



REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

# Language Learning with Netflix: from Extensive to Intra-formal Learning

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Abstract

This article introduces the concept of intra-formal learning. Building on approaches to extended learning (in reading, listening and viewing) it suggests that instead of extending learning from formal into personal learning spaces, learners should be encouraged to draw on informal learning experiences to extend learning opportunities in formal settings. The concept is illustrated through extended viewing. With the emergence of Netflix as a global provider of international and multi-lingual TV, language learners have unprecedented access to second language video. Mainstream media has picked up on the opportunities of this resource for language learning, as have many informal language learners who share their experiences on social media. The pilot study presented in this article examines the viewing behaviour of 12 intermediate German language students who engaged in out-of-class viewing of self-selected German TV series over a period of three weeks. Drawing parallels between principles of extensive learning and emerging **patterns from the data analysis of the participants' reflective blog entries, the findings** suggest that the principles of variety and frequency apply similarly to extensive and intra-formal learning, and that appropriate use of learning strategies develop through reflective viewing.

Keywords

Extensive learning, Netflix, German, Intra-formal language learning

## 1. Introduction

The popular global video streaming service Netflix is heralded in the media as a transformative tool for language learning (Tapper, 2019). Available in 190 countries, Netflix enables language learners around the world to watch a wide range of international movies and TV-series. Subtitle options make these videos accessible to language learners **at all levels, providing both entertainment and exposure to the learners' second languages** (L2). The development of a number of online resources to support language study with Netflix - **such as Lindsay Dow's "Ultimate Guide to Netflix for Language Learning" (2018) or the Chrome extension "Language Learning with Netflix", adding additional language features** - indicate that language learners are not only using the video streaming service for entertainment but that they are also looking into ways of optimising their viewing experience. As informal language learners engage with a sense of agency in language learning practices and discover the joys of entertainment-based language learning, it is time to propose formal learning models that incorporate learner initiatives. This article investigates the potential of Netflix (and similar video streaming services) for self-directed language learning within a formal educational context.

## 2. From extensive to intra-formal language learning

The terminology of *extensive* as opposed to *intensive* learning has its roots in the second language (L2) reading literature. Whereas intensive reading refers to the detailed study of a given text, extensive reading (ER) requires learners to engage with larger volumes of text either in dedicated school time, or in personal out-of-school settings. As digital resources of different modalities have become more readily available, the approach extended to L2 listening (EL) and to L2 viewing (EV). The personal access to resources in foreign languages in the formal educational context has over time transformed the conditions for learning, calling for a stronger focus on learner led L2 initiatives. As opposed to extensive approaches to learning, which extend formal learning into personal learning **spaces, it is now conceivable that formal learning environments draw on students' personal and informal learning experiences.** The term I propose for such an approach, which transforms formal learning by validating informal learning experiences, is intra-formal learning.

To determine the principles informing an intra-formal approach to language learning, the following section provides an overview of established principles of ER, EL and EV, and of the current conditions of informal viewing.

### 2.1. Extensive reading

The aim of extensive reading (ER) is to develop the learner's reading skills as they read for pleasure. The first of Day and Bamford's (2002) 10 principles for successful ER stipulates that reading materials should be easy. The authors recommend the use of **graded texts, adapted to the learners' language level that allow them to read within their comfort zone. To entice learners to read "as much as possible" (p. 138),** they should be able to choose from a wide variety of texts. Ideally, they should be able to read what **"they like reading in their own language"** (Williams, 1986, p. 42). Referring to Nuttall (1996), Day and Bamford recommend that the reading speed should rather be faster than slower, as "speed, enjoyment and comprehension are closely linked with one another" (p. 128). Learners are discouraged from using dictionaries and are encouraged to develop **reading strategies as they read for pleasure by "guessing at or ignoring unknown words or passages, going for the general meaning, and being comfortable with a certain level of ambiguity" (Day & Bamford, 2002, p. 139).**

