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Robert J. Werner, Ryutsu Keizai University, Japan

Corresponding author: rjwerner@gmail.com

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Abstract

This is the second part of an autoethnography about trying to enrich my vocabulary and improve my listening skills as a self-directed learner through French language songs. I followed the same Study Use Review Evaluate (SURE) learning cycle as my students in a self-access English class, and my work occurred at the same time as theirs, over a period of six weeks. Throughout the project and in the course of writing it up, I was making comparisons and identifying connections between my learning and that of my students. This installment covers the second and third weeks of the project, and part of the fourth. First, it discusses vocabulary, describes how I adjusted a strategy, ways I enlisted help from native French speakers, and a problem that arose with using new words (the second step of SURE). Next, it details how I reviewed grammar through Duolingo, a language learning app, and the unexpected benefits I derived from using this app. Finally, this paper examines fluctuations in motivation and affect, which many learners experience at some point, and this initially led to anxiety and self-doubts about my purpose in conducting this project. Stepping into the learner's experience was valuable, however, in helping me to rediscover intrinsic motivation and regain my self-confidence as I headed into the final weeks of the project.

Keywords: autoethnography, French, music, vocabulary, motivation

Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit, neuf, dix. We repeat after Ms. Farina, counting to ten in French, unknowingly picking up some of her slight Italian accent. The small classroom has five rows of four wooden desks each, the kind where the desk and chair are connected, and one has to shift around for a while to achieve some semblance of comfort. The bottoms of the desks are coated with a thick, hardened, bumpy layer of bubble gum from years of bored students leaving sticky deposits. I am sitting at the second desk in the middle row. The classroom is windowless, and the open door is just ahead and to my left. The opposite side of the hallway contains a row of open windows, but only a stifling wind blows in on this muggy June day, typical for this time of year on Long Island. The smell of fried potatoes wafts up from the school cafeteria and mingles with the sea air, simultaneously making me hungry for lunch and giving me a fleeting impression of the cool breeze tickling my face at the beach down the road. I am twelve years old, and my first year of middle school (sixth grade) is thankfully almost over. I am mesmerized by what I am hearing in this introduction to foreign languages class. *Bonjour. Comment vous appelez-vous ?* The words

sound so beautiful, so exotic, so musical. Suddenly, I know that I am going to study French next year.

"Study Spanish. It's more useful in the US, and we can help you with your homework," says my father. It is one or two weeks later, and he is standing to my left as I sit at the dark wood-block Formica table trimmed with white in my parents' cramped kitchen, looking at the yellow, brown, and orange gingham-style flowered wallpaper that someone once thought stylish. A pencil is in my right hand. The form is in front of me. It asks for my name and my foreign language preferences numbered from one to three (Spanish, French, Italian). I wrote a "1" next to French, and I never needed any help with my homework.

Following My Heart

As a child (and into my adult years), I never succumbed to peer pressure and 'did what everyone else was doing' or what others told me was practical. Instead, I have always listened to my heart (Aronson, 2003), and let the rest work itself out. For the most part, my parents encouraged and supported me, even when my decisions did not mesh with their wishes.

In second grade, when my friends were listening to Michael Jackson and trying to do the moonwalk and other breakdancing moves, I was obsessed with the music and lyrics from the Broadway musical "Cats", which I had just seen with my family. I still have my copy of T. S. Eliot's (1939) "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats", with its orange cover that soon became faded and worn out from use. Many of the poems in the book became songs in the musical, with nearly identical lyrics that I often tried to sing while alone in my bedroom. I think I bored my best friend to death listening to the songs, but maybe it had a positive effect, since he is now a professional musician. I still enjoy seeing musicals, and I can thank my parents for giving me those experiences at such an early age.

As an instructor living in Japan, I have always admired Japanese students who also follow their hearts, especially as members of a society with the proverb *deru kui wa utareru* (the nail that sticks out gets hammered down). From a young age, they have been taught to always conform to the group. When teaching and working with students who are thinking about going abroad, I encourage them to see the outside world, get different perspectives on life, and communicate with people from different cultures who speak different languages, which is one opportunity a study abroad program will afford. I feel that everyone should enrich themselves with these types of experiences.

The idea of 'following my heart' is also central to my teaching and advising philosophy. Students need to enjoy what they are doing and be interested in the task or subject matter in order to be fully invested in the learning process (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vallerand, 1997). While a student might choose to study vocabulary for an extrinsic purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2020), such as to get a higher score on TOEIC, it is imperative that they find a method of learning the words that interests them as they work towards their goal (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In this way, they need to be learning for themselves, rather than doing what they believe a teacher or parent expects.

