WHAT THE GOOD (DIGITAL) LANGUAGE LEARNER CAN TEACH US?

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Abstract

The article revisits the question of the good language learner, with special regard to the contemporary digital learner of English as a foreign language. It focuses on the learner who can certainly be called *successful* based on the considerably high level of language proficiency s/he has reached (B2-C1). The question considered here – with reference to good learner studies of the 1970s – is to what extent such successful learners of English can actually be called "good language learners" as described in research to-date. In particular, it is interesting to investigate whether such learners effectively utilise the "plethora of creative routes for digital language learning" (Oxford and Lyn 2011: 157) available today.

The answer to the questions above was sought in a two-partite study carried out in October-December 2014 among 106 first-year students of the English Studies programme at the Pedagogical University in Cracow, Poland. In the first part of the study all the participants filled in a survey (N=106) whose purpose was to discover typical online language learning routines of the respondents. Subsequently, 16 study participants, randomly sampled from the main pool, took part in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were aimed at examining the nature of the online routines reported in the survey and confronting them with selected characteristics of good language learners identified in the early studies (Rubin 1975; Stern 1975) as well as the more contemporary studies into good digital language learning reported by Oxford and Lin (2011).

The results of both parts of the study give a number of insights into how the participants of the study augment their language education with the use of the new media as well as show areas in which they still need the assistance of the (digital) teacher. As a result, it is argued here that while the respondents are good digital language learners from whom we may learn, there are still important things to be taught to them, with particular regard to developing digital learner autonomy, closely connected to a whole range of digital language learning strategies (Oxford and Lin 2011) and multiliteracies (Pegrum 2009).

Keywords: good language learner; learner competence; multiliteracies

1. Introduction

Learning from those who know/can is both an old maxim and a well-known educational technique called modelling. Modelling, a part of the socially-mediated implicit-learning

models, is also called observational or vicarious learning (Bandura 1977). Such learning involves paying attention to the observed model, noting and retaining the details of his/her behaviour and reproducing these details in one's own actions. Good learner studies (Rubin 1975, Stern 1975, to mention the best known research attempts in this area) as well as learning/learner strategy investigations (O'Malley and Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990, among others) are all closely related to the idea of modelling. They stem from the belief that success in language learning is less a matter of special predispositions and more a question of mastering a set of effective educational routines. Such routines, called strategies, are sought and identified in those learners who are exceptional in how they approach language learning and how effective they are in it; in *good* language learners. The most recent examples of research in this area (Oxford and Lin 2011) complete the model by adding strategies connected with digital language learning.

All models of this kind – presented both in the early as well the more contemporary publications on the good language learner – are a combination of *real* human characteristics identified in a vast body of research to-date. However, when aggregated, all these good-learner features create a model which seems extreme and, as such, difficult to follow *in toto*. This is why it is always interesting to confront such idealised models with reality.

The present study is an attempt at such a confrontation: it seeks to find out to what extent a fairly *successful* language learner – the one who has reached a considerably high level of language proficiency (B2/C1) – can be called a *good* language learner in the sense that s/he adheres to the model. The paper starts by setting the background through reporting on the classic good learner studies (Rubin 1975 and Stern 1975) and their follow-up: the research strategies used by language learners, both traditionally-understood (O'Malley and Chamot 1990; Chamot 2005) and digital ones. In relation to the latter type of learner, the article considers the characteristics of a good language learner vis à vis the competences needed in the contemporary digitalised world (Oxford and Lin 2011; as well as Kramsch 2006 and Pegrum 2009). Situated within such a context is the study of the online language learning routines of 106 potentially good language learners. The article describes the study, discusses the results and puts forward some conclusions.

2. Background to the study

2.1. Good language learner studies

Before considering how reality lives up to the model, it seems necessary to introduce the latter, tracing it back to the first general good language learner studies, the ones by Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975). Their findings are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. The good language learner (Turula 2010: 132)

Rubin (1975)	Stern (1975)
• Good learners make intelligent guesses about language. • Good learners are willing to communicate and do so in spite of language limitations. • Good learners are free of inhibitions. • Good learners take charge of their learning and seek opportunities to practice. • Good learners are able to monitor their performance. • Good learners pay attention to form and to meaning.	Good learners are active. Good learners are tolerant towards the language and its users. Good learners experiment with the language. Good learners plan and monitor their performance. Good learners practise willingly. Good learners are good and ardent communicators. Good learners pay attention to meaning. Good learners develop their understanding of language as a system.

Based on the two studies, as well as ample subsequent research cited in Chamot (2005), we can define the good language learner as somebody who is: active; uninhibited in front of the teacher (frequently asks for clarification) or other language users; an effective communicator who relies on their current knowledge, both linguistic and general, when facing interaction problems; a good strategy user – able to plan and monitor their performance as well as skilled in mnemonics. As regards the last characteristic, Chamot (2005) makes an important observation: it is not the size of the strategic repertoire that draws the line between successful and unsuccessful learners; the difference is qualitative in nature. To use Chamot's words (2005: 116, my emphasis), "good language learners are skilled at matching strategies to the task they were working on whereas less successful language learners apparently do not have the *metacognitive* knowledge about the task requirements needed to select appropriate strategies".

2.2. Good learning in the digital era

Today's good language learner needs to be considered in the context of the contemporary world, both the real and the virtual. What kind of learners are the representatives of the net generation? How, if at all, do the good language learners of the 21st century – who are part of this generation – fit into the model delineated in the previous millennium? First, the questions

will be considered in relation to the characteristics described in the previous section: being active, uninhibited and risk taking; good communication skills; knowledge and use of strategies, mostly metacognitive ones. Then the article will refer to research into how "the Digital Age has changed the characteristics of the language learners themselves" (Oxford and Lin 2011: 157).

Some researchers (Strauss and Howe 2000; Twenge 2006) agree that the present generation, called the millennials, are generally confident, tolerant and open-minded. As a result of their Web 2.0 experience, they are also community-oriented, which leads to new lifestyles that capitalise on and reinforce their confidence, open-mindedness and a certain degree of risk-taking typical of the millennials; new lifestyles based on sharing seen in car pooling, couch-surfing, etc. In addition to such forms of collaborative consumption, the new, sharing, economy of today accommodates modern ways of language learning: in tandem, through social networking. This is a context that seems a suitable habitat as well as a truly formative experience for the good language learner, who is to be active, uninhibited and ready to take risks.