### 2.2. Extensive listening

The availability of L2 audio resources through the Internet have made extensive listening (EL) a realistic alternative or addition to ER (Alm, 2013). The conditions for successful listening, however, differ fundamentally from reading. Nuttall's (1996) recommendation

to “read fast” is not transferrable to extensive listening. Firstly, because it is physically not possible, but also because fast speech is one of the main comprehension issues L2 listeners face (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). The focus of Vandergrift and Goh’s (2012) metacognitive approach to EL is therefore the development of L2 learners’ listening strategies. Conceptually similar to ER, EL requires learners to be able to access a variety of listening resources and to listen frequently. However, it is only through repeated listening that learners “become familiar with the content, vocabulary, and the structure of the spoken text” (p. 201). Highlighting the cognitive benefit of listening to a text repeatedly, the authors argue that each repetition allows learners to verify the received information and to focus on new information. The criteria of variety and frequency also have a stronger strategic focus. Variety entails that learners should listen to “as many different types of authentic texts as possible, on a wide variety of themes and topics” (Vandergrift & Goh 2012, p. 200). Hence, variety does not just provide choice for the learners, it should mainly expose them to the linguistic differences of formal and informal language, supporting structural and lexical development. Vandergrift and Goh also recommend listening to texts of varying levels of difficulty, easier ones to build confidence, and more challenging text to support the development of listening strategies. Their principle of frequency embraces regularity: learners should not just listen “as much as possible”, but also “follow a planned daily or weekly routine of sustained listening for a defined time, between five minutes to an hour” (p. 201). Vandergrift and Goh’s strategic approach to L2 listening has been applied to EV as it not only shares the auditory channel but also trains learners to use visual clues to infer meaning (Alm, 2013). The increasing availability of L2 viewing resources, however, has created a new context for EV, covered in the next section.

### 2.3.1. Extensive Viewing

Online streaming video services such as Netflix have made the frequent watching of a variety of programmes a realistic option for foreign language learners. Webb’s (2015) approach to extensive viewing encourages learners indeed primarily to “watch L2 television as much as possible” (p. 164). Just as ER, EV engages learners at an affective level as they are encouraged to watch for pleasure. As opposed to reading, however, which is universally recognised as an educational pastime, watching television is strongly associated with entertainment, and herein lies one of the major challenges for extensive viewing: the acceptance of its educational value for language learning. This issue informs the main concern of Webb’s *principled approach to extensive viewing*: “The language-learning benefits of extensive viewing must be clear to everyone involved” (p. 162). Classroom-based viewings prior to independent viewings ensure that students are aware of the different nature of L1 and L2 viewing, learn to become comfortable with knowledge gaps and develop appropriate learning strategies to deal with comprehension issues. Similar to Vandergrift and Goh (2012), Webb also sees a great benefit in repetition. **Students should be encouraged to “watch an episode of a program more than once”** (p. 163), and further to watch TV series rather than movies. The chronological viewing of the episodes of a series allows learners to build up background knowledge of characters and their relationships, and exposes them to re-occurring topic-related vocabulary, which in turn has a positive effect on their lexical development. To support this “narrow viewing approach” (Rodgers & Webb, 2011), Webb suggests using glossaries listing key words and background information of characters and storylines, and pre-teaching frequently occurring words as well as captions, which are now available in many online video streaming services, to support comprehension for more difficult episodes of a programme.

### 2.3.2. Extensive viewing with subtitles

Subtitles add a further dimension to extensive viewing. Their increasing availability, both as captions (L1 subtitles) on social media, and L2 subtitles in video streaming services such as Netflix, provide additional support for language learners. The affective and cognitive impact of subtitles on L2 viewing is well documented. Subtitles can promote a low affective filter in some learners, especially at lower proficiency levels, also reducing the cognitive load of the working memory (Frumuselu et al. 2015). Winke, Gass and Sydorenko’s (2010) findings indicate that subtitles influence how learners pay attention to input, encouraging a stronger focus on cognitive processing. While there seems to be

consensus that language students benefit from multiple modalities, some drawbacks have also been observed. King (2002) warns that subtitles can lead to overreliance with students focusing on reading instead of listening to the spoken dialogue. Similarly, Winke, et al. (2010) refer to the risk of subtitles being used as crutches. Investigations into the use of traditional or interlingual subtitles (audio L2, subtitles L1) as opposed to captions or intralingual subtitles (audio L2, subtitle L2) have shown that interlingual subtitles lead to better comprehension and recall, whereas intralingual subtitles support lexical learning (Danan, 2004; Bairstow & Lavaur, 2012). The range of multiple subtitle options available to language learners in informal settings, including reversed subtitles (audio L1, subtitle L2) and the personal control over subtitle selections add a further dimension to the observed benefits and downsides of subtitle use. In the context of EV subtitles can draw **the learner's focus to form and details, enhancing cognitive engagement with the language** (Vanderplank, 2016).

