning and potentially evolve into a shared anti-language-learning peer culture, which itself may further depress attitudes, as discussed. Where no choice is available, the above factors are accordingly restricted, with potentially more negative attitudinal consequences. Lack of choice in MFL may thus be a very important factor in explaining the more negative MFL attitudes of the English pupils and the more negative peer culture surrounding MFLs at the English schools, though it should be remembered that the English pupils expressed much enthusiasm for a wider number of languages and the ability to select. Extending the languages offer within the curriculum and better accommodating pupils' choices (in the English system in particular) are thus important recommendations, and may also provide food for thought for US and Australian MFL policy makers.

In relation to Nikolov's (1998) and Dörnyei's (1998) assertion that classroom practice is thus chiefly responsible for pupils' MFL motivation and attitudes, the current study can only offer support if the notion of classroom practice is defined more broadly to include the wider curricular context that underpins and bears on the teacher and the nature of the lessons. The above authors also argued that classroom practice was more influential than

pupils' instrumental or integrative orientation. Though this may be true for some learners, the findings here offer less support for this argument, in that the pupils' predominantly instrumental outlook appears to act as the filter through which classroom activity is often perceived. Classroom context often proves an important attitudinal and motivational influence, though there is evidence here that suggests positive classroom influence can be significantly undermined if unaccompanied by firm convictions of the usefulness of the MFL endeavour. Examples of the reverse situation, where negative classroom influences are offset by strong beliefs in language utility, are also evident in the study.

This last point raises the question of what can be concluded about the relative importance of educational and social factors. Any answer to this must again be prefaced by an acknowledgement that this will vary from pupil to pupil in light of differently balanced relationships with individual variables. A broader view might, however, suggest that sociocultural issues are more important. Given the centrality of beliefs in language utility, assumptions regarding this often appear constructed from the social worlds – the parental home, the social circle, and the wider cultural context – in which the pupils exist. There is evidence that the pupils tap into these already existing, ordered cultural understandings of the value of MFL to construct their own attitudinal standpoints. These understandings then merge and conflict in a variety of ways to either support or challenge the business of MFL education. The media appear as an additional but important agent in this construction process within these different social layers. The findings also suggest that the ways in which these social factors combine to form a collective influence are probably more important than any individual variable, and the strength of these social influences arguably lends further support to the social constructivist standpoint underpinning this enquiry. Among the German pupils, MFL attitudes in the study emerge as predominantly favourable against a background of positive parental attitudes, positive views of the TLCS, and generally positive peer and societal perceptions. This was true for attitudes to English among the Dutch pupils, but less true for their attitudes to German and French in each respect. The English pupils' impressions of how the social world perceived MFL were less favourable still (in spite of much greater satisfaction with their teachers) and the collective force exerted by such perceptions (cf. Watts' climate of negativity (2003)) may be key in explaining why English attitudes appear most negative overall, and indeed so similar to the Australian and American attitudes described in the literature.

Among these social factors, the role of peer influence emerges as an issue worthy of more detailed consideration in future comparative studies. Classroom climate is seen as an important influence in all three countries (as also noted by Osborn *et al.* (2003)), and an investigation focusing on the ways in which MFL peer cultures are socially constructed in different national contexts would almost certainly yield valuable insights, particularly with regard to the associations attached to individual languages and the ways in which these impact on learning and learners. Though others (e.g. Williams *et al.* (2002)) have previously observed the gendered conceptualizations of French and German among English pupils, similar findings in the three countries examined in the current study raise further questions about perceptions of these and other languages elsewhere.

Given the link between attitudes and motivation, a more explicit treatment of pupils' attitudes might also be an important addition to MFL education in all the countries considered. The study provides much evidence of the negative attitudes some pupils have towards aspects of MFL and the TLCS. By explicitly addressing these issues in class and bringing them out into the open as topics for discussion, teachers may gain important insights that could help them improve attitudes to languages. Frank and carefully managed discussions may help to dispel false assumptions about the TLCS by allowing pupils to rationalize stereotypes, and in the process develop their intercultural competence (Byram 1999). Teachers would, for example, be better able to tackle anti-French attitudes by helping pupils to deconstruct these ideas critically. Such an approach may additionally help to dismantle dominant negative classroom cultures and address some of the broader 'moral' aims of language education.

