

Investigating Multimodal Tasks in Asynchronous Online German Instruction

by

Erica Leigh Swyers

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Examining committee membership

The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

External Examiner	CAROLINE RIEGER Associate Professor, University of British Columbia
Supervisor	BARBARA SCHMENK Professor, University of Waterloo
Internal Member(s)	EMMA BETZ Professor, University of Waterloo GRIT LIEBSCHER Professor, University of Waterloo
Internal-external Member	SVITLANA TARABAN-GORDON Sr. Educational Developer, University of Waterloo

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I investigate task-based language learning (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007) in asynchronous online German instruction. Following a Design-based Research methodology, the study involves the development and implementation of a learning module into an online introductory German course. The module is built around a task which draws on principles of foreign language pedagogy (Biebighäuser, 2021; Funk, 2010) and multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996). A review of previous literature reveals that most studies which employ instructional interventions in language learning focus on synchronous online or in-person instruction with little focus on asynchronous learning. Previous approaches to online teaching stem from early distance education and focused on self-study (Andrade & Bunker, 2009) and automating learning (White, 2003), and are associated with behaviourist pedagogies (Bates, 2019; Swaffar, 2014). Taking a multiliteracies perspective, I argue that asynchronous online language learning requires tasks that are situated in real-world online communicative practices such as those that have become a normal part of daily life (Mills, 2015). Such tasks should be at home in an asynchronous online environment as it is insufficient to simply add technology to learning activities that are normally carried out in person (Bates, 2019) or which are rooted in singular understandings of literacy with a strong focus on reading, writing, and grammatical accuracy. I argue that the multimodality of digital literary practices (Kress, 2003) is beneficial for learners who can lean on the combination of meaning making modes when interpreting and creating multimodal texts. Data from the study include survey questions, semi-structured interviews, and analyses of participant submissions. The results of this study inform future research and teaching in foreign language learning as well as online learning more generally.

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List of Abbreviations

Computer-mediated Communication	CMC
Design-based Research	DBR
Learning Management System	LMS
New London Group	NLG
Sociocultural Theory	SCT
Task-based Language Learning	TBLL
Task-based Language Teaching	TBLT
Zone of Proximal Development	ZPD

Chapter 1: Introduction

Online learning offers exciting directions for language education. There has been increased interest in online teaching in recent years, especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In my own experience as an online instructor, I have encountered comments from peers, colleagues, and students which have negatively framed online language teaching as ‘impossible’ or simply ‘worse’ than its in-person counterpart. My motivation for investigating *asynchronous* online instruction, i.e., that which does not include any live sessions (in-person or via video conferencing platforms like Zoom) was also driven by my own observation through research and teaching that this format has not been designed according to the same kinds of pedagogical principles that are used for in-person or synchronous online German teaching. In this dissertation, I describe my doctoral research project which investigates multimodality in task-based asynchronous online German instruction. The study involves the development and implementation of a learning module into an online introductory German course. The module includes a task which draws on principles of foreign language pedagogy (e.g., Biebighäuser, 2021; Funk, 2010), task-based language learning (e.g., Van den Branden et al., 2009; Ellis, 2003) and multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996; Warner, 2024). A review of previous literature reveals that most studies which employ instructional interventions in language learning focus on synchronous online or in-person instruction with little focus on the asynchronous context. Previous approaches to online teaching stem from early distance education; these often focus on self-study (Andrade & Bunker, 2009) and automating learning (White, 2003), and are associated with behaviourist pedagogies (Bates, 2019; Swaffar, 2014). Taking a multiliteracies perspective, I argue that asynchronous online language learning requires tasks that are situated in real-world online communicative practices such as those that have become a normal part of daily life (Mills,

2015). Such tasks should be at home in an asynchronous online environment as it is insufficient to simply add technology to learning activities that are normally carried out in person (Bates, 2019) or which are rooted in traditional understandings of literacy with a strong focus on reading, writing, and grammatical accuracy. I argue that the multimodality of digital literary practices is beneficial for learners who can lean on the combination of meaning making modes (e.g., video, audio, text, etc.) when interpreting and creating multimodal texts. This project demonstrates the need to adjust how we think about online learning and to take the asynchronous online context as a starting point to achieve success.

This study seeks to investigate how principles from task-based language learning can be integrated into asynchronous online learning. More specifically, I am interested in examining the affordances and challenges of online module designs which are based on digitally mediated tasks as well as how learners engage with the materials and evaluate their experiences. My research questions are:

1. To what extent can we design online language learning tasks that incorporate elements of the pedagogical principles identified in task-based language learning (TBLL) research?
2. How do beginner-level German students engage with online language learning tasks?
3. How do learners evaluate their experiences with online language learning tasks?

I address these questions through an empirical qualitative approach within a Design-based Research methodology. The module is tested in an asynchronous online teaching and learning context with student participants.

The main task of the online module tested in this study sits at the heart of this project. The task engages participants in the creation of a ‘Day in my Life’ vlog (henceforth; daily vlog) which is a popular format of short-form video shared on social apps such as TikTok and

Instagram. While the daily vlog genre is inherently connected to its social media context, this study is not concerned with practices of engaging with social platforms but is rather concerned with the qualities of this type of text and how participants orient to the social context around it. In other words, this project does not investigate the practices of using social media, but focuses on what participants understand the textual features of daily vlogs to be.

A term that frequently appears in this dissertation is ‘design.’ I use this term in several contexts which I will try to clarify here. First, the notion of design is introduced in Chapter 3 in the context of multiliteracies pedagogy. This notion of design concerns the creation of texts through the use of culturally shaped resources (writing, speech, image, music, etc.) and is used in the context of the main task: participants engage in the design of a daily vlog. The second use of design is found in Chapter 4 and is associated with my methodological approach, Design-based Research. This understanding of design is associated with the development of an educational intervention which is tested over multiple iterations. In a sense, both terms are based on the same metaphor; that the products of designing are designs-in-process which can be iterated and improved on. The distinction in this study is drawn between *who* is designing *what*; the student participants who take part in the study will engage in the design of meaning in texts, whereas I as the researcher will design the educational intervention tested in this study.

The chapters of the dissertation are organized as follows: in Chapter 2, I outline pedagogical considerations for this study relating to three key areas: learning theory, task-based language learning, and online learning. I describe the theoretical foundation for the online module which is built on a social constructivist paradigm. I provide information about task-based approaches and define how the term ‘task’ is understood in this project. This section also touches on relevant scholarship from online learning research and highlights some potential challenges.

Chapter 3 introduces the topics of multiliteracies and multimodality as well as the related concepts of text, design, mode, and genre. In Chapter 4, I describe Design-based Research which serves as the methodological framework for this study. I provide detailed information about the study including the procedure for designing the online module and the focal points which guide the analysis. Chapter 5 provides information about the development of the online module. I introduce the course context within which the educational intervention is tested and explain the decisions which guided the design of the module. In Chapter 6, I present my detailed analysis of the data collected during the testing phase of the study. I discuss excerpts from the data and investigate common themes that emerge. Chapter 7 includes a discussion of the results of the analysis and situates the study within the scholarship on task-based language learning and multiliteracies pedagogy. I conclude with a discussion of persistent challenges and identify areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Pedagogical Considerations

For decades, scholars have studied foreign language teaching methods in an attempt to identify the best instructional approach. This methodological discussion has been influenced by several factors, e.g., the underlying learning theory, implicit versus explicit instruction, and the polarizing issue surrounding the instruction of linguistic forms (Ellis, 2003). Ultimately, scholars recognize that there is no single, one-size-fits-all method for foreign language instruction as the needs and experiences of language learners differ greatly and are context-dependent (Biebighäuser, 2021; Rösler, 2012). In place of prescriptive methods, research has instead turned towards teaching approaches which focus on pedagogical principles which can be integrated to varying degrees based on learners' needs and goals. In this chapter, I outline relevant pedagogical considerations for this study. I begin with a discussion of two learning theories which are relevant for the design of online task-based modules: constructivism and sociocultural theory. In the second sub-chapter, I provide an overview of task-based language learning research and how this is realized in practice. Finally, I discuss challenges and opportunities of online learning that factor into this project. The findings from previous research discussed in this chapter inform my decision-making with regards to module design and they provide additional contextualizing information necessary for understanding the analysis of participant data. I begin with a brief overview of some earlier methods and approaches to foreign language instruction.

2.1 Learning Theory

Learning theories have played an important role in foreign language education as they have shaped the methods and approaches used in teaching practice. Over the course of the past several decades of research, the dominant learning theory in the field of German as a foreign language has shifted as research and trends in educational psychology changed. For example,

behaviourism is a learning theory which sees learners as actors who exhibit a certain behaviour in response to a stimulus to have their immediate needs met (Biebighäuser, 2021). This learning theory underpinned language teaching methods such as the audiolingual method in the 1950s and 60s. Cognitivism, which grew in popularity in the 1970s and 80s, was more concerned with what happens inside of learners' minds and thus attempted to control learning based on the interaction between the external environment and internal cognitive processes (Biebighäuser, 2021). This theoretical perspective was ultimately criticized for its limited view that there is a singular, describable reality and form of knowledge. Both behaviourism and cognitivism have been criticized for their orientation to the learning process as predictable and governable (Biebighäuser, 2021). Such transmission-oriented views of learning describe what has been called 'instructivism,' (e.g., Lane, 2009) which follows an objectivist view of knowledge and learning. Objectivist and positivist traditions of knowing are based "on a dualism between knower and known; knowledge exists independently of the knower and understanding is coming to know that which already exists" (Biggs, 1996, p. 347). From this perspective, teaching and learning are understood as the process of transferring knowledge from a knowledgeable expert to an ignorant student. Instructivist pedagogies assume a neutral starting point, i.e., that learners' minds are blank slates, and take a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning activities.

Current research in language pedagogy considers learners and learner groups to be too diverse for a single method to apply to all learning situations. Reagan (1999) describes how many academic disciplines "have begun to undergo a significant change in the epistemology which underlies their pedagogical practice, moving increasingly toward constructivist approaches" (p. 413). Constructivist learning theory has thus become a basis for understanding learning and knowledge in language education.

2.1.1 Constructivism

The term *constructivism* has been used to describe theories of learning, ways of knowing, and approaches to teaching. It is associated with the work of scholars such as John Dewey (1916), Jerome Bruner (1966), Jean Piaget (1972), Lev Vygotsky (1978), and others. In contrast to transmission-based theoretical perspectives, constructivism concerns the ways in which we learn by incorporating new knowledge into existing knowledge structures. It has been called “the most current psychology of learning” (Fosnot 1996, p. 8) and serves as the underlying theoretical perspective for current work in language education research and practice (Biebighäuser, 2021). In this section, I define constructivism and discuss constructivist approaches to teaching foreign languages as they contrast with instructivist teaching practices (e.g., Lane, 2009).

Building on Fosnot’s (1996) view of constructivism as a theory about knowledge and learning, Reagan (2006) describes how constructivism is “concerned with understanding and explaining knowledge and learning, rather than as an explicit theory of teaching” (Reagan, 2006, p. 300). A constructivist view of teaching and learning sees learners as individuals who bring with them previous knowledge, beliefs, preconceptions, misconceptions, intentions, motives, and fears, whether or not there is an observable independent reality (Biggs, 1996; Prince & Felder, 2006). Fosnot (1996) describes how some research has focused primarily on the individual’s learning process in what is known as ‘cognitive constructivism,’ while those who focus more on the sociohistorical effects of learning refer to ‘social constructivism’ (p. 23). Cognitive constructivism generally rejects “traditional transmission-oriented views of learning, as well as behaviorist models of learning” (Reagan, 2006, p. 300) and instead emphasizes the role of the individual learner in the construction of their own knowledge. The learning process is an individual one in which learners pass new knowledge through their existing mental structures and prior experiences. This theory assumes that newly encountered information from an

individual's environment is interpreted based on what the individual already knows (Biebighäuser, 2021). Under social constructivism, learning is seen as an active process, which is collaborative and situated. It makes sense to view language learning through a social constructivist lens as language is not a static entity which can be transferred from one individual to the next but is dynamic and socially constructed. Constructivist teaching practices in language education generally consist of guided inductive approaches, self-discovery, and task-based learning. The role of the instructor is seen not as a purveyor of knowledge but rather as a facilitator who is responsible for preparing materials and supporting individuals' learning process (Biebighäuser, 2021). Van den Branden et al. (2009) describe that during the shift to a social constructivist paradigm, "the role of the teacher shifted to that of coach or partner, supporting the problem-solving activities of the students, enriching their learning experiences by offering appropriate input and feedback, and reflecting upon their learning processes" (p. 5).

Although constructivism "does not translate neatly into a set of pedagogical practices" (Blyth, 1997, p. 51), some guiding principles for constructivist pedagogy have been identified. For example, discovery- or inquiry-based learning activities which provide scaffolding allow students to discover something that is new to them. Likewise, active participation in learning activities that are open-ended, e.g., problem- or project-based tasks, require learners to solve real problems, make decisions about how to complete a task, and identify their own learning needs. In approaches to teaching German as a foreign language, a prescriptive method for language teaching is replaced by guiding principles (e.g., Funk, 2010; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). These tend to place emphasis on engaging learners in active participation as much as possible with meaning-focused interaction as a priority. The integration of pedagogical principles is more effective than

a prescriptive method because they can be used to a greater or lesser degree depending on the local context and needs of learners.

Regarding curriculum design, constructivist pedagogy generally tends to steer away from pre-defined learning outcomes, which are determined by instructors and assume that all learners will arrive at the exact same result. Because learning is an individual process, it cannot be predicted in terms of strictly defined outcomes. Thus, learners are responsible for reporting what they have learned rather than showing to what degree their learning matches an intended outcome. When learners are all held to the same standard, they may be unduly reprimanded for not learning the ‘right’ material while their actual learning goes unnoticed. Biggs (1996) described this phenomenon via a metaphor which sees students as treasure boxes:

“Teacher: How many diamonds have you got?”

Student: I don’t have any diamonds.

Teacher: Then you fail!

Student: But you didn’t ask me about my jade!” (Biggs, 1996, p. 358)

Incorporating student reflections in language courses is one way to make space for learners to describe what they have learned: “allowing reflection time through journal writing, representation in multisymbolic form, and/or discussion of connections across experiences or strategies” may facilitate reflective abstraction, which is described as “the driving force of learning” (Fosnot, 1996, p. 29).

Constructivism in its various realizations has been established as an appropriate theoretical perspective through which to approach foreign language teaching and learning. Social constructivism, which emphasizes the sociohistorical aspect of learning and communication, has had a particularly meaningful impact on theory and practice in language education. This

theoretical perspective is also known as sociocultural theory (SCT), which I describe in the upcoming section.

2.1.2 Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory (SCT) is a theory of learning based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978). It is centered around the central idea that all higher order thought in the human mind is mediated by language (Donato, 2004; Ellis, 2003; Lantolf, 2004; van Lier, 2004). In other words, the learning and communicating of complex concepts would not be possible without the use of language as a mediator. Mediation can take several forms; van Lier (2004) describes how “in second language learning, mediation involves (1) mediation by others in social interaction, (2) mediation by self through private speech and (3) mediation by artifacts (e.g. tasks and technology)” (p. 12). The first point in van Lier’s statement, i.e., mediation through social interaction, has had the greatest influence on foreign language education. The social interaction aspect of SCT plays an important role as it is understood to be a driver of development and learning. For example, Ohta (2004) states that “for Vygotsky, learning is a socially situated activity. What a learner at first accomplishes only in a social setting, she or he will eventually be able to do independently” (Ohta, 2004, p. 53). Interaction with others is thus seen as a necessary step in learning to use language independently.

Vygotsky described that the difference between what learners can do on their own and what they can do with the help of others is known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Ellis, 2003; Fosnot, 1996; Lantolf, 2004; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). The ZPD is based on an understanding of learning and knowledge as existing on two planes: one that is socially mediated and one that is personal to the individual: “first it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then

within the child as an intrapsychological category” (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 163; cited in Ohta, 2004, p. 53). Through social interaction in the ZPD, learners can achieve more than they could if working alone: “social interaction actually produces new, elaborate, advanced psychological processes that are unavailable to the organism working in isolation” (Donato, 2004, p. 46). Thus, when a more knowledgeable other can provide support through social interaction, learners can do more with language than they could on their own. Such support is referred to as ‘scaffolding’ (Wood et al., 1976), which Ellis (2003) describes as “the dialogic process by which one speaker assists another in performing a function that he or she cannot perform alone (pp. 180-181). Biegbighäuser (2021) expands on this definition and describes how supports for learners are gradually removed until the learner can complete the task on their own: “nach und nach sollen diese Hilfen reduziert werden, bis die Lernenden die Aufgabe allein bewältigen” (p. 249).

One way that learning occurs through interaction with others is described by Vygotsky as imitation. Imitation, which takes place in the ZPD, is described by Lantolf (2004) in the following way: “imitation in the ZPD, unlike copying (the verbatim mimicking of what the expert appears to do), is a complex activity in which the novice is treated not as a repeater but as a communicative being” (Lantolf, 2004, p. 18). Imitation is developmentally meaningful when it is used in such a way that the learner appropriates some kind of language from the expert and uses it in a meaningful way, i.e., “something new is created out of saying ‘the same thing’” (Newman and Holzman, 1993, p. 145). Newman and Holzman (1993) contrast the behaviour of a parrot who is capable of seemingly complex utterances with those of a child: “the parrot’s imitations, even with their potentially unlimited complexity and length, are, at best, merely linguistic behaviors; they are determined by the predetermined and predetermining tools. The child’s imitations, in contrast, are not determined by the predetermining tools; they are the use of

such tools for results to create tools-and-results, to create meaning, and thereby, to reorganize thinking/speaking” (Newman and Holzman, 1993, p. 83). In other words, the child is capable of using the linguistic tools provided by the expert to create meaning, whereas the parrot is limited to the linguistic behaviour of mimicry.

Social interaction in the ZPD has often been understood to take place between an expert and a novice, for example, interaction between parents and children or teachers and their students. However, as Lantolf (2004) points out, “several scholars are now calling for a broader understanding of the scope of the ZPD to include more than just expert/novice interaction” (Lantolf, 2004, p. 17). Lantolf and Thorne (2006) understand that “learners can scaffold one another, or ‘mutually construct’ assistance, in much the same way experts scaffold the performance of novices” (282). This idea has informed our understanding of language learning as a process that happens through interaction and has had a significant influence on how classroom language learning activities are designed as this understanding of social interaction between learners “forms the psycholinguistic rationale for emphases on group work and collaborative tasks” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 283). It is for this reason that collaborative group and partner work are promoted as effective teaching strategies in socio-constructivist approaches to language instruction.

2.1.2.1 SCT and Asynchronous Online Learning

SCT has been an important resource for scholars and instructors working in language education, however, it should be acknowledged that this understanding of social interaction comes with an assumed synchronicity. Many of the previous studies on which SCT is based have investigated synchronous, face-to-face interactions. For example, Wertsch, Minick, and Arns (1984) studied interactional activity between mother-child and teacher-student dyads in a puzzle-copying task;

and Takahashi (1998) studied how elementary school students provided mutual assistance to one another. Existing publications about SCT are filled with other such examples. Ellis (2003) even specifies ‘verbal interaction’ in his description of mediation and learning in SCT: “a primary means of mediation is verbal interaction. Thus, SCT sees learning, including language learning, as dialogically based” (p. 176). Studies that have investigated SCT in online contexts have also focused on synchronous interaction. For example, Thorne (1999) investigated language learners’ communicative activity in the context of computer-mediated online chat. Similarly, Birjandi and Ebadi (2012) studied L2 learners’ socio-cognitive development in synchronous computer mediated communication. Both studies investigated synchronous interaction where moment-to-moment feedback is still possible and therefore do not provide insights about how this might play out in an asynchronous setting. Referencing Thorne’s work, Lantolf (2004) explained that “the shift in the mediational means from verbal face-to-face interaction that might occur in the normal language classroom to electronically mediated interaction, in which the students were no longer facing each other physically, changed the activity of communicating and thus opened up a set of options not available in the other venue” (p. 12). In other words, the shift from face-to-face to online chat changed the nature of the interaction. This raises questions about how social interaction changes when the setting is further removed from the originally conceived face-to-face context (i.e., through the move from synchronous in person to asynchronous online forms of communication).

A closer look at the mechanics of how learning occurs in interaction confirms that synchronicity plays a role. According to SCT, it is through social interaction that knowledge can transfer from the social to the psychological plane through internalization, understood by Vygotsky as “as a process whereby certain aspects of patterns of activity that had been performed

on an external plane come to be executed on an internal plane” (Wertsch, 1985, pp. 61-62). Ohta (2004) describes how this occurs through a process called microgenesis: “language acquisition – internalization of the language of social interaction from interpsychological to intrapsychological planes – occurs through a dynamic transformative process called microgenesis” (p. 54). She further describes how “microgenesis is cognitive development that occurs moment by moment in social interaction” (Ohta, 2004, p. 54). If microgenesis is understood to be the process of internalization from the social to the personal levels, and it is understood to unfold in moment-to-moment interactions, then we can assume that microgenesis needs to take place synchronously in order to function. Therefore, according to SCT, social interaction must take place synchronously (either in person or online, as previous studies show) in order for learning to occur. In other words, the process that drives the effectiveness of social interaction, and by extension group and collaborative activities, is necessarily synchronous. It is not clear from the available SCT research how or whether this process occurs through asynchronous communicative practices. Therefore, it may be necessary to take a different approach in the design of asynchronous online language learning activities compared to in-person or synchronous online learning. This is not to say that SCT does not play a role in asynchronous online learning. After all, it is mediation, not interaction, that is at the center of SCT. I therefore return to the quote from van Lier introduced at the beginning of this section: “in second language learning, mediation involves (1) mediation by others in social interaction, (2) mediation by self through private speech and (3) mediation by artifacts (e.g. tasks and technology)” (van Lier, 2004, p. 12). Social interaction is just one of the ways that mediation can play out. Since the interactional aspect of SCT does not seem sufficient to explain learning that occurs in asynchronous learning environments, I turn the focus towards (3) mediation by artifacts, i.e., mediation that occurs through tasks and technology.

2.1.2.2 Artifacts

Another way that our relationships to others can be mediated is through cultural artifacts. Just as we would use physical tools to accomplish something in the physical world, “humans use symbolic artifacts to establish an indirect, or *mediated*, relationship between ourselves and the world” (Lantolf, 2004, p. 1). But cultural artifacts are more than just a means to an end; they are described by Lantolf and Thorne (2006) as “simultaneously material and conceptual (or ideal) aspects of human goal-directed activity that are not only incorporated into this activity, but are constitutive of it” (p. 62). Artifacts are material and conceptual in the sense that they can simultaneously exist as mental concepts and in the physical world. The authors give the example of a table, which exists as a concept in the mind of the person who makes it but also exists in the world as a physical object, noting that “a table is at one and the same time an ideal and a material artifact” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 62). In the above excerpt, the authors also mention that artifacts are used to achieve human goal-directed activity, noting that artifacts are not simply used as tools but are embedded into the activity itself. In other words, cultural artifacts are the process and outcome of symbolic activity that we engage in as humans.

For artifacts to be meaningful for SCT, they need to serve as mediational means; we engage in the creation and sharing of cultural artifacts as a means of mediating our relationships to others and the world. It is important to understand that “as objects in and of themselves [artifacts] are *not* mediational means. They only take on this quality through repeated use” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 69). Without existing in a wider, repeatable context of use, cultural artifacts cannot be mediational. This is why artifacts are said to be “historical in nature” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 64). Artifacts are not created in isolation; how we create them greatly depends on existing artifacts that pre-date the individual which are adapted to fit the individual’s own context. They are thus redefined each time they are created and built on those that exist

already: “humans do not generally build these artifacts from scratch; instead they adapt the artifacts that have been built gradually by others throughout history” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 65). This may mean that we veer away from the original intention behind the artifact; however, this shows that the features of artifacts are not permanent but flexible and can be reinterpreted and recreated over time. In other words, humans “do not merely select ready-made tools, including prefabricated linguistic forms and meanings, from a cultural tool-kit” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 65), but shape the emerging artifacts as needed. As a result, “cultural artifacts do not have permanent features, despite the fact that as objects, either physical or symbolic, they may possess stable characteristics” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 66). This understanding of artifact resembles the process of Design as described by the New London Group (1996) and the concept of genre as understood by Kress (2003). I return to these concepts in a later chapter.

The use of cultural artifacts as mediational means in digital spaces has had an influence on communicative practices and learning. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) describe that “the relationship between mediational means, genres of communicative activity, and forms of communication at the utterance and lexical levels suggest that digital communication technologies have mediated substantive aesthetic shifts in human communicative practice” (p. 68). Because digital technologies influence communicative practice, this is bound to have an effect on language education. The authors describe that integrating new technologies into formal educational settings can be beneficial: “leveraging such new communication technologies has the potential to blur the boundaries of formal schooling and socially meaningful communicative activity and thus create hybrid spaces that couple historical processes of language acculturation with the contingencies of emergent communicative practice” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 68).

The combination of socially meaningful online communicative practice with educational spaces can thus take advantage of how the historical development of cultural artifacts intersects with the emerging cultures-of-use surrounding newer technologies. The point made by Lantolf and Thorne illustrates that working with artifacts in online language learning contexts makes sense in the context of SCT as these are used in the context of online communicative practice. This is significant for the current study as this theoretical perspective aligns with the practice of integrating new technological communicative practice (e.g., daily vlogs) into foreign language education.

Although SCT is most often associated with social interaction, it is important to remember that mediation is at the heart of this learning theory. Social interaction facilitates learning in that it helps learners achieve things that they would not be able to do on their own. However, existing SCT research does not sufficiently describe how this process plays out in asynchronous interactive contexts. This does not mean that we must rule interaction out entirely; after all, we can conceive of many types of asynchronous interaction that take place in online spaces. Rather, it is not clear how or whether learning unfolds in such forms of interaction. Alternatively, engagement with cultural artifacts as mediational means falls under the scope of SCT and better fits with asynchronous learning environments and communicative practices that have emerged in digital spaces.

The theories of constructivism and SCT serve as a basis for the design of the online module designed and tested in this project. As current theories in language education research, they also underlie approaches to foreign language instruction, for example, the kinds of pedagogical principles outlined in previous scholarship as well as task-based language learning

approaches. In the next section, I describe task-based language learning and how research in this area informs the present study.

2.2 Task-based Language Learning

Task-based language learning (TBLL) is a learner-driven and meaning-focused approach to teaching second or foreign languages. It provides a way of addressing concerns surrounding “the role of meaning-based activity, the need for more learner-centred curricula, the importance of affective factors, the contribution of learner-training, and the need for some focus-on-form” (Ellis, 2003, p. 33). By participating in tasks that are centered around real-world communication, learners are meant to be able to improve their communicative skills and restructure their interlanguages. TBLT emerged during the 1980s and has since gained considerable attention and popularity amongst scholars, teachers, and curriculum developers around the world from grade school instruction to adult education (Müller-Hartmann & Schocker, 2016; Norris et al., 2009). Results from previous research studies speak to the suitability of task-based approaches for language learning (see Biebighäuser et al., 2012, p. 13) and it is promoted by the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020). In this section, I describe language learning tasks, approaches to implementing TBLL, and considerations for online TBLL in this study.

2.2.1 Finding the Right Terminology: TBLL

Many scholars in various contexts have researched task-based instruction (e.g., Biebighäuser, 2021; Ellis, 2003; Funk et al., 2014; Long, 2015; Nunan, 1989; Prabu, 1987; Willis and Willis, 2007; and others). Because there is such a wide range of research and various understandings of what this approach looks like in action, TBLL cannot be treated as a homogenous body of research: “this gradual accretion of sometimes disparate interpretations has given rise to a number of different educational approaches and models in which tasks are (claimed to be) used,

but which quite often, in one or many ways, deviate from the basic principles” of being learner-driven and meaning-focused (van den Branden et al., 2009, p. 9). Scholars have treated the approach differently across contexts, thus there are multiple terms for referring to it: task-based (language) teaching; task-based (language) instruction; task-based (language) learning, etc.). Long (2015) describes how the synthetic approaches to TBLT that have emerged are “palatable to commercial publishers and various politically powerful LT [language teaching] institutions because they are what underlie at least 90% of existing, commercially highly successful textbooks sold around the world” (Long, 2015, p. 7). This has resulted in a large body of learning materials and syllabi which claim to be ‘task-based’ despite the fact that they do not adhere to the theoretical principles of TBLL which I describe in this section. Scholars have differentiated between ‘task-based language teaching’ and ‘task-supported language teaching,’ also known as ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ versions of task-based approaches (Ellis, 2003; Skehan, 2003). Ellis explained that the “weak version views tasks as a way of providing communicative practice for language items that have been introduced in a more traditional way” (Ellis, 2003, p. 28).

Task-based approaches, while not entirely homogeneous, are generally built on a social constructivist foundation and place importance on creating meaning in social interaction: “rather than social interaction providing a mere forum for the practice of complex social skills, social interaction was now seen to be centrally implicated as the means for deep-level, complex learning” (Van den Branden et al., 2009, p. 5). Similarly, other approaches, such as the *Post-method Condition* (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and the *Action-oriented Approach* (Piccardo & North, 2019) follow similar principles but go by names that are not associated with ‘tasks.’ Yet, such approaches are similar in the sense that they are meaning-focused and engage learners in active participation.

Based on the different descriptions of task-based approaches as described above, we can differentiate between ‘task-based language learning’ (TBLL) and ‘task-based language teaching’ (TBLT). The term TBLL places a stronger focus on learning than on teaching, thus demonstrating the commitment to learner-centeredness. When I refer to TBLL, I am referring to the body of research that supports tasks and task-based instruction as described in the following sections. Similar task-based approaches that go by other names, such as those named above, I also include in this definition. I now turn to the definition of ‘task,’ which has similarly been defined in many ways in previous research.

2.2.2 Defining ‘Task’

There is no singular accepted definition of ‘task’ in the context of task-based approaches; within this body of literature, the definitions vary greatly. For example, Long (2015) differentiates between ‘tasks’ with a non-technical meaning, i.e., “the real-world activities people think of when planning, conducting, or recalling their day”; and ‘pedagogic tasks,’ i.e., “the activities and the materials that teachers and/or students work on in the classroom or other instructional environment” (Long, 2015, p. 6). Van den Branden et al. (2009) describe tasks as “the hundred-and-one things people do – identifiable as bounded recurring activities that people engage in – in order to reach real-world (and very often non-linguistic) ends, and for which they need to use language” (p. 6). Scholars have further defined what constitutes language learning tasks (see Ellis, 2003, for an overview of previous definitions as well as a list of defining criteria); in this section, I will focus on definitions of ‘task’ from previous TBLL research which are relevant to the current project. A distinction can be made between ‘task’ (*Aufgabe*) and ‘exercise’ (*Übung*), (e.g., Biebighäuser, 2021; Ellis, 2003; Funk et al., 2014). Funk et al. (2014) differentiated these two terms, describing that tasks represent the goals of action-oriented instruction, while exercises

aid in achieving those goals: “Aufgaben stellen das eigentliche Ziel des handlungsorientierten Fremdsprachenunterrichts (Zielaufgaben) dar, Übungen dienen dem Erreichen dieser Ziele” (Funk et al., 2014, p. 25). In the sections that follow, I discuss these terms in further detail with additional examples.

A salient feature of tasks according to previous research is a primary focus on meaning. Ellis (2009) described that when completing a task, “learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances” (Ellis, 2009, p. 223). Similarly, Nunan (1989) stated that “tasks involve communicative language use in which the user’s attention is focused on meaning rather than linguistic structure” (Nunan, 1989, p. 10). In other words, as language learners complete a task, their main focus should be on communicating a desired meaning, rather than on the correctness of grammatical structures. This is consistent with the definition of task by Biebighäuser et al. (2012): “eine Unterrichtsaktivität, die Lernende zu funktionalem und authentischem Sprachgebrauch anleitet und die einen eindeutigen Fokus auf den Inhalt der auszutauschenden Nachrichten legt” (p. 14). Similarly, Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth (2005) described that a task „legt den Schwerpunkt auf die Bedeutung dessen, was gesagt wird und nicht auf die Verwendung einer bestimmten Form (z.B. die Anwendung einer grammatischen Struktur).“ This focus on meaning relates to Funk’s (2010) principle of *Inhaltsorientierung*, which places emphasis on the content of the task, i.e., on the meaning of what is being communicated in a given utterance or text.

Tasks have also been defined in terms of their orientation to real-world language use. That is, tasks should resemble the kinds of communicative practice that we engage in on a regular basis outside of the language classroom and there should be some focus on ‘authentic’ language use, i.e., the kind of real language that speakers genuinely engage in in such

communicative situations. For example, Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth (2005) write that „sie [die *task*] versucht, die Sprache so zu verwenden, wie sie im Alltag vorkommen könnte (*real or authentic language use*)“ and Funk et al. (2014) describe ‘tasks’ by stating: „Aufgaben sind all jene sprachlichen Aktivitäten, die einen ‚Sitz im Leben‘ haben, d.h. die in dieser Form nicht nur im Kursraum stattfinden: Wie kann ich mich nach dem Weg erkundigen? Wie erzähle ich jemandem davon, was ich gelesen habe? Wie schreibe ich einen Lebenslauf? Wie berichte ich über Erlebnisse?“ (p. 11). Similarly, Nunan (1993) describes how, desirably, tasks should be “systematically linked to the things learners need to do in the real world” (p. 63). It is important for learners to be able to draw on real-world language use and practice using the language in actual communicative situations as much as possible. This allows them to situate the language in the communicative context and to draw on their existing knowledge relevant to that communicative situation. Carless (2003) describes how there should be a context in which the task takes place, importantly pointing out that this context may be “real, simulated or imaginary” and that language learning tasks should exist within “a framework of knowledge, strategy and skill used in carrying out the task” (p. 486). Placing a focus on real-world communicative practice relates to the principle of *Handlungsorientierung*, which emphasizes the importance of learners’ ability to act in the new language.

A further feature of tasks is that they have a concrete outcome, i.e., „eine *task* nennt den Zweck und das erwartete Ergebnis einer Aktivität“ (Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth, 2005). Nunan (1993) takes up this position as well by stating that a task should have a “sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right” (p. 59). Language thus “serves as the means for achieving the outcome” (Ellis, 2009, p. 223) rather than serving as the goal itself. The purpose of engaging learners in a task is therefore to have

them arrive at some kind of outcome, not to use the language for the sake of using the language.

A concrete outcome in TBLL can be achieved through the integration of a target task (*Zielaufgabe*), i.e., by engaging learners in a complex learning task with a specific outcome towards which learners work by completing a sequence of tasks and exercises (Funk et al., 2014). An orientation to the outcome of a task is connected with the idea that tasks should be success-oriented (*erfolgsorientiert*): „Aufgaben und Übungen sollten ... erfolgsorientiert angelegt sein. Sie zeigen den Lernenden durch Beispiele oder Modelle, wie sie ein Problem lösen oder durch gestufte Hilfen ein (kommunikatives) Ziel erreichen können“ (Funk et al., 2014, p. 18).

TBLL is generally learner-centered which shapes task design. A feature of tasks is therefore that learners act as themselves when completing exercises and tasks and that they interact with input that is relevant to their lives and interests: learners “must be exposed to and use the kind of language that they want and need for their own interests or purposes” (Plews & Zhao, 2010, p. 43). This position is also taken by Funk et al. (2014), who state: „gute Aufgaben sprechen die Lernenden als sie selbst an, regen zur Beschäftigung mit bedeutungsvollen Inhalten an“ (p. 44). Tasks should expose learners to relevant language and should engage them in communicative activities that allow them to act as themselves. It is important for this reason that learners engage in tasks that are relevant to their lives and interests.

In line with constructivist learning theory, tasks are generally open-ended. This means that the learner must actively engage in some communicative action to complete the task, rather than being a passive observer. This contrasts with closed-ended exercises, e.g., in which learners choose from a selection of pre-determined outcomes. Learners need to be actively engaged in language production to facilitate learning, which is why learner activation (*Lerneraktivierung*) is

included in Funk's (2010) pedagogical principles. Learner activation has been promoted as important for learning in other task-based approaches such as the Action-oriented approach. It is widely accepted that learners need to be actively engaged in language production in order to learn a foreign language (e.g., Biebighäuser et al., 2012; Funk, 2010, Van den Branden et al., 2009). Engaging learners in tasks in which they need to actively work towards a communicative goal gives learners the opportunity and responsibility to make decisions about which linguistic resources to employ: "die Lernenden müssen sprachlich aus dem, was sie schon beherrschen, selbständig auswählen, und sie greifen dabei inhaltlich auf das eigene Weltwissen, eigene Vorstellungen usw. zurück" (Biechele et al., 2003, p. 12; cited in Biebighäuser et al., 2012, p. 26). In many cases, there is more than one way to express a thought or idea through language (i.e., one can achieve the same or similar message by using different linguistic structures). Open-ended task design is therefore a valuable feature of TBLL; learners do not get the same opportunity to act as decision makers in closed-ended learning activities in which there is only one correct answer, or in which they focus on linguistic form. When tasks focus on form instead of meaning and/or the task procedure is dictated by the curriculum or instructor, learners are deprived of the opportunity to decide for themselves which linguistic resources to employ in a given communicative context.

In sum, tasks in TBLL have a primary focus on meaning, engage learners in active production of the new language, require learners to arrive at a concrete outcome, cater to learner's own real identities and interests, and are open-ended. Because learners are required to actively participate in completing a task, it is important that they have the adequate resources and supports to do so successfully. A task sequence in TBLL will therefore include a series of tasks

and exercises leading up to the target task such that learners have some appropriate tools at their disposal. In the next section, I define the term ‘exercise’ and describe how they fit in with TBLL.

2.2.3 Definition of ‘Exercise’

Generally speaking, exercises can be described in the following way: „Übungen bereiten Aufgaben vor, indem sie Wortschatz, Aussprache, Strukturen oder einzelne Fertigkeiten gezielt trainieren. Sie zielen auf die korrekte Anwendung und möglichst rasche Verfügbarkeit des Geübten und seine freie Anwendung in Aufgaben ab.“ (Funk et al., 2014, p. 14). Scholars have differentiated between ‘exercise’ and ‘task,’ though the boundary between these two terms is not always drawn along the same lines.

Some have stated that the difference between task and exercise is that exercises are closed-ended while tasks are open-ended (e.g., Biebighäuser et al., 2012). Exercises are more likely than tasks to be closed-ended (i.e., with only one correct answer possibility), which may be why some researchers define them based on this quality. However, not all exercises are necessarily closed-ended; Funk et al. (2014) differentiate between receptive exercises (e.g., reading or listening to a text), reproductive exercises (e.g., producing statements according to exact predefined specifications), and productive exercises, in which learners produce language themselves and can grasp onto any linguistic resources they have in their linguistic repertoires. In this sense, productive exercises “sind schon ein Übergang zu den Aufgaben“ (Funk et al., 2014, p. 30).

Others define exercises in terms of their focus on form. For example, Ellis (2003) describes tasks as primarily meaning-focused, associated with pragmatic meaning, and requiring learners to function as “language users.” In contrast, he describes exercises as mainly form-focused, associated with the ‘practice’ phase of Present-Practice-Produce (PPP) pedagogy and

requiring learners to function as “language learners” (p. 3). While exercises are often form-focused, they can be meaning-focused, e.g., in activities that test reading or listening comprehension. Focus on form has been a highly debated topic in previous research (discussed further below); however, including form-focused exercises in a task sequence that prioritizes meaning-focused learning does not detract from the focus on meaning; depending on how and where exercises are inserted into the task sequence, these can be productive and helpful for learners as they progress through the lesson. When exercises do focus on form, they should take an inductive approach: “teachers must set learners activities that help them notice language forms; induction/discovery is preferable to deduction/presentation; teachers should (explicitly) instruct form in the context of activities where meaning is primary” (Plews & Zhao, 2010; p. 43). The focus can thus stay on meaning while allowing learners to discover linguistic patterns on their own.

An overreliance on form-focused exercises as a means of teaching foreign languages may be counterproductive for learners and may not lead to successful learning. For example, Funk et al. (2014) describe that fill-in-the-blanks exercises (*Lückentexte*) are not ideal in many cases as these are “nicht zielführend, wenn es darum geht, sprachliche Fertigkeiten oder grammatische Kompetenzen zu entwickeln oder zu trainieren. Sie zeigen den Lernenden nicht, was sie können, sondern was sie nicht können.“ (p. 36). Alternatively, the authors describe that fill-in-the-blanks exercises are better used for concentrating on content and comprehension or for testing concepts that have already been learned. In addition to this, there is little evidence that *Lückentexte* actually help with language learning: „wenn 90% der Zeit geübt wird, Lücken in Sätzen zu füllen, dann werden die Schülerinnen ziemlich gut darin werden, Lücken in Sätzen zu füllen“ (Funk et al., 2014, p. 8). The popularity of exercises such as *Lückentexte* is likely due to the fact

that they are easy to make and assess, and they can provide learners with immediate feedback in online learning situations. Instructors and curriculum designers should aim to include a variety of exercises and exercise types to cater to different learner preferences and experiences in task-based lessons and courses (Funk et al., 2014).

It is important to note in the consideration of exercises and tasks that one is not better than the other; both play a role in the task sequence. According to Funk et al. (2014), good exercises: “leisten einen Beitrag zur Bewältigung von Aufgaben; sind transparent hinsichtlich der Lernziele; sprechen die Lernenden als sie selbst an; trainieren die Verwendung authentischer Sprache; trainieren Flüssigkeit; regen dazu an, sich mit Sprachformen auseinanderzusetzen; sind erfolgsorientiert gestaltet; enthalten auch spielerische Elemente“ (p. 44). In this sense, the goals of exercises resemble those of tasks; exercises follow similar pedagogical principles with the purpose of adding additional practice, structure, and focus on particular concepts. As such, exercises are a useful tool which lead learners through the progression of task-based lessons. As discussed in this section, exercises are the learning activities that learners engage in as they prepare to complete the target task. Exercises come in many forms and have varying aims; they may focus either on meaning or form and have varying degrees of closed- versus open-endedness. Exercises can be included in task-based sequences depending on the needs and goals of learners. Like tasks, exercises should speak to learners as themselves and should relate to their lives and interests. Exercises are a versatile tool that instructors can use to prepare learners to engage independently and confidently in communicative tasks. In the next section, I move beyond definitions of task and exercise and describe how task-based language learning is structured.

2.2.4 Structuring Task-based Language Learning

In the following sections, I provide some information from previous research about how TBLL is structured and what aspects should be taken into consideration when planning task-based instruction. In line with the features of tasks, task-based pedagogy is based on principles of learner-centeredness, learning by doing, egalitarian teacher-student relationships, and a primary focus on meaning (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2015). Within a task-based approach, learners interact with and use language in context, speak or write about things that are meaningful to them, and are supported by a teacher who facilitates the learning process. When these principles are followed, the task (and its outcome), rather than preselected grammar and vocabulary, are the goal of the lesson. It is important to note that there is not a fixed method or approach to doing task-based teaching, but rather some generally accepted practices which are built on a social constructivist foundation. The following section includes a description of those practices and concepts that are most relevant for TBLL in the context of the present study.

Willis (1996) provides a framework for task-based learning (TBL) which consists of three main phases: the pre-task phase, the task cycle, and language focus. The pre-task phase “introduces the class to the topic and the task, activating topic-related words and phrases” (p. 40). The teacher introduces the topic and activates words and phrases that learners are already familiar with. Learners engage in pre-task exercises such as classifying words and phrases, creating mind maps, or matching phrases to pictures. During this phase, learners first acquire „den grundlegenden Wortschatz, Redemittel und Strukturen, die ihrem Kenntnisstand entsprechen“ (Funk et al., 2014, p. 45). The teacher outlines the task instructions and ensures that learners know what they have to do.

The task cycle phase involves three stages: task, planning, and reporting. During this phase, learners use “whatever language they already know in order to carry out the task” (Willis,

1996, p. 40) rather than being instructed to use certain forms. After learners have completed the task, they are given time in the ‘planning’ stage to prepare for the ‘reporting’ stage, during which time they present the outcome of the task. Following the task cycle is the language focus phase of the TBL framework, which “allows a closer study of some of the specific features naturally occurring in the language used during the task cycle” (Willis, 1996, p. 40). During this phase, learners engage in analysis activities (e.g., consciousness-raising, language awareness) and practice (e.g., completing phrases, gapped transcript, match the word to the definition, etc.).