#### *2.4. Informal viewing*

As videos with subtitle options are now widely available, through Netflix and other video streaming services, language learners are increasingly watching TV series of their own accord, outside the formal educational context. Advice for informal viewing can be found in learner blogs (Appleton, 2019) or the mainstream media (Tapper, 2019), where informal language learners share their experiences. Dizon (2018) has explored the behaviour of informal viewers through a survey study. Provided with access to a Netflix account and a basic training session, students were given no direction on how to watch TV programmes or movies through the video streaming service. Dizon found that students appreciated the access to L2 knowledge, specifically pragmatics knowledge and language input. Watching Netflix in their L2 increased their motivation to study the L2, and participants reported enhanced learning effectiveness through the use of subtitles. The only negative factor mentioned was hindered convenience due to mobile data costs and restrictions.

All types of extensive learning involve elements of informal learning. By taking the L2 out of the classroom, students start to engage with L2 resources in their own individual ways, integrating them in their lives and personal language use. While informal learning is embedded in the personal context of a learner, always self-initiated and often the result or by-product of an interest-driven activity (Sockett, 2014), extensive learning attempts to support learners to extend their learning experiences beyond the classroom, preparing them for independent language use. The focus of the approaches outlined above varies: **ER appeals on the affective dimension of learner engagement (cf. Nutall's (1996) maxim "reading is caught, not taught" (p. 229))**, whereas EL and EV foster cognitive engagement in possibly already existing informal listening and viewing practices (Toffoli & Sockett, 2010), through the development of metacognitive listening strategies and by making learners aware of the language-learning benefits of extensive viewing.

This study explores the validity of the principles established in extensive learning for an intra-formal learning context, that is, when language learners in a formal learning context are given control over the viewing of self-selected TV. The research question is therefore as follows:

How do language learners approach the principles of variety and frequency, and strategic viewing if they have control over the selection of their TV series and learning tools?

The study expands on a presentation given at the EuroCALL 2019 conference, also published as a short paper in the conference proceedings (Alm, 2019). A pilot study, the findings of this paper inform a larger investigation currently undertaken by the author.

### 3. Method

#### *3.1. Participants and task design*

The study involved 12 students of an intermediate level (B2) German language course. Students met three times a week for a 50-minute class. The social networking site NING

was used as a learning management system (LMS). The site enabled students to access links to learning materials, including a list to German TV-series. In addition, students used the site to publish their weekly blogs. To prepare students for the viewing activity, some German TV-series were presented in class. Students were then asked to choose a series in their own time and to write about their viewing experiences in their blogs. In their initial blog entry, they reported on their first impressions of their series, in their second post on the conditions that shaped their viewing experiences and in their third post they reflected on their use of learning strategies. In addition, they submitted a final report, which included a summary of their series, a description of their listening strategies, and a reflection of their learning experiences. Participants were able to read and comment on **each other's blogs and final reports. They granted permission for their work to be used for this study.** The names used are pseudonyms.

### 3.2. Data analysis

The blog entries (n=28), the comments on these entries (n=35), and their final reports (n=12) were collected, downloaded and collated into one document. Following Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), the data was then analysed for specific themes and the topics of the research question and organised into three overarching categories: the viewing choices (variety), viewing routines (frequency) and viewing strategies (use of subtitles, repetition).