By choosing to study French in suburban New York, where Spanish could frequently be heard, I might have been taking the road less traveled (Frost, 1916), but it would lead to so many memories (both good and bad). French was my first love, and I experienced so many firsts through using it: successfully ordering food in another language in a foreign country; a letter-writing language exchange throughout high school with my cousin, Marine; getting ridiculed for my American-accented French (by a *crêpe* vendor in Montmartre, a Paris neighborhood); experiencing cultural differences (such as being served hot cocoa in a large bowl); drinking alcohol legally as a teenager (in a café across the street from the *château* in Fontainebleau); and being the only one of my friends who could spell and pronounce [French Canadian] hockey players' names correctly (like *Daigneault* /dɛˈnjoʊ/). Choosing to study French was one of my better choices at the time.

However, French and I parted company midway through university. I felt abandoned after one too many attempts at daily conversation had resulted in brusque responses from Parisians. I have been to many countries and tried to speak to many people in their native language. Usually, I can only say simple phrases like "hello" or "thank you". The locals were often receptive, and reactions ranged from overjoyed to ordinary responses like "you're welcome". Only in Paris have I encountered downright rudeness, and this led me to lose motivation and even my desire to continue with French. Instead, I chose to study abroad in Greece, because I love archaeology. I went on to learn Modern Greek, Spanish, Arabic, and Japanese, and I did not look back until I began this project, more than 20 years later.

My Return to Studying French

This paper continues the autoethnography of my experiences as a self-directed learner studying French through music for six weeks. My work paralleled that of my students (some of whom were studying through music, some through movies, and others through graded readers or test preparation books) in a new course called Lifelong English, which was

described briefly in the first installment (Werner, 2020). Detailed descriptions of a similar course can be found in articles by Curry et al. (2017) and Morrison (2013).

Students (and I) thought about a target situation (what we want to be able to do in the language), skills to focus on, and resources to use. Each week, they made a Study Use Review Evaluate (SURE) plan (Morrison, 2013) and reflected on their learning (Watkins, 2015). In the first installment (Werner, 2020), I described the project in detail, told my language learning history, especially with regard to French and Japanese, and I discussed how I was drawn to revisit the French language after many years through my love of music and sports, bundled together during Team France's march to the FIFA World Cup 2018 title. My learning goal was to improve vocabulary and listening to better understand French language songs. My interests provided the motivation that I have yet to sustain with Japanese, since I genuinely enjoyed the music and was happy studying in this way (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The first installment went through Week 1, and I was excited at the beginning of this project.

This second installment will cover Weeks 2, 3, and part of Week 4. Rather than looking at each week in chronological order, it will be organized thematically. Thus, I will discuss vocabulary study at length, including a problem I ran into with using new words in daily life, the new apps I tried, my revisiting of an early vocabulary strategy (and emotions) from my high school days, as well as circumstances that led me to study grammar. I will also deal with factors related to motivation and affect and how I questioned whether I should change my 'small goal' (Morrison, 2013), which is part of the learning plan, from vocabulary to grammar.

Throughout the paper, I will examine my learning experiences. At the same time, I will compare them with those of the students in last year's course, as well as others I have known who were engaging in similar self-access learning tasks (note that the terms self-directed and self-access are used synonymously in this paper).

I will periodically 'take a step back' and examine my learning with an ethnographic eye (Ellis, 2004). In this way, I hope to make a meaningful contribution within the burgeoning field of autoethnography (Holman Jones et al., 2013b; Short et al., 2013) and also illustrate connections with self-access. As educators, auto/ethnography provides an important avenue to relate to and better understand our students' experiences, because in conducting such studies, we venture inside the experience and become a part of it (Holman Jones et al., 2013a). This, in turn, can help us to become better teachers and advisors. In this paper, I will blend social scientific writing with literary prose and dialogue to *show*, rather than describe

events. In writing evocatively, I hope that you, the reader, can *feel* the story (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 2004) and make deep connections with your own language learning and/or your students' development as observed through their written reflections, during advising sessions, in the classroom, or beyond.

Vocabulary

In Week 1, I tried out four different vocabulary apps to find English meanings of French words. In Week 2, I came to use Reverso Context exclusively because I could look up individual words, as well as phrases. Before looking up a term, I first tried to understand the context in which it was used as best I could. Then, I scrolled through sub-entries on the app to find the best-fitting definition (Nation, 2013). While the lack of context in a dictionary can make it difficult to grasp the correct meaning (Miller & Gildea, 1987; Nist & Olejnik, 1995), the example sentences in Reverso Context made it easier. Tapping on the "information bubble" also revealed the sentence before and after in the original source. Thanks to Reverso Context, I now had a second contextual example (in addition to the song) to help me make sense of each unknown word I encountered.

