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**A diary study of second language learning: participant observation in a residential educational setting**

**A diary study of second language learning:  
participant observation in a residential  
educational setting<sup>1</sup>**

**Jess B. Unger**

This paper is an analysis of an ethnographic examination of a language learning program in Sweden, which took place in a folk high school, a residential educational facility for adults, in the summer of 1983. The methods of investigation included participant observation, with field notes, and a diary component, in which were recorded a broad spectrum of reactions to learning in this particular environment. Affective, physical, linguistic, and pedagogical aspects of communal living and learning are discussed in the analysis, and recommendations for the use of diary studies as research and learning tools are proposed, along with conclusions regarding the effectiveness of residential language programs of this type.

In the summer of 1983, I carried out ethnographic research in second language classrooms in a Swedish folk high school, a residential educational setting for adults. The methods of investigation included participant observation, with field notes, and a diary of the sort described in detail by Bailey (1983)<sup>2</sup>, in which I recorded a broad spectrum of my personal reactions to learning in this particular environment. This paper is an analysis of that research.

The research was performed in an open-ended ethnographic fashion, with few preconceived hypotheses about learning in this context. I recorded in field notes and in the diary reflections on those aspects of the learning situation which seemed to be of particular importance in the daily progress of instruction and interaction, and then examined those notes for recurring patterns of interaction or attitudes. As a result, affective and pedagogical factors figure most prominently in the analysis, although some discussion of language acquisition issues appears as well. Issues of motivation and energy, vulnerability and frustration are discussed. I attempt to draw conclusions in three main

areas: I examine the advantages of language learning in a residential setting such as this one, as well as some of the drawbacks of its communal arrangement; I discuss briefly the value of keeping a learner's diary as a means for the student to gauge his progress and actively manage his own learning; and I suggest conclusions about the function of this type of introspective research in a broader program of classroom-oriented research in second language acquisition. It is hoped that the analysis will prove useful to researchers who employ ethnographic methods in acquisition research, and to teachers of foreign students in similar programs who are interested in the various affective and pedagogical factors which influence their students' learning.

#### Language-learner Background and Learning Goals

I had first studied Swedish as a university student in Sweden during the 1983-84 academic year. The course of study included one semester of intensive language study, at the end of which I had reached an intermediate level of proficiency. I succeeded in developing mainly passive skills in Swedish -- reading and listening comprehension, along with a fairly good grasp of basic grammar. Consequently, when I enrolled in this summer's course, I was primarily hoping to improve my active spoken-language proficiency. The course offered as a regular part of its program a two-week "immersion" period at a folk high school, a residential educational facility in rural central Sweden. This, I thought, would be an excellent place to improve speaking and listening skills. Formal classroom lessons were offered as well, and I hoped to improve my knowledge of grammar and my reading and writing abilities. In general, then, my immediate goal for the summer was to raise my speaking and writing skills to a level which more closely corresponded to their passive counterparts. In the long run I wanted to develop all four skills to the point where I could carry out field research in Swedish schools. This goal would require a very thorough knowledge of sociolinguistic and pragmatic rules and patterns, much more than I currently possessed. My previous instruction had stressed

grammatical correctness, as appropriate to a reading course, but at the expense of pragmatic and sociocultural knowledge.

I had no clear idea of how much progress I could expect over a six-week period. Nor did I have an externally imposed goal, such as a qualifying exam to pass. In retrospect, I recognize that I expected to make considerable progress, since I had always been a successful second language learner, but I had no fixed goals. I considered any possible advancement an open-ended matter.

### Setting

I had enrolled for a six-week course of instruction. The first two weeks were scheduled to take place at an isolated folk high school (FHS) in the farm- and lake-country of central Sweden, and the following four weeks in ordinary classrooms at a Swedish university. This analysis will concentrate on the two weeks of immersion at the FHS, and will consider the subsequent weeks at the university insofar as they reflect trends which began during the FHS period.

"Isedal" Folk High School is a residential school located in rolling farm country about 10 km from the nearest town. Although relatively isolated, by American standards it is lavishly equipped, with several classrooms, an auditorium, student lounges, a store, a library, dining hall, chapel, gymnasium, an outdoor track and playing fields, and a fully-outfitted wood shop, pottery studio, and a small audio-visual facility.

Living conditions are every bit as well-appointed as the teaching facilities. Most students have private bedrooms in cottages which they share with seven other people (the cottages, not the bedrooms). Each cottage is grouped with four others around a small square, with benches and tables in each square -- a favorite place for afternoon study or tea-time conversation.