When it comes to good communication skills, the connectivity of the globalised networked world of the Internet augurs well for a variety of interactions, either interpersonal or with a variety of texts, in languages other than one's mother tongue. In the digital domain the means of communication is frequently English and the online interlocutors are likely to be its non-native speakers. They usually have different agendas and connect in ways that often require more than communicative competence understood as the ability to make one's meaning effectively and fluently. As Kramsch (2006: 250) points out, "communication in the global age", with its complexity, its multicultural quality, its variety of discourses, "requires competences other than mere efficiency." These competences include the following (after Kramsch 2006):

- producing – and being able to understand – complex language to render all shades of meaning;
- treating grammar as a choice of structures enabling such meaning making;
- tolerating ambiguity in intercultural dialogue.

Such competences require going beyond everyday language use, into all different varieties of discourse. As these varieties are typical of the Internet, its users – the contemporary good language learners – have a great chance of acquiring and developing symbolic competence.

Finally, when it comes to the use of metacognitive strategies, the new media offer an array of tools whose affordances allow to plan, organise and monitor one's learning. In this

sense, the digital world assists the contemporary language learner in his/her use of metacognitive learning strategies. It also reinforces other indirect strategies: the affective ones, by providing new types of motivation (including the motivation of belonging; Sade 2011), and social strategies, as the main characteristic of learning online is its interactivity. As a result, in addition to reinforcing one group of strategies, the digital world has the potential to simultaneously induce the development of other personal ways of boosting one's learning effectiveness. The latter will include: collaborative strategies, including the ability to organise other people into effective communities of inquiry and to motivate them (and oneself) to persevere with learning – an ability akin to what Thompson (2013) calls tummelling; strategies supporting learning with and from others such as effective ways of finding and evaluating information, including the one construed through multimodal discourse. Such strategies are a function of abilities called multiliteracies (Pegrum 2009), including search, information, participatory, multimodal and other literacies. Consequently, the good language learner of today will be the one using the new media to reinforce his/her use of traditionally understood strategies as well as to develop a new set of competences and related strategies.

Such learning strategies of the good digital language learner, presented in Oxford and Lin (2011), actually go hand in hand with all the three areas of learner competence delineated earlier in this section. Using the net to "[reverse] the situation of insufficient exposure to authentic discourse in the target language" (Oxford and Lin 2011: 162) is well situated within the context of sharing economy, accommodating, among others, tandem language learning. The ability to cope with variety – "[r]esolving confusion about which digital programme to use" (Oxford and Lin 2011: 158); but also dealing effectively with plethora of resources, genres and registers – is a characteristic of both the good digital language learner and an effective global communicator (cf. Kramsch 2006). Similarly, (i) "[o]vercoming a sense of lack of community in digital language learning" (Oxford and Lin 2011: 164) coincides with the skill to build a community through chat and forum discussions (Thompson 2013); (ii) "[t]ranscending affective inadequacies of distance or completely independent digital learning" (Oxford and Lin 2011: 164) can be carried out through different self/community-motivation strategies (Sade 2011); (iii) "[c]ompensating for missing guidance in distance or completely independent digital learning" (Oxford and Lin 2011: 165) is implemented by the application of digital tools enabling planning, monitoring and evaluation.

In addition to the above, Oxford and Lin (2011: 159-162) mention four more challenges and related strategies:

1) hypertext path construction – good language learners have and apply high meta-comprehension skills, considering semantic relations and not screen position or hyperlink interest;
2) reducing design-induced 'extraneous' cognitive load – the strategies applied boil down to noticing differences between key information and distracting information and mentally setting the latter aside and concentrating on the former;
3) managing significant 'intrinsic' cognitive load – good language learners rely on chunking and organising information into meaningful streams;
4) coping with unhelpful pressures towards excessive speed and multitasking – the strategy is to resist the pressure by applying metacognitive strategies of planning, organising etc.

The question that needs to be asked and resolved is whether and to what extent the *real* digital language learner, *potentially* good in the sense of the language proficiency s/he reached, lives up to the ideal presented in sections 2.1 and 2.2. And, more importantly, how the Internet helps him/her translate the ideal into practical ways conducive to effective language learning; ways which teachers as well as other learners can learn from him/her. The answers to these questions were sought in a study described in Section 3.

3. What the good digital language learner can teach us – the study

3.1. The aims and context of the study

Examining all the nine groups of strategies described – based on the research to date – by Oxford and Lin (2011) is an ongoing multifaceted research project, whose scope goes beyond a single article. For the sake of the present text, a part of it is going to be described; the one concentrating on selected strategies of a good digital language learner. The questions that are going to be asked – and, potentially, resolved in this study – are:

(i) How good are the subjects of the study at resolving confusion with online variety?
(ii) Do they reverse the situation of insufficient exposure to authentic discourse in TL?
(iii) Do they overcome the sense of lack of online community and missing teacher guidance?

In order to find the answer to these questions, a two-partite study was carried out in autumn 2014. Its subjects were 8 groups of first-year students of the English Studies programme at the Pedagogical University in Cracow, Poland. The group composition was the result of purposive sampling: all respondents were the so called millennials and digital natives (born in the years 1994-1995) as well as *potentially* good learners of English as a foreign

language. This potential was assumed based on the fact that all of them passed their grammar school leaving exams in English on the level B2-C1. The group contained 106 persons, 78 females and 28 males, the gender proportion being typical of the study programme in question.