I wonder if Japanese students would find the example sentences in Reverso Context useful too. Not only do French and English share the same alphabet, but I also have a strong background in reading from my grammar and printed text-heavy high school French classes. While I think many Japanese learners of English have had similar high school language learning experiences, the writing systems of the two languages are vastly different, and this factor might evoke anxiety in second language reading (Saito et al., 1999). Personally, I have always been interested in learning other writing systems, and this is partly why I chose to study Arabic. On the other hand, I was able to learn to read French and Spanish much more easily than Modern Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and Japanese because I did not have to take as much time to decode a sentence. In the end, I think an app like this, with example sentences and additional context, would be more useful for students who are interested in and/or have higher skills in reading, than it would be for those who do not.

The Process of Finding Meanings

When meanings from the app did not fit with the context in the song, I had to go back, examine the words or lines before and after in the lyrics, and recheck the definitions. My second song (*Normal* by Hocus Pocus) was more complex than the first one, with a lot more lyrics, less repetition, and more complex grammar. Therefore, with this song, I added a third step:

1. Bold unfamiliar words.
2. Check meanings.
3. If I think the meaning does not fit the context, underline the entire phrase.

Because I had prior knowledge of French, I could sometimes tell when an idiomatic expression was being used (where the overall meaning might differ from that of individual words). In these cases, I swapped the second and third steps. The following paragraph illustrates my thought processes and the steps I took as I tried to make meaning of one line of the song.

One phrase I encountered was "*ça c'est le monde à l'envers*" (Hocus Pocus, 2007). I already knew that *ça c'est le monde* meant "that is the world" (or "this is the world"), but I did not understand *l'envers*, so I bolded it. When I looked it up, I found it to mean "reverse". "That is the world in reverse" or "That is the reverse world" was not natural English, but I thought I could get the gist. However, I was looking for a precise meaning, so I underlined the phrase and kept the original bolded word. It now looked like this: <u>*ça c'est le monde à* **l'envers**</u>. On Reverso Context, I found the machine translation "This is the world upside down" (Hoffenberg, 2020), as well as over 30 possible meanings (seven in the free version) that omit the initial "*ça*", such as "It's a topsy-turvy world" or "The world has turned upside down" (Hoffenberg, 2020). I thought, "While *l'envers* by itself means 'reverse', as a collocation of *le monde* it must mean 'upside-down.'" It now made sense linguistically, as well as in the context of the song.

While writing this paper, I asked a native French speaker to check my translations. At that point, I learned that my assumed meaning of *l'envers* was not entirely correct. It literally means "the back [of something]" or "the other side [of something]", and it could also mean "upside-down" (M. Massard-Combe, personal communication, March 20, 2020). When I returned to Reverso Context, I found that "the other side" was the fourth, and "the back side" the seventh out of eight possible sub-entries, while "reverse" had been the first. In the end, I arrived at the correct meaning, but my work was not perfect along the way, because language learning often includes some trial-and-error.

When I Could Not Find an Appropriate Meaning

While studying *Magic in the Air*, I encountered a particularly puzzling phrase. The song begins with "*comme d'habitude on est calés*" (Magic System, 2018). I found that the expression *comme d'habitude* means 'as usual'. However, *calés* confused me. In my notes, I recorded several different meanings for the word, as well as for the expression *on est calés*. I

listened over and over again and read the lyrics many times, but nothing made sense in the context. Did I need to find a native speaker? I thought, "I can ask my cousin, but she is from France. I do not know if the expression comes from standard French or *Nouchi*" (the unique dialect spoken in Ivory Coast, where the group originated, and which appears elsewhere in the song).

I am tired after a long day of work and almost an hour sitting on the train so far, with just a short break in the middle to walk up the stairs and then down to the connecting platform. A comfortable padded seat under me, the gentle rocking motion of the train gliding to the next station is lulling me to sleep. "I'll try one more strategy to stay awake," I think. "My students say that HiNative is useful." I open the App Store on my phone, download HiNative, and make an account with a few taps. I choose "What does this mean?" from the menu option, type "*on est calés*" in the box, add context with the full sentence and song title, and tap post.

When I wake up the next morning, I find an answer from the user Coumbaa, a native French speaker, informing me that the phrase means "we ate a lot and we're full" (Lang-8, 2019). It turned out that my translations from the dictionary had been off the mark. Figure 1 shows an excerpt from the data, which illustrates my process of identifying unknown vocabulary words and attempting to translate them. In this example, I separated the line into two phrases. The first set of parentheses following "*on est calés*" contains Reverso Context translations for *calés*, and the second set has phrase translations from the app (with question marks because I was unsure if they were correct), followed by the information obtained on HiNative.

