



**Erasmus and Europe's Least Known and Taught
Languages: an empirical study of Erasmus students'
awareness of Regional and Minority Languages**

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The UK's 2016 referendum vote to leave the EU cast doubt over its on-going participation in certain European initiatives and institutions, including the popular student exchange programme, Erasmus. Such uncertainty has provoked concern amongst many, not least as studies have shown that short-term mobility periods can have considerable positive effects not only on students' future educational and work-related ambitions prospects (European Union 2014) but also on their cultural and linguistic awareness (cf. Mitchell 2012; European Communities 2004; ESN survey 2014). However, until now the focus of such research has predominantly been on nation states and their languages, overlooking one of the founding aims of the Erasmus scheme 'to promote a quantitative and qualitative improvement of the knowledge of the languages of the European Union, *and in particular those which are least widely used and taught*' (emphasis added, European Parliament 1995). Indeed, the potential of an Erasmus period abroad to expose students to some of Europe's least known and taught languages, namely regional and minority languages (RMLs), has not been investigated in research to date. Therefore, this article will use empirical data gathered from British students who have engaged in short-term mobility in France, Germany and Spain to illustrate the extent such mobility increases students' awareness of RMLs in Europe.

1. Introduction

As the largest exchange program in the world the Erasmus, now Erasmus+, program has been at the centre of many studies exploring the benefits of mobility for participants and for the European community as a whole. Until recently, research on Erasmus mobility centered almost exclusively on the socio-economic benefits,¹ however, in past years there has been a recognition of other benefits of mobility, such as increased cultural awareness and improved linguistic skills, that were previously marginal in scholarship in this area. Consequently, scholars have begun to assess the extent to which European

¹ The exchange of students for work and study purposes has been seen historically to strengthen the EU economically by developing professional connections between European countries as many mobile students engage in periods of employment in other EU nations following their Erasmus experience (González et al.: 2011: 413; Barilaro, 2015: 8).

student mobility is achieving the cultural, as well as socio-economic, aims set out by the European Commission (EC) in the creation of student mobility programs such as Erasmus. Although this literature continues to grow, particularly in the context of the ‘mother tongue plus two’ initiative (cf. European Communities 2004: 16-17; ESN survey 2014), it appears the aim of the EC ‘to promote a quantitative and qualitative improvement of the knowledge of the languages of the European Union, *and in particular those which are least widely used and least taught*’ (emphasis added, European Parliament 1995) through mobility programs, has been largely overlooked thus far. Indeed, Europe’s Regional and Minority Languages (RMLs), languages historically spoken in a region but known and used by a minority of those living in a given country (for example Catalan in Spain or Cornish in England), undoubtedly fall into the classification of ‘least widely used and least taught’ and have yet to feature in any study of Erasmus mobility. This study therefore aims to contribute to growing scholarly discussion of the cultural benefits of Erasmus mobility by investigating the potential of Erasmus mobility periods to increase participating students’ knowledge of Europe’s lesser known languages, RMLs. Empirical data from 275 students from UK universities who undertook an Erasmus period in RML regions of France, Germany and Spain will be used to gain an introductory understanding of the interaction of mobile students with RMLs and their perception of the impact of this on their awareness of RMLs in Europe.

2. Context

2.1 RMLs in Europe

Although today the linguistic make-up of Europe, and indeed the EU, is dominated by nation states and their languages, ‘[o]ver 50 autochthonous groups in the EU speak other languages than those spoken by the majority of each State’s population’ (European Parliament 2002: 7). These languages are typically confined to speakers in a small number of regions or even towns within the state as a whole and often ‘have different legal statuses and social and demographic strength’ (Ibid.) compared to the national language(s). The use of ‘minority’ can however be misleading as this ‘refers to the social group or community that share the language, but not to the language itself’, as the minority language of one country may be the national language of its neighbour (e.g. Danish as a minority language of Germany) (Ibid.).