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1. Viewing choices

#### 4.1.1. Variety

Provided with a list of German TV-series available on Netflix and on German video streaming providers, students were able to choose from a variety of genres and topics. Four of them had already watched German Netflix series on their own. Gabby had seen *Charité*, *Sandra Dark* and *Andreas* and Melanie *Babylon Berlin*. Andreas and Melanie decided to re-watch or continue watching *Babylon Berlin*. For Andreas it was a chance to focus more on the language (using captions instead of subtitles), and Melanie seized the opportunity to watch the last three episodes of the season. *Babylon Berlin* was the most popular series, watched by six students. The choices of the others reflect the range of personal preferences and circumstances of the group. Rebecca and Irene watched the historical hospital drama *Charité*. The remaining four students chose series from other providers. Kirsten and Sandra each chose series streamed on the ARD Mediathek (German television), *Die Heiland*, a story of a blind female lawyer, and *Meuchelbeck*, a black comedy. Jane picked *Hilfe Hochzeit*, a romantic comedy available on the online comedy server MySpaas. Finally, Roswitha who was advised to avoid screens, recovering from a **concussion, listened to the children's story *Jim Knopf* on YouTube.**

#### 4.1.2. Viewing for pleasure

Participants seemed to be guided by their viewing habits in their own language (L1) when choosing their series. Gabby, for example, explained that she turned to Google when she looked for a series prior to the project, looking for the most popular and highest rated series:

“Nach meiner Meinung lassen sich TV-Serien am besten durch Rezensionen beurteilen. Ich wählte Charité, denn 96% der Google-Nutzer haben die Show laut Google genossen” [In my opinion, TV series are best judged by reviews. I chose Charité because 96% of Google users enjoyed the show, according to Google] (Gabby, 1).

Mainly concerned about the entertainment value of the series, linguistic considerations, such as anticipated language difficulties or usefulness of the vocabulary encountered in the series did not influence her choice.

#### 4.1.3. Selection criteria

The following two extracts illustrate the affective dimension of the participants' decision making process. Suzanne checked out four different series before she settled on one she really liked. Starting with two series that seemed popular and entertaining, *Stromberg* (the German equivalent of the US series *The Office*) followed by *Doctor's Diary*, she wrote in her blog that she enjoyed the humorous side of the programmes, but did not find the content interesting enough to persevere. *Charité* seemed initially interesting, but she **disliked the explicit medical scenes, which she described as "cool and detached"**. *Die Heiland*, met two of her selection criteria: interesting content, and easy to follow, yet she dismissed it and decided to watch *Babylon Berlin*.

"Babylon Berlin" ist heftig und intrigierend. Es gibt auch viele Gewalt, aber das kann ich vergeben, weil die Handlung so gut ist. Ich hatte die Absicht, "Die Heiland" zu benutzen, weil es ein bisschen leichter zu folgen war, aber ich habe meine Meinung geändert. Vor eine Stunde besuchte ich Netflix, um etwas auf Englisch anzuschauen, und konnte es nicht widerstehen, an "Babylon" zu klicken. Ich werde es anschauen, egal ob es für eine Aufgabe ist. Weil ich mir dafür so interessiere, habe ich mich für "Babylon Berlin" entschieden.

["Babylon Berlin" is intense and intriguing. There is also a lot of violence, but I can forgive that because the plot is so good. I intended to use "Die Heiland" because it was a little easier to follow, but I've changed my mind. I visited Netflix an hour ago to watch something in English and couldn't help clicking Babylon. I am going to watch it, no matter if it's for an assignment. Because I am so **interested in it, I chose "Babylon Berlin".**] (Suzanne, 1)

Considering one series after another, for different reasons - popularity, familiarity, humour, comprehension - Suzanne finally took an emotional decision, choosing the one that is competing on an entertainment level with one that she watched in her L1.

Most participants (all but Andreas and Melanie) checked out a few different series before making up their mind what to watch. Jane, for example, watched two episodes of *Charité* and *Babylon Berlin*, **which she described as "pretty dark and a little depressing" before she decided on *Hilfe Hochzeit*. She justified her choice, explaining that she was "enjoying comedies a lot at the moment". Also, the series had shorter episodes, a practical consideration, which allowed her to fit in her L2 viewings with her daily commitments:**

Ich mag, dass die Episoden mit etwa 20 Minuten auf der kürzeren Seite sind. Es gibt oft eine Pause zwischen meinen Universitätsunterrichtsstunden und ich weiß nie was ich mit dieser Zeit machen sollte. Manchmal verwende ich die Pause zum Lernen, aber sobald ich mich wirklich im Rhythmus befinde muss ich zu meiner nächsten Klasse gehen. Jetzt habe ich die perfekte Ausrede, diese Stunde zu nutzen, um fernzusehen und gleichzeitig mein Deutsch zu üben und zu verbessern.