Figure 1

Lyrics with Dictionary and HiNative (Lang-8, 2019) Translations

Comme d'habitude (as usual) on est **calés** (firmly fixed, embedded) (on est calés - we have experience? We are well versed? We're ready? We're on the ball? According to Coumbaa on HiNative, "That means that we ate a lot and we're full")

As it turns out, *on est calés* is "nearly slang" (M. Massard-Combe, personal communication, March 20, 2020), so my difficulty in finding the correct meaning is understandable. In the end, I used all the resources at my disposal, including two apps and two native speakers, to grasp (and verify) the meaning of a single phrase. While most of the song was not this difficult, the example illustrates how far I was willing to go in my quest for knowledge. I think some students would give up after finding meanings in a dictionary (even if they did not entirely fit the context), while others would take similar steps to mine, especially with access to so many resources literally at their fingertips. Whether or not someone takes that extra step would likely depend on intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017, 2020), and how strong their desire for knowledge is (Mynard & McLoughlin, 2020).

Interlude

My head is pounding from thinking so much about vocabulary. A wave of dizziness washes over me as I type these words. Invisible walls are closing in from all sides, the light is being swallowed up, and I have that familiar feeling in the pit of my stomach. It is like I just received a rejection letter in the mail, or I am staring at a blank screen, unable to find the words, with a looming deadline and a pile of ungraded student work beckoning from the corner of my desk. The bleakness increases as I feel overwhelmed, realizing I cannot work on either task right now, because my son is waiting for me at his school. I have a confession to make. I hate learning vocabulary. It is so boring, so hard, and in the past, I could never remember the meanings after the test (Mondria & Mondria-De Vries, 1994). Maybe I was not studying correctly. Maybe I never learned the right strategies.

My First Vocabulary Strategy

I was under immense pressure when I had to retake the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test, used for entrance to an American undergraduate university program) in the beginning of my last year of high school. Similarly, I know students who take TOEIC two, three, or more times to try to put themselves in a better position for a study abroad program or a job. I had scored poorly on the verbal section, and my dream university was slipping away. I needed to significantly raise my score, and I had one chance to do it (or it would reflect poorly with the admissions office).

I have always been much stronger at math than English, and I was especially weak in the areas of the test encompassed by vocabulary, such as analogies and antonyms. Previously, I had studied lists of words and definitions by covering the meaning with my hand as I tested myself. It worked fine when I had to learn ten words for a quiz, three or four of which I

already knew. However, there were now hundreds of words to learn. My mother, a former teacher, taught me about flashcards, and I set to making a massive pile from all the words I needed to learn in the preparation book. I also used mnemonics in a rudimentary way by thinking about something the word reminded me of as I tested myself (Nation, 2013). It was almost the keyword technique, but I never wrote the keyword down. I cannot remember whose idea it was to use mnemonics, probably my mother's. Even though I experienced anxiety when I looked at my enormous pile of cards or envisioned the sheer level of improvement I had to achieve on the test, I was able to stay focused and rise to the challenge (Luo et al., 2020). At times such as this, when I have had to cram a lot of vocabulary in a short time, I have used flashcards to good effect. However, it is a boring way for me to study, and I cannot stay motivated in the long-term.

While the story had a happy ending, the process was anything but, especially for my 17-year-old self, living a pressure-filled life while attending a competitive high school. Why, then, after all these years, did I choose vocabulary for this project *and* decide to write an autoethnography about it? I guess I want others to learn from my experiences and avoid my mistakes. To take a step back, studying vocabulary through music with a method that *I* chose helped me find a more interesting (and hopefully more sustainable) way of learning. I hope my experience will help to teach educators and students that there might be better ways of learning words. Every learner is different, however. If it does not work, consider trying something else.

How to "Use" New Vocabulary

I hit my first bump in the road when I was reflecting on my approach to the SURE (Study Use Review Evaluate) learning cycle. I thought to myself, "'Study:' find new words in a song and learn the meanings. 'Review:' go over the meanings both in and out of context. 'Evaluate:' I will do that in a week or two [around Week 3 or 4] to see if I can remember the meanings. How will I 'Use' the new vocabulary?" As I thought and thought, I could not envision what I might do according to my understanding of SURE. "Use" is defined in course materials as "using the language learned in everyday life". However, I did not feel that listening to a word in a song was sufficient, even though this is one way the step can be defined (Morrison, 2013). I thought I needed to be doing more with it. I was thinking that if my learning goal had involved speaking or writing I would be producing language. "How could I produce something when I just listen?" I contemplated. I mentioned this dilemma during a conversation with a colleague. I said, "I feel like just listening to a song is not good enough."