Although undeniably ‘over the last three decades, regional minority languages in Europe have regained increasing recognition and support’ (Gorter & Cenoz, 2011: 651), many of these languages have a long history of repression and discrimination in favour of prestige varieties and, following the Age of Nationalism in the 19th century, national languages. Consequently, many RMLs are now considered to be endangered to some extent, though the severity of this endangerment varies considerably from country to country and language to language (cf. UNESCO 2016), as many discrepancies exist in the levels of support RMLs receive both on an official and popular level (European Parliament 2002: 11). However, ‘the European parliament has called on member states and the Union itself to take appropriate measures to respect and protect both regional and minority languages and ethnic minorities’ (Ibid.: 7), in an attempt to foster a more positive perception of RMLs and a consistent level of protection and promotion.

A key vehicle in this endeavour has been the European Council’s Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), adopted in 1992, as the ‘only legally binding instrument that contains concrete actions for the promotion, use and revitalisation of these languages’ (Npld.eu 2015: 18). However, although 33 European nations have signed the Charter, many have not and of those that have signed, eight are yet to ratify the Charter. Moreover, even amongst those nations that have both signed and ratified the Charter, considerable differences persist in the tangible support RMLs receive.

2.2 RMLs in the Host Countries

Indeed, in the host countries to be examined here, the lack of consistency between signatory states is evident and each country has its own complex history with its RMLs. Whilst all three host countries have signed the ECRML, only Germany and Spain have ratified the Charter. The justification given for France’s failure to ratify the ECRML is that it is felt it contradicts the French Constitution (European parliament 2002: 112; Hawkey & Kasstan 2015: 113-114), specifically Article 2 which states that ‘[l]a langue de la République est le français’ (French Constitution 2015). However, some have argued that even if the Constitution were to be rewritten to permit ratification of the ECRML, France’s republican values and its subsequent reluctance to undermine the principles of equality and fraternity by recognising the rights of individual groups (Oellers-Frahm 1999: 940), would continue to leave RMLs with very little room to improve their situation. If the Charter were to be ratified, it has been suggested that 75

RMLs would have to be recognised by the French government. However, only eight of these are in metropolitan France with the others all found in France's various overseas territories (DOMs) (Cerquiglini 1999), where the situation of the RML, or typically French based Creole, is very different, as will be discussed later. Inside metropolitan France RML speaker numbers are dwindling, despite some concessions to RMLs in recent years (cf. loi Deixonne (1951)), thanks to the disruption of familial transmission of the languages further limiting the oral use of these languages (Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism 2011: 22).

However, this is also true in German RML communities undeterred by Germany's exemplary efforts to support its RMLs which have been described by the ECRML's Committee of Experts as examples of 'best practice' (ECRML Germany 2014: 4). Indeed, in spite of favourable policies towards RMLs, the visibility and viability of Germany's seven RMLs in everyday life can be questioned (ECRML Germany 2014: 6-7). In Spain on the other hand several RMLs are co-official in their relative autonomous communities (ACs) and used actively in these communities. Some of Spain's 'big languages' (cf. Lasagabaster 2011), such as Catalan, Basque and Galician, are even taught as foreign languages as part of some language degrees in the UK and in other parts of the world (cf. Institut Ramon Llull 2016), indicating their privileged position amongst Europe's RMLs. In Spain itself, some have gone so far as to claim that Spain's best known RMLs, such as Catalan, are now in such a privileged position as to disadvantage monolingual Spanish speakers in these regions (cf. opinion piece in *Nature* 2008: 575; Anson 2014). However, not all of the seven RMLs recognised in Spain's ratification of the ECRML are in the same position and many of Spain's lesser known, or 'small languages' (cf. Lasagabaster 2011) do not receive the same level of support and exposure and can be seen in some areas to be in direct competition with other well-known RMLs.

3. Hypotheses

Given that prior to this research there was no evidence that mobile students would have any awareness of RMLs much less explicit knowledge of them, the decision was made to focus in this research on awareness of RMLs in general terms before and after mobility rather than knowledge of RMLs in quantifiable terms. Subsequently, the research for this article was guided by three major hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Undertaking a period of short-term Erasmus mobility will increase participants' awareness of RMLs in the host country.