Similarly, Willis and Willis (2007) discuss task-based teaching (TBT) which is structured around task sequences that resemble the TBL framework described above. The authors describe that planning a task sequence begins with selecting a topic and subsequently deciding on a target task or tasks, noting that “in most cases, these will be tasks which closely reflect activities in which learners may engage in the real world” (Willis and Willis, 2007, p. 23). The instructor must then decide “how to introduce relevant vocabulary, how to focus learners’ minds on the content of the task sequence and how to explain and demonstrate what will be expected of them in the target task” (Willis and Willis, 2007, p. 23). During the lesson, such activities belong to task preparation (e.g., learners make a list relating to a certain topic or prepare for a class discussion about a given issue). As in Willis (1996), learners then complete the task using their own available linguistic resources and are given time to prepare before reporting or presenting the outcome. Following the task sequence is a focus on form; a focus on form at the end of the lesson is said to help learners “to make sense of the language they have experienced,” to highlight “language they are likely to experience in the future,” and to provide motivation (Willis & Willis, 2007, p. 25). Giving learners the freedom to complete the task before a concentrated focus on form is important because, as the authors state, “the more we try to control the language

that learners produce, the more learners are likely to be concerned with form rather than meaning, and the less task-like the activity becomes” (Willis & Willis, 2007, p. 14). This is similar to what Harmer (2007) called the ‘Boomerang’ procedure, i.e., in which “the teacher gets the students engaged before asking them to do something like a written task, a communicative game or a role-play. Based on what happens there, the students will then, after the activity has finished, study some aspect of language which they lacked or which they used incorrectly” (p. 67).

These frameworks provide a starting point for task-based language learning; however, they have a strong focus on in-person classroom learning, with many tips on planning synchronous learning activities such as brainstorming and other teacher-led exercises. Their suggestions for focus on form are also necessarily linked to the outcome of the task, which is more difficult to handle in online learning scenarios where not all learners are completing the task at the same time. For this reason, the design of asynchronous online task sequences will necessarily diverge from previously established sequencing models. There is no prescriptive method for TBLL; thus, in addition to the approaches described above, I consider other concepts and issues relevant to TBLL in the design of the online module used in this study. These are described in the following sections.

2.2.5 Additional Considerations

2.2.5.1 Rückwärtsplanung

Backwards planning (*Rückwärtsplanung*, e.g., Legutke, 2011) involves the sequencing of tasks and exercises by starting with the end in mind, i.e., to begin by choosing the target task (*Zielaufgabe*). When working with this concept, the instructor considers the current abilities of the learners: “die Lehrkraft und Lerngruppe prüfen, welche Teilfertigkeiten und Wissensbestände

die Schüler noch erwerben müssen, damit die den Anforderungen gewachsen sind, welche reaktiviert werden müssen und welche als vorhanden angenommen werden können” (Legutke, 2011, p. 7). In addition to this, instructors must consider what learners need to be able to do in order to complete the target task, i.e., “welche Hilfen ihnen auf dem Weg zur Bewältigung angeboten werden müssen” (Legutke, 2011, p. 7). Starting with the end in mind is a good way to ensure that the target task is the main focus of the lesson and can be used as a guiding principle for preparing exercises (i.e., concerning relevant vocabulary, linguistic structures, and topics for the target task). It is important to consider, however, that the decision about what supports learners need to complete the task is predetermined by the instructor. While a certain degree of support from the teacher will be required, giving learners space to decide for themselves what to include in their task submissions is also important in constructivist pedagogy.

2.2.5.2 Formulaic Language

When considering what kind of vocabulary and phrases learners might need to complete the target task, a useful approach can be to work with formulaic language or chunks (e.g., Aguado, 2002). These concern chunks of language that have become routinized, i.e., they are used with high frequency in commonly repeated, everyday situations. There is increasing evidence that a large part of a speaker’s utterances is not constructed creatively, but is made up of complex, pre-constructed chunks of language (Aguado, 2002). Working with chunks allows learners to draw on frequently used, relatively fixed phrasings or commonly used pieces of language. This is also described by Funk et al. (2014): “wenn man eine Fremdsprache flüssig spricht oder schreibt, reproduziert man formelhafte Wendungen in der phonologisch gespeicherten, grammatisch richtigen Form. Man spricht dabei von Chunks. Chunks entstehen, indem kleinere Einheiten miteinander verknüpft im Gedächtnis abgespeichert werden, sodass sie als eine Einheit

abgerufen werden können. Man baut in der gesprochenen Sprache also Sätze nicht nach grammatischen Regeln auf“ (p. 24). Such formulaic sequences play an important function socially and cognitively; their appropriate use in communicative situations can demonstrate belonging and group membership to others, and they help free up cognitive resources during the cognitively demanding act of speaking and communicating. This has important implications for language learners, as formulaic language may be helpful for speaking more quickly and fluidly. This can also free up cognitive resources for further discursive activities.

2.2.5.3 Focus on Form

Focus on form has been a highly contested topic in language learning research over the span of decades, with scholars disagreeing on how and whether linguistic forms (‘grammar’) should be taught: “the value in teaching explicit knowledge of grammar has been and remains today one of the most controversial issues in language pedagogy” (Ellis, 2005, p. 214). In the context of TBLL and TBLT research, focus on form has also been discussed at length (with variations like ‘focus on forms’ (Long, 1991) and ‘focus on language’ (Willis and Willis, 2007). Scholars have generally agreed that some focus on form is appropriate and necessary when inserted into a task sequence that is primarily meaning-focused. However, the placement of the form-focused learning matters, which I discuss below.

In previous SLA research, the terms ‘implicit,’ ‘explicit,’ ‘deductive,’ and ‘inductive’ have been frequently used in reference to the teaching of grammar; these terms have often overlapped and have been used interchangeably. An explicit approach to language teaching involves direct articulation of the target grammar rule by the teacher. In contrast, implicit approaches to grammar teaching do not provide any explanation of grammatical rules but assume that learners will internalize the rules on their own after engaging with the language. This has

been highly debated; Ellis (2006) has argued that there is convincing evidence to support the explicit teaching of grammar, while other scholars (e.g., Haight et al., 2007) have criticized both implicit and explicit approaches for their failure to acknowledge the role of the learner in discovering grammatical explanations. Cooke (2021) stated that “the debate is not fundamentally about whether second language grammar should be taught but more importantly how it should be taught” (p. 727), thus the debate becomes more about how and when to focus on form.

Similarly, deductive versus inductive approaches to grammar teaching have been highly debated. Deductive language teaching is an inherently explicit approach to teaching grammar rules which “moves from the general to the specific” (Erlam, 2003, p. 242). Under a deductive approach, teachers present explicit grammar rules to learners who practice them through exercises such as information gap activities, verb tables, and the rote memorization of vocabulary. Learners are expected to practice the rules until the information becomes internalized and automatized. An approach may be considered deductive if their purpose is to practice a recently learned grammar rule. Deductive grammar teaching has been criticized for emphasizing “grammar at the expense of meaning and to promote passive rather than active participations of the students” (Shaffer, 1989, p. 395). When learners are treated like passive receivers of linguistic content, they are not actively engaged in processing the linguistic content and are less likely to retain it. Learners such as the participants interviewed in Cooke (2021) may therefore report an inability to use a rule in conversation, despite having understood it in class. Deductive approaches are also necessarily linked with another person’s understanding and explanation of the rules: “a cloze passage essentially requires the student to reconstruct the mental processes of someone else’s mind” (Blyth, 1997, p. 62). Moreover, learning a foreign language is more than the rote memorization of facts but ultimately constitutes “learning to be

another social person” (Reagan, 1999, p. 419). Learners therefore need to reconstruct the “personal identity that is at the heart of FL [foreign language] learning, and it is in this process of reconstruction, rather than merely in terms of learning vocabulary and grammatical forms, that constructivist epistemology may be most useful.” (Reagan, 1999, p. 419).

An example of deductive language teaching is known as Present-Practice-Produce (PPP), “a significant teaching procedure from the middle of the 1960s onwards” (Harmer, 2007, p. 66). Under this approach, the teacher explains a grammatical form to learners who then spend time practicing it with a focus on accuracy. Finally, learners practice producing the chosen form in sentences of their own. PPP has been criticized for its roots in behaviourism, the fact that it is teacher-centred, and because it treats learning as additive and linear. However, “learning rarely happens in an additive fashion, with bits of language being learnt separately, one after another. We cannot predict and determine what students are going to learn at any given stage. Instruction does help, in the long term, but it cannot guarantee when something will be learnt” (Willis, 1996, p. 135). PPP is incongruent with TBLT as learners are often able to complete the task without using the target linguistic form. Additionally, if target forms are given too much attention before the task, learners may pay more attention to the correctness of linguistic forms than to communicating their desired meaning (Willis and Willis, 2007).

In contrast, an inductive approach to language teaching follows a constructivist understanding of language learning as active and individual. In a process that “moves from the specific to the general” (Erlam, 2003, p. 243), inductive learning first requires that learners engage with the new language, i.e., through applying it, before being presented with an explanation. Earlier understandings of implicit inductive teaching have been associated with behaviourist methods such as the audiolingual or direct method (Seliger, 1975; Shaffer, 1989),

which has caused many scholars to reject inductive approaches. More recent understandings of inductive language teaching are more learner focused. For example, Ellis (2006) explains that “in inductive teaching, learners are first exposed to exemplars of the grammatical structure and are asked to arrive at a metalinguistic generalisation on their own; there may or may not be a final explicit statement of the rule” (p. 97). It should be noted that in this example, there is still an assumed target grammatical structure waiting to be discovered. Constructivist understandings of inductive learning would have learners discover any and all linguistic patterns on their own without an underlying grammar agenda. This imposes “more responsibility on students for their own learning” than lecture-based deductive approaches (Prince & Felder, 2006, p. 123) and can lead to more powerful learning (Hidayat, 2017). This is supported by further research which shows that learners can more easily recall newly learned information when they have engaged in a deeper level of processing (Craig & Lockhart, 1972), for example when they have to come up with a rule or learning tip themselves (Bruner, 1961). In order for inductive language teaching to be effective, learners must be provided with opportunities to construct knowledge for themselves and adjust their prior beliefs where necessary. Learners can actively add to and alter their existing understandings as they create and test their own hypotheses about the new language. These are further shaped by input from learning materials and interactions with peers and teachers.

As previously mentioned, scholars have suggested that the placement of focus on form activities in task-based language learning is significant. Willis and Willis (2007) emphasize the importance of sequencing and suggest placing form-focused exercises after the completion of the target task. Müller-Hartmann and Schocker (2016) advocated for more flexibility in the inclusion of focus on form: “die Lehrenden integrieren einen sprachlichen Formfokus an unterschiedlichen

Stellen im *task cycle* (präaktiv, integriert oder reaktiv), abhängig von den sich oft erst im Prozess ergebenden Bedürfnissen einer Lerngruppe. Die Forschung hat gezeigt, wie notwendig dieser flexible Formfokus ist, um den Sprachlernprozess der Lernenden effektiv zu unterstützen“ (p. 328). A flexible integration of focus-on-form allows the instructor to discuss grammatical structures as they become relevant in real time. This flexibility is easily achieved in classroom-based instruction; however, it is difficult to be flexible with the task sequence in asynchronous online learning contexts where learning materials are prepared in advance, teachers do not have access to instantaneous feedback from their students, and learners work through online lessons at different times. One way to accommodate learners' differing experiences, knowledge, and competences in the new language could be to include the option of additional form-focused activities or to give learners the opportunity to repeat a lesson or exercise.

As a highly contested topic, scholars and teachers have often questioned how or whether form-focused instruction should be included in the curriculum. Because deductive approaches to form-focused instruction such as PPP have been criticized in previous research, and with the increased focus on meaning under task-based approaches, a focus on form may not always seem like the right move. However, a primary focus on meaning does not mean that no focus on form can be included; rather, a combination of both is needed for successful learning (Biebighäuser et al., 2012; Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth, 2005; Nunan, 2004; Willis, 1996). How focus on form is realized in learning activities and where it is placed in a task-based lesson should be carefully considered and planned, and a focus on meaning should still be the primary focus of the lesson.

2.2.5.4 Input

Previous research has discussed the role of meaningful, comprehensible input in task-based approaches to language learning, with some scholars including it in the definition of task (e.g., Wright, 1987; Nunan, 1989). The input that learners interact with should be relevant and meaningful to their lives and interests, however, it may not always be immediately clear what that is: “was für Ihre Lernenden bedeutungsvoll ist, können wir Ihnen nicht sagen“ (Funk et al., 2014, p. 24). The authors note as well: „ein personalisierter Unterricht, bei dem Lernende sich persönlich angesprochen fühlen, wird als bedeutungsvoll empfunden. Sie schenken den Unterrichtsinhalten mehr Aufmerksamkeit und somit wird eine größere Verarbeitungstiefe erreicht“ (Funk et al., 2014, p. 24). However, Biebighäuser (2021) points out that learning materials such as course textbooks are written by authors who are not familiar with the learners’ particular context and that “eine Differenzierung, die auf jedes Individuum im Klassenzimmer in seiner spezifischen Weise eingeht, ist ... nicht möglich” (p. 247). A benefit of online learning is that there is potential for a more personalized learning experience: “an digitale Medien wird ... die Erwartung gerichtet, auf jeden Lernenden individuell einzugehen und Input, Aufgaben und Übungen an seinen Lernstand und sein Lernvermögen anzupassen“ (Biebighäuser, 2021, p. 247).

Researchers have argued that input should be authentic in the sense that it reflects actual patterns of real-world language use (“Sprachverwendung in muttersprachlichen Kontexten”; Biebighäuser, 2021, p. 246), rather than being based on the presentation of a particular grammatical structure. Rösler (2013) discusses the challenges of task-based learning in beginner levels where there is tension between the need to teach learners particular structures while also exposing them to authentic materials. He highlights the challenge that the learners may not be able to understand such materials, but notes: “solange es auf der Anfängerebene um Informationsentnahme, um die Arbeit mit Inhalten geht, ist es möglich, durch die Art der

Aufgabenstellung auch sprachlich komplizierte Texte im Spiel zu halten“ (Rösler, 2013, p. 161). This again emphasizes the importance of a primary focus on meaning in TBLL.

Providing learners with examples of the kind of communicative task they will complete can be useful as it sets expectations for learners about what to do, what the final product could look like, and what kind of language could be included. Working with real examples provides organizational structure (i.e., of the text) as well as linguistic structures that learners can use in their own work. More specifically, working with examples exposes learners to vocabulary, structures, sociolinguistic elements, and paralinguistic features of language which are immediately relevant to the context of the task. As such, incorporating contextualized examples into TBLL provides opportunities for interaction. Lindenberg (2021) points out that “for beginner-level learners, contextualized input and student-initiated production within meaning-focused tasks benefits the acquisition of nouns and adjectives” (p. 1), thus highlighting the importance of relevant input that is situated in a context. This can be achieved by working with communicative practices that learners are already familiar with and topics that are relevant to their own daily lives.

2.2.5.5 Interaction

As previously discussed, meaningful interaction with others is a central component of social constructivist understandings of learning. Working with others allows learners to construct new knowledge through their interactions: “acquisition occurs *in* rather than *as a result* of interaction” (Ellis, 2003, p. 177). Moreover, when working independently, “students are entirely reliant on their own resources” (Ellis, 2003, p. 265). Because learning is understood to occur in interaction, tasks are designed to facilitate social interaction between learners, often realized through partner and group work. Scholars have identified that “soziale Interaktion im Fremdsprachenunterricht

fördert die Motivation zum Lernen und hilft das Gelernte besser zu behalten“ (Funk et al., 2014, p. 49). Working in partner or group constellations allows learners to be more actively engaged because they have more opportunity to speak than they do in teacher-centred teaching. Moreover, learners are more likely to engage in meaningful interaction when working in “interaktionalen problembearbeitenden Formen” (Müller-Hartmann & Schocker, 2016, p. 328).

Oxford (1997) distinguishes between three commonly used terms in this arena: interaction, cooperation, and collaboration. She describes (verbal) interaction as a broad category which describes “the situation in which people act upon each other” (Oxford, 1997, p. 444). Cooperative learning “concentrates on rigorously prescribed, although creative, features of classroom organization designed to lead to skill development” (Oxford, 1997, p. 447) and is associated with structure and specific direction to students. As a more holistic understanding of interaction, collaborative learning is more than just small group work but “has taken on a connotation of social constructivism, which holds that learning is acculturation into knowledge communities” (Oxford, 1997, p. 444). Collaborative learning is thus the goal of group and partner work in task-based learning.

Some benefits of partner and group work in task-based approaches are described by Funk et al. (2014). For example, learners are more creative and show higher levels of motivation when they work together. Group and partner work allows learners to support each other’s learning and offer help when needed. In addition to this, learners who are normally shy or avoid speaking in front of the whole class may find partner and group constellations to be a safer, more comfortable space to participate. Such group formations also allow learners to engage in communication that would also occur outside of the classroom, i.e., when they need to divide up the work, ask each other questions, report on what they have done, etc. Furthermore, group work

and partner work develop learners' social competence in the sense that they need to decide at which pace they work, handle disagreements or misunderstandings, and implement strategies for completing the task.

However, there are also some disadvantages of group or partner work, for example, that learners in linguistically homogeneous regions may use their native language when completing tasks or they may be easily distracted and waste time rather than complete the task at hand (Funk et al., 2014). In partner constellations, differing levels of competence may impact how well learners can work together, and if learners do not get along, this may not be a productive partnership. In larger group constellations, it may be difficult to assess which group member contributed which aspect of the work and there is a risk that stronger learners may dominate the decision making and outcomes of the task. Weaker students may thus take advantage of the “free rider effect” when they do not pull their weight (Zibelius, 2012, p. 218). One proposed way of dealing with this issue proposed by Zibelius is to divide the group into individual roles such that it is easier to identify who was responsible for which part. However, this assumes that learning can be divided into individual parts and detracts from the benefits of collaborative learning. Oxford (1997) explains that learning is “fully situated or located within a given context. Learning occurs while people participate in the sociocultural activities of their learning community, transforming (i.e., constructing) their understanding and responsibilities as they participate” (p. 448). Collaborative learning focuses on the “social relationships in a community of learners” (Oxford, 1997, p. 447), therefore it is important that learners work together throughout the completion of the task, rather than working individually side by side.

Social interaction through group and partner collaborative learning plays an important role in language learning. However, while this may hold in classroom settings where learners can

work together face-to-face, we must consider how the learning context is changed in online learning environments. For example, I have discussed earlier in this chapter why social interaction may not lead to the same quality of learning when moved to asynchronous online instruction. It may be necessary to find alternatives to interaction or reconceptualize how it unfolds in asynchronous online instruction, where the learner is, in a sense, always working ‘alone’ (i.e., in a physical sense) while simultaneously interacting with content created by speakers of the new language. We should also consider learning opportunities that align well with online learning contexts. For example, in asynchronous online situations, learners can easily work with materials and resources they find online. Biebighäuser et al. (2012) confirm that tasks that are completed via computer-mediated communication (CMC) align with the same theoretical learning principles that guide task-based approaches to language instruction: “die kollaborative Wissenskonstruktion, die durch die Bearbeitung von Aufgaben mittels CMC erfolgt, entspricht auch den soziokulturellen und konstruktivistischen Prinzipien des Fremdsprachenlernens, welche, ausgehend von den Untersuchungen Vygotskys (1978) darlegen, dass der Mensch effektiver in Zusammenarbeit mit anderen bzw. unter Anleitung von erfahrenen Vorbildern lernt“ (Biebighäuser et al., 2012, p. 37).

The products of asynchronous CMC do not derive from interaction with peers; however, they do constitute cultural artifacts emerging from digital forms of communication and can thus be seen as valuable resources for learning. Because digital technologies enable easy authorship and publication to a wide audience, many forms of asynchronous online communication, e.g., videos, podcasts, social media posts, do not take place one-on-one (i.e., between two or more people in a closed network). Internet users thus have the ability to interact with asynchronous forms of communication created by people they do not know personally. Such interaction does

not unfold synchronously as in a face-to-face conversation but is mediated through digital texts, i.e., digital artifacts. Because these can be created and shared by anyone on the web, learners can work with artifacts that have been created by users of the new language all over the world. Of course, some forms of digitally mediated communication do constitute one-on-one interaction, in which case connecting learners with their peers in partner or group is possible. In place of synchronous interaction, learners can interact in asynchronous communicative settings, engaging with contributions and materials created by people they do not know personally.

2.2.6 Online Tasks

TBLL has not been widely researched in online contexts; thus, there are few resources which can be referenced when designing asynchronous online tasks. Biebighäuser et al. (2012) offer some suggestions for tasks in the context of Web 2.0 and computer-mediated communication (CMC) which I discuss in this final section about TBLL. The authors claim that the central features and criteria which describe traditional (i.e., in-person) tasks also apply to tasks which employ digital media: „Grundlegend gilt, dass zentrale Merkmale und wichtige Kriterien von traditionellen Aufgaben auch auf Aufgaben in digitalen Medien zutreffen“ (Biebighäuser et al., 2012, p. 45). They also argue that there is a higher potential to create language learning tasks that feel less artificial than those conducted in a classroom, likely because of how the internet affords many opportunities for coming into contact with the new language. Thus, many of the principles identified in this chapter so far apply to online task design. Tasks that include the use of digital media and/or the internet create opportunities for diverse forms of interaction; these allow „vielfältige Formen der Interaktion, Diskursteilnahme und Bedeutungskonstruktion durch die Lernenden“ (Biebighäuser et al., 2012, p. 46). Biebighäuser et al. (2012) highlight the importance of *Ergebnisorientierung*, i.e., an orientation to the result of a task. Although this

principle is important for all tasks (also those that take place in classrooms), there is great potential for designing tasks that have a concrete outcome in online learning due to the ease of access to, and availability of, various applications and software.

Biebighäuser et al. (2012) point out that: “insgesamt bieten Pod- und Vodcasts sowohl was die Rezeption als auch ... was die Produktion mündlicher fremdsprachlicher Inhalte betrifft, neuartige Potenziale – v.a. für einen aufgaben- und projektorientierten Fremdsprachenunterricht“ (Biebighäuser et al., 2012, p. 43). The authors make an excellent point that digital task types have a lot to offer in terms of comprehension, but that these also serve as examples that learners can draw on in the creation of their own digital texts. The authors further point out that the internet offers a diverse range of “authentischer, audiovisueller fremdsprachlicher Materialien (z.B. Comedy-Sendungen, Nachrichten, Talk Shows, Musikvideos, wissenschaftliche Vorträge, etc.)” (Biebighäuser et al, 2012, p. 43). This is beneficial for learners as it enables them to come into contact with forms of language other than those heard and seen in the classroom: „dies führt dazu, dass verstärkt andere als die aus dem fremdsprachlichen Klassenzimmer bekannten Diskursstrukturen kennen gelernt werden, das Hör-Sehverstehen mit authentischen Materialien geschult und allgemein eine stärkere Öffnung des Unterrichts für authentische, audiovisuelle Inhalte erreicht werden kann“ (Biebighäuser et al., 2012, pp. 43-44). Learners thus get the opportunity to interact with different kinds of texts and variation within the language when digital texts are integrated into the curriculum. It should be noted that some digital text types (especially those which stem from newer online communicative practice) may not be familiar to all learners. In a study about tasks in social networking, Müller-Hartmann & Raith (2008; cited in Biebighäuser et al 2012, pp. 41-42) point out that social networks come with new text structures which can pose challenges for those who are unfamiliar with them. It is therefore

important that instructors provide supports through scaffolding, clear task sequences, and additional task support.

In this subchapter, I have defined tasks and exercises, discussed how TBLL can be structured, and considered modifications for online delivery. While social interaction cannot always play out synchronously as it would in classroom-based learning, understanding that online communication is mediated by digital artifacts unlocks potential for online task-based approaches. Online TBLL should continue to engage learners in tasks which have a primary focus on meaning, that are outcome-oriented and encourage learners to interact with mediating texts in the new language as much as possible. Understanding previous research about task design and sequencing is helpful for this study; however, adaptations to existing TBLL theory and practices need to be made to accommodate differences between in-person and online interaction and learning. With such an increased interest in online course offerings in recent years, it is imperative that we learn more about the experiences of language learners in contexts and work towards theories that take asynchronous online learning as a starting point. In the next section, I consider additional perspectives from online learning research.

2.3 Online Learning

As I have previously mentioned, there have not yet been any studies of asynchronous online task-based language learning (TBLL). This poses challenges for the design of online tasks in the present study as there are few resources which can offer guidance on this particular topic. I thus consulted previous scholarship on online teaching and learning to identify potential opportunities and challenges which may be relevant for designing online learning modules for the present study. Scholars have identified several benefits of online learning, for example, “online learners do not have to follow the same pace as others, keep the same time, or follow the same paths, and

they do not have to relocate in order to learn. Meanwhile, they benefit from many of the advantages of social interaction that classrooms support, as well as new affordances enabled by the vast numbers of people with whom they might interact, at any time of day, in any place, with any degree of personal involvement that suits them, at times and places far beyond the classroom.” (Dron and Anderson, 2023).

The level of flexibility afforded by asynchronous online learning is convenient, grants time for reflection, and offers the possibility to return to class discussions later. On the other hand, asynchronous online learning also brings about some potential challenges. For example, there is less room for asking questions when all teacher-student communication is mediated by email or discussion boards, thus signifying a need for clearer instructions in asynchronous learning environments (White, 2003). Many approaches to online language teaching stem from early distance education practices which center around self-study and learner autonomy (Andrade & Bunker, 2009), are often primarily concerned with automating learning and knowledge transfer (White, 2003) and are associated with behaviourist pedagogies such as fill-in-the-blanks type exercises (Bates, 2019; Swaffar, 2014). In addition to these considerations, the most important takeaways from previous research for the present study concern learning theory and its realization in practice, conceptual challenges between online and in-person learning, and limitations of learning technologies.

2.3.1 Theorizing Online Learning

The fact that online learning is always mediated by technology has influenced how learning theories are selected and operationalized in online teaching and learning scenarios. For example, Bates (2019) noted that behaviourism “is the basis of populist conceptions of learning among many ... computer scientists interested in automating learning. It is not surprising then that there

has also been a tendency until recently to see technology, and in particular computer-aided instruction, as being closely associated with behaviourist approaches to learning” (2.3.3). However, although behaviourism may continue to underpin some online teaching practices, research has been directed towards the integration of connectivist and constructivist learning theories.

Developed by Siemens (2005) and Downes (2007), connectivism sees new forms of knowledge resulting from the “collective connections between all the ‘nodes’ in a network” (Bates, 2019, 2.6.1). The knowledge that resides in an individual is seen as less important than the connections between them, and learning is seen as something that can reside outside of the individual, including in non-human appliances: “learning (defined as actionable knowledge) can reside outside of ourselves (within an organization or a database), is focused on connecting specialized information sets, and the connections that enable us to learn more are more important than our current state of knowing” (Siemens, 2005). While connectivism may have some practical application in some subjects, it is not a suitable theory for online foreign language learning. Connectivism relies on a view of learning as existing across a network of collective knowledge. It focuses more on where and how knowledge can be stored and accessed rather than put into action. Knowledge is seen as fixed and describable, as something that can reside in an individual or be transferred to another individual or database. Furthermore, the database and knowledge network metaphors strongly resemble the cognitivist *mind-as-computer* metaphor which has been criticized for being reductionist and lacking context (e.g., Searle, 1990). Connectivism is associated with massive open online courses (MOOCs; Bates, 2019), a type of online learning which is not ideal for language learning due to the lack of possibilities for feedback.

A social constructivist perspective (referred to by Dron and Anderson as belonging to the ‘subjectivist paradigm’) continues to be most appropriate for online language learning, however, this has faced challenges in practice: “subjectivist approaches to teaching gained support in traditional education throughout the twentieth century, but the limited opportunities for learner-teacher or (especially) learner-learner interaction that could be supported through communications tools of the time made it difficult to implement for distance learners” (Dron & Anderson, 2023). Although current technologies enable more reliable communication between individuals, many educational technologies (e.g., Zoom, Kahoot) require synchronous engagement to be used. My research has found that the inclusion of constructivist practices in online learning research is often realized through the dissemination of situation-specific findings with little theoretical work (e.g., Cui & Wang, 2023, which studied online social annotation in online postgraduate courses) or the sharing of ‘best practices’ which tend to push group work, online discussion, and instructor presence (e.g., *7 Tips for Teaching Online*, n.d.). Although active (online) discussion as a form of interaction generally falls under the socio-constructivist learning paradigm, as I have previously described, it is not clear from existing theoretical findings whether asynchronous interaction leads to successful learning in the same ways that live interaction has been shown to. It is therefore important to be aware of the dissonance between social constructivist ideals and how they are realized. The blind adoption of practices like group work and online discussion with little consideration for the underlying theoretical foundation may not lead to successful learning. Theory based on in-person findings cannot necessarily be translated perfectly into an online educational setting, highlighting a need for more rigorous theoretical work in online learning research.

2.3.2. Conceptual Challenges

Dron and Anderson (2023) describe that in-person teaching practices evolved in response to challenges that are unique to the physical environment (e.g., boredom, confusion, or a lack of autonomy), and that what we recognize as good classroom pedagogy tackles precisely those challenges. The authors note that distance institutions “had to replicate many of the central features of in-person learning that ... emerged in response to the limitations of the physics and organization in a physical world” (Dron & Anderson, 2023). The authors describe that ‘relatedness,’ or interaction with other learners, was never a concern for in-person learners since this is easily achieved in a physical classroom. However, this is more difficult to support in online settings “because all communication must normally be intentional, focused, and mediated through further technologies, often with limitations on cues such as voice intonation, body language, and touch (Dron & Anderson, 2023). This is further limited by the lack of opportunities for live communication in asynchronous courses. It is therefore important that asynchronous online education be designed for the challenges unique to its own setting, rather than adopting teaching practices from classroom interaction which address a different set of problems. For example, the seemingly infinite content of the web changes the needs of language learners with regards to learning materials. Learners no longer need materials whose main purpose is to provide content in the new language; rather, they need scaffolding and supports to help them make sense of the kinds of content they discover online and to participate in those discourse communities themselves.

Bates (2019) referred to the translation of in-person teaching practices to online settings as “old wine in new bottles.” He argued that simply adding technology to classroom teaching practices is insufficient for online learning as doing so does not fit the restraints and opportunities of the digital age: “just adding technology to the mix, or delivering the same design

online, does not automatically result in meeting changing needs” (Bates, 2019). It thus makes sense to take the asynchronous online context as a starting point when designing online courses. Technology provides many opportunities for addressing the changing needs of students and teachers; however, it should be noted that technology is designed according to the priorities of the companies that create educational technology products, which necessarily determines what we can do in online spaces.

2.3.3 Learning Technologies

There is a heavy reliance in online education on learning management systems (LMS) such as D2L Brightspace, Moodle, or Canvas. However, such platforms are rooted in cognitive-behaviourist or instructivist approaches to learning (Lane, 2009) and are designed to reproduce classroom teaching through the delivery of one-size-fits-all course materials, video lectures, online discussion boards, and unit testing (Bates, 2019). Furthermore, LMS are often operated by large corporations who are more interested in scalability and efficiency than pedagogy: “today’s enterprise-scale systems were created to manage traditional teaching tasks as if they were business processes. They were originally designed to focus on instructor efficiency for administrative functions such as grade posting, test creation, and enrollment management. Pedagogical considerations were thus either not considered or were considered to be embodied in such managerial tasks.” (Lane, 2009). As far as language pedagogy is concerned, such systems dictate how online communicative practices can play out and how learners can collaborate with one another.

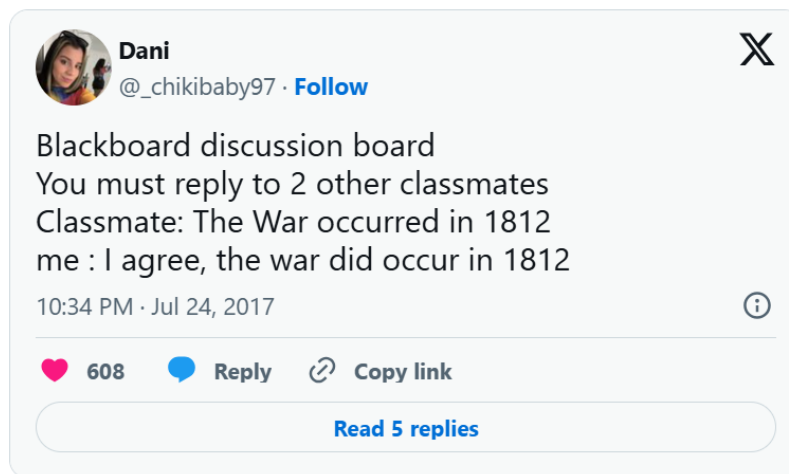
Advancements in web technologies in the wake of Web 2.0 have opened up seemingly endless opportunities for online communication; we communicate in many ways that are mediated by technology on a daily basis, e.g., email, SMS, social media. Jones (2009)

acknowledges how the emergence of Web 2.0 has changed how the internet is used: “from a focus on information to a focus on interaction” (p. 118). Internet webpages are no longer solely intended as places where information can be retrieved and consumed by users; rather, there is a more active involvement on “interactive sites such as online communities, weblogs, social networking sites, social bookmarking sites, video sharing sites and wikis” (Jones, 2009, p. 118). There is a greater focus on user-created content in Web 2.0, however, most learning management systems (LMS) remain sites for learners to passively consume content that has been provided by instructors; there is very little opportunity for learner authorship in such spaces. For example, the only feature on D2L Brightspace that makes space for learner-created content (e.g., cultural artifacts) or learner-learner communication is the discussion board.

Discussion boards are frequently promoted as a means of engaging learners in asynchronous online interaction. For example, Russel and Murphy-Judy (2020) presented guidelines for online communicative language learning such as “facilitate student-student and student-teacher interaction in the new language to promote the negotiation of meaning” and “engage students in open-ended communication where they can create with language” (p. 161). The authors continue, stating that “an example of asynchronous communication would be one person posting a message on a discussion board and another person answering it a few hours, or a few days, later” (Russel & Murphy-Judy, 2020, p. 161). A problem is that discussion boards rarely offer opportunities for negotiation of meaning or truly open-ended communication. One reason for this concerns social interaction and sociocultural theory (SCT). As I have previously discussed, there is no evidence in SCT research to support the notion that asynchronous interaction leads to successful language learning. Another reason concerns the fact that online discussions are frequently constrained by strict regulations about how and what to post (e.g., a

minimum word length; a minimum number of posts or replies). This detracts from any opportunity for learners to take part in an emergent, digitally mediated communicative practice and instead inserts learners into an artificially constructed exchange of information in which details about how to ‘do’ interaction have been externally dictated.

Figure 1. A student’s satirical post which highlights how online discussions are not taken seriously (Martinez, 2019)



In addition to this, Locke (2007) noted a tendency towards homogeneity and conformity on online discussion boards and pointed out that other tools such as shared-document conferencing may be better suited to co-operative learning. Moreover, the fact that BuzzFeed published an article highlighting learners’ disdain for online discussions suggests that they are not taken seriously by the students who participate in them (Martinez, 2019; see Figure 1). Proponents of the discussion board seem to ignore the fact that language is deeply and inherently tied to its conventions and contexts of use and that real-world communicative practices that take place in online spaces would be more effective for learning than information sharing practices that satisfy distance education expectations.

Similarly, Gonzalez-Lloret (2020) pointed out that a large number of tools, techniques, platforms, and products have been promoted since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, yet highlighted the problem that “most of them fail to address the necessity that we have to incorporate tools and activities that allow students to *use* the second language in productive ways” (p. 261). In other words, it is not enough to simply add technology to instructivist teaching practices. There is a clear need for educational technologies which can facilitate real-world, meaningful communication between learners in ways which are consistent with existing forms of asynchronous online communication.

When we consider the multitude of ways in which we use technology to communicate in our daily lives, we can easily conceive of possible (individual and group) tasks for language learners to engage in. For online language courses, it is especially important that learners can engage in real-world communication, i.e., commonly used communicative practices, thus highlighting a need for a new perspective in online language learning research. For asynchronous online learning to be successful, we need to shift away from seeing in-person learning as the ‘default’ way of doing teaching and instead develop new approaches that start with the existing online communicative context.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted some important pedagogical considerations for the development of asynchronous online task-based learning. Online TBLL requires theoretical foundations that treat learners as thinking, feeling, communicative human beings with differing knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes. A social constructivist paradigm is therefore an appropriate starting point for this study. A task-based approach to language learning which engages learners in active participation through meaning-focused, open-ended tasks is consistent with this theoretical perspective. A

survey of previous research reveals that task-based approaches have not been studied in asynchronous online learning, and current theoretical perspectives and approaches to online language learning do not sufficiently account for the nature of online communicative practice. This highlights the need for task-based approaches which take asynchronous online communication as a starting point. I propose that this is best facilitated through a multiliteracies approach to online teaching and learning, which I describe in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Multiliteracies and Multimodality

In Chapter 2, I presented some considerations from previous pedagogy research that are relevant for this study. The chapter concluded with a discussion of online language education which signaled a need for opportunities for learners to use the new language in meaningful ways. In this chapter, I present the multiliteracies framework as a potential means for revealing such opportunities. I begin by introducing the concepts of literacy and multiliteracies as well as the related concepts multimodality, text, design, and genre. These concepts concern the construction of meaning through the use of semiotic systems such as language and other modes. This has implications for language education as this perspective also influences how language users are perceived. I argue that a multiliteracies framework is especially relevant for asynchronous online language learning and discuss how shifts in digital technologies have resulted in communicative practices which play out in online spaces. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of an example of a task from an online German course which conforms to singular understandings of literacy.

3.1 Singular Views of Literacy

The term ‘literacy’ tends to be associated with reading, writing, and print media (Hull & Nelson, 2005) and has been defined in terms of “a single, official or standard form of language, one right way to write” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, p. 1). Scholars have noted that literacy education “has traditionally meant teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language” (New London Group, 1996, pp. 60-61). This understanding of literacy may have sufficed during the “era of the dominance of writing” (Kress, 2003, p. 7), however, it falls short in the wake of significant social, economic, and technological changes; thus, scholars have begun to call for an expanded definition. A static view of literacy fails to account for the “multiple literacy practices that vary across languages, cultures, and contexts”

(Cenoz & Gorter, 2011, p. 340), including many which exist in online or digitally mediated spaces. “With a shift to sociocultural models of literacy also came an insistence that literacy is not a singular cognitive ability or a functional skill-set that one either does or does not possess; instead, scholars in education began to talk of *literacies* as a way of indexing the multiplicity of practices ... through which social actors engage” (Warner, 2024, p. 26) The concept of multiliteracies offers an alternative way of viewing communicative practice which can account for “the new kinds of texts and textual engagement that have emerged in the wake of new information and multimedia technologies” (Warner and Dupuy, 2018, p. 119). This perspective has been gaining traction in language education: “inspired by a set of intersecting discussions in education and applied linguistics that have developed over the last two decades, there has been a steady paradigm shift towards approaches to language education, which envision language as a dynamic repertoire of resources for making meaning in and out of the world” (Warner, 2024, p. 4).

3.2 Multiliteracies Framework

3.2.1 Multiliteracies

In the mid-1990s, a group of scholars known as the New London Group (henceforth; NLG) gathered to find alternatives to older definitions of literacy that were no longer deemed sufficient for describing communicative practice. They established a manifesto (NLG, 1996) in response to the changing conditions of work, schooling, and social lives. The NLG had begun to question the notion of literacy as a singular concept and called for an expanded understanding which they call ‘multiliteracies.’ They tie the concept of multiliteracies to two important arguments relating to “the emerging cultural, institutional, and global order: the multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity” (NLG, 1996,

p. 63). In other words, a multiliteracies perspective acknowledges the kinds of new communicative practices which have emerged around digital media as well as the diversity of linguistic and cultural practices which fall outside of a singular linguistic standard.

As I have described earlier, social constructivist views of language learning do not see language learning as a process of transferring knowledge from an expert to a novice but see learners as active participants in the process of constructing knowledge. Warner (2024) criticizes conceptualizations of learning which treat language as singular and learners as empty slates. For example, the metaphor of ‘language acquisition’ treats languages as singular and “positions language as a thing in the world that can be possessed” (p. 6). The concept of multiliteracies fits in with changing conceptualizations of language and communication in line with shifts towards more social constructivist approaches in language education. For example, Warner (2024) states that “proponents of the multiliteracies framework in language and culture teaching emphasize that the goal of second language teaching is not simply to equip students with communicative skills, but more importantly to foster active and critical languagers ... who are capable of moving beyond literal meanings and of reflecting on the nuanced connections between semiotic form, meaning, context, perspective, and history” (Warner, 2024, p. 36).

Since the conception of this new understanding of literacy, scholars continue to call for a similar shift in thinking. For example, Cope and Kalantzis (both members of the NLG) note that it is “no longer enough for literacy teaching to focus solely on the rules of standard forms of the national language” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, p. 3) and Warner & Dupuy (2018) described a need for “more integrative frameworks that embed literacy and other communicative modes from the beginning levels of language teaching” (121). The fact that scholars are still calling for a shift

towards multiliteracies perspectives almost 30 years after the NLG's initial publication indicates that traditional understandings of literacy continue to underpin many language programs.

3.2.2 Multimodality

Because an expanded understanding of literacy (or *literacies*) makes space for communicative practices outside of formal writing alone, we can expect to encounter language in diverse situations in multiple varieties and realized through various modalities. This includes texts (i.e., any product of communicative practice; discussed further in Section 3.3.3) in which meaning is realized through modes other than language: “the pedagogical frameworks that have developed from this body of work have collectively emphasized that language learners are not most importantly acquiring new words but diverse ways of making meaning – through language and other culturally embedded semiotic systems, such as images, gestures, and sounds” (Warner, 2024, p. 4). While multiliteracies accounts for the multiple communicative practices in which we engage, the related concept of ‘multimodality’ concerns the multiplicity of modes which we use to take part in such practices. “Multimodality starts from the position that all modes, like speech and writing, consist of semiotic resources ... From this perspective the modes and semiotic resources a person chooses (or are permitted) to use shape communication and meaning” (Jewitt, 2009, p. 2).

Mode has been defined in diverse ways in previous scholarship. For example, from the perspective of Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics, mode has three functions: “interpersonal functions that speak to an audience; more immaterial qualities that express ideas, values, beliefs, emotions, senses as ideational functions; and, physical features that materialize these more ephemeral qualities of texts as textual functions” (Rowse, 2013, pp. 3-4). Kress (2014) rather focuses on the latter, the tangible characteristics of mode. He differentiates between

material means (i.e., mode) and non-material means (i.e., genre; discussed in Section 3.3.5) for making meaning: “modes are material means for making meaning: socially shaped and culturally available. The non-material theoretical resources are cultural / semiotic categories. They ‘emerge’ in and are ‘materialized’ through the resources of *mode*” (Kress, 2014, p. 135; emphasis in the original). Within this understanding, modes may be realized through, e.g., image, video, audio, music, colour, 3D objects, gesture, speech, alphabetic writing and others. Like language, modes are not used gratuitously but function to shape meaning and communication.

An important aspect of working with multimodality is understanding that different modes do different things, e.g.: “because there are so many possibilities and combinations of modes, certain materials afford more meaning potential in certain instances than in others” (Rowsell, 2013, p. 4). Similarly, Hull and Nelson (2005) point out that “although different semiotic modes may seem to encode the same content, they are nonetheless conveyors of qualitatively different kinds of messages” p. 229). Even when different modes are communicating the ‘same’ message, they will inevitably do so in unique ways. For example, Kress (2003) discusses the differences in the ‘reading path’ between linguistic texts and images, pointing out that the former follows the logic of time while the latter follows the logic of space. This same point is taken up by Hull and Nelson (2005) who state that “the meaning in images is apprehended by the viewer in accordance with an ordering principle that is spatial and simultaneous, whereas language, particularly oral language, is organized and apprehended temporally and sequentially” (p. 229). The logic that governs how a given text can be ‘read’ contributes to what is known as the ‘affordance’ of mode. For example, “the affective affordances of sound are entirely different to those of sight or those of touch; sound is more immediately tangibly felt in the body than is sight, but certainly differently felt” (Kress, 2003, p. 46). In other words, different modes are perceived

and read differently, thus certain modes may be better than other at conveying different kinds of information. Jewitt (2009) expands on Kress' definition, stating that affordance is "shaped by how a mode has been used, what it has been repeatedly used to mean and do, and the social conventions that informs its use in context. Where a mode 'comes from', its history of cultural work, its provenance, becomes part of its *affordance*" (p. 24; emphasis in the original). Because modes are bound to their own histories and conventions of use, there are always gains and losses in transduction, i.e., the shift from one mode to another: the "materiality of the different modes – sound for speech, light for image, body for dance – means that not everything can be released in every mode with equal facility, and that we cannot transport mode-specific theories from one mode to another without producing severe distortions" (Kress, 2003, p. 106). We can therefore assume that different kinds of (multimodal) texts will do different kinds of semiotic work. The affordance(s) of the modes at work in a given communicative situation should be considered when designing foreign language learning materials, as some modes may be better suited to in-person communication, while others may be better suited to asynchronous or online communication.