Students were placed in houses according to age, in an effort to form more compatible housing groups. This meant, however, that people of widely differing proficiency in Swedish lived together. Lastly, about fifteen of us, including the two

married couples in the group, were placed together in a large overflow dormitory somewhat removed from the main campus. We lived there with the language teachers and administrators and their children, in accommodations similar to those of the other students.

### The Student Body

Of the seventy-five students in the immersion course at Isedal, the largest group were from the USA -- about thirty. Most were college students or in their early to mid-twenties. All but six or seven were beginners in Swedish.

The next largest contingent came from Finland. The Finns tended to be older, white-collar employees or students in professional school who needed to pass advanced qualifying exams in that bilingual country. They were without exception advanced students who had studied Swedish for several years in comprehensive school in Finland.

The remainder of the students came from Europe, for the most part, with a few from Asia and Latin America as well. A significant exception were a number of refugees who had received Swedish resident status, and were enrolled in the program in order to prepare for further vocational or university education in Sweden.

The students can be divided into two groups according to their reasons for being in the program. On the one hand were those who were in Sweden on vacation and wanted to get a taste of the Swedish language and culture, and perhaps visit Swedish cousins and do some sight-seeing. This group included most of the American students. The program accommodated these students, who provided much of the financial support for the program, by arranging weekend tours around central Sweden. Afternoon courses in traditional Swedish handicrafts, and a survey course taught in English which examined Swedish social institutions were also designed with this group in mind. On the other hand there were those who needed to improve their Swedish for professional or educational reasons, and who tended to focus on their language studies to the exclusion of the non-Swedish instruction.

## Methods and Focus of Study

This study began as a full ethnographic examination of an "immersion" program in a residential school setting. I had intended to do participant observation as a student, recording observations in field notes and in a learner's diary. I had planned to triangulate hypotheses generated by my observations by means of interviews with other students and by examination of audiotapes made during lessons.

However, as the learner's diary shows, limitations on my time and energy became a serious obstacle to research, and I was forced to decide whether I wanted to take the time to do a full triangulation of my observations and fall behind in class, thus losing my status as a full participant. Limiting my objectives somewhat, I produced a diary study according to the procedure outlined by Bailey (Bailey, 1983, pp. 72-73). I recorded observations during lessons in the form of field notes which dealt with the structure and conduct of the lesson, my immediate reactions to various aspects of the lessons, and observations about other students' behavior. In addition, I kept a personal learner's diary in which I recorded general observations about the program as a whole, as well as my personal thoughts and self-evaluations. I periodically reread both the field notes and the diary, and made glosses in the margins, commenting in retrospect on my earlier observations and making revisions and addenda. The method employed was therefore both "introspective" and "retrospective" (Cohen and Hosenfeld, 1981; Radford 1974). "Introspective" observations in this study include those made within a few seconds of the time of occurrence, and for the most part they concern my own affective reactions and attitudes to classroom situations, as well as questions about the behavior of the teacher and the other students. "Retrospective" observations include all observations recorded any time up to a week after an occurrence. They represent extended or summative considerations of classroom events or reconsiderations of those events in the light of subsequent occurrences. It is my intention that introspective and retrospective methods together will present a fuller picture of the learner's state of mind, since both immediate reactions *and* the way the learner rationalizes and explains these reactions to himself are important to the language learning

process. For example, a learner's reaction to "failure" during a lesson is immediate and unpremeditated but the way he subsequently explains the reasons for this failure to himself are important insofar as they play a role in determining his subsequent learning strategies.

This study focuses primarily on my *attitudes* as a learner, and on the factors which I thought affected those attitudes most significantly. I began this study in ethnographic fashion, without predetermined hypotheses. I was looking for patterns to appear in the notes I was keeping and then examining those patterns more closely, intending to test informally some of the hypotheses suggested by the patterns. As noted previously, time did not allow for full triangulation but I was able to carry out some interviews. Because I had difficulties securing permission to audiotape enough classes to form a useful sample, I decided to limit triangulation to conducting informal interviews. These interviews with other students suggested that many of the attitudes and reactions which appeared in my journal were shared by other learners in the program, and lent support to some of my initial hypotheses.

Lastly, I should point out that although I use the word "introspective" to describe some of the data used in this analysis, I do not mean to give the impression that I was able to carry out an introspective study of language acquisition *processes* of the type described by Cohen and Hosenfeld in their methodology (Cohen and Hosenfeld, 1981). Their method requires experimentation, in a more controlled fashion, in which class is suddenly halted during a particular activity and the students are asked to write down exactly what they were doing or thinking in the course of the activity. The sort of observation I made, while still of an introspective type, are more appropriate for *generating* hypotheses than for testing them. The Conclusions Section explains this point further.