[I like that the episodes are on the shorter side at around 20 minutes. There is often a break between my university classes and I never know what to do with this time. Sometimes I use the break to study, but once I'm really on the rhythm I have to go to my next class. Now I have the perfect excuse to use this lesson to watch TV while practicing and improving my German.] (Jane, 1)

Rebecca on the other hand considered the number of episodes in one season when deciding on a series. She wrote in her blog that she liked the idea of watching an entire season, setting herself the achievable, and personal goal of watching six episodes, exceeding the requirements of the task. "Dass heißt, es ist ein realistischeres Ziel für mich, die ganze Staffel anzuschauen" [That means it is a realistic goal for me to watch the whole season] (Rebecca, 1).

Her desire to watch a whole season does not only demonstrate a strategic approach, it also aligns with more authentic L1 viewing practices. Interestingly, she also pointed out

that she looked for a series with a continuous storyline, providing a similar rationale to **Rodgers and Webb's (2011) narrow viewing approach**. "Ich würde eher eine Serie anschauen, die immer an der gleichen Geschichte bleibt und entwickelt" [I would rather watch a series that always follows and develops the same story] (Rebecca, 1).

In sum, participants reflected on a range of reasons for their selection. While some watched a series they already knew (or had heard about), others checked out several different programmes until they found one that they were happy to follow for a few weeks. The entertainment value of a series, was, similar to series choices in the participants' L1, a deciding factor. Half of them decided to watch a series that was popular on Netflix at the time, *Babylon Berlin*. The adjectives used to describe the series (*intense, intriguing, extremely funny*) also indicate that their choices were emotionally driven. Cognitive concerns were not mentioned by any of the participants, even not by those who chose to watch non-Netflix series without subtitles. Some students, however, were strategic in their reasoning, such as Melanie who chose *Babylon Berlin*, because she had not seen the last three episodes (number of episodes required for the assignment), or Rebecca who chose a series with six episodes to set herself the personal goal of watching a whole season. In the next section, we will see how their viewing routines developed.

#### 4.2. Viewing routines

##### 4.2.1 Social viewing practices

**Finding the right series and "getting into it" as some participants put it, was conditional** to developing regular viewing routines. This seemed easier for those who were already watching Netflix either in their L1 or L2. The example of one student shows that this cannot be taken for granted. Amalia was an exchange student, who had partly chosen New Zealand as a destination because of her passion for the outdoors. For this reason, she had little interest in spending her days in front of a screen. While she acknowledged the advantage of the task for her German, she neither got into Netflix, nor into a German Netflix series, completing the task with the minimal requirements. "Aus diesem Grund habe ich Netflix kaum benutzt, aber ich hoffe, dass diese Aufgabe ein guter Weg ist, meine Deutschkenntnisse zu verbessern" [For this reason, I've rarely used Netflix, but I hope that this task is a good way to improve my German skills] (Amalia, 2).

This minimal investment contrasts with the engagement of other participants who started binge-watching their series, a practice that has developed over recent years with the emergence of Netflix and similar providers (Sweet, 2018). The trend to watch several episodes or even entire seasons at once is driven by Netflix, as entire seasons are released at once, instead of daily or weekly episodes, as was customary with traditional TV-series. In addition, the auto-play feature, which automatically progresses from one to the next episode, encourages viewers to keep watching. It is therefore not surprising that most participants watched more than one episode at a time, and ended up watching more than the assigned three episodes. This tendency was already expressed by some participants **in their first week, as by Suzanne, who "couldn't help clicking" on *Babylon Berlin*** while watching another programme in English and Jane who did not see the time pass as she watched two episodes in a row: "Ich fand die Geschichte extrem lustig und bevor ich es wusste, hatte ich schon zwei Folgen gesehen" [I found the story extremely funny and before I knew it I had seen two episodes] (Jane, 1).