Discussion of attitudes to aspects of MFL may also help teachers to provide pupils with a better understanding of the reasons behind particular methodological issues (e.g. the need for repetition, target-language teaching), which may in turn improve attitudes; furthermore, it may help teachers to capitalize on approaches that appear to support positive pupil attitudes. In this respect, ensuring variety in teaching and learning, providing clear explanations and using assessment genuinely to support learning emerge as three key recommendations. The study provides examples from all three countries where deficiencies in these areas are associated with negative attitudes.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on what the comparative dimension of the study has specifically contributed to our understanding of MFL attitudes. In this regard, it is useful to draw on Osborn *et al.*'s discussion (2003) of

constants and contexts – factors which appear important irrespective of context, and those which would seem more dependent on particular circumstances. Relating this categorization to the current study, evidence of particular phenomena across the range of contexts arguably allows more weight to be attached to certain conclusions given the replication of findings across datasets from all three countries. Though this is clearly useful in strengthening the validity of certain findings, it does not of course suggest that these are universally generalizable. All the same, the cross-national commonality here suggests that these issues may be worthy of attention from MFL teachers and policy makers in other countries too. The following areas could thus be identified as the ‘constants’ emerging from the current study:

- the instrumental nature of pupils’ MFL attitudes;
- the role of perceptions of utility in attitude construction;
- the lesser influence of the affective dimension;
- the greater attitudinal influence of sociocultural over educational factors;
- the potential compatibility of difficulty and positive attitudes;
- an association between curricular choice and positive attitudes;
- an association between a culture-focused MFL curriculum and positive attitudes;
- the potentially greater importance of the curriculum than the teacher;
- common pupil likes/dislikes of MFL teaching and lesson activities;
- positive attitudes to English;
- more varied attitudes to German and French.

The range of contexts involved in the study has proved useful in that it has revealed the importance of culture in regulating the effects of the various attitudinal influences and has illustrated the ways in which social and educational factors can strengthen or weaken attitudes to different languages in different national settings. The comparative dimension here thus underlines the importance of examining educational issues in their cultural context, and the rich illustration of this relationship is arguably one of the study’s strengths, offering us ‘a body of descriptive and explanatory data which allows us to see various practices and procedures in a very wide context that helps us to throw light upon them’ (Phillips 2000: 298).

The wealth of detail generated by the study’s multi-layered approach, and the progressive focusing of meaning which this facilitated could be identified as further strengths, particularly where the study has offered new insights, for example with regard to the impact of choice on attitudes and

peer dynamics – aspects which have hitherto received little attention in the literature. Though the strength of the study's internal validity and the use of critical friends during data analysis have enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings, which are further supported by generally wide agreement with the literature, it is still important to be mindful of certain limitations. The relatively small samples involved preclude definitive conclusions being drawn from the study, and for this reason, larger-scale follow-up research could prove useful in providing some indication of the extent to which the patterns identified are representative of the larger national pictures.

Furthermore, research conducted by a team of 'nationality-neutral' researchers might lend further credibility to the findings. Though attempts were made to avoid bias, as discussed, it is still possible that the German and Dutch teenagers felt compelled to respond more positively to an English researcher investigating attitudes to English. It is also possible that as an English researcher, my interpretation of data supplied by the English pupils has been influenced by the negative climate that so many have argued surrounds MFL in England. One final limitation concerns the data themselves and the study's exclusive reliance on the pupils as a data source. Though the learners are arguably the most authoritative commentators on their attitudes, an additional examination of pupil orientations from the perspective of their language teachers may have yielded further insights by corroborating or qualifying certain findings.