#### Analysis of Diary and Field Notes

The most salient trend which emerges from my diary and field notes is an over-all pattern which (unfortunately) maps a curve of alienation and withdrawal over the course



of the first three weeks of class. This problem was resolved in the fourth week of study; its resolution will be described below. In this section I will describe the prominent aspects of this growing alienation. I was aware of some of these aspects while they were developing; I only became aware of others when I examined the diary and field notes. In references, I shall refer to the diary as LD and to the field notes as FN.

In this analysis I have divided these aspects of alienation into the following categories:

1. tiredness
2. vulnerability
3. frustration
4. disagreements over teaching methods
5. changes in motivation

In the rest of this section I will address these aspects in the order listed. Unless specifically indicated, this arrangement is not meant to imply either a chronological or a causal ordering. Of course this analysis is only one of several that could be made of the data. For example, nowhere in the diary do I use the words "vulnerability" or "disagreement with teaching methods"; these are analytical categories that I have devised to explain patterns in the diary and field notes.

### Tiredness

"Tiredness", on the contrary, represents no analytical category, but rather is mentioned frequently and from the very first. Normally, tiredness is taken for granted in adult learning situations, but in this particular combination of intensive instruction, communal living, and immersion in a foreign culture, it appears to be particularly significant.

Many students arrived with a jet lag from which they had no opportunity to recover, given the brisk pace of activities in the program's first week. Although I had a chance to rest before classes began, I too felt the course was moving too quickly, and just wanted to rest. Even before classes began, I found the strain of trying to function in a foreign culture very taxing, even in this culture which I knew fairly well. On my second day in Sweden I recorded the following: "Today ventured out to take care of business. Five-

six interactions in Swedish and I'm exhausted "(LD: 4). By the second day of classes I was making comments such as:

I'm becoming very, very tired -- can't sustain conversation, even in my own language, all day long, which is a possibility in this communal living situation. I find myself wanting to withdraw and rest. Can't wait until Friday (LD: 11).

In large measure this exhaustion was a result of the communal residential situation and therefore is noteworthy when considering the pros and cons of residential adult education. Tiredness was commented on by almost all the students and affected their behavior in class, as evidenced by lateness and lack of participation. Students' health was affected as well; by the end of the second week, fully one third of all the students had missed at least one day of class, mostly due to head colds.

#### Vulnerability

The category that I have labelled "vulnerability" represents a set of apprehensions about and sensitivities toward the classroom situation that are indirectly expressed in the diary and notes. It represents a feeling of uncertainty which seems to come through the various complaints and criticisms recorded in my notes.

These feelings of vulnerability were expressed in several ways. First of all, I felt that we were being "overtested" during the first days of class:

Essentially the first three days were constant evaluation of the student -- and re-evaluation: written, formal grammar, decontextualized grammatical exercises, free written discourse and extemporaneous speech before the whole class, which blew everyone away. [Most of us] felt greatly pressured when forced to speak before the class [on the first day]. [The teacher] may use this to plan the course ... but it damaged many a confidence among the students. Sick of being tested! (FN 16-6).

During these two days we did not yet know which level we had been placed in; for some of us, particularly those who wished to enter a Swedish university in the fall and who needed therefore to receive as high a placement as possible in this summer program, this was a very uncertain period. Some merely worried while others lied about their placement, claiming to have turned down an offer of placement in a more advanced class. Although I

did not feel that there was much competition among the students of the sort that Bailey discusses, I did feel that "face" was an important factor at stake:

... maybe my sensitivity ... is indicative of the vulnerability I feel these first two days of testing and adjustment. What does this vulnerability spring from? I think there is a potential loss of face involved (for all of us) in applying for Level III and then being "sent down" to Level II, even though you tell yourself it would be for the best, to take instruction at [the] appropriate level ... (FN 16-6).

My desire to preserve face came out in other ways as well, among them a fear of appearing unprepared for class. Curiously enough, nowhere in my notes is there the sort of apprehension about making mistakes in class that appears in the diaries Bailey examined. Perhaps I had finally accepted the idea that errors are inevitable in language learning. On the other hand, this fear of being unprepared may be an expression of competition with myself -- my ideal learner self, which Bailey discusses.

The real reason, I tell myself, is that I can't abide the thought of coming to class unprepared. I don't think I echo Bailey's feelings of competitiveness; I would rather avoid the shame of being [shown] to the rest of the class as unprepared (LD: 12-13).