Hypothesis 2: There will be variance in the levels of exposure to RMLs and subsequent increase in participants' awareness of RMLs post-mobility dependent on host country and host region.

Hypothesis 3: Those who had some awareness of RMLs previous to their mobility period will increase their awareness to a greater degree than those who were previously unaware of RMLs.

4. Methods and Participants

This research is comprised of empirical data collected from 275 participants via a direct elicitation task (survey) during 2016. Three surveys were used to collect data from students of British universities who were Erasmus students in France, Germany and Spain between 2011 and 2016. In all three surveys respondents were requested only from regions where RMLs have traditionally been spoken, which in the case of Spain and Germany were the languages and regions stated in their respective ratifications of the ECRML.² The relevant regions are highlighted on Maps I, II & III and the corresponding RMLs are listed in Table I.

The short, multiple choice surveys were distributed using certain community brokers as well as the *friend of a friend method* and were composed of four sections: demographic information (section 1), academic information (section 2), awareness of RMLs pre-mobility (section 3) and awareness of RMLs post-mobility (section 4).³ Although all three surveys were distributed via the same means- participants were requested via social media and by emails sent to eligible students from various international offices both in the UK and abroad – fewer participants were sourced from Germany (75 participants) than from France and Spain (both 100 participants). Furthermore, notably

² There is often difficulty in agreeing the number of RMLs in any given country as definitions of what 'counts' as a language in its own right and what could be classed as a dialect of another language vary. Subsequently there are and have been discussions in all these countries regarding adding further recognised languages – some of these have resulted in more languages being added recently whilst others are still debated.

³ The friend of a friend method is one of several judgment-sampling methods used in sociolinguistics (Milroy 1987). The researcher makes use of their extended social networks and those of their contacts to reach eligible participants (cf. Hoffman 2014).

more respondents from universities in England were received than from other British nations. This is, however, not an unusual trend as in the academic year 2008/9 79% of the UK's total outgoing Erasmus students were from English institutions (Whittaker 2011: 19).

Although no controls were put in place regarding the demographic and academic information of participants, in general, the data collected here can be seen as representative of British students who participate in Erasmus mobility. With 68% of participants being female (France: 75%, Germany: 64%, Spain: 64%) this study reflects the fact that Erasmus students are 'disproportionally female', (previous studies have indicated that generally between 60 and 70 percent of Erasmus students are female cf. European Commission, 2014: 7; Ahrens et al., 2010: 2; Teichler, 1996: 159). Despite the fact that some participants undertook mobility several years ago, the average current age of those surveyed, 22.27, was within the typical range for Erasmus students. This is perhaps explained by the fact that although participants were requested from groups of students mobile within a 5-year period, only 10% of respondents had undertaken their mobility period before 2013.

Students were asked to state whether the degree they were enrolled in during mobility was a Single or Joint Honours (SJH) Modern Languages degree (e.g French or French & German), a Mixed Joint Honours (MH) degree (one modern language and another non-language subject e.g French & Law), Business Studies,⁴ or Other. The majority of participants stated they were enrolled in a Modern Language degree of some kind (SJH, 42%, MH, 19%). 'Other' degrees (34%) varied from Marine Biology to Textiles, with just 5% stating their degree was Business Studies.

Participants' responses to sections 2, 3 and 4 were then cross tabulated in various combinations in order to investigate the hypotheses proposed. Subsequently, in order to establish the impact of the various independent variables that were investigated in this research on participants' reported increase in their RML awareness (dependent variable), Linear Regression Modelling (LRM) was used to identify any statistically significant factors.

⁴ Given the fact that within Erasmus internationally Business Studies is the most common discipline for mobile students (Juvan & Lesjake 2011: 25; Whittaker, 2011: 23), the decision was made to separate this degree type from the catch-all 'other' option.