3.2. Results and findings

3.2.1. The survey

The aim of the first part of the study was to reach an overall understanding of the studied learners' EFL online routines, based on quantitative data. The 106 respondents answered questions in a three-section anonymous survey (cf. Appendix 1), in which they were asked

(i) if the school-independent use of the Internet had helped them reach their high level of proficiency in English (106 affirmative answers);

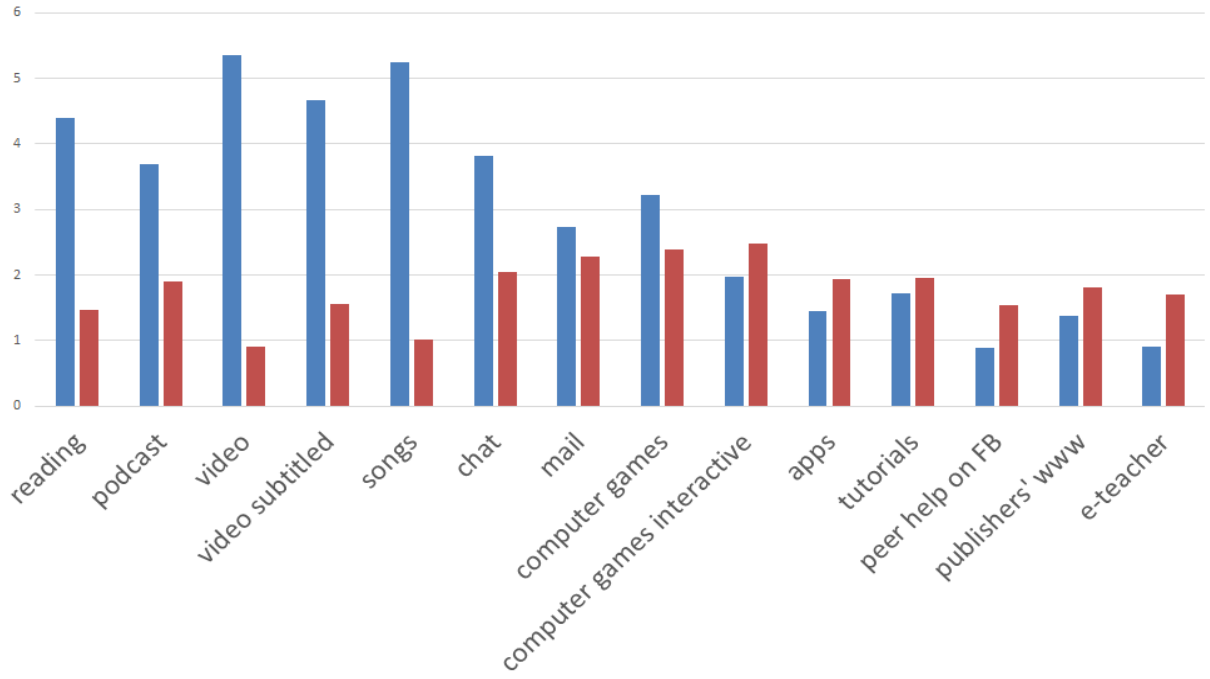
(ii) what kind of activities they thought had been the most beneficial for them in this respect;

(iii) how the online potential, which proved so advantageous in their case, could be exploited in class.

The questions were related to the following characteristics of the good language learner as defined by Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975): being pro-active, willing and independent in one's pursuit of practice, seeking opportunities for learning. They were also connected with the strategies investigated: coping with online variety; reversing the insufficient exposure to TL discourse; and dealing with the sense of community and lack of teacher guidance.

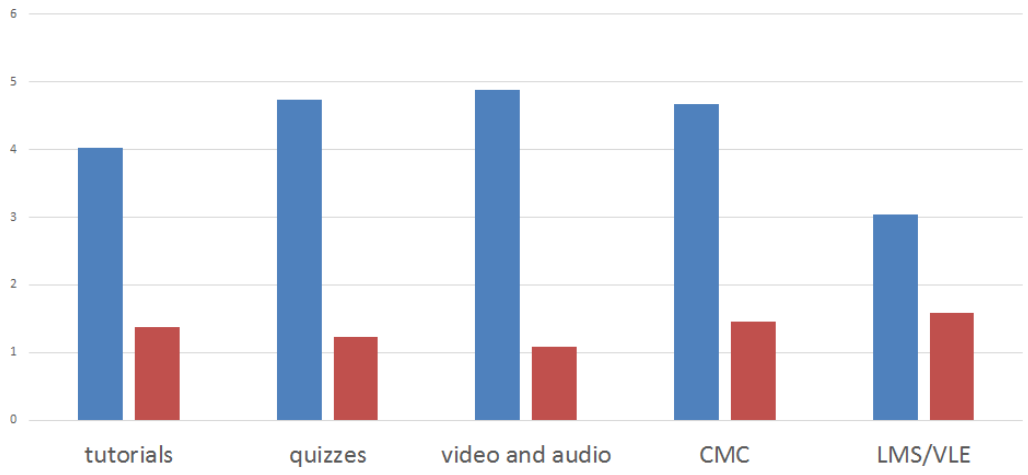
Answers to parts (ii) and (iii) of the survey, in which the respondents rated the answers provided on a 6-point Likert scale (1=not helpful at all; 6=very helpful), are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. How the respondents use the online tools and resources
(blue bars: mean; red bars: SD)



As can be seen in Figure 1, the digital language learners see the Internet as a place to practise their EFL receptive skills, especially reading (including subtitles in videos and instructions in computer games), and listening (videos, podcasts, songs). In this area the rating for most of the resources is above 4 (with the exception of podcasts, which seem the least popular), with SD measures being low and indicating that the respondents are generally quite similar in their preferences. Productive skills are practised online much less frequently, with chat being the most popular way of communicating in English. Interactive computer games are an interesting case: with their mean below two and a very high SD measure, they show that while the majority rank them low, there is a group (37 respondents, 24 males, 13 females) who think interacting with other players in English has been really advantageous to their language skills. Finally, there are small groups of (i) users of learning apps and tutorials, as well as (ii) those who learned from the materials made available on publishers' websites or (iii) owing to their teacher who used digital tools and resources (e-teacher). The option that ranked the lowest is collaborative peer-to-peer language learning via social media (experienced by 28 respondents and ranked as positive or rather positive by 11).