Lastly, I was feeling vulnerable and apprehensive about the teacher, and this may explain further why I didn't wish to come to class unprepared. To begin with, during an oral exam, the teacher had referred to my performance on the grammar test as *inte helt briljant* -- "not exactly brilliant"-- which was true enough but a rather gratuitous comment, I thought, to throw out in an oral exam. I became apprehensive about the teacher's use of sarcasm in the classroom, which most of us in the class felt was entirely inappropriate: "Who needs strict rule-following behavior in adult classrooms? Swedish sarcasm and superciliousness in areas where they cannot be challenged [was] pretty tiresome the first time I encountered it" (LD: 10).

In retrospect I think I was too sensitive to this evident sarcasm but this sensitivity may be evidence of our general feelings of insecurity and vulnerability during the first few days of class, before the comfortable structures of class routine had been erected and before we had received our permanent placements. Of course such feelings were only increased by the prevailing exhaustion among the students.

## Frustration

Another emotion which was expressed very frequently in the diary and field notes was a feeling of frustration. Frustration is undoubtedly common to all second language learners at many times in the learning period. I very frequently felt frustration at the sheer difficulty of speaking: "Many days it is difficult to carry along a conversation in Swedish. I try, and listeners are patient, usually ... but sometimes speech seems just too difficult and I just want to be left alone" (LD: 23).

Often in the classroom situation I became very frustrated at not being able to explain even the simplest abstract concept in Swedish. I felt put back to a child-like position of not being able to explain my own reasons for action or my own opinions. Terence Moore, in one of the diaries Bailey reviews, also notes the similarity of a language learner, "a person confined to a restricted code," to "a child in a class where the work is too difficult for him" (Bailey, 1983: 79).

Another source of frustration lay in the classroom discourse itself, having to do with strategic competence appropriate to the classroom. In the years since my previous Swedish course, I had forgotten all clear and effective ways of asking questions about language during class. I knew how to ask ordinary questions on the street such as "what time is it?" or "from where does the Kronåsen bus leave?" but I had forgotten any appropriate means of getting the floor in a classroom or phrasing a question about a relative clause or proper word order. In part this was because I lacked the vocabulary of grammar, that is, the Swedish terms for syntactic structures and processes. In addition I wasn't fluent enough to build the complex sentences necessary to ask questions about grammar. It is worth noting that these are specialized language and discourse skills, usually employed only in the classroom, and of limited application for practical purposes outside of class. Therefore they tend to receive less reinforcement during everyday interactions with native speakers. It is not surprising that they are soon forgotten. For the first week of class, then, I could only get an answer to a question about grammar by modeling a suspect form or pair of forms for the teacher and hoping she recognized which

part of the form was causing problems. For example I might ask something along the lines of *Kan man siga "han inte jobbar har?"* (Can one say 'he not work here?'), an example of incorrect word order, and then ask "Why not?"

I couldn't yet ask the sorts of detailed questions that I thought were necessary to discover how the syntactic system functioned:

--difficulties (posing) questions ... in order to go deeper into grammatical or semantic problems. Harder to ask questions at more advanced level, or questions (have) become more complicated. Find myself relying on (another student's) questions to explicate what I am wondering about. (FN 19-6)

Essentially, then, I acquired a level of strategic competence equal to the demands of the classroom by listening to the ways other students asked questions, and noting the interrogative structures they used. I also spent a lot of time looking up grammatical terms and learning them to build a vocabulary which would enable me to ask specific grammatical questions. This was a slow and time-consuming process, and in the field journal numerous notes like this one appear: "NEED: to list question forms common in class."

A last major source of frustration that I have been able to identify in the notes has to do with an inability to find a learning style appropriate to this level of instruction. This particular frustration led fairly soon to disagreement and irritation with the teaching methods employed in the class.

After the first day of class the teacher began relying heavily on a grammar-based structure-by-structure approach designed to cover the common gaps in our knowledge, as revealed by the diagnostic tests. In practice this meant that between three and four hours of workbook exercises were assigned each night, covering areas such as relative clause structure, proper use of prepositions, irregular verb paradigms and passive constructions along with short "canned" reading assignments from a book of specially written intermediate level texts. Class consisted of checking the homework, item by item, for three hours every morning, plus time for questions and review of unfamiliar vocabulary from the reading. Very little "real" communicative speech was used in the classroom, and no

"real" texts. Vocabulary learned from the homework was rarely integrated into the day's lesson; items were "learned" once and never used again.

Not surprisingly, this regimen soon produced grumbles from the students. But when even the highest-status student in the class, a German who had been with the program for three consecutive summers and now worked part-time in the program's administration, protested against the dull routine, he was shrugged off with a joke:

Student: "Det finns jag inte så spännande." (I don't find [these workbook exercises] too exciting.)