3.3.3. Working with (Multimodal) Texts

Modes are frequently used together with other modes to create a multimodal text, i.e., a text which is made up of two or more semiotic systems. The combination of modes in a single text is not necessarily additive in the sense that each mode is perceived separately in addition to the other modes present. Rather, through a process of 'braiding' or 'orchestrations,' "a multimodal text can create a different system of signification, one that transcends the collective contribution of its constituent parts" (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 225). Modes can thus be combined in a single text to create meanings that would not have been possible through a single mode individually.

Working with texts is an important aspect of a multiliteracies perspective because it concerns the way that we approach the study of literacy. The term ‘text’ does not have to refer to a written text nor does it necessitate the use of alphabetic language; a ‘text’ can be defined as “the result of the social semiotic action of representation” (Kress, 2003, p. 83). In other words, text is the result of meaning making through some representational means. Another way of looking at text is provided by Halliday and Hasan (1993): “we can define text, in the simplest way perhaps, by saying that it is language that is functional. By functional, we simply mean language that is doing some job in some context, as opposed to isolated words or sentences that I might put on the blackboard” (Halliday and Hasan, 1993, p. 10). The authors note that text cannot be separated from its context; because text is the result of some kind of social action, “the notions of text and context are inseparable; text is language operative in a context of situation and contexts are ultimately construed by the range of texts produced within a community” (Halliday and Hasan, 1993, p. 117). Text is a central category in a multiliteracies framework.

Scholars have noted that textual thinking, i.e., work with language at the textual level, has benefits for learners’ literacy development; however, it is often left out of beginner-level language education. Maxim (2006) points out that learners at lower levels engage primarily with their immediate environments and concrete needs; work with texts is not introduced until higher levels of foreign language education: “no longer centered on the learners’ immediate physical environment, upper-level instruction emphasizes the verbally created and imagined world of texts that inherently contains a level of abstraction and ambiguity not found at the lower level” (p. 21). He writes that an emphasis on work with texts “implies supersentential and discourse-level processing of a message system within a text rather than the sentence-level registration of isolated details” (Maxim, 2006, p. 21). Simply focusing on sentence-level language does not

make space for learners to develop the higher-level thinking that comes with the consideration of a text as a whole. Similarly, Swaffar (2014) writes that learners are often “asked to make language constructions without seeing them in their natural environments” which results in tests that “still reward memorized command of isolated language features (morphology, ‘fill in the blanks’) rather than holistic abilities to integrate language and meaning” (Swaffar, 2014, p. 31). Working with language and other meaning making resources at the textual level is thus more productive for learners than work with decontextualized, sentence-level language as it encourages learners to consider the wider context of the text in question.

Warner (2024) points out that “there has been continuous importance placed on the role of authentic texts, that is, those not designed primarily for didactic or language practice purposes, as models of available designs as they are instantiated in socially situated, culturally constituted acts of meaning making” (p. 54). She further notes that “through the experience of these texts and guided opportunities for interpretation and reflection, learners are designing meaning as active participants in literacy activities” (Warner, 2024, p. 54). Working with authentic texts in language education thus provides opportunities for learners to draw on them as resources in their own creations of meaning. This may result in textual borrowing or the imitation of certain elements from a source into a newly designed text. Scholars have shown how “the re-appropriation of elements from a model text, can also be a helpful strategy for linking and reading texts and attending to their available designs in the creation of new compositions” (Warner, 2024, pp. 54-55). She further discusses a study by Allen and Goodspeed (2018) which found that “learners were not merely appropriating available designs but were weaving together borrowed resources and individual expressions, infusing their texts ‘with creative perspectives, ideas, and expression’” (Warner, 2024, p. 56; citing Allen and Goodspeed, 2018, p. 102). In the

next section, I expand on the process of working with textual resources in a discussion of the concept of design.

3.3.4 Design

Shifting perspectives about literacy and contextualized language requires a move away from understandings of learners as passive receivers of information. One way to approach foreign language education within a multiliteracies framework is through the notion of design: “this invites a model of language teaching and learning, which centers acts of meaning design and positions learners as not only decoders or interpreters of language but more importantly as users, as themselves designers of meaning” (Warner, 2024, p. 18). From this perspective, learners are seen as language users who design meaning through the creation of texts. The notion of design in this sense was first used by the NLG (1996); Warner (2024) comments on why their choice of terminology is appropriate in the multiliteracies framework: “in addition to expanding the scope of available resources from more traditional, linguacentric metalanguage such as grammar and vocabulary, the NLG chose the term design to highlight the ‘creative intelligence’ needed in contemporary society and the role of learners as social agents” (Warner, 2024, pp. 29-30). The concept of design thus provides a means of talking about meaning making that is not framed in terms of linguistic categories, and it draws attention to the necessarily creative process of making design decisions. Kress (2003) similarly notes that creativity is a regular part of the design process: “in such a theory all acts of representation are innovative, and creativity is the normal process of representation for all.” (Kress, 2003, p. 120). The NLG’s concept of design has increased in popularity since the appearance of their 1996 publication: “the notions of design and genre have been central features in literacy-oriented and multiliteracies approaches to collegiate foreign language (FL) teaching in recent years” (Warner & Chen, 2017, p. 121). In this section, I

describe design as it is outlined by the NLG and discuss how it contributes to our understanding of multimodal meaning making.

The NLG describes design in the following way: “we propose to treat any semiotic activity, including using language to produce or consume texts, as a matter of Design involving three elements: Available Designs, Designing, and The Redesigned. Together these three elements emphasize the fact that meaning-making is an active and dynamic process, and not something governed by static rules” (NLG, 1996, p. 74). Thus, the creation of texts is not a matter of following some static, top-down, given set of rules; rather, the conventions of meaning making are shaped through design. The NLG describe the process of design as a three-stage process which consists of available designs, designing, and the redesigned.

The first of the three design elements, available designs, refers to a body of existing texts that authors can draw on when creating something new. Available designs carry the conventions of communicative practices which can be taken up by the authors of new texts as per their own understanding and interpretation of those conventions: “within orders of discourses there are particular Design conventions – Available Designs – that take the form of discourses, styles, genres, dialects, and voices, to name a few key variables” (NLG, 1996, p. 75).

The second element, designing, involves the actual creation of texts, i.e., the work performed on or with available designs in the meaning making process. In designing texts and interactions, “people always draw on systems of sociolinguistic practice as well as grammatical systems. These may not be as clearly or rigidly structured as the word ‘system’ suggests, but there are nevertheless always some conventional points or orientation when we act semiotically” (NLG, 1996, p. 75). In the process of designing, designers (i.e., language users; the creators of texts) must draw on the conventions that they understand to be important to the sociolinguistic

practice in question. Designers thus make decisions based on their own understanding of those conventions and the social situation at hand.

The third element in the NLG's process of design, the redesigned, describes the products of that decision-making process, i.e., the new texts that have been created. Having been added to the pool of existing texts, the redesigned become available designs for future designers. The redesigned "is founded on historically and culturally received patterns of meaning. At the same time, it is the unique product of human agency: a transformed meaning. And, in its turn, The Redesigned becomes a new Available Design, a new meaning-making resource" (NLG, 1996, p. 76). The redesigned thus embodies something novel yet recognizable. The notion of design "recognizes the iterative nature of meaning-making, drawing on Available Designs to create patterns of meaning that are more or less predictable in their contexts. This is why the Redesigned has a ring of familiarity to it. Yet there is something ineluctably unique to every utterance." (NLG, 1996, p. 76). Utterance, in this sense, can be understood as any product of communicative practice. Designed artifacts are thus recognizable and familiar despite constituting something new.

Working with the concept of design in language education means placing responsibility on learners to make their own design decisions. Warner (2014) points out that "when language learners are positioned as active designers of meaning rather than as cultural decoders or mediators, it quickly becomes clear that their positioning as flat, static, tourist-like personas, as found in many textbooks and materials, is an inadequate representation" (p. 58). A view of learners as active designers of meaning sees them as actors who make their own design decisions: "design rests on choice and it is the outcome of choices made. Choice is always political, that is, it is subject to power; it is about (possibilities of) selecting and not-selecting –

of rejecting – possibilities. A change in focus from competence (a focus involving authority and convention, itself the sedimentation of power over time) to design (the materialisation of the interests of the rhetor/designer) has far-reaching social-political repercussions” (Kress, 2014, p. 151). The process of decision making goes beyond simply choosing the correct lexical item or grammatical structure, but extends to the choice of mode, topic, register, etc. within a sociohistorical context and an understanding that design choices are not ideologically neutral.

As we work towards understandings of literacy and learning that move away from singular views of literacy and objectivist understandings of knowledge, the notion of design is valuable for conceptualizing how learners interact with texts and create their own meanings. Within this perspective, an understanding of genre is useful for understanding the organization of texts and their conventions.

3.3.5 Genre

Genre has been defined in several ways in previous scholarship. The NLG (1996) describes genre as “an intertextual aspect of a text. It shows how the text links to other texts in the intertextual context, and how it might be similar in some respects to other texts used in comparable social contexts” (p. 78). Eggins (2004) understands genre as “the staged, structured way in which people go about achieving goals using language” (Eggins, 2004, p. 10). Kress (2014) sees genre as the intangible organization of a text: he describes genre as “a cultural / semiotic category, a non-material cultural resource: social in genesis, and with social effects and meanings” (Kress, 2014, p. 136). Whereas mode is understood to be the material means for making meaning, genre is understood as the non-material organizing principle. Just as we draw on mode to embody meaning through material means, we draw on our understandings of genre as the intangible organizing principle in interpreting and designing texts.

For Kress (2003), the notion of genre goes hand-in-hand with his understanding of text; he argues that the “introduction of the concept of genre into theories of literacy entails that we see text – not letter, not word, not clause or sentence – as the central category in literacy” (Kress, 2003, p. 85). He argues that all texts (i.e., available designs) that we encounter in the world are influenced by genre, and states that it is not possible to encounter language that has not been touched by genre: “every bit, every strand of language-as-text which we encounter is generically shaped. When we use language in our new making of texts, in social situations which are always at the same time recognisably like others and always new, we use generically shaped strands to make our new generically shaped texts” (Kress, 2003, p. 87).

What the generic organization of a text ultimately looks like will be influenced by the conventions of a given genre. Consistent with Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of dialogism, Maxim (2009) states that language users “do not reinvent language for every communicative event; rather, they draw on stable and mandatory patterns of language use established in previous instantiations of that event” (p. 102). Although genre conventions may be recognizable through stable patterns, they are by no means fixed characteristics. The NLG writes that “intertextual characterizations of texts in terms of genres and discourses are best regarded as provisional approximations, because they are cultural interpretations of texts that depend on the analyst’s fuzzy but operationally adequate feel for the culture, as well as for specialist knowledge” (NLG, 1996, p. 78). Text design is thus contingent on a language user’s own individual interpretation of the conventions at play. This is further complicated by the social relationships at stake as well as the language user’s desire to adhere to the conventions; as Kress (2003) argued, the stability or instability of textual form derives “from the social arrangements in which actions take place and,

to some extent – but always present – the interest of the text-maker in closely or not so closely adhering to what they understand the reasons for the conventions to be” (Kress, 2003, pp. 84-85).

Warner (2024) notes that genres are “configurations of design elements and the recurrent social purposes they realize” (p. 50). The notion of genre thus goes beyond the organization of textual elements; it also concerns the relationship between the creator and receiver of the message. Kress (2003) sees genre as sitting “directly in the domain of social interaction: the questions that arise are questions such as ‘who are the participants involved in the social action as it takes place?’ and ‘what are their social relations with each other?’ Such interactions have structure and shape, which is reflected in or realised in the representational practices that are part of such actions, or which constitute such actions.” (Kress, 2003, p. 83). In other words, the structure of interaction as well as the representational means used to realize them (i.e., the modes) depends not only on conventions but also on the social relations at stake.

Working with design and genre in language education has the benefit for learners that they can come to see the genre as a kind of template. For example, in a discussion of student-created fanfiction, MacFarlane (2007) wrote that “the act of composition becomes easier when there is a framework to follow” and that the “intertextual connections play a crucial role in the creative and discursive practices of design.” The intertextual connections, i.e., learners’ abilities to read and work with the conventions of the fanfiction genre, is helpful for learners as they make design decisions in their own writing. When learners are confronted with the task of designing a text in a specific genre, they are not only working with real-world communicative practices (which is encouraged in e.g., in TBLL research), but this has the added benefit that learners can lean on the genre as a kind of template to follow, much in the same way we might build scaffolding into learning activities by providing examples or helpful phrases. Moreover,

learners may have previous knowledge or experiences with common real-world genres which they draw on to complete the task. The quote from MacFarlane (2007) also highlights the importance of including examples of the target genre in the curriculum, i.e., when learners have examples from which they can work, they can engage in textual borrowing and adopt patterns of language and other modes in their creation of meaning. As Warner (2024) highlights, “an explicit focus on genre can help educators to orient language teaching activities toward ‘the purpose of communication’ while also making space for critical reflection of the design of a wide range of text types and media” (Warner, 2024, p. 50; citing ACTFL, 2017, p. 1).

As I have discussed so far, ‘multiliteracies’ refers to the varying, multiple, and possibly multimodal communicative practices that we engage in as language users, while ‘multimodality’ concerns how semiotic modes are used and combined in the context of communicative practice to design and share meaning. A multiliteracies perspective considers various ways of meaning making across different communicative contexts and combinations of modes. This is why Kress (2003) described a shift towards a multiliteracies and multimodality perspective as a theoretical change away from linguistics towards semiotics: “from a theory that accounted for language alone to a theory that can account equally well for gesture, speech, image, writing, 3D objects, colour, music and no doubt others” (p. 36). A multiliteracies framework in language education makes space for learners to engage in the design of texts and work with real-world genres. The design of a text will be based on a language user’s stable-yet-fuzzy understanding of semiotic patterns within available designs, and it will be further influenced by social relationships. The resulting text design, i.e., the tangible elements (mode) and intangible organization (genre) is known as the redesigned and is thus added to the pool of available designs. Learners’ abilities to interpret and design meaning is becoming especially important as new types of communicative

practices and multimodal texts become an increasingly normal part of our everyday lives. In the next section, I discuss multiliteracies and multimodality in the context of online communication and changes in technology.

3.4 Multimodality and Digital Media

Over the course of the past several decades, changes in technology have had significant effects on daily life. Jewitt (2009) points out that changes in technology “enable image, sound and movement to enter the communicational landscape in new and significant ways” (p. 18). This has had an impact on the way that information is organized; scholars have noted that the dominant textual domain has shifted from the page to the screen (Kress, 2003; Warner, 2024), and Jewitt writes of a “modularization that can be seen across many contexts as information is reorganized across the screen, and elsewhere, to produce information in bite-sized chunks regardless of media and mode” (Jewitt, 2009, p. 19). These changes coincide with the fact that the shift to Web 2.0 (also known as the ‘social web’) has had an impact on how the internet is used, moving “from a focus on information to a focus on interaction” (Jones, 2009, p. 118). As a result of this change, the creating and sharing of multiple kinds of texts using a variety of modes has become easy, accessible, and normal. Gee and Hayes (2011) note that “digital media deliver knowledge and language, just like writing and print do. But they do so faster, more widely, more easily, and in a way that allows rapid modification and wider participation” (p. 88).

The increased use of the internet and digital technologies have led to changes in communication such that the internet “has increasingly become a site where significant portions of our daily interactions and transactions play out” (Warner & Chen, 2017, p. 122). Leander and Vasudevan (2009) describe how new media and technologies have changed the nature of identity and communication in online spaces: “Web 2.0 technologies and platforms combine with mobile

technologies to facilitate new cultural practices of self-portraiture, identification, and global communication” (p. 136). As a result, new social and communicative practices have emerged around digital technologies. Sharpies et al. (2007) note that “technology use occurs within a social system of other people and technologies. Social rules and conventions govern what is acceptable (e.g. how to use e-mail, who is allowed to e-mail whom, what kinds of document format should be used).” In other words, technology is not used in a vacuum nor is it a tool for reproducing the same old literary practices using new tools; technology shapes and is shaped by the social practices of the people who use it. There are shared rules and conventions that are associated with these social practices; they are not recycled versions of their analog counterparts. Kress (2003) points out that it is “essential to take account of what conventions are at work in [a given] domain of practice; if I am not aware, I will commit errors which will be noticed by those who are in the community that observes that convention” (p. 84).

It is not surprising that such shifts in technology and communicative practice have led to an increase in multimodal communication: “the digital enhances the inherently multimodal nature of semiosis by making it easier for teachers and students to access and create a wider range of available designs. (Warner, 2024, p. 40). Emerging digital communicative practices thus necessitate new design practices: “contemporary authors, faced with complex rhetorical situations, need the ability to draw on an increasingly rich set of design resources and representational modalities to make meaning and create texts – among them, still photography, video, audio, alphabetic, animation, graphical drawings, colour.” (Hawisher & Selfe, 2007). Similarly, Mills (2015) writes that in increasingly digitally-dependent societies, “reading and writing in personal and public life requires exponential shifts in new knowledge of media,

modes, genres, and ways of working with texts” (p. 172). Language users are therefore confronted with an increasing need to be able to read and design multimodal texts.

Of course, shifts in communicative practice have an impact on pedagogy and language education. Warner (2024) states that “multimodality in multiliteracies pedagogies is bound up in the increasing presence of digital communications media over the last couple of decades and the now-established place of digitally composed and circulated forms of cultural expression in contemporary life” (Warner, 2024, p. 39). Cope and Kalantzis (2015) call for an extended multiliteracies pedagogy which does not overlook the integration of multimodal texts; they state that “we need to extend the range of literacy pedagogy so that it does not unduly privilege alphabetical representations” and that a multiliteracies approach “suggests bringing multimodal texts, and particularly those typical of the new, digital media, into the curriculum and classroom” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, p. 3).

Others acknowledge that technology and diverse ways of meaning making are not new to many language educators. For example, Warner (2024) recognizes that both multimodality and digital technologies “have been present in language classrooms separate from any discussions of multiliteracies or literacy-based teaching, but what it provided was support for exploring and assessing learning in relation to a range of vernacular digital genres” (Warner, 2024, p. 40). The integration of a multiliteracies perspective thus makes space for the new social, communicative practices that have emerged (and are still emerging) in the wake of shifts in technology and society. Genres of meaning making that are primarily found online or which are used via mobile devices are granted a level of legitimacy that was not thought possible under singular understandings of literacy. A multiliteracies perspective provides necessary opportunities for

online language learning as it opens up a range of possibilities with regards to the types of language learning tasks that can be integrated into the curriculum.

3.5 Multiliteracies and Online Language Learning

In Chapter 2.3, I discussed that online teaching practices have sometimes succumbed to Bates' (2019) concept of 'old wine in new bottles,' i.e., the adoption of in-person teaching practices to courses with online delivery methods. This kind of pedagogical approach had been criticized as the same practices that work in classrooms do not necessarily address the needs of online learners. The adoption of a multiliteracies framework in asynchronous online learning provides an opportunity to work with genres of communicative practice that are by default asynchronous and online. Working with actual real-world genres that already match the format of the online learning environment is an important aspect of designing online tasks. Just as the adoption of in-person learning activities to online courses does not necessarily lead to effective learning, simply adding additional modes of meaning making to practices that are rooted in singular understandings of literacy will not necessarily engage learners in meaningful design work. To illustrate this point, I draw on an example from a newly developed online asynchronous beginner-level German course and discuss how the integration of the multiliteracies concepts discussed in this chapter could offer improvements to the quality of the task.

3.5.1 Example from an Online German Course

The following excerpts contain the instructions for a video assignment from an asynchronous online beginner German course. The assignment instructions span across two excerpts (they are found on two different pages in the course): Excerpt 1 contains general instructions which apply to all video assignments in that course; Excerpt 2 includes the specific instructions for that particular video task.

Excerpt 1:

Description

You will submit a short video assignment for at least four chapters in this semester. These videos are of different types: question & answer and individual video. While making the videos, please make sure to remain at the level of this course and use the vocabulary, phrases, expressions, and grammar rules you have acquired in this course. You are not expected to go beyond the language knowledge and skills acquired throughout the semester.

Please Pay Attention to the Following

- Put your video in a real-life context and make it as authentic as possible,
- Think of a solid structure from the beginning to the end of the monologue / dialogue,
- Practice well ahead of recording the video,
- Make the video in a quiet place,
- Test your equipment before recording your video,
- Talk loudly and clearly to have a good sound quality,
- Avoid using background music,
- Make sure to speak freely and refrain from reading from your notes or the screen, and
- Distribute the dialogue roles so that each partner speaks equally.

Excerpt 2

In this individual video project, you talk about the activities you perform on a usual weekend from the moment you wake up until you go to bed. In so doing, make sure to reflect the following elements in your monologue:

- Times of the day
- Hours
- Activities

Please make sure that you use complete sentences for each activity.

The objective of the assignment is for students to talk about a typical weekend; what activities they engage in and when. The assignment thus serves as an opportunity for learners to practice vocabulary and time telling in German. The instructions for the assignment are clear; however,

what is missing is a communicative framework (i.e., a set of conventions for the organization of the text; a genre). This format of video does not constitute any kind of recognizable genre; it seems to exist only for the purpose of proving that learners have learned appropriate words and phrases from the chapter. The instructions are very specific about what kind of language should be used, but does not specify, e.g., who the audience is (we can presume it is the course instructor), what the tone should be, how it should be narrated or what style of language should be used. The instructions indicate that learners should put their video in a real-life context and speak as authentically as possible; however, this is difficult considering the fact that the assignment is set up to be context neutral.

The product of this assignment is a monologue that is recorded on video. Although the task technically requires learners to engage in the use of digital technology to complete the assignment, conceptionally, it is still bound to a singular understanding of literacy. The described monologue displays the same kinds of features we would expect to see in a written text: it should be created by a single author for a broad audience; it does not make space for dialogue or any kind of response (something which is possible or even expectable on the internet, e.g., through comments, but is not typical of written texts); students are instructed to use a formal writing style (full sentences); and they are discouraged from including additional modes of meaning making (no music, for example). This demonstrates how singular conceptualizations of literacy can impact on the effectiveness of online learning.

In addition to the issues identified above, the assignment does not see learners as designers of meaning, nor does it treat them as active participants in their own learning. The task does not encourage self-discovery or reflection; learners are told exactly what to include in their videos (activities, times, hours) and they are told how to do it (in a monologue-style video,

clearly spoken, in full sentences, without any background noise or music). The assignment does not provide learners with a model of what is expected but instead provides specific instructions. Because learners are told what they should include, they do not have the opportunity to make their own design decisions about the content, mode, or organization of the text. In contrast, a more open-ended assignment would grant learners the freedom (and responsibility) of making those decisions themselves based on their own interpretation of what is appropriate.

In light of the increasing multimodality in digital forms of communication, including video assignments in the online foreign language curriculum is an improvement over approaches that strictly adhere to formal reading and writing tasks. However, this assignment could benefit from the addition of a multiliteracies perspective. If we are going to engage learners in creating videos in course assignments, we need to recognize that the mode of ‘video’ cannot be treated as singular; it is used in a multiplicity of ways across various communicative practices (e.g., news reports, movie trailers, vlogs, film, etc.). Without a communicative context to work within, this assignment misses out on potential learning opportunities that emerge when learners can work with their previous knowledge and reflect on meanings they encounter in available designs.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the multiliteracies framework as well as the related concepts of multimodality, design, and genre. A multiliteracies perspective moves away from singular forms of literacy which are often restricted to understandings of language pedagogy which preference standardized forms of formal reading and writing in language education. An expansion of such views of literacy is necessary to account for the many types of meaning making that have become a normal part of our everyday lives, especially as a result of changes in the accessibility of technology and digital authorship. Under such an understanding of literacies, language

learners and users are seen as designers of meaning who draw on existing texts in the processes of designing something new. This view of language, design, and literacies is important for asynchronous online language learning as it makes space for the creation of tasks that are based on digital genres. As discussed in the example above, it is not sufficient to add digital media to teaching and learning practices that are rooted in singular conceptualizations of literacy as this does not account for contextual factors. In the present study, I aim to design a task for asynchronous online German learning which accounts for the multiplicity of modes and genres used across communicative practices and which engages learners in the process of designing meanings that are relevant to the context of the task.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological framework of the present study. I begin with a discussion of some of the challenges in conducting research about teaching and learning; as a difficult and messy process, it requires consideration of many influential factors. I argue that a Design-based Research (DBR) framework (e.g., Brown, 1992) fits with the current study which aims to investigate multimodal tasks in online German learning. DBR is a method for designing and testing educational interventions through an iterative testing process which begins with an assessment of the local context and “is informed by relevant literature, theory, and practice from other contexts” (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012, p. 16). I provide a detailed description of DBR and describe the framework used in this study in sections 4.2 and 4.3, respectively. In section 4.4, I describe the procedure for creating the online task-based module tested in this study. Section 4.5 provides a thorough description of the procedure for testing the online module with learners of German. I include information about the recruitment and data collection process and describe how the data are analyzed.

4.1 Challenges in Researching Teaching and Learning

Several issues related to research about teaching and learning have been identified in previous scholarship. For example, studying just one part of an educational setting is difficult because there are a number of different factors (e.g., students, teachers, curriculums, administrators, technology) which influence each other (Brown, 1992). These parts cannot be observed or studied in isolation; because we cannot separate students from their learning, we cannot directly observe it. Hoadley and Campos (2022) describe that “even if psychological theory could specify thinking as well as Newton’s laws can specify the movement of objects, the thorny problem of defining initial conditions (e.g., prior knowledge, affective state, etc.) would still exist” (p. 207).

This quote expresses two important points: first, that psychological theory is incapable of specifying learning in a way that is objective and observable. Secondly, initial conditions are always going to differ greatly; learners are always going to come to a classroom with varying experiences, knowledge, emotions, beliefs, etc. Thus, methods which try to treat teaching and learning as measurable and observable phenomena are often insufficient.

Despite these issues, many studies seek to take objective, positivist approaches which measure learning through predetermined categories and by using statistical analyses to come to definitive conclusions and generalizable results. Such studies have been criticized, e.g., by Reinking and Bradley (2008): “horserace-like studies pitting one instructional intervention against another using statistical comparisons of relatively narrow measures contribute little to understanding or to use” (p. 7). While objectivist approaches may be valuable in certain contexts, their generalizability may be insufficient for predicting what might happen elsewhere. For example, Cui and Wang (2023) investigated the effectiveness of the online application *Perusall*. This study employed quantitative measurements such as questionnaires and student grades and found a positive correlation between the use of the tool and student learning, based on a pre-intervention activity and a post-intervention assessment. While these findings suggest a positive outcome, they fail to account for the quality of students’ work or experiences, and they do not expand our theoretical knowledge about how to effectively teach online.

Further, although positivist studies are often rigorous in describing their results, they do not always extend our understanding of teaching practices and theories: “the predominant research models that exist in education do not contribute to educational innovation. Most researchers do not adopt a heavily interventionist, transformative stance in their endeavors ...

and the other modes of research only weakly inform how to promote and sustain innovation in the world” (Bell, 2004, p. 251).

Research in online teaching and learning has been further challenged by the fact that there has been limited consistency in the design and application of research approaches: “the vast differences in both the contexts of application, and in the potential design features of the online learning environment as implemented, make it difficult to know how to generalize empirical findings, and/or recontextualize them to new circumstances” (Hoadley and Campos, 2022, p. 208). The authors further explain that in online settings, it may be difficult to tell what the ‘treatment’ is, that is, what parts of the teaching and learning context are being tested, versus those which have simply become the norm with regards to how we use technology.

Due to changing understandings of learning and theory in the past several decades as described in Chapter 2, “methodological changes are needed to reflect these developments” (Brown, 1992, p. 144). It is necessary to establish methodologies which make space for the many and multiple ways in which teaching and learning can be researched, since “learning is too complex a phenomenon to be the sole province of any one discipline, theoretical perspective, or research method” (Bell, 2004, p. 243). A ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach may not be appropriate for studying learning due to its complex nature; therefore, methods that can account for and adapt to this complexity are necessary.

4.2 Design-based Research

Design-based Research (DBR) is best described as a research method for studying educational interventions in real-world learning contexts through an iterative design process. DBR has been gaining in popularity since it was first conceptualized in the early 1990s (Bell, 2004; Campenella & Penuel, 2021). In DBR, “an intervention is tested and refined in a real-world setting through

cycles of implementation, data collection, analysis, and redesign to build theory and progress toward a pedagogical goal” (McCarty et al, 2021, p. 170). Although it is described as a ‘research method,’ it is important to note that DBR is not a fixed, prescriptive set of rules for conducting research. Barab and Squire (2004) note that “design-based research is not so much an approach as it is a series of approaches, with the intent of producing new theories, artifacts, and practices that account for and potentially impact learning and teaching in naturalistic settings” (p. 2). Design-based approaches thus work with the context of the research situation to better understand learning. Despite the “lack of specificity among researchers interested in this approach, there is some convergence about its defining characteristics” (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 17). Scholars generally agree on the main tenets of DBR, for example, DBR studies test interventions in a real-world setting, consist of an iterative design process, and place emphasis on the resulting theoretical findings. I describe these in more detail in the following sections and highlight some of the benefits of working with DBR for the present study.

4.2.1 Application in Real-World Settings

The emphasis on working in a real-world context is an important feature of DBR. Educational interventions are not tested in a laboratory, clinic, or small sample group; rather, the intervention is tested right in the educational context itself. This allows educators and researchers to recognize and account for the real and complex relationships between the various elements in a given educational setting (e.g., teachers, students, attitudes, technology, curriculum), rather than trying to remove them. This differs from positivist approaches to educational research which attempt to strip the research context from as many of these influential factors as possible. The goal of studying educational interventions in DBR is not to ‘sterilize’ naturalistic contexts, but to develop “flexibly adaptive theories that remain useful even when applied to new local contexts”

(Barab & Squire, 2004, p. 11). Reinking & Bradley (2008) argue that an educational intervention “must be studied in an authentic instructional environment where all naturally occurring variation is allowed to operate and where instructional responses to that variation are not unnaturally constrained by the researcher” (p. 18). This sentiment is shared by other researchers who study DBR as well, for example, Barab and Squire (2004) point out that “design-based research focuses on understanding the messiness of real-world practice, with context being a core part of the story and not an extraneous variable to be trivialized” (Barab & Squire, 2004, p. 3). Context is not only accounted for but considered an integral part of the story, that is, understanding and describing that context is a key part of understanding the educational intervention and the tentative generalizations and theories that emerge out of it. As Chandler-Olcott et al. (2021) state, their team “embraced DBR because the approach acknowledges complexities ... as the starting point for innovation and inquiry, rather than treating complexities as separable from an intervention” (p. 149).

The consideration of influential contextual factors is important for upholding ecological validity and creating useable knowledge (Bergeson, 2021). Hjalmarson et al. (2021) describe ecological validity as “the degree to which outcomes of a study are predictive of outcomes in real-world settings” (p. 25), and state that “design research accounts for the importance of ecological validity by enabling researchers to ensure that the intervention can be effectively applied in real-world contexts” (Hjalmarson et al., 2021, p. 25). DBR accounts for the complex relationships that exist on different ecological levels (e.g., the level of the course, of the institution, and the wider world outside of the learning environment) and thus results in findings that better reflect real-world outcomes. As such, the learning context is important for creating useable knowledge: “researchers who gravitate toward this approach focus on creating

conditions that allow promising interventions to work, and they seek theory that can be directly useful to practitioners. They are not interested in debating philosophical question[s] about ultimate meanings” (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 22). This approach therefore caters to goal-oriented research needs. Because Design-based Research is rooted in real educational settings, it allows researchers to “develop and test specific pedagogical theories based on instructional practice, rather than only overarching theories of teaching and learning” (Hjalmarson et al., 2021, p. 25). The findings of DBR studies are therefore likely to be more immediately useful and directly relevant to teaching practices: “research often takes years to influence practice, but the impact of a DBR study can be immediate on both students and teachers” (Bergeson, 2021, p. 204).

4.2.2 Iteration and Flexibility

Another feature of DBR is iteration: “often, instead of comparing a treatment and a control group, DBR will compare treatments as iterations on a particular design” (Hoadley and Campos, 2022, p. 211). Testing an intervention over several iterations allows educational researchers to work step-by-step towards a concrete pedagogical goal: researchers “iteratively analyze data, often in cycles or predetermined periods of time, and make refinements to the intervention until the desired goal is met” (Hjalmarson et al., 2021, p. 24). This allows researchers to determine what works and what does not in the educational context while the experiment is running. High fidelity experiments are not a high priority for design-based researchers because the “goal of the research is to adapt the intervention to make it work better in response to the inherent variability within classrooms” (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 20). Such iterative work is the kind of practice that many teachers are already engaging in: “this adaptive and iterative approach is what good teachers do, but rarely do teachers have the opportunity or resources to gather systematic,

rigorous data in service of the deep insights that process might produce” (Reinking and Bradley, 2008, p. 21). Data collection is thus an important aspect of the framework.

Hjalmarson et al. (2021) point out that the flexible and iterative nature of the approach is appealing as it “differs from other methodologies that require strict adherence to an intervention, regardless of whether it is working in a way that aligns with a desired outcome” (Hjalmarson et al, 2021, p. 24). The flexibility that DBR affords means that researchers are free to intervene and change an educational intervention if it is not working as expected. This leads to more effective educational interventions and more practical, useful knowledge. Moreover, DBR is compatible with quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approaches to data collection and analysis (Reinking and Bradley, 2008), which shows that it can be applied in various research contexts.

As an interventionist research method, DBR is focused on effecting change or transforming instructional practice (Bell, 2004; Hoadley & Campos, 2022). DBR studies seek to change or transform some sort of instructional practice by orienting to a particular goal, rather than testing the effectiveness of a particular theory (Reinking and Bradley, 2008). The goal of the educational intervention is a driving factor which informs and guides the design of the research, or as they put it, becomes a “day-to-day reference point for collecting and analyzing data, for making modifications to the intervention ... and at the end of the investigation for determining the extent to which progress has been made” (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 19).

4.2.3 Theory Work

It is important to understand the role of theory in Design-based Research. Theory is not only used to guide a researcher’s decision-making process in terms of how they design an educational intervention; it also develops out of its findings. Reinking & Bradley (2008) use the example of the Wright brothers and how they used and created theory in their quest to achieve flight: “the

Wright brothers used long-standing theories to achieve lift, but they developed new theories about how to control flight” (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 18). It is therefore not just a matter of designing educational interventions based on theory and testing them; DBR researchers must also describe new theoretical perspectives that emerge out of the practical applications of an intervention. In other words, and in following the Wright brothers example, we can use existing theories about learning to develop new theories about how to design teaching. The emerging theories can then be used to inform further research, either as additional iterations on a design or in studies in other contexts. Design-based Research experiments “are not aimed only at creating conditions that allow an intervention to accomplish a pedagogical goal. Instead, they are also aimed at theoretically understanding the conditions that enhance or inhibit an intervention’s effectiveness and at generating pedagogical understandings that generalize beyond specific instances” (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 19).

As described in this section, Design-based Research studies allow researchers to investigate local educational contexts. In contrast to studies which create rigid experimental conditions, DBR accounts for the multiple complex relationships that exist at different ecological levels in educational settings. Design-based researchers employ educational interventions informed by theory and practical findings and, through an iterative process, adapt the intervention to work towards a pedagogical goal. The results of DBR studies have an immediate impact on the contexts in which they are studied and have further implications for both practice and theory in future educational research. DBR is an appropriate methodological approach in the context of the present study which seeks to investigate how task-based language learning can be used in asynchronous online German learning.

4.3 DBR In This Study

Due to the lack of existing research in asynchronous online task-based language learning (TBLL), many decisions concerning the design of the online module for this study are based on adaptations of theoretical findings from other contexts. DBR is thus an appropriate choice for this project due to the flexibility of the methodology and the possibility to make changes to the intervention if necessary. Hoadley and Campos (2022) promote DBR as a solution “to solve some of the challenges of knowledge production in the context of online learning” (p. 211). The iterative nature of DBR is suitable for this project as it provides an opportunity to make changes to module content and learning activities between iterations as needed. As such, new knowledge is gained through each iteration after collecting data which contributes to theory building.

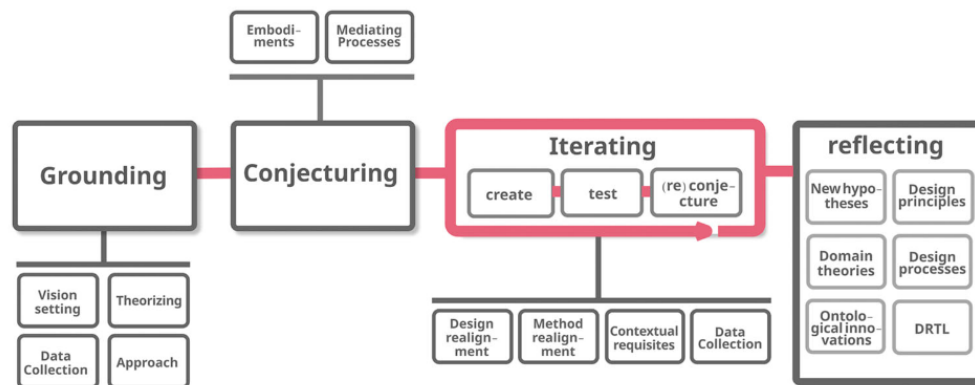
Another reason why DBR is a good choice for this project concerns the role of context. Because DBR factors in the knowledge and experience of stakeholders at multiple levels, information collected from several sources of knowledge is considered valuable. DBR makes space for the researcher or teacher to draw on their own experience and to use this in designing and theory-building. I therefore consider my own experience teaching beginner-level German and my familiarity with the GER 101 Online course (the course from which participants in this study are recruited) to be valuable to the study. Considering the many ways that DBR can be realized in practice, it is necessary to specify how it will be used. In the next section, I describe the DBR framework that I use in this study.

4.3.1 A Design-based Research Framework

As I have previously discussed, DBR is not a fixed or prescriptive methodology for conducting research but comes down to the same general defining characteristics: “several scholars have attempted to pin down defining characteristics, but all agree that it involves studying flexible

iterations of designed interventions in a naturalistic context” (Hoadley and Campos, 2022, p. 212). Nevertheless, it is useful to work with a concrete procedure. I therefore adopt the Design-based Research framework proposed by Hoadley and Campos (2022). The authors summarize their understanding of DBR in a single process model, pictured below in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Process model for DBR (Hoadley and Campos, 2022, p. 212)



This model is made up of “four activities that help researchers produce knowledge about online learning” (p. 212). The authors state that “this model helps illustrate how DBR solves the problem of generalization and particularization in online learning research” (Hoadley and Campos, 2022, p. 212). Because Hoadley and Campos’ model is constructed on the notion of studying online learning specifically, it is especially useful for this study. I briefly summarize each of the four activities, or phases, below.

4.3.1.1 Grounding

The grounding phase involves identifying a gap or problem that the researchers aim to solve by conducting a real-world intervention. This includes mapping out the context in which an intervention will be tested. Data collection at this stage involves collecting information about the given context, i.e., “information about learners, specific domains, and historical data about

previous experiences with existing solutions” (Hoadley and Campos, 2022, p. 213), while considering relevant contextual factors and theory. This stage of the current study involves establishing key information about the educational context in which the intervention will be tested, e.g., understanding the course contexts, topics covered, current pedagogical approach used in the course, etc.

4.3.1.2 Conjecturing

DBR recognizes that “the intended design is different from what may be enacted in a complex social context, one in which both participants and designer-researchers have agency” (Hoadley and Campos, 2022, p. 211). The authors explain that, for this reason, hypotheses in DBR “take a dualistic form as *design conjectures*, in which there are explicitly (at least) two degrees of freedom between inputs (context, initial conditions, participants and their histories, etc.) and final outcomes” (p. 211; emphasis in the original). There is therefore an understanding that any predicted outcomes from the DBR intervention may be heavily influenced by situational factors in practice. Hypotheses are thus referred to as ‘conjectures.’ These generally involve hypotheses which connect design propositions to “a proposition about people” (Hoadley and Campos, 2022, p. 211), i.e., a prediction about the psychological processes involved for those who participate in the designed intervention. Therefore, in the conjecturing stage of DBR, the researcher maps out a set of high-level conjectures which guide the implementation of a design. This serves the purpose of “capturing the research team’s ideas about how particular *embodiments* might generate *mediating processes* that will, ultimately, lead learners into the hypothesized outcomes” (Hoadley and Campos, 2022, p. 213). Embodiments, in this sense, materialize the various elements of a design, i.e., learning materials, exercises, and tasks; mediating processes are understood as the bridge between the designed elements and learning outcomes. In sum, the

conjecturing phase involves planning a design and making predictions about how that design will lead to learning once put into practice. In the present study, this stage involves consideration of previous research to conceive of possible designs for the online module.

4.3.1.3 Iterating

In the iterating phase, abstract designs are embodied in a concrete form and tested in a real-world setting. Hoadley and Campos (2022) describe iterations as “the key methodological feature of a DBR project that allow researchers to make empirical claims about designed learning tools, artifacts, or interventions while they are being created and brought into play” (p. 213). Data collected during each iteration is used to refine the conjectures made in the previous stage and make adjustments to the design where necessary. The process of testing, collecting data, and re-conjecturing allows the researcher to move step-by-step towards the intended outcome and reflect on theoretical outcomes.

4.3.1.4 Reflecting

The final stage, which the authors call ‘reflecting,’ involves a reflection on all aspects of the design process, that stem from the implemented design to arrive at a theoretical conclusion. Hoadley and Campos (2022) describe that the “ultimate goal of this phase is to allow the research team to explore which actions or circumstances might or might not have led to potential changes in the studied environment” (p. 213). There are a variety of possible theoretical end points that DBR can lead to which are summarized in Table 1. Hoadley and Campos (2022) explain that these types of ‘findings’ are “dissimilar from those achieved through positivistic or interpretivist qualitative research” (p. 214), for example, “domain theories, which may look similar to those produced by experimental psychology, are epistemologically different in that they represent tentative understandings with an explicit acknowledgment of an unknown degree

of limited generalizability to other contexts or design variations” (Hoadley & Campos, 2022, p. 214). The theoretical findings from DBR research are not meant to be generalizable to all teaching and learning scenarios but come with a known degree of uncertainty. Such findings are nevertheless useful in their own contexts and serve as a starting point for further research in similar contexts.

Table 1. Possible theoretical outcomes of DBR studies

Outcome	Description
New Hypotheses	When questions rather than answers emerge from the design, researchers may develop new hypotheses.
Domain Theories	“Domain theories generalize a particular piece of a high-level, hypothesized learning theory (e.g., how online environments influence learning)” (Hoadley & Campos, 2022, p. 213) “The generalization of some portion of a problem analysis,” “a theory about the world, not a theory about design per se” (Edelson, 2002)
Ontological Innovations	Challenges to current frameworks or assumptions of learning or design
Design Principles & Patterns	Outcome-focused; Prescriptive principles about how to achieve a particular outcome through design. Design patterns are generalized partial solutions for a particular learning problem
Design processes	Process-focused; “prescriptive procedural knowledge that describes the particular methodology for achieving a type of design” (Hoadley & Campos, 2022, p. 214),
Design Researcher Transformative Learning (DRTL)	“DRTL describes a series of ‘a-ha moments’ that enable design researchers to develop new conceptualizations of ‘how they position themselves as actors within the situation they are exploring’” (Hoadley & Campos, 2022, p. 214, citing Kali & Hoadley, 2020, p. 10)

The Design-based Research framework by Hoadley and Campos (2022) described here serves as a useful starting point for this study. Its four activities of grounding, conjecturing, iterating, and reflecting are used to investigate learners’ experiences working with multimodal tasks in online German learning. In the remainder of this chapter, I provide more information about the

procedure of designing the online module and describe the process of collecting and analyzing data.