Figure 2. What the respondents think should happen at school in the digital age
(blue bars: mean; red bars: SD)



When it comes to what, according to the group studied, should be exploited in schools (Figure 2), the respondents rank the highest what they have benefited from themselves: practising receptive skills (mostly listening) online (4.88; SD: 1.08). However, in addition to this, they want what they seem to lack in their own out-of-school digital learning routines: practice in productive skills (CMC, interaction; 4.66, SD: 1.46) as well as quizzes, tutorials and learning in online classrooms.

3.2.2. The interviews

The second part of the study was aimed at deepening the understanding of the routines of the respondents reported in the survey and at investigating the quality of their massive exposure to the digital input in English transpiring from the quantitative data. In other words, it was interesting to know *what* the respondents read, watch and listen to in English as well as *how* and *how often* they do it. This part of the study was based on a structured interview (15-30 minutes each; cf. Appendix 2 for the questions). The other questions of this interview pertained to whether and to what extent the respondents know the educational potential of the digital world (learning apps), especially as regards the FL learning classics: words and grammar. In the latter case, the interview also concentrated on whether the respondents are familiar with selected areas of grammar as well as metalanguage used to talk about these areas. All this aimed at determining if the *potentially good* language learners were proficient users of the three groups of digital strategies – coping with online variety; reversing the

insufficient exposure to TL discourse; and dealing with the sense of community and lack of teacher guidance. It was also important to find out if the respondents were well prepared for the participative learning in the digital world, including their symbolic competence.

The participants of this part of the study were chosen randomly from each of the 8 groups surveyed, 8 males and 8 females (a male and a female from each group). Based on their self-report, the time they spend online daily is between 1 and 9hrs (mean=3.75h).

When asked what they read, watch and listen to online as well as how often (in the past two weeks: 3=every day or almost every day; 2=several times; 1=once or twice; 0=never), they reported the frequency of the routines shown in Figures 3-5.

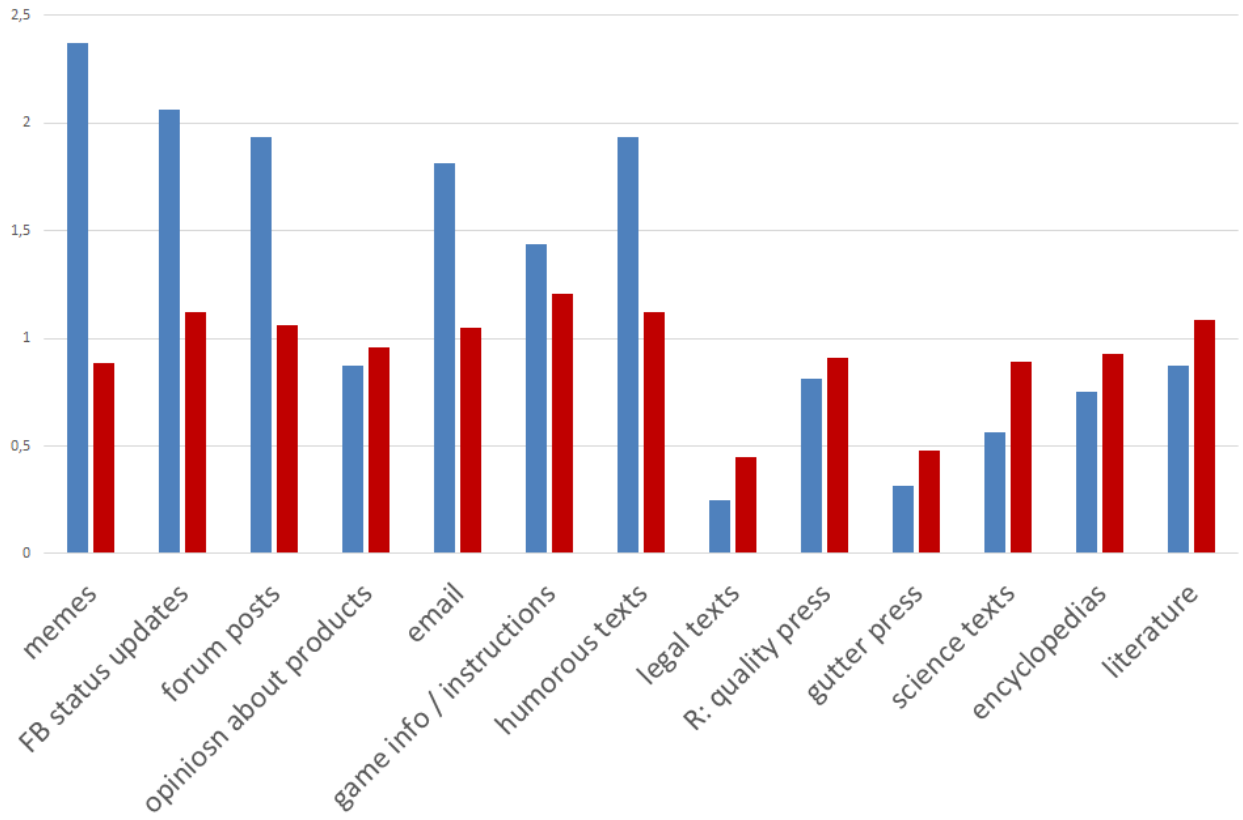


Figure 3. What they read (blue bars: mean; red bars: SD)