5. Erasmus and Europe's Least Known Languages

5.1 Exposure to RMLs and Increase In Awareness

Given the lack of research into Europe's lesser known languages in the context of Erasmus mobility, the primary research questions of this study sought to establish whether mobile students encountered RMLs at all whilst abroad and if they perceived this to have improved their awareness of RMLs in the host country. The data collected in this study reveals that the majority of students surveyed did encounter RMLs during their mobility period to RML regions (65%) and many subsequently felt that their awareness of RMLs post-mobility was greater than pre-mobility. When asked to rank the increase in their RML awareness due to mobility from 1 ('not at all') to 5 ('significantly'), three quarters of all students surveyed felt their awareness of RMLs had increased to some degree during mobility and 11% stated that their mobility period had increased this awareness 'very significantly' (Figure I). Whilst for some this was based on simply gaining an awareness of RMLs existence, for others they stated having a greater awareness of the use of the language in everyday life, a knowledge of language policy and tensions surrounding these policies. In several cases students stated they begun learning an RML, such as Catalan, Provençal or Frisian, during mobility to these areas. This indicated that there is then a positive connection between Erasmus mobility and participants' awareness and knowledge of lesser known languages that has not been recognised previously.

However, as would be expected there was a marked difference in the increase of participants' RML awareness dependent on whether they had been exposed to RMLs or not. The mean increase in awareness score of the 179 students who reported encountering RMLs was 3.4 compared to 1.7 amongst the 96 who stated no contact. It is therefore unsurprising that LRM showed exposure to RMLs during mobility to be the most statistically significant factor effecting participants' post-mobility awareness of RMLs ($p=0.0000000000000123$).

5.2.1 Variance by Host Country

Although when the data was split into country datasets, as shown in Table III, the same correlation of exposure and average increase in awareness score was evident, it was clear in this data that the experiences of students mobile in different countries varied significantly and this had a profound impact on their increase in RML awareness. Far

fewer Erasmus students in Germany encountered RMLs (29%) than those in Spain (96%) or France (61%), resulting in more students in Germany stating their mobility period had no impact on their awareness of RMLs (48%). Amongst those mobile in Spain, just 4% of respondents stated no contact with RMLs during mobility and subsequently only 8% of all participants stated they did not feel there had been any increase in their RML awareness. Though the number of French Erasmus students not experiencing RMLs during mobility was much higher than the percentage of those in Spain, less than a quarter of Erasmus students in France felt their RML awareness did not increase at all. Therefore, it seems from this data, the higher the levels of exposure to RMLs the lower the percentage of students perceiving no increase in their RML awareness.

In a similar vein, there is also an indication here that the higher the levels of exposure to RMLs, the higher the percentage of students stating a more substantial increase in their RML awareness. Indeed, the mean score of increase in RML awareness per country does appear to correlate to the level of exposure to RMLs reported by participants with Erasmus students in Spain returning the highest average score (3.45) and those in Germany, the lowest (2.2). In Spain, where exposure to RMLs was highest, more than half (52%) deemed the increase in their awareness to have been ‘significant’ or ‘very significant’. In direct contrast, those mobile in Germany produced the lowest levels of ‘very significant’ increases (3%). Nevertheless, the percentage of students in France and Germany reporting a ‘significant’ or ‘very significant’ increase in their RML awareness is very similar (France 24%, Germany 21%) despite the gap in levels in RML exposure in these countries, suggesting a more complicated interplay of factors should be considered to explain why some students stated a higher increase in their RML awareness than others. Still, this data appears to support the assumption of Hypothesis 2 that there will be variation in exposure to RMLs dependent on host countries and this will therefore result in differing increases in participants RML awareness post-mobility.

5.2.2 Variance by Host Region

Variance in exposure to RMLs and subsequent increase in RML awareness dependent on host region was also prevalent in this study and indeed seemed to highlight the divergent and complex relationships RMLs have with their respective communities. Host region was shown to be a statistically significant factor in the dataset as a whole ($p=0.00605$), and though not statistically significant amongst individual national

datasets (most likely due to lower tokens in these datasets), the data from certain regions in all host nations allows some interesting reflections on RML interactions in these regions and in the host countries generally.