4.4 Study Design: Creating the Online Module

In order to best understand TBLL in asynchronous online learning, I have designed an online learning module for beginner-level learners of German. I did so in conjunction with a first-year course at the University of Waterloo, GER 101 Online. In cooperation with the course instructor(s), I tested the module during one week of the course (equating the typical length of one module in this course). Student participants could complete this module in place of the existing course module for that week. I tested the module in two academic terms and collected data which inform the findings of this study. Working with empirical data is valuable as it provides access to learners' perspectives and experiences as well as information about the local educational context. The data also indicate how the module could be adapted for future iterations. In line with the DBR framework described above, there is no concrete hypothesis about expected findings; rather, module design decisions are based on conjectures about the kinds of learning processes that are expected to occur.

Development of the online module took place over the course of about eight months and was influenced by many factors. The development process began with a review of previous research on TBLL, asynchronous online learning, and multiliteracies and multimodality, as previously discussed. I then considered existing content and assessments in GER 101 Online as well as the topics covered in the course's textbook, *Das Leben* (Funk et al., 2020). Some questions emerged out of that research, regarding, e.g., which task to work with, what kinds of exercises are appropriate, and task sequencing. I have previously discussed how educational

technologies impact online pedagogy. Therefore, another important decision concerned where the module should be hosted and how it should be accessed.

4.4.1 Module Website

One available option for hosting the module was Brightspace, a learning management system (LMS) created by the software company D2L. There are several advantages of using this platform: first and foremost, Brightspace, which sometimes goes by different names at the institution level, is the LMS used at the University of Waterloo, i.e., it is the platform through which online courses are administered. This means that all students who are enrolled in GER 101 Online, i.e., the study's potential participants, have access to Brightspace and use it on a regular basis to access their course. Brightspace thus offers a functional solution without a learning curve at no additional cost. Over the past 15 years, I have gained considerable experience working with Brightspace in my roles as a student, teaching assistant, and course instructor. I am therefore familiar with its features and how to manage content, communications, and assessments.

I consider my familiarity with Brightspace to be an asset, however, I am also aware of this platform's limitations. Technology companies such as D2L have not adapted their products to reflect the focus on user authorship that has emerged in Web 2.0 and thus do not afford sufficient opportunities for sharing learner-created content. Content is kept separate from assessment; students are meant to internalize the provided course content which is then tested in formal evaluations. There are several types of questions that instructors can create on Brightspace, e.g., multiple-choice, short answer, matching, written response, and others. However, these can only be inserted into quizzes or surveys; they cannot be embedded into lesson content. Brightspace's options for organizing content and assessment are predetermined with little space for other conceptualizations of learning. This lack of flexibility would not allow

me to create online lessons in the way that I had conceived of. I aimed to create online module designs which combine input, practice, and feedback in one streamlined lesson, rather than separating learning into individual pieces. I also wanted to move away from a course design that requires learners to work with a physical textbook alongside their digital device or to navigate to multiple pages while concentrating on a single topic.

A workaround of this issue in Brightspace's design would be to work with embeddable elements from external websites, for example H5P. H5P allows users to create and share interactive HTML5 content and applications (*H5P*, n.d.), e.g., interactive video, drag and drop, multiple choice questions, and many more. However, H5P content can only be closed ended (i.e., there are no content types that support open-ended or written responses) and if an instructor does not have an institutional license, they cannot access student's input. H5P would thus enable me to create streamlined, interactive lessons, but would prevent me from accessing learner data. This is therefore not a suitable option for studying online learning.

Ultimately, I decided not to create the online module in Brightspace and instead opted to create my own website on which to host it. The decision to make the module website myself came with another set of challenges; without a background in web development, I needed to find a solution that would allow me to create the website to my own specifications, allow learners to input data, and allow me to access that data. Most free website builders, e.g., Google Sites or WordPress, can only support static content, i.e., one can present content to viewers but there is no database which can store or retrieve user inputs. This also means that free website builders do not have the option to manage authenticated users, i.e., users cannot create an account, thus, their lesson progress cannot be saved, and their responses cannot be tied to their user profile. It is

therefore not possible to create interactive lessons that are appropriate for educational research on a free website builder.

I therefore decided to create the website using a cloud-based service called Bubble (*Bubble*, n.d.). Bubble is a proprietary service that offers its users the ability to build full-scale web applications without code and to store data securely. I used Bubble to create an online platform for use in this study which is called *Swyfly* (Swyers, 2023a). Building the website and developing the module took about four months. This includes time spent becoming acquainted with Bubble's no code system and functionalities, database administration, creation of fundamental website elements (e.g., home page, account administration, navigation, privacy settings), and the planning and creation of learning activities, i.e., exercises and tasks. As the operator of *Swyfly*, I retain the right to and ownership of all content on the website, including End User (participant) data. Bubble does not collect, use, monitor, or control personal data from End Users (*Bubble Privacy Policy*, 2024) and data collected through *Swyfly* is not accessible to Bubble employees. Bubble's servers are compliant with international certifications for data security including SOC2, CSA CAIQ, and ISO/IEC 27001. In addition to this, Bubble encrypts all data according to industry standards (RDS AES-256, SSL). Bubble has implemented additional safeguards through third-party protection services to prevent cyber attacks and to close any potential system vulnerabilities. The security standards implemented by Bubble are state of the art and are equivalent to those used by many Canadian technology companies, including D2L (*Security & Privacy Compliance*, n.d.).

Students who choose to participate in this study are required to register for an account on *Swyfly* in order for their participation to be recorded, i.e., in order for their module responses and task submissions to be saved. To register, participants provide an email address and password.

Their first names and last initials are also collected on registration as this information is used to differentiate between participants' submissions and will allow them to act as themselves in any collaborative exercises. Users' email addresses are used as unique identifiers only and are only visible to me as the owner of the website; passwords are encrypted and not accessible to me or any other user. No user data on *Swyfly* is publicly visible on the internet; participant data including personal information and submissions are only accessible to authenticated (i.e., logged-in) users.

Although creating the module using Bubble was time consuming and often challenging, this was ultimately the right decision for this project. Bubble's development platform allowed me to create the module as I had conceptualized and granted a great deal of flexibility that would not have been possible in D2L's Brightspace. I was able to create a range of various learning activities and had more control over the data collected during the study. In Chapter 5, I provide a complete description of module development with regards to practical and theoretical considerations. In the next section of this chapter, I describe the process of testing the module with learners of German.

4.5 Study Design: Testing the Online Module

4.5.1 Learning Context for Module Testing

After module development had been finalized in the Spring of 2023, the online module was ready to be tested with learners of German. GER 101 Online is an undergraduate university course for beginners with no previous knowledge of German. I have previously mentioned that task-based learning at the beginner level has been called difficult due to the perceived lack of communicative ability in early-stage learners (e.g., Rösler, 2013), highlighting a clear need for further research at this level. This course was therefore selected for this study so that multimodal

tasks can be investigated with beginner-level learners. More information about GER 101 Online is provided in Chapter 5.1.1.

4.5.2 Recruitment

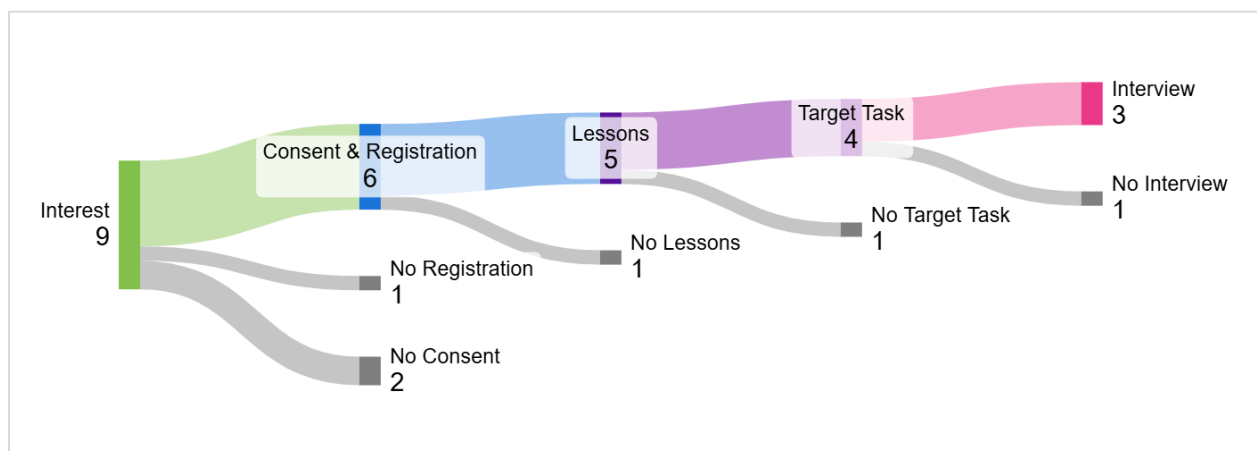
Participants for this study were recruited from GER 101 Online in the Spring 2023 and Fall 2023 terms. Potential participants were enrolled in the course at the time of recruitment and thus had a limited knowledge of German. Participation was done on a voluntary basis, i.e., interested students were given the option to complete the test module in place of the existing course module; students who did not sign up to participate completed the existing module in that week. Recruitment information was circulated via email from the course instructor in weeks 4 and 5 of the term with an invitation for interested students to contact the research team for more information. Because student participants were given the option to complete the study materials in place of the existing Week 7 module, recruitment was timed such that potential participants had enough time to learn about the details of the study before Week 7 began. Interested students were provided with detailed information about the study and were first invited to sign a consent form and register for an account on the study website, *Swyfly*. Upon registration on *Swyfly*, participants were directed to a landing page from where they could access online module. They were then free to work through the online lessons at their own pace. No exclusions were made in the recruitment of participants. This study received ethics approval from the University of Waterloo Office of Research (#44930).

4.5.3 Participants

In total, nine student participants expressed interest in participating in the study over the Spring 2023 and Fall 2023 terms. Two interested students had registered for an account on *Swyfly*, however, because they did not consent to participate, they are excluded from the data set.

Similarly, one other student had signed the consent form but did not register for an account on *Swyfly*. Of the six remaining participants who consented to participate and registered for an account, four completed all of the online lessons and the final task of creating a vlog. The other two participants showed little to no participation; one participant did not complete any of the online activities; the other completed about half of the online lessons. Two of the remaining four participants took part in the Spring 2023 term and two participated in the Fall 2023 term. All four participants completed the anonymous survey and three took part in a semi-structured interview. Figure 3 provides an overview of participants who took part in the study.

Figure 3. Visualization of student participation



Because I am most interested in participants' experiences with the target task, the data analysis includes only those participants who completed the entire module and vlog task. I have given these participants the pseudonyms Nicholas, Robert, Miranda, and James. Nicholas and Robert participated in the Spring 2023 term; Miranda and James participated in the Fall 2023 term. An analysis of their module submissions, vlogs, and interview data (where applicable) is provided in Chapter 6. In the next section, I provide more information about these types of data and how they are used.

4.5.4 Data

The analysis in this study uses several types of qualitative data collected during and after participants' completion of the vlog task. Working with qualitative data is appropriate for this study as they provide a rich understanding of each participant's individual experiences. Each of the types of data collected provided different insights about the learners and their experience working through the online module. The data include multiple forms of expression emerging from different contexts; some of the data are written, some are spoken, some include combined forms of meaning making. Some of the forms of data require participants to use their own words to formulate their thoughts, others allow them to select from available options. This range of data provides more insights into their experiences than any singular form of data.

4.5.4.1 Module Responses

One source of data in this study comes from participants' module responses. I use this term to refer to all responses provided in the learning activities of the module, with the exception of the final task of creating a daily vlog (the vlogs are analyzed separately). Module responses thus include any of the answers that participants provided when completing exercises in the module. For example, written responses to reflection questions or discussions, selected answer possibilities in multiple choice questions, open-ended exercise responses, responses typed into fill-in-the-blanks exercises. Module responses are provided by participants in response to any of the learning activities that they complete. Whenever possible, participants' responses are saved in the *Swyfly* database such that they can be used in the analysis as these provide insights into participants' learning progress and participation throughout the module. I retrieve the data from the website on a page that is only visible to me which provides an overview of all module responses from a given participant (this resembles an instructor's ability to view a quiz attempt

on Brightspace). Most participants completed all of the questions in the individual lessons, with some participants completing lessons or activities more than once. Occasionally, a question may have been incomplete or left blank; these were included in the data set.

4.5.4.2 Vlogs

Each participant created their own version of a daily vlog and submitted it on *Swyfly* after they had completed the online lessons in the module. Lesson completion was not a prerequisite for submitting a vlog, i.e., if participants had left out any exercises or lessons, they could still complete the final task. As the main task of the module, the vlogs are particularly important. They provide information about each participant's unique understanding of the daily vlog genre and demonstrate how each participant uses multimodal resources to express meaning in this task, in addition to demonstrating linguistic knowledge. Participants could submit their vlog as a video file (e.g., .mp4) or as a link to an external website (e.g., cloud-based storage solutions like Dropbox, Google Drive, or SharePoint; social platforms like TikTok or Instagram). All four participants in the data set submitted a daily vlog; each of these is included in the data set and analysis.

4.5.4.3 Survey Data

After submitting the final vlog, participants were invited to complete an anonymous survey which included questions about their experience working through the module. The survey questions consist of quantitative measurements (e.g., Likert-scale questions with pre-defined answer choices) as well as open-ended questions in which participants could provide their thoughts and feedback about the module. The survey also collected some demographic information about the participants, e.g., their knowledge of other languages, gender, field of study, and others. Participation in the survey gives participants the ability to make comments on

the overall experience as it fits in with their previous experiences with language learning and online learning. The resulting data allow me to identify possible trends in participants' survey responses and make space for possible generalizations. While relying on survey data alone would likely not provide enough information about participants' learning experiences, when combined with other qualitative data, they can provide additional information about the group's overall opinions. Because survey questions mostly cater to rating the experience, survey responses are considered mostly in the consideration of module development, i.e., when making changes to the module for Round 2.

4.5.4.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview data are useful for finding out more about participants' work in the module and their experiences with the learning situation: Charmaz (2001) states that interviewing is a "flexible, emergent technique; ideas and issues emerge during the interview, and the interviewer can then immediately pursue these leads" (Charmaz, 2001, p. 676). Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to follow up on participants' responses that are interesting to the research and can "elicit views of this person's subjective world" (Charmaz, 2001, p. 676). Because of the reciprocal influence of e.g., emotions or responses, it can be said that the "researcher and participants co-construct the research (at least data collection) together" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 31). I chose to conduct interviews with the participants of this study to better understand their overall experience working through the online module and to follow up on module responses or vlog features that stood out.

Three interviews took place: two in the Spring term with Nicholas and Robert, and one in the Fall term with Miranda. Interviews were scheduled to take 30 minutes; the actual length of the interviews ranged from about 30 to 90 minutes. Each interview was conducted via the online

video conferencing platform Zoom and, with permission, was recorded so that they could later be transcribed. I prepared a general list of questions as a starting point which inquired about, e.g., general impressions, how much time was spent working, opinions about the target task; other questions were added on an individual basis depending on participants' previous submissions. The interviews were scheduled such that they took place shortly after participants had submitted their vlogs, within about one week. This was planned such that participants' experiences working through the module would still be fresh in their minds while reflecting on it in an interview.

4.5.5 Data Analysis

4.5.5.1 Methods of Analysis

This study draws on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in the analysis of data. The purpose of grounded theory is “to create workable scientific knowledge that can be applied to daily life situations” (Brinkmann et al., 2020, p. 33). This is done through an inductive approach of allowing concepts and categories to emerge from the data through a process of open coding in order to generate theory. The process of open coding allows the researcher to consider the full meaning potential of the data: “only after considering all possible meanings and examining the context carefully is the researcher ready to put interpretive conceptual labels on the data” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 160). To guide the coding process, I have developed focal points which serve as starting points in my analysis. These make up the theoretical landscape that builds the foundation of the study. These are not exclusive or all-encompassing categories but offer a general lens through which to look as I carry out the coding process. Because the concept of design has emerged as a potentially meaningful aspect of asynchronous online task design, aspects of meaning design are factored into the data analysis. I am thus interested in investigating themes that emerge in the data based on the following focal points:

1. *Multimodality and meaning making*: how participants use multimodal resources to create meaning in their vlogs; how they orient to multimodality in general.
2. *Genre*: how the genre of ‘a day in my life’ vlog is realized in participants’ submissions; what participants understand as belonging to the genre, how working with genre shapes their experience.
3. *Language*: how language is used in participants’ vlog submissions; uptake from module learning activities; language awareness in reflections on the learning process.
4. *Evaluation of experience*: how learners assess their experience of working through this online module and completing the target task; other aspects of the learning experience that are significant for them.

In addition to these core parameters, I am interested in investigating any other noteworthy themes that emerge from the data.

Transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews are analyzed using an inductive approach to thematic analysis. This process of coding the data does not try to fit it into a pre-existing frame; rather, the “themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 83). This approach begins with the identification of general themes in the data through open coding; these are later refined based on patterns that emerge. While the analysis of interviews draws on what participants say, details of their expressions are only used to identify themes in their attitudes and beliefs; a detailed analysis of e.g., the structure of participants discourse was not conducted. More detail about how I conducted the analysis can be found in the following section.

4.5.5.2 Procedure of Analysis

All forms of the collected data are sorted and organized according to participant and source (i.e., module responses, vlog, interview). This process involves sorting the data into one Microsoft Excel spreadsheet per participant. Each unit of data is assigned an alpha-numeric label such that each piece of data can be easily linked to the corresponding participant and data source. Module responses are exported from the *Swyfly* database and labelled per question or learning activity as appropriate. Each vlog is transcribed by aligning screenshots from each scene of the vlog with a transcript of the corresponding line of voiceover; labels are then assigned to each scene.

Recordings of participant interviews are transcribed, and transcript segments are labelled based on turn-taking such that one unit of data consists of e.g., a participant's response to a question. Labelling the data this way allows me to keep the multiple sources of data organized. Labels are not assigned based on the content or emerging themes but simply serve as a way to break up the data into more manageable chunks that can then be analyzed systematically.

After the data were labelled, I conducted a preliminary analysis in which I examined each piece of data and made notes about anything that stood out with regards to the focal points identified above. This preliminary analysis allowed me to get a general overview of the data set before taking a closer look at each excerpt individually. I then conducted a detailed analysis of each participant's contributions by investigating the content of each unit of data and making notes about emerging themes through the lens of each focal point. By breaking down the data into components, I could identify themes in the data set. This allowed me to put together a picture of each participant's individual perspective. After this step was complete, I conducted a cross-analysis of themes relating to each focal point which allowed me to draw conclusions and make observations about common themes that emerged in the data within each parameter and to make comparisons between participants. After completing the analysis of participant data and the

cross-analysis of each focal point, I returned to the Design-based Research framework to discuss the theoretical findings that can be taken from the analysis.

In this chapter, I have described the methodological framework and analytical approach used in this study. DBR is appropriate for this project because it involves the design and testing of an educational intervention in a real-world setting, rather than under controlled conditions. DBR studies use an iterative design process to gradually work towards a pedagogical goal. The focus on developing theory that is relevant to the local context results in the creation of useable knowledge that has an immediate impact on teaching and learning. I have developed an online module for beginner-level learners of German and have tested it over two iterations with student participants who were registered in an online German course. I collected data during their participation in the form of their module responses, vlog submissions, and excerpts from semi-structured interviews. The data are analyzed according to grounded theory and through the lens of focal points which were selected based on their relevance in previous research. These relate to multimodality, genre, language, and overall experience. In the next chapter, I explain the module development in detail with reference to previously discussed theoretical considerations and findings from pedagogical research.

Chapter 5: Module Development

Creating learning materials for asynchronous online delivery in this project requires consideration of several factors including principles of task-based pedagogy, the constraints and affordances of asynchronous online learning, and the design features of texts that language users frequently encounter in online spaces. In addition to this, it is important to consider that the participants in this study are students enrolled in a university language course; the online module created for this study is tested in the context of their current German course, therefore, the materials need to fit with the curriculum. These considerations reflect the reality of studying teaching and learning in real-world settings; fortunately, the iterative design process of Design-based Research methodology makes space for these many influential factors as an intervention can be altered and changed if it does not work as expected. The design of the online module for this study was done so carefully, while considering as many of these factors as possible. In this chapter, I outline the process of planning and designing the online module. Starting with the planning process, I first describe my choice of task in the context of the GER 101 Online curriculum, considerations about what online learners might need to complete the task, and potential challenges for the implementation of the module. I then describe the process and outcome of the first round of design, including an overview of the module structure in general, the types of learning activities included throughout the lessons, topics covered, and some of the challenges I encountered. I present feedback from the first round of data collection and describe how this is used to make improvements for Round 2. Finally, I discuss how the module could be improved for any possible future iterations. This chapter provides the necessary knowledge and context to understand the analysis of participant data presented in Chapter 6. The results of the module development, i.e., the main takeaways regarding the design process, will inform the

overall findings of this study and will inform future research about the design of asynchronous online language learning courses.

5.1 Course Context

Working within a Design-based Research framework means considering the local teaching and learning context when designing educational interventions. Participants who took part in this study were enrolled in GER 101 Online at the time of their participation and were given the option to complete this online module in place of their existing course module. Therefore, it was not only important that learners could successfully complete the module for research purposes, but also to ensure that they did not miss out on key topics from their GER 101 Online course.

GER 101 Online is an asynchronous online beginner-level German course offered at the University of Waterloo. The course is structured around weekly modules, with each focusing on one chapter from the textbook. During each module, students work through the course content (organized into *Schritte*, explained below), complete a homework assignment, quiz, and larger task in the form of a video assignment or written discussion post. Course topics include those that are commonly covered at this level, e.g., talking about personal information, food and drink, studies, hobbies, etc. An overview of the course structure and topics covered in each module is provided in Table 2.

The course learning content is divided into steps or *Schritte* which are organized according to the thematic subchapters introduced in the corresponding textbook unit and serve to prepare learners to complete the homework assignment, quiz, and task. Each *Schritt* is accessed on its own webpage on the LMS and is modeled around completion of textbook learning activities. Additional media and material, such as relevant audio files or practice exercises, are linked in the activity instructions.

Table 2. Overview of Modules and Topics in GER 101 Online

Module	Unit Name	Topics
1	Start: Willkommen!	Greeting, spelling, basic questions, classroom instructions
2	Sommmerkurs in Leipzig	Introduce yourself, where you come from, where you live, languages you speak
3	Möller oder Müller	Read and provide address information, ask for someone's name and personal information
4	Arbeiten im Café	Order drinks in a café, make plans with a friend
5	Lecker Essen!	Talk about food, say what you like and don't like, describe how something tastes
6	Plateau 1	No new content, review exercises
7	Hast du Zeit?	Understand expressions of time, make appointments, talk about your daily routine, ask about departure/arrival times, write and/or answer an invitation
8	Meine Stadt	Talk about tourist attractions, understand time tables, name different means of transport, give directions, talk about your belongings
9	Der neue Job	Talk about rooms in an office building, ask for/give directions in a building, address colleagues and friends appropriately, describe the location of objects in an office
10	Freizeit und Hobbys	Talk about activities you can do, hobbies, talk about the city where you study, say where you have been in the past
11	Plateau 2	No new content, review exercises
12	Review	Final course week, no new content, review exercises

Learning activities in each *Schritt* are not built into the learning management system directly; rather, the webpage for each *Schritt* contains instructions in both English and German which direct students to textbook learning activities which are then completed on their own. Students thus use their textbooks (in print or e-book format) in conjunction with the activity instructions presented in each *Schritt*. It is important to note that the textbook learning activities are designed to be completed in a physical classroom; thus, activities that were designed for partner work must now be completed independently. After completing the activities outlined in each *Schritt*,

students move on to the graded assessments of the module (homework, quiz, and video or written assignment). Figure 4 shows a screenshot of the tabular layout of *Schritt 2* in module 7.

Figure 4. *Schritt 2: Termine machen* in module 7 of GER 101 Online

In this part you will work on the section " Termine machen " of chapter five in your coursebook and do some of the exercises at the end of the chapter.			
Aktivität / Activity	Anweisungen (DE)	Instructions (EN)	Zusatzmaterial / Additional Material
KB1	1 Tageszeiten. 6 Uhr morgens oder abends? a) Ordnen Sie die Uhrzeiten zu. b) Welcher Termin passt? Sprechen Sie schnell. c) Vier Minidialoge. Hören Sie und spielen Sie.	1 Times of the day. 6 a.m. or p.m.? a) Match the times. Then read the greeting forms for different times of the day. How does "Gute Nacht" differ from the other ones? When is it usually used? To greet or to say goodbye to somebody? Watch the video in the next column to learn more about the times of the day and how to use them in sentences. b) Which appointment fits? Combine different clauses and make new questions. Read the Questions and answers and speak quickly. Look at the phrases in the first column. You can use them to ask for appointments. The two phrases "das passt" and "das geht" are used to say that something works out for you. By adding "nicht" you make your answer negative. The questions with "Geht es ..." you can ask for / offer an alternative. c) Four mini dialogues. Listen and play. To do this exercise, scan the page in your PagePlayer-App and open the file for this activity.	 

The online module tested in this study was designed to replace module 7 in the existing course which is built around the textbook unit 'Hast du Zeit?' This unit covers multiple topics related to time telling, e.g., understanding time expressions, making appointments, talking about daily routines, and creating and responding to invitations. The form-focused topics covered in module 7 include time expressions, separable-prefix verbs, temporal prepositions, and the syntactical structure of questions. The unit is thus organized around a single topic (time-telling) which extends into multiple contexts and applications which incorporate several grammatical topics.

5.2 Creating My Task-based Module

In the design of the online module tested in this study, I chose not to organize it around the many contexts in which time-telling is used; rather, in line with TBLL principles, the planning process for the online module tested in this study began with the end in mind, i.e., selecting a task.

Considering that module 7 covers the topic of daily routines, I chose to use the genre of daily vlog as the basis for the task. The content of module 7 aligns well with the task of creating a daily vlog since these often include timestamps, and several common daily activities are formulated with separable verbs (e.g., *aufstehen*, *einschlafen*, *Essen zubereiten*).

5.2.1 Choosing a Task: #eintagininmeinemleben

After considering many possibilities for the module's main task, I chose the 'A Day in My Life' style vlog that has become a trend on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels. Its popularity is evidenced by the fact that the hashtags #dayinmylife and #dailyvlog (as well as the German equivalent, #eintagininmeinemleben) yield over 8 million results and over 35 billion views on TikTok (Aubrey, 2022). While the daily vlog originally became popular through longer versions which showed the lavish lifestyles of YouTube influencers, the TikTok trend has popularized the documentation of the everyday lives of everyday people. These vlogs are usually under one minute in length and are fast-paced: "quickly chopping between key scenes of an average day: a vitamin C serum, a takeaway oat latte, new loafers, a train commute, a salmon bowl, a sweaty boxing class, a 3pm Nutella doughnut, an office lift outfit check followed by office banter, a buzzy restaurant, a purring cat, folding laundry, cooking stir-fry, a pink sunset. Sometimes there is a voice-over describing the day, other times it's just set to music." (Aubrey, 2022). Aubrey's description touches on the kinds of activities that are typically included in daily vlogs: e.g., the morning routine, mealtimes, school or work life, exercising, meeting with friends,

and going to bed. These events are realized through video clips, on-screen text, voiceovers, and background music which come together to create a narrative of what the creator does on a typical day. Not all daily vlogs depict the real lives of the creators, with many integrating humour or satire into their videos: “there are enough ‘day in my life’ videos on TikTok to power a robust cottage industry of satirical ‘day in my life videos’” (Jennings, 2022). Daily vlogs thus serve as a means for creators to showcase their lives, however mundane or glamorous, and serve as a creative outlet for those who create them.

The #eintaginmeinemleben style of video is an appropriate choice of task for an online beginner-level German course for several reasons. First, given its prevalence on popular social media platforms, university students are likely to be familiar with this style of video and its position as a format of online communication as it exists outside of formal education; this holds potential for capturing learners’ attention and interest. The videos are short enough that even beginner-level German speakers can include enough content to fill the typical duration. Daily vlogs also employ a wide variety of meaning making modes to depict individual actions, offering more semiotic information to learners who may not yet understand every word. Moreover, they center around the topic of one’s daily routine which is covered in module 7 of GER 101 Online. In addition to this, the genre of daily vlog has become conventionalized such that daily vlogs have recognizable, relatively stable features; viewers can therefore tap into their existing knowledge of the genre to assist their comprehension. By working with examples of daily vlogs, conventionalized patterns (i.e., in the use of language and other modes) may become recognizable even to those who are not familiar with the genre. Put simply, working with #eintaginmeinemleben vlogs gives learners a structure to work with and language to borrow. Having learners create their own vlogs also gives them the opportunity and obligation to act as

designers which requires that they draw on their own linguistic repertoires and interpretations of the genre. Once I had established the daily vlog as the target task for the online learning module, I could begin to plan the learning activities. Reflecting on the pedagogical considerations discussed in Chapter 2 and discussion of multimodality, design, and genre in Chapter 3, I considered what learners would need to know to successfully create their own vlog, focusing on meaning making, textual organization, language, and cultural knowledge. I also considered how the task fits in with the GER 101 Online course curriculum and identified some potential challenges of working with daily vlogs and how these could be addressed.

5.2.2 Considerations about Relevant Knowledge

It is important that learners are equipped with the sufficient linguistic resources for completing the target task; however, a learner's ability to successfully complete a task like a daily vlog comes down to more than just vocabulary and grammar. Drawing on the concept of *Rückwärtsplanung* (backwards planning), my process of planning began with the target task in mind. I started by finding and watching examples of daily vlogs by searching on social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. I paid attention to their content and structure, and made observations about, e.g., length of the video, types of activities shown, which modes were used, how information is presented, how language is used. This helped me to identify some topics that I could include in the module content which might be helpful for German learners creating a daily vlog.

As I surveyed examples of daily vlogs, I paid attention to elements in four key categories: multimodality (e.g., what modes of meaning making can be observed); genre (e.g., how are the texts organized, what kinds of events take place); language (e.g., which linguistic forms and registers are commonly used, through which modes is language realized), and cultural

knowledge (e.g., do creators depict anything in their vlogs that participants might not be familiar with, i.e., concepts that are unique to life in Germany). For example, I noticed that many creators included timestamps (e.g., “11:45”) or time expressions more generally (e.g., “in the afternoon”) in their vlogs. I also made note of the types of daily events creators included, e.g., morning routine, mealtimes, work/school life, exercise, socializing and leisure time. It was important to me that my own understanding of the genre not impact on participants’ own interpretations; because making a vlog is a creative task that engages creators in self-expression, I wanted to give them space to work with their own interpretations of design through mode and genre. I recognized that there was not going to be a perfect formula for creating a daily vlog, nor were my observations exhaustive or exclusive; however, they guided my thinking in terms of what topics might be relevant for participants and whether there was anything that might require more explicit explanation, support, or practice. After watching many daily vlogs and making observations, I selected three examples to include in the online module. More information about the example vlogs and relating learning activities can be found in section 5.2.3.

5.2.3 Anticipating Challenges for Learners

Part of this process was to anticipate potential challenges that participants may face while working through the module and creating their own vlog. Daily vlogs are not (usually) created with the intention of educating beginner-level language learners; the language used by creators is not simplified for A1 level learners but is intended for a German-speaking audience. I knew that the example vlogs that I included in the module would likely include language that learners were unfamiliar with, or which was not part of the GER 101 Online curriculum. I anticipated that learners would have trouble with the more complex language used in the example vlogs. In addition to the fact that learners would be faced with vocabulary and linguistic structures that

they have never seen or heard before, many creators' voiceovers are spoken quickly such that they align with the short video clips on screen. This could make comprehension difficult for learners, especially if there are no closed captions. Recognizing these challenges, I identified some potential solutions and considered these as I worked on the module design.

First, I included variety in the example vlogs that I chose. I included vlogs with a variety of voiceover types: one vlog includes a voiceover spoken by TikTok's built-in text-to-speech feature (i.e., a slow, robotic sounding voice) which is only used to speak a few simple sentences. Another example does not include a voiceover at all but describes the daily activities using on-screen text elements combined with video clips. I did include one example in which the voiceover is fast-paced and rather complex. I decided to include this more challenging vlog in the module so that learners could be exposed to a variety of authentic materials in the new language. I framed this in the module by informing participants in advance that the language is more complex and by encouraging them to focus on what they *can* understand. Because the vlog also contained multimodal elements such as visuals, body language, facial expressions, timestamps, words, and emojis, I anticipated that learners would be able to generally understand the main message without needing to understand every word of the voiceover.

Secondly, I increased the level of complexity over the course of the module. I designed lessons around each example vlog and put them in order from least to most complex. This allowed participants to gain experience with the textual design of daily vlogs as well as some commonly used words and phrases before moving onto more complex texts and concepts. I connected each lesson's learning activities back to what learners viewed in the vlog; these learning activities also grew in complexity from lesson to lesson; in the beginning, learners complete more closed-end activities aimed at comprehension (e.g., identifying which activities

took place in the vlog in a matching activity) in the beginning of the module, and they complete more open-ended activities (e.g., answering questions about the creator's day in complete sentences) as the module progresses. Drawing on my own experience teaching German at the A1 level was very helpful for determining what beginner-level learners might find difficult and where they could benefit from additional supports.

There is ultimately no way to plan for every possible issue when planning lessons for language learning. The decisions I make about which knowledge and language is relevant for the task will necessarily be influenced by my own understanding of the daily vlog genre. Yet language learners, especially beginners, will require guidance with regards to linguistic structures and vocabulary that will likely be helpful for them. Taking an iterative approach under Design-based Research is thus a useful way to plan and make changes as needed. As discussed in this chapter so far, the process of planning the online module for this study involved considerations about lesson content which would simultaneously be relevant to the daily vlog task, and which make space for participants' own understandings of the vlog genre. I have also considered the teaching and learning context and the needs of learners enrolled in GER 101 Online. I attempted to account for potential challenges by including variety in the kinds of example vlogs chosen for the module and by gradually increasing the level of complexity from lesson to lesson. In the next section, I discuss the design and goals of the individual module lessons, including an overview of the types of learning activities used.

5.3 Module Design in Round 1

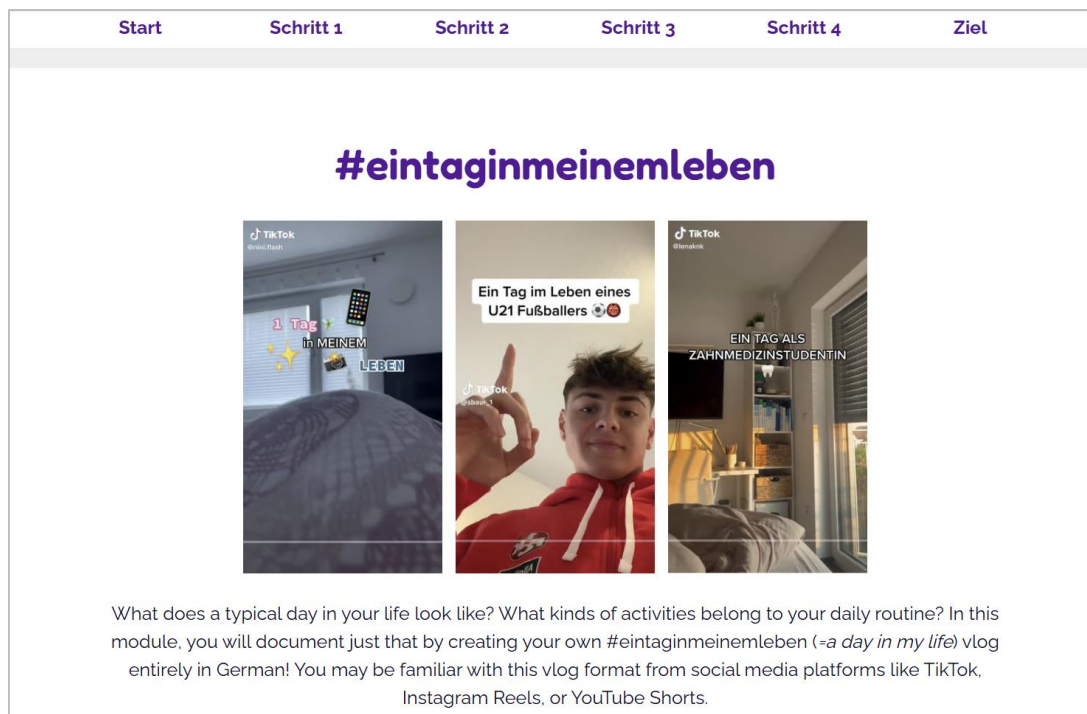
Due to the fact that there is little research about asynchronous online task-based language learning, I have not been able to find any resources that specifically outline design principles for online TBLL sequences. I therefore relied on my understanding of existing research in TBLL,

social constructivist learning theory, multiliteracies, and multimodality as I created learning activities for this online module. Relying on my knowledge and experience as a German instructor for beginner-level learners was helpful for making some of the more challenging design decisions. This section focuses on the design of the first iteration; in section 5.3 that follows, I describe how the module was updated for the second iteration. I start with a description of the example vlogs I selected and continue with a discussion of my general approach to the online module design.

5.3.1 Overview of Module Structure

The online module is made up of four lessons which I call *Schritte* and includes four examples of daily vlogs; three found online and one made by me. The module is designed such that participants work step-by-step towards the target task of creating their own vlog.

Figure 5. A screenshot of the landing page of the online module



The module is hosted on *Swyfly*, a website which I created for the purpose of conducting this research as described in Chapter 4. The website consists of a landing page (see Figure 5), to which participants are directed when they sign up or log in; a webpage for each of the four *Schritte*; and the target task (*Ziel*) page where participants submit their vlogs. Example vlogs are embedded into the webpage such that participants do not need to navigate to any external websites to complete the module. Participants can navigate between pages via the navigation bar at the top of the page or the ‘Next Lesson’ button at the bottom of each lesson. In the first iteration, no deadlines for lesson or task completion were set; in Round 2, a calendar with suggested deadlines was included on the website to provide structure similar to the module structure in GER 101 Online.

5.3.2 Designing Online Task-based Learning

As described above, part of the planning process was the inclusion of four example vlogs to incorporate into the online module which were arranged from least to most complex. I planned to design a series of lessons for the module and include one example vlog in each. In line with TBLL research, the next step in my design process would have been to determine partial learning goals (*Teillernziele*; e.g., Ende et al., 2013) for the lessons which focus on things that learners need to be able to do to complete the target task. However, I found myself at odds with the idea of creating learning goals for this task in this context. As I reflected on what learners might need to know or do for the target task, I recognized the influence of my own interpretation of the genre. Consistent with the notions of design (NLG, 1996; Warner, 2024) and genre (Kress, 2003), texts are always designed according to an author’s own interpretation of the conventions; in order for learners to create a daily vlog, they would need to do so according to their own understanding of that genre based on their interaction with available designs.

Rather than divert participants' attention to predetermined, instructor-selected goals, it made more sense to build learning activities around topics that grew out of the example vlogs selected for the module. I did not see it as my role as an instructor and designer of the online module to tell participants how to approach the task, but rather to choose appropriate examples, provide scaffolding, anticipate challenges, and build learning activities around topics that might be relevant (while recognizing that learners may find other things relevant as well). I ultimately decided against the inclusion of a concrete learning goal for each lesson. Instead, each lesson was anchored around one example vlog and focused on helping learners make sense of the vlog's content and language.

Table 3. Description of Module Learning Activities

Type of Activity	Description
Comprehension and Vocabulary	Introduce relevant vocabulary; help participants follow along with example vlog; usually closed-ended
Productive Exercises	Learners use their own words; questions about example vlogs or learners' own lives; usually open-ended. Some productive exercises take place on discussion boards.
Reflection	Learners reflect on experience and knowledge; think about aspects of communication that go beyond vocabulary and grammar. Some reflections take place on discussion boards.
Discussion	Sometimes in German to facilitate communication between learners; sometimes in English to gain perspective from others.
Focus on Form	Form-focused exercises; usually follow activities that allow participants to discover meanings on their own, make connections, reflect, or make observations/inferences about the linguistic phenomenon in question.

Learning activities touched on, e.g., learning how to phrase common daily activities and understanding key phrases in their contexts. Several types of learning activities were included in

the lessons; these include comprehension and vocabulary-focused exercises, productive exercises, reflection questions, discussions, and focus-on-form (see Table 3 for an overview of activity types and their descriptions). Of particular importance in the module are the reflections, which make space for participants to think about what they learned and how it might be relevant for their own vlog creation. While I did not choose concrete learning goals for individual lessons, I did expand on topics that I observed in the example vlogs when I suspected they would be relevant for participants. For example, the creator of the first example vlog includes timestamps on screen and in her voiceover; however, the text-to-speech function used to create the voiceover speaks the time incorrectly (e.g., ‘vierzehn Punkt null fünf Uhr’ instead of ‘vierzehn Uhr fünf’). This presents an opportunity to bring up the topic of time telling and draw attention to how time is used in daily vlogs. I therefore included learning activities related to time telling in the first lesson, including one which prompts participants to correct the incorrectly spoken voiceover. Directly connecting lesson content to the examples provided allows learners to immediately understand the relevance of the topics covered and think ahead to how they might replicate relevant concepts in their own submissions. Working with examples in the target genre also allows learners to focus on things that are not explicitly didacticized by the teacher, or that learners can pick up on implicitly, for example how modes intersect (e.g., the combination of ‘showing’ through video and ‘telling’ through speech).

When working with a real-world genre, it makes sense to work with language content that is situated in the genre without expanding into other contexts. It is not necessary to bring in other topics that are only marginally related to the daily vlog genre just because they fit with the general topic of ‘daily routine’ or grammar concepts that are frequently taught together. It is sufficient for learners to work with examples of the target genre; making space for learners to

make decisions based on their own knowledge and understanding is what constructivist learning looks like in action.

5.3.3 Example Vlogs

A benefit of working with the daily vlog genre is that there is an abundance of examples available. With millions of vlogs to choose from, it is important to take care in choosing appropriate examples which align with the goals of the research and the context of participants' GER 101 Online course. After watching many vlogs online, I chose three which would serve as examples for participants working through the module. In addition to this, I created my own daily vlog to include in the online module such that I had four examples in total.

Table 4. Summary of Example Vlogs in the Online Module

Lesson	Example Vlog Creator (Platform)	Nickname
Schritt 1	@nini.flash (TikTok)	Vlog 1
Schritt 2	@sbaur_1 (TikTok)	Vlog 2
Schritt 3	Erica Swyers (YouTube)	Vlog 3
Schritt 4	@lenaknk (TikTok)	Vlog 4

I created my own vlog for several reasons: first, to show learners that creating this kind of vlog with simple language is possible. Secondly, this allowed me to tailor the vlog to my audience; I could model the content, organization, and formatting of the vlog to include aspects that were relevant to both the genre and the learner group (e.g., using the present tense, speaking a little more slowly and clearly, including closed captions). Finally, creating my own vlog allowed me to see what was involved in the process and gave me some tips I could pass on to participants (e.g., you do not have to film it across a whole day but can shoot most of the shots from home within a

one-hour period or less). It also made me aware of the level of creativity involved in multimodal meaning making (e.g., a boiling pot of water to signify cooking, an outfit change to indicate e.g., going to the gym). This process was especially helpful for creating learning activities, discussion topics, and reflection questions. I refer to each example vlog by its nickname which corresponds to its lesson number, i.e., ‘vlog 1’ is the example vlog used in *Schritt 1*. An overview of the example vlogs and their creators can be found above in Table 4. In the following sections, I provide additional information about each vlog and how it was integrated into its respective *Schritt*.

5.3.3.1 Vlog 1

Vlog 1 was rather simple in terms of content and language. It was posted on TikTok by a creator with the username @nini.flash. The vlog is 28 seconds long and follows the events of the creator’s day which include waking up, getting ready, choosing an outfit, going to a friend’s house, going out to eat, and going to sleep. Vlog 1 includes a voiceover that has been created by TikTok’s text-to-speech function and thus has a robotic sounding voice. The voiceover matches the on-screen text for each scene such that viewers see and hear the same thing simultaneously.

Each scene includes a time stamp (e.g., ‘10 Uhr aufstehen’), however, in two instances, the time is read incorrectly by the text-to-speech function, resulting in incorrectly spoken time statements (excerpts V1001 and V1002). *Schritt 1* begins with a reflection about whether participants are familiar with this style of vlog and what their expectations are. Several comprehension activities are included to give participants the language to describe the events of the vlog, e.g., matching the word to the corresponding screenshot (excerpt S1001). In another comprehension activity, participants are invited to investigate the phrase ‘Ready machen’ (‘fertig machen’) which is heard and seen in vlog 1. Because vlog 1 includes timestamps, and especially

because it contains a partially incorrect use of time-telling in its voiceover, this presented an opportunity to cover the topic of time-telling.