Teacher: "Vilket krav du har för livet!" (loosely: What demands you make on life! What a lust for life you have!) (FN 20-6).

As class continued in this fashion, I began to wonder about exactly what I was supposed to be learning. I felt I was indeed learning grammar--but I could stay home and take a correspondence course to do that. I had come to Sweden to acquire greater spoken proficiency, not only to learn grammar rules. Only residence in a Swedish-speaking environment -- in Sweden -- would provide the level of input needed to improve fluency, and I felt we weren't getting that level of input in class. Talks with other students revealed similar frustrations on their part. Several of us began submitting essays, unassigned, to be corrected, hoping to improve at least our productive written skills. But this was difficult to sustain, given the tedious regular assignments and the pace of afternoon activities.

In particular, I began to bridle at what I considered to be "make-work." I began to think that no amount of filling in blanks in the workbook would make me a more proficient speaker if I never had the opportunity to speak and listen in conversation.

I'm particularly frustrated at the amount of workbook exercises we are assigned... The Swedish "hurry up and wait" pace affords little enough time (as it is) to chat or recollect one's thoughts. I particularly resent having to sit in my room and fill in "busy-work" exercises rather than chatting in Swedish or watching Swedish-language TV [in the common room]. (LD: 13-14).

By the second week I was no longer completing the workbook assignments in a serious fashion; my goal each night was to get through the exercises as quickly as possible and get on to what I thought would be "more productive" activities using Swedish. My

disagreements with the teacher were not confined to the homework, however. By the first week's end, several of us were expressing discontent with the classroom methods too. "Beginnings of complaints about the way Swedish III is being conducted, echoing my own sentiments ... [One student] said that he thought the teacher wasn't doing anything, just collecting a paycheck" (LD: 18).

I suggested to my classmates one day that we students take the first steps to improve instruction without directly confronting the teacher (a characteristically Swedish approach). As mentioned, we began submitting essays, unassigned, for her correction, and we considered proposing that we volunteer individual oral presentations, which could serve as a springboard for discussions that would involve the whole class. The former strategy worked well as long as we had the energy to write extra essays; we never got around to attempting the latter.

By the start of the second week of class I found myself beginning to withdraw, at least psychologically, from active participation in class. In much the same way that John Schumann found himself withdrawing because of his teacher's strict audiolingual approach, I found that I was less able to concentrate, and unwilling to commit much effort to the type of work expected of us in class. Like Schumann, during the second week I kept trying to find ways to get around the limitations of our teacher's approach, while putting less and less effort into the assigned exercises:

I'm trying to find a justification for all the evenings spent doing workbook exercises. But I can find NO justification for going over every item in class ... Can't a key be posted and a shorter time allotted for questions? Let us take responsibility for our learning.

Another complaint. Surely an intermediate class can handle realia -- so sick of canned textbook readings "coordinated" with a workbook.

I'm convinced that [the teacher] is just coasting with all this workbook checking during class time. Significant communicative activities could be devised -- it would just take a little work. I guess the students will have to go that extra mile ... (LD: 14-15).

However, by the middle of the second week, my extreme tiredness put an end to individual efforts to improve instruction and input. My *motivation* to work at Swedish had

begun to change toward the end of the second week. These changes in motivation are the subject of the next section of the analysis.

#### Changes in Motivation: Withdrawal

My original motivations for studying Swedish in this program are described more fully above, in the section on learner background and learning goals. By the end of the second week these original motivations had already begun to shift along several lines. I should note that for the most part, this analysis of changes in motivation is retrospective; I outlined these changes as an interim analysis during the fourth week of class.

As I said before, my main *long-range goal* was to develop Swedish as a second language for research purposes. However, during this period I was rediscovering the difficulties of mastering a second language. I had not studied a foreign language at an advanced level since freshman year of college, and I had forgotten how difficult it could be to try to attain a high level of fluency. I had mastered enough of the basics of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, such that the complexities of prosody, sociolinguistic appropriateness, pragmatics, and style began to take on greater significance. I felt that I was indeed making progress in these areas, but that the investment of time and money necessary to reach a level of proficiency that would allow me to carry out field research there would be prohibitively great, and the rewards of that research disappointingly small.

Therefore, sometime in the third week of the summer program I redefined my learning goals; I would continue to work on speaking and writing skills, but would shift priority back to the passive skills of reading, listening comprehension, and vocabulary expansion. I decided that these skills would be of greater use to me in the immediate future; they would allow me to keep abreast of research in Sweden and Norway, and they would equip me to continue learning Swedish at home, should I decide in the future that higher proficiency was desirable. (see FN 20-6).