With these limitations in mind, if the wider cultural context is held chiefly responsible for the construction of MFL attitudes, this may seem a rather bleak conclusion in countries like England, the USA and Australia, where attitudes emerge as more negative, given the obvious difficulties involved in effecting cultural change. It certainly appears to be the case that the special status of English around the world makes it a very different kind of foreign language, given that few other – if any – languages offer the same widespread motivational benefits, whether these be related to employment and employability, youth culture, media, travel or technology, etc. In this sense, it could be argued that little can be learned from comparing language attitudes in English-speaking countries with those elsewhere, since the comparisons are not 'like with like' and thus unfair. This argument must clearly be acknowledged, and the data here and evidence from the literature show very clearly that Anglophone countries face considerable societal odds which often militate against positive MFL attitudes. Understanding the nature of language attitudes, however, allows us to avoid falling into defeatism, however great the challenge, and highlights the need for schools and

teachers to communicate to learners a strengthened set of beliefs about the importance and wider benefits of language learning. Adopting some of the lessons discussed here may provide them with suitable armoury for battle!

At a national level, there is no reason that language promotion campaigns – such as that proposed by Australia’s Group of Eight – should not yield some improvements and successfully communicate the varied benefits of language learning. In addition, more robust governmental commitment to the position and length of language learning in the school curriculum – as demonstrated by the German and Dutch education systems – may add significant weight, credibility and power to these messages in pupils’, and indeed society’s, eyes. But advances can also be made at a more local level. As the English pupils indicated very clearly here, the classroom and the school are after all equally very important social environments able to support pupils in constructing positive MFL attitudes. Yet, as Enever (2009: 189) acknowledges, ‘at school level in Europe, little is mentioned with regard to the question of student motivation’ in MFL – surely then there is all the more reason for schools to deal more explicitly and constructively with pupil attitudes and orientations. This message is further underlined by Coleman, Galaczi and Astruc’s large-scale UK study which acknowledged widespread attitudinal problems among secondary school pupils, but concluded that ‘declining motivation is a slightly less worrying phenomenon where the school environment supports language learning’ (Coleman *et al.* 2007: 270). The following is thus a summary of educational recommendations/points of focus, based on the findings from all six schools, which may be useful in this construction process, particularly – though not exclusively – in the English-speaking context. Some of these ‘lessons’ may of course be beset by various constraints in different contexts, but they are certainly worthy of consideration.

- The importance of clarity in teacher explanations.
- The importance of an empathic teacher–pupil relationship.
- Maintaining a supportive but ordered classroom environment.
- Consulting pupils on their attitudes to using the target language in class.
- Sensitive handling of oral activities to defuse potential embarrassment and reluctance.
- Variety in teaching and lesson structure.
- Engaging and up-to-date materials, (ICT) resources and curricula.
- Limiting the focus on a largely ‘transactional’/functional curriculum.
- Helping pupils to identify a realistic but convincing set of beliefs about the practical and wider benefits of MFL.

- Using materials and approaches which offer insight into the life and culture of the TLCS.
- Using approaches which support positive attitudes towards the TLCS.
- Not allowing assessment to dominate the pupils' experience of the MFL curriculum.
- When assessing, ensuring a meaningful fit with previous learning, and not over-assessing.
- Increasing the cultural dimension of the MFL curriculum.
- Providing opportunities to encounter the TLCS, physically and/or electronically.
- Dealing openly with pupil attitudes to the MFL curriculum and the TLCS.
- Using strategies to develop cooperation between MFL learners in an attempt to dismantle negative peer cultures.
- Providing 'taster' classes to increase language choice and interest within the curriculum.
- Giving pupils some thematic options within their MFL courses.
- Considering ways in which MFL could be better integrated into the whole school curriculum.
- Consolidating the role, position and length of MFL within state/national systems.

Furthermore, if this gradual philosophical shift away from an instrumental curriculum – which has been shown to privilege positive attitudes to particular languages in particular cultures – towards a more humanistic approach to MFL education that asserts the importance of language learning in terms of personal, social and cultural enrichment can be made, this would arguably allow more positive MFL attitudes to be formed on a basis which offers equal advantages to learners of all languages, with utilitarian benefits assuming an important ancillary function. The further corollary of such an approach could be a greater development of pupils' integrative attitudes, and given evidence from Gardner (1985) and others indicating that such attitudes are associated with greater success in language learning (and the endless possibilities for human contact offered in today's world of electronic multi-modal communications), the importance of attempts to address the fundamental nature of the curriculum are perhaps all the more worthy of investigation and consideration. Though this may appear a rather radical challenge, as Osborn *et al.* (2003: 227) remind us – 'this is the *raison d'être* of comparative studies'.

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