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FINAL PROJECT REPORT

A survey of the ways universities cope with the needs of dyslexic foreign language learners and, in consultation with tutors and learners, the piloting of appropriate assessment methods

Jenny Hill and Jannie Roed,  
University of Sussex

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### 1. Introduction

According to the British Dyslexia Institute, about 10% of the British population suffer some form of dyslexia, of which 4% would be categorised as severely dyslexic (<http://www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk>). Definitions vary greatly, but generally dyslexia can be said to encompass problems with language processing and the impact this has on other abilities, in particular reading and writing (Miles 1993; Schneider and Crombie 2003).

The literature on dyslexia is large but falls mostly within three categories. One attempts to investigate the nature and explain the causes of dyslexia. A second category of studies focuses on the actual manifestations of dyslexia or symptoms, and a third category deals with support issues – how students can help themselves and how teachers or lecturers can help their students.

An increasing number of students who enter Higher Education are diagnosed with dyslexia or dyslexic related problems. However, the literature dealing specifically with dyslexia at university is limited. One early study which aims simply at raising awareness of dyslexia in higher education is Cain's study of American college students from 1987. The book is a collection of students' testimonies to what it is like to be a dyslexic student at university. It also illuminates the problem by emphasising all the different manifestations or warning signs of dyslexia apart from reading, writing and spelling. The students' revelations echo general research into dyslexia, namely that the disability is often accompanied by one or more problems such as lack of focusing, short attention span, problems with coordination and organisation, memory and word association and speech.

As would be expected, most of the studies on dyslexia and higher education focus on support issues and how best to help dyslexic learners overcome barriers they may face (Chanock 2005; Mortimore 2005). A study by Riddick, Farmer and Sterling (2002) *Dyslexia and Inclusion: Assessment and Support in Higher Education* is dedicated to the HE sector, and chapters seven and eight in which assessment requirements for courses in Higher Education are discussed are of particular interest in this context.

One study by DiFino and Lombardino (2004) looks at dyslexic learners and foreign language learning in HE and lists a number of warning signs the language tutor may react to which could indicate a risk of failing. However, no study seems to discuss

actual assessment of accuracy in foreign language learning and concepts such as 'lenient marking' in relation to assessing dyslexic learners.

Whilst dyslexic students in most disciplines can be offered general help in the form of a scribe, the use of a spell checker etc. for assessment purposes, the assessment of accuracy for the foreign language learner remains a problem. Despite much research into dyslexia, this is a problem that has not yet been addressed in any depth.

This paper reports on preliminary findings from a one year project aiming at identifying ways in which language accuracy can be assessed fairly in dyslexic learners of foreign languages.

## **2. Background**

Assessing accuracy in dyslexic students of foreign languages has been a recurring problem for years in the Sussex Language Institute. Experienced as well as new lecturers are left with little central university help regarding how best to tackle the assessment of dyslexic language learners. The university's guidelines state that: "All written work submitted for assessment is eligible for sympathetic marking." (2.1 The University of Sussex Policy Procedures for assessing students diagnosed as dyslexic.) But what constitutes 'sympathetic marking'? If a lecturer is grading an essay on an anthropological or biological topic he or she can choose to be sympathetic with regard to organisation of the content and the spelling. But if the primary task is to assess a student's spelling and grammar in a foreign language, the concept of 'sympathetic marking' becomes more blurred, especially regarding accuracy.

Informal conversations with colleagues from other higher education institutions revealed that the University of Sussex was not alone in finding assessing linguistic accuracy problematic when it came to dyslexic learners. A search of the huge body of research on dyslexia and dyslexic related problems yielded little result. Whereas the literature provides multiple examples on how to assist dyslexic learners in learning foreign languages, issues relating to the assessment procedure itself are largely ignored. So, how does a tutor know if a dyslexic student's misspelling of a word or wrong use of a tense is a result of the student's disability or simply because the student has not grasped a specific grammatical concept?

New legislation in favour of widening participation requires that reasonable provision is set in place for learners with a disability amongst whom are the dyslexic learners. But what is 'reasonable'? Is it 'reasonable' to ignore some of the mistakes in order to be 'sympathetic'? Tutors of foreign languages are often left to their own devices when marking language assignments written by dyslexic students. As a result, they are left quite vulnerable if they decide to solve the dilemma of dyslexia by being lenient (sympathetic) markers. First, there is the question of fairness. Students must be dealt with fairly, and if the main purpose of an assignment is to assess linguistic accuracy, one cannot apply one rule for the dyslexic students and another for the non-dyslexic. And how about students who have been diagnosed with 'dyslexic related problems'? Will yet a third set of rules apply to them? Tutors also need to be careful about treating students markedly differently in a climate where students are becoming increasingly more litigious. Secondly, there is the question of standards and assuring quality. It would be unprofessional to award a degree with the proviso that this is a dyslexic student and therefore accuracy has not been taken into account. The university needs to be accountable and tutors are concerned to be seen to be fair to **all** students.

### 3. Original aims

Originally, there were a number of questions we wanted to explore in our project. We wanted to

- find out whether Sussex and other universities had strategies to help tutors cope with the problems mentioned above
- consult with tutors and learners about their needs and views on assessing language accuracy
- pilot appropriate assessment methods
- share good practice
- establish a set of guidelines for tutors

Whilst we recognised that this was an ambitious undertaking, we felt that it was exactly the direction we wished our research to take in its initial stages.

### 4. Initial inquiries

We carried out some background research, focusing on dyslexic language learners, rather than dyslexic students in general, as the scope and amount of time given for the project was limited to one year and we were more interested in actual practice. Despite the fact that much research has been carried out in the area of dyslexia, the issue of assessing accuracy in dyslexic language learners is not one that has been widely addressed. However, we did get some information from

- the British Dyslexia Association
- **Dyslexia and Foreign Language Learning** by Schneider & Crombie (2003)
- The Alladin Project
- The University of Hull guidelines on dyslexia ([http://www.hull.ac.uk/languages/current/olc/dyslexia\\_guidelines\\_tutors.html](http://www.hull.ac.uk/languages/current/olc/dyslexia_guidelines_tutors.html))
- the Examination boards at GCSE and A level

As would be expected, the information from the British Dyslexia Association's web site is fairly general. There are some references to foreign language learning and, where they appear, they focus on how dyslexic children can be supported when learning. The book **Dyslexia and Foreign Language Learning** by Schneider, E. & Crombie, M. (published by David Fulton Publishers in association with the British Dyslexia Association) is a very useful publication, but again, the focus is on how to detect dyslexic language students, how to help them develop effective learning strategies and how tutors can best support their learning.

The Alladin project (<http://www.alladin.ac.uk/project/aims.html>) explored the integration of computer based resources into language learning and this included addressing the needs of the dyslexic language learner. However, assessment as such was not included.

The guidelines on dyslexia and language learning published by the University of Hull ([http://www.hull.ac.uk/languages/current/olc/dyslexia\\_guidelines\\_tutors.html](http://www.hull.ac.uk/languages/current/olc/dyslexia_guidelines_tutors.html)) are also concerned primarily with the support of language learners with dyslexia rather than specific ways of assessing students with such problems.

Looking at the 'Special Arrangements for Modern Foreign Languages' from the Examination boards at GCSE and A level when assessing students was disappointing. Extra time is the only provision that could be used in case of dyslexic students, as the use of an amanuensis (or scribe) in these cases is seen as impractical by the boards.

## **5. Method**

Three different methods were used to collect data in the project. The survey of practices in higher education was conducted by questionnaire; group discussions were used to gather views from language teachers, and individual interviews were used to explore the students' view at the University of Sussex.

### **The questionnaire to practitioners**

We produced a short questionnaire (Appendix A) for practitioners requesting information on their own university's policy, whether help was available for language tutors specifically, whether they had encountered problems in teaching and assessing dyslexic students and whether they were willing to share good practice.

The questionnaire was sent to our own colleagues at the Sussex Language Institute and named colleagues from other HE institutions which were seen as similar to the University of Sussex. It was also posted on the Sussex Language Institute's website and a link was circulated via the Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies Subject Centre (LLAS) email bulletin. Care was taken to assure respondents of confidentiality.

The number of responses was initially very disappointing. Whilst it is well-known that the response rate is low for questionnaires, we had targeted specific people and hoped for a reasonable response. We can only speculate as to the possible reasons why we received so few completed questionnaires.

### **Group discussions I**

#### **Sussex Language Tutors' Workshop**

A general workshop on dyslexia lead by the Head of Student Support was organised for Sussex language tutors. This was very useful and confirmed that many of the strategies we habitually used in language teaching were already helping those with dyslexia to become successful language learners. There were, however, a number of areas where language tutors used strategies, which were not considered suitable and in fact disadvantaged dyslexic language learners. There was an interesting debate on strategies to use in the classroom and also in the setting out of language tests. In the main tutors agreed that the suggested strategies would help all language students not just those with dyslexia. (Appendix B)

### **Group discussions II**

#### **Meeting with colleagues from other HE institutions**

As a result of the publicity given by the LLAS to the project, a number people contacted us early in the autumn term. They had been given the task of working out strategies for assessing dyslexic language learners for accuracy within their own institutions. A meeting was held in November which actually confirmed our belief that the assessment of dyslexic students of languages was an important issue and one that lacked investigation.

The issues raised at the Sussex workshop and points from the student interviews were also discussed. These discussions were invaluable, although given the time limit on our project, we shall find it difficult to pursue them.

## **Interviews with students**

Language students, who were flagged as being dyslexic or having dyslexic related problems on the University of Sussex database, were approached and invited to discuss their language learning experiences. All of those approached agreed to take part, and we were able to interview six, five of whom were female.

## **Findings**

### **The questionnaire**

Eleven tutors responded representing seven institutions. Responses indicated that colleagues elsewhere were experiencing problems in assessing students for accuracy and were mainly using their own discretion when marking work by dyslexic learners. Judging from the few replies, colleagues were eager to have more concrete guidelines, but were concerned that they would not have enough time to cater individually for their students' needs in either teaching or assessment. Tutors in higher education are rarely provided with extra time and resources to give students with learning difficulties the necessary attention.

A number of strategies for teaching were employed by tutors when teaching students with dyslexia or dyslexic related problems including using the board more frequently, giving students handouts in advance or making them available electronically, using special fonts and colours, allowing more time for reading. Strategies specifically alluded to in assessment were, giving exercises out of class time, using appropriate software and placing more weight on oral tests. Amongst concerns mentioned were, the amount of time and extra resources needed to support dyslexic language learners and the difficulties in deciding whether mistakes were due to problems linked to dyslexia or other causes.

### **Group discussions**

The outcomes of the tutors' workshop and the student interviews were discussed at the meeting with colleagues from other institutions. The comments below are the outcome of discussions at the Sussex Tutors' Workshop, the student interviews and the meeting with colleagues from other institutions. Many of the suggestions and recommendations below are also mentioned in the literature (the materials from the British Dyslexia Association and the guidelines from the University of Hull). Some of the comments relate to classroom practice, some relate to assessment and many to both.

#### **Good practice**

1. a clear layout to handouts and tests, preferably in Arial 12 and without too much information on each page;
2. concise and simple instructions whether in the target language or in English;
3. a variety of exercise types.
4. gap-filling (cloze) and sentence manipulation are standard practice in language teaching but often considered to be confusing for dyslexic students. However, it was felt that these exercises were useful as long as practice was given, sufficient space was allowed for answers and examples were given.
5. too much choice in essay titles can be overwhelming for students.
6. oral presentations are an essential language skill.
7. paired oral assessment, prepared outside the classroom, can relieve language anxiety.
8. care needs to be taken in limiting the variety of topics and exercises in each class.

9. it is important that all classes have a structure which is made clear to the students
10. allow for some quiet moments in each class
11. avoid asking students to read unpractised texts aloud (especially in the early stages of language learning)
12. encourage students to do more to help themselves by thinking about their own pet errors and working on them and by having their own checklist of problems.
13. consider introducing the idea of a 'language buddy'
14. extra time can be useful to some students and should be offered for all forms of assessment including oral and aural
15. aural assessments should take place in an environment where students have control over the number of times they listen to the piece within a given time limit

### **Interviews with students**

The students interviewed had all been diagnosed as suffering from dyslexia or dyslexic related problems. Although there were a number of very personal comments made by the students we interviewed, there were issues which were iterated more than once and which are already supported in the literature we have perused.