One experience in particular confirmed my decision. Frustrated by the lack of varied input in the classroom, I began looking for a Swedish study circle or discussion



group to join. I visited an Amnesty International group which had just been formed by students at the law school. The first meeting was wonderful: they spoke Swedish, my wife and I spoke English, and we all seemed to understand each other throughout a fairly complicated discussion of international law. This convinced me that I could manage any future study visits to Sweden with my current level of oral proficiency, and that the most profitable areas to improve were my listening and reading skills. I decided that every Swedish university student or professor had a ten-year "head start" when it came to foreign language learning, and that any discussions I might have with them would inevitably take place in English. (That is not uniformly true of lower-school personnel, however.) Improved listening skills, on the other hand, would allow me to attend Swedish-only lectures and monitor news broadcasts, which would keep me abreast of the broader educational and immigrant issues. Improved reading skills were obviously important as well. This, then, was the substance of the change in my long-range language learning goals.

My short-term language needs had undergone a change as well. I arrived at Isedal Folk High School wondering if I would be able to manage all the activities exclusively in Swedish. Would I be able to make friends in this foreign language that I used with such difficulty? Would I manage to communicate with the FHS staff and the handcrafts instructors? Those few interactions in Swedish the day after my arrival had been so tiring -- would I have the energy to manage 24 hours a day in Swedish?

Surprisingly, the answer to all of these speculations turned out to be yes. Within three days or so I was having relatively little trouble expressing anything I wanted to say -- outside of the classroom, that is. I don't claim it was grammatically or stylistically correct and appropriate Swedish, but I *did* make myself understood. (There were humorous exceptions. One day at lunch I tried to tell my Finnish friend that I didn't really understand how the international money market functioned. He started to explain to me how to change money at the bank, thinking I meant I didn't know how to convert currency.)

By and large, though, I was communicating very successfully in my learner's Swedish. In effect, I had very quickly reached a comfortable plateau of proficiency. I had satisfied my need for integration into the speech community; I could chat with friends, tell jokes during coffee breaks, ride the bus, and ask the cook about supper. For a while I felt no impetus to improve -- I occupied a perfectly tolerable position among other second language learners who comprised the speech community at Isedal.

I find my motivations to speak Swedish shifting rapidly from what they were during the first week. Perhaps I have hit my particular level of integration and accommodation, and wish to go no further? The first week I had little idea of what would be required of me in the way of proficiency, and I was eager to raise the level of fluency in order to account for any contingency. Now I see what is required for mealtime conversation, for administrative business, and for other extra-curricular matters, and I am no longer anxious to engage in conversation at every chance, to meet people and get to know them. Six hours of interaction per day in Swedish is plenty for me, and I am glad to go off and write up field notes by myself. (FN 20-6).

In this last quote we see the combined effects of accommodation and chronic tiredness. Once a comfortable position in the community had been reached, the ever-present feeling of exhaustion prevented me from pushing myself beyond that level of "equilibrium."

I think there is a relatively low threshold of accommodation or integration in a temporary group such as this, and I have reached it. I want to achieve a particular modus vivendi within the group which is not too hard to maintain -- and I have met it. Consequently I am already experiencing decreased motivation to improve my spoken Swedish. (FN 20-6)

In retrospect, I think that what I needed at that point was a little external motivation in the form of classroom exercises which stressed the spoken language to counteract the effects of integration and tiredness. Unfortunately those types of exercises were not part of classroom instruction at that point. Maybe I needed a good dose of Bailey's competitiveness, too.

It is interesting to look at the classroom as a different sort of speech community, located within the temporary community of the FHS. One spent four hours every morning in class, speaking according to rules laid down and monitored by the teacher, who was empowered to interrupt at any point to correct a speaker and who organized and guided

every speech activity. The most common pattern of speech activity in the classroom followed the traditional initiation-response-evaluation model. The most common type of initiation was a known-information question. At one point I noted the artificiality of the situation:

Class continues as "normal" -- most of class time is spent going over pages of workbook exercises which had been assigned as homework. Any discussion of language, or anything else for that matter, is relegated to the "interstices" of the lesson -- [in] questions raised by the students themselves, for example. (LD 19-6)

By contrast with the classroom hours, the rest of the day was filled with meaningful conversation in a fairly broad range of situations. Generally, conversations adhered to "normal" rules of politeness (with some cross-cultural difficulties, of course). In contrast with the classroom, deliberate interruptions were few, and the *content* of one's speech was far more important than its *form*. Since everyone was a learner, it was expected that one's speech would be imperfect.