Although there is little meaningful difference in the percentages of students in each Spanish region encountering the RML, the cross-tabulation of region and reported level of increase in RML awareness post-mobility highlighted some intriguing differences between the interaction of students with two of Spain's 'big languages' dependent on which region they were in. Both Catalan and Basque are afforded the more extensive Part III ECRML protection in all their nominated regions: Catalonia and the Balearic Islands for Catalan and the Basque Country and Navarre for Basque. However, there is perhaps some reflection here of Navarre and the Balearic Islands' status as secondary regions of their relative RML in their lower mean increase in RML awareness score than Catalonia and Basque Country. The less poignant interactions of participants in these areas perhaps indicate the differing circumstances of the RML in these regions; Navarre contains many regions declared as 'mixed', where a large proportion of inhabitants do not speak the RML (ECRML Spain, 2005: 7), resulting in differing RML policies in key areas such as education and use of the RML in public spaces and media, perhaps resulting in Basque being less prevalent here than in the Basque Country. Similarly, uninformed visitors to the Balearic Islands may also be unlikely to encounter the RML as it is a region of high population mobility, due to tourism and seasonal workers (Salvà-Tomàs, 2002), meaning few RML speakers exist in certain areas. This variance underlines that the interaction of students with RMLs in the host country is more nuanced than a dichotomy of big, well known RMLs versus smaller, lesser known RMLs.

Nevertheless, this Spanish data does also indicate a correlation between the areas afforded the lesser Part II protection under the ECRML (Asturias and Aragon) and the extent to which students mobile here increased their awareness of the RML. Half of the students who did not encounter RMLs were mobile in these regions and the mean scores for both Asturias and Aragon reflect the fact that no student mobile here felt their RML awareness increased 'significantly' and the majority gave a score of 3 ('somewhat') or below. Furthermore, several students in this region commented that they encountered RMLs whilst travelling outside of the host region. Therefore, although stated levels of exposure to RMLs were very similar in all Spanish host regions, some very slight

differences in participants' increase in their awareness of RMLs based on their host region suggests some correlation with the linguistic situation and composition of the region and the application of language policies within the context of the ECRML which warrant further investigation.

Due to low numbers of participants experiencing RMLs in Germany, in all regions mean increase in RML awareness scores were generally lower than these scores in Spain and France, with the exception of the region of Schleswig-Holstein. Nevertheless, there is perhaps still some indication in this data of discernible differences based on the ECRML protection level of the RML in question. The regions of Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt scored lowest for mean increase in RML awareness and are both regions where Low German receives only Part II protection. For Saxony-Anhalt, the one student mobile there stated they did not encounter the RML, whereas of the five students mobile in Brandenburg two did encounter the RML yet one of these students still felt their awareness of RMLs did not increase at all. In contrast, in Schleswig-Holstein, all five participants in this region claimed to have encountered the RMLs and all stated their awareness had subsequently increased either 'somewhat' (3) or 'significantly' (4). It is perhaps unsurprising that this region was the only German region where all participants agreed on having encountered RMLs, as this is the region of highest RML density in Germany; Low German, Danish, North Frisian and Romani (which has protection nationwide) all receive Part III protection here and the region has been praised for its impressive and exceptional efforts to raise awareness of the region's historic linguistic diversity and support these languages (cf. Die Ministerpräsident des Landes Schleswig-Holstein, 2001; ECRML Germany, 2014: 13-17, 34-40, 73-80). Students here mentioned an array of cultural activities they took part in which exposed them to the RMLs of the region, such as attending the Niederdeutsche Bühne, which shows theatre in Low German, or listening to Radio plays and attending seminars on this topic hosted by local societies. Thus, despite low levels of RML exposure generating less substantial increase in RML awareness amongst German Erasmus students, this data still indicates some interesting variance in students' experience based on the RML situation in their host region.