"What do you mean, 'not good enough?'"

"If you just hear it, you're not really using it for anything."

"Are there any benefits at all for just listening and enjoying the song?"

"Ear training," I said.

"Is there anything else? Think about why you're doing this in the first place."

I thought for a moment and responded, "Enjoyment."

"Absolutely. That's massive, isn't it? Otherwise, if you just treat it like a study activity, you're going to forget the reason why you started doing this in the first place. You love the music."

Music and Me

It is true. I do love the music. Music is what drew me to this project in the first place. In fact, it is all about the music and always has been. I have listened to music during tasks I have dreaded (e.g. hours of grading) and while doing more mundane activities (e.g. reading the news). Students can be observed all over campus sporting the latest wireless headphones and doing activities like homework, working out in the gym, or texting a friend. During my days as a high school student, I made it through four to five hours of homework every night by popping CD after CD into the tray and using the music to keep myself on task.

I love music so much that just having the opportunity to do this project has been incredibly satisfying. As I type, I realize again that to be a successful self-directed learner, it is paramount for one to have a deep interest not only in the task (Ryan & Deci, 2017), but also in learning for the sake of learning (Mynard & McLoughlin, 2020). In considering students, it is important to take charge of one's learning and follow intuition (Ryan & Deci, 2020), because as students develop as learners, they learn more about themselves and come to realize which strategies will work best for a particular situation (Oxford, 2016). Kato and Mynard's (2016) advising tools can also assist learners in reaching this point. As Madonna (1987) sang, "No one knows you better than you know yourself."

To take a step back and look at my problem of "Using" new words, was I pushing myself too hard to be 'academic'? Was I falling into the same trap as some students, looking over my shoulder and expecting to be judged by an imaginary teacher or advisor? Is "Using" the word just by recognizing it in a song actually a perfect method, since I was learning for enjoyment? Now, as I write about the experience, I have come to the realization that it is.

The Role of an Advisor

When unsure about which direction to go with their studying during a self-directed course, many students have the benefit of meeting with an advisor to discuss the learning process or receiving written feedback on their work (Carson & Mynard, 2012; Kato & Mynard, 2016; Mynard, 2017, 2020; Mynard & Thornton, 2012; Navarro & Thornton, 2011; Shelton-Strong, 2020; Thornton & Mynard, 2012). While I had discussed the project with a colleague once before the start (and would do so again around the halfway point), these chats were not strictly for advising purposes, nor did I consider them as such. I will frequently use a colleague as a sounding board because I need to talk things through with someone, and I usually come out of these conversations with new ideas. Since the colleagues I speak with are in the same field as me (language teachers and advisors), they can often relate to my predicaments. For students, a similar scenario might be peer mentoring (for a description see Curry & Watkins, 2016).

I found studying through SURE to be liberating because there are so many choices. I can do anything I want, and if it does not work, I can change to a different method. On the other hand, it can be hard to know what to do without any guidance. In a comparison of three learners who received different amounts of written feedback and face-to-face advising sessions, Mynard (2017) found that it was difficult for a student to successfully complete the process without any constructive feedback, either verbal or in writing. In addition, learners do not always know which resources match up best with their learning goals and might make poor decisions with regard to trying to improve their language (Werner, 2014). An advisor can help them consider new possibilities and move in the right direction when they feel lost, either through dialogue or written advising (Kato & Mynard, 2016; Mynard, 2012a, 2012b, 2020; Mynard & Thornton, 2012; Navarro & Thornton, 2011; Thornton & Mynard 2012). This was the case with one of my students, who had identical goals to mine but seemed not to know how to "Study" (Werner, 2020).

I have found some students who "Study" with one resource (e.g. a test preparation book), but then "Use" language with something completely different (e.g. a vocabulary app). They feel that they are fulfilling the task, but it is often not the same language (e.g. the same vocabulary words) that they had learned in the previous step. I think some students have trouble connecting the two steps, especially when they are using this method for the first time, as many of them are, and they need to be gently refocused on the task (for a practical example of one way this might be done, see Navarro & Thornton, 2011).

Is the Vocabulary in a Song Enough?

Because I was learning vocabulary from music, I was only learning "random" words and phrases (whatever happened to appear in the song). I remarked to my wife one night, "This method is enjoyable, but is it really the best way to learn?" In my Week 2 Journal, I wrote, "How useful is it that I can say, 'I am enjoying myself,' in slang that originated in Ivory Coast, or that I know about Anoumabo, a neighborhood in Abidjan?" Since I was studying for pleasure, I was choosing songs for the melodies, rather than the topic or vocabulary that appears in them. However, this led to a problem when it came to language acquisition. I wondered, "How can I find vocabulary that is more useful for my language learning? Do I need to use another resource?"