Figure 6 (left). “Vierzehn Punkt null fünf Uhr neue Tasche nehmen” (V1001)

Figure 7 (right). “Vierzehn Punkt zwei null Uhr zu Lea” (V1002)



Figure 8. A comprehension activity from Schritt 1 (S1001)

Drag & Drop

Match the words and images from the video. Watch the video again if you need to.

Vlog 1 - Match activities to words

Aufstehen

Bubble Waffel essen

neue Tasche nehmen

Schlafen

Ready machen

zu Lea fahren

Check

This was therefore covered in the learning activities of *Schritt 1*. After working through exercises which focus on time-telling, participants apply their knowledge by ‘fixing’ the incorrectly spoken text-to-speech statements. This both tests learners’ abilities to tell time correctly and draws attention to the fact that AI-powered tools are not always trustworthy or correct. Finally, learners are invited to reflect on what they learned in the lesson and what they might use in their own #eintagininmeinemleben vlog.

5.3.3.2 Vlog 2

Vlog 2 is a daily vlog created by TikTok user @sbaur_1. The vlog is 44 seconds in length and depicts several events from throughout the creator’s day. It does not include a voiceover but describes each event with on-screen text, e.g., ‘Fertig machen,’ ‘Frühstück.’

Figure 9 (left). Screenshot depicting ‘fertig machen’ in vlog 2 (V2001)

Figure 10 (right). Screenshot depicting ‘Frühstück’ in vlog 2 (V2002)

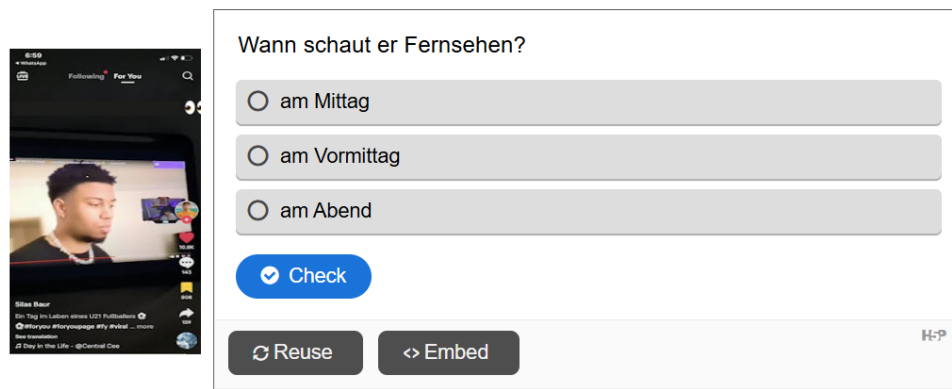


Events depicted in the vlog include waking up, preparing breakfast, getting ready for the day, grocery shopping, eating lunch, going to training (he is a soccer player), going home, preparing dinner, reading, and watching TV.

Schritt 2 begins with a reflection on how vlog 2 compares to vlog 1, prompting participants to think about content, language, mode, and any other observations they may make.

Like *Schritt 1*, *Schritt 2* includes learning activities which focus on understanding the events depicted in the video. Consistent with the GER 101 Online curriculum, the topic of parts of the day, e.g., ‘am Morgen,’ is introduced.

Figure 11. A comprehension activity from Schritt 2 (S2001)



Wann schaut er Fernsehen?

☐ am Mittag

☐ am Vormittag

☐ am Abend

✓ Check

↻ Reuse <> Embed H-P

Participants work with this topic to make inferences about when the creator’s events take place as timestamps are not always included. *Schritt 2* ends with another reflection in which participants can comment on what they have learned and how this influences their approach to the target task.

5.3.3.3 Vlog 3

Vlog 3 is the vlog that I created for the module. It is 54 seconds long and depicts daily events which include waking up, preparing breakfast, drinking coffee, working, exercising, walking the dog, tidying up, cooking, watching TV, and going to bed. The vlog is made up of video clips, voiceover, on-screen closed captions, and background music.

Following the same structure as the previous 2 lessons, *Schritt 3* includes comprehension questions which refer to the events seen in the vlog. Comprehension questions ask not only about

the events seen in the vlog, but when each event took place, thus reviewing time telling and parts of the day.

Figure 12. A productive learning activity from Schritt 3 (S3001)



Um wie viel Uhr bereitet sie das Abendessen zu?

Wann macht sie Sport?

Um wie viel Uhr geht sie ins Bett?

Schritt 3 contains more productive activities than the previous two lessons, resulting in a gradual increase in complexity from lesson to lesson (i.e., what was a multiple-choice question in *Schritt 1* is a short-answer question in *Schritt 3*). Because some of the events in vlog 3 include separable verbs (e.g., *aufstehen*, *Essen zubereiten*, *aufräumen*), this topic is thematized in the learning activities of *Schritt 3* as well.

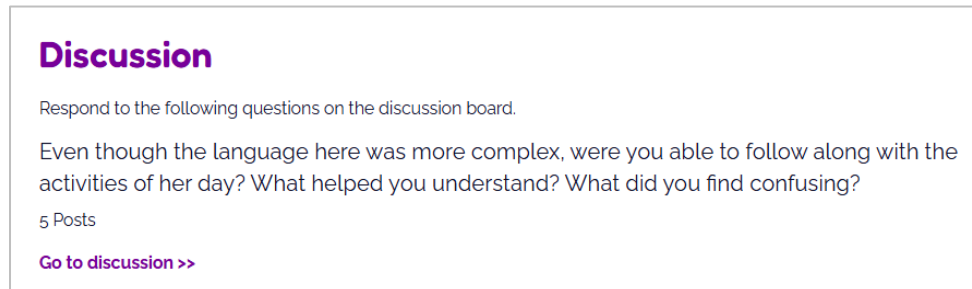
5.3.3.4 Vlog 4

Vlog 4 is linguistically more complex than the previous vlogs, mainly due to the fact that the creator's voiceover includes more information and is spoken quickly. Vlog 4 was created by TikTok user @lenaknk, is 41 seconds in length and covers events throughout her day from waking up until going to bed. These include eating breakfast, drinking coffee, viewing an online lecture for her studies, exercising, eating lunch at the Mensa, going to the dental clinic (she is a dentistry student), grocery shopping, and going out to eat with friends.

Schritt 4 begins with a discussion prompting participants to reflect on whether and how they could follow along with the creator's day despite not understanding every word of the

voiceover. The learning activities also review the previously learned topics with regards to the content of vlog 4.

Figure 13. A discussion question from Schritt 4 (S4001)



Because vlog 4 includes a clip of the creator eating in the Mensa (a concept that students at a Canadian university may not be familiar with), this topic is briefly thematized in the lesson and an external blog post about Mensa culture at German universities is linked. Like all previous lessons, Schritt 4 ends with a chance for reflection.

As described above, each of the module's four lessons focuses on one example vlog, with learning activities that are based on the events and language depicted in each one. While each lesson is unique, they generally follow a similar structure. They grow in complexity over the course of the module and always review what was learned previously. After participants have completed the final lesson (*Schritt 4*), they are directed to the *Ziel* or target task page.

5.3.4 Ziel

The *Ziel* is the final stage of the module; on this page, participants submit their daily vlogs.

Because they have written several reflections throughout the lessons in which they reflect on what they might include in their vlogs, the first thing that participants encounter when they arrive on the *Ziel* page is an overview of their own reflections from the previous lessons. This allows them to review their own thoughts and ideas about what they might include in their vlogs.

Instructions for the target task are intentionally left open-ended so that participants may approach

the task according to their own interpretation of the genre. This allows them to act as designers and make decisions regarding e.g., which content to include in the video, how to order and depict events, which language should accompany the visuals and in which format. The only specification for the task is that videos should be at least 30 seconds in length. Some tips for their submissions are included, e.g., keeping things simple, being creative, ensuring that any audio is clearly audible. The task description makes it clear that participants are not required to upload their submissions to social media unless they choose to do so. After participants upload their vlog as a file or link, they are invited to complete some reflection questions which ask about their experience completing the vlog, what additional resources they used to complete the task, and prompting reflection on what was learned throughout the process of completing the module

5.3.5 Design Challenges

There is no singular, correct way to design asynchronous online task-based learning sequences. The design process was not always straightforward and thus, I encountered challenges along the way. The greatest challenges concerned 1) conceptualizing productive learning activities; and 2) facilitating meaningful interaction. While there are some types of communicative practice that facilitate asynchronous online communication between two or more speakers (e.g., instant messaging, email); these can be difficult to integrate in a learning environment in a way that is meaningful for learners and relevant to the main task. Moreover, many modes of online communication take more time to play out compared to synchronous forms of communication. Because the length of time to complete the module was set to one week (corresponding with the GER 101 Online course), this did not leave much time for participants to interact with one another via asynchronous communicative practices before completing the target task. In addition

to this, it was necessary to consider how the addition of communicative activities would help prepare learners for the final task, or whether such activities might distract from the central task-based focus of the module.

In this section, I have described my process for designing the online task-based module tested in this study. The module consists of 4 individual lessons and a *Ziel* page; each lesson centers around an example vlog which is integrated into the lesson. Learning activities in each lesson are based on the content, language, and other forms of meaning making that can be observed in the vlogs. Reflection questions are included in each lesson to prompt participants to reflect on how meaning making resources are used in the examples and to think about how they would design meaning in their own submissions. Example vlogs include a variety of content and differ from each other in terms of the complexity of language used. The lessons thus build in complexity over the course of the module and provide participants with the chance to review previously encountered language and structures. In spite of some design challenges, the module design was completed in time for the first iteration of testing in the Spring term of 2023. Based on feedback from participants and my own observations, some adjustments to the module were made for the second iteration. These changes are discussed in detail in the next section.

5.4 Module Design in Round 2

Part of the Design-based Research framework implemented in this study includes the testing of an educational intervention over several iterations. The design of the online module as described in the previous section was tested with student participants in the Spring 2023 term. Following the data collection from this first round of testing, I reviewed the data to determine any changes that needed to be made to the module before the second iteration began. In this section, I describe these changes with reference to data collected in Round 1. I do not provide a detailed

analysis of these data in this chapter, nor do I give a detailed description of their context; rather, data excerpts presented here are included solely for the purpose of justifying the changes made to the module learning activities. A detailed analysis of the data collected in Round 1 which considers the wider context of participants' overall experience is provided in Chapter 6.

The feedback received from participants in Round 1 was generally positive overall and was rated as 'sufficiently challenging' in the anonymous survey. Based on the data collected, there was no need to make any large-scale structural changes to the module or lessons. Some adjustments were made based on participants' suggestions for improvement as well as my own observations and reflections after considering the data collected in Round 1. Alterations to the module generally fall into two categories: (1) learning materials, and (2) technological changes.

Figure 14. Round 1 Survey: What I liked about the module was...(SV001)

What I liked about the module was:

The modules were simple and straightforward to complete.

I liked the interactive parts of the module, listening and watching videos helped me understand what was going on. Question wise, I thought the module was sufficiently challenging enough to make sure that I understood what was going on even in the faster videos.

Changes to learning materials include the addition of extra practice or explanation, links to additional resources, and clarification of activity instructions. Technological changes include improvements to the user interface and behind-the-scenes alterations to learning activities and data management.

5.4.1 Changes to Learning Materials

Some changes to the learning materials were implemented based on participant feedback. These include the addition of new learning activities and links to additional resources as well as

changes to the instructions of some activities. I discuss these with reference to excerpts from the data in this section.

5.4.1.1 Addition of Learning Materials

In the design of the second iteration, I included additional learning materials in all four of the module lessons. These mostly included the practice materials for the concepts introduced in each lesson. For example, I expanded the time-telling topic in *Schritt 1* after I had noticed that the first version focused primarily on official time telling (e.g., using the 24-hour clock). I updated this section to be more consistent with GER 101 Online which covers both formal and informal time telling, e.g. the use of expressions such as *Viertel*, *halb*, *vor*, *nach*, etc. This change made sense in the context of the daily vlog task which generally uses rather informal language.

Another addition was made in *Schritt 2* based on feedback from Nicholas who found that he was not sufficiently prepared to talk about his own daily activities after watching the example vlogs. He reported in his interview that he needed to rely on external resources to look things up (excerpt NI007).

NI007

N: if I didn't really know how to say an activity or have to do I'd have to do a bit of research on like say I wanted to say that I played basketball at some point [...] I don't think there was an example of that or like there might not have been I dunno [...] like the idea of like just a variety of different topics, I guess could've helped

This statement drew my attention to the fact that there were insufficient opportunities for participants to talk about their own common daily activities before arriving at the vlog task. Of course, it will not be possible to cover the spectrum of all learners' daily activities in any single learning activity. However, the addition of a new activity provided the chance to build in scaffolding for the final vlog task. The activity added to *Schritt 2* introduces some common daily

activities and gives participants the chance to add to the list of possible activities (Figures 15, 16, 17).

Figure 15. Participants prepare for a productive exercise by selecting activities relevant to them (S2002)

Was machst du? 🎯

Look at the activities below and select the ones that you do on a typical day. You can add to the list if something is missing. Click 'Save' to save your responses. You should select at least 4 activities.

Sport machen	zur Uni fahren	mit Freunden treffen	lernen	zum Supermarkt gehen	fertig machen
frühstücken	Fernsehen schauen	ins Bett gehen	den Hund / die Katze füttern	Kaffee trinken	kochen

Add an activity

Save

Figure 16. Participants choose a time expression from the dropdown menu (S2003)

Wann machst du? 🎯

The activities you selected are listed below. For each activity, select the time of day you typically complete each activity. Of course, the answers can be true or made up! If something doesn't look right, repeat the previous activity to update this one.

Was?	Wann?
Sport machen	Choose one
zur Uni fahren	Choose one
lernen	Choose one
Kaffee trinken	Choose one
Fernsehen schauen	Choose one

The goal of the activity is for participants to combine their own daily activities with time expressions and use these elements to construct sentences. Participants choose activities from the

list that are relevant to them, after which they are prompted to select a time expression from a dropdown menu.

Figure 17. Participants write sentences using previously selected information (S2004)

Sätze schreiben 🧑

Use your activity and time information to write sentences about your day.

zum Beispiel: Kaffee trinken -- am Morgen Am Morgen trinke ich Kaffee.
Sport machen -- am Nachmittag Ich mache am Nachmittag Sport.

Sport machen	am Abend	Type here...
zur Uni fahren	am Mittag	Type here...
lernen	am Nachmittag	Type here...
Kaffee trinken	am Vormittag	Type here...
Fernsehen schauen	in der Nacht	Type here...

They are then prompted to combine these into full sentences. The number of sentences that participants are prompted to write depends on the number of activities they select.

Additional materials were also added to *Schritt 3*, to expand on the topic of separable-prefix verbs. Both participants in Round 1 reported that they understood the concept of separable verbs; however, I noticed that the existing module in GER 101 Online included much more on this topic than was currently included in the online module. I therefore expanded this in the online module by adding a consciousness-raising activity, a form-focused fill-in-the-blanks exercise, and an online discussion. The online discussion provided the opportunity for learners to use separable verbs in context; however, their use was not a requirement for this exercise. Rather, this discussion provided further scaffolding for the vlog task.

Another addition to the learning materials was the expansion of the topic of ‘die Mensa’ at German universities in *Schritt 4*. This topic was originally included because the creator of vlog 4 includes a shot of her meal during her lunch break at the Mensa in her vlog. Because this

presented an opportunity to engage with that topic, some additional questions were added for which reading the (initially optional) blog post was necessary.

Figure 18. Participants make observations about separable-prefix verbs (S3002)

What do you notice? 🧐

Look at each sentence in the previous section and answer the following questions.

What do you notice about the position of the **prefix** (auf, ab, etc.) in each sentence?

Type here...

What do you notice about the **verb form** in each sentence?

Type here...

Figure 19. A discussion following the introduction to separable verbs (S3003)

Discussion: Der Alltag 🧐

It's your turn to ask questions.

On the discussion board, ask your peers about their daily routines. What activities do they normally do? At what time of day? Take the questions in the previous activity as an example. Your question can, but doesn't need to, include a separable verb. Ask at least 1 question and post at least 2 responses.

4 posts

[Go to discussion >>](#)

In addition to this, additional supports were added to *Schritt 4* to aid in comprehension of vlog 4. Both participants in Round 1 gave feedback that vlog 4 was difficult to understand due to the more complex language used and made suggestions for how this could be improved (excerpts NI004 and RI005).

To prevent future participants from experiencing similar frustration in Round 2, I added a transcript of vlog 4's voiceover to *Schritt 4*. It is hidden by default to encourage participants to try and understand the main ideas presented in the vlog without relying on the need to understand

every word. Participants can choose to view the transcript by clicking the ‘View Transcript’ button.

NI004

N: I think for some of the videos it might have helped like for the f- more fast paced ones you (could) like add subtitles so you can like see what they're saying as well [...] and when they're speaking fast it's kind of hard to tell exactly what they're saying

RI005

R: maybe if there was like at least closed captions where it's like I could like kinda of read what she's saying an then like if I wanted to I could like google search what that sentence means [...] things like that [...] because it's it's hard to because she was speaking just so fast it was hard to pick out like even just (tight/to like) repeat what she was saying

In addition to changes made to the online lessons, the *Ziel* page was updated to include links to external resources which contain support for creating a vlog using various video editing software programs and mobile apps. This decision was based on feedback from Robert's interview in which he reported that it was difficult to create the vlog from a technical perspective (excerpt RI010).

RI010

Int: did you find that those activities prepared you for creating your own vlog?

R: umm I guess like ih it kinda prepared me in the sense that like I knew kinda what to put in it [...] but not prepared me to make it cause [...] um I didn't wanna install tiktok so I I tried doing it through instagram reels [...] and that was a lot harder than I thought cause I'm like yeah just it was a pain tryna sync up the speech in (then) the like the slide

Robert encountered difficulties in the creation of his daily vlog partially due to the fact that he had never used the Instagram app to create a Reel (i.e., a short-form video for sharing on social media). The inclusion of technical guidance can provide additional support for participants in Round 2 with the creation of their daily vlogs.

5.4.1.2 Updated Instructions

As well as the addition of extra learning materials and supports for participants, in preparation for the second iteration of data collection, I updated the instructions for some of the module's learning activities. Participants in Round 1 reported frustrations that resulted from misunderstandings about some of the activities. For example, Robert explained in his interview that he could not find the answer to a multiple-choice question in *Schritt 1* (excerpt RI002).

RI002

R: one of the questions was um it was uh I think it was like m machen fertig like get uh to get ready or to ready oneself [...] um one of the questions was like what's another way of saying that and I'm like I have no clue and I tried searching and I couldn't find the same the like what the alternative was

Robert was unable to find the answer to the question because it was not explicitly provided in the lesson; rather, participants were meant to use trial-and-error to find the answer. However, this was not clear from the activity instructions. Based on this feedback, I updated the instructions for that question to make it clearer to participants that they should try as many times as necessary until they find the answer. In addition to this feedback received from Robert, participants reported in the anonymous survey that the wording of some questions was confusing (excerpt SV002).

Figure 20. Round 1 Survey: I think the module could be improved in the following way(s)... (SV002)

I think the module could be improved in the following way(s):

Some of the questions were confusing with the wording,

Based on this feedback, I took time before the second iteration to proofread each lesson and examine all the learning activities. I updated activity instructions for clarity as necessary to avoid any potential confusion in Round 2.

Based on the feedback received in Round 1, the learning materials underwent some changes, for example, the addition of new exercises and practice activities as well as updates to instructions for improved clarity. In addition to the changes described here, I also implemented some technological changes to the website; these are described in the following section.

5.4.2 Technological Changes

The ways in which participants interact with technology can have an effect on learning and shape the overall experience. I consider the user experience to be an important factor in the design of the module and thus considered participants' feedback about the functionality of the *Swyfly* website in preparation for Round 2. Data collected in Round 1 thus contributed to module updates that concerned the technical operation of the website. Because I am the owner and creator of *Swyfly*, I can make changes to the layout and user interface of the webpages and learning materials as needed.

Figure 21. Round 1 Survey: What I did not like about the module was... (SV003)

What I did not like about the module was:

I didn't like that there was no easy way to answer questions about the videos, I would need to keep scrolling between the video, pausing it and un pausing it, which was annoying to use.

Figure 22. Round 1: I think the module could be improved in the following way(s)... (SV004)

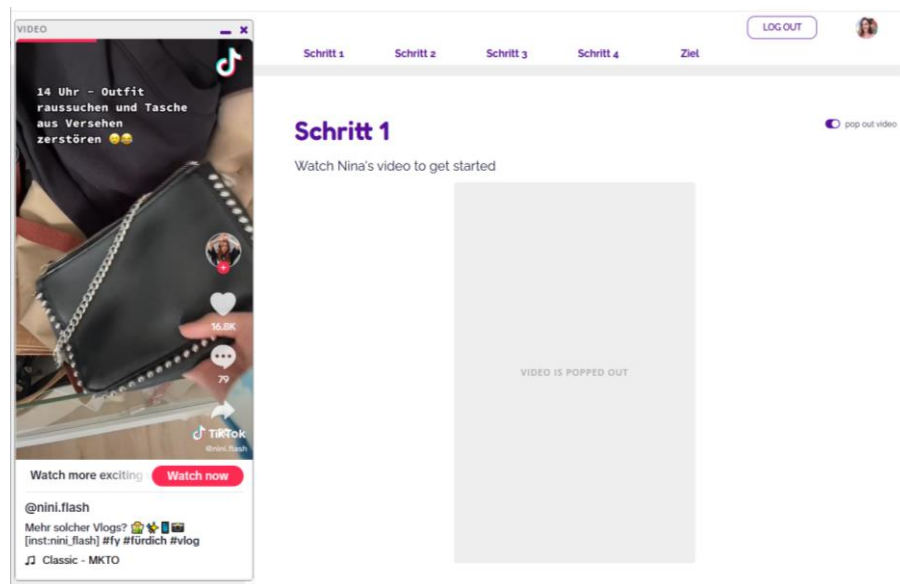
I think the module could be improved in the following way(s):

A better UI could help, make it so the video and questions can be viewable on the same screen (maybe video on left of screen and question scrollable on the right?).

For example, comments in the survey feedback brought up an issue with the user interface (UI) (excerpts SV004 and SV005). These responses from the survey feedback indicate that the layout of the lesson webpages was annoying to use because users had to scroll between the example

vlog at the top and the questions throughout the lesson in order to complete the learning activities. Since most of the learning activities in the lessons draw on the content of the example vlog, users need to frequently switch between watching the vlog and viewing the activities. One participant suggested displaying the video in a fixed position on the left side of the screen while users scroll through the lesson on the right side of the screen.

Figure 23. An example of popped out video (S1002)



I decided to implement this suggested change on the module website which now enables users to ‘pop out’ the example vlog such that it remains visible as users scroll down. When the video is popped out, the example vlog is visible in a separate window on the left side of the screen while users can scroll and interact with the lesson content on the right side of the screen.

Another technical change that was implemented in preparation for Round 2 is a change from H5P to self-made learning activities wherever possible. As described in Chapter 4, H5P is a tool for creating closed-ended interactive activities that provide participants with immediate feedback. While this tool allows instructors to create engaging and interactive activities for learning, it restricts data retrieval (i.e., learners’ responses) without a paid license. In the first

iteration, I had created multiple choice questions in several of the lessons. These were all made with H5P in the first round; however, after gaining experience working with Bubble's no-code platform, I could recreate all of the multiple-choice questions as well as some other question types such that I would have access to additional data in Round 2.

Figure 24. A H5P multiple-choice question from Round 1 (left) compared to the self-made version from Round 2 (right) (S1003)

The figure displays two side-by-side screenshots of a multiple-choice question interface. Both screens show the same question: "What is another (and more German) way of saying 'Ready machen' (=to get oneself ready) ?".

The left screenshot (Round 1) is an H5P interface. It features four radio button options: "bereit machen", "fertig machen", "parat machen", and "Ready werden". Below the options is a blue "Check" button. At the bottom, there are two buttons: "Reuse" and "Embed", and a small "H5P" logo.

The right screenshot (Round 2) is a self-made version. It features four radio button options: "Ready werden", "fertig machen", "parat machen", and "bereit machen". Below the options is a purple "Check" button. The interface is simpler, with no "Reuse" or "Embed" buttons.

This update did not change anything for the participants; they could still interact with the new self-made activities in the same way they could in Round 1, and they still received immediate feedback on their answers. However, the updated activities were beneficial for the research study and resulted in a larger data set for Round 2.

Finally, in addition to the technological changes described above, some other minor back-end changes were made to the module website *Swyfly*. These changes mostly concern the functionality of the website and database management; they were not undertaken as a result of feedback but rather as a result of my own observations. For example, I implemented an update to the website which changed the way that participants submissions were saved and labelled. The purpose of this change was to give participants the opportunity to complete a lesson a second (or third, or fourth, etc.) time if desired. This change aimed to provide participants with multiple opportunities to complete a lesson before submission.

Overall, the changes made to the online module were relatively simple, i.e., there was no need to implement large-scale changes to the module structure or task. The changes that were implemented were based on participants' feedback from data collected in Round 1 as well as my own observations. The changes concerned the lesson content, e.g., the addition of new materials, updates to task instructions, as well as technological changes such as updates to the lesson UI, interactive questions, and database administration. Although the online module was only tested in two iterations and thus only required one round of updates; student feedback collected in Round 2 contains suggestions for further updates in the event that an additional iteration would be carried out in the future. In the remainder of this chapter, I describe the potential updates for future iterations of the online module tested in this study.

5.5 Feedback for Future Iterations

Feedback collected from participants in Round 2 indicates how the module could be further improved if it were to be tested in a third iteration. Similar to Round 1, feedback from Round 2 was generally positive overall (e.g., Figure 25) with some suggestions for minor updates.

Figure 25. Round 2 Survey: What I liked about the module was... (SV005)

What I liked about the module was:

It was interactive!

I liked how the module was set up, by that I mean I liked its use of examples and how it allowed the user to try again if they failed the question.

For example, during an interview, Miranda gave a positive assessment of her experience working through the module. She enjoyed the level of engagement and variety of activity types that were included, such as the use of image matching and drop-down lists. Miranda's only feedback regarding what could be improved was a desire for more practice exercises:

MI004

M: I need a lot of for me specifically a lot of repetition ahm [...] a lot of practice activities a lot of you know um so that for me you know we had those practice activities but part of me is like oh you know maybe there could have been a little bit more to like help me really retain some of it

An idea for future iterations would be to include additional practice for the concepts covered.

One option would be to include optional additional practice activities such that participants have more flexibility to account for their individual learning needs and preferences.

Another suggestion made by participants in Round 2 concerns the functionality of the website. As mentioned above, between Round 1 and Round 2, I had made some updates regarding the way that lessons submissions are saved and labelled. This update would allow participants to complete the lesson multiple times if desired. However, this had the unintended consequence that participants could not review their responses after submitting them. Although the data was saved to the *Swyfly* database, it was not visible to participants who left and returned to the lessons at a later time. This was an issue for participants in Round 2 who provided feedback about this issue in the survey (see Figure 26).

Figure 26. Round 2 Survey: What I did not like about the module was... (SV006)

What I did not like about the module was:

I didn't like how my answers disappeared! Especially when I wanted to go back and review them.

Whenever the tab reloaded it would erase all my progress, which did cause some mild annoyance.

Both participants in Round 2 comment that the disappearing answers were an issue for them, especially if they wanted to return to their work later or review their answers. If this online module were to be used in future iterations, this is something that would need to be addressed before participants begin their work in the module.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the process of planning, designing, and re-designing the online module that was tested in this study. The planning phase was informed by previous research on TBLL, online learning, multiliteracies, and multimodality, and considered the needs of participants enrolled in GER 101 Online. The blending of these multiple, sometimes competing factors posed challenges for the design process. The module was ultimately designed around examples of the daily vlog genre which served as the starting point for each lesson; lesson activities were based on topics that could be observed in the example vlogs. Participants in both rounds of testing provided an overall positive assessment of their learning experience and they provided some suggestions for improvement. Data and feedback collected in the first iteration of module testing were used to inform updates to the second iteration; feedback collected during the second round could be used to make additional changes for possible future iterations. In the next chapter, I present an analysis of the data collected from participants' work in the module, vlog submissions, and interviews.

Chapter 6: Analysis

This chapter is divided into two parts: 1) an analysis of individual participant data, and 2) a cross-analysis of the main emergent themes. The individual analysis considers the data collected at the level of each participant, i.e., their vlog submissions, module responses, and interviews. The cross-analysis examines and compares the central themes across all four participants, identifies patterns, and draws comparisons. In the following sections, I present my analysis of participants' vlog submissions, module responses, and semi-structured interviews to piece together a well-rounded understanding of each participant's experience completing the online module and vlog task. I present data excerpts from each of the four participants who completed the main vlog task: their pseudonyms are Nicholas, Robert, Miranda, and James. I analyze the data through the lens of the focal points identified in Chapter 4: multimodality, genre, language, and overall evaluation of experience. My interest in multimodality concerns how participants employ various modes of meaning making in their vlog submissions as well as how they orient to multimodality, i.e., how they describe their experience working with multimodal texts. My investigation of genre regards how the genre of daily vlog is realized in participants' submissions and how their understandings of the daily vlog genre influence their vlog designs. The analysis also considers how participants use language to create meaning in their vlogs as well as their language awareness and perceived learning. Finally, I examine participants' overall experience working through the module as evaluated in their written reflections and interviews. These focal points provide a lens through which the data are viewed; they are not exclusive or all-encompassing. Other relevant themes which emerge from the data will be discussed in this chapter as well. Thus, the focal points described here serve as a starting point for the

investigation. An overview of participants and the points of interest in their individual analysis is provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Overview of analysis by participant

Participant	Analytical Points of Interest
Nicholas	Meaning design; multimodality and comprehension; understanding of genre; reflections on learning; beliefs about learning and assessment
Robert	Meaning design; understanding of genre; multimodality, comprehension, and accuracy; evaluation of experience
Miranda	Meaning design; reflections on design decisions; influence of genre on decision making; reflections on mode and language; evaluation of experience
James	Meaning design; work with example vlogs; understanding of genre; evaluation of experience

This chapter is organized according to participant starting with Nicholas and Robert who participated in Round 1 and continuing with Miranda and James who participated in Round 2. Within each individual discussion, I describe the meaning design in the vlog submission, for example how the vlog is structured, which activities are included, and through which media these are represented. I then discuss the central themes which come to light in each participant's module responses and interviews and touch on, e.g., participants' commentary on their understanding of daily vlogs, their decision making, and their beliefs and attitudes. While the individual analyses are conducted according to the same focal points, the structure of each analysis is presented somewhat differently due to differences in emerging themes. Images depicting participants' faces have been altered for anonymity.

6.1 Nicholas

Nicholas is an undergraduate student at the University of Waterloo who took GER 101 Online in the Spring 2023 term. He registered for an account on *Swyfly* and completed all of the module activities over the course of about one week before submitting his vlog. He also participated in a

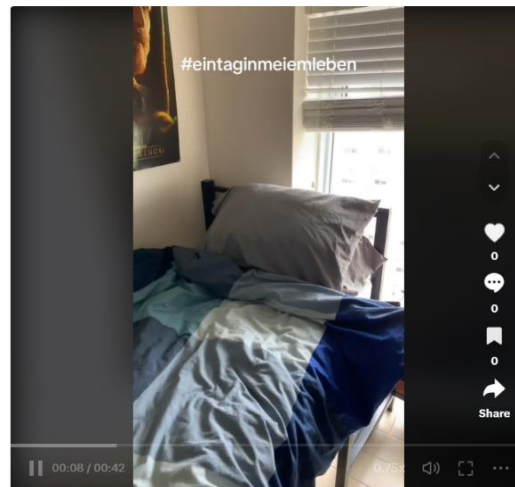
follow-up semi-structured interview after completing the module. This section begins with an analysis of how Nicholas designs meaning in his vlog submission and continues with a discussion of excerpts from the module responses and interview with reference to the vlog. I discuss Nicholas' commentary on multimodality and comprehension, the development of his conceptualization of the daily vlog genre, his evaluation of his experience working through the online module, and his beliefs about language, learning, and assessment.

6.1.1 Meaning Design in Nicholas' Vlog

Nicholas submitted a vlog on *Swyfly* after completing all four lessons in the module. His vlog is 42 seconds in length and includes eight short video clips which he recorded that depict the activities from throughout his day. The vlog begins with an opener, i.e., an introductory video clip with an accompanying spoken statement; aside from the opener, the vlog is ordered chronologically. The events depicted in the vlog include getting up in the morning, making breakfast, studying, preparing supper, and going to bed. Nicholas uses visual and audible modes of meaning making in his vlog to create meaning. The visuals consist of video clips and the hashtag '#eintagmeinleben' in the form of text which is visible on the top half of the screen throughout the duration of the video. The vlog also includes speech in a voiceover that Nicholas recorded himself.

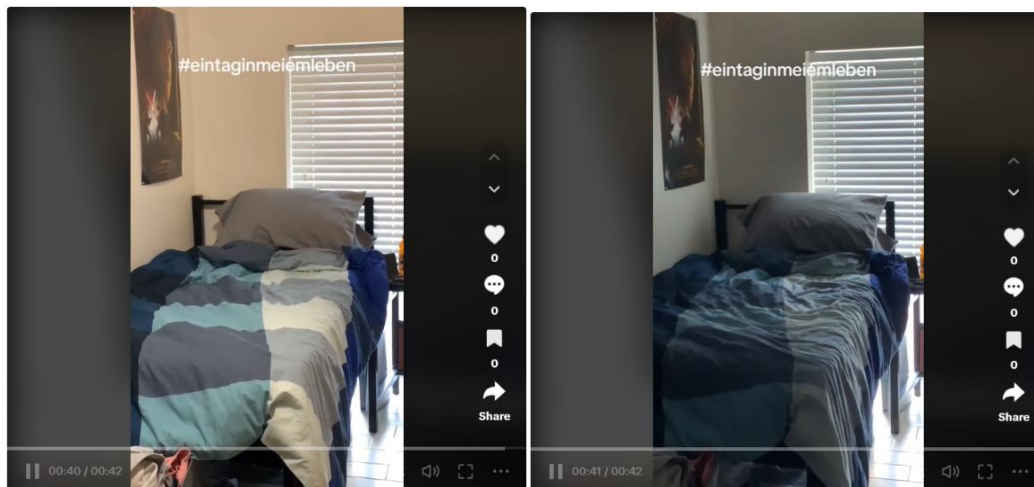
In his video clips, Nicholas uses camera angle and light to differentiate between similar-looking activities. For example, his depiction of waking up and going to bed both include a shot of his bedroom with the camera pointed towards the bed. Excerpt NL002 depicts the event of waking up.

Figure 27. “Zehn Uhr ich stehe auf“ (NL002)



The camera is near the end of the bed; this shot could have been taken by someone sitting on the end of the bed, as if the action of getting up is still in progress. The blinds on the window are open such that the viewer can see the daylight shine through the window. This scene differs from his depiction of ‘going to bed,’ shown in excerpt NL007.

Figure 28. “Am Mitternacht ich schlaf“ (NL007)



Even though the video clips in this scene show the same object (his bed), there are some aspects of this shot which differentiate it from his clip of ‘getting up.’ First, the camera is further from the bed such that we can see the entire bed, giving the impression that the viewer is just entering

the room. Second, there is the use of light: he switches the overhead light off while the camera is recording, and the blinds are closed to make the room darker (even though it's clearly daytime). The way the events of waking and sleeping are portrayed in each video clip contributes to how meaning is communicated in the mode of video and thus in the vlog more generally.

In addition to visual elements, Nicholas includes speech in his vlog through the inclusion of his spoken voiceover. Each of the scenes in Nicholas' vlog is accompanied by a corresponding statement in the voiceover. His statements consist of rather simple language in short sentences whose contents correspond to the visuals presented on screen. The inclusion of speech with the video clips provides context and specific information about the activity presented, mostly with regards to times and locations of the events shown. Some of the language Nicholas uses relates to linguistic topics that are covered in the online lessons, e.g., separable-prefix verbs and time statements, as shown in the excerpts below.

NL002. "Zehn Uhr ich stehe auf"

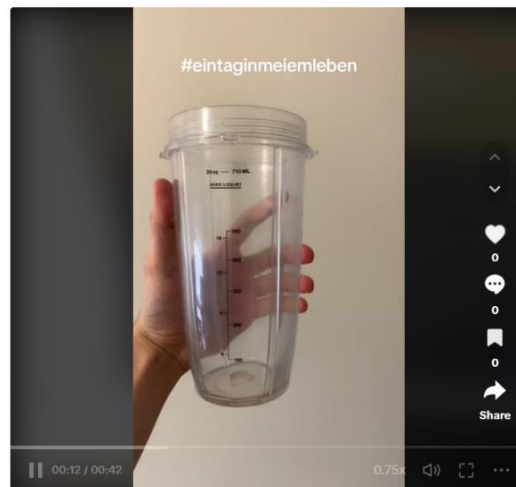
NL004. "Ich studier zuhaus bis Nachmittag"

NL005. "Neunzehn Uhr bereit isch Abendessen vor"

NL006. "Am Abend ich studier zuhaus"

His time statements consist of both specific times (e.g., 'at 10 o'clock') and more general statements (e.g., 'in the afternoon'). Several of his sentences contain errors, especially regarding the 'verb second' rule; however, these do not detract from the viewer's ability to understand. Nicholas does not only use language that is relevant to the current chapter of GER 101 Online but also draws on his entire linguistic repertoire to complete the task. For example, he includes a scene which describes what he eats in the morning (NL003).

Figure 29. “Ich mach(e) einen Smoothie mit Bananen Erdbeeren und Kefir” (NL003)

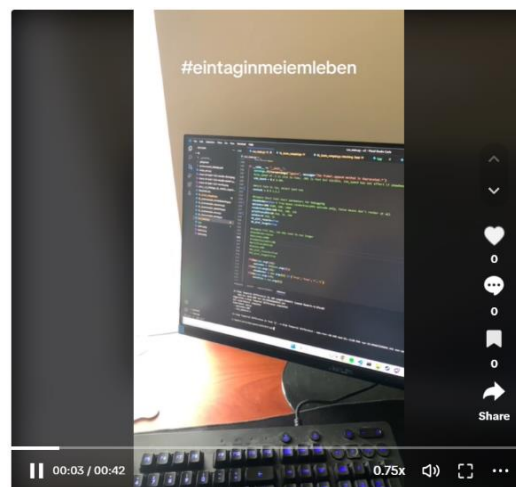


This is noteworthy because the topic of food was covered in the previous unit in Nicholas' German course. He uses this opportunity to integrate previously learned vocabulary, thereby drawing on the linguistic resources which are available to him.

6.1.1.1 Textual Borrowing

Nicholas engages in textual borrowing in the design of his vlog, i.e., he borrows elements from the example vlogs included in the module and integrates these into the context of his own daily vlog. An example of Nicholas' textual borrowing can be seen in his opener (excerpt NL001).

Figure 30. “Ein Tag in meinem Leben als Engineer Student an der University of Waterloo” (NL001)



Nicholas' opener consists of a video clip of his computer screen and an introductory statement in his voiceover. While openers such as this one can be seen in each of the example vlogs, they were not thematized in the module, i.e., Nicholas' inclusion of an opener is a result of his interpretation of what belongs to the daily vlog genre. His opening statement in the voiceover is linguistically very similar to the opening statement heard in vlog 3 (see a comparison of excerpts NL001 and V3001 below), which suggests that he has borrowed this element.

NL001: "Ein Tag in meinem Leben als Engineer Student an der University of Waterloo"

V3001: "Ein Tag in meinem Leben als Doktorandin an der University of Waterloo"

Given the similarities between these opening lines, it is probable that Nicholas borrowed this statement and adapted it by replacing the word 'Doktorandin' with 'Engineer Student' so that the statement fits with his own context. In order to adapt the statement to represent his own identity, Nicholas needed to be able to understand the meaning of each word in the statement so that he could replace the appropriate term (i.e., replacing 'Doktorandin' with 'engineer student'). His use of textual borrowing thus does not represent a simple copy of the statement but required him to deconstruct the statement and recreate it. Because the resulting statement is expressed through speech, he also recreates the pronunciation and intonation of the borrowed words. By adopting this string of text, Nicholas thus begins his video with a statement that suits the daily vlog genre as well as his own personal context.

We can see how Nicholas understands meaning making through his use of video and speech in his vlog. He combines these two modes of meaning making throughout the duration of his video. While the voiceover adds some additional detail to the imagery presented on screen, the modes do not otherwise build on each other. The overall structure and content of the vlog

resemble the example vlogs that Nicholas worked with in the online module, and his opening statement was borrowed and adapted from vlog 3.

6.1.2 Multimodality and Comprehension

In his module responses and interview, Nicholas comments on his work with multimodal texts and expresses that multimodality was helpful for his ability to follow along. For example, in a discussion question in *Schritt 4* which follows the more complex vlog 4, Nicholas acknowledges how the visuals and audio contribute to his understanding of the overall message (NM026).

NM026

Discussion. Even though the language here was more complex, were you able to follow along with the activities of her day? What helped you understand? What did you find confusing?

I was able to follow along generally, what she was doing thanks to the visuals where I could infer what she was saying by watching the video. But, the extra words that weren't written, I could not understand much of, so I could follow what she did thanks to the video of the actions and the words written (because some words sort of sounded like English words)

He explains that he could follow along with the activities in vlog 4 with the help of the visual elements in the vlog. He specifically names the actions seen in the video (i.e., depictions of what the creator does) and on-screen text as parts which allow him to follow along with the contents of the video. He also shares that his recognition of English cognates expanded his ability to understand as well. He describes how he could make inferences about the creator's speech due to the fact that these multimodal elements were present. In contrast, most of the spoken parts of the creator's voiceover which were not printed on screen were inaccessible to him, i.e., he would not have been able to follow the recorded speech alone.

Similarly, in an interview, when asked whether the visuals were helpful in vlog 4, Nicholas responds that the vlogs would be more difficult to understand if there were no visual elements (excerpt NI005).

NI005

Int: did you find that the visuals helped in in understanding what was going on like the fact that you can kind of look at what the the creators were showing did you find that helpful in understanding?

N: yeah I actually did I think it would be a lot harder to understand without the visuals [...] I think some of them also had (like) a time up in the corner and that kind of just helped me recognize exactly what they're saying (like) with re- respect to the time [...] the visuals definitely helped cause then I can just say like I guess it- it helps more in German cause there is a bit of like some some things are a lot similar like some words kind of sound the same almost even though they're not spelled exactly the same like you can say- they say something and you can see what the visuals are [...] and you can kind of just match up

Nicholas states that the text would have been more difficult to understand without the inclusion of visual elements. He notes that the visuals which accompany the spoken language allow him to match up the actions seen on screen with the statements heard in the voiceover. He adds that the inclusion of timestamps in some of the vlogs was helpful as it allowed him to better understand the creators' spoken time statements. This combination of multiple modes of meaning making in a single text is thus helpful for Nicholas' ability to read and interpret the example vlogs; if reduced to one mode or the other, he would likely not be able to follow along in quite the same way.

Observing how Nicholas uses multimodality to design meaning in his own vlog and listening to his experience interpreting multimodal texts (i.e., the example vlogs) suggests the important role that multimodality plays for him as a beginner-level learner of German. It gives him meaning making potential in his own vlog and lets him understand spoken texts which would otherwise be inaccessible to him.

6.1.3 Nicholas' Understanding of Daily Vlog Genre

Nicholas provides insights about his understanding of the daily vlog genre through multiple channels. He draws on his understanding of the genre conventions in his own submission, and he makes his knowledge of the genre more explicit through his module and interview responses. While Nicholas' understanding of the genre can be observed in the content and structure of his vlog, this does not provide a complete picture of his conceptualization of this type of text; his module and interview responses provide additional insights.

Nicholas shares that he was familiar with daily vlogs before starting the online module which he explains in an initial reflection question (excerpt NM001) in *Schritt 1*. He states that he has seen this style of vlog before but has never created one himself.

NM001

Reflection. Are you familiar with this style of video/vlog? What experience do you have – have you seen this kind of vlog before? Have you created one before? What do you expect to see in this kind of video?

I've seen these types of videos before, but I've never created one. I expect to see generally, a couple of things people do during their day along with the times they did them.