##### 4.2.2. Time and place

Over the four-week period, participants developed individual routines for their L2 viewings. Jane tried to fit in a few episodes between lectures, not unlike Gabby who seized any opportunity to watch a bit of Netflix, reporting that she even watched her German series on her phone while working out at the gym. Others preferred the peace and quiet of their home where they could watch without interruptions. Melanie developed the habit of watching *Babylon Berlin* over dinner, whereas Sandra watched her series to relax before going to sleep: "Ich habe Meuchelbeck vor ich schlafe angeschaut, denn ich Zeit im Abend habe um es zu schauen. Es gefällt mir etwas Spaß und nicht so anstrengend zu machen vor Ich schlafe" [I watched Meuchelbeck before going to sleep because I have

time in the evening to watch it. I like to do something fun and not so exhausting before I sleep] (Sandra, 2).

While such differences in behaviour seem to support the popular assumption that mobile learning can happen anytime and anywhere (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012), the participants' reflections indicate that the quality of their learning experiences varied according to the chosen time and place of their viewings, or to put it the other way around, that places they chose reflect their type of engagement. Those who watched their series for recreation (as they would watch their L1 series) chose downtimes whereas those who attempted to optimise their viewing for L2 learning chose times best suited for concentration as reported by Kirsten who consciously picked a time when she knew she would be able to focus:

Ich habe beide letzte Woche und diese Woche am Sonntag morgen die Folgen angeschaut. Für mich ist der beste Zeitpunkt des Tages irgendwann vor ungefähr 15 Uhr, denn danach bin ich einfach zu müde. Ich finde es auch einfacher zu verstehen, wenn ich kein Zeitdruck habe, damit ich Szenen wiederholen und schwere Worte übersetzen kann. Ich finde es zu schwer, nur ein Teil der Folge anzuschauen, nicht genug Zeit sie zu wiederholen usw. Deshalb ist Sonntagmorgens sehr gut für mich, denn ich bin total entspannt, habe genug Zeit und bin nicht zu müde.

[I watched the episodes both last week and this week on Sunday morning. For me, the best time of day is sometime before around 3 p.m., because after that I'm just too tired. I also find it easier to understand when I don't have time pressure so that I can repeat scenes and translate difficult words. I find it too difficult to watch only a part of the episode, not enough time to repeat it etc. So Sunday morning is very good for me, because I am totally relaxed, have enough time and am not too tired.] (Kirsten, 2)

**Reading about her classmate's experience, Sandra voiced a similar sentiment in her blog "wenn ich nicht Müde bin, so ich es leichter zu verstehen finden" [when I'm not tired so I find it easier to understand], leading to a shift in her viewing routine] (Sandra, 3), possibly reconsidering her night time viewing routine.**

#### 4.2.3. Value of routines

**The impact of others was also noticeable in the participants' comments about the value of having regular viewing routines.** Kirsten took the lead when she wrote in her blog: "Für mich ist es jetzt einfacher eine Serie zu verstehen, wenn ich es regelmäßig anschau. Ich glaube, es war früher schwerer für mich zu verstehen, denn ich habe nur ab und zu Serien geguckt" [It is now easier for me to understand a series if I watch it regularly. I think it used to be more difficult for me to understand because I only watched series now and then] (Kirsten, 3).

**Her reflection led others to agree, as shown in Andreas' comment, who wrote that he agreed with his peers who found that their listening understanding had improved thanks to their regular routines, reinforcing their own practices.** "Ein Paar andere Klassenmitglieder sage, dass es für sie einfacher wenn sie schaut ihrer Sendung regelmäßig an sind" [A couple of other class members say that it is easier for them if they watch their program regularly] (Andreas, 3).

#### 4.2.4. Change in routines

As the semester progressed, viewing routines changed. Some students got sick, as Irene who complained at one stage about a migraine, and others found that their L2 viewing had at times given way to other study, work or social engagements.

Diese Woche habe ich zwei Meuchelbeck Episoden angeschaut. Ich wünsche, dass ich mehr Zeit hätte, um es zu anschauen. Diese Woche hatte ich sehr wenig Zeit – eine Freundin von Wellington hat mir besucht, und ich hatte eine große Prüfung



am Mittwoch und eine Bewertung am Donnerstag. Aber trotzdem, habe ich Meuchelbeck ein bisschen angeschaut.