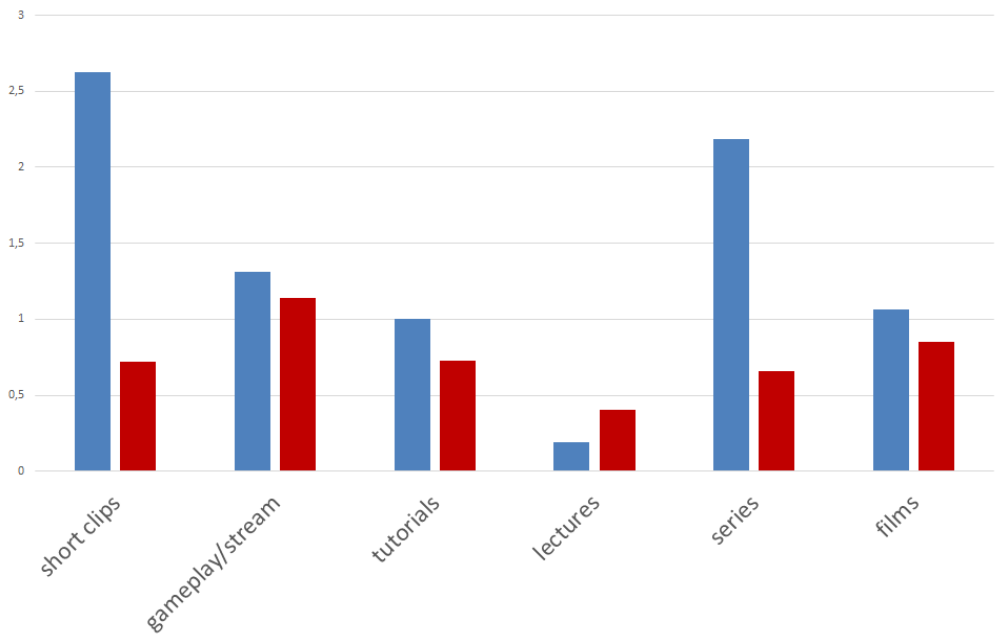


Figure 4. What they watch (blue bars: mean; red bars: SD)

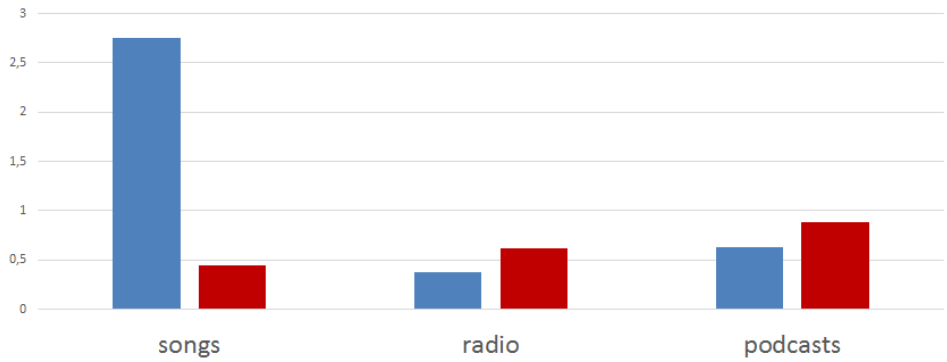


Figure 5. What they listen to (blue bars: mean; red bars: SD)

The values shown in Figures 3-5 demonstrate that the respondents expose themselves to texts characterised by a variety of forms on the one hand and, on the other, a certain uniformity of register. All the reported genres popular with the group – memes, FB updates, forum posts, humorous texts, emails, short video clips, TV series, lyrics of songs – use informal or semi-formal English as a means of expression. Other genres – and their typical registers – are underrepresented: academic English (lectures, tutorials, science texts – 3 respondents on a regular basis); legal English (0 respondents on a regular basis); different kinds of English expository prose, including *belle lettres* (4 respondents on a regular basis) and newspapers (press – 3 respondents on a regular basis).

As for the digital learning of words and grammar (Figures 6 and 7), 2 out of the 16 interviewees report using learning apps dedicated specifically to vocabulary practice

(*Memrise*, *fiszki*); another 4 mention using online dictionaries for this purpose. The number for grammar is even lower: 3 people use sites with interactive tests. The question of whether they would like to know such digital tools gained 9 affirmative answers for vocabulary and 7 – for grammar. When asked how they learn these building blocks of language, the respondents report a range of traditional (offline) routines. For words, they include: learning from vocabulary lists (9), rewriting (4), using mnemonics (4: colour coding – 2; associations – 2), exposure / not learning (3); in the case of grammar learning, the main routines are: the rules-and-drill way (9), exposure / not learning (6), rote learning (2), using mnemonics (graphic representation on timeline – 1). None of the respondents reported using any applications to plan, monitor or evaluate their language learning.