#### **1. grammar and structure**

*"One big problem for dyslexics is that we were not taught grammar; so to learn a language ... it has opened up this whole new world of terminology...it is amazing! Now I can apply these rules to the way I write sentences and it is the best thing ever!"*

*"I'd say definitely make sure everyone understands the grammar."*

*"The beauty of the French language is the rules."*

It is apparent from the above that students with dyslexic related problems appreciate a structure for their learning and feel that language study in earlier years has not been structured enough or given them specific rules to apply. This is echoed in the controversial article "Dyslexia Myths and the Feel-bad factor" by Prof Julian Elliott, TES, 2.9.2005 and the C4 programme "The Dyslexia Myth" 8.9.2005. Apart from the discussion on whether dyslexia exists or not, it was evident in the programme that parents felt that their children benefited from intensive help during their early years. The BDA vice-president Prof Margaret Snowling in an article following this programme said "Early intervention is critical for early reading difficulties to prevent the downward spiral to dyslexia."

Our students felt a structured way of learning a second language was the right way for them. This leads us to believe that, although, wherever possible, total immersion in the language is ideal, in the language classroom the student needs the rules and structured practice, the communicative classroom was not enough. (Schneider & Crombie (2003) p.16, 18, 56) ( Ganschow, Philips and Schneider (2000)) and (Ganschow, Sparks and Schneider (1995))

## 2. Visual impact of handouts and practice of exercises

*“The problem with gap-filling is that there is never enough space”*

*“ ..... Reading or suddenly being asked to read something in Spanish out loud in the class, without having seen it before is like I think really hard .....I was trying to scan ahead and anticipate when I might be asked to read.... Because I knew that if it got to me, otherwise it's just embarrassing, you just do it wrong because you're not paying attention.”*

*“ For example we had one French exam where we had to do a commentaire as opposed to an essay or grammar and I got a very low mark. We'd done one practice .... But since then I did a lot of practices myself and gave them to the teacher, who marked them – I feel more confident now.”*

*“If you have a sheet of white written paper printed, you can read it but it's a lot harder than if it's actually coloured.”*

Students did make comments about the style and layout of both handouts and tests. They appreciated a clear, well-spaced document. As can be seen in our earlier comments, this should really be adopted for all student handouts and tests, and is suggested in relevant workshops as well as the literature we have read. (Schneider & Crombie (2003)

According to Ganschow et al (2000) students also found problems with the pace and illogical sequence of material in course books and in the classroom. We too have found that students do not always see the links between different activities in the lesson and it is suggested that a clear lesson plan should be provided for all students. Students we interviewed were eager to point out that it was important to practise exercise types and skills required, for example commentaries and essays. There were comments about difficulties encountered when students were asked to react with no warning, in a short controlled time period or read an unprepared text. This is echoed in Ackerman & Dykman (1996). These sorts of classroom activity were discouraged in both the literature and in the workshops offered by student support groups, but we do feel that sometimes a challenging activity is justified. (Schneider & Crombie (2003) p 57/58 & 63). If such activities are gradually introduced, initially as prepared tasks, all students should benefit and will be able to react more spontaneously later. After all in real life situations we are not always given notice of what will happen next and what we shall be called upon to do.

## 3. The importance of student's time and their own strategies

*“Dyslexia is a flaw, but it is an advantage in a way, because it makes you think of ways in which to do things in other ways”*

*“ I definitely put a lot of effort and time into it, possibly more than the majority of people. I mean, I've always been quite hardworking anyway and I've felt I can always achieve if I just put all the time in.”*

*“ I have to revise everything a lot more than normal people if I am going to remember it.”*

*“I think if you are dyslexic you just have to put in a lot more effort.”*

*“I’m quite ridiculously organised. Because when I was younger I used to have problems with it, so now I’m very, like, I have a diary, I have filing systems, I have things all over my walls and that kind of thing.”*

*“I have learnt a trick which is to read the conclusion first. I then make a summary based on the conclusion. Then I go to the beginning and then I read it, because then in my mind I think of it as bullet points; I look for arguments to back up the conclusion. It is like being a detective”*

*“Doing things back to front really helps”*

*“I’m quite a colour kind of person”*

Students spoke of having to spend longer on all aspects of their learning and of having to be really well organised. This did discourage some but was accepted by more motivated students, who worked out different and varied coping strategies. As was apparent in the Alladin project report, which centred on students following courses in art and design, dyslexic students are often more creative laterally and enjoy working with colour and shape. See also West (1991). One of our interviewees had actually studied, photography, Art and Maths at A level and begun a course at Art School before deciding to do a degree in Anthropology and languages. Another student mentioned using colours to identify verbs etc. We did find that some of these students were among the best in our groups, they had recognised the need to spend time on their language learning and were rewarded, as were we, by their achievement.

#### **4. Group work and group assessment**

*“Working with other students helps a lot. Pair work – also outside class - should be encouraged more. If I am left on my own I am totally lost”*

*“I think a lot of people would welcome assessed group work. It is a way of sharing the burden”*

Both dyslexic and dyspraxic students expressed a liking for group work and group assessment. Our language courses are generally assessed through a variety of assessment modes both individual coursework, group work, paired orals and unseen examinations as we all believe in giving all students a fair chance. Most language teachers include group work in their lessons. Although this can be helpful for all concerned it can sometimes be difficult to assess. Perhaps we should be able to allow for each member of the team to contribute in their own way and play to their own strengths combining flair with eye to detail. What is additionally awkward is how to assess each team member for accuracy. This leads us into our major problem – how to assess for accuracy when a student has worked on an individual piece of work with a friend.

#### **5. Assessment**

*"I have never before thought about what a struggle it must be for the assessor to mark exams. You don't know whether the mistake is down to the dyslexia"*

*"I don't think allowances should be made for dyslexic students in assessment. I don't see how you can"*

It is interesting to note that our own students recognised the problems tutors encounter in knowing when an error in accuracy is due to a dyslexic problem. In the main, students felt that no allowance should be made in assessment. Making allowances in assessment is impossible, because, as shown in our interviews, students' disabilities varied so much that it would be virtually impossible to make strategic allowances for dyslexia. For example, misspelling and word-order problems, if repeated, may be attributed to dyslexia but agreement, verb endings and major structural errors could be because the student does not know or has not learned the rules, however we do not know.

## **6. Difficulties in specific skill areas**

*"What's the hardest do you think?"*

*"Spoken, probably..... I know everyone has a fear of speaking on a tape in a foreign language, but I just found completely that everything just goes out of my head."*

Generally people consider that dyslexic problems only manifest themselves in written work but students made comments about speaking and listening. In assessing these two skills, it is difficult to know whether the problems are related to dyslexia or just plain nerves. It is very important for tutors to recognise that problems in these areas do exist. Extra time allowed by most examination authorities for written examinations needs to be considered for orals too, unless this causes more panic. Students appreciate free access to listening exercises albeit within a regulated time limit. However in both of these areas the importance of practice and individual student's strategies cannot be over-emphasised. (Schneider & Crombie (2003) p 52, 70) (For full transcripts see Appendix C)

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The number of tutors who responded to the questionnaire was very disappointing. We can only speculate as to the reasons for this. One could be that the timing was unfortunate. The questionnaire was sent out in April just before the Easter vacation and the deadline for completing and returning the questionnaire was 10 May. This is a very busy time for tutors as exams need to be set and administered. Another reason for the poor response could be a concern among the respondents that some institutions were not addressing the problem and that tutors were unhappy about divulging the lack of policy or guidelines.<sup>1</sup>

It became clear that tutors were very concerned about the increasing number of foreign language students who were diagnosed with dyslexia and dyslexic related problems. Often tutors had little support and no extra resources or, importantly, time from their institution to deal with these students. Tutors agreed that standards should

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<sup>1</sup> We have chosen in this report not to identify the institutions that returned the questionnaires, since the number is so small.

not be allowed to fall outside the accepted envelope and that if a student is unable to achieve the learning outcomes s/he should be advised and ultimately should not pass.

Our original aim to offer appropriate ways of assessing dyslexic language learners became closely linked to the adoption of teaching and learning strategies, which would be good practice for **all** language learners. Our research supports research carried out by Margaret Crombie resulting in her comment that it seemed as though methods, which are best for dyslexic students, work for all. (Crombie, M 1999). It became apparent that as long as appropriate strategies were followed in teaching, learning and assessment preparation dyslexic language learners could often be assessed in the same way as all other students.

In an odd way, dyslexic students seem to be the ideal language learners. The reason for this is that – because of their disability – they have developed learning strategies, which would benefit all language learners (repetition, colour coding, self-testing).

The students interviewed acknowledged the difficulties around assessing accuracy in language, and agreed that there should be **no** allowances made. It is acknowledged that the ideal language learning and testing situation has yet to be found.

As a result of this project, we aim in the near future to produce a pamphlet with guidelines for language tutors as well as students.

This is an area of research which would benefit greatly from an expansion in the collection of data surrounding assessment from both tutors and students.

### **Acknowledgements**

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Jenny Hill  
Jannie Roed

April 2006

## Appendix A

### THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX THE SUSSEX LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

We should be grateful if you could answer as many of the questions as possible

The first three questions are **optional**.

1. Name of institution

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2. Name of department

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3. Name of person contact

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#### Information about the institution

4. Which of the following languages are studied on degree programmes?  
Please circle.

French    German    Italian    Spanish    Other please specify

5. Approximately how many students study a language as part of their degree per year?

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6. Does your institution offer special help for language students with dyslexia?

Yes	No	Don't know
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7. Does your institution have a policy on dyslexia and modern language testing?

Yes	No	Don't know
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8. What provisions are made by your institution when testing dyslexic language students?

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9. Are all dyslexic students categorised the same way regardless of the nature of their problem?

Yes	No	Don't know
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If No, please specify

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**10.** Is there a specially designated person at your institution to advise students and tutors on dyslexia?

Yes		No		Don't know	
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**Information about you - the tutor**

**11.** Which language(s) do you teach?

French    German    Italian    Spanish    Other please specify

**12.** Are you always made aware of the presence of dyslexic students in your group?

Yes		No	
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**13.** Over the last few years, how many dyslexic foreign language students have you had

on average per year? \_\_\_\_\_

**14.** Do you make any allowances in your teaching for dyslexic students?

Yes		No	
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If Yes, please specify:

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**15.** What do you consider to be the main problems you encounter in teaching dyslexic language students?

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16. Do you get support or advice from your Head of Department or course convenor on dealing with dyslexic students?

Yes		No	
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17. Do you feel you have enough time to make appropriate allowances for dealing with language students with dyslexia?

Yes		No	
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18. When assessing foreign language students with dyslexia, what allowances do you make in -

Oral proficiency \_\_\_\_\_

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Listening comprehension

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Grammatical accuracy in writing

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Coherence in essays

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19. What are the main problems you encounter when assessing dyslexic language students?

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20. Have you found any particular methods of assessment which are effective?

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21. Would you be happy to collaborate further on this project?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**If Yes, please give a contact number or e-mail address:**

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A final report on this survey will be available in 2006. If you would like a separate summary of the findings, please give your email address:

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**THANK YOU** for completing this questionnaire.



## Appendix B

### THE SUSSEX LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

#### **Hints to support language teaching, learning and assessment for all students but particularly for those with problems such as dyslexia.**

The following are just a few things which might better inform our teaching, in general, and would help those with learning problems, in particular.

This is an initial list in which I have included simple things. Obviously in the best possible of worlds we would try to accommodate and work individually with each student, as every student's needs are different, but we do not always have the time to do this and must not give other students the feeling that we are neglecting them. We need to adopt a sympathetic, not patronising approach

Please feel free to add other things which you find useful.

#### **General guidelines for good practice in language teaching:**

1. Avoid too much 'teacher talking time'!
2. Make sure there is an obvious structure to your class – we always know there is a structure but do the students see it?
3. Written instructions should always be given in the native language
4. Give clear instructions both on paper and orally – not too long or too complex.
5. Always give an example for all exercises (particularly in exams)
6. Give ample practice of exam questions and techniques.
7. Teach one thing at a time, don't try to fit too much in.
8. Use a variety of ways and exercises to reinforce a grammar point or skill.  
See Appendix A
9. Have a pause in class activities, particularly during grammar sessions.
10. Use material which is designed for the right age group and type of students in your group.
11. Use a multi-sensory approach, written, visual, audio stimuli.  
To select good material see Appendix B
12. Don't draw attention to any particular student to make them feel uncomfortable.
13. Try not to force students to read aloud in the early stages of learning a language without having prepared the piece.
14. Do not expect immediacy in oral work at beginner's level – students need to practise beforehand.
15. Take great care in choosing pairs if the pair work is assessed.

#### **For dyslexic students in particular:**

16. Consider using a cream coloured paper for handouts and worksheets.
17. Make sure that handouts are clear and not too busy, yes, it saves paper but may not help in the long run. Use Ariel 12 and not too many CAPITALS.
18. Ideally, handouts and lecture notes should be posted on the web for students to change to the colour and font which suits them best. Not easy for language classes.