In an analysis of lexis in English language songs, Morrison (2012) found that learners need to supplement songs with other resources in order to effectively learn the language. This finding supports my thinking that I needed something else, but what did I need?

What About Grammar?

At the same time, I had another problem. While looking up meanings from *Magic in the Air* and making sense of the phrases, I found that I did not remember grammar as well as I had thought. I began to wonder if I should study that too. After all, understanding the grammatical rules is a necessity for complete comprehension of a language (Cook, 2016). According to my Week 2 Journal, "I was once very good at grammar in French class. Shouldn't I revisit it?" I remembered my colleague telling me about Duolingo (Von Joo, 2018), so I decided to try it.

Duolingo

When I started using Duolingo, I first tried to take a placement test to skip easy content. While I could comprehend just about everything, I could not produce any language and scored poorly as a result. This was frustrating because I used to consider reading and writing to be my best skills, and I had some of the highest grades among my peers in my high school French class. As a result of flunking the placement test, I had to start from the very beginning. I did not see any reason to retake it because I was clearly rusty; starting from the basics could only help.

As I went through the lessons, I felt like the floodgates opened, and the knowledge came flowing back (or maybe it had never left and had been hiding in a dusty corner of my brain). I began to relearn and remember how to use the main tenses (i.e. present, past, and future), and I refreshed my memory on some basic vocabulary words. I especially liked

Duolingo because it uses spaced repetition (Settles & Meeder, 2016), where content is shown less frequently if it is answered correctly and more frequently if it is answered incorrectly. This leads to better retention (Mondria & Mondria-De Vries, 1994; Pimsleur, 1967; Roediger & Butler, 2011; Schuetze, 2017; Seibert Hanson & Brown, 2020). With its colorful display and game-like play, such as leveling up, and getting coins to 'buy' things (Duolingo, 2020), I was able to dive right in. While I am not a 'gamer', I was in flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) as I completed the lessons and kept thinking, "I'll just do one more set. Just one more." In this way, it kept my interest during the course of this project.

Unexpected Benefits

There were two unexpected benefits to using Duolingo. First, I found that there is an option to include listening and speaking in the quizzes. This turned out to be a great way to supplement my French listening, because the voice in the app speaks clearly and at a moderate speed (slower than in all three songs I chose). Next, the app turned out to be good for vocabulary. In addition to grammar, new words were introduced in each lesson. Shortly after beginning with Duolingo, I experienced an "aha" moment: I had found more useful vocabulary, and I could use it in a meaningful way! After learning words through a Duolingo lesson ("Study"), I was interacting with them (reading, writing, and sometimes listening and speaking) through the app ("Use"). From Week 2 until the end of the project, I used Duolingo for ten to twenty minutes at a time, for a total of approximately 60 minutes per week. Figure 2 shows a week-by-week representation of the apps I used during this project.

Figure 2

Timeline of Apps Used Each Week
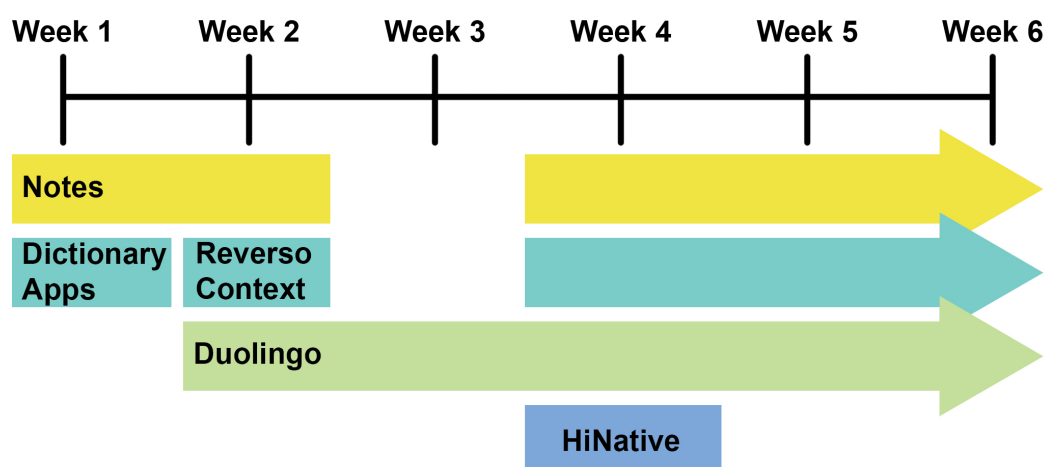
Because Duolingo was so useful for me, and because it is good for learning many different features of language (Von Joo, 2018), I frequently suggest that students use this app. In fact, in a program that my colleagues and I run for rugby student-athletes preparing to teach the sport in Indonesia (Von Joo et al., 2020), we tell participants about it as a possible resource to study both languages (Indonesian and English), especially during weeks when we are not meeting.