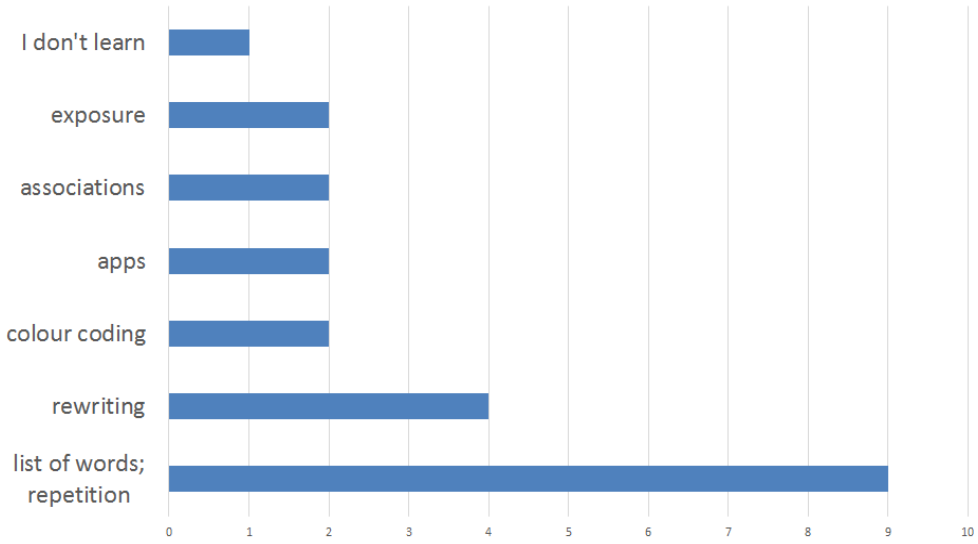


Figure 6. How they learn words

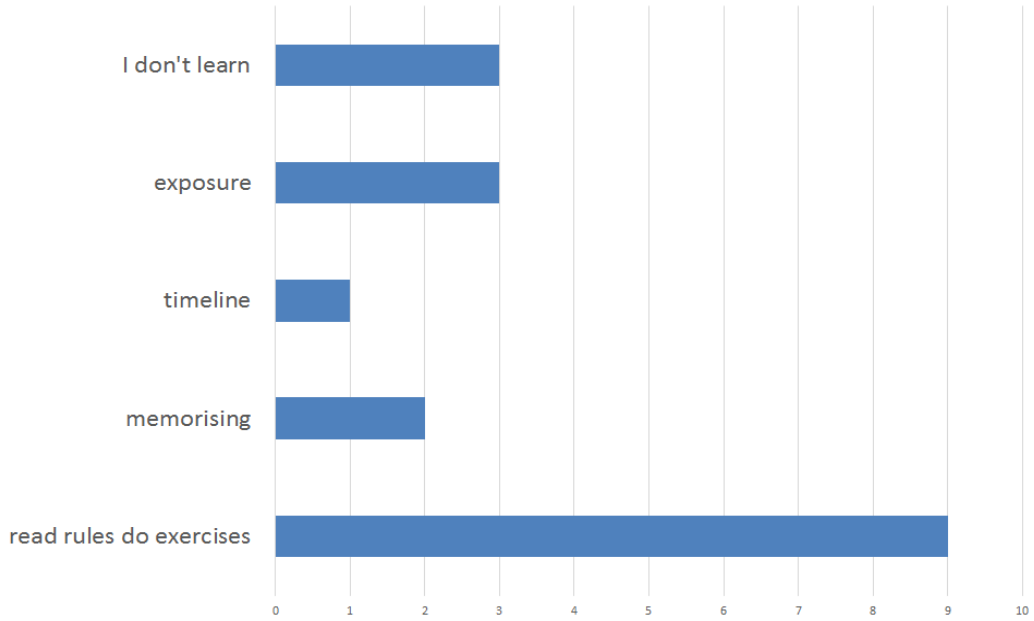


Figure 7. How they learn grammar

Additionally, the 16 respondents were asked to complete a structure recognition test in which the respondents' knowledge of selected grammatical constructions as well as the relevant metalanguage were checked. The test consisted of 8 questions, each of which required indicating *all* examples of a chosen structure (e.g. modal verbs; for all 8 categories, cf. Figure 8). The maximum score for each question was 4 points. The results (mean scores and SD values) are presented in Figure 8. The aim of this part of the interview was to offer yet another insight into how the respondents cope with discourse variety as well as the metalanguage of grammar explanation, should they need to understand it without the teacher's assistance.

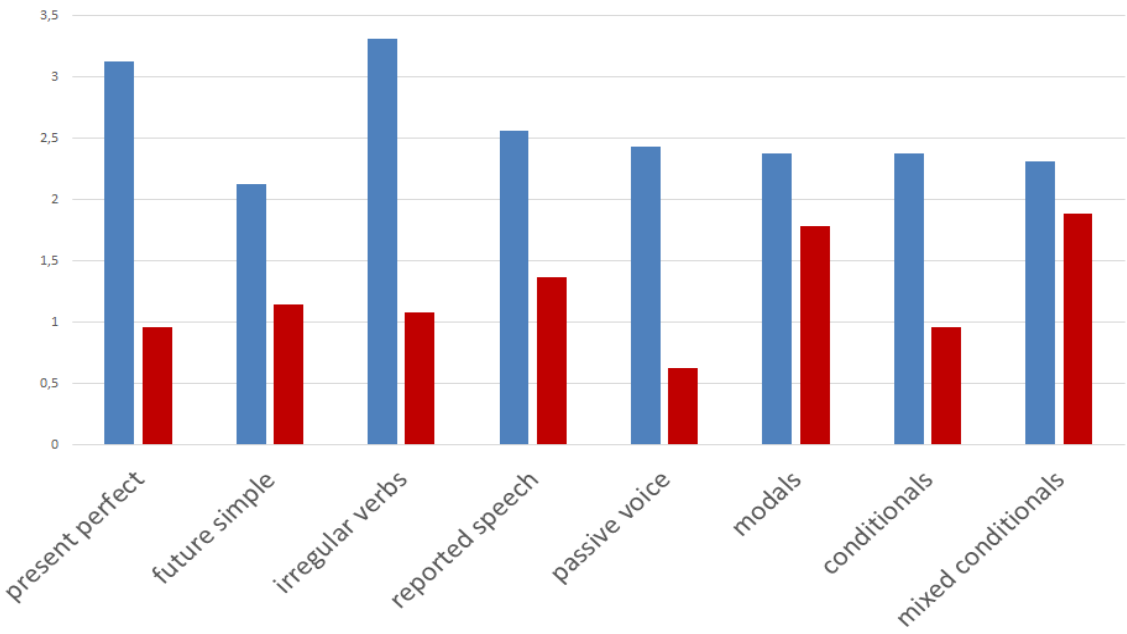


Figure 8. Recognition of grammatical structures (blue bars: mean; red bars: SD)

As it is shown in Figure 8, the best recognised constructions are the Present Perfect tense and the irregular verbs. The correct recognition ratio for other structures is generally above 50%, with the Future Simple tense ranging the lowest. Based on the SD values, the greatest differences in score were noted for modals and mixed conditionals. When it comes to the most problematic tokens in selected types of structures (Table 2), the largest number of errors were made as regards usage that can be labelled as less prototypical: the BE *have got* mistakenly recognised as the Present Perfect tense; the less frequent *shall* future (as opposed to the *will* future); indirect speech with less frequently used reporting verbs; and catentative passive.

Table 2. What they don't / mis- recognise

Type	**Token**
Present Perfect	*They've got a house in the country.*
Future Simple	*You shall not pass!*
Reported speech	*He demanded to be told the truth.*
Passive voice	*He got fired.*

4. Discussion

Before the data are discussed in relation to the research questions, one potentially important finding needs to be highlighted. Based on the learning routines self-reported and evaluated by the 106 respondents, it seems that – considering their proficiency level, which they claim they owe to their extensive Internet use – they should be called *the Krashen Generation*. This

remark refers to Krashen's (1985/2004) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, in the light of which being exposed to comprehensible input is enough to effectively acquire a foreign language. This impression is gained from Figure 1, which can be divided into the receptive routines, which the respondents value highly as conducive to EFL learning, and the productive routines, which enjoy a considerably lower popularity. The reasons of such a status quo being of less importance here, based on facts alone we can note that the 106 digital learners think they owe their considerably high proficiency levels to input rather than output. This observation is further reinforced by the data from the interviews. First of all, a notable number of the 16 respondents admit that they actually do not learn words or grammar (3 and 6, respectively). This acquisition-rather-than-learning is also seen in the results of the structure-recognition test: the constructions that pose greater problems are the ones whose frequency in input is low. As a result, they are less known by those who learn mainly / only through exposure. All this shows that – at least to a certain extent – we may need to talk about *digital* language acquisition rather than learning (Krashen 1985). This issue, however, seems to need a more in-depth study and is not going to be considered here beyond the observation made in this paragraph, and boiling down to noting that online input tops output in the respondents' evaluations of digital routines conducive to effective language learning.