Although there is no ECRML protection to speak of in France, the data for Erasmus students here indicated some similar correlations between the standing of the RML in the region and participants' exposure to this language and subsequent level of increase

in their RML awareness. For example, as shown in Table VI, the Rhône-Alpes region has the lowest levels of exposure to RMLs in this French data and subsequently returned the second lowest mean increase in RML awareness score. Franco-Provençal, the RML present in the Rhône-Alpes region, is one of France's less secure RMLs; it is classed as severely endangered by UNESCO with less than 1% of the regional population reported to speak it (Hawkey & Kasstan, 2015: 117) and a study by Kasstan (2010) reported that 67% of the native speakers claimed to see no future for the language.

Conversely, it is unsurprising that all participants from Reunion Island and Guadeloupe experienced the RML, or rather the French-based Creole, as several studies have illustrated the prominence of these languages in their speech communities (cf. Bollée, 2013, Colot & Ludwig, 2013). Consequently, the mean scores for increase in participants' RML awareness in these regions was by far the highest of all the regions in all countries examined here. All participants in the French DOMs reported having encountered RMLs in several different situations, from courses at the host university to via local friends and all noted that they had come across the RML being used around the town and host university generally, illustrating the vitality of the RMLs in the everyday life of these regions. Indeed, in all DOMs represented in this data almost all inhabitants of the region are bilingual in the local creole and French and the use of the creole in formal settings, in which traditionally French would have been the only language used, such as education, in recent years has led some to suggest a shift away from the traditional diglossia situation, making creoles much more visible in the community (Ibid.). Therefore, it is evident that opportunities to encounter and learn about each RML were indeed variable from country to country and then region to region, with some indication that the level of protection and engagement on the ground with RMLs affected participants' capacity to increase their RML awareness. As such it would be worthwhile to test Hypothesis 2 on a larger scale to further explore this.

5.3 Effect of Pre-Awareness of RMLs

However, it was not only levels of exposure to RMLs during mobility that differentiate the data of the three host countries here but also the levels of awareness of RMLs of students in each country pre-mobility. Interestingly, as shown in Table VII, levels of pre-awareness of RMLs were lowest amongst those mobile in Germany and highest amongst those in Spain, reflecting the results of both reported levels of exposure to

RMLs during mobility and participants' general impression of the increase of their RML awareness post-mobility. This therefore raises the possibility that a students' pre-awareness of RMLs may predispose them to recognising encounters with the RMLs of their host country and subsequently perceiving this as having a greater importance for their RML awareness than those previously unaware of the existence of RMLs. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that those with no prior knowledge of RMLs may well not have recognised instances when they encountered the RML unless the RML were either so prevalent so as not to be missed or in such a context that they could have had the concept of an RML explained to them. On the other hand, those who stated they had knowledge of RMLs prior to mobility, thanks to studies of the RMLs themselves or of language policy pertaining to them at their home institution or via personal experiences such as holidays, were in a strong position to enhance their awareness and gain more detailed knowledge during mobility thanks to everyday interactions with RMLs.

The effect of pre-awareness of RMLs on participants' awareness of RMLs post-mobility was shown to be statistically significant ($p=0.00013$), with those who stated pre-awareness giving an average score of 3.2 compared to 2.1 amongst those without. The influence of pre-awareness of RMLs was particularly evident amongst students mobile in Germany, where few had prior knowledge of RMLs but those who did had the second highest increase in RML awareness score (3.2), lower only than those mobile in Spain with pre-awareness. In contrast those mobile in Germany who claimed no prior awareness of RMLs scored the lowest average increase of RML awareness (1.7). Indeed, although the same number of respondents in the German cohort declared a 'very significant' increase in their awareness whether they had some pre-awareness or not, considerably more students with prior awareness felt their awareness increased 'somewhat' or 'significantly' thanks to their mobility. Moreover, of the 25 students in Germany who did have some awareness of RMLs previously, only 12% felt their RML awareness had not increased at all due to their mobility compared to 66% of those with no prior RML-awareness. Given this notable difference it is perhaps unsurprising that LRM indicated that having some pre-awareness of RMLs was a statistically significant factor ($p=0.0000156$) influencing German participants' reported increase in their RML awareness after mobility.