Consequently I began to wonder about the quality of the linguistic input I was receiving. The only significant native speaker model we had was the teacher, but we had access to this model only in a highly "artificial" speech situation, i.e., the language classroom. On the other hand, in the larger school community, where more ordinary speech situations existed between speakers who were social equals, the speech model was that of non-native learner language. Precisely what was lacking in this learning community was immersion in a variety of native Swedish-language speech situations. The classroom was entirely segregated from the other activities of the school.

I do not mean to give the impression that I was not learning anything during this period. In class I seemed to be improving my knowledge of grammar, and in conversations outside of class I was improving spoken fluency and listening skills. However, there seemed to be no way to acquire the pragmatic and stylistic skills which only residence in a second-language community can provide. I began to withdraw more and more from the classroom, since it failed to give instruction in those skills which I had come to Sweden to acquire.

In short, then, this withdrawal was the result of a combination of three factors: (a) a change in motivation due to altered long-range goals for learning Swedish; (b) an early accommodation to the linguistic demands of the community of non-native speakers at the FHS, i.e., an easy integration into that community; and (c) frustration with a classroom approach which failed to teach the complex communicative skills that I wanted to learn.

My withdrawal from class was only a mild sort of rebellion. I began skipping large portions of assignments which I felt had no value for language acquisition. I began to avoid non-mandatory program activities as I tried to find other contacts with native speakers. It was primarily a psychological withdrawal; I ceased to take the class seriously. I continued my daily participation and observation, but I didn't believe it would help my language acquisition.

This withdrawal period lasted about a week. I finally decided that I should take the course more seriously after all, since I was learning Swedish grammar steadily. Even with my altered long-range goals, a thorough knowledge of grammar was still essential, and that was the only thing which the course had to offer. I purchased a good descriptive grammar of the language, and began studying Swedish syntax in the same fashion I studied English syntax in college, as an artifact or system somewhat divorced from the reality of language use, but useful in a heuristic sense.

### Conclusions

This diary study describes a "curve of involvement" which moves from an early period of high motivation, high involvement and consequently high vulnerability, to a middle period of rapid accommodation with the learner community simultaneous with an increasing frustration over teaching methods. Later, a change in both long-term and short-term motivations led to a psychological withdrawal from the course. Finally, a new set of motivations were created which allowed for reintegration into the program. What conclusions, then, can be drawn from the information in this study? In this final section I will discuss conclusions and recommendations in these areas:

1. residential education as a context for language learning;
2. the diary as a learning tool;
3. diary study as a research tool.

#### Residential Education as a Context for Language Learning

As the diary demonstrates over and over, the effects of chronic exhaustion in this type of program should not be underestimated. The experience of immersion in a second language environment produced a constant tiredness which in turn exacerbated many of the other problems of frustration and disagreement with classroom methods. In addition, the circumstances of communal living at the FHS often meant that for many people it was difficult to get enough rest at night, so that the tiredness accumulated and eventually many students became sick.

A second shortcoming of this sort of isolated residential program concerned the quality of input the students were exposed to. Since there were so few Swedes at Isedal, almost all the speech we heard was that of other learners. This was a crucial factor in the acquisition of certain aspects of Swedish. Take for example the acquisition of *ordmelodin* or prosody. In Swedish, prosody has a phonemic significance beyond that of many other European languages, and can only be acquired by listening to native speakers, i.e., through meaningful input. The most proficient speakers of Swedish among the students at Isedal were the Finns but as sources of input for the acquisition of prosody they were useless since their speech, although fluent, was even more monotonal than the other Europeans. Therefore proper input in at least one very important area was almost completely lacking.

On the other hand, there were many positive aspects to the FHS setting as well. We ~~were~~ generally forced to speak Swedish all day long, after all. However, the organizers of the program missed an interesting opportunity by not insisting that instruction in the afternoon crafts class be carried out in Swedish. Because beginners were mixed together with more advanced students in these classes, the teachers felt forced to teach in English.

Of course, not everyone was fluent in English, either, but they managed as well or better than the rest. I am convinced that the combination of spoken explanation, visual diagrams, and physical demonstration of the crafts techniques would have created a very effective contextualized language lesson for all levels. The more advanced students could have interpreted for the beginners when absolutely necessary, which would have been a good exercise as well. But this scenario, I think, offended Swedish sensibilities of orderliness and efficiency, and so was never seriously attempted. I was disappointed, as I had expected handicraft instruction in Swedish, and was looking forward to a combination of visual learning and directly contextualized speech. Therefore, I would recommend that any language learning program which has access to facilities for instruction in manual crafts or skills make use of them as an opportunity for extended and very natural language lessons.

Lastly, it should also be mentioned that the beautiful setting of the school and the many opportunities for recreation did much to counteract fatigue and created a pleasant atmosphere for study as well as varied contexts for speech which cannot be provided in a classroom setting alone.