When it comes to the research questions, a number of answers can be given based on the data obtained in both parts of the study. However, these answers are far from straightforward.

The first and quite an important finding of the study is that the *potentially good* digital language learner is close to the model of the good learner delineated by Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975). Based on all the different school-independent ways (Figure 1) in which the 106 respondents digitally augment their language learning experience, we can say that these learners are definitely active (Stern 1975) in their pursuit of opportunities to use the foreign language (Rubin 1975) independently of the teacher. As a result of this self-reliance, it is quite possible that they are regularly on their own while making sense of language as a system of form-meaning pairings (Rubin 1975, Stern 1975). If they do this falling back on intelligent guesses (Rubin 1975) and experimenting (Stern 1975), they are definitely successful, considering their language level. In this sense they are certainly capable of successfully overcoming the missing teacher guidance (Research Question iii).

The assumption above is confirmed by another important observation following from the data gathered, namely, that the respondents are fairly self-aware. Moreover, they are conscious not only of what helps them to learn but also what their digital practice lacks. When

we examine their recommendations as to how schools should exploit the potential of the new media (Figure 2), we can see that what they advocate is not only the result of transfer of training (their own ample practice in receptive skills) but also of a reflection on what is missing in their independent learning (online language production). In other words, even if they *are* 'the Krashen Generation' in terms of their learning experience, they seem to be more input/output-balanced in how they perceive effective language education. This indicates a certain capacity for detachment and reflection characteristic of good learners (Rubin 1975, Stern 1975, Chamot 2005).

Such a capacity as well as being pro-active and independent in one's learning are typical of autonomous language learners, whose characteristics generally coincide with those of good language learners (Turula 2010). However, before we add learner autonomy to the description of the respondents of the present study, it is good to reflect upon the quality of this autonomy. Such a reflection needs to be accommodated within the current discussion of learner autonomy (Little 2002 and 2004, Murray 2014) and its shift from independence to interdependence; from learning understood as an individual intellectual pursuit carried out in self-access centres to language education in which one learns from and with peers and is both self- and other-regulated. If we look at the online routines of the 106 good digital language learners, we cannot escape the impression that they treat the Internet as a massive self-access centre. This perception is based on the prevalence of input over output practices – the latter more commonly associated with interaction than the former – self-reported in the survey. There is also another source of the impression that independence prevails over interdependence in the group studied. Only 28 out of the 106 surveyed admitted to having social learning experience (peer help on FB), and this experience was positive for only 11 out of these respondents. This may show that when it comes to overcoming the sense of lack of online community (Research Question iii), the group studied lacks in strategies typical of good digital language learners. What seems optimistic is that in their recommendations for school practice, the 106 learners surveyed rank Computer-Mediated Communication quite high. This, however, is what they think they might have capitalised on rather than where they are in terms of their learner autonomy understood as interdependence.

Continuing along the lines of interdependence and, what follows, effective online communication – which seems a must in the globalised context of the Internet – it appears that the group under investigation does not fully live up to the model of symbolic competence described, based on Kramsch (2006) in Section 2.2. The already-noted lack of practice in online interaction notwithstanding, the group seem slightly deficient in what Kramsch (2006)

sees as a *sine qua non* of intercultural communication: the ability to produce and understand a variety of complex meanings rendered through complex language in diverse discourses. While the group's massive exposure to online text is a fact (survey results), the input, as demonstrated in the interviews, is quite monotonously informal, making it difficult – if not impossible, as shown in the structure-recognition test – for the group to produce and understand rarer discourses or less prototypical form-meaning pairings. In other words, while in terms of quantity they generally reverse the situation of insufficient exposure to authentic discourse in TL, the quality of this exposure is far from what one would expect in the intercultural world (Research Question ii). Consequently, the group do not appear to demonstrate sufficient skills in dealing with online variety (Research Question i).

Along the very same lines of resolving confusion with online variety, the respondents' language learning know-how is rather disappointing. They may be millennials and digital natives based on their birth certificates; and they, most certainly, are tech-comfy: proficient in their use of the present first-need new media (social networks, basic CMC tools). What they do not seem to be is tech-savvy (Pegrum 2009): knowledgeable as regards the educational power of the digital world, with its variety of tools and their affordances to be used based on one's learning needs. The evidence for the claim above can be found in the interviews, whose participants are virtually unaware of how to digitally boost their learning, on both the cognitive and metacognitive levels. Very few respondents use digital tools for learning the basic elements of language. Instead, they tend to fall back on study techniques that are most traditional, in the pejorative sense of the word (list of words for vocabulary learning; the rules-and-drill for grammar practice). When it comes to the digital augmentation of language learning as regards its planning, monitoring and evaluation, 16 respondents have nothing to report. In summation, as regards the know-how of online learning apps, they cannot be described as good digital language learners (Research Question i).

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the group under investigation can generally be described as *good digital* language learners: millennials, whose multifaceted online presence accommodates successful, self-regulated, language education. As a result, the *digital* language learners whose routines were investigated in the present study can be described as *good*, with the meaning of the word similar to the one delineated in the studies of the past (Rubin 1975 and Stern 1975): active and independent in their language pursuits; and also, to a considerable extent, by Oxford and Lin (2011): able to overcome the missing teacher guidance as well as generally capable of

reversing the insufficient exposure to TL and – up to a point – of dealing with online variety. What seems to be missing in their repertoire of strategies is coping with the lack of community; reversing the insufficient exposure to language *production*; as well as coping with varieties of discourse other than the informal register or familiarity with online language learning apps.