NB. Research seems to show that total immersion is unsuitable for students with these learning difficulties.

**Student Strategies** – some onus should be placed on the student him/herself

1. Many students will already have worked out strategies to cope with their learning, which may also help when they are learning a language.
2. They should always have a number of different coloured markers to identify different types of vocabulary or structure.
3. They should practise with a partner for oral examinations.

**Good practice for assessing languages**

1. Have a clear idea of what you want to assess
2. Try out different assessment modes in class during the term.
3. Use a variety of assessment methods – continuous assessment, questions prepared at home, oral work as well as sit down tests and exams.
4. Multiple choice activities can be suitable, give adequate practice and clues such as – eliminate the incorrect answer rather than look at first for correct answer.
5. Consider picture cues
6. Consider testing cultural knowledge in native language
7. Give clear instructions as above 2/4.
8. Do not introduce a new form of exercise just for the test.
9. Give a clear example for each question.
10. Make sure that assessments are interesting and challenging, don't dumb down.
11. Consider an oral/aural test instead of or as well as a written one. Take care here as some students will have equal difficulties orally.
12. Consider the test environment. Is it as good as it can be? Don't bring in a pot of green paint to create an illusion of calm, but.....!!
13. Create, if possible, a friendly test atmosphere?! – Can the student ask questions of clarification?

**For dyslexic students in particular:**

14. Consider a separate room.
15. Could the assessment be completed on the PC without losing sight of what is being tested?
16. Cloze (gap-filling) and matching exercises are very difficult for these students.
17. Remember that the student's problems may not only be with the written word but may affect oral and aural skills.
18. Always allow more time if you are advised to by the Support Unit, although sometimes it only serves to prolong the student's agony.

We should remember that we are always trying to do our best. We are not asked to make unreasonable adjustments but those which are possible. Most of those I have listed above could benefit all students.

**Appendix a** – acknowledgement Schneider, E., Crombie, M. Dyslexia and Foreign Language Learning BDA. David Fulton Publishers, London 2003

**Memory aids**

Test-taking: essay question: REMEMBER

- R: Read the questions carefully
- E: Eliminate difficult questions – go for easy ones first
- M: Mark key words in question to focus
- E: Eliminate irrelevant information that crosses your mind
- M: Mark down keywords – what you want to say
- B: Breathe to give your brain oxygen
- E: Estimate time you can take to answer question
- R: Respond and recheck answer

**Appendix b** acknowledgement – The Alladin Project

**Do's and Don'ts when selecting learning materials**

<b>Look for the following:</b>	<b>Avoid:</b>
A clear uncluttered layout	An over-crowded style of presentation
Left-justified margin	Fancy or unusual fonts and italics
Selective use of bold and bullet points	Small fonts (below 12)
Adequate spacing	Whole words or phrases in capital letters
Pictograms and graphics	Text reproduced over visuals
Diagrams and charts	Text reproduced in either red or green

Jenny Hill 12.5.2005  
 Jannie Roed 23.5.2005

## Appendix C - Student interviews

Interview with C - student - female

JR - Jannie Roed

C

JR: So, could you just tell me again a couple of, could you just tell me when did you realise that you had a problem, or that it, that not everybody was like you.

C: Yeah, well it was really, I mean all my schooling my spelling's always been horrendous. And my Mum's always thought that maybe I was a bit dyslexic because my writing's never been very good, and just like that kind of thing, but I only had the test when I was actually in university, my first year. And also for my A Levels I did Art, Photography and Maths, so they were, I don't know, my Maths was fairly strong as well, and I think I kind of avoided doing any subjects that I had the problems in. So I didn't really notice it so much. I mean, I did OK in my GCSEs. I work quite hard, I've always worked quite hard so I think I've managed to work through a lot of things.

JR: Yes, so it's really, so that's your way of compensating.

C: Yeah, I think so. I've just put a lot of time into a lot of things. Especially with the languages, like, because through my GCSEs, the French was, I don't know. My Dad's actually French, so I've always been exposed to French from a young age, but I've never really got it, and I've always found it really, really difficult. And then when I, I did it at school but I had a tutor and I managed to get an A at GCSE, but I never really understood what was going on. I don't really remember really getting it.

JR: You speak it well then, don't you?

C: I didn't then, at all. I used to go over there and my Dad always spoke English to me because, and that was just a bit awkward. But then I did Art Foundation after school, and then I went to live in France for a year because I just really felt like I really needed to be able to speak French, because I couldn't speak to any of my grandparents or anything. So I went there for a whole year, and that's when I really learnt to speak French. I also like started language classes in France, from like the beginning, and that's when it really, I spent the whole year basically doing language classes, like four hours a day sometimes, two hours a day other times. And that's how I got my French basically up to A Level standard after a year. When I started in France, because it had been three years since my GCSE, I actually started at the beginners again.

JR: Right then, it must have been really hard work in France. Was it?

C: Yeah. I did find it really hard, especially like the first three months or something. Because when they teach French in France, or when I got taught it, it was very very grammar-based, which I'd never really done before. Because at school they kind of skip over the grammar somehow. But I think, so it was really hard at the beginning, it was just like 'grammar grammar', like you know at least a couple of hours a day just for grammar, really strong on that. But I think eventually, there were definitely times when I was in

tears because I didn't understand it, I'd ring up my Mum. But then I think I kind of pushed through it. You know, I did put a lot of time because I wasn't actually even working when I was there, so I literally spent my whole time doing French. Like, pretty much the whole year was dedicated to learning French, every moment of every day I'd like try to read the paper or you know watch TV or speak to someone French.

JR: Can I ask you, how did you, how do you go about learning a grammatical structure? How would you begin to explain that?

C: Mmm, for me I had like, I didn't like, for verb endings and stuff, it was just literally writing them down like 15, you know like writing them down continually for me. That's what I do now in Spanish still if I need to learn the verb endings, I'll literally write them down on a scrap piece of paper, like 10 or 15 times over and over again, because that's just how it gets in my head. Otherwise...

JR: Does that suggest you had some kind of photographic, if you see it written down then that sort of, or is it just repetition?

C: No, I don't think I that's it, I think it's the repetition of writing it. Because if I was reading it over and over again, I'd forget it now or later. For me it's really the act of writing somehow, I don't know if maybe that makes a different connection in the brain or whatever, I don't really know about it but... For me that's definitely what helps with that kind of learning. And vocabulary as well, if there's a word that I can just never remember, I'll just write it down 15 times on a scrap piece of paper, and then it would stick more, not necessarily always but more likely to. I think with like the grammatical structures I used to have like books with loads of exercises with the answers in the back. And I think I sort of like treated it like maths to a certain degree, because I'd just literally do loads until, like, you know, like 30 or 40 until I kind of got it, like trial and error and I had the answers. Because that will help me if I didn't understand something in the class, then if I could I'd spend like two hours at home trying to, just trying it and, yeah trial and error really until I figured it out. So I think that kind of thing was definitely what helped me.

JR: Can I ask a sort of more personal question, because you chose to do a language degree, and clearly you're good at maths and stuff, so you chose to do a degree where you knew that you would work probably a lot harder to achieve the same. What made you do that?

C: Erm, well, I also because as I say my, it's a bit complicated really, because my three A Levels were Art, Photography and Maths, because I thought I was going to do Costume Design. And I went to Art School and that didn't really work out, and then I went to France, and I just didn't really, I was completely like I didn't know what to do because I knew I didn't really want to do that, but I didn't really know. And then eventually like five months into being there, I started really thinking I really enjoy learning French and it's definitely something I want to not lose, and I wanted to carry on. And I do Anthropology as well as my major, erm, I just did that because, that's probably more challenging to me than the languages to be honest, just because I, I think a lot of my problems really lie with reading texts and understanding and putting things in my own words, and I find that much more difficult than the la... I think that's just really what I'm more used to, the languages now is just kind of like it's, I've kind of trained myself how to do it, so it's all, like I've been doing Spanish now for the last two years and it's just been really easy, because I think I just, it's a matter of learning stuff, but my brain kind of knows what to do with it. So it's just kind of quite systematic.

JR: Perhaps, I've never thought of that, but perhaps your mathematical background helps you in that sort of systematic way.

C: Yeah.

JR: The texts you say in Anthropology, that's a concern you've had to work with.

C: Yeah, yeah. Well definitely something I'm worried about next year is having to read French texts that are also, you know, quite complicated, and extrapolating what they're trying to say and then reformulating it in my own words. In English that's probably the thing I find the most difficult. And reading and actually understanding more difficult texts.

JR: Yes, yes.

C: But, erm, I mean with the maths as well, I was, I wasn't naturally great at it, I definitely had to work a lot at that. I mean, my first year I did it at school, I got a C and a D, and then I had a tutor and I really like, I definitely put a lot of hours into it, and eventually I got a B, a high B, so that was good. But I always quite enjoyed maths, I think I enjoyed the systematicness of "right, wrong", which is why Anthropology is definitely quite a challenge after that! It's a change!

JR: Can I, erm, I think some of these questions you've already answered, it's just a couple... So, which languages do you speak? You speak Spanish and French and...?

C: Well, I speak English sort of as...

JR: That's your native?

C: Yeah native, and then French. I wouldn't say I, I've been learning Spanish for two years so I wouldn't say I spoke it, I haven't really had the opportunity to try too much apart from in classes, so probably better at writing it I think. But, erm, I can understand quite a lot because I went to Spain last year for a month to work, but I was doing a camp for kids to learn English, so you're always speaking English, but you're hearing Spanish a lot. So I think my Spanish understanding has actually improved a lot from that.

JR: So that's two foreign languages that you've tackled?

C: Yeah.

JR: Great. Erm, now the problems you encounter, do you think they're the same when you learned French and, you said Spanish was really easy?

C: Mm, to be honest I haven't really had any problems learning Spanish.

JR: Do you know that, you probably do know that with dyslexia French is the most difficult language to learn, and they say Spanish is the easiest.

C: Oh right? I didn't know that, but I mean French I definitely found very very difficult when I was learning it, it was quite stressful at times, you know. I found it really hard. But I think also because Spanish is quite similar, I definitely apply the same rules and everything but I just, for me Spanish...

JR: It's easier to spell, isn't it?

C: Yeah, first of all it's been much easier to spell, and like to be honest my spelling in French is probably better than my spelling in English, because I think French is more phonetic than English is maybe. And I maybe learnt it more as opposed to putting up with it. But with Spanish it's quite, erm, I think it's just because I've learnt it all in French, and it's just literally a matter of learning different words and different endings, and occasionally different ways of putting it together, but it just seems to be quite natural to me. I think even when I was, I think in France it took me like three months before I could really understand what people were saying to me. In Spain it was like three, you know, two weeks and I could get a lot better, so I think maybe my, from having done it once, my kind of, my whole brain is maybe tuned in better to doing it again. I don't know, I could try it with another language and see if it works afterwards.

JR: Well you did learn French the hard way, which is just being dumped there, it is really stressful to not know what's going on around you.

C: Yeah.

JR: Do you, about strategies you've developed to cope, you've sort of said a bit about, I mean you're also somehow putting a lot of work into everything.

C: Yeah, to be honest I definitely, when I think of people I was doing classes with at the time, I definitely put a lot of effort and time into it, possibly more than the majority of people. Just, I mean I've always been quite hardworking anyway, and I've felt I can always achieve if I just put all the time in. So I, that's definitely something that I have done, with the Spanish I haven't so much because it's come much more naturally to me, but I still have to put effort in to learning things, but it hasn't been a struggle, it's just been a matter of doing it, whereas with the French at the time it was more of a struggle. But erm I put a lot of hours into it, and I think that's probably the main thing.

JR: How do you cope with, have you developed a strategy for texts, so like in Anthropology when you are faced with complicated texts where you have to, how do you go about that?

C: Erm, I often highlight the bits but I often don't understand them the first time I read them, and then so I'll highlight them. And then often if I go back and make notes, then I understand it. And then sometimes, you know, when I'm revising now I feel like if I go back over the notes, then try to understand them from that, and if I don't then go back to the text. Yeah lots of, to me, lots of repetition really, which is time-consuming but it's the way that seems to work.

JR: Do you get any support?

C: I don't actually, I think I'm open to it but I've never taken it up.

JR: OK. What about working with fellow students, is that a way that you...

C: Yeah, for the Anthropology more. With the languages as I say, I think I haven't found it so difficult since I've been here, like the French has been a bit difficult, but nothing that I haven't done before really. I think for me as well I think definitely if I'm familiar with it,

it's not so much of a thing. It's when, for example we had one French exam where we had to do a *commentaire* as opposed to an essay or a grammar exam, which is always what we'd done before, and then that I got a very very low mark, because I just wasn't really prepared for it. We'd done one practice but I hadn't really understood it. Erm, but since then I did a lot of practices off my own bat and gave them to the teacher, and she marked them, and I had another one in just now at the end of term and I think that went definitely a lot better, I haven't got the mark back yet.