Nicholas describes his expectations about what he will see in a daily vlog; he expects to see things that people do during their day, i.e., implying that the video content is an indicator of whether a video falls into the daily vlog category. He also notes that he expects to see the times that the events took place, indicating that the inclusion of time statements is something that belongs to the genre. Nicholas does not specifically name through which modes he expects these aspects to be embodied, i.e., whether the events and times will be shown on video, through text, or described audibly. He does, however, use the verb 'see' when describing his expectations, suggesting that these elements will be depicted visually in some way.

In a similar discussion post, Nicholas describes how he can recognize that vlog 1 is a daily vlog. In excerpt NM002, Nicholas again emphasizes the inclusion of typical daily activities as well as time statements. He explains that the included events typically span the entirety of the day (“from wake up to sleep time”).

NM002

Discussion. Even if you don't understand all the language used in the video, how can you recognize that this is a 'day in the life' style vlog? What parts of the video help you to understand what the creator means?

It's possible to recognize that this is a day in the life style vlog due to how it includes activities from throughout the day from wake up to sleep time. In addition, the times that they include help show that this is something that is happening throughout the day.

Nicholas explains how he can recognize vlog 1 as a daily vlog, thus providing additional information about his understanding of the genre. He again points to the content of the vlog; he does not explicitly state which activities he expects to see but draws on an assumed understanding of the group of activities that constitute ‘activities from throughout the day.’ Nicholas also points out that the chronological organization of the text (i.e., through the use of time expressions) makes it recognizable as a daily vlog. Specifically, he notes that the inclusion of time statements indicates the passing of time in the video and thus indicates that the events take place over the course of one single day.

In a later reflection at the end of *Schitt 2* (i.e., after Nicholas has worked through two lessons and interacted with two example vlogs), he reflects on the elements that he would include in his own vlog (excerpt NM013). Compared with Nicholas’ initial reflection (NM002) on what he expects to see in a daily vlog, here, he includes more elements of daily vlogs in his description: background music, a quick pace, and additional visuals to aid his viewers’ comprehension.

NM013

Reflection. Which aspects of this lesson and/or vlog would you use in your own #eintagmeinleben video? Why?

I think that I like the music in the background, I would probably add that to my vlog. I think I would also try to keep an uptempo style, which using more visual clues so that people could understand what is being said better.

He further comments on a feature of the vlog's organization ('uptempo style') that he finds relevant. His conceptualization of what belongs to the daily vlog genre is more detailed than his previous description which was limited to unspecified daily activities and times. His emphasis on making his vlog understandable to the people watching shows how he understands the relationship between multimodality and meaning making, i.e., by including more semiotic information through visuals, his vlog will be more intelligible to the audience. This further shows that Nicholas considers the wider social context in the design of his vlog, i.e., the understanding that the vlog should be intelligible to an audience influences the design of the vlog (in this case, through the addition of visuals).

Similarly, in a reflection that Nicholas wrote at the end of *Schritt 4*, i.e., after completing the last lesson of the module, he again reflects on what he would include in his own vlog (excerpt NM032).

NM032

Reflection. Which aspects of this lesson would you use in your own vlog? Why?

I think I like the aspect of having the general activity written, and then explaining more with words, so just presenting the title of the activity and the time, and explaining more about what I am doing using audio.

In this reflection, Nicholas comments even more specifically on the use of mode; his description of what he would include is less concentrated on the content of the vlog and is more attuned to the nuanced use of language and other modes of meaning making. For example, he comments on

how language can be used in both written and spoken forms simultaneously and specifically notes that the written language seen on screen is less detailed whereas spoken language as heard in the voiceover tends to be more specific. These reflections demonstrate how Nicholas' understanding of meaning making in daily vlogs developed throughout his work in the online module.

The different data points provide different perspectives on Nicholas' understanding of the daily vlog genre. The progression of his reflections on what he might include progress throughout the module and become more specific; Nicholas includes increasingly more detail about the modes that are included in daily vlogs and how they are used. However, many of these elements are not used in his own vlog submission. Similarly, Nicholas includes elements in the vlog that are not described in his reflections, for example, the opener. This shows that language users' conceptualization of genre may not always neatly translate into a material product in the design of a text.

6.1.4 Reflections on Learning

Nicholas shares what he has learned in the module through his reflections and interview. The excerpts discussed in this section shed light on the kinds of language and other meaning making resources that Nicholas learned in the lessons and by working with example vlogs.

In a reflection question at the end of *Schritt 3*, Nicholas recounts some of the words and phrases that he learned through his experience completing the online module (excerpt NM024). Nicholas notes that he learned the phrase 'Abendessen zubereiten' and recognizes that the word 'Abendessen' is a compound noun. He draws on this knowledge as he talks about the possibility of breaking the word down to make it less specific, i.e., to describe making food more generally without necessarily referring to the evening meal.

NM024

Reflection. Were there words or phrases used in the video that you did not know, or needed to look up? Which? Would any of the words/phrases you learned in this lesson be helpful in creating your own #eintaginmeinemleben video? Make some notes here.

One new verb that could be useful is "gucken" as I could add a part taking about what I watch. Another phrase I learnt was "abendessen zubereiten" which is to prepare dinner, and since "abend" means evening, I could also probably use just "essen zubereiten" to say if I add a part where I prepare food.

Nicholas does not only refer to the words and phrases learned as linguistic information; rather, he reflects on language in combination with the kinds of activities that he might include in his vlog. In other words, the vocabulary that he has learned is not arbitrary or selected by someone else; Nicholas identified these terms as potentially useful for his own context by watching vlog 3. Ultimately, Nicholas does not include the act of watching TV, but he does include the expression 'Abendessen vorbereiten' in the vlog.

Similarly, Nicholas further comments on his language learning during an interview (excerpt NI015).

NI015

Int: did you find that you did learn new words and phrases throughout completing this module?

N: I think so I think also I think I learned more on like it helped me a bit for like the grammar side almost or like the verb side a lot [...] learning about what's it called the verbs read like take the front of it put it at the end of the sentence [...] I forget exactly what the word was but I remember I remember learning about like watching TV like what the verb would be for that [...] I think they said Abendessen at some points like which is like dinner and I didn't really know that beginning [...] and all these sorts of, I think I did learn a bit for like actual words.

Nicholas shares that he learned about grammatical concepts (e.g., separable-prefix verbs) and vocabulary. Notably, he remarks the same two expressions in the interview that he does in the previously discussed reflection question, despite participating in the interview several days later.

He states that he learned the word for watching TV (though he is unable to recall it in that moment) and also that he learned the word ‘Abendessen.’

Nicholas does not only report on language that he learned through his work in the online module but also comments on what he learned with regards to creating a daily vlog (excerpt NI006).

NI006

Int: did you find that [the example vlogs] helped prepare you for creating your own vlog?

N: I think so [...] kinda like, what did do you have like a little introduction [...] you say generally like what time you're doing something talk a little bit about it [...] continue on like I honestly wouldn't even think thought of like just adding videos that kind of correspond to what you're saying [...] but um, that's something I kind of like learned from these I think it was good.

Nicholas points out that by working with example vlogs, he learned how to make meaning multimodally. He notes that, prior to his work in the module, he would not have thought to combine video and speech this way (‘wouldn’t even thought of [...] adding videos that kind of correspond to what you’re saying’). Multimodal communication is not something that was explicitly taught in the module content; thus, Nicholas’ statement that he has learned to make meaning this way is something that he learned by working with examples.

Although Nicholas does not make use of everything that he learned in his final vlog submission, his reflection on his learning in module responses and the interview reveal some of the concepts and specific expressions that he took away from his work in the online module. Through his reflections, we can see how language and meaning are connected in the process of design, i.e., his consideration of which language he might use is directly connected with his anticipation of which content he could include in his vlog. Moreover, by working with example vlogs, Nicholas learned about other ways of making meaning beyond language alone such as combining video clips with spoken language.

6.1.5 Beliefs about Learning and Assessment

While discussing language and learning in his interview, Nicholas expresses some of his beliefs about learning and assessment. I present some excerpts from that discussion in this section.

Nicholas expresses beliefs which generally concern his orientation to linguistic accuracy and his thoughts about how the vlog task compares with the existing video assignments in his GER 101 Online course. I discuss each of these themes in further detail below.

Nicholas expresses that linguistic accuracy in his work is important to him, especially with regards to grammatical correctness and pronunciation. For example, Nicholas describes which kinds of tools he used for looking things up in the process of creating the vlog (excerpt NI021).

NI021

Int: What kind of resources did you use on the side to [...] look things up?

N: I like to have google translate open normally what I'll do is I just use it as a dictionary [...] and if I don't understand it more then I will do (actual) dictionary [...] if I don't know how to conjugate a verb I'll search it up, just see a conjugation and put it in [...] sometimes if I don't know what verb to use I'll use a google translate to find the verb and then conjugation to conjugate that verb itself. [...] I like to write all my sentences, like like before I'll record the video or write all my sentences down and then I'll (always/probably) plug them into google translate just to make sure they sorta make sense and that's one thing to- for me where I just want to make sure like I'm not doing anything weird and like the grammars actually sort of off and kind of altering what I'm trying to say right [...] I think that's important.

He describes the ways in which he uses Google Translate to help him understand and express himself in German. He uses Google Translate as a dictionary to look up individual words and notes that he will reference an actual dictionary if he needs more information. It is clear that linguistic accuracy is important to Nicholas as he is willing to go through several steps to ensure that he has, e.g., the correct verb endings. He explains that it is important to him that he is 'not doing anything weird,' i.e., a concern for him seems to be related to the high stakes associated

with saying something wrong or inappropriate in the new language. Because he understands that grammar can impact meaning ('the grammars actually sort of off and kind of altering what I'm trying to say'), he recognizes that errors in grammar might lead to miscommunications. Nicholas further explains that he does not only use Google Translate to check his work for grammatical correctness but also uses it as means for practicing pronunciation (excerpt NI022).

NI022

N: also like for the video if I don't know how to pronounce something I'll just like google translate's [...] speaking thing so they'll speak out the sentence for me and I can just kind of repeat it myself a couple of times before actually recording the video

Again, it is clear that Nicholas places importance on linguistic accuracy as he uses external tools to practice pronunciation. This is not an unusual perspective for learners, especially in an assessment-driven context like a university course.

When asked to give a general impression of the work he did in the online module, Nicholas provides an overall positive assessment of the lessons and task. He shows an affinity towards learning with texts that are made by speakers who are 'actually German' (excerpt NI001).

NI001

Int: what was your general impression?

N: I did like the videos especially the ones where it's like somebody who is actually German talking [...] if you're not really like listening to actual people who are speaking the language an you kind of- you won't be ready to actually use it if you ever need to use it in person [...] there's quite a bit bit of a difference between how people speak when you're learning a language compared to how people speak when you're actually talking in real time.

Nicholas grants legitimacy to this 'actual' use of the language, differentiating it from the kind of language he expects to encounter in language learning environments. He similarly expresses the belief that real communication can only be learned through interaction with 'actual people who

are speaking the language,’ as he refers to this as the only way to prepare to ‘actually use it if you ever need to use it in person’. He comments further on this matter in excerpt NI003.

NI003

Int: Was that was that helpful? Was it difficult?

N: I think it was a bit helpful but it was a bit hard [...] I think if you kind of like extend this over like a long period of time like say you do a full course in this style [...] or like more more practice like this you kind of get more used to it and you start as you learn more vocab you start learning more and like you kind of understand it better rather than listening to just like learning materials where it's a lot slower paced and just easy to comprehend

Nicholas states that interaction with authentic speech (i.e., as spoken by people who speak German outside of a learning context) is good practice for learners and he believes that this is something learners can (or perhaps should) get used to with practice. He shows a preference for learning from faster-paced ‘authentic’ speech over learning materials which are slower, for example those used for language learning. The difficulty of working with authentic speech (which is often rather complex, as in the case with vlog 4) is not perceived as an issue, but as something that requires practice. He describes work and practice with authentic materials to be better compared to learning materials which he describes as slow and easy suggests a belief that ease of comprehension is not necessary in order for learning to take place.

At a later point in the interview, Nicholas compares the video assignments in his current GER 101 Online course with the vlog task (excerpt NI008).

NI008

Int: how would you kind of compare the two?

N: they [the 101 assignments] are quite similar if I'm thinking about it like where you just [...] I guess I guess this one is more like creative almost um the video ones when I'm thinking about like it's just basically just answering a question [...] but this one's more of a creative assignment you know add some visuals I guess add some text on it [...] go outside and go find some activities and like document it almost [...] I think it's more like visual and probably more engaging than just sitting at your computer waiting for somebody to say some question and answering it

He notes that the vlog task is more engaging as it requires students to be creative, add a variety of media (visuals, text), and to go out in the world, rather than simply working at a computer. He describes the former positively such that the learner is positioned as an agent ('go outside [...] document it') versus the latter which positions the learner as passive ('waiting for somebody'). Creativity and getting away from the computer are, in contrast, framed favourably. Nicholas expands on his thoughts about creativity in assignments for language learning and compares this to other forms of assessment (excerpt NI010). Nicholas displays a preference for creative tasks over 'boring' tests. He points out that the kind of language that learners are usually asked to work with on tests and assignments are 'random phrases' (i.e., not interesting; not related to the learner personally).

NI010

Int: for you personally is that something that you like?

N: I would say so yeah, creative things they're just more engaging it's just if you think about like a test or something or multiple choice tests you're just doing do this this this it's kind of boring right [...] or just writing just random phrases right it's kind of boring where you get more engaged in what you're doing if you're doing something more interesting and it kind of lets you learn a bit more and like open up I guess to learning new things compared to something else where you might not care about it as much

He notes that creative assignments such as the vlog task are more engaging, and they allow learners to open themselves up to learning new things. He shows enthusiasm for creative assignments and suggests that more personal, less random uses of language might be something that learners care more about.

In excerpts NI008 and NI010 above, Nicholas expresses enthusiasm for creative assignments such as the vlog task which he finds engaging and interesting compared to work with pre-selected language on tests and quizzes. When asked which type of assessment he would

prefer to see in a language course, he reveals more about his beliefs about learning as assessment (excerpt NI011).

NI011

Int: which one do you think you would rather have in a course?

N: I think I probably want like, sort of a mix of both. Because I think it's probably important to do a bit of quizzing as well to make sure that you're actually learning the materials

He sees a combination of creative assignments and more formal testing to be appropriate for language learning. He believes that testing/quizzing should be included in the language learning curriculum to ensure that students are 'actually' learning. Despite his previous comment that tests are boring, he nevertheless sees them as a legitimate format for assessing learners' linguistic knowledge. He expands on this position in excerpt NI012.

NI012

N: the quizzes, I think are important to verify that you've learned something properly because if you do if you do just the creative assignments you can sort of get it- get away with like doing the bare minimum do your video make it look good but like just only learn a couple of phrases that are just needed for your video and then just not learn anything else I think that's not really something you want to see right in terms of actual learning in a course

He sees formal testing as a necessary means of verifying whether something has been learned 'properly.' In contrast, he expresses that creative assignments may not be as well suited to testing a wide range of knowledge, but that these are more limited to their own context of use. He believes that formal assessments are necessary to validate whether the core linguistic material has been learned. These examples suggest that Nicholas sees creative and formal assignments as complementary, with each supporting different aims.

In a subsequent discussion about the importance of grammar for language learning, Nicholas describes his nuanced understanding of grammar and how it fits in with communicative

ability (NI014). Nicholas sees grammar as an important foundational part of understanding and speaking a language, though he points out that competent speakers of a language will likely be able to ‘read between the lines’ in the event that a learner makes grammatical mistakes (i.e., that there is still potential for mutual understanding in the wake of minor grammatical errors).

NI014

Int: Do you think the grammar is important for language learning in general?

N: Yeah I think it is important to make sure that you have [...] proper grammar bases because like if you're using the wrong verbs or like or you're using the wrong der die das type things I guess people could probably still sort of understand but it makes it more like of course the goal of a language learning course to be able to speak the language right language and all this stuff and listen to the language [...] if these things are like hindering how you communicate with people then yeah you should be able to test on that and [...] I think to an extent you you should test on stuff like grammar like that because it does hinder sometimes people's understanding of what you're saying [...] I think sometimes they may be able to like read between the lines of what you actually meant but it is important in my opinion

He also recognizes that grammatical errors have the potential to hinder successful communication which is why he believes that grammar should be learned and tested.

Nicholas shows a preference for linguistic accuracy in the work that he submits as he is concerned about expressing himself appropriately in the new language. He orients to a belief that both creative as well as formative assessments are appropriate for language learning. He finds creative assignments like the vlog task to be engaging, creative, and enjoyable (i.e., better than working with ‘random’ words in phrases as on a test). On the other hand, he understands grammar to be an important aspect of language learning as he understands that grammatical errors can hinder successful communications. However, he also recognizes that minor mistakes will likely not impact a speaker’s ability to communicate.

6.2 Robert

Robert is an undergraduate student who took part in this study in the Spring 2023 term while he was taking GER 101 Online. Robert completed all of the lessons in the online module on *Swyfly* and completed the final vlog task. He took part in a semi-structured interview and described his experience working through the module. In the following sections, I provide a detailed description of meaning design in Robert's vlog and I discuss other themes related to his experience with and understanding of the daily vlog genre, his views about multimodality, comprehension, and accuracy, as well as how Robert assesses his experience working through the online module and vlog task. Robert's experiences offer insight into how different instructional approaches and learner beliefs can shape learner expectations and responses, particularly in relation to unfamiliar vocabulary and multimodal materials

6.2.1 Meaning Design in Robert's Vlog

Robert's vlog is 35 seconds in length, includes an opener, and is ordered chronologically. It includes ten scenes which depict the activities that he undertakes during his day: these include waking up in the morning, getting ready for his day, drinking coffee, studying, mealtimes, playing video games, and going to bed. Robert uses visuals (in the form of images) and speech (in a spoken voiceover that he recorded) to index each event of his day and he includes time expressions in his spoken statements.

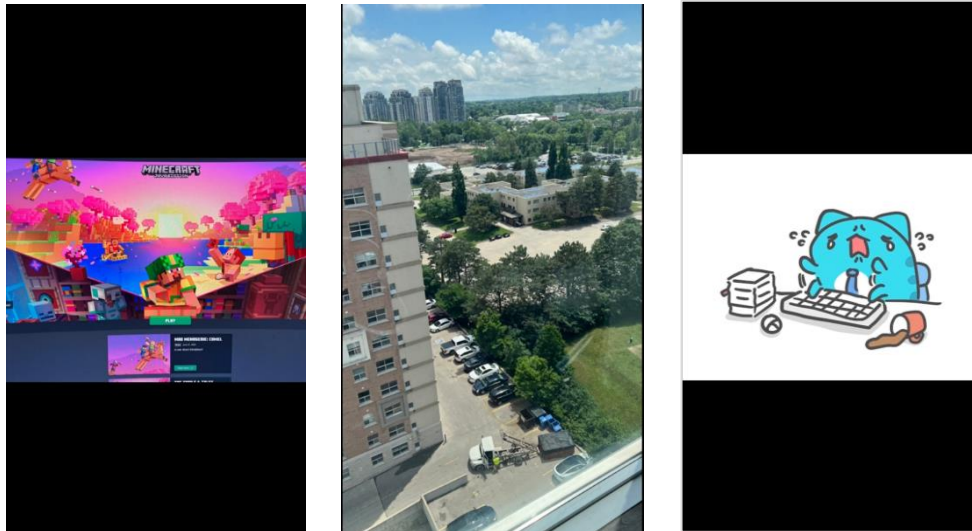
Robert's use of visuals in the vlog is realized through images. He does not include any video clips; rather, each image is displayed on screen for about 3-4 seconds before moving to the next one. He does not include other visual elements such as on-screen text, although he discusses the possibility of doing so in reflection questions in the module (see section 6.2.2.2). Because daily vlogs are most often created, shared, and viewed on mobile devices such as smartphones,

they are typically filmed in portrait orientation, also commonly referred to as “vertical video” (e.g., Schroeder, 2024; Google, n.d.). Robert uses a combination of images in both portrait and landscape orientation in his vlog (see Figures 31 and 32 below).

Figure 31 (left). An image in landscape orientation (RL009)

Figure 32 (centre). An image in portrait orientation (RL002)

Figure 33 (right). The opening scene of Robert’s vlog (RL001)



The majority of the images appear to have been taken by Robert himself with the exception of one; in his vlog opener, he includes an image of a distressed cartoon cat sitting at a desk and feverishly typing (RL001).

Robert uses speech in the form of a spoken voiceover that he recorded to add more information to the visuals on screen. Each image in his vlog aligns with one statement in his voiceover such that the viewer hears the spoken voiceover while the corresponding image is displayed on screen. He does not include any other audible elements such as music. Robert’s spoken language in the voiceover generally consists of simple statements. It includes some of the concepts that were included in the module, e.g., time expressions and separable-prefix verbs. His sentences contain few linguistic errors; for example, he consistently follows the ‘verb second’

rule, i.e., the verb remains in second position even when his statement begins with something other than the subject (see excerpts RL002, RL003, RL007, RL009).

RL002. “Ich stehe um zwölf Uhr auf”

RL003. “Und mache mich um halb eins (Uhr) fertig”

RL007. “Um acht Uhr abends esse ich mit meinen Freund”

RL009. “dann schaue ich fern und spiele Videospiele”

There is generally a connection between the images shown and the spoken language heard, i.e., the content of the image corresponds to the content of the voiceover in most cases.

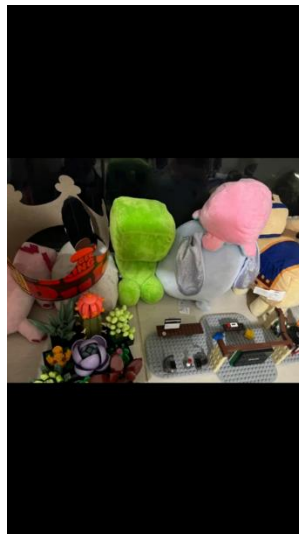
Figure 34. “Dann trinke ich eine(n) Espresso mit viel Milch“ (RL004)



For example, he includes an image of a coffee with the voiceover “dann trinke ich eine(n) Espresso mit viel Milch” (RL004). In the image, a cup of coffee with foamed milk is visible in the foreground while what looks like the bottom of a coffee or espresso maker is visible in the background. In this example, the voiceover and the image align. However, while the events depicted in Robert’s images and spoken statements mostly align, there is sometimes a slight disconnect between the event as spoken in the voiceover and what is displayed on screen, i.e., the

combined modes of image and speech do not always build on each other. For example, in the last scene of Robert's vlog, the image depicts a collection of stuffed animals and Lego sets on a flat surface (desk or table) against a semi-reflective black background (possibly a monitor or TV screen that is turned off). The image appears to show the kinds of objects that Robert has in his living space. The corresponding voiceover states "Endlich gehe ich zum schlafen um 2 Uhr(e)."

Figure 35. "Endlich gehe ich zum Schlafen um 2 Uhre" (RL010)



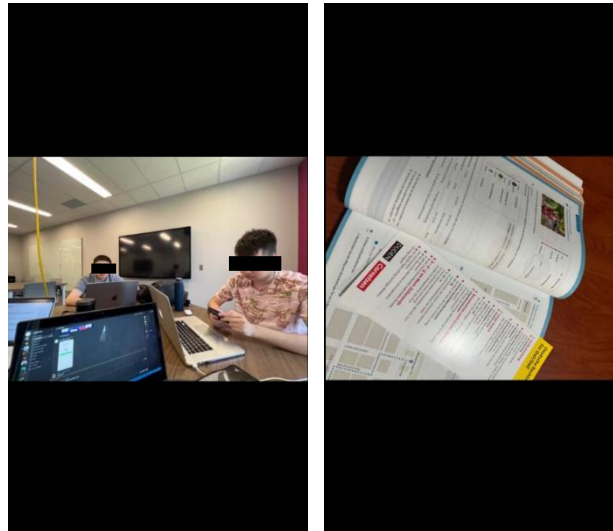
This image is not recognizable as depicting the action of going to bed nor as the closing scene of a daily vlog. A viewer who does not understand German would likely not understand Robert's image as signifying the act of going to bed but would perhaps rather associate it with hobbies or leisure time.

In other scenes, Robert uses the combination of visual and audible modes of meaning making to provide more specific information about the events depicted in his vlog. For example, he uses two different images to depict the same action ('studieren') at two different times during his day. In the first instance of 'studieren,' Robert uses an image of what looks like a shared working space. A laptop is visible in the foreground; two students sitting at the same table and

several other laptops are visible in the midground; and a TV is hung on the wall in the background.

Figure 36 (left). “Und um vierzehn Uhr studier ich” (RL005)

Figure 37 (right). “Um neun Uhr dann studier ich mehre” (RL008)



The voiceover statement accompanying this image states “und um vierzehn Uhr studier ich.”

Understood in this context, the activity shown here could be recognized as a study group or work on a group project. In the second instance of ‘studieren,’ we see a book (recognizable as the course textbook from GER 101 Online) accompanied by the audio “um neun Uhr (dann/wann) studier ich mehre.” In both cases, the word used to describe the action is the same; however, by using two different images to depict the act of studying, he gives more meaning to each event individually, i.e., the combination of modes contains more specific information than is expressed with the verb ‘studieren’ alone.

6.2.1.1 Textual Borrowing

Robert uses connector words like ‘und’ and ‘dann’ which establish coherence in his text. These words were not covered in the lesson content but can be observed in the example vlogs provided

in the module. Some examples from Robert's vlog as well as from example vlogs 3 and 4 are provided below.

V4001. "dann habe ich mich ein bisschen fresh gemacht"

RL004. "dann trinke ich ein(n) Espresso"

V3001. "und um elf Uhr gehe ich schlafen"

RL005. "und um vierzehn Uhr studier ich"

In addition to borrowing/adopting connector words, Robert uses other expressions in his voiceover which are not covered in the module content but can be heard in the example vlogs, i.e., which he likely borrowed or learned in the module. For example, the phrases 'fertig machen' and 'schlafen gehen' (RL003 and RL010).

RL003. "und mache mich um halb eins (Uhr) fertig"

RL010. "endlich gehe ich zum schlafen um 2 Uhr(e)"

His adoption of connector words and other expressions from the example vlogs are examples of textual borrowing and suggests that Robert has drawn on these examples as resources (i.e., available designs) in making decisions about the design of his own text. The use of connector words allows Robert to establish a connection between each even presented in his vlog and gives a feeling of continuity between the events of his day. Similarly, the adoption of the above-named expressions from the example vlogs increases the range of meanings that he can express in German.

In sum, Robert makes use of the modes of image and speech to design meaning in his daily vlog. His use of images instead of video clips is somewhat out of the ordinary considering that a vlog is, by definition, based on the mode of video (*Vlog*, n.d.). Robert combines visuals with a voiceover to create meaning and express the events of a typical day for him. As a beginner learner of German, he likely does not have the broad vocabulary to differentiate between the

specific details of individual events. He therefore uses multimodal resources to add more detailed visual information to his use of language. While the combination of modes does not always lead to an immediately clear understanding of the depicted activity, Robert demonstrates an ability to work within a combination of semiotic systems to create and communicate meaning. In his module responses and interview, Robert provides additional information about his views on multimodality and the design of a multimodal text in the daily vlog task.

6.2.2 Experience with and Understanding of Genre

6.2.2.1 Social Aspect and Previous Knowledge

Robert shares that he does not have experience watching or creating vlogs, and he does not demonstrate much interest in the genre throughout his participation in the study. Robert nevertheless engages with the genre in the online lessons and demonstrates an increased awareness of how language and mode are used in the generic structure and organization of the text. In an initial reflection after watching the first example vlog in *Schritt 1*, he describes his previous experience with and expectations of daily vlogs.

RM001

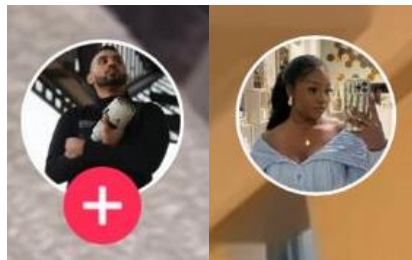
Reflection. Are you familiar with this style of video/vlog? What experience do you have – have you seen this kind of vlog before? Have you created one before? What do you expect to see in this kind of video?

I don't watch vlogs so I am not familiar with this kind of video nor I have created one. Based on the video shown, I'd assume the person would record several segments in a day and stitch them together chronologically to showcase what they did that day.

Robert shares his initial understanding of the daily vlog genre by expressing his assumption that vlogs are made up of several recordings which are ordered chronologically. His use of the word “showcase” indicates an understanding that the purpose of creating this kind of vlog is for a creator to present the events of their day to others. Although Robert reports having little

experience watching vlogs, in a later lesson, he shows that he is familiar with social media practices more generally. In a written reflection question in *Schritt 2*, Robert reflects on why the creator of vlog 2 may have ended his video with the phrase “Drückt auf dem Plus für mehr.” This phrase refers to the practice of becoming a follower on TikTok by tapping the ‘plus’ icon on a creator’s profile. On the TikTok app, there is a small plus sign (+) on a creator’s profile picture when the viewer is not a follower of that account. When a user taps on the plus sign, they become a follower, and the plus sign disappears. Thus, encouraging your audience to ‘click on the plus sign’ is a way of asking them to become a follower (see Figure 38).

Figure 38. the difference in the profile picture icon when the viewer is not a follower (left) versus when the viewer is a follower (right)



RM011

What do you think the phrase 'Drückt auf das Plus für mehr' means? How would you translate this?

'Drücken' means to press. so the phrase means 'Press on the plus for more'.

RM012

Why do you think this creator ended his video with this phrase?

The creator wants more engagement to boost his channel so he is telling the viewer to view his account and watch more of his content.

Robert understands the context of the creator’s call for viewers to follow his account. He sees that the creator is hoping to attract more engagement with his content by encouraging viewers to become followers. Robert does not disclose whether he frequently uses TikTok specifically,

however, his previous knowledge of online social practices helps him to understand this aspect of the creators' daily vlog. Thus, although he does not watch vlogs, his knowledge and experience with other similar online social practices aids in his understanding of the wider social context around vlogs and vlogging.

6.2.2.2 Reflections on What Belongs

In a module reflection at the end of *Schritt 1*, Robert shares what he has learned and what he would consider including in his own daily vlog. His report on his understanding of the daily vlog genre provides additional insights about what he finds suitable for this kind of text and builds on the reflection posted in RM001. He notes how he would use mode and language in his own submission (excerpt RM008).

RM008

Take a moment to reflect on the video you watched here and the subsequent activities. Did you learn any new words/phrases/structures from watching this vlog? Are there any aspects of this video (visuals, language, sounds) that you would use in your own #eintaginmeinemleben vlog? Make some notes here.

I learned Ready machen which means to get ready. I would definitely use the captions but I would choose to narrate the vlog myself since the robot is not that accurate. The captions are also very simple, they are not full sentences but rather consist of just a noun and a verb to indicate what the person is doing in that moment.

Robert first points out the phrase 'Ready machen' ('sich fertig machen') as a phrase that he learned in this lesson. He comments on how he would use language in on-screen text and in a voiceover, and he makes an observation about how language is used. He points out that the on-screen text ('captions') are not full sentences but simple phrases, consisting of a noun and a verb. In other words, Robert notes that when language is used on screen in daily vlogs, the text is not detailed but includes concise information which relates to the overall activity presented in that scene. He states that he would use this mode of meaning making in his own vlog. In addition to

written text, Robert comments that he would include a spoken voiceover in his vlog that he records himself ('I would choose to narrate the vlog myself'). He comments on the fact that TikTok's text-to-speech function is unreliable ('the robot is not that accurate;' this was thematized in a *Schritt 1* learning activity). Compared to his initial commentary on the daily vlog genre in RM001, Robert's reflection contains additional detail about his ideas for the design of a vlog. He expands on this understanding further in a later reflection which also included a chance to reflect on tense and meaning (excerpt RM032).

RM032

Think of your own version of an 'Ein Tag in meinem Leben' vlog - would you choose to tell your story in the present tense (e.g., 'I wake up') or the past tense? (e.g., 'I woke up')? What difference do you think tense make in describing a day in your life?

I would choose to also make my vlog in the past tense since that is common for vlogs. I would also copy their style of narration where they have very simple captions and go into more detail in the speech.

Robert finds the past tense more appropriate for a daily vlog (he does not comment on the fact that he does not yet know how to form the past tense in German). He mentions that the past tense is 'common for vlogs,' which may be an assumption based on his previous reflection (RM001) in which he stated that he does not watch vlogs. Here, he comments on the different uses of language that he observes in written language ('very simple captions') and spoken language ('more detail in the speech') Consistent with his reflection in RM008, he notes that on-screen text is kept simple; here, he adds that the voiceover therefore includes more detail. He refers to this dual use of language as the 'style of narration' used by the vlog's creator and states that he would copy this in his own vlog. Robert ultimately does not include on-screen text in his vlog; however, he describes elsewhere that this is a result of the technological issues he encountered while creating the vlog (see Section 6.2.4.1).

6.2.3 Multimodality and Comprehension

In Robert's module reflections, he comments on how the multimodal elements of the example vlogs contributed to his ability to understand their contents. For example, in a reflection in *Schritt 2*, Robert comments on his ability to understand the contents of vlog 2 (RM010). He notes that there are no timestamps in the on-screen text (which he refers to as 'captions') and points out that this made it more difficult for him to follow along with the creator's day.

RM010

Does anything stand out to you in this video? Are there words/phrases you don't understand? How does it compare to the previous video you saw? Help each other out - brainstorm with your peers to identify gaps in your vocabulary knowledge.

The lack of time in captions make it harder to understand at what point in the day things are happening. Also without narration, the video has a higher pace with a lot more going on. I didn't understand the captions after he left the house but I can assume from the video they correspond to getting groceries and then training for soccer.

Robert makes note of how multimodal resources (or a lack thereof) impact on his ability to understand the content of the vlog. He finds it difficult to follow at some points due to the absence of certain modes of meaning making; for example, the fact that timestamps are not included on screen and there is no voiceover. Robert further notes that he could not understand the entirety of the on-screen text ('captions') but that he could draw conclusions about what happened based on the visuals. In other words, Robert would not have been able to understand the meaning of the text based on the words alone but can fill in some of the gaps in his understanding in the presence of additional modes of meaning making. When modes are left out, he has more difficulty following along.

Similarly, in a reflection in *Schritt 4*, Robert comments on language and other modes in vlog 4 (RM026).

RM026

Discussion. Even though the language here was more complex, were you able to follow along with the activities of her day? What helped you understand? What did you find confusing?

I was able to follow along due to the captions but I could only make a few individual words from her speech since it was very fast paced.

Robert found that the inclusion of on-screen text ('captions') allowed him to follow along with the content of the vlog. However, due to the fast pace of the creator's voiceover, Robert could only make sense of some isolated words. This again demonstrates how the addition of mode contributes to Robert's ability to understand meaning. It is unlikely that Robert would be able to follow along if he had been working with the voiceover in isolation.

Robert's comments on multimodality during his interview are consistent with these module reflections and discussions. For example, he brings up the more complex language used in vlog 4 (RI004).

RI004

R: I could underst- like from from what the captions were it was fine to understand what she was doing but like what she was saying it was just going right over my head

Robert found the multimodal elements of vlog 4 helpful, i.e., the inclusion of on-screen text ('captions') helped with understanding what the vlog's creator was doing. However, he struggled to understand what the creator was saying, thus further indicating that multimodality supports comprehension for learners, including texts whose language is rather complex. Without the inclusion of on-screen text, it is unlikely that Robert would have been able to understand the events presented in vlog 4.

It is clear from Robert's submissions and interview comments that the multimodal aspects of the daily vlogs he viewed in the online module assisted with his comprehension ability. He specifically points out that multimodal forms of meaning making seen in the vlogs enable him to

understand the content of the vlog when he otherwise would not have understood the language alone. When certain modes are not included, for example a voiceover or timestamps, comprehension is described as being more difficult compared to vlogs which do employ those modes of meaning making.

6.2.4 Evaluation of Experience

Overall, Robert did not have trouble completing the work in the module in spite of some technical difficulties in creating the vlog. The data suggest that Robert's evaluation of the overall experience is influenced by his beliefs about language learning and assessment and the importance he places on comprehension and linguistic accuracy.

6.2.4.1 Assessment of Module and Task

Robert notes that the example vlogs were helpful and that he used them to guide his own design decisions (excerpts RI014 and RM035) in the creation of his vlog.

RI014

Int: Do you think that watching the vlogs that were provided? Do you think that those helped you structure your own video

R: Yeah I think I definitely kind of followed like a lot of them I [...] followed more of the first one sure it was more simple where it's like oh this is what I did I ate some food hung out with my friends and that's about it

RM035

Were the videos provided in each Schritt helpful for preparing you to complete the task? Why or why not?

They were quite helpful in understanding some slang/phrases for saying things.

In an interview response (RI014), he references vlog 1 as an example that he used while completing his own design. He states that he took note of the contents, i.e., the kinds of activities shown by the creator such as mealtimes and socializing. In a reflection at the end of the module

(RM035), Robert states that the vlogs were also helpful for understanding contextualized language that is appropriate for this style of vlog (e.g., ‘slang’).

While he felt prepared to create the vlog in terms of what content to include, Robert states that he did not feel prepared to create the vlog from a technical standpoint and shares that creating the vlog was more difficult than he anticipated (excerpt RI010) and further expands on these difficulties in a module reflection (excerpt RM034).

RI010

Int: did you find that those activities prepared you for creating your own vlog

R: Um I guess like it kind of prepared me in the sense that like I knew kind of what to put in it but not prepared me to make it cause [...] I didn't want to install TikTok so I tried doing it through Instagram reels [...] and that was a lot harder than I thought because I'm like yeah just it was a pain trying to sync up the speech in like the slide the video but I think that was just because I decided to take the difficult route

RM034

Rate your experience creating a #eintagmeinleben vlog. Was it easy/difficult? What did you like/dislike about it? Why?

It was quite difficult trying to sync the audio and images together. I disliked how I couldn't set the exact duration for each image to make it line up with exactly what I was saying. I could not figure out how to make the captions show up for each image slide.

Excerpt RI010 und RM034 show that Robert struggled most with using the Instagram app to align the different media (images and audio). Specifically, he had trouble setting the duration of each image slide to match his speech in the accompanying audio. He also notes that he could not figure out how to integrate on-screen text (‘captions’) into each image slide. These technical difficulties may have influenced his overall experience. For example, in a reflection question which was written after submitting the main task, Robert states that he has no desire to create a vlog (excerpt RM037).

RM037

What did you learn through this whole process?

I never want to make a vlog. I learned the different ways to say what you did during the day and the ways to structure those sentences.

As mentioned above, Robert felt prepared to create the vlog in terms of which content and language to use, however, he encountered technical problems along the way which unfortunately made it difficult for him to create the vlog. This highlights a need for additional resources which could support learners as they navigate technologies and text types that are new to them.

6.2.4.2 Beliefs about Learning and Assessment

Robert's overall evaluation of his experience working through the module is further influenced by his expectations and beliefs about language learning and assessment as shaped by his prior experiences. Throughout his module and interview responses, Robert shows a preference for understanding every word that he encounters and an expectation that things he does not understand will be explained. For example, when describing his overall experience completing the online module, Robert explains that the lessons were not difficult, but he points out that he was confronted with many words that he did not know (described by Robert as 'terminology').

RI001

Int: How would you sum up the experience of working through the module?

R: I guess like the modules weren't too difficult per se um I guess there's a lot of like I guess terminology just cause of the vlogs like what they're saying and understand what they're saying so there's a lot of me just having to um I guess look up the meanings certain words [...] versus with the course content I guess um normally the course content there's always like the German side and the English side so it's a bit easier to do that like translation

Robert expresses obligation with regards to looking up words that were unknown to him ('me having to ... look up the meanings'), i.e., if he does not understand, the next necessary step is to look up the meanings. It is possible that Robert is not used to working with foreign language

texts in which he does not understand every word which may relate to his learning experience in his current German course which usually provides English translations.

Similarly, Robert does not appear to be used to working with self-discovery approaches to language learning (RI002).

RI002

R: one of the questions was [...] I think it was like *machen fertig* like get to get ready or to ready oneself [...] one of the questions was like what's another way of saying that and I'm like I have no clue and I tried searching and I couldn't find the [...] what the alternative was

He notes that he had difficulty finding the answer to a multiple-choice question in *Schritt 1* which required learners to work with trial and error. This is again likely influenced by his experience in learning environments in which content is first presented and then tested on. This example highlights potential transitional challenges that learners may face when working with educational approaches that are new to them. This can be further observed in Robert's comments about the language used in vlog 4 (RI003).

RI003

R: but I I I liked how the I guess the vlog kind of one like maybe increasing difficulty with the first one was very simple then the next one was a bit more difficult but not too bad and then the last one is like this girl just speaking full German I'm like I have no clue what she's saying

While Robert did not have difficulties understanding example vlogs 1-3, he notes that he had greater difficulty with the more complex and quickly spoken language in vlog 4 (which he describes as 'full German'). This shows, again, that Robert is likely not used to working with texts in which he does not understand every word.

Robert's perception of the task is likely also influenced by his beliefs and attitudes towards assessment. When asked about his preference between formal assessments like tests or

quizzes compared to a video task such as this one, he expresses a preference for quizzes (excerpt RI017).

RI017

- R: Um I guess maybe maybe the quiz because it's bit more of a like a test of knowledge versus a test of like pronunciation
Int: Mhm [...] what kind of knowledge do you think is is tested in something like a quiz?
R: Ah I guess like um like verb conjugation I'm using like the correct articles [...] sentence grammar sentence structure things like that

Robert sees video assignments as primarily serving as a test of pronunciation. He contrasts this with quizzes, which he sees as a test of knowledge. It is possible that Robert has more experience with more formal styles of assessment such as tests and quizzes than he does with video assignments. His experience with quizzes in his current German course compared with the technical complexity of the vlog task may also shape his beliefs here.

Similarly, Robert draws comparisons between the vlog task and other video assignments that he has completed in his GER 101 Online course. Some of the video assignments in GER 101 Online require students to record monologue-style videos. Following a discussion of the existing monologue assignments, Robert expresses his beliefs about the vlog task as a means of assessment in a language course (excerpt RI038).

RI038

- Int: Do you think that creating a vlog like this can be a good way for your teacher to assess how well you know German?
R: Um I mean yeah I mean compared to [...] just a video monologue I feel like it's like the same type of quality [...] but it's just like the the added work of having to make the vlog is maybe kind of unnecessary

Robert shows a preference for the monologue-style video over the vlog task due to the simplicity of creating it (i.e., it does not require the same complex steps). This is not an unusual perspective for an undergraduate student whose workload in an engineering program is likely demanding.

This shows the importance of considering the workload and barriers to entry of working with tasks that are mediated by technology. Additional supports provided by the instructor may ease some of the challenges associated with multimodal task types such as those encountered by Robert.

Robert's engagement with the vlog task demonstrates how he engaged with multimodal forms of meaning making. In his own vlog, he used multimodal resources to extend his meaning making potential beyond what he could say with language alone. He found the combination of multiple modes in the example vlogs helpful for his ability to understand, especially in situations where he may not have otherwise only understood single words. He similarly noticed the absence of modes which would have expanded his ability to understand even more. The data presented in this section thus support claims that multimodality is valuable for learners' comprehension of texts and ability to express themselves. It is clear that Robert's beliefs about and prior experiences with (language) learning shape his overall assessment of the online module and daily vlog task. His description of the challenges he encountered while completing the module show the importance of supporting learners by being transparent about the pedagogical approach and providing supports that may assist with the task completion.

6.3 Miranda

Miranda is a PhD student who took GER 101 Online in the Fall 2023 term. She completed all of the lessons in the online module and submitted a daily vlog of her own. She also took part in a semi-structured interview which lasted 90 minutes. In the following sections, I discuss meaning design in Miranda's vlog with reference to the organization of her vlog as well as her use of multimodal forms of meaning making. I then discuss Miranda's reflections on her design decisions, the influence of her understanding of the genre on her vlog submission, her reflections

on mode and language, and finally, how she evaluates her overall experience working through the online module.

6.3.1 Design of Meaning: Miranda's Vlog

Miranda's vlog is 1 minute and 20 seconds long. The events depicted in her vlog are in chronological order and include, for example, her morning routine, mealtimes, work life, leisure time, and bedtime; thus, covering the span of the entire day. Her vlog also includes an opener made up of a short video clip and introductory statement.

Miranda uses multiple modes of meaning making in her daily vlog design; these include video clips, voiceover, on-screen text and emojis, gesture, facial expression, and music in her submission (see excerpts ML002 and ML008).