Motivation and Affect

Around the midway point of this project, I began to question the practicality of studying French. As much as I was enjoying it, I think I was beginning to feel guilty for studying French in Japan, when I am far from proficient in Japanese. I just cannot seem to shake my extrinsic motivation, which keeps poking its head up saying, "What about me?" I wrote:

> I no longer have the goal of studying or living abroad like some of my students do. I would like to visit France again, but who knows when that will be? I cannot really afford to immerse myself in French full-time because I live and work in Japan, and that language is more important for practical purposes. So, maybe this is just a hobby. It can be a hobby, right? (Week 3 Journal)

For someone who has spent my whole life 'following my heart', this thinking might be contradictory, but the necessity of considering external factors, such as my next employment opportunity in a world of fixed-term contracts, is also something I cannot avoid.

Extrinsic Motivation

I have been assigning activities and projects that promote autonomy and self-directed learning for a number of years. I understand how it works. Why, then, do I spend so much time thinking about 'what is practical' instead of 'what do I enjoy'? I keep drawing myself into thinking about extrinsic motivation and how I need to learn Japanese, such as to pass a test or to gain a future job (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand, 1997). My wife is a Japanese teacher, and she wishes my Japanese were better or that I had the same interests or motivations for learning the language as many of her former students. At home, we mostly use English with each other, and we are raising our four-year-old children bilingual (one parent, one language). Because of this, I hear a lot of Japanese at home, but I rarely speak it. I have had trouble finding the time (or lasting motivation) to study, except while commuting on the train.

I often feel like I am being tugged in two different directions. Should I follow my heart and study French because that is what I am enjoying at the moment, or should I try to raise my Japanese language ability at all costs?

Grammar Revisited

While studying with Duolingo, I began to mentally compare it to WaniKani, a Japanese vocabulary app that I had been using on the train for a little over two years. WaniKani utilizes spaced repetition (Tofugu, 2020), and I have always listened to music while studying with it. Now, I was using Duolingo in the same way. Because of the similarities between the two apps, and because I had been able to stay motivated with WaniKani for so long, I could clearly see the possibility of continuing my project with Duolingo and shifting my focus to grammar.

Interlude

I am driving down a country road. I have never been here before, or have I? The rocky landscape with its short, pale green grass and small bushes seems vaguely familiar. Gently rolling hills stretch into the distance behind me. Up ahead, the road starts to slope slightly upward, and the nearby hills are a little higher. Olive groves dot the serene landscape. As I glance to the right, I catch glimpses through the tall evergreen shrubs of another road meandering its way closer. Moments later, I stop at the crossroads. Do I keep going or turn onto the new road? This was the first time I considered changing my goal.

Affective Factors

During the first three weeks of this project, I felt a range of emotions. Early on, there were positive emotions like joy, interest, and contentment. Then, I began to feel negative ones, such as anxiety and self-doubt. Nearing the midway point of the six-week project, my mind was in turmoil. Should I change to grammar? Should I even be studying French at all? Am I using this method correctly? My questioning and doubting were making me anxious. This was the backdrop to a casual conversation with a colleague (who I had also spoken with at the start of the project). I said, "I think I'm doing SURE the wrong way."

"Why do you say that?"

"I'm not being thorough enough. I don't write out all the steps the way the students do, and I occasionally skip some of them."

"Your learners are doing this for the first time. They've never been trained in how to learn. You've learned languages for many years. You're allowed to do what feels natural to you."

In my Journal, I wrote:

I talked with _____ yesterday and feel more energized to work on this project. For now, I will continue with this method. However, I will review grammar online as needed and will also supplement my learning with Duolingo, as it is more structured and will give me the necessary grammar/vocabulary refresher. (Week 4 Journal)

The conversation settled me down and helped me continue with the goals I had initially set for myself. Whatever I decided, it would still be the right thing. Speaking with someone about what I was doing also helped me to realize that I *could do it*. It was at this point, in the beginning of Week 4, that I started my second song, *Normal*, a jazzy hip-hop song by Hocus Pocus, a group I had recently discovered and was really into (Week 3 Journal).