JR: But that's sort of one of those things that's not very good practice, you don't give students a kind of new thing they've never seen before, so...

C: Yeah.

JR: Is there any kind of assessment that you feel comfortable with, that you like, or don't feel threatened by?

C: Again I think it's what I'm most used to doing, because for me the like grammar exams now, because I learnt the grammar so strongly in French, they were most easy things, they were almost like similar to maths in a way, you know you revise the rules and you just have to sort of apply them. But erm, I've probably found that most easy. And then I guess, the essays I've kind of done a lot of them over the last three years, so I wasn't so nervous about doing that because I was familiar with doing them in that situation. But for example with the *commentaire* I was so nervous doing that, I definitely didn't like doing that type of assessment because I didn't feel comfortable with it, I wasn't really sure what to do. So now after having practiced I'm OK with them. Erm, I think orals are always something that's a bit difficult. Erm, but again I did a lot of practices so I felt slightly more comfortable with that at the end than I had been the year before.

JR: Why don't you find that, because your French must be pretty good?

C: I think orals are just very nerve-wracking when you're doing them. I don't know...

JR: That probably doesn't have anything to do with your issues.

C: No, yeah, that's not true. No, you're right. Erm, I guess the orals aren't, I don't know how much that affects it really. I think the first time it was definitely more nerve-wracking, but I've practised it so it got easier. But something I definitely feel that I was really good at learning languages but I really really worked at it, and now I am good at learning languages as a result of that, as opposed to just being naturally good at it. I really found it so difficult at the beginning.

JR: OK. But you've persevered which is great. Is there anything that you, do you have any idea about how to assess accuracy? You don't make mistakes?

C: Well I do make mistakes, but erm I think it's a difficult one because I think, I think maybe with spelling maybe some allowances would be good, but when it comes to like, I know that in English they'll give you some grammar allowances, but in a language that's kind of the whole point. So I don't know, I mean I probably, I think for me I think there maybe just needs to be, I think it's a difficult one definitely. I don't know, I think spelling allowances with some people that could be probably quite helpful, because obviously when you're assessing stuff in English it's what you're saying as opposed to how you're saying it. Whereas with this, with languages it's really how you're saying it as opposed to

what you're saying. So I think to be honest I don't know how many allowances can be made to a certain extent because the whole point is that you have to be able to speak it. I mean, it's a difficult one.

JR: But that's it, isn't it. You get a degree in say French, and people would expect you to have mastered, you know to write in French to a certain degree, so it is really hard and I'm not sure we'll find a solution.

C: I think, one thing that I'd say that I reckon people might find helpful is just literally to be given the opportunity that if they can put more work in what they need to do, like quite structured, you could do if you find this difficult you could do all these exercises, so it's not ideal but I think that is something that I would definitely find, have definitely found helpful to be like "oh I don't understand this" and to have a lot of examples that I could work on it. I mean, with my grammar and French even, I had the rules drummed into me so much in France, like unbelievably, because they're so strong on that. But I still make mistakes because I forget them, or I didn't check that, or I just read it and didn't realise, or was writing quickly and just completely forgotten it. But I think, I mean, I don't that, I think extra time is definitely useful, to have that time to read it all through and to re-check it, and definitely I think I re-check stuff quite slowly, like I read it through very slowly and carefully and it often takes 10 or 15 minutes to actually read it through checking it. So that's definitely helpful. I don't know, I'm not very dyslexic so it's hard for me to say.

JR: Do you think for instance, if you think your condition had been say five or six times worse, and real problems getting accurate like some students are. But erm, I don't know, I think there is a tendency as you said that people choose not to, they don't think of languages because they have, but it would be nice if they could find a way of assessing them so that it wouldn't put them off.

C: No I definitely agree with you, it is definitely, I know a lot of people with dyslexia who say "oh I'm not good at languages" or "I can't do that", like one of my ex-boyfriends was actually told he shouldn't do it in school because he was going to get such a bad mark, they said you shouldn't bother doing it and stuff like that, which I think is really bad.

JR: It's awful isn't it, because it really cuts people off from the very good experience of speaking other languages. So yeah. I think we've covered everything. Is there anything you think would be useful for us to know, any particular things that you've come across.

C: I think just that in my experience it's really good to know what you're going to be assessed on, and to be given practices and that sort of thing. That's definitely helped me, so then if people do want to spend extra time into it, they have a structured way of doing it and know what's expected of them.

JR: Yes.

C: Because for me, obviously different people are different, but for me the repetition is just really what has done it.

JR: And of course given the way you work, you said you'd spent much more time on it, then it's important to know where to focus that extra effort, isn't it? Because otherwise, especially with languages..

C: Yeah, you can spend hours doing something and then it not help.

JR: Because you won't be assessed on that. I think that's a very important thing to get across. So, yeah. It's only when you make noise that it's activated. Very smart. Well thank you very much for your time, and I wish you very good luck.

C: And if you have any other questions you can always email me.

JR: Thank you. Certainly it won't be until next year that we'll have the report, but if you want to see it.

C: Yeah I'd be interested to. Will it be on the website do you think?

JR: It'll be on a website, it will certainly, because we're only interviewing three of you so we can manage to get you a copy.

Interview with L1 - student - female

JR – Jannie Roed

L – L1

JR: So, you just, er, what languages are you? You're a second year student? Well, you're a first year student?

L: I'm a first year again.

JR: It's your second year.

L: Last year I did Italian, and this year I'm taking Spanish, just to confuse myself a little bit more.

JR: Oh right? So why did you change languages?

L: Because, basically, erm, about five, four or five years ago, I took GCSE Spanish, and had quite a few Spanish friends, so I spoke quite a bit of Spanish. Erm, coming to uni I thought "that's a very long time ago, I'll take Italian, it'll be fun", but started talking Spanish and writing Spanish in my Italian classes, mixed together. Which was a bit silly. Erm, so I decided to change back, having some theory that I probably have more knowledge in Spanish, somewhere in my head, deep down. But also I think Spanish is probably more useful, more people speak it and so on.

JR: Oh right, good. Are you... what kind of problems do you have? Are you dyslexic?

L: Yeah, I am dyslexic.

JR: Is it bad, or...?

L: I'm pretty much quite dyslexic yeah, I get extra time and for a long amount of my life couldn't spell a lot of things.

JR: Can you tell me a bit of how it manifests itself? Because you know there are all kinds of different types of dyslexia.

L: Erm, well I don't know what type, there's not like a classification.

JR: No, no. Just try and explain what the problem, you know, how does it manifest itself?

L: Well, I read ridiculously slowly. If I don't make notes on everything I read, I've not got a hope of remembering anything. Erm, I have to revise everything a lot more than normal people if I'm going to remember it. Erm, and if I'm doing verbs for example in a language, I have to learn them really, really, really well before I can use them. Like, vocabulary's not such a problem as the actual grammar of the thing. But that's partly because I think in schools in this country, you don't really get taught grammar. You're just expected to know. And then you try and learn a language, and they just say "oh, well this is the subjunctive", and in England they don't really ever teach you what that is, you know. And you're trying to find out that, while learning a new language. Which is a bit, you know, crazy. But also I do confuse the two languages quite a lot.

JR: But that's easy to do even if you don't have any dyslexia.

L: Yeah, I suppose. I don't know.

JR: They're quite similar, aren't they?

L: They are quite similar. But, I don't know, some people manage to learn like, so many languages. Some people I know just have them in different blocks somehow? I don't understand. But also things, like with languages and that kind of thing, often, really really often, I'll know a word and I'll know what it means, but I just can't remember it. That's the thing with dyslexia, often it is. Like you know the information, but often you just can't bring it, like make it come back. There's a word for that, I can't think.

JR: Retrieval?

L: Retrieval, yeah.

JR: Right. So, do you have problems with generally organising your time and that kind of thing?

L: Erm, I'm quite ridiculously organised. Because when I was younger I used to have problems with it, so now I'm very, like, I have a diary, I have filing systems, I have things all over my walls and that kind of thing.

JR: Because that was one of the things that I was going to ask you, was erm the strategies you've developed to cope.

L: Yeah, I'm quite a visual person, I like colour and I like silly little pictures and stuff, and like, erm. I find, if I take notes in a lecture or in a class or whatever, I won't read them again if they're just like that. I have to write them out again, which helps me remember them. If I write them out and highlight bits and colour bits and, like, contents and stuff? It sounds silly but just having a contents so you know, like, you can look up "oh, how do I do verbs?" or... Because when you're trying to write something at a later point, you need to know where to find it in your book or whatever.

JR: OK. Do you, the fact that you're a visual person, do you use that when you learn languages? Do you sort of colour verbs in blue, or...

L: I'm quite a colour kind of person, like, I have, erm Spanish and English say in different languages, er, in different colours next to each other. And often a note in another colour of how they work or whatever.

JR: OK.

L: You know, like the form "I" or "you" or whatever down the side. That kind of thing.

JR: Oh right. When you then work in Spanish, for instance, write something in Spanish, is that something you then see? Do you see this as the green part, and this as the...?

L: I don't tend to do it so much as that, but it's just that it makes me look at it again. And it's easier, it's actually easier to read I find. Like, there's that thing if you have just a sheet

of white written paper printed, you can read it but it's a lot harder than if it's actually coloured. So I end up highlighting and other things like that. Like actually printed stuff.

JR: OK, yes.

L: It's just not going to, I mean like it's readable, but I can't really explain. But it's a lot easier to read if it's coloured, and also the main points as well are easier to find, they stick out and stuff.

JR: Could you try and explain how you go about learning a new language? When you are studying Spanish, how do you do it? Do you watch television, do you listen to the radio, do you read?

L: I would say a main thing of it is that you have to try and do a lot of different things. And it's variety that keeps you interested and brings it all together, sort of thing. But I would say, erm, a main thing is sort of have your rules, say for conjugating, whatever texts, you put them down in easy steps. Say, "Number 1: you take off the 'ar'. Number 2: put one of the following endings".

JR: So you do that?

L: I do that literally, just step by step because it's a lot easier to remember it that way.

JR: And does that work when you speak, for instance? Are you so quick that you have to do steps...

L: Erm, I think speaking generally is... you get better at it by practice. Like, the only way you can speak confidently is if you know in your head already the third person ends in 'a' or whatever, in the present tense, or you know 'ar' verbs or whatever. And that kind of thing you need to learn by practice. But to actually learn the endings or whatever, you need to have it written down really simply. Like some people just, I don't know, some people write "oh these are the endings for reflexive verbs", but for reflexive verbs you have to move bits about and have funny endings and, I think it's a lot easier if you have step-by-step.

JR: Is it, when you think about how you've been taught languages, and I'm not just thinking, and you can speak freely about, it won't come back to anybody, do you feel that it's been taught in a way which is helpful to you? Is that something extra work, do you have to do extra work to go back and...

L: I think at school level generally languages were taught badly. I think here they're taught better, but I think if you are dyslexic or something then you just have to put in a lot more effort. Like, even if you do just the exercises or something that they've set you, you've not got a hope basically. You need to make your own notes and you need to do your own practice as well.

JR: Is there any, could you give sort of, some help. Could you say, if you as a dyslexic language learner were asked to design a course in Spanish, could you say what part in particular would you focus on? Because the thing is that, you have a particular problem, but perhaps language could be taught so that it would help others as well. You see what I mean? If there's something you could say to a teacher, it would be really helpful for me if you did this.

L: I think probably grammar is a big thing. Because grammar is the main thing with a language that you have to really know, I mean there's vocab and stuff but to get, sort of, notes that everyone understands on every point is very tricky I'd say. They have to be like really well structured. Often, I've found the grammar you get for a course is like in the textbook and it's sort of written out in grammar sections, but they don't necessarily make sense or whatever. I'd say definitely make sure everyone understands the grammar.

JR: And how could that be done do you think? How would you set out so that...

L: Maybe have a sheet, for each tense say, written I don't know... Maybe write it together as a class. Like, go through whatever's in your textbook, and then write on the board, the teacher say, these are the main points or whatever, and photocopy it or something. Just so you have the main things on a sheet for each one, I think that'd be really helpful.

JR: And you said as a class, so you're suggesting that you could actually make the class...

L: I think participation is a big thing, it kind of helps people keep their attention and be involved and stuff. You remember stuff a lot more like definitely. But just like, I don't know, because often they'll go "oh read this bit in your book", and it'll tell you how to do the pluperfect, but you might go home and read that and go "what? Arrgh!" Erm, so I think maybe do that but then come back the next time and say "what do you think the main points were?" and put them down, and put down how you conjugate it, and put some examples or something like that.