In the light of the above the good digital language learners studied offer us, the teachers, a lesson in two different areas. First of all, they show a model which we may popularise among other learners: a model of a self-sufficient and pro-active online learner. At the same time, however, they – directly (survey responses) or indirectly (survey and interview results) – pinpoint areas in which we should provide language learning know-how: learning through computer-mediated communication; giving structure (digital or not) to language education through the use of indirect strategies, metacognitive (learning planning, direction and management) as well as affective (curating motivation) and social (digital learner autonomy which stems from interdependence as well as independence); learning through exposure to discourses whose variety goes beyond the informal language of everyday online interaction. And this seems to be the most important lesson to be learned from the 106 good digital language learners involved in the present study.

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Appendix 1. The survey[1]

1) Do you think surfing the Internet helped you learn English?
YES / NO

2) If the answer to Question 1 is YES, how far did you benefit from the different ways of using the net listed below? (Please evaluate each action on a 1-6 scale, where 0=not at all; 6=considerably)

1. I read texts in English online.	1 2 3 4 5 6
2. I listened to English podcasts.	1 2 3 4 5 6
3. I watched English films online (incl. TV series, documentaries, TEDtalks etc.).	1 2 3 4 5 6
4. I watched English films (as above) with English subtitles.	1 2 3 4 5 6
5. I listened to music with English lyrics.	1 2 3 4 5 6
6. I chatted in English online (various CMC tools).	1 2 3 4 5 6
7. I exchanged emails in English.	1 2 3 4 5 6
8. I played computer games with English instructions.	1 2 3 4 5 6
9. I played interactive (PvP) computer games in English.	1 2 3 4 5 6
10. I used online / mobile apps for learning English (Duolingo, e-fiszki etc.).	1 2 3 4 5 6
11. I watched English grammar tutorials (on Youtube, etc.).	1 2 3 4 5 6
12. I learned English collaboratively, seeking peer support on social media.	1 2 3 4 5 6
13. I used English learning activities available on different publishers' websites.	1 2 3 4 5 6
14. My teacher taught English the blended way – we had an online classroom.	1 2 3 4 5 6
15. Other (please specify)	1 2 3 4 5 6

3) How can the Internet be used for learning English at school? (Please evaluate each action on a 1-6 scale, where 1=not useful at all; 6=very useful)

1. To learn words and grammar from video-tutorials made by the teacher.	1 2 3 4 5 6
2. To learn grammar by doing a lot of interactive quizzes.	1 2 3 4 5 6
3. To read and listen to authentic text, recommended by the teacher.	1 2 3 4 5 6
4. To communicate, in speaking and writing: the teacher should suggest ways / organise exchanges or tandem learning.	1 2 3 4 5 6
5. To practice all language skills in a VLE set up by the teacher.	1 2 3 4 5 6
6. Other (please specify)	1 2 3 4 5 6

age …; gender …; result on advanced *Matura*[2] …

[1] The survey was carried out in Polish – the native tongue of the respondents.
[2] Polish grammar school leaving exam

Appendix 2. : **The interview**[3]

1) How many times during the last 2 weeks did you read something in English online?

2) What did you read? (choose from the list):
- meme
- comic strip
- social media status updates
- forum discussion
- product evaluation
- email
- computer game instructions
- joke
- terms of use
- press article (spreadsheet)
- press article (tabloid)
- encyclopaedia entry
- belle lettres
- other, please specify.

3) How many times during the last 2 weeks did you watch something in English online?

4) What did you watch? (chose from the list):
- a short clip
- gameplay / streaming
- a tutorial
- a lecture / talk
- an episode of a series
- a film
- other, please specify.

5) How many times during the last 2 weeks did you listen to something in English online?

6) What did you listen to? (chose from the list):
- a song with English lyrics
- a radio programme in English
- a podcast
- other, please specify.

7) How many times during the last 2 weeks did you play a computer game with English instructions?

8) How many times during the last 2 weeks did you play an interactive (PvP) computer game in which you communicated with others in English?

9) How many times during the last 2 weeks did you chat online in English?

10) How many times during the last 2 weeks did you email somebody in English?

11) How much time do you spend online daily?

12) What are your preferred ways of vocabulary learning?

13) Do you know online / mobile apps which help learn vocabulary?

14) What are your preferred ways of learning grammar?

[3] The interview was carried out in Polish – the native tongue of the respondents

15) Do you know online / mobile apps which help learn grammar?

16) In each point identify the grammatical structure in question. It may appear 1-4 times. Don't guess – if you don't know, admit it.

1) Present Perfect

a) She was being taken to hospital b) They've been here awhile. c) He is said to have been sick.
d) They've got a house in the country. e) I don't know.

2) Future Simple

a) We're going to London tomorrow b) You shall not pass! c) I'll write to you soon.
d) If you'll do the dishes, I'm willing to take care of the coffee for both of us. e) I don't know.

3) Irregular verb

a) He drove slowly because of the weather. b) You lied to me. c) You would need a hand.
d) I don't ask questions. e) I don't know.

4) **Reported speech**

a) He demanded to be told the truth. b) He said I was stupid. c) 'Don't worry,' she said.
d) I wish I were somewhere else. e) I don't know.

5) **Passive voice**

a) She is being interviewed as we speak. b) He got fired. c) You're believed to be very powerful. d) Stop being silly. e) I don't know.

6) **Modal verb**

a) I have been told you're waiting. b) They are to be here soon. c) We ought to be leaving now.
d) She is able to do that, don't worry. e) I don't know.

7) **Conditional sentence**

a) If you know her, why don't you ask her out?
b) He will come unless he doesn't want to see her.
c) You will pass as long as you get 60% of the answers correct.
d) If I were you, I would have gone to that party.
e) I don't know.

8) Mixed conditional

a) If I were you I would have accepted his proposal.
b) If he had learned more, he would be at university now.
c) Should you want my help, just ask.
d) If you finish, you can go.
e) I don't know.