[This week I watched two Meuchelbeck episodes. I wish I had more time to look at it. I had very little time this week - a friend of Wellington's visited me and I had a big exam on Wednesday and a rating on Thursday. But anyway, I watched a bit of Meuchelbeck.] (Sandra, 3)

"In den letzten Tagen hat sich meine Arbeitsbelastung auf der Universität erhöht. Die meisten meiner Aufgaben werden in den nächsten zwei Wochen fällig. Das bedeutet, dass ich seit meinem letzten Blogbeitrag nur zwei weitere Episoden gesehen habe" [In the past few days, my workload at the university has increased. Most of my tasks will be due in the next two weeks. That means I've only seen two more episodes since my last blog entry] (Jane, 3).

While Sandra and Jane complained about their time constraints, they still continued to watch more than they had to. Gabby on the other hand found her viewing routine for *Babylon Berlin* too difficult to maintain as other university assignments became more demanding as the semester progressed. She wrote: "In der letzten Woche war ich ziemlich beschäftigt, und wollte mich mit Netflix nur entspannen, nicht fokussieren" [I've been pretty busy for the past week, just trying to relax, not focus, with Netflix] (Gabby, 3). While she continued to watch, she used it as a recreational activity and not to progress her language skills.

The accounts of the participants suggest that their initial disposition for frequent viewings related to their existing habits of watching TV series in their L1. At times, L1 and L2 viewings seemed to compete with each other, some students replacing their L1 series with a L2 series, others reverting to L1 series. While the viewing times were not measured in this study, the reports indicate that participants who watched their series for pleasure generally watched more than those who watched with the purpose of learning, who had a more regular routine but watched more slowly, as they stopped the video and replayed passages. Depending on their orientation, participants made different choices about the time and place of their viewings. Those who focused more strongly on the language displayed a higher use of language tools. Finally, the interaction between participants also impacted on viewing behaviours. By reading how others approached the task and comparing their practices, participants became more aware of their own preferences, discovered similar routines, or changed or considered changing their routines.

#### 4.3. Viewing strategies

Participants developed and applied a range of strategies to focus on the language, supported by tools provided in their online environment.

##### 4.3.1. Episode guides

Participants, especially those who watched programmes with no available subtitles looked for episode guides. Kirsten reported that she read the episode guides of her series before she started her viewings. She herself seemed surprised how much the information about the plot helped her comprehension: "Ich weiß nicht, warum ich das nicht früher gemacht habe, aber es hilft ganz viel" [I don't know why I didn't do it earlier, but it helps a lot] (Kirsten, 3). Others mentioned their usefulness as well, although commenting that episodes varied in length and relevant information provided for each series.

##### 4.3.2. Subtitles

Those who had chosen series on Netflix had more language support options, with choices in audio tracks in multiple languages, and, of course, subtitles. They listened to the original German (L2) audio with L1 (English) or L2 (German) subtitles, or as surprising as it might sound, changed the audio to their L1, with L2 subtitles, also referred to as "reversed subtitles". This was reported by a weaker student, Peter, who watched at least one episode dubbed in English with German subtitles. He explained that this approach

helped him to get started. Another participant chose L1 subtitles, a habit acquired from earlier informal viewings. This participant also seemed less motivated and admitted in her final reflections that using L2 subtitles might have helped her to increase her vocabulary. Yet, she added that the medical vocabulary she encountered in *Charité* was too specific and therefore not useful to her. The majority of participants discovered the benefits of L2 subtitles during the project. The ability to read the words they heard spoken helped them with word recognition and to reduce the cognitive load, as Andreas put it: *Ich höre die Deutsch, und sehe sie auch. Deswegen bekomme ich der Dialog zweimal, und kann es besser verstehen.* [I hear the German and see it too. That's why I get the dialogue twice, and can understand it better.] (Andreas, 3) Andreas found the L2 subtitles particularly useful as he had watched his series previously with L1 subtitles. Familiar with the content, he was now able to focus on the language.