JR: Great. No, I think that's really useful. About assessment, I was going to ask you about assessments.

L: Don't write half your Italian paper in Spanish, that's the first point for anybody!

JR: I was going to ask you how you, what kind of assessment, I know it's a strange question, but what kind of assessment do you feel most comfortable with? When you're talking about languages.

L: Erm, well we had four different ones. We had speaking, listening, writing and portfolio, like handing in work.

JR: And which one of those would you prefer?

L: I think in a way you have to do all of them, because otherwise there's no point really in learning the language. Because you need to learn to speak and you need to understand what people say to you. And write it or whatever.

JR: So you're quite happy with it that way?

L: I'm quite happy, I find it quite hard some of it, but I think it's necessary.

JR: What's the hardest do you think?

L: Erm, spoken probably. Like just, I know everyone has a fear of speaking on a tape in a foreign language, but I just found completely that everything just goes out of my head.

And like we had one point where we were allowed to just say a speech that we knew, and I knew it, and outside the door I could have told you it thirty times, but as soon as you go in you know it just disappeared.

JR: So that's this retrieval thing again?

L: It's a retrieval problem, which makes it really hard.

JR: But you said you have Spanish friends, do you speak Spanish to them sometimes?

L: A long time ago, like five years ago.

JR: Right.

L: But this was Italian that I took, so it doesn't really help.

JR: Do you feel, is that combined with nerves?

L: Definitely. Like, retrieval is a lot worse if you're nervous. But maybe, I mean, I suppose it probably wouldn't be seen as fair though, if you completely messed it up to be allowed to start again. Literally to sit, breathe, and start again, not go outside and practice or whatever. Just because it disappears out of your head.

JR: So were you to sit there and let us know when you're ready, would that help?

L: I don't know, I think you'd probably just sit there going "arrgh I want out".

JR: Yeah.

L: But I don't know how to really tackle that, it's really hard because it's sort of exam situation, exam nerves, but you've obviously got to do it then, but if actually just all go out of your head, you're in big trouble then really.

JR: Yes, I see. Do you receive any support? From the university regarding...

L: No. Nothing. Because the only sort of thing they offer is you can have someone who will go over your notes with you, but I mean I do that myself and somebody telling you a different way to write it probably wouldn't actually help me. Or the other things are like "this is how you can write notes" but I've done that six thousand times in my life because I've been to various dyslexia things, study skill kind of things.

JR: What about with other students? Do you work with other students?

L: Erm, for languages you mean? Well, for sort of conversational things. But not really other things.

JR: OK. Have you got any idea how to assess accuracy? You know, if you write an essay in Italian, or Spanish, and you make mistakes in the grammar section, how can the teacher tell whether it's because you're dyslexic?

L: They probably can't, is my honest answer.

JR: And how do you feel they should assess you, should they take into account, it's not just you...

L: Yeah, dyslexic people.

JR: ...do you think it would be fair just to say "sorry, this is an area where we just can't take that kind of disability".

L: Isn't that what happens at the moment? I think. I thought that was what it was at the moment?

JR: Do you think that's fair?

L: I don't know, for me I think dyslexia is a flaw but it's an advantage in a way as well, because it makes you able to think of things in other ways. I mean, it probably makes learning a language a lot harder, but it makes other things easier say, maybe. So in a way maybe it shouldn't be taken into account, but also it's account for so many other subjects, so maybe it should be for that as well, on that kind of score.

JR: Yes. It's just more difficult.

L: It is tricky. I mean, maybe the only way to do it is sort of give five per cent or something extra, or take five percent less off, or whatever from their mark. I don't think there's a way you could go through and go "this is a dyslexic silly blunder", because I think it'd probably look the same, but I wouldn't know. I mean, I can't read other languages like that and tell you.

JR: No. What about... there's something you just said about... oh it's gone now. Old age.

L: Yeah, old age, dyslexia, it's all the same!

JR: Yeah. I think we've covered... yeah, I remember now, I think it's because of dyslexia, I mean if you're an engineering student, it doesn't really matter whether your English is perfect or... so, it could be problems with organisations. I know now what I was going to ask you- does it help to have extra time in exams?

L: In Spanish or whatever, in languages?

JR: Yes, in languages.

L: Erm... Yes and no. I mean, you don't get it for listening at all. I mean, you do for extra writing time, but there's no point because the tape's played or whatever.

JR: So it would help to listen to it an extra time?

L: Yeah, but the rest of your class would probably kill you at that point.

JR: How long are you allowed to, how many times are you allowed to...?

L: Twice usually.

JR: Right. So that could be changed.

L: What, for the whole class?

JR: Yes, why not?

L: Well....

JR: Everybody benefits then.

L: Yes but that just makes it easier I think, and I don't, I don't think they kind of want... I don't know, I think listening, I've done foundation though I think listening really, listening's not my big issue. Erm, it's more sort of remembering and retrieval and stuff. Whereas listening it's generally like "oh what did Carla say to Bert" and stuff, and you can sort of say "well she said this" or whatever, which is easy enough because you've literally just heard it. Or you can guess. Or you can do questions about it. Whereas with writing or something I suppose it is more useful having extra time because you've got to plan what you're going to write, and you've got to check, try and check your errors or whatever. Erm, I mean speaking as well you don't extra time, but I don't really... there wouldn't be any point really.

JR: No.

L: Unless maybe it was sort of preparation time, what you were saying really.

JR: Would that be useful?

L: I don't know.

JR: An oral exam with preparation time, would that be useful? So you actually...

L: It depends like preparation time in what sense I suppose.

JR: Well at the moment you just walk in don't you?

L: Yeah, you all sit in the hall, and you just walk in one at time, and go "right so" all in Italian, "tell me about your family" or whatever, and you have to go "bomp", and that's the point at which nerves and dyslexia go "arrgh" and you forget everything, you know.

JR: So would it sort of be, would it be helpful to say you know "I'm going to ask you a bit about your family, I'm going to ask you..."

L: And give you ten seconds to think. Maybe.

JR: Ten minutes, yeah? I mean that would again help with dyslexia, wouldn't it?

L: It would help. Yeah.

JR: Just to calm people down. So that's something I think worth thinking about, maybe the small changes that can be done.

L: But I mean then if you were going to implement that, you could always give non-dyslexics five minutes and dyslexics six minutes, if you're trying to do the extra time thing, you know what I mean.

JR: Yes, you could do that.

L: But I don't know if you actually need that long to prepare, but...

JR: No, but it's just to collect your thoughts.

L: But the problem is it's quite, it's sort of meant to be spontaneous speech, I think that's the problem. Erm... so, I don't know. Also, say they ask you about your family, and you say "I've got a brother who's interested in this", they'll ask you "oh, does your brother like this?" and you'll just go "yes". You know because you don't think as well. The point is it's supposed to be like a normal conversation you'd have, it's not meant to all be planned. That's the problem.

JR: No. I mean, I suppose at beginners stage it is fairly planned, isn't it?

L: Yeah.

JR: You would give your brother all kinds of interests, as long as you know the words for them.

L: Oh yeah, like sky diving and horses, and you know...

JR: I think we've covered everything. Is there anything you'd like to add that you can think of that might be useful for us?

L: Erm, there was one thing I thought of actually. Erm, as a general point it would be useful if there were more exercises available for practising. Like...

JR: What kind?

L: Grammar probably. Because often they give you like two exercises, or there's two in the book. And that's good, sure, but if you've got to practise it in your own time because you've not got a hope of remembering it, there's no point doing the same ones because you will actually remember the answers.

JR: OK.

L: Or they'll come back to you. You need like... That's just them recommending some activity book or something, but the fact that they might be willing to mark it for you as well.

JR: So something like a work site where you could fill in answers and get feedback, that would be useful?

L: Yeah, that would be quite good. I mean, there are various websites on the internet, I know that, but I mean teachers telling you ones that are relevant or that kind of thing.

JR: Yes, they should be tied into your general course. No, that's great. Thank you very much. That was really good, if I can just stop this...

Interview with K - student - female

JR - Jannie Roed

K

JR: What's your subject?

K: Psychology, so I'm actually quite interested. I'm thinking, I've noticed that next year you can actually do a course which is, erm, like something about dyslexia, so I'm obviously quite interested, so I thought it was quite interesting to take part in this.

JR: Oh? Well I can tell you that we have a colleague at City University in London who is in the Psychology Department who's working with dyslexic students. I'll give you his contact number if you're interested.

K: Yeah, I do find it interesting, especially the thing about learning a language, because like they tend to say when you're learning a language your dyslexia doesn't play... your dyslexia's not there.

JR: That's one theory.

K: That's what people have said, but I don't know because I think, well my thought was if someone gave me that passage to read out in a seminar or something, I'd just like sort struggle to read that completely correctly out loud and everything, but then reading or suddenly being asked to read something in Spanish out loud in the class, without having seen it before is like I think really hard.

JR: So that's one thing you can say, that it's not a good idea to give students something they haven't prepared.

K: No, because what I used to find myself doing is not really paying that much attention, but in the, to actually what was going on at the time. I was trying to scan ahead and anticipate when I would be asked to read, so I was trying to read my section which I thought I might have to read out, because I knew that if it got to me, otherwise it's just embarrassing because you're just sort of hesitating or and then you just do it wrong because you're...

JR: Well that's a very useful thing to know, because even if you don't have a problem reading out, it's not nice just to be told...

K: Well then you're not really paying, the class is then not really that useful because you're not actually taking part in what's going on because you're so worried about when you're going to be asked to read, and not sort of make a fool of yourself, you're trying to be prepared for when you're asked to do it.

JR: What language...?

K: Spanish.

JR: So can I ask when did you discover, or have you always known that you were dyslexic?

K: Erm, I think it's quite, there's quite a strong, on my Mum's side of the family there's loads of people that are dyslexic, my sister's dyslexic, she's just started uni with a disabled student allowance, and quite a lot of my cousins, all the ones that went to uni have got it, and I think my Mum, like at the time I don't know if they really didn't test so much for it then, but my Mum would definitely be dyslexic and my Aunt, it's quite strong on my Mum's side of the family. But erm, sorry what did you ask me?

JR: When were you aware of it?

K: When I was at primary school, learning to read and stuff, they said to my Mum, they asked her if she wanted to go on a course about dyslexia. Because although they wouldn't test for it I think at that stage, I think it was expensive or something, but obviously when I was learning to read they were obviously aware that something was not quite right, and then I always had what they called 'special needs' and flashcards and all that stuff at primary school. But then when I got to secondary school, I didn't have any sort of help at all there, which I was actually sort of glad about in a way, because I used to hate being taken out of class and then doing these things, and then going back into class and you're not quite sure what's going on. And I'd sort of come up with my own sort of strategies and stuff by then.

JR: Can you tell me a bit about that? Your strategies?

K: I think basically it just does take me, I know that I have to spend a lot longer doing something than you know the rest of the people, just making sure that you, I have to read something, have to highlight it and make notes. The biggest thing for me is that when you go to, you know you've got to do some reading for a seminar, but it's just so daunting. I'll always look to see how much I've got to read, and I'm like "oh my god, 40 pages, I can't read that". That's sort of the worst thing, just the thought of having to do it. But yeah there's different things, like different revision things.

JR: Do you not work with other students, would that make it easier to get through a seminar?

K: I don't know, because, I haven't, because I've been doing it independently. It's good in seminars when you're put in a group and stuff, but if I was doing a presentation and stuff, before I've even met up I'd make sure that I knew, because I knew that if we were all researching it at the same time, in theory I would have had to do a bit before because I wouldn't take it in, be able to read it and take it in quick enough.

JR: So you're sort of quite, you seem quite to be saying "I have to spend more time".

K: Mm, definitely, definitely.

JR: Don't you resent it sometimes? Or has it just become...?

K: Yeah, I think probably not such a good thing, but I sort of do, if it does get, if I do not do the reading and stuff, like last year there was loads of stuff that I didn't even really read. Because I was doing Spanish and it took me so much time, Spanish, I may have, it was only my elective, but I may as well have been doing a Spanish degree for the amount of time I spent doing Spanish last year. But it wasn't so bad because it was the first year and I had the Psychology A Level, so I did know, you know sort of in the

seminars, even though I hadn't done the reading, I could you know get away with it and still have a few things to say and stuff.

JR: What made you choose to do a language then?