Another thing occurred around that time. I took a step back and examined the days and times that I study. 'When' have I used WaniKani (or Duolingo)? 'When' have I studied French through listening and checking lyrics? Looking at it from that perspective, I realized that the apps have functioned solely as a way to pass the time during my long commute. I almost never use them anywhere else. On the other hand, I listen to French music (and pay attention to lyrics) on the train, at home, and occasionally in my office at work. This is the key, the internal confirmation that I needed. I do not need any quizzes to stay motivated to learn through music. I am doing it because I *enjoy* it.

Looking Back and Ahead

In this installment, I looked at vocabulary strategies and resources in detail and examined past difficulties and emotions conjured by these recollections. In addition, I examined how I began to refresh my French grammar through Duolingo and the unexpected results this produced. In doing so, I also experienced changes in motivation and affect, which led to anxiety and questioning not only of my goal of learning vocabulary, but also the overall wisdom of conducting this project. At times, I might feel anxious or disheartened, but I always pick myself up from the floor and keep going. This is a part of who I am. Foreign language anxiety is normal, and it manifests itself in different areas (e.g. speaking, reading, listening) for different learners (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Students can also continue with their studies if they realize that it is not the end of the world. Things will look up because they always do, so they just have to keep working and trust that everything will work out. Just like a student receiving help from an advisor, in the end, a conversation with a colleague helped to settle me down and realize that I was doing okay.

After that conversation, Week 4 turned out to be abuzz with activity. I felt like I was beginning the project anew with fresh motivation and the confidence to continue. The next installment will cover the final weeks of the project, but will it complete the story? I realize that there are a few loose ends, including the final piece of SURE, "Evaluate". I will also talk about how my third song brought me to study *Nouchi*, an African dialect of French, and this led me to read (in both French and English) about the fascinating history behind its inclusion in music. Before this series is complete, I will discuss advising in more detail and how going through this process has made me a more empathetic teacher and learning advisor. Finally, I will review the 'ethnographic I' (to borrow from Ellis, 2004) and look at myself as an autoethnographer, as well as the process of writing my first autoethnography. In doing so, I will also reflect on how the writing process itself became a method of inquiry as I shaped and re-shaped my story (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Richardson, 2000).

I will conclude this installment with a metaphor to describe my feelings during the weeks discussed in this paper:

Click. Click. Click. Click. I am sitting on a hard, plastic bench that has just enough room for two people. My friend is on my left. A horizontal bar is locked into place over our legs, but there is more than a little wiggle room because we are both skinny. The shoulder-high walls on the front, back, and sides partially close us in, but there are no windows or roof. The sun shines down from a mostly cloudless sky, the temperature is pleasant for July, and the smell of popcorn floats on the gentle breeze.

Click. Click. Click. Click. I look around as the car continues methodically up the incline. The park entrance is just ahead on the right. Beyond it is the parking lot with rows and rows of cars, a few campers and some buses. Verdant, green trees are everywhere. Click. Click. Click. Click. "We're *still* going up?" I think. I am not afraid of heights, but this is very high. To the right, I can now see the sparse skyline with just a few tall buildings. Then, I glance to the left. It looks like we are level with the high mountain tops in the distance. The sudden lack of sound is deafening. The car glides forward. "Oh…," and then straight down, "Noooooooooooooo!" I fly up into the air more than hand's width off the seat and bang my legs on the bar, before falling back down hard. At the bottom, the car twists to the right. Then, just as suddenly to the left. I bang my right knee on the side. As the car twists this way and that, rounding curves at breakneck speed and twisting again, I am thrown back and forth like a rag doll. Up a hill. It is not as high as the last one, but 'high' is relative on a rickety, old, wooden track. Plunging straight down, my stomach flutters, and I feel air under my bottom, not quite weightless, more out-of-control. "Will I fall out this time?" I wonder, anxiety rising as my heart tries to beat right out of my chest. I hold on for dear life, and my knuckles are white from gripping the bar. A sharp curve to the left, and my right knee bangs the side again, "Ouch!" Quickly up and then down just as fast. I fly into the air before slamming back down on the hard seat. The train goes straight ahead and only slightly down. A minute to catch my breath. Then, sharply to the left. "Ouch!" as my knee is banged again. A sharp curve to the right, and it stops short. I exhale a deep breath, unaware that I had been holding it. I turn to my friend, "Wow, that was wild! What should we do next?" It was only our second ride, and we have a whole day.

Notes on the Contributor

Robert Werner is a teacher, learning advisor, and self-access center coordinator at Ryutsu Keizai University. He has taught ESL/EFL at elementary schools, junior high schools, and universities in Japan and the US, and he spent a memorable year teaching social studies at a New York City public high school. His research interests include self-access language learning, motivation, metacognition, and autoethnography.

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