#### 4.3.3. Repetition

Participants commented that the naturally occurring repetition though regular and narrow viewing supported their comprehension. In addition, they exposed themselves to repetitions by reviewing an entire season, episodes, scenes or individual words. Watching episodes twice, using L2 subtitles both times, was a strategy used by Suzanne, reducing her reliance on subtitles in the second viewing.

Ich schaue jede Folge zweimal an, um die Momenten und Einzelheiten zu sehen, die ich erstmals vermisst habe. Das zweite mal ist es immer einfacher, den Dialog zu hören und die Schauspielern gleichzeitig anzuschauen, statt die Untertitel so viel zu lesen.

[I watch each episode twice to see the moments and details that I missed for the first time. The second time, it's always easier to hear the dialogue and watch the actors at the same time, instead of reading the subtitles as much] (Suzanne, 3).

**Netflix' inbuilt 10 second replay function indicates that replay can be useful even for native speakers, making it an intuitive choice for checking L2 understanding.** For more difficult scenes, Rebecca reported (along with Suzanne) that she replayed scenes twice, once with L1 subtitles and then with L2 subtitles:

“Was mir am meisten geholfen hat, wenn ich eine Szene nicht verstanden habe, war die es wieder an zu schauen, mit Englische Untertitel, und dann wieder mit deutsche Untertitel” [What helped me most when I didn't understand a scene was to watch it again, with English subtitles, and then again with German subtitles] (Rebecca, 3).

#### 4.3.4. Looking up vocabulary

Replay and subtitle options allowed participants to view their series with a focus on the language. This focus varied between learner-viewers, but also from one viewing situation to another. Jane, for example explained that she was less likely to look up words when she focused on the story. “Es hängt davon ab ob ich die Szene aufregend und interessant genug finde um sofort nach der Übersetzung zu suchen oder ob ich das Wort erst nach der Episode nachschaue” [It depends on whether I find the scene exciting and interesting enough to look for the translation immediately or whether I only look up the word after the episode] (Jane, 2).

Focusing on her enjoyment of the series, rather than on the language, Jane illustrates the benefits of fast viewing, as recommended by Nutall (1996) for ER. Some students expressed their general preference to listen for the gist, avoiding looking up unknown words. Irene wrote: “Was hilft am meistens ist zu nicht versuchen um jedes einzelne Wort zu verstehen, das gesagt wird, aber eher die allgemeine Hauptpunkt einer Szene. Das ist auch nützlich, weil es Ihnen ein größeres Verstehen des gesamten Handlung” [What helps most is not to try to understand every single word that is said, but rather the general main point of a scene. This is also useful because it gives you a greater understanding of the whole plot] (Irene, 3).

Similarly, Melanie explained that she only looked up words that she repeatedly heard. "Wenn ich ein Wort nicht verstehen, die ich immer höre, dann übersetzte ich es, weil es deutlich wichtig ist!" [If I don't understand a word I always hear, I translate it because it is very important!] (Melanie, 3). This was echoed by other participants, who realised in hindsight that the words they had written down during the viewing were not useful for their everyday use of German. Enjoying the series with a more general, rather than detailed understanding allowed them to develop a more important listening skill, tolerance for ambiguity.

## 5. Conclusion

This pilot study on intra-formal L2 viewing has shown that the principles established for extensive learning apply similarly for self-directed learning in a formal context. The variety of L2 series enabled learner-viewers to make choices that resonated with their personal interests, creating interest and leading to the development of routines which resulted in frequent viewings. The availability of language tools, such as subtitles, encouraged learners to explore learning features that suited their language level and learning focus. A bottom-up approach, this study has shown that learner-viewers display a wide range of learning strategies, as promoted in approaches to extensive learning. This suggests that learners are likely to develop appropriate viewing skills if they are provided with a space that offers variety, opportunities for frequent engagement and language support.

The study has also highlighted that participants who engaged in informal viewing prior to the project only made reduced use of the language features. For example, all of them used the L1 subtitles that are displayed as a default option. Individual reflection on their viewing behaviour and sharing enabled participants to extend their viewing behaviours, equipping them for more confident informal viewing experiences in the future.

## Ethical statement

In accordance with ethical approval practices at the **researcher's institution**, permission was sought from participants to use their data for this study. To preserve their anonymity, pseudonyms were used. There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

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