K: Well, I've always, sort of, really really wanted to be able to speak in a language, and I love Spanish, I think it's a really nice language. And I took a gap year and did a month's, I did a, the last part of it was a month's language course, erm, in South America. Which was really really good. And I just thought it'd be really nice to, because I'm doing an elective, I thought it'd be nice to pick it up. But I went into Intermediate, and I just found it, I did find it really hard. But it was nice because at the end my teacher said that she thought I'd definitely improved the most out of everyone, because when I went into the class I think she was like "Oh my god, she's terrible!" because most people had done A Level, but I did AS but I didn't do very well at my AS and I dropped it, because I just thought I spend too much time on it, it stresses me out too much, I'm just going to carry on with the ones that I know. Because what I found with a language, however hard, however much time you spend with it, I still can't get the grades, because if it was something for Psychology, if I spent enough time I know that I'd come out with a good grade. With Spanish, if I spend a lot of time with it, but I still will get around 50%, you know, I'd never get into higher grades, erm however much time, because you can't just read a book and then "oh yeah, I know Spanish".

JR: Can you tell me a bit about how you, when you learn a language, how you go about it? How do you work your way through?

K: Erm... I don't know. I know it's probably not a good thing, but I know I do spend a lot of time looking things up in the dictionary, which is probably not the best thing. But then I sort of, so that you're familiar with the words, because that was the thing I was finding last year, a lot of the texts which we were coming across in the class, they were words which we completely unfamiliar to me because, you know, because it was getting to more advanced stuff, and it wasn't just sort of stuff you'd come across every day. Like some things I was looking up in the dictionary and I was like "what is that, in English?", do you know what I mean? I was just like... So that was difficult, because then you're trying to sound all the words and it's a big passage, and you're doing it so slowly compared to everyone else.

JR: So what do you find most difficult when learning a language? Or what's most time-consuming?

K: Erm... I don't know. It's really hard to say, you know, because there's so many different parts to learning a language. Erm... but, I don't know.

JR: If I try and put it a different way: if you were asked to design a Spanish course, and you should try and take into account that the people have the problems you have in the class, how would you go about it? What would you do?

K: Well, I definitely wouldn't do, if we were going through a text, I would make sure they had it the day before. So if they were like me, who would be worried about not seeing it before and know that I would struggle the first time, I need to read it in my head a couple of times so that I know, I can work out what it is and stuff. I would definitely do that, because I know that a lot of the classes were completely useless because I'm just too

busy worrying about when I'm going to be asked, so I'd definitely do that and make sure they had it the day before. Erm... and... I don't know.

JR: What about grammar? Do you have the problem, how does it manifest itself? You say you read slowly, are there any other...

K: Well, I did, sometimes she'd be speaking in Spanish and we'd be writing down the question or whatever, and I'd look up and I could see her like sound- because obviously she knew I was dyslexic- like trying to break down the sounds for me, because that's a big problem with a language, because you're talking so quickly, she was talking to us so quickly, you can't hear. You can't hear the, you know, how it's broken down. Other people just seem to know how to write it and I'm like "how do you do that?", but I don't know if they were getting it right all the time as well. But then that sort of makes it worse, because you're thinking so much to get it right that you've forgotten what she's saying, and then, you just get left behind, so I'm sort of looking at the next person...

JR: Your spoken Spanish must be quite good, is it?

K: Erm... well I think, now it's got to the stage where, if someone was speaking to me, I'd be understanding what they were saying, but then when it comes to my turn to speak, it's sort of thinking of your tenses and thinking of, you know thinking, so there's sort of a delay, there's a big discrepancy between what I'm understanding and what I'm actually communicating back, and how accurate I am doing that.

JR: Do you watch Spanish television or radio?

K: Well I've actually dropped Spanish now because I just thought now it counts towards my degree and I can't, there's no way I can spend how much time I spent last year doing Spanish, I'm not going to get... it will bring my grades down. And I've got to a nice stage with Spanish now, you know, I could read a Spanish magazine and stuff, read my horoscope, which is nice and, erm, I was going to the Language Learning Centre last year and watching *Prisionera* which is like a Spanish soap and stuff, and just little things like that.

JR: So you keep it up?

K: Well I think, well I try. I don't know if I can still go to the Language Learning Centre actually, because I'm doing...

JR: I think that you can.

K: Yeah, you probably just need your student card, erm, but yeah little things like that, maybe buy a Spanish magazine and stuff, but then it's just sort of like, it was getting to a stage where it's not that pleasurable because you're asked to read, we had this book of twelve short stories, and they're quite complex, big moral things behind them and stuff, they were quite strange texts in English, and then sort of analysing those, I would struggle to do that with what issues to raise in English. And it was getting to be beyond the nice fun sort of stage.

JR: What about assessment? The way that they assess you in languages, is that... did you get extra time then? Did that help you?

K: Yeah. To be honest I don't think that is.. with my exams for Psychology, the extra time is so really really need that, but I find that in the actual Spanish exams I wasn't really using the extra time. Which is, you know, I always would use it in my usual examinations. Erm, but I think it's more difficult, because I don't think that there's that much, you've got to know the stuff, and I don't really think that's that much that can really be done, really, about that.

JR: Do you tend... do you learn the grammar by heart, or..?

K: Erm, yeah I try to sort of... yeah probably. But I've obviously forgotten them now. But at the time if I knew I had a test, I'd like make sure I knew the thing. And stuff for like presentations and stuff, erm, when you can't read off it, I know you're not supposed to do it but I would actually try and learn it, but completely learn it, just learn the whole thing, because I would just try and do that and stuff. But erm I think I've got quite a good memory when it comes to doing stuff like that, because people would be like "how do you know all that?", because sometimes there's a five minute presentation, obviously I wouldn't know everything but I'd try. But then it's not really that natural I suppose, so it's not really that...

JR: But it's a coping strategy.

K: Yeah, exactly. It's something to fall back on, you don't go into there thinking "what if I don't have anything to say?" or anything.

JR: Yeah. That's fine I think. That's all really, I can't... I think that's it. The only thing I can ask you is, one of the problems we have for language teachers is to assess how accurate your language is. Because if you put on the wrong endings, some kinds of dyslexia they swap endings, is that because you're dyslexic or because you don't know?

K: I don't think, that's not really a part of the thing that's really affected me that much, you know the whole 'b' and 'd' thing, that's not really been a part of my problems with dyslexia or anything, mine's a lot more the reading side of it, which is my biggest... So I don't, for me, if I've got the wrong endings it's because I don't know it rather than...

JR: I'm just thinking that your reading, because you're doing Psychology, you have quite hefty reading, do you get somebody to read it aloud and have it on tape?

K: I've actually got this quite good thing on my computer, which doesn't help for reading this, erm, but when I do an essay I've got this thing where it'll read it back to me, which is really good because you've started writing an essay, a lot of the thing about going back to it is I think "Oh no, now I've got to read it all" before, because obviously to get back into it, you can't just start writing it. And that's the thing I find again just really daunting and this thing is really good because it sort of takes some psychological things, my things about reading, it just starts doing it and then you sort of naturally get back into it, and then you are reading it with it, because it highlights it as it's reading it, so you're doing it as well. It just makes it easier for me to get back into doing it, which is really good. But I wish there was some help with reading, because there is so much. Because all of my courses now, you're supposed to have read so much stuff, it's just, it really is just so daunting and I just know that I can't... I'm going to try to keep up with it, but to be honest it'll be pretty impossible, because they give you so many things to do.

JR: Something that would really help you in your situation would be if they had those texts read out or...

K: Like... or talking books, do you know what I mean? If there was a tape, that would just be so so good, because I would, because it would just be so much easier to do it. You can just think "I'm going to put that on" and then you would be looking at it as well, and then reading as well, because sometimes I read a whole page and then have got absolutely no clue about what I've just read about because I'm not taking it in at all. Just so of... even if I read a sentence three times, I won't sometimes just... I still don't know what it was. But yeah, having that would just make it so much easier.

JR: So that's a very concrete, do-able thing, isn't it?

K: Yeah, that would just be so good. Or even just parts of it, some of maybe the journal articles, because the journal articles I find really hard to read. Because they're really horrible small writing, and a lot on a page which is really horrible for me, but yeah they wouldn't even be long things read out, but for me to try and read one of those takes me ages. And then I still quite often don't really, haven't really absorbed it, so I'll have to try and read it another couple of times, try and highlight it and stuff. But it just all takes loads of time.

JR: Mmm, that is very concrete...

K: Definitely, that would be really useful.

JR: Can I just ask, do you read in your spare time?

K: Oh god no, I really should.

JR: No, I understand why you don't.

K: I've just got such a thing about it now, because obviously at uni and stuff I will have to do a lot of reading and stuff, but no I don't. My boyfriend does loads of reading, but I just don't. I just wouldn't.

JR: Do you use these talking books or tapes?

K: No. When I was younger, we had the Roald Dahl things and stuff on tape, but I just sort of... reading has not been a thing I do in my spare time, because I don't really enjoy it that much. But I really should try, because I'm sure there are some really good books and once I've got past the initial, it's just the initial bit, once you've got into it, it'd be good. I did try and read *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, and when I went abroad, I got sort of a bit into it, I just kept trying at it but I never read it, I've still never read it and I've had it for about three months.

JR: No I understand.

K: I do like reading magazines, but they're little bits, sort of, and a lot of it, I don't try and read the big articles unless I really am interested in it, but then you're just sort of little bits of reading around the edges of the pages.

JR: Great. Well thank you very much Katie, that's really useful. And I think, in particular...

(recording ends)

Interview with L2 - student - female

JR - Jannie Roed

L - L 2

JR: So, it's not really an interview, but I have some questions I would... And you can say no if you don't want to answer them of course. I just want to know what... what languages do you learn?

L: French and Spanish.

JR: French and Spanish? So you are a language... that's your main...?

L: It's joint with, erm, ELT, which is kind of language-based English Language Teaching.

JR: OK. So what sort of problems do you get, are you dyslexic, are you...?

L: Erm, it's a bit vague really. I don't think I'm dyslexic, more like dyspraxic. I had an assessment a while ago, I couldn't find the documents to bring with me today but they sort of, they said I had specific learning disabilities but that it wasn't enough to get, erm, the grant, I can't remember what it's called.

JR: So you couldn't get a disability grant?

L: Yeah.

JR: So they wouldn't let you have that?

L: No.

JR: So how do the problems manifest itself?

L: Erm... to me it's kind of, more of a motivational problem, which makes me wonder whether it's even like to do with dyslexia or...

JR: It can be, yes.

L: Well, I think it's a lot to do with like I'm totally disorganised, I always forget things, I forget homework we've got to do, I forget when things are supposed to be due in, erm, I'm not very good at keeping a diary. I'm trying to improve that so that I can actually look things up and I won't just have to remember. But you know I make sort of, "oh yeah, I'm going to do this, and plan this, and do it this way", and then it all just kind of goes... wrong.

JR: OK, so what do you do? You say you're keeping a diary or trying to keep a diary?

L: Yeah, I've got a separate book now that's just for homeworks and assignments and things, so every day I have that with me in lessons and I write down exactly what I've got to do and when it's got to be done for, so instead of going through my diary with everything else, which I tend to leave at home a lot because I don't take it everywhere, I just have this in my school bag and bring it out and... it's just a bit clearer because all that's in it is work that I need to do.

JR: Yes, yes.

L: So that's helped a bit, I've just been doing that the last few weeks.

JR: Has it always been like that, since you were a small child or...?

L: Erm, I used to do really well at school when I was a small child, but erm, ever since, like after GCSEs I struggled a lot trying to do A Levels. Even with GCSEs, when I'm sort of left to do something on my own, I get a bit lost. And, erm, I just find it difficult to organise my thoughts, and... If I have to write a long piece of work especially, like an essay or anything that's you know... If it's just answering questions, that's a lot easier, but even then I sort of have a phobia of anything now, I find myself just being afraid to even open the books because it's... You know, even if it's something quite simple.

JR: Have you sort of, have you developed a kind of strategy to, you know, you say you have the diary, have you done anything else to... Like working with other students, would that help?

L: I think that would help a lot. I haven't really managed to organise much, last year I tried to occasionally do my work with other people from my class, like my friends from the class, but I've, I'm in totally different groups in French and Spanish class now, so I don't really know anyone in my classes. Well, not yet. But that's something I'm thinking would be good for me, because I need a lot of time someone else just to motivate me or make me do something, if I'm left alone I'll just sit there and be totally distracted for hours on end with anything... a spot on the wall or...

JR: That must make, particularly language learning, quite a tough thing for you, because it's a lot about sitting by yourself a learning. How do you..?

L: I don't know, sometimes I quite enjoy reading unrelated things in the language. So I'll sit down to do a piece of work, and instead of doing the piece of work I'll do loads of background reading because that's a lot easier and that sort of gets words into my head and stuff. But, the actual piece of work I never get done. I think I need to work on planning through it, and you know making sure I have just a limited amount of time for doing the research and make sure I've set myself goals... I'm not really doing this at the moment, but I've got an idea of what I should be doing.

JR: But you know what to do...?

L: Yeah, more or less. It just doesn't always work out the way you think.