Figure 39. Examples of Miranda's use of video and on-screen text (ML002, left; ML008, right)



Miranda's vlog is made up of video clips that she captured herself. The clips depict the objects that she interacts with, her surroundings, as well as clips which depict herself on screen as she completes some of her daily activities. She uses body movements, gestures and facial

expressions to add detail to the visual forms of meaning making. Additional visuals are added through on-screen text and emojis which provide additional contextual information to the events of her day.

Miranda also uses audible forms of meaning making through a spoken voiceover and background music. The language used in her voiceover is made up of relatively simple statements which describe the activity displayed on screen, many of which include time expressions (e.g., excerpts ML002 and ML013).

ML002. “Guten Morgen. Ich stehe normalerweise um neun Uhr auf”

ML013. “Dreiundzwanzig Uhr ich gehe ins Bett. Gute Nacht”

Some of Miranda’s use of language appears to have been influenced by her work in the online module. In a learning activity in *Schritt 2*, participants construct sentences using activities and time expressions that they have previously selected. Miranda wrote more than 20 sentences in total with differing parts of day and word order. Some of her sentences are presented in excerpt MM010. One of her sentences reads ‘Ich füttere meine Katze am Morgen;’ this sentence is included in her vlog (excerpt ML005).

MM010

lernen	in der Nacht	Ich lerne in der Nacht.
lernen	am Nachmittag	Ich lerne am Nachmittag.
zum Supermarkt gehen	am Vormittag	Ich gehe am Vormittag zum Supermarkt.
den Hund / die Katze füttern	am Morgen	Ich füttere meine Katze am Morgen.
Frühstücken	am Morgen	Ich frühstücke am Morgen.

Figure 40. “Ich füttere meine Katz am Morgen“ (ML005)



As previous participants have noticed, Miranda recognizes that language is sometimes used in multiple ways in daily vlogs, and she replicates this in her submission. She uses language in two modalities by combining spoken language in her voiceover with written language on screen to create and expand on the action that is depicted in the video clips. Her written and spoken language differ as seen in excerpts ML002 and ML010.

Figure 41 (left). “Guten Morgen. Ich stehe normalerweise um 9 Uhr auf” (ML002)

Figure 42 (right). “siebzehn Uhr ich gehe spazieren” (ML010)



In each of these scenes, the on-screen text includes a concise, simple description of the event depicted in that scene ('9 Uhr Aufstehen,' '17 Uhr Ein Spaiziergang') and the activity is described using a single word or noun phrase. In her voiceover, which is heard simultaneously, Miranda describes the activities in complete sentences in which she adds additional detail. By using language in this way, Miranda shows that she recognizes how language can be used to express information in different ways at the same time.

Moreover, Miranda combines semiotic modes to create meanings that she cannot necessarily express using language. For example, she combines a simple phrase ('fertig machen') in her voiceover with several activities in her morning routine which are depicted on video (excerpt ML006).

Figure 43. "Zehn Uhr fertig machen" (ML006)



The same phrase is visible as text on screen while the video clip plays out. Miranda may not have the vocabulary for each of the individual events shown (she has not yet learned reflexive verbs such as 'sich die Zähne putzen' in her German course), but by combining a less specific spoken phrase with more specific activities embodied visually, she can add more detail and

expand on what ‘getting ready’ means for her. She uses body movement and gesture in this scene to depict the individual actions; she includes a clip of her brushing her teeth, followed by a clip of her putting up her hair. Finally, we see Miranda in a different outfit giving two thumbs up to signify that she is ready for her day.

6.3.1.1 Textual Borrowing

In addition to constructing her own sentences for the spoken voiceover, Miranda borrows chunks of language from the example vlogs and applies them to her own context. For example, her opening statement is borrowed from vlog 3 (excerpts ML001 and V3001).

Figure 44 (left). “Ein Tag in mein Leben als Doktorandin an der University of Waterloo” (ML001)

Figure 45 (right). “Ein Tag in meinem Leben als Doktorandin an der University of Waterloo” (V3001)

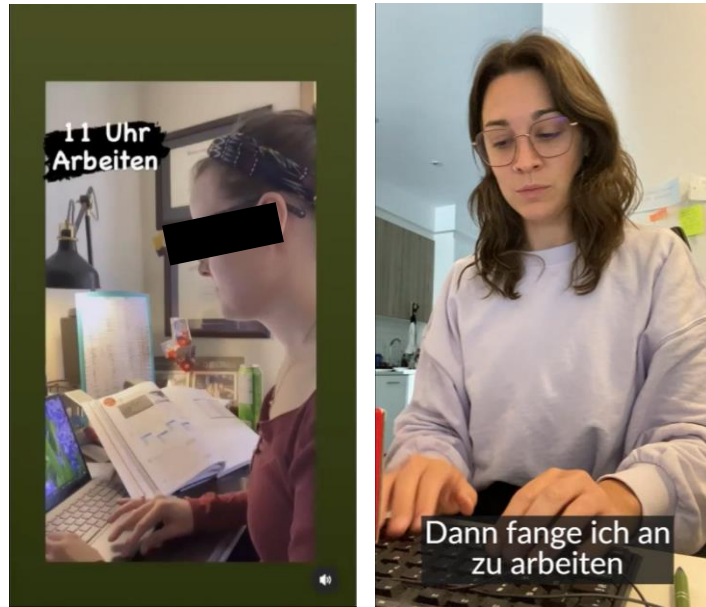


Similarly, in another instance, Miranda borrows a different statement from vlog 3 (excerpts ML007 and V3002). Like the creator of vlog 3, Miranda is also a doctoral candidate at the University of Waterloo; therefore, borrowing this opening statement as an introduction to her vlog fits her own context and does not need to be changed for it to suit her own context. Miranda

combines her opening statement with a video clip of a butterfly on a flower; the hashtag #eintagininmeinemleben is also visible on screen.

Figure 46 (left). “Elf Uhr dann fange ich an zu arbeiten“ (ML007)

Figure 47 (right). “Dann fange ich an zu arbeiten so um acht Uhr“ (V3002)



In the scene depicted in ML007, Miranda borrows the phrase ‘dann fange ich an zu arbeiten.’ It is easy to tell that she has borrowed this phrase because the ‘dann’ is superfluous in its current position. In excerpt ML007, the video clip shows Miranda from the side as she works at a desk on a laptop. There is an open book on the desk beside her which appears to be the textbook for her GER 101 course. By borrowing from other texts, Miranda can work with language that suits her own context. Though she may not have been able to construct these sentences on her own, by adopting them, she shows that she understands the meanings and that she recognizes their relevance in their current positions in her vlog.

Miranda demonstrates her understanding of multimodality and the daily vlog genre through her vlog submission. Her vlog is the result of her design decisions as she had to make choices about which modes to employ and in what ways. She uses various forms of meaning

making such as video, speech, music, on-screen text, body movement, and gesture. She made choices about which language to use and how to differentiate between language that is spoken and that which is printed on screen. Miranda drew on the example vlogs as resources for how to structure her vlog and to decide what kinds of language and other modes to include. In the following sections, I present some excerpts from Miranda's module responses and interview and discuss her commentary on making meaning and her understanding of the daily vlog genre as well as her description of her overall experience and some of her beliefs about language learning.

6.3.2 Reflection on Design Decisions

In her interview, Miranda reflects on some of the decisions that she made in the design of her vlog and explains how she arrived at them. For example, in her interview, she reflects on the decisions that led her to put together the scene in ML006 ('fertig machen'). Excerpts MI010a and MI016a provide insights about her design decisions and reveal additional insights about Miranda's assessment of the vlog task.

MI010a

M: Take oh okay so like fertig machen I'm getting ready how do I show I'm getting ready?

MI016a

M: I'm like okay I'm not quite sure how to say all these aspects of like putting up my hair and brushing my teeth but I do know how to say getting ready so I can show that

In excerpt MI010a, Miranda describes her thought process as she reflected on the task of depicting 'getting ready' in her vlog. She shows that the question of how to depict this activity is something that she considered in the design process. In excerpt MI016a, she acknowledges her awareness that she did not have all of the necessary vocabulary to describe each event in her morning routine individually while planning her vlog; however, because she does have access to

the more general term for ‘getting ready,’ she can use a combination of modes to provide a more complete description/depiction of her morning routine. Ultimately, as shown in ML006 in section 6.3.1 above, Miranda uses the phrase ‘fertig machen’ in combination with video clips which depict individual activities.

Miranda uses language in two different modalities throughout her vlog. In her interview, she reflects on her use of language and the language she observed in the example vlogs (excerpt MI010b).

MI010b

M: when I looked back at what I did I realized there were sometimes I did full sentences other times I just did like the short form cause I was like I don't know I saw a mixture I wasn't sure which was you know right so I kind of went with both

Miranda states that she noticed both longer, complete sentences (resembling the language in her voiceover) as well as shorter, more compact forms of language (e.g., similar to her use of on-screen text). She expresses that she felt uncertainty about which form of language was correct, but decided to use a combination of both, defending her choice by pointing out that she saw a mixture in the examples. The decisions that Miranda ultimately made about what to include in her vlog and how to represent it was based on what she saw in the examples, her awareness of what she can do with language, and her ability to work around identified gaps in her knowledge.

6.3.3 Influence of Genre on Decision Making

Miranda’s understanding of the daily vlog genre influences her decision making in the process of creating a daily vlog of her own. She notes that she was familiar with the daily vlog genre before beginning to work through the online module and she provides a detailed description of her understanding of this style of vlog. It is clear from her vlog submission and her reflections on the

experience of creating it that her understanding of the daily vlog genre had an impact on her design decisions.

Miranda has previous experience with and knowledge of the daily vlog genre. She reports that she has watched vlogs like these before on platforms like YouTube Shorts or TikTok, however, she has never created a daily vlog herself. She shares her expectations about what kinds of activities creators typically include in this style of video (excerpt MM001) and discusses what makes this kind of vlog recognizable (excerpt MM002).

MM001

Reflection. Are you familiar with this style of video/vlog? What experience do you have – have you seen this kind of vlog before? Have you created one before? What do you expect to see in this kind of video?

I am familiar with this type of video. I typically see them in YouTube shorts or on TikTok. I have never created one before! This format is a day in the life so I expected to see the person getting ready for their day, activities they did throughout their day, and getting ready for sleep.

MM002

Discussion. Even if you don't understand all the language used in the video, how can you recognize that this is a 'day in the life' style vlog? What parts of the video help you to understand what the creator means?

It became apparent that it was a "day in the life" video due to the quick clips of what she was doing throughout the day, be it getting ready, meeting with friends, getting food, and going to sleep. It also made it clear that it was a "day in the life" because of the times that were shown throughout the video as well.

Miranda expects that daily vlogs will include common daily activities that span the entire day, i.e., from morning until night. Based on her discussion post in MM002, her conceptualization of such activities could include getting ready, socializing, going out to eat, and going to bed. She is otherwise not specific about the other activities that belong in this category but draws on an assumed understanding of what 'activities from throughout the day' include. She notes that mode (e.g., video clips, timestamps), pacing, and content (types of events) all contribute to her ability

to recognize vlog 1 as a daily vlog. She also specifically notes the inclusion of time as an indicator that a video belongs in the daily vlog category.

Miranda explains how her previous knowledge of daily vlogs influenced her decision making in creating a vlog when she describes her previous social media experience during her interview (Excerpt MI015).

MI015

M: I'd say in the last couple years I started seeing more of short snappy clips and [...] those day in the life clips that I so yeah I think it definitely kind of you know I would say maybe more subconsciously I don't know if like it was more if I was more aware of how it influenced it but I was- the general themes right? You see is quick snappy usually the music for these day in the lifes are more upbeat which I tried to do incorporate more kind of like happy vibes and [...] I guess in that sense maybe I was kind of like wanting to create kind of a positive day in the life experience that people would enjoy watching it right? cause that's part of you know social media is I guess [...] from most of these kind of vlogs as you see people wanting you to you know watch the video and why is she so excited? And what's going what's going to happen next even though my you know my life isn't as riveting as a celebrity but [...] you know that kind of thing so I'd say in some aspects it probably influenced me more than I think I consciously realize

She describes the influence of social media on her vlog design as being rather 'subconscious' in the sense that she can recognize 'general themes' of this style of vlog, which she is able to explicitly describe. She names some features of daily vlogs that come to mind which she tried to replicate in her own submission. For example, consistent with her description in excerpt MM002, she states that daily vlogs are fast paced ('quick,' 'snappy'). She finds that background music in daily vlogs usually matches this description and is rather upbeat; this is consistent with the fact that Miranda includes pop music ('Good Day' by Jake Scott) in the background of her vlog. She explains that she aimed to create 'happy vibes' and a 'positive day in the life experience that people would enjoy watching,' thus orienting to her potential audience. She understands that such vlogs are often designed to capture the viewer's attention which implies that they are

created with the viewer in mind. She associates daily vlogs with a sense of anticipation about what will happen next, despite describing her life as not ‘as riveting as a celebrity.’ In other words, she understands that daily vlogs are designed to make ones mundane, everyday life as interesting and exciting for the viewer as possible. She thus orients to an imagined audience outside of the context of her German course or the research study she is participating in.

Miranda’s interview responses indicate that she considers a wider imagined audience in the design of her vlog. She further comments on how her understanding of daily vlogs as positive and enjoyable to watch influenced how she approached the task (excerpt MI014). As described above, Miranda understands vlogs to be associated with positive energy, a happy mood, and creating something that others will want to watch. She notes that she was aware of a perceived need to stay positive while on camera.

MI014

M: there were some moments where you kind of exaggerate for flare right? Because you know [...] your day in the life gotta get those likes right? [...] I'd say yes, there were some moments where, you know when I was physically on camera where I was very conscious of just trying to like make it fun because that's what it was right? [...] being exaggerated with your gestures and having a big smile and [...] you know makes it more fun for me because I don't want to watch myself being grumpy you know going around

Miranda’s understanding of the daily vlog genre is again framed in terms of the social practice within which it is situated. She sees the text as inseparable from its context, i.e., it is understood that this kind of vlog is created for a certain kind of audience with a particular social practice in mind (sharing on social media, attracting likes). How the vlog is received seems to be an important aspect of the vlog’s design as she associates positivity in vlogs with positive reception, as measured by ‘likes.’ This is thus factored into Miranda’s conceptualization of the vlog genre and her approach to her vlog’s design. Her consideration of the social practices within which

social media posts (such as vlogs) are situated influences the decisions she makes in the process of designing her own vlog, for example, staying positive on camera. She shares that she tried to adopt the kind of exaggerated positivity that she understands as being an integral part of daily vlogs ('being exaggerated with your gestures and having a big smile'). As evidenced through statements made during her interview, Miranda's understanding of the daily vlog genre goes beyond the level of the text itself and extends into a wider context of social practice such that the design of a text is not limited to textual features alone.

There is further evidence in the data that Miranda's understanding of the daily vlog genre guided her decision making in the creation of a vlog. The task instructions were intentionally left open so that participants could work according to their own understanding of what is appropriate based on past experiences or those gained through their work with examples. In an interview, Miranda talks about her decision to include a voiceover (excerpt MI017).

MI017

M: that's so funny, you know, yeah, you didn't say and I did just do it and I didn't even think about why I did that [...] I think that that added an extra layer of complexity [...] you know I chose to do this right? So I was an extra layer of complexity [...] definitely that's so funny I didn't it didn't even occur to me not to do a voiceover [...] I was like [...] I should just do one because that just makes sense for the context of this video and also for me I thought well you know I want her to I want to show that I'm [...] I can say some of these phrases

Miranda makes the decision to include a voiceover in her vlog even though it was not a requirement of the task. She notes that the voiceover adds a layer of complexity to the vlog; this is likely due to the fact that she includes more details in the voiceover than she does in the language displayed on screen. She explains that she did not put a lot of thought into this decision which suggests that for her, a voiceover belongs to the default understanding of a daily vlog. Miranda further states that she did not even consider not including the voiceover with the

justification that it makes sense for the context of the video and for herself. The context in this situation may draw on her understanding of the daily vlog genre as well as her desire to demonstrate her abilities in her university course.

Miranda's conceptualization of the daily vlog genre influences her approach to creating her own vlog. She understands the genre to be rather upbeat, positive and fast-paced; her understanding that vlogs of this type are most often made to capture the attention of the viewer inspired her to incorporate a similar positivity in her own submission. Her understanding of the genre also determined which modes of meaning making she included in her vlog design.

6.3.4 Reflections on Mode and Language

As described earlier in this chapter, Miranda uses multimodality in her submission to create a vlog according to her interpretation of the genre. She expands on her understanding of multimodality and the role it plays in comprehending the contents of the example vlogs, especially for beginner-level learners like herself (excerpt MI006). She recognizes that the combination of multiple modes offers valuable semiotic information to viewers and suspects that her own ability to understand a German language text would be compromised if reduced to just one mode, e.g., if listening to audio alone ('if this is just an audio file ... there would be some words I could pick up').

MI006

Int: how did you [...] make it work for yourself to understand what was going on

M: I think that's kind of the beauty of observation when you're learning language right? I think you know the fact that if this is just an audio file and you were just playing the audio file and there would be some words I could pick up right? We you know some basic words and phrases [...] I think that the visual component as a vlog was so, you know, crucial for me to understand what she was doing and [...] the title of you know when she would say oh at this time [...] I'm eating pizza right? I'm doing this so it that I think it was all these like you know supplemental things so that [...] the tagline of whatever she was doing in that moment the imagery from the actual video itself

made it you know allowed me to comprehend or helped me comprehend what was happening even though I couldn't understand every aspect of what she was saying I could get the general picture which I think [...]is so important when you're learning language can you at least understand what is happening in the context even if you don't know every detail because the details are for later when you're more fluent right?

She points out that, while she would likely understand some basic words and phrases if listening to an audio file, the inclusion of visuals was 'crucial' to her understanding of the main ideas presented in the example vlogs (in this excerpt, she is specifically referring to vlog 4).

Furthermore, Miranda states that the combination of multiple modes such as on-screen text and video facilitated her understanding of the overall message even though she could not always understand the creator's spoken voiceover. For Miranda, the ability to understand the overall message is sufficient for someone who is learning the language. She is comfortable with her position as a novice and satisfied with her ability to understand the overall idea. She does not worry about understanding every detail and sees this as something that is reserved for more advanced learners.

Although Miranda is comfortable with gaps in her level of comprehension, she expresses that linguistic accuracy in her own use of language is important to her and that she used several additional resources to complete the vlog task (excerpt MM035). She reports not feeling confident in her German skills and explains that, for this reason, she referenced several sources to check the accuracy of her work.

MM035

Did you use any additional resources to complete the task? Which ones? E.g., dictionaries, websites, Google Translate. How did these help you to complete the task?

I used all the sources! As I am not confident in my German language skills, I used dictionaries to make sure I translated correctly, went to websites to listen to the pronunciation of different words, and used Google Translate when I got stuck and wanted to confirm that my translation was relatively accurate!

She used dictionaries and online tools like Google Translate to verify her linguistic accuracy and pronunciation. Her statement ‘to make sure I translated correctly’ orients to an assumption that linguistic correctness is desirable or expected in the context of university-level language learning; her use of ‘relatively accurate’ in the last line indicates that there is a certain degree of leniency in her expected degree of accuracy. Miranda appears to be comfortable as a novice language learner when it comes to understanding and interpreting texts (i.e., she does not need to understand every detail); however, she does not display the same nonchalance when it comes to productive language use. Based on the lengths Miranda is willing to go to in order to ensure accuracy in her work, it is clear that linguistic accuracy in her submitted work is important to her.

6.3.5 Miranda Evaluation of Experience

Miranda generally expresses an overall positive assessment of her experience working through the module. She notes in reflection responses and during her interview that she found the examples and learning activities in the module helpful for learning German. For example, in a module reflection, Miranda comments that the progression from less to more complexity in the example vlogs was something that she liked (excerpt MM034). She reports that her linguistic knowledge was expanded through her experience working through the module (‘taught me new words’), and she found it helpful that each vlog progressed in complexity from lesson to lesson. She also notes that she found the variety and multimodality of learning activities to be enjoyable, for example matching images to words.

MM034

Were the videos provided in each Schritt helpful for preparing you to complete the task? Why or why not?

Absolutely! Each video slowly progressed from an easier to more advanced German-speaking vlog. It helped me figure out what phrases I could use and taught me new words! I really enjoyed all the difficult elements that were included, such as word matching and listening to audio clips.

Miranda notes that she ran into challenges while completing the task. Her biggest difficulty in creating her vlog was the technical aspect of actually creating it (excerpt MM033).

MM033

Rate your experience creating a #eintagmeinleben vlog. Was it easy/difficult? What did you like/dislike about it? Why?

What I found the most difficult was creating a reel! I rarely use Instagram, so that was a HUGE learning curve for me. I found myself getting frustrated with timing the audio to the video! Once I figured it out, I really liked the final product!

She attributes this difficulty to the fact that she rarely uses Instagram. Miranda used the Instagram app to create her vlog ('a reel') and reports that there was a 'HUGE learning curve' involved in putting it together. She had difficulty aligning the audio and video clips which she found frustrating. Ultimately, she was happy with the resulting vlog after getting past the technical hurdle. Although she encountered technical difficulties, this does not seem to have impacted Miranda's overall experience.

Finally, Miranda further describes how she appreciated the freedom that the task instruction granted to her as a learner. This allowed her to work with language that she felt comfortable with (excerpt M016).

MI016

M: I definitely felt like there was a lot of [...] room and again there was a lot of freedom in this assignment right? You didn't give us the rigid guidelines saying you must speak six sentences [...] I like the freedom that was given to us because I could choose what language I was comfortable with what aspects of the language I was comfortable with [...] which allowed me at some points I'm like okay I'm not quite sure how to say all these aspects of like putting up my hair and brushing my teeth but I do know how to say getting ready so I can show that

Miranda felt that there was a lot of freedom in the task for her to make her own decisions about what to include and how to express herself. She liked that she could phrase things in a way that worked for her rather than being instructed about exactly how (much) language should be used.

Overall, Miranda provides a positive assessment of the task and the online module. She demonstrates her understanding of the daily vlog genre through her vlog submission, and she provides more information about the details of her understanding in her module responses and interview. Miranda combines multiple modes of meaning making in her vlog submission. Her understanding of the genre (and its wider social context) contributed to the decisions she made with regards to mode and language (e.g., her use of language on screen and in the voiceover, upbeat background music, a general positive energy). Her understanding of the vlog genre is not limited to the features of the text alone but extends into the connected social practice of sharing such vlogs on social media; thus, she factors her perceived audience and their expectations into the design of her vlog, i.e., by creating something that she thinks other people will want to watch. Miranda found the use of example vlogs helpful for her work in the module. These allowed her to borrow language structures and their inclusion of multiple modes of meaning making aided her ability to comprehend the main ideas of the vlog. Miranda was comfortable with not understanding every detail of the language she encountered and was happy to acknowledge what she could understand; however, she also shows that linguistic accuracy in her own work is important to her.

6.4 James

James is an undergraduate student who participated in the study during the Fall 2023 term while he was enrolled in GER 101. James completed all of the lessons in the module, and he submitted a daily vlog. He did not participate in an interview; however, insights about James' experience, including his understanding of multimodality and genre can be gathered from the module response and vlog data.

6.4.1 Design of Meaning: James' Vlog

James submitted a vlog which is 60 seconds in length and includes a variety of activities from throughout his day. These include waking up, getting ready for the day, working at his computer, taking a break to exercise and engage in leisure time, preparing food, tidying up, and going to bed. The events are organized chronologically with the exception of the opener which shows a clip of him reading a book and smiling to the camera. James uses multiple modes of meaning making to express these activities, e.g., visuals through the use of video clips, speech through a voiceover that he recorded himself, background music, facial expressions, gesture, and bodily movement.

James uses video clips to depict the events of his day, most of which depict James himself on screen. He uses body position, gesture, and facial expression to create meaning within the mode of video. For example, he uses body position to depict the same action but at different points in his day (see JL004 and JL006).

Figure 48 (left). "Dann fange ich an zu arbeiten" (JL004)

Figure 49 (right). "Dann zurück an die Arbeit" (JL006)



In each of these clips, James describes the same action ('arbeiten'/'Arbeit'), however, by working with visuals, he can give more meaning to each event individually. In the first clip (JL004), the viewer sees James from a close angle; only his face and part of his shoulders are visible, and his body is angled slightly towards the left. He is sitting in what looks like a desk chair with neutral posture; one could assume from the reflection visible in his glasses that he is looking at a computer screen. In the second clip (JL006), James sits in the same desk chair, this time slightly further away from the camera. His right arm is visible, and his right hand is positioned over his mouth to signify that he is concentrating or thinking. His posture is slightly more relaxed than in the first clip, and his body is turned slightly, this time to the right. Excerpt JL004 portrays a rather neutral view of working while excerpt JL006 portrays a more thoughtful, concentrating position, i.e., as if the current task is more cognitively demanding or he has been working on it for some time.

Excerpt JL006 also shows how James uses gesture to express meaning in his vlog. The placement of his hand in front of the lower part of his face signifies that he is concentrating or thinking. The gesture contributes to the scene as depicting 'work,' since other computer-mediated activities (e.g., gaming) would likely not be depicted this way. Moreover, this gesture provides the viewer with information about James' attitude and emotional state during his work, i.e., based on his posture and gesture, we can imagine that his current task is rather complex and requires deep concentration (whereas a particularly boring or exciting task might have been portrayed differently).

Additional examples of James' use of gesture are seen in excerpts JL001 and JL008. The former depicts James' opening scene which begins with a shot of him reading a book. As his voiceover statement is heard, James looks towards the camera, smiles, and waves as a means of

addressing the viewer. Similarly, in the final scene of James' vlog (excerpt JL008), he flashes a peace sign to the camera before taking his leave to go to bed.

Figure 50 (left). "Willkommen bei ein Tag in meine Leben als Studenten an der Univeristy of Waterloo" (JL001)

Figure 51 (right). "Und um freundzwanzig Uhr gehe ich schalfen. Gute Nacht" (JL008)



The use of body position and gesture in the video clips allows James to add more detailed information to the activities included in the vlog, specifically with regards to what James might be thinking or feeling in those moments. This allows him to communicate his attitude(s) about the events shown and towards his audience. The use of gesture at the beginning and end of the vlog also contribute to the text's overall coherence by signalling a clearly defined beginning and end.

James also uses facial expressions to express his attitude towards his daily activities. For example, a scene depicting himself sitting at his desk working is accompanied by his voiceover statement which explains that he writes and repairs code that doesn't work as it should (JL004). At the start of the clip, James is seen from a close angle sitting at his desk with a neutral facial expression. After his statement that his code does not work, his facial expression changes from

neutral to confusion or frustration: the corners of his mouth turn down and his brow is furrowed. This is immediately followed by an exclamation (“was?!”) which is seen and heard through the video clip.

Figure 52. “Dann fang ich an zu arbeiten. Das bedeutet schreiben und reparieren (ein) Code, der nicht funktioniert” (JL004)



This exclamation represents an additional use of speech outside of the voiceover. James’ voiceover can be heard narrating the events of his day throughout the vlog; however, we do not actually see James speak aside from in this clip.

James uses multimodality to depict activities in his morning routine for which he does not have the linguistic resources (excerpt JL003). The first video clip in this scene shows a shower and the second shows James combing his hair. Like Miranda, James may not have the vocabulary for each event shown (he has not yet learned reflexive verbs like ‘sich die Haare kämmen’ in his German course), but the phrase ‘fertig machen’ combined with multiple video clips allows him to expand on what ‘getting ready’ means for him. The inclusion of the mode of video thus allows James to add more content to his statement about getting ready without needing to rely solely on language.

Figure 53. “Dann ich mache fertig für den Tag un frühstücke ich” (JL003)



Moreover, James includes information in his voiceover that is not depicted on screen. The voiceover in this scene also states that he eats breakfast; however, this is not included in the visuals.

As mentioned already, James’ use of language in his vlog is realized through the inclusion of a spoken voiceover. He does not include any closed-captions, on-screen text, or timestamps. Most of the statements in his voiceover contain time expressions or are otherwise temporally ordered, e.g., through the inclusion of connector words like ‘dann’ and ‘und.’ He uses both specific time expressions (e.g., “at 7:00”) and more general time expressions (e.g., “in the afternoon”) as shown in the examples below.

JL002: “Ich stehe um sieben Uhr dreißig Uhr auf”

JL005: “Um zwölf Uhr ich mach(t) Sport”

JL006: “Dann raume ich mein Haus auf dann zurück an die Arbeit”

JL007: “Am Abend mache ich Abendessen”

Although his use of time expressions is not always linguistically accurate (he makes common mistakes e.g., with regards to the position of ‘Uhr’ and the verb-second rule), he nevertheless demonstrates an ability to express at what time the events took place.

6.4.1.1 Textual Borrowing

James draws on the example vlogs provided in the module as resources and borrows language and other meaning making resources from them. Specifically, we can see that James borrows from vlog 3 at three points (see JL004, JL006, JL008, and their comparisons to vlog 3). James does not only borrow linguistic elements (words and phrases) from vlog 3; his use of visual elements also resembles that of vlog 3. In excerpt JL004, James is seen working at his desk.

Figure 54 (left). "Dann fang ich an zu arbeiten. Das bedeutet schreiben und reparieren (ein) Code, der nicht funktioniert" (JL004)

Figure 55 (right). "Dann fange ich an zu arbeiten so um 8 Uhr" (V3003)



The first half of his voiceover in this scene resembles a line used in the voiceover in vlog 3 (VL003): 'dann fange ich an zu arbeiten.' While this chunk of language is the same in both vlogs, James inserts this line into his own context and adapts it to fit his intended meaning. For example, he does not include time expression as is included in VL003, and he expands on the statement to include other information (i.e., his line about writing code that does not work). Similarly, in JL006, James borrows the expression 'zurück an die arbeit,' but he replaces

‘nachmittags’ (from V3004) with ‘dann’ such that this line fits better with the meaning that he is expressing.

Figure 56 (left). “Dann zurück an die Arbeit” (JL006)

Figure 57 (right). “Nachmittags zurück an die Arbeit” (V3004)



Figure 58 (left). “Und um dreiundzwanzig Uhr gehe ich schlafen. Gute Nacht” (JL008)

Figure 59 (right). “Und um elf Uhr gehe ich schlafen. Gute Nacht” (V3005)



Similarly, the final scene of James’ vlog (JL008) strongly resembles that seen in vlog 3: both scenes begin with a shot of the creator’s bed and then switch to a shot of the creator taking leave from the viewer (James flashes a peace sign; vlog 3 creator waves to the camera; both use the smartphone

camera pointed towards a mirror). The voiceover statements in both vlogs are also almost identical, the only difference being that James replaces ‘elf’ with ‘dreißig’ in the time expression. It is clear through these examples that James did not just borrow language but visual meaning making resources from the example vlogs he watched in the creation of his vlog. By borrowing meaning making resources in this way, he demonstrates his understanding of what is appropriate for use in a daily vlog and reformulates these for use in his own context. Furthermore, by borrowing chunks of language, he also borrows the pronunciation and intonation of the words.

6.4.2 Work with Example Vlogs

In his written reflections, James provides information about his experience working through the online module. In a reflection question at the end of the module, he frames the experience of working with example vlogs as a positive one (excerpt JM034). He describes how working with example vlogs was helpful as he sees them as templates which showed him what to do. By describing the examples as templates, James shows that he sees them as tools or resources which he can use to create his own vlog.

JM034

Were the videos provided in each Schritt helpful for preparing you to complete the task? Why or why not?

The videos were incredibly helpful, they served as templates for what I was meant to be doing.

More specifically, a template is something that can be used as a guide in creating an artifact such that the creator does not need to start from scratch but can lean on existing structures or guides. By describing the examples in this way, James shows that he sees the example vlogs as a starting point for future creation. This is consistent with his use of textual borrowing as described in the previous section.

Similarly, the multimodality of the example vlogs was helpful for James' understanding of the vlogs' content. In a reflection in *Schritt 4*, James comments on the complex language used in vlog 4.

JM022

Discussion. Even though the language here was more complex, were you able to follow along with the activities of her day? What helped you understand? What did you find confusing?

I did follow along mostly based on what I saw her do and the caption that were put up. I wasn't able to pick up on her speech at all, except a few words.

He shares that he could follow along with the events of the vlog which he attributes to the video clips ('what I saw her do') as well as the on-screen text ('the caption'). These elements of the vlog allowed him to follow along in spite of the fact that he could not understand the details of the spoken voiceover aside from a few words. Working with example vlogs also allowed James to reflect on his understanding of what belongs to the daily vlog genre.

6.4.3 Understanding of Genre

We can see James' demonstrated understanding of the daily vlog genre through his vlog submission as previously discussed. Additional information about how he conceives of the genre can be found in his module reflections. For example, in a module reflection in *Schritt 1*, James shares how he can recognize vlog 1 as belonging to this genre (excerpt JM002).

JM002

Discussion. Even if you don't understand all the language used in the video, how can you recognize that this is a 'day in the life' style vlog? What parts of the video help you to understand what the creator means?

The body language and task the creator is doing fill in the gaps in communication

James states that body language as well as the activity that the creator engages in (as viewed on video) provide clues about what kind of video this is. The inclusion of these resources adds

additional semiotic information with which he can work to fill in gaps in his comprehension. This aligns with James' use of body language and gesture to create meaning in his own vlog submission, i.e., the fact that he understands these elements to be indicative of the genre may lead him to work with these modes himself. In another reflection, James describes his experience and expectations with regards to the genre of daily vlogs.

JM001

Reflection. Are you familiar with this style of video/vlog? What experience do you have – have you seen this kind of vlog before? Have you created one before? What do you expect to see in this kind of video?

I expect a day in the life videos to be a brief account of what the maker does on the average day. When I see them I expect something humorous or mildly interesting or strange, as I assume if the experience wasn't any of those things the poster wouldn't have bothered making the video.

As other participants have noted, James expects that a vlog will report on the events of an average day in the life of the creator; however, he also expects that the creator will build in some kind of humour or interest, i.e., he understands that there is some entertainment value associated with this style of video. This aligns with his own use of humour in his vlog, e.g., in excerpt JL004 described in Section 6.4.1 above, James includes humour in his statement that his work involves writing computer code that does not work. In line with James' understanding that daily vlogs include interesting elements for the viewer, he comments on the amount of content included in the creator's day, referring to vlog 2 (excerpt JM013).

JM013

Reflection. Which aspects of this lesson and/or vlog would you use in your own #eintagmeinleben video? Why?

Unlike the first video he seems to have sought out one of his busier days, after all it's not likely that he goes shopping and to the gym daily. If I were to make such a vlog I would imitate this to fill it with more content.

James notes here that he finds it unlikely that the day seen in vlog 2 represents an average day in the creator's life; he rather suspects that this is 'one of his busier days.' James seems to see value in the inclusion of a larger volume of content in a daily vlog, thereby orienting to his previously stated understanding of daily vlogs as being interesting or entertaining, i.e., through the inclusion of more content or humour. James, like Miranda, demonstrates an understanding of the daily vlog genre as situated in its social context. He understands that the design of the text is inherently tied to its context of use, i.e., the fact that it will presumably be viewed by other people is seen as a factor which influences the text's design. James' design decisions are thus likely influenced by his understanding of the wider social context; he orients his decision making according to his understanding of the genre, rather than his ability to follow assignment instructions in a German course.

6.4.4 James Evaluation of Experience

Because James did not take part in an interview, the data about his experience working on the module is relatively limited compared to the other participants. Nevertheless, he expresses his thoughts about the vlog task through some of his module responses. For example, early in the module, after completing Schritt 1, James seems somewhat reserved or skeptical about the task of creating a vlog (excerpt JM008).

JM008

Reflection. Take a moment to reflect on the video you watched here and the subsequent activities. Did you learn any new words/phrases/structures from watching this vlog? Are there any aspects of this video (visuals, language, sounds) that you would use in your own #eintagmeinleben vlog? Make some notes here.

I didn't really take away any vlogging aspects, as I dislike making videos about myself and would not make a vlog without it being requested. However I learned of the word "Kurz" from this activity.

In reflecting on what he learned in the first lesson, he notes that he did not learn anything about vlogging, but comments on the language he learned (he learned the word ‘kurz’ from a time-telling exercise which included phrases like ‘kurz nach fünf’). His justification for not taking away aspects of vlogging is that he does not like making videos about himself. He therefore does not seem interested in learning about the vlogging aspects of the module but is more interested in the language that he might learn. He states that he would not choose to make something like a daily vlog if it were not asked of him. In a later reflection, which was written after his vlog had been submitted, James rates his experience of creating a vlog.

JM033

Rate your experience creating a #eintagmeinleben vlog. Was it easy/difficult? What did you like/dislike about it? Why?

It was not very difficult, though it was a bit uncomfortable as i am not used to making videos about myself or hearing my own voice. I did like how easy it was to actually put into production, i hadn't realized how much tiktok streamlines video making.

James expresses that he was pleasantly surprised that the vlog was not difficult to make. He attributes the ease of creating the vlog to TikTok’s functionalities, which is presumably the app he used to create the video. In line with his previous statement about his dislike for making videos about himself, in excerpt JM033, he describes the process of creating a vlog about his life as somewhat uncomfortable. He does not describe the vlog as something he ‘dislikes,’ as in the initial reflection; rather, he attributes his perceived discomfort to be a result of the fact that he is not used to making videos about himself or hearing his own voice. Despite his initial hesitation about being the center of attention in a vlog, James does not rate his experience of making one very negatively, but even comments on what he liked about it.

Moreover, in another post-vlog reflection, he comments that his German has improved through his work in the module and by completing the vlog (excerpt JM036).

JM036

What did you learn through this whole process?

I learned with proper experience how to describe my day and activities to someone in German, I did also learn that my pronunciation has improved.

He specifically comments that he learned how to talk about his day and common daily activities in German, citing the experience gained through the vlog task. He also notes an improvement in his pronunciation. Considering that James initially seemed more interested in the linguistic aspect of the module, his perceived improvement likely contributed to the positive aspects of his experience.

In sum, James uses his understanding of and experience with the daily vlog genre along with various multimodal resources (including language) to design a vlog which showcases a day in his life. His understanding of the genre as having an entertainment value (i.e., including something funny or interesting; presenting a day that is rather eventful) manifests in his vlog through his inclusion of humour and a variety of activities. He found the example vlogs to be helpful and took advantage of them by using them as templates; he borrowed chunks of language and meaning making and applied them in his own context in some of the scenes of his vlog. Although he would not normally choose to make a vlog about himself such as this one, he did not encounter any issues creating it, and he found that he improved his German by completing the online module and main vlog task.

6.5 Cross-Analysis

The individual analyses provide a rich understanding of each participant's vlog submission and their unique perspective on topics relating to the focal points introduced in Chapter 4. In this section, I discuss patterns that emerged in the previous analysis and reflect on individual differences between participants' perceptions of the online module and task. I begin with a

review of meaning design in participants' vlog submissions and continue with a discussion of multimodality and its influence on participants' designs. I then reflect on participants' work with texts and how this impacts the design process in task-based learning. Finally, I describe how participants evaluate their experiences and examine differences in participants' beliefs and attitudes towards language learning and assessment. I refer to excerpts from this chapter's analysis in the text by providing the excerpt number (e.g., MI001) and the heading number for reference (e.g., 6.2.1 to refer to Chapter 6.2.1).

6.5.1 Meaning Design in Vlog Submissions

The participants in this study employ various modes of meaning making in the creation of their vlogs; the vlogs contain visual elements such as video or image as well as sound such as speech and music. Some participants include on-screen text and others incorporate bodily movement, facial expression and gesture. None of these modes of meaning making are used in isolation but are always combined with others.

Each participant uses visual media that they have captured themselves, that is, the visuals represent the real lives and surroundings of their creators (as opposed to using, e.g., stock footage). Nicholas, Miranda, and James use video clips in their vlogs while Robert uses still images. Participants differ in terms of how they represent themselves in their submissions. For example, Miranda and James can be seen on screen throughout the vlog and thus make use of bodily position and movement, facial expressions, and gesture. Nicholas and Robert do not show themselves on screen; their visual content consists of imagery which represents their surroundings.

In addition to visual media, all four participants include spoken language in the form of a voiceover that they recorded. The language used in all four voiceovers generally consists of

simple sentences or phrases which describe the event as it unfolds on screen. The inclusion of a voiceover in every vlog was somewhat surprising, especially because voiceovers were not included in all of the example vlogs, nor was it a requirement of the task instructions to include one. Considering that e.g., James reported feeling uncomfortable recording and listening to his own voice, it was expected that some may choose to leave this element out of their vlog. Robert commented on the fact that computer-generated text-to-speech tools, like the one used in vlog 1, are not reliable; this was thematized in a learning activity in *Schritt 1*. He therefore chose to record his own voiceover. He does not comment on the possibility of leaving it out entirely, however, he did comment on the fact that he found vlog 2 difficult to follow because there was ‘no narration’ (RM032, 6.2.2.2). Miranda notes that it ‘did not occur to her’ not to include the voiceover, i.e., for her, this element felt like a default part that simply belongs to the daily vlog genre (MI017, 6.3.3). Participants’ decisions to include a voiceover were thus likely influenced by the example texts and learning activities that they encountered in the online module, as well as their own understanding of what belongs to the daily vlog genre.

The inclusion of voiceover may also be influenced by a linguistic pattern that participants identify. Nicholas, Robert, and Miranda comment on a common way of using language in daily vlogs that they noticed in the example vlogs (excerpts NM032, 6.1.3; RM008, 6.2.2.2; and MI010b, 6.3.2, respectively). The linguistic practice described refers to how creators use both spoken and written modalities of language simultaneously in daily vlogs. The written language, which is visible on screen, is rather concise and briefly sums up the action. The spoken language, which is included in the voiceover, contains a longer string of text which contains more details about the action. An example of this can be seen in vlog 4 (excerpt V4001).

Figure 60. “Ich bin um sieben Uhr dreißig aufgestanden dann gabs erstmal nen Kaffee im Bett.” (V4001)



In this example, the on-screen text displays the time and labels the current activity (‘7:30 Aufstehen’) while a video clip depicting the creator’s hand holding a cup of coffee against a duvet can be seen on screen. The voiceover states, “ich bin um sieben Uhr dreißig aufgestanden dann gabs erstmal nen Kaffee im Bett“ (@lenaknk, 2022). The voiceover thus ties together the elements that are visible on screen by describing the details of the activity in a single utterance. As mentioned above, three participants demonstrate an awareness of how language is used in these two formats; however, they do not all recreate it in their own designs. While Nicholas and Robert show a desire to follow this pattern of language use in their own submissions, they ultimately do not include on-screen text in addition to their voiceovers. As discussed in Chapter 6.2.4.1, Robert explains in his interview that for him, this was a result of the fact that he was unable to add on-screen text due to technical difficulties (RM034). Nicholas does not comment on his exclusion of the textual elements. Miranda, on the other hand, does use this linguistic pattern in her vlog by combining short phrases on screen while her voiceover is heard simultaneously (ML002 and ML010).

Moreover, all four participants note that time is a key part of the daily vlog genre. Even before time telling was introduced in *Schritt 1*, in an initial reflection and discussion, Nicholas and Miranda comment that they expect to see timestamps in daily vlogs, and that this is one way that they can recognize a text as belonging to that genre (NM001, 6.1.3 and MM002, 6.3.3). Robert and James do not comment on time as a feature of daily vlogs; however, all four participants consistently use time expressions throughout their submissions.

Since participants understand time expressions to be a key part of daily vlogs, it follows that they all structure their vlogs chronologically, apart from the opening scene. Chronological ordering is not something that is outlined in the task instructions or covered in the lesson content, nor is it brought up in module responses or interviews. It seems to go without saying that the daily activities portrayed in the vlog are presented in the same order as they unfold in real time. Opening scenes, however, fall outside of the chronology. Consistent with each of the example vlogs, each participant's submission contains an opener. The opener includes a video clip or image that is otherwise not seen in the vlog (Nicholas includes a shot of his computer, Robert shows a cartoon, Miranda's opener includes a shot of a butterfly on a flower; James includes a shot of himself reading a book and waving to the camera). As with the voiceover, the inclusion of an opener was not part of the task instructions; the fact that all four participants include one suggests that they see this as part of the daily vlog genre.

Through their vlog submissions, participants demonstrate their understanding of how multimodal resources come together to create meaning in daily vlogs. They work with visual media such as video and images and, in some cases, combine these with additional modes of visual meaning making. The participants recognize patterns in how multimodality is used in the daily vlog genre, for example how language is used in two different modalities, and the inclusion

of voiceovers, time statements, and opening scenes. In the next section, I describe how multimodality is useful for beginner-level language learners as observed in the data.