#### Diary Techniques as a Learning Tool

Using the field notes that I had taken down in class, I was able to learn more about my learning style and preferences. This made me a better student in that it helped me recognize problematical situations in my learning and take steps to change or improve the situation. For example, by reviewing my notes on word melody, I was able to identify the gaps in teaching about prosody and take steps to get better input outside of class.

The learner's diary played a similar role in allowing me to reflect productively on my attitudes and motivations. By reflecting on my shifting long- and short-term motivations, I was able to recognize the best way to participate in the program to suit my changing needs and goals. Eventually I was able to shape a new synthesis of short- and long-term goals which allowed me to take advantage of instruction, when I might

otherwise have withdrawn further. Therefore I recommend keeping a learner's diary as a useful adjunct to any language learning situation.

#### Diary study as a research tool

I began this diary study as an ethnographic endeavor, describing first my previous experiences learning Swedish and my goals and expectations for this summer's course. I also described the nature of the course and its setting at the FHS, as well as some general characteristics of the students. In the course of keeping the diary and the classroom notes I was determined simply to report my thoughts, feelings, and experiences as soon as possible after their occurrence. I assumed that if I mentioned a feeling *frequently*, then perhaps that feeling was an important part of my experience as a learner. In a sense, then, *quantity* -- the number of times a thing is mentioned, or the amount of space devoted to discussing it in the diary -- became the main criterion for analyzing the diary and field notes. As a result, phenomena of different types and from different domains appear to be equally significant in the analysis. Broad emotional states such as frustration and vulnerability are discussed as well as external factors affecting motivation. Such mundane problems as simple tiredness and very specific issues such as the teacher's ways of correcting students while they are trying to speak in class were also noted. The method used in this study seems like trolling with a fine-mesh net; you cast a wide sweep, and come up with lots of everything -- a few whales, lots of shrimp, and some flotsam and jetsam as well.

I think this was a good method to use, especially as a first attempt at introspective research. I now have a better understanding of my own learning style, as well as some of the common difficulties faced by language students in foreign countries. This can only make me a more insightful and sympathetic teacher in the future.

I was interested in my participation in the program as a whole, not just in the classroom; therefore the broad focus was appropriate. It allowed me to see the mismatch between the classroom "community" and the broader speech community of language

learners at the FHS. However, I am sure that I missed much of what was significant in the classroom precisely because my focus was not discriminating enough.

Consequently I tend to agree with Bailey that the findings of a diary study are *significant* but not *generalizable*. For example, the discussion of motivation and affective factors, which takes up so much space in both the diary and the fieldnotes, was extremely important to me, and greatly affected my achievement in the course. But the factors affecting my motivations were unique to my immediate situation that summer, and cannot easily be extended to other learners in other programs.

Obviously a course as short as this summer's could only allow time for a preliminary study. As a preliminary overview of the language learning situation in an FHS environment, this diary study was an excellent way to *orient* myself as a researcher. Were I to continue research, for example, in immigrant education programs in Sweden, many of which take place in folk high schools, I could use this study to generate issues on which to focus more closely. In a subsequent study, I might profitably take up the issue of the mismatch between classroom speech and speech outside of class among the learners in a residential program. Audiotapes could be made in class and in non-class settings, such as at the cafeteria and in student lounges. The recorded speech could be analyzed for target models, and for the amount and native-like quality of student speech in the different domains. Such a study would probably proceed best as participant observation, but more narrowly focused than the preliminary study.

In sum, I suggest that broad-focus diary studies such as this one can contribute the most to second language learning research if they are used as preliminary investigations to generate hypotheses for further inspection. This subsequent investigation may be experimental or observational or a mixture of both, depending on the circumstances and the hypotheses to be tested. In this way diary research will be



contributing toward building *grounded* theory in SLA, since the hypotheses being tested are based on the actual previous experience of at least one learner.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was written for Dr. Teresa Pica's course on Classroom Discourse and Interaction in Fall 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Bailey reviewed the published literature of researchers who used diary studies as a method of participant observation and enumerated the common elements of methodology which the diarists employed. These included:

1. The diarist/learner/researcher systematically records events, details, and feelings about the current language-learning experience in a confidential and candid diary.

2. The researcher studies the journal entries as data, looking for significant trends.

3. The factors identified as important to the language-learning experience are discussed, either with or without illustrative data (Bailey, 1983: 72-73).

She also discovered strong common themes in the diary studies she reviewed and in her own classroom experience. These included overt comparison with the other students, competitiveness, and feelings of anxiety and inferiority.

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