JR: But it sounds like you could benefit a lot from working with someone, because that would also help with your goals. You could say "well, I'm doing this next".

L: Yeah, actually I think, well sometimes we do do pair work in class or we're left to do sort of projects in pairs or presentations in pairs and things, but erm I think if that was encouraged more. A lot of times if I wanted to do a piece of written work with a friend last year, they would be like "oh, well you better not hand in the same thing" because then we'll just get accused of copying you know, whereas if it's an equal input from both people, I think that's quite acceptable, and I'm not sure how the teachers would've felt. I think they might have frowned upon it a bit, but I was just quite keen to do that with my

friends, and they would be like “well... you do yours and I’ll do mine”. Erm... but yeah, even just being with someone else, if there was more sort of study groups. We’re kind of left to get on with it on your own a bit, and, I don’t know, you just always end up leaving it all until the last minute, and you’re, like, trying to call my friends at midnight the night before and things. But yeah, I think that’s something I could imagine myself doing, it maybe could be encouraged more.

JR: So would you welcome, or do you think your fellow students would welcome, sort of assessed group projects for instance?

L: I don’t know... I think some people prefer to work individually and in their own time and do it when they want to without having to meet up all the time, which, you know, even for me it can be difficult even though I want to work with other people. It’s difficult outside of class to arrange, but yeah I think a lot of people would, because it would just take some of the burden off and to share their ideas and...

JR: And you learn quite a lot from each other, don’t you?

L: Yeah I think so. I think there’s always cases of some people not doing much and one person carries the group, so people can be afraid of that, but, erm, some people just prefer to work individually, but it would be nice to maybe have a more equal balance.

JR: What about the assessments? Are there any kind of assessments that you really hate given your problems?

L: Assessed essays. I’d rather do, I don’t particularly like tests and oral presentations, but you have to go there and just do them, you know. I don’t know, yeah I think for me that’s better, like try and put a bit of time in preparing and revising or whatever, but if it’s a written essay of 500 words or 1000 words then...

JR: Then it’s hard?

L: Then it’s really hard because you have to put it all down on paper yourself and hand it in on the date given. It’s not something you can just sort of show up and wing your way through. Not that that’s a particularly good way to get through an oral presentation or a test, but...

JR: Is it easier for you to, say, in an exam situation, to sit there and write an essay?

L: Er... no. Sometimes the pressure just sort of helps, you just think “I’ve got to do it”, so you end up writing something, but a lot of the time I’m quite unhappy with my work, but, when it’s sort of questions, if it’s to do with grammar assessment or reading comprehension, that sort of thing I much prefer. When you’re giving short answers. And then usually the last part of the test is an essay, and I find that really difficult. I suppose it helps to have more time, but erm... I don’t know. Possibly that’s better for me than being given six weeks to write, to research and write your own essay. Just being given a couple of hours and a topic to write on, it sort of, you just have to get on and do it. I mean, no-one likes it, so you know I’m not speaking from particularly someone-with-problems point of view, obviously no-one likes to do that, but yeah I think if it’s something that you have worked through the term, I’d rather just be told “right, now write this down” instead of being given weeks and weeks.

JR: Do you think the way that languages are being assessed at the moment, do you think that's OK? The way it's being assessed? With grammar tests and...

L: Yeah I think it's fairly balanced, I mean, I don't like the coursework side of it because I find that hard to do, but in the first year it wasn't too bad, because, you know, we had to hand in homeworks as well as the tests we'd done throughout the year and some longer essays, so it was quite a good mixture. I suppose it's quite fair really.

JR: Good. Erm... let's see. Which one do you find... you say you do Spanish and French? Which one is the harder?

L: Erm... I think they're pretty similar, I think as languages they're quite similar and there's not very much to differentiate them. I've been learning French a lot longer, but my Spanish since I've been here has been more... I think I've probably picked up some bad habits in French.

JR: Do you get any support? For your... it doesn't sound like you do.

L: Not... nothing, not really. Although there's, I don't know what they call it, there's like a drop-in clinic for dyslexic-type problems, that you can, like I can go and have one-on-one support with, which I should probably take more advantage of really, I think it's sort of, there's a few hours a week set aside, you have to book them. Erm, I haven't been doing that much. I mean I haven't had a lot, it was only towards the end of last year that I really started doing anything about this course, and... Erm, my tutors are pretty helpful when I go and see them, a lot of them have sent emails saying "If you have any problems, come see me".

JR: So basically, what they do when they assess you is you get more time in exams? That's the only suggestion that has been made?

L: Er... Yeah, and the fact that I've been told that I can come along to these sessions if I want to. Which isn't particularly help-, I mean they don't help-, the person that would be with me wouldn't be able to give me any help with languages, it would just be general, like she could help me with planning my week, or in vague terms like planning an essay, but not you know 'language'.

JR: So really the thing that helps you is to have as structured a course as possible.

L: Yeah.

JR: So you know precisely what is expected of you at every... and when to give it in. And not having these long essays that you say you get six weeks to do, that does seem to be very...

L: Yeah it's just... No, you're just left on your own and I find that really difficult to...

JR: But do you think, I mean it's not really, you might have some extra problems because of, some extra difficulties because of your problem, but in a way I think a lot of language students find it quite difficult because it's based on independent learning a lot, isn't it? You just go to the language centre, you listen or you read. It's not really, especially when you get to that level of competence which you obviously have in French and Spanish.

L: Yeah, I think, you know, it's probably in other courses other than languages as well, it's a lot to do with the university, you're expected to be a lot more independent, and I suppose everyone finds that hard, and some people more than others. Erm, like I sometimes wonder whether there really is anything wrong with me or different, but you know I had this assessment and they sort of said there was, but they were really vague about it. So I don't know, maybe it's more do with just having been out of education for a long time and not really having the motivation, or whether it's actually a specific learning difficulty, you know. I've been told it is, but, I don't really understand to be honest.

JR: So does it have any effect on the rest of your life when you're not a student? Is it something which, do you have problems planning or meeting deadlines outside the university?

L: Yeah, I suppose I do. I'm late for pretty much everything I try and do, I think there's a bit of a time-planning and organisation problems there, but, you know, it hasn't really affected me much, as long as people don't mind me showing up a little bit late. In jobs and stuff I've sometimes got into trouble, because I just tend to be late often. But I've never been in a job that requires me to get on a do things on my own, to write as much, or just to sort of be dependent on myself, like because the only jobs I've done have been quite menial and fairly structured jobs. So in every day life, not really.

JR: So perhaps you could be right, perhaps you don't have a learning problem at all, it's just normal.

L: I'm not even sure I've got one to be honest with you, I struggled a little last year which is why I went there, and I think was just a lot to do with not knowing how to organise myself. So whether that's really a...

JR: Which is quite common I think with first year students, because as you say, because they're sort of expected to be independent and to learn independently, but they come from a very structured background. School where everything is set out, and those things. And as you say, if they were very vague about what was really, what your problem was... Dyspraxic, I thought that was, is that what in the old days not very nice people put as 'clumsy'. Knocks things over and so on.

L: That's a lot to do with it. They made me do this test where I had to sort of walk, put one foot in front of the other with my eyes closed, and I literally thought I was going to fall over, I couldn't do it. And like getting left and right confused, I think that's quite a, that's something I do, I think that's a symptom. Just being quite badly balanced. But then in other areas of my life that's not really a problem, like maybe I was always a bit clumsy, but I do a lot of snowboarding and I don't fall over then, so I guess I've kind of overcome it there, but erm it's also to do with organising things in your head. Like, you can have a lot of information that you might want to put into an essay or something, but not know how to get it in a sort of order.

JR: So that counts as dyspraxic?

L: Yeah.

JR: Because that's also a symptom of dyslexia.

L: I think there's some crossover. They didn't sort of say I was one or the other, but they said like 'dyspraxia tendencies', they call it a specific learning disability. But that's not really very specific to me!

JR: And... I think we've covered all the things. Is there anything you'd like to say about learning languages, and that you would like said? Some class practices you would like to comment on, something which is not very help- very good, or something you would like to emphasize as being...

L: Erm... I don't know. I suppose, maybe a little more help with how our written work should be, how it's supposed to be... We do get some help in class though, it's not bad really. I have one grumble about my particular French teacher at the moment because he speaks more English than he does French, but I don't think that's something to be brought up here.

JR: Do you prefer to be taught in the target language?

L: Yeah, I think certainly once you reach a certain level you have to be, because you get so little contact with native speakers, and that's, you know I think I'm able now to be able to follow class instructions. Occasionally it's nice to get a little explanation in English for something very complicated, but not throughout the entire lesson. Yeah, I don't know, maybe more encouragement to work with other people, which would be nice for people like me.

JR: And you wouldn't mind being assessed as a group?

L: I don't think so, I mean last year our oral for Spanish, not for French, we did in pairs. And it was good for me because I was put with someone really motivated, and you know we met up for hours on a time, we'd work on what we were going to say, how we were going to do it, and you know I didn't want to let her down so I would be there. And we each contributed pretty much equally, but if it hadn't been for her I probably wouldn't have put nearly so much work in. And we presented it as a pair, it was kind of done less as a presentation and more as a conversation about a topic, and you were allowed to prepare it as much as you want. And erm, that was fine, they can sort of look at both of you and see who's, you know, they can easily see. I think maybe if it was more than two or three people it would be difficult to get a fair grade for each person. But that worked really well for me, just sort of gave me the kick up the arse that I needed to go and do it.

JR: I think that's an important thing to get across, because I think that when it comes to, well in languages you often work in pairs, I mean that's sort of to do the practices, at least as a way of building... but also I think at advanced level, but I think teachers are reluctant to have assessments with interaction, and I think that's an important message to get across.

L: I think one thing that's difficult, I don't really know what the deal is with this, but if you, obviously it's good for a language learner to meet native speakers, just through an informal language exchange or whatever, and talk and practice, and there's no doubt about that. And if you're doing that regularly you're probably going to want them to help you out with work that you're doing, and to what extent is that acceptable? If they're sort of writing essays for you, obviously that's no good. But if they're looking at your work and helping you to correct it, I don't know, without feeling like cheating it would be quite a good thing to do. If they're helping you to prepare your oral presentations, in exchange

for you helping them with their English or whatever, that's probably something that, it's kind of obviously up to you to find somebody to do that with which is something I'd quite like to do. But you've probably got to be a bit careful about not letting them do your homework for you.

JR: But I think you have, sort of, don't you have a fairly good idea where the limit, I mean obviously if a person re-writes your essay, it's not your work any more. But if you get a native speaker to go through it with you and point out things...

L: If you correct it yourself?

JR: You correct it yourself, I mean don't take my word for it. But it's very sad when, you're here to learn and that's the idea, it's very sad when assessment criteria somehow is a barrier for the way you learn. And for you, you say you don't learn any better, I mean the best way is with a native speaker who tells you "this is not how you say it, you say this". I mean, you're learning and that's why you're at university. So it's very sad when you say "oh no I can't possibly do that", because that's the whole point of being here, is to learn.

L: I think for things like coursework you want to get as much help as you can in that way, but then obviously in an exam you're on your own, so you'll prove how much you've actually learnt and how much has just been...

JR: I mean, there's a way of getting around this to perhaps create a way of assessing people, if you could make sure that everybody in the class had access to a native speaker, and that's one problem because it's a matter of fairness. If you had a close friend who's French or Spanish who would do this, but somebody, other people don't have it, then it becomes difficult doesn't it? But if you made sure that everybody had a native speaker, it could be part of your assessment to explain what he or she commented on your work, as a kind of reflect- "I showed it to him or her, and these were the comments, and that's what I did to..." It's a learning process that you're reflecting on as well, the mistakes you made that you have pointed out, so if that was part of the assessment. But I think the problem with that is, it sounds very good perhaps but, er, you do need to make sure that all the students had equal access to a native speaker, otherwise it's always the ones with a Spanish boyfriend or whatever who get the good marks! But yeah, I think that's, have you got anything to add to it or...?

L: I don't think so.

JR: Well thank you.

L: That's alright.

## Interview with M - student -female

JR - Jannie Roed

M

JR: It's really... I just want you to, I have a few questions as guidelines, but I just want you to tell me what it's like to be a language learner having or being dyslexic and how you feel about...