6.5.2 Multimodality, Comprehension, and Expression

Multimodality allows language users to construct complex meanings by combining modes that have different affordances, i.e., that do different kinds of semiotic work. The individual analyses reveal that this is useful for the participants for several reasons. The combination of multiple modes in a single text supports participants' comprehension, provides them with more meaning making potential, and indexes genre, thus supplying clues about what kind of text this is.

Participants describe that the multimodal aspect of vlogs helped them to understand what activities the creators in each example vlog were undertaking, even when they could not understand the language spoken. For example, Miranda describes how the multimodality of vlog 4 allowed her to understand beyond what would have been accessible to her if she had been listening to audio alone (MI006, 6.3.4). The additional modes of meaning making in the example vlogs such as video and on-screen text allowed her to follow along with the general message of the creator. Similarly, Nicholas states that the visuals allowed him to make connections between the spoken words and activities depicted on screen and that he would have had difficulty understanding the vlog without them (NI005, 6.1.2). All four participants in the data set noted that the multimodal elements of the example vlogs assisted their comprehension. Especially when interacting with authentic materials, i.e., those which were not created for learning, learners will likely encounter language that is complex or spoken quickly. The presence of multimodal resources in such texts thus allow even beginner-level learners to understand the main ideas of a text, even when they do not understand the language in its entirety.

In addition to this, the participants demonstrate through their vlog submissions that multimodality provides them with more meaning making potential. For example, Miranda and James both use the phrase ‘fertig machen’ to describe their morning routines. Miranda combines this phrase with video clips of herself brushing her teeth and putting up her hair (ML006, 6.3.1). James uses the same phrase combined with a shot of the shower and himself combing his hair (JL003, 6.4.1). The inclusion of visual forms of meaning making along with the spoken message allows them to provide more information about what getting ready entails. Robert similarly uses two different images to express the ‘same’ action (RL005 and RL008, 6.2.1). He uses the word ‘studieren’ while providing additional visual information about what that looks like through the use of two different images (in a group vs. independent work, work on a laptop vs. work with a physical book). For these beginner-level learners whose linguistic repertoires in German are still developing, the opportunity to combine systems of semiotic information grants them more power to communicate their ideas than a single mode does. This leads to the production of richer meanings and a wider scope of what can be expressed. Novice learners can then use multimodal resources to ‘say’ more than their linguistic resources would normally allow.

Finally, the analysis of participant data reveals that multimodality can index genre, i.e., participants see the presence of certain modes as clues about the type of text with which they are interacting. This is illustrated through the fact that, when asked about what they expect to see in a daily vlog, all four of the participants describe the genre in terms of which modalities they expect to see. In other words, the genre is not only conceptualized in terms of content or organization, but also the modalities that are present. See, e.g., comments from Nicholas, Robert, and James from the initial discussion post in *Schritt 1* (excerpts NM002, 6.1.3; RM002, 6.3.3; JM002, 6.4.3, respectively). These participants list times (displayed on-screen), video clips, and body

languages as clues that allow them to recognize that this is a daily vlog. Multimodal elements thus provided clues about the genre of the example vlogs.

6.5.3 Working with Texts

Participants share that working with examples of daily vlogs was helpful for several reasons. For example, they could draw on the additional meaningful elements to assist their comprehension, as demonstrated through reflections at the end of the module by Robert, Miranda, and James (see excerpts RM035, 6.2.4.1; MM034, 6.3.5; JM034, 6.4.2, respectively). Participants noted that they could use the examples provided as resources for creating their own vlogs. In other words, participants did not need to reinvent how a daily vlog is structured but could use existing texts as a reference or starting point. This was not only helpful for deciding which language to include, but also for deciding which modes to include and how to use them. Robert notes that the vlogs were helpful as they allowed him to understand ‘slang;’ in other words, working with examples of the target genre allowed him to become exposed to language (and other modes) that are appropriate for that context (RM035, 6.2.4.1). Working with texts of a specific, recognizable genre in task-based learning, and including examples of that genre in the learning materials, allowed participants to use the structure of the text as a template; similarly, working with examples provided opportunities for them to engage in textual borrowing.

6.5.3.1 Textual Borrowing

The analysis of vlog submissions reveals that all four participants engage in textual borrowing. Each participant borrows pieces from the example vlogs that they find to be appropriate for use in their own contexts. For example, both Miranda and Nicholas borrow the opening statements of their vlogs, adapting them as necessary to fit with their own needs (ML001, 6.3.1 and NL001, 6.1.1). James borrowed not only language from an example vlog but also modeled the

composition of some of the scenes in his vlog after what he saw (e.g., JL008, 6.4.1.1). Textual borrowing in these instances is beneficial to the participants as they do not need to create their expressions from scratch but can work with existing texts as a starting point. When borrowing language for use in their voiceovers, these participants also adopt the pronunciation and intonation of the words used in the examples.

Moreover, in another example of textual borrowing, participants include connector words like ‘und’ and ‘dann’ in their vlogs to create continuity from one event to the next. James and Robert use connectors consistently throughout their submissions, while Miranda uses them in some of her scenes. The explicit teaching of connectors was not included in the module; however, they can be heard in some of the example vlogs. Connectors are something that work at a textual level rather than the sentence level as they concern the coherence of the text as a whole by creating connection between the individual scenes. This highlights the importance of working at the level of text, rather than at the sentence level and shows that explicit instruction does not always cover every relevant linguistic topic for completing the task.

6.5.3.2 Texts and Their Social Contexts

Participants in the study reveal that their understanding of the genre of the text (i.e., the structure and organization of daily vlogs) and its wider social context influences the design of their own text. Although the vlogs created for this study were done so in the context of a closed environment (the module did not require learners to share their vlogs, neither with other participants nor with the wider community), participants consider their audience in their vlog designs. For example, as discussed in Chapter 6.3.3, Miranda’s conceptualization of the daily vlog genre hinges on her understanding of the wider social framework within which daily vlogs are created and shared. Her adoption of the kind of exaggerated positivity that she sees on social

media (e.g., through animated gestures and cheerful facial expressions) shows that the social practice associated with the daily vlog genre (i.e., sharing them on social media platforms) influenced the design of her text. Similarly, Nicholas reports in a reflection that his reason for wanting to include additional visuals is so that ‘people could understand what is being said better’ (NM013 6.1.3). The design of Nicholas’ vlog is therefore also influenced by his imagined audience, i.e., by the associations he makes with the social practice of sharing vlogs. These examples demonstrate that the participants understand the genre of daily vlog to be communicative in nature; it is created with the purpose of communicating something to someone else. Even if the resulting text is not shared, these participants orient to textual design features which are influenced by the wider social practice associated with this type of text.

6.5.3.3 Task-based Learning and Design

As discussed above, working with example texts is seen as helpful by the participants who interact with them and allows participants to engage in textual borrowing. The analysis reveals that working with texts is also beneficial for facilitating the design process before participants begin creating their own text. Participants’ reflections about what they plan to include in their vlog reveal how working at the textual level and encouraging an awareness of the upcoming task allows them to reflect on the forthcoming task and consider content, multimodal, and organizational aspects of their designs. This is especially beneficial in the context of task-based instruction; the frame of reference provided by the vlog task, which is communicated at the start of the module, allows participants to start planning as they work through the lessons and interact with example vlogs. Because participants know that they will create a vlog of their own at the end of the module, they pay particular attention to the kinds of things that might be relevant to them as they interact with examples and complete lesson activities. This is further facilitated

through the inclusion of reflection questions at the end of each lesson which allows them to note down their ideas. Examples of this phenomenon can be observed in reflections by Nicholas and Robert (NM013, 6.1.3 and RM008 6.2.2.2, respectively). They both demonstrate that they are thinking ahead to the vlog task and considering which resources they will use and how. For example, Robert states that he will ‘definitely use the captions’ and makes a note of how language is used in them. Even before participants start creating their vlogs, they are already engaged in the design process by thinking about choices that they might make, what their preferences are, and considerations of what is possible. The incorporation of example vlogs into the task-based learning sequence prompts the participants to closely examine them; they would likely not pay as close attention to the details of the texts and genre if they were not tasked with creating a vlog of their own.

6.5.4 Evaluation of Experience

Analysis of participant data reveals how the group of participants who took part in this study rated their experience completing the online module and vlog task. Participants generally had an overall positive orientation towards the online lessons and module with some variation in their reported beliefs and prior experiences.

6.5.4.1 Evaluation of the Online Module and Task

Participants rated their experience working in the module positively with regards to improving their German language skills and feeling prepared to complete the target task; however, participants showed differences in their evaluation of the vlog task. For example, as discussed in Chapter 6.1.5, Nicholas rated his experience positively and shared that he found the task to be more engaging than more formal types of assessments (NI008). Similarly, Miranda shared that she appreciated the flexibility afforded by the task which allowed her to work with language she

felt comfortable with (MI016, 6.3.5). Robert found that the module was helpful for his learning but shared a preference for less complex video assignments over the vlog task (RM037, 6.2.4.1). Participants' differing assessments of the vlog task seem to be impacted by both concrete issues such as technical difficulties as well as less tangible factors such as their attitudes and beliefs about language learning and assessment.

6.5.4.2 Experience with Technology

The vlog task necessarily requires participants to work with some kind of video editing software. The vlog cannot be recorded all in one take; assuming that the creator will include multiple events in the vlog, i.e., showing multiple activities from throughout the day, it is necessary to use multiple video clips which must then be stitched together. Creators can use video editing software on computers (e.g., Microsoft ClipChamp; iMovie) or on mobile devices (e.g., social apps like Instagram or TikTok; video editing apps like CapCut). While popular apps such as TikTok have streamlined the process of video creation, they are tied up with concerns around users' data and privacy. It is therefore difficult to recommend a solution that works for every user; ultimately, participants need to decide for themselves which software they are most comfortable using. Participants report that they had differing experiences with technology while creating their vlogs which impacted how they evaluate their overall experience. For example, Robert reports that he encountered difficulty using Instagram to create his vlog as he had trouble aligning the visual and spoken elements and he was not able to include on screen text as he originally planned (RI010, 6.2.4.1). In contrast, James reports that he did not have any trouble creating his vlog; on the contrary, he was pleasantly surprised to find out how easy it is to edit a video using the TikTok app (JM033, 6.4.4). Miranda reports that she found it challenging to align her video clips and voiceover segments; however, these issues do not seem to have affected her

overall experience as she reported that she was happy with the final product (MM033, 6.3.5), and she otherwise expresses a positive attitude towards the vlog task. Nicholas does not comment on his experience using technology to complete the task.

The experiences that participants have while completing the task will impact how they assess their experience. Technical issues can be expected in a task such as this one which necessarily requires the use of technology; how learners perceive the issues will be unique to them. Participants' differing experiences with technology in this study highlights the need for instructors to provide appropriate supports to avoid potential frustrations.

6.5.4.3 Learner Roles and Responsibilities

Participants display differences in how they position themselves and see their roles as learners. An example of this is revealed through participants' responses to working with authentic texts (i.e., example vlogs) during the module. Participants express different opinions about interacting with language that is more complex than what they are used to in the beginner-level German course. On the one hand, the opportunity to work with authentic texts was seen as an exciting opportunity to interact with the new language and people who speak it; to see German as it is used and spoken for other speakers of German. This was the case for, e.g., Nicholas, who rated his experience working with 'actual German' in authentic texts positively (NI001, 6.1.5). On the other hand, work with authentic texts is difficult for beginners who may be used to being provided with English translations of German texts. This was expressed by, e.g., Robert, who reported that he could not understand the 'full German' language he encountered in the example vlogs (RI003, 6.2.3.1). The difference in how participants rate this experience seems to be influenced by how they position themselves as learners and how comfortable they are in working with gaps in their knowledge. For example, Miranda positions herself as a user of the language

who is at a beginner level. She understands and accepts that she will not be able to understand every piece of language she encounters but tries her best to follow along with the general message. In contrast, Robert positions himself as a student; he expects that he will be tested on content that has been provided by an instructor such that he does not need to work with uncertainties in his course work. How participants see themselves and their roles as language learners depends on their previous experience and conceptualization about what it means to be a learner. Because learners have different experiences when they enter a learning environment, they are bound to experience the learning materials and tasks in different ways, as illustrated here. This ties in with the beliefs participants have about learning and assessment.

6.5.4.4 Beliefs about Language Learning and Assessment

The participants demonstrate differing beliefs about language learning and assessment. For example, as discussed in Chapter 6.1.5, Nicholas shares in his interview that he finds the vlog task engaging, creative, and more interesting and personal than most formal assessments such as tests or quizzes (NI008); however, he does not see such tasks as sufficient on their own for assessing learning. He also expresses a belief that tests or quizzes may be more appropriate for assessing language learning. Similarly, Robert shares that he prefers formal testing over video assignments (RI017, 6.2.4.2). He explains his preference by sharing his belief that quizzes are a test of knowledge whereas video tasks are better for testing pronunciation. Miranda makes a note of the flexibility of the assignment; she appreciates that she is not bound to using language in a predetermined way, but that she can choose to use the language that she is comfortable with to express herself (MI016, 6.3.5). Miranda thus orients to language as a resource she can draw on to make meaning in a way that is appropriate for her. The differences in participants' beliefs about language learning relate to their own unique experiences with learning, including their current

experiences in GER 101 Online. These positions and the beliefs that the participants express about language and assessment seem to influence the ways in which they describe the vlog task and rate their experience with the online module.

In addition to the beliefs described above, all four participants in this study show an affinity for linguistic accuracy in their work. Each participant describes the steps they took to ensure that the language they used in their vlog was accurate, for example, drawing on dictionaries, conjugation websites, and translation services. Nicholas and Miranda also comment that they used Google Translate to ensure their pronunciation was accurate. Nicholas mentions in his interview that he has concerns about ‘not doing anything weird,’ i.e., he wants to ensure that the language he uses is appropriate (NI012, 6.1.5). However, given that there are few social consequences to making mistakes in a beginner-level language course, it is possible that other factors might be a play, e.g., expectations that fewer errors will result in a higher grade.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented an analysis of the daily vlogs created by Nicholas, Robert, Miranda, and James. Each learner mobilized their own understanding of the genre of daily vlog and multimodality to design a daily vlog of their own. The participants show that their understanding of the daily vlog genre is influenced by their previous knowledge and experience with not only vlogs, but wider social media practices as well. They use multiple modes of meaning making to represent the activities that they engage in during their day, and they draw on the example vlogs provided in the module as resources for borrowing language and other elements. Participants generally provided a positive assessment of the online module and its learning activities; ultimately, their differing opinions about the vlog task are shaped by prior experiences and beliefs about language learning in a university setting.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The overarching goal of this research has been to better understand asynchronous online language learning. The last several decades have seen considerable research in the field of language pedagogy and task-based language learning; considering the extent of knowledge in this field and the increased interest in online learning in recent years, it is remarkable how few studies focus on the asynchronous online context. This study has taken steps to investigate multimodal tasks in asynchronous online German learning such that we can develop pedagogical principles that are designed for this specific context. With the completion of this study's analysis, I return to the research questions introduced previously:

1. To what extent can we design online language learning tasks that incorporate elements of the pedagogical principles identified in task-based language learning (TBLL) research?
2. How do beginner-level German students engage with online language learning tasks?
3. How do learners evaluate their experiences with online language learning tasks?

I have investigated these questions through the consideration of previous research and the development of an online module which was tested with learners of German in an asynchronous online course. In this final chapter, I discuss the findings of the study which address these research questions. I identify principles for designing online task-based learning modules and provide an overview of participants' engagement with the module and task. I provide information about challenges that are still present in online task-based learning design and highlight some areas for future research as well as the limitations of the current research.

7.1 Discussion of Findings

7.1.1 The Value of Multiliteracies in Online Learning

The findings of the study reveal that a multiliteracies perspective can provide great benefits for learners in asynchronous online task-based language learning. This perspective is valuable for several reasons. Multiliteracies perspectives make space for communicative practices that lie outside of singular conceptualizations of literacy, for example those restricted to reading and writing. This perspective sees value in modes of meaning making other than language, making room for multimodal texts and social practices that are less academic and less commonly associated with formal education. The daily vlog genre is thus seen not as a frivolous use of media but as a format of communication which engages creators in the use of systems of meaning making across multiple modes.

Working with the concept of design (NLG, 1996; Warner, 2024) was fruitful for the participants who took part in this study. The analysis shows that the process of designing a text required participants to draw on both tangible (mode) and intangible (genre) resources of meaning making. This perspective saw participants as active designers of meaning and engaged them in decision making about which ideas to express and how to represent them. They worked with available designs (example vlogs) and mobilized their own understanding of the daily vlog genre in the process of designing. Working with available designs allowed participants to make observations about what is appropriate in the context of daily vlogs. They could then work with language and other modes that they found important for their own contexts. Seeing participants as designers of meaning allows us to look at each of their vlogs as a design; in this sense, it is not upheld to a measure of correctness (i.e., whether their texts were designed the ‘right way’) but rather we can see each participant’s design as their unique understanding of the genre, mode, and their desire and ability to recreate this in their own texts. The goal of this kind of task is thus not

to see if learners can complete it correctly, but to rather understand how they conceptualize text design, genre, mode in context through designing and reflecting.

Working with multimodal texts in beginner-level courses is enormously beneficial for language learners whose linguistic repertoires are limited. They can say and understand more when additional modes are present in a text. Participants in the study reported that the combination of modes in the daily vlog examples was helpful for their ability to understand what was being communicated, e.g., they reported that the visuals were helpful for filling in gaps in their linguistic knowledge. Working with texts that are conventionally monomodal (i.e., which are made up of a single mode such as a spoken news report or a written memorandum) would likely not be as helpful for beginners as multimodal texts which present more opportunities for interpretation and making inferences about meaning. The usefulness of mode extends beyond comprehension; participants' ability to incorporate multimodality into their own submissions meant that they could communicate beyond the extent of their linguistic abilities to include more comprehensive information about their daily activities. In other words, participants could do more with multimodality than they could without it. Thus, in this study, multimodality functioned as a form of scaffolding. Scaffolding, as previously described, involves initially providing supports and gradually removing them as learners' abilities in the language develop. Scaffolding is used to guide learners through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), i.e., what learners can do with help but not yet independently. The usefulness of multimodality is consistent with previous research which has described that different modes do different kinds of semiotic work, i.e., they have different affordances. If language learners do not understand one mode, they can lean on their understanding of other present modes which may express a similar meaning in a different way. This understanding of mode similarly aligns with Warner's (2024)

description of the difference between orality and literacy: “attention to oral and written modalities, not as distinct skills, but as differently mediated modalities of language, ... makes it possible to recognize the potential of hybrid practices” (p. 12). This shows that language cannot be seen as a singular meaning making mode; it takes on different forms in different modalities which have different affordances.

The creation of a daily vlog requires creators to recognize patterns of conventions in existing texts and to participate in the systematic use of several modes of meaning making at once. When working with a recognizable genre of text that exists in the world, it allows learners to work with their existing knowledge and experience of that genre and the wider social context within which it functions as they work on their text designs. Some of the participants came into the study with previous knowledge of the genre, which they could draw on in their designs. Participants showed that they are sensitive to the conventions of the daily vlog genre as illustrated by their ability to recognize patterns and create their own texts. They have an awareness of what belongs and what does not; despite the variety in their vlogs, they orient to the same kinds of patterns. Consistent with the discussion of genre in Chapter 3, participants understood the genre as a framework to follow (MacFarlane, 2007). Working at the textual level is beneficial for learners because they can work with all of the features of the text within its social context. This aligns with Halliday and Hassan’s (1993) definition of text, i.e., that it cannot be separated from its social context.

The fact that the example texts in the module all belonged to the same genre allowed participants to notice patterns. Even though each of the example vlogs were made by different creators and varied in terms of the choice of mode, language, complexity, content, etc.; the participants could still recognize them as daily vlogs. Working with texts that belong to a single

genre allows learners to pick up on regularities and engage in textual borrowing which is helpful for their overall development and gives them a wider range of communication potential. Participants frequently borrowed words, phrases, content, and combinations of modes (e.g., the combination of voiceover and on-screen text) and inserted these into their own contexts appropriately. The extent of the content that participants borrowed from the provided examples goes beyond what was thematized in the learning materials, i.e., goes beyond what was ‘taught.’ As discussed in Chapter 3, textual borrowing, i.e., the “re-appropriation of elements from a model text” (Warner, 2024, pp. 54-55) can be a useful strategy for facilitating learners’ self-expression. It is important to note that textual borrowing does not constitute the simple copying of a text or element, rather, it involves weaving together borrowed resources with individual expressions. This aligns with the concept of imitation as discussed in Chapter 2, which sees learners not as copiers but as communicative beings. Imitation allows them to create something new “out of saying ‘the same thing’” (Newman and Holzman, 1993, p. 145). The textual borrowing observed in the individual analyses thus aligns with the expected behaviour of novice learners and represents a strategic form of self-expression. When learners borrow language from relevant contexts, they are liable to include linguistic elements that improve the quality of their communication, whether conscious or unconscious, as demonstrated in the analysis. A learner’s understandings of a genre may go beyond what a teacher or course author finds useful, which is why working directly with examples of the target genre is especially valuable.

Participants in this study demonstrated beliefs relating to singular views of literacy and transmission-based understandings of language learning. For example, they showed preferences for tests and quizzes over creative assignments, expressed beliefs that the vlog task may not be an appropriate means of assessing learning, and demonstrated a strong preference for linguistic

accuracy in their work. The focus on linguistic accuracy was especially prevalent in the analysis. This raises questions about the role of linguistic correctness in university level foreign language courses. Each of the participants in this study named several resources such as online dictionaries, Google translate, their textbooks, and more which they used to help them complete the task. Some participants even used Google Translate's text-to-speech function to test the correctness of their pronunciation before recording their voiceover. None of the participants reported asking their teacher about uncertainties; rather than get feedback from their instructor, they preferred to maximize the linguistic correctness of their work with external tools before submitting it. While this shows a degree of resourcefulness on the part of the learner, issues can arise when learners use tools that give them the answers without understanding why. Instructors can provide valuable feedback regarding not only the grammatical correctness of an utterance, but also whether the context of use is appropriate. Instructor feedback is arguably richer and better for students' learning than AI-powered tools, yet the participants in the study did not take advantage of this resource. Within the scope of research on task-based language learning, it is valuable to investigate students' beliefs about learning and their relationships to their instructors such that solutions can be found to potential problems or misunderstandings and learning potential can be maximized. This finding similarly reveals that learners do not have experience with multiliteracies pedagogy and views of literacy and demonstrates the need for more multiliteracies-based pedagogy in practice. Previous research has highlighted the need for more multiliteracies pedagogies in language education, as learners often appear to have little experience with this type of approach.

7.1.2 Pedagogical Considerations

The outcome of the module development is consistent with previous pedagogical considerations. I aimed to build an online task-based sequence that adheres to principles of TBLL and was able to incorporate principles from TBLL research. For example, the vlog task incorporates the principles of *Handlungsorientierung* (it orients to learners' ability to act in the new language), *Inhaltsorientierung* (the content of example vlogs is interesting and relatable), *Personalisierung* (learners complete the task as themselves, using language that is relevant to them to describe their own lives), and *Erfolgsorientierung* (creating a product in the new language may lead to a sense of accomplishment in some learners). In addition to this, the online module incorporates the principles of *Reflexionsförderung* as there are several reflection questions throughout the module which encourage participants to reflect on meaning, mode, and language. Reflection questions give the instructor additional, richer, qualitative information about what students have learned through their engagement with the materials and points out just how individual the process of learning is. Working with the vlog task also aligns with a social constructivist paradigm; the open-endedness of the task means that learners can work with their own understanding of the task and genre rather than being rated against a singular standard or whether a sufficient amount of the material has been learned.

7.1.2.1 Asynchronous Online Communicative Practice

We have come to understand interaction in online courses to consist of group assignments (i.e., in which two or more students in the course work together on a single assignment) or exchanges on e.g., discussion boards. Although group work was not included in the online module, it is necessary to acknowledge the influence of others in the collective construction of participants' texts. The participants in this study did not simply develop their own sense of what a daily vlog

is; they worked with their own knowledge and the examples provided to develop their own sense of the genre conventions. These conventions are, however, socially constructed, i.e., learned through interaction with the products of what others have created. The participants interacted with the example vlogs in order to complete the lesson activities, and they designed their own vlogs with their audience in mind. In this sense, the resulting vlog submissions can be understood to be the result of socially constructed asynchronous online communicative practice.

7.1.2.2 Modality-appropriate Pedagogy

It makes sense to build a task-based module around a communicative practice that is by default online and asynchronous. The vlog task in this study constitutes what Warner (2024) called a “vernacular digital genre” (p. 40), i.e., it is by default accessed, created, and shared using digital technologies, and it is shared and viewed asynchronously (i.e., the time of the creator’s posting does not necessarily align with the viewer’s time of watching). Such digital genres are appropriate for asynchronous online TBLL; there was no need to adapt anything about this task to ‘make it fit’ with asynchronous online delivery. Working with genres which are appropriate for the mode of delivery allows us to work with the same kind of TBLL principles that we have been working with in classroom-based learning. Moreover, the inclusion of examples sets expectations for what learners are expected to do, which is especially valuable in an educational environment where asking questions is always mediated (e.g., through email) and feedback is rarely immediate.

7.2 Coming Back to DBR: The Reflecting Phase

The final phase of the DBR framework introduced in Chapter 3 is the Reflecting phase (Hoadley and Campos, 2022). This stage of the methodology involves a reflection on the design and testing process to arrive at a theoretical conclusion. Theory plays an important role in DBR

studies; it is not only used to guide a researcher's decision-making process for designing educational interventions but also develops out of its findings. It is the theory work at the end of the testing process that allows us to advance our knowledge about a particular teaching and learning design. It is important to reiterate here that the purpose of DBR studies is not to identify overarching theories, but to develop theoretical findings that are novel and useful: "a design research program should yield new theories that have utility for resolving important problems" (Edelson, 2002, p. 118). Therefore, the aim of this study is not to develop learning theories that are applicable and testable across multiple domains of knowledge, but rather to identify new avenues of achieving success in its own context of use.

7.2.1 Design Principles

Design principles are described by Hoadley and Campos (2022) as prescriptive principles about how to achieve a particular outcome through design. Based on the findings of this study, I have identified five design principles for designing task-based modules in asynchronous online German learning at the beginner level. I list these below with a brief description.

- 1) *Keep tasks open-ended.* Keeping task instructions open-ended requires learners to act as designers of meaning and make choices about how to complete the task based on their own interpretations (e.g., which meanings to make, how to represent them, how to structure their texts, etc.).
- 2) *Root tasks in genre.* Choose a task that is rooted in a real genre that exists in the world outside of the learning environment. This provides a useful frame of reference for learners such that they know what is expected of them. Learners can draw on their existing knowledge and experience with the target genre and the broader social context in the completion of the task. The decision of which genre to work with

- should be guided by contextual factors of the learning environment (e.g., synchronicity, online vs. in-person, salience of the genre in society).
- 3) *Work with examples.* Online TBLL sequences should incorporate examples of the target task in the learning materials, i.e., examples of the type of text that learners will create themselves. This allows learners to pick up on patterns of meaning making that are valuable and important for them, rather than working solely with the topics identified by a teacher.
 - 4) *Work with Multimodality.* For beginner-level learners, working with genres that are conventionally multimodal provides them with more semiotic information for them to understand and create meaning.
 - 5) *Include Reflection.* Reflection questions are valuable as they allow learners to identify what they learned and how it fits in with their conceptualization of the target task. Reflections also facilitate the design process even before learners engage in the completion of the task.

The design principles listed above can be used in the design of asynchronous online TBLL sequences. Previously identified principles of TBLL and other pedagogical considerations should also be considered alongside these principles in the design of task-based materials.

7.3 Implications for Teaching Practice

The design principles identified above are relevant to the current online German teaching context and can be directly applied to online course design in other areas as well. The principles are relevant for instructors, course designers, and teacher trainers who are interested in online TBLL as they provide concrete guidance about how to design online task-based learning modules. In the context of new online course designs, the findings may provide useful insights for decision

making when creating new online tasks. In addition to this, the results of this study demonstrate that it is not necessary to change or redevelop an online course at once; for this project, a single unit was exchanged for the task-based module. Course redevelopment can thus take place over the course of several terms, adjusting them as needed in between iterations. The findings of this study have also shown how online learning can be designed to be carried out in one place, i.e., with all of the learning components completed on one website rather than switching between books, learning management systems, and apps. These findings also provide opportunities for future research.

7.4 Implications for Future Research

This study has explored TBLL in asynchronous online German instruction; an area that has not received significant attention in previous research. The findings of this study will therefore inform future research in this and similar areas of inquiry. Through the design and testing of an online task-based module in this project, I have identified several directions for which additional research is needed. I begin with a discussion of the implications for the local teaching context and continue in the sections that follow with a discussion of some of the challenges encountered in this research which future research could address.

Research in the local GER 101 Online context could be continued by conducting additional iterations of the online module tested in this study. As described in Chapter 5, participants in Round 2 provided feedback which could be used to make further adjustments to the module which could be implemented for additional rounds of testing. In addition to this, other modules in the current GER 101 Online course could be developed following the same design principles identified here.

Beyond the GER 101 Online context, the findings of this research may be useful for scholars investigating asynchronous online TBLL in their own language learning contexts, in German or in other languages. The resulting theoretical findings identified above may be helpful to others who aim to integrate task-based learning into their online courses. While the findings are not completely generalizable to other contexts, using these principles as a starting point may be helpful for scholars who wish to design task-based materials for online delivery, especially considering the lack of research in this area.

7.4.1 Learner Orientations to Multiliteracies

The findings of the present study are interesting for scholars who are interested in multiliteracies. Scholars have previously emphasized the need for an expanded view of literacy pedagogy in language education; the results of this study highlight a need for future research in this area. Participants who took part in this study demonstrated beliefs that multimodality was helpful for their ability to understand texts and express themselves; however, their experience with language learning is rooted in singular understandings of language and literacy. Moreover, participants show a preference for linguistic accuracy in their work, thus demonstrating a singular understanding of language that is considered either ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect,’ rather than understanding language as a repertoire of potential meaning making resources. Future research on the topic of multiliteracies and multimodality could focus on learners’ beliefs about language, meaning making, and assessment to better understand the perspectives and previous experiences that learners have in this area.

7.4.2 Conceptualizing Productive and Communicative Activities

One of the greatest challenges that I encountered while designing the module for this study was to conceptualize productive learning activities which engage learners in meaningful

communication with others. It is difficult to think of open-ended productive activities which are both relevant to the target task and relevant to real-world communicative practices. It is easy to fall back on closed activity types like fill-in-the blanks and multiple choice because they are easy to create and share online using external tools (e.g., H5P). Many interpersonal online communicative practices are mediated through alphabetic writing (e.g., e-mail, instant messaging) which could be difficult for beginner-level learners whose linguistic repertoires are limited. Because all asynchronous online communication is mediated through technology, learners usually do not have access to the paralinguistic cues of their peers such as intonation, facial expression, or body language. In addition to this, written communication in online spaces is more permanent than the spoken utterances that learners would produce in a physical classroom which may be associated with higher stakes for many learners.

Similarly, there are limited opportunities for learners to practice spoken communication in asynchronous online courses. The inclusion of synchronous speaking activities would defeat the purpose of having an asynchronous course and would render benefits such as flexibility and working at one's own pace redundant. However, oral communication in the foreign language is an important aspect of language education and is no doubt something students in a German course expect to learn. A direction for future research is the development of communicative activities that engage learners in meaningful, productive activities as well as communication with others. Future research should also consider possible ways to engage learners in speaking practice in online courses. Advancements in digital technologies, especially in the field of generative artificial intelligence, are likely to result in new tools that could be useful for asynchronous online language learning. It may also be worthwhile to consider making a case for

more hybrid language courses at universities instead of necessarily favouring a purely asynchronous model.

7.4.3 Time

A challenge I encountered while developing and testing the module relates to the element of time. Even though asynchronous online courses are not synchronous in the sense that there are no live meetings, they are still constrained by time in ways that could be investigated. With only one week to complete the entire module (corresponding with the GER 101 Online course schedule), this did not leave a lot of time to provide feedback before participants completed the target task. I found that I did not have sufficient time to provide feedback to learners on their work in the individual lessons before they submitted their vlogs. In the context of the module tested in this study, lesson feedback would likely have been valuable to participants who could have reflected on this prior to the completion of the vlog.

It is important to consider that methods of online communication differ from those in face-to-face or synchronous forms of communication. Online interactions can take longer to play out; an instant messaging conversation can span the course of days if both users are not online at the same time, whereas the same conversation face-to-face would be through in a matter of minutes. In addition to this, digitally mediated communication affords the possibility of having more than one conversation simultaneously, which is not possible in physical spaces.

Synchronous forms of communication are necessarily governed by time; however, this is not the case with many online communicative practices. It may therefore be necessary to (re)consider the ways in which asynchronous online learning is governed by time. If we want to organize online learning around principles of online interaction, it may become easier to facilitate real-world communication if learners are given more time for their interactions to play out. Future

research could experiment with different ways of organizing course content such that learning activities and tasks are not bound to such strict timelines. Additional research about the nature of how forms of asynchronous online communication play out would greatly benefit this area.

Time is an influential factor on how learning plays out, but it also impacts improvements and changes to courses and modules in the sense that such updates may take longer. Scholars in TBLL (e.g., Biebighäuser et al., 2012; Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von-Ditfurth, 2016) have suggested that instructors remain flexible while teaching task-based lessons on account of the fact that learners' responses to the materials may differ from what was expected. This is something that is more difficult to implement in asynchronous online courses. When teaching in a physical classroom or synchronous online course, it is relatively easy for an instructor to see if students have grasped the material or not based on, e.g., their level of engagement, uptake of the material, and facial expressions. It is more difficult to monitor learners' progress online when an instructor does not have access to the same kinds of cues. Whereas synchronous instructors have the ability to make changes to a lesson while it is in progress, asynchronous instructors are likely not able to make changes to the course until the end of the semester. It is therefore necessary in asynchronous online courses to anticipate the variety of needs that learners are likely to have and build in, e.g., optional additional materials. Online learning materials need to be fully prepared before the course even begins, thus there is little chance to adapt materials once the course has started. This may also impact how long it takes for improvements to asynchronous online learning to be made as the progress may take longer than it would in a synchronous course.

7.4.4 Feedback

Feedback from instructors is considered an important aspect of task-based language learning (e.g., Willis and Willis, 2007). Due to limitations of time and scope, this aspect of the task-based

approach in this study was not included. This is not to say that feedback was not considered to be an important component of the learning process; rather, it was tied up with several additional considerations and limitations. For example, during the module design phase, it was not known how many learners would participate or what they would produce in the main task. This made it difficult to anticipate how feedback might look and how much time it would demand. In addition to this, the timeframe of just one week for the entire module made it difficult to determine when feedback should be provided. Each participant completed the module activities and task at different times and paces; there was therefore no clear point in time in which feedback could be written and shared to all learners. Considering feedback in asynchronous online TBLL therefore presents an opportunity for future investigation. For example, following DBR, adding feedback options would be a next step in the module revision process. See also the discussion of feedback and artificial intelligence in the following section.

7.4.5 Educational Technology and Artificial Intelligence

Technology and user interface design play a consequential role in online learning. As discussed in Chapter 4, the features of D2L Brightspace were unfortunately not appropriate for the design of the online module tested in this study. I was able to achieve most of my design goals on my own website; however, as an inexperienced web designer, there were limitations on the kinds of activities I could create and how I could access the data. There is a multitude of apps and digital products designed for education available on the market, however, many new web technologies are built on ‘freemium’ models, which means that their use is limited without a paid license.

Thus, although there are many useful tools and educational technologies on the market, many of them are not accessible to researchers or instructors. In addition, such technologies are often produced by companies founded by software engineers or computer scientists who aim for

scalability and a simplification of learning processes. There is a clear need for interdisciplinary research on online language learning which engages (language) learning experts, programmers, and user interface designers. Experts in language pedagogy will not be able to improve asynchronous online learning beyond its current state without improvements to the accessibility of educational technologies.

Another important consideration in the discussion of educational technologies is the role of artificial intelligence (AI). AI has taken on a considerable role in public and educational discourse since I began working on this project. It is important to note that the online module designed for this study was developed in 2023 when generative AI tools were quite new and less accessible than they are today. AI presents many opportunities for learners in asynchronous online language courses as generative tools can act as a conversation partner or tutor where opportunities for interaction are rather limited. The possibility of integrating AI into task-based modules thus presents an interesting opportunity for future study. In addition to this, AI tools could be used to provide feedback to learners at any time of day which would alleviate some of the challenges associated with instructor feedback discussed in the previous section. However, it is important to consider the hurdles that may stand in the way of implementing AI tools. For example, AI tools would need to be built into the module itself in order for feedback to be provided effectively, which may be associated with challenges of customization or higher costs for additional software plugins. Given the benefits that AI could add to asynchronous learning, further research in this area is worth pursuing.

7.4.6 Learning Materials

Learning materials pose a challenge for asynchronous online language learning for several reasons. First, while promotional materials may suggest otherwise, most commercial language

textbooks are not designed for full integration into online courses. The majority of the learning activities in commercial textbooks are meant to be completed in a classroom: they include partner work and often require the guidance of a teacher in real time. When the activities included in textbook materials are ‘adapted’ for online delivery, we fall back into what Bates (2019) called ‘old wine in new bottles,’ i.e., we do not take the online environment as a starting point and miss out on the potential affordances of online delivery.

Second, the contents of commercially published textbooks are copyrighted and therefore may not be reproduced or distributed, including in non-public online spaces such as learning management systems (LMS). This means that textbook materials cannot be included in the one space that is supposed to be the primary site of learning for online learners. Learners must therefore work with their textbooks solely in book form while working on online materials simultaneously. This is not an economical use of time and materials and likely does not align with learners’ expectations about what learning *online* looks like.

Of course, creating instructor-made materials for online learning is time consuming and requires, as demonstrated in this study, knowledge of learning theory, principles of language learning, and knowledge of online learning more generally. The integration of materials that are freely available online (e.g., vlogs, social media) does take away some of that work, however, supplementary materials may then be needed. Most language instructors are not in a position to create their own online materials from scratch. Thus, there is a need for online learning materials (i.e., textbooks that are made specifically for online learning) which can be easily integrated and/or accessed from the web. In some cases, open education resources may be appropriate, however, these are limited in number and often also meant for classroom delivery.

7.4.7 Learning Theory: Challenging Assumptions

Finally, additional theoretical research on online learning is needed for making advancements in online language education. The learning theories identified in previous research, including constructivism, are based on findings from studies about learning that were conducted in face-to-face situations. Although we may be able to take some of those findings as a starting point as we explore online learning more in-depth, theoretical assumptions about learning need to be challenged and online learning needs to be treated like unknown territory. In-person or synchronous online learning does not exist under the same conditions as asynchronous online learning, and asynchronous online communication operates much differently than synchronous communication does. There is a need for additional research in online language learning which takes online communicative practices as a starting point. Design-based Research studies are an appropriate way to study such scenarios as they result in useable knowledge that helps to advance teaching practices right away.

The findings of this research are useful for both online teaching practice as well as future research. In the context of the local GER 101 Online context, additional iterations of the online module could be carried out, or additional modules in the course could be redeveloped using similar principles. This study has provided a starting point for how online TBLL can be conducted in undergraduate foreign language education. There is a need for more research in online TBLL as well as in other peripheral domains of knowledge, as discussed above.

7.5 Limitations

7.5.1 Accessibility of Technology

A challenge to consider when working with online materials and genres in education is the accessibility of technology to learners. The daily vlog genre is primarily accessed through mobile

devices, especially smartphones, and vlogs are usually shared on social media platforms, accessed through their respective apps (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, YouTube). While the genre may be familiar to learners who have seen them online, the act of creating one may be more challenging for users who are less familiar with digital technologies. This is further complicated by the planned obsolescence of technology; older devices or outdated operating systems may not support certain apps. When implementing a genre-based task in an online language course, it is important to know whether such a task would work with the learners in that course.

The daily vlog task may not work in every language course and there is bound to be variety in students' level of comfort with technology in every class. Some participants in this study reported that the part of the module they struggled with most was the video editing component of the task. Some solutions to potential issues would be to include additional resources with information about how to carry out the task, such as more detail tutorials about how to use common applications; to provide an alternative to the technological task; or choose a simpler genre that does not require the same degree of technical skill to create. This issue further supports the argument that we need better educational technologies which are not bound up in the life cycle of new developments in the technology industry.

7.5.2 Limitations of the Study

Some limitations of the research can be identified. First, the findings of this study are based off the responses and submissions of only four student participants and three interviews. The in-depth analysis of each participant's submissions allowed me to get a rich and deep understanding of each person's experiences working through the online module. Because I gathered data from several sources, this did allow me to get a thorough understanding of each participant's perspective. However, a larger sample size would have yielded additional perspectives and

feedback on the online module. This would have been especially beneficial for the anonymous survey, which would have allowed me to work more with overall perceptions. Due to limitations of time, additional rounds of data collection were not possible for this study.

Another limitation concerns the semi-structured interviews held with three of my participants. Each interview was held shortly after each participant had completed their work in the module and submitted their vlog (in some cases, a few days after; in other cases, a few weeks). I chose to hold the interviews relatively soon after the vlog submission so that the module would still be fresh in participants' minds and to maximize the likelihood of their participation, as waiting longer might have led to reduced engagement or missed follow-ups. Due to the short period of time between the submissions and interviews, I did not have time to conduct a thorough analysis of the submission and vlog data before conducting the interview. I did review each participant's responses and vlog before the interviews took place; however, while conducting the analysis, I did notice some gaps in my understanding of participants' experiences and noticed missed opportunities for additional questions.

Finally, the participants for this study signed up on a voluntary basis. This means that everyone who took part in the study did so willingly and out of an assumed interest in the topic and learning German more generally. Therefore, I do not have access to data from less motivated students or those who may be falling behind or struggling with the materials. This is one of the challenges of conducting educational research and represents a divide between research and practice. However, because the study was otherwise conducted in the learning context (i.e., the participants took part in line with their GER 101 Online course rather than under controlled conditions), we can assume that the findings that I did collect in this data set are true to their experiences and represent an authentic learning situation from which we can learn.

This chapter has discussed the main findings this study. I have identified five design principles for developing asynchronous online TBLL based on the key takeaways from the research. While this study has expanded our knowledge of asynchronous online teaching and learning, the discussion reveals that this educational format continues to pose both theoretical and practical challenges which present opportunities for future investigation.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This study has investigated asynchronous online TBLL by conducting a teaching intervention in which an online learning module was tested in a beginner-level asynchronous online German course. Working with a Design-based Research (DBR) methodology, the module was tested over two iterations with four total participants who completed learning activities and the main daily vlog task. The study brings together principles of TBLL and multiliteracies pedagogy to create a module design that engages participants in the completion of an open-ended task which is relevant and interesting to their lives and related to real-world communicative practices. The findings reveal that engaging learners in the process of design in online TBLL is conducive to learners' abilities to work with the new language and other modes of meaning making. Five design principles which outline how online task-based language learning modules can be designed were identified based on the outcome of the analysis.

In this dissertation, I have highlighted the fact that asynchronous online learning takes place under different conditions and therefore has different needs and affordances when compared to in-person or synchronous online learning. This research allows us to conceptualize a shift away from seeing in-person learning as the default mode of language education and which forms the basis of online approaches. Instead, we can see online learning as a practice in its own right, rather than a deficit version of its in-person counterpart. This study has shown that we can conceive of ways of doing online learning that do not need to incorporate practices that have been adapted from in-person forms of delivery. Work with tasks that align with asynchronous forms of online communication serves as a productive basis for online language learning. The inclusion of a multiliteracies perspective is thus imperative to creating asynchronous online task-based modules.

This research serves as a starting point for future research and teaching practice. It contributes to expanding our understanding of facilitating learning in a context that has, until now, received little attention. There are many opportunities for future research about asynchronous online language learning. For example, there are other types of tasks that could be investigated in online TBLL, opportunities to integrate feedback or other technologies such as artificial intelligence could be found; and the design principles identified in this study could be expanded on or adapted depending on findings in future studies. Potential research avenues are not just limited to online learning; multimodal tasks could also be investigated in other educational formats including in-person classes. In addition to this, the findings from this study may influence future teaching practice as instructors and course designers may draw on these design principles when designing their own online learning modules and courses. Overall, I hope that this study helps stimulate more research in the field of German Studies aimed at exploring new and exciting educational opportunities that have yet to be discovered.

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