M: OK, well, erm, last year I did an Open Language Course in Arabic and that was at the university, but it wasn't formal enough for me. It was too all over the place, and I can only remember one thing from that course, and that's how to say my name in Arabic. So for me that was a real struggle because I couldn't remember all these things, there was no real structure to it. But when I had lessons for French over the summer, because it was so, there were so many tables and things, I could visualise it. So, in the Breakthrough textbook, and it turned out to be the general form for learning verbs, they're all set out like this. And that's because it's the first person, second person, third person. So because that's a rule, and I just repeat that pattern in my head, it stays there. And so, like another big problem with dyslexia, and it's quite a common problem with people of my age who have been through the national curriculum, is that we weren't taught grammar properly at primary and secondary school level. So, to learn a language, I've been opened up to this whole new world of terminology with, like, what's a possessive adjective, or an intransitive verb, and I was like "what is this? it's amazing!". And it was a real, a realisation for me. I was like "wow, I've never been introduced to this before", and now, learning a language and learning all those terms, I've applied that to how I write essays or even how I speak, and just knowing the right words and the right time, and timing and structure in sentences, it's the best thing ever. So I knew...

JR: So you're really saying that the fact that you're now learning grammar is an enormous support to you.

M: Absolutely.

JR: Well that's worth, perhaps that's a message that should go back to schools.

M: Yeah, oh god yeah. The education system in this country really needs to crack down on grammar, and to start teaching it properly from a young age. So it depends on the person obviously, because they might suffer from dyslexia in a different way, erm, but for me the cure is rules. And even the rules with the adjectives, just as an example, in French the adjective comes after the noun. So because it's a rule, I can remember it. So it's all good. But I didn't, I hadn't thought in enough depth before about the actual assessment and what a struggle that must be as the exam marker or test marker, because obviously it could just be, like, you forgot how to spell that word, and that's not a dyslexic trait, you just forgot or you never knew. So...

JR: Well I'm just beginning to think now, because, with all the, with one exception, the people that I've spoken to so far have said exactly what you're saying. That it's a pattern, it's the grammar, the pattern. And I'm just beginning to think that perhaps dyslexic students actually make fewer mistakes, because you train, you actually remember the endings, because it's a pattern.

M: Yeah, well the beauty of the French language is the rules, that's what I've found. So, erm, if you can remember in your head how to say something that ends in the 'e acute' sound, which makes the sound of 'A, Y', say in English, so like "ay", I know to use e acute, and I never forget that. So because of that rule, there's less chance of me messing the spelling up. Because I think of the sound, and it sounds as one should write it. So yeah.

JR: Can I just ask you, when you er, have you always known that you were dyslexic, or when was it diagnosed?

M: No, erm, it was exactly a year ago.

JR: So after you came to university?

M: Yeah, what happened was, erm, my boyfriend at the time was a teacher and I told him all these problems that I was having writing and it was really driving me crazy, and he was like "I think you should get tested for dyslexia". And I remember a teacher at school had said to me "you write very complicated, you're using too many words and you don't need to". And either she didn't have the training to recognise that that's a dyslexic trait, or I don't know, she just didn't say it to me. But that should have sent alarm bells ringing, that's dyslexia. And so when I did the test, it opened up all these things that the person who analysed me, and when she gave me back the report, she erm, the way she put it is "I can't believe that with all these things I've managed to get through to university level and not have somebody identify this already".

JR: So did you have problems at school?

M: Erm, remembering things, like I was terrible at Maths and I only just scraped a C grade at GCSE in Maths. And that's because my brain doesn't work very well in putting numbers together and stuff, it just didn't work for me.

JR: So how do you, if we can just go away from languages for a second, how do you cope with, there's a lot of reading isn't there?

M: For International Relations, there's so much reading. But there's a trick that I learnt from a book: read the conclusion first. So that way, you've got a summary, so what I do is make a summary based on the conclusion. Then, I go to the beginning, and then I read it because in my mind, if I think of it as bullet points, like "I'm looking for this", so it's like being a detective but knowing what you're looking for. So, I don't know, I sort of look for the arguments to back up their conclusion.

JR: Good. So was that something you picked up from a book?

M: Yeah, it was in a book, it wasn't even a dyslexia book, it was "how to read properly", called, what was it, *Essay Writing*.

JR: So that's a good point, because then you know what you're looking for as you read so you don't have a surprise.

M: Yeah, so if I'm doing a lot of things, back to front really helps. So like, one things I'm experimenting with at the moment is writing essays back to front. So, if I've developed an argument, I write the conclusion, then I write the content. If I need to modify the

conclusion, I can do that, and then do the introduction as the very last thing. Because it's got to weigh up with what you say, and how do you know what you're introducing unless you've already done it?

JR: Good. That's very good. And that actually helps non-dyslexic students if they think like that.

M: Of course, yeah.

JR: Erm, if we go back to assessment, are there any kind of language assessments which you find particularly difficult? As a dyslexic?

M: Are there any? Erm... when we had to do the entry, the entry test. And we had to write the reasons why we wanted to study the language, I mean obviously my French wasn't that advanced, but I was just like "arrgh". And then I was trying to think of how I'd say it in English, and I couldn't think of what to say in English. Like, I was thinking so how shall I structure this? Shall I do, like, sentences, or... And then it just came out as a complete, it was a real mess. I don't know, that's the only real assessment thing that we've had.

JR: Right, so, is there any kind of exercises that you prefer? Grammar exercises, or, you know, some people, the books say that you should not have 'gap filling', that's very bad for...

M: What's that, gap filling?

JR: Gap filling, yes.

M: Oh what, like when you have a sentence and like what goes in here?

JR: Yes, you put the word in. And a lot of the books on dyslexia say this is not a good exercise for dyslexic students. Is that something..?

M: Oh right, let me just have a look at one of my exercise books, because I don't know... See a problem I feel with gap filling is that they don't give you enough space, so you get really messy writing, and if you get, when you get, I don't know, I need things to be neat. Otherwise I get angry with myself, and I'm like "oh that's so annoying", but... Erm, and sometimes, I don't know, you might misspell things, I know it sounds ridiculous, but to misspell things so that it fits in the gap, if that makes sense. Or you scribble it. So that's the only problem I can see with gap filling myself.

JR: But is there anything, is there a way of, well you haven't done any assessments have you?

M: No these are the only exercises we've had, we haven't...

JR: And there haven't been any of them which you've found particularly...

M: No, it was really what I expected. I mean, because we're at a beginners level, it really is the type of thing you would have say in school. Yeah, it's the type of thing you would have in school. Erm, when you're a beginner. So yeah, the only problem with these

things is just neatness. So, like with this, I got so frustrated with that I was like “if I can write it neatly at the top of the page, I’ll be happy”.

JR: I don’t think that’s anything to do with dyslexia, that’s just you!

M: No (laughs). But, erm, a big thing in dyslexia is presentation, so I think for me I’m just a neat freak, but if it’s not clear then I just don’t absorb it properly. Which is another thing with French, well, or this technique I was trained with doing language, is blue for French, red for English, green for pronunciation. Because it’s entertaining the mind, all of those colours, that really helps it sink in as well.

JR: So you use that, the colours thing?

M: Yeah, definitely.

JR: Have you found, do you spend more time learning French than your other classmates? I know that’s a very difficult question to answer, but do you find that you put a lot of effort into learning the French? More than...

M: Erm, I was over the summer, because I was trying to get into the intermediate group, which is a real challenge because I haven’t done French at school, I did German. So, I’d sort of set myself this challenge over the summer to get as good as I could. Erm, so, sorry I just completely lost track of what I was saying. What was the question again?

JR: It was because some people say, there was a girl who said to me that “I just know that because of my problems, I can never get beyond a certain level”.

M: Oh yeah, timing? Oh right, so yeah I was really hardcore working with the French over the summer. Now that I’ve been put in the beginners group, I’ve become a bit more lazy. I know one shouldn’t confess that, but I’ve become more lazy because I feel that I’m not, compared with the rest of the class, I’ve done like all these verbs and I’ve gone through all of that stuff, and they’re not at that stage yet. So I don’t feel behind in any way, if anything I feel a bit ahead because there are people who haven’t done it at all.

JR: So you’re really sort of in between, you’re an advanced beginner aren’t you?

M: Yes, that’s probably the best way to describe it, mm hmm.

JR: Great. Erm, what about writing essays and stuff?

M: In French?

JR: Yes. Probably in both.

M: I haven’t done anything like that in French yet, but in general essay writing, if I can combat that this year, it’ll just be the best thing to happen to me in my life, because I’ve got all this, like all these arguments. Like, one essay, I researched it to death, like on World War I, I know all these arguments, and I can talk about them until the cows come home. When it comes to putting them on paper, it is an absolute mess. And, erm, I’m getting help with that now, er, like I’ve met for a first time my dyslexia tutor this week. So he’s going to help me, like, sift through all of these extra words that I keep adding in that don’t need to be there. So to make it more concise and to get to the point instead of

going round the houses, and to really articulate the arguments well. So that's really my problem. I mean one thing that somebody told me which, I wish I'd been told this ages ago, it had to be made really clear for me: summarise the readings. No-one had ever said that to me before. Like, when it was put to me as blatant as that, it was like "oh!" like a light bulb in my head. "Oh that's what I need to do, summarise the readings."

JR: Of course when you say that, that would help all students, even people without any learning difficulties or dyslexia. If they did that, they would have a much clearer idea, if they worked like that.

M: Yeah, I think the dyslexia thing is that you really need it to be as clear as day, like somebody has to say something concisely so it gets right into your head. Instead of, like what didn't help me was last year people were like "oh develop your own style" and all of this. I needed someone just to tell me how to structure it, and then I could, like once you combat the... then think about your own style. Like there are essays I've written, that I was just like "oh that's rubbish", and I got a decent grade for them. Whereas essays I've put so much into them, and thinking about flair and the style of it, and I've got like grades that just almost made me cry, I was just like "how could this be, I did all this reading?" So yeah it gets, it's confusion really.

JR: So you want clear guidelines and clear instructions really.

M: Things have to be just really clear for me, that's why learning with bullet points, say, if I was summarising a reading, put bullet points all the time so it's there and it's clear.

JR: OK, good. Erm, I think we've covered... you do receive support because you said you have a dyslexia tutor?

M: Mm hmm. Yeah, so I've got a dictaphone which I've found really helpful over the summer, erm, because my French teacher at the time, she'd just say loads of things onto the dictaphone, that I could take away and learn at home. Or I would say them myself, like so I could improve my pronunciation and things. So yeah, the dyslexia support has really helped, like all the funding they've given me for stuff.

JR: Good. OK, is there anything you want to add? Anything you think that we should know that you can think of? Things that would help you as a language learner? You don't seem to have any problems with... you seem to be sailing through it!

M: No, as I say, if anything this has been the best thing I could do for my dyslexia, but I do see now that it poses a real problem when assessing it. Erm, for you guys, because you have to think "is this dyslexia or is it not?" But for me, because of the rule element, I think there's a less likely chance of me mixing up my spelling with French than with English because there's not enough rules.

JR: Or you don't know them.

M: Yeah, but there's always an exception to the rules, but in English yeah, I mean...

JR: But I think that's a very important point that you made, that learning grammar would really help. And it just, I haven't thought of it before, but you know there's an enormous increase in people being diagnosed, not necessarily with dyslexia but they have what's termed dyslexia, dyslexic problems...

M: Dyslexic tendencies?

JR: Or related, dyslexic related problems, all kinds of, not, they can't say "this person is dyslexic", there are all these other problems. And I just wondered if this enormous increase that has happened say in the past ten years is actually due to the way that you are not taught proper grammar, that it's not really, when I say it like that it sounds like dyslexia isn't a problem, I know it is of course. But these people who are not really dyslexic but have problems like better organising...

M: Yeah grammar is just not taught at, I mean I was unfortunate because I was born in '84, so that meant that when I went to school I was the first year for the national curriculum, and when I got to do my A Levels I was the first year for when they did the AS and the A2.

JR: So you've been the...

M: AS was so easy; A2 was so difficult, that everybody was like "oh my god". And then it was the first year that they could down-mark you. And then if you appealed, they could down-mark you again. And then it was just like one thing after another. And we were the first year for the SATs as well, so we really were the guinea pigs. So what they taught us at school, like in English I can't even remember like ever doing grammar. Although I may remember one lesson on how to use an apostrophe, and when something's possessive or not. But never proper terminology.

JR: And I think it's a great shame, because like actually small children quite like it, because it's a system, and it's something they can learn and show off, so it's not because it's difficult to motivate small children at least. I think...

M: Yeah, it needs to be taught at primary school level. It's just ridiculous that they don't, and they're trying to, now they're doing more reforms to schools, and they're just looking at the wrong problem. It's so bad!

JR: Right. Do you have, you said this thing about colours, red for English and blue for French, do you generally have a very visual...

M: Yeah, I'm a visual learner.

JR: So you, if you see things written down then it's easier to... Do you sort of map, mind-mapping?

M: I do it all the time for everything. Like it's so, I don't know, it just so entertaining, it's like a diagram and that for me is the best way to do anything. Whenever I plan an essay or something. That's one system that I use.

JR: Mm hmm, good. Well I think that's all. Thanks very much, you've been really very useful.