Although the influence of pre-awareness was not as profound on the increase of students' awareness amongst the French and Spanish cohort, there is still an indication

here that those with prior knowledge of RMLs were far less likely to gain no additional RML awareness due to mobility. This is clear when comparing the percentages of respondents presenting no increase (1) or only a slight increase (2) of their RML awareness as shown in Table VIII.

However, as also shown in Table VIII, a comparable portion of students in Spain and France stated a ‘significant’ or ‘very significant’ increase in their awareness regardless of pre-awareness of RMLs, which is not the case of those in Germany. Given the accounts discussed above of more meaningful and frequent interactions with RMLs whilst mobile, one could perhaps suggest that those mobile in France and Spain had a greater opportunity to increase their awareness of RMLs regardless of their prior knowledge of these languages. Consequently, although having no pre-awareness appears from this data to precipitate a lower level of increase in mobile students RML awareness, this effect is seemingly less profound if the exposure to RMLs during mobility is meaningful and frequent.

6. Conclusion

Therefore, in summary, this study indicated that short-term mobility can indeed increase participants’ awareness, and indeed knowledge, of RMLs with the majority of students mobile in historic RML regions encountering RMLs and engaging with these languages in a way that was not possible pre-mobility. However, it has become clear within this research that the experience of students mobile in different host countries varies greatly and consequently it is important not to generalise in regard to the positive effect mobility can have on students’ RML awareness. Indeed, whilst it can be stated that those respondents mobile in Spain exhibited very high levels of contact and interaction with RMLs during their time abroad, resulting in many commenting that their awareness of RMLs had improved considerably, quite the opposite was true in Germany. Nevertheless, although the average reported increase in awareness score was the lowest in Germany, more than half of participants mobile in Germany still felt their awareness of RMLs improved to some extent during their time abroad. Similarly, despite levels of exposure to RMLs in some regions being very low, resulting in participants reporting a lower level in the increase of their RML awareness, this was not the case across the board and in some regions it is clear that exposure to the RML has had a profound effect on students’ awareness of RMLs.

Furthermore, this study has highlighted the importance of awareness of RMLs before mobility in facilitating mobile students' ability to increase their RML awareness to a greater extent and gain tangible knowledge of RMLs. This was particularly important seemingly for students mobile in Germany where RMLs were reportedly less prevalent, though those Erasmus students in France and Spain with prior knowledge of RMLs were also less likely to state their Erasmus experience had not increased their awareness of RMLs at all. This suggests then that in order to maximise on mobile students' potential to increase their knowledge of RMLs during mobility more specific details of RMLs in the host country pre-departure could be helpful.

Therefore, Erasmus mobility undeniably holds the potential to increase mobile students' awareness of the linguistic diversity of European countries as part of a wider positive impact on the cultural awareness of participants. Further research in this area, perhaps engaging with students in different host countries or those undertaking the ever more popular option of Erasmus work placements, would no doubt be beneficial to explore in greater depth the extent and consistency of the positive impact indicated here. Additionally, it seems appropriate to now further investigate the specific knowledge that mobile students build about RMLs as a consequence of their increased awareness, by quantifying through further research the extent of RML language learning during mobility and participants' understanding of some of the sociolinguistic issues surrounding RMLs. Indeed, now more than ever it is important to understand and highlight such benefits to illustrate the advantages of such mobility not just on a socio-economic level but also on a cultural and intellectual level, thus demonstrating the need to protect the future prospects of British students in participating in the Erasmus scheme in light of the United Kingdom's forthcoming exit from the European Union.

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Biographical information

Following her own year abroad to a Regional and Minority Language region of France, Amber Bartlett became increasingly interested in the practical and academic implications of Erasmus mobility. Her experiences as the President of the Bristol Erasmus Society Network (ESN) in Bristol and her interest in linguistics led her to pursue a research project investigating the connection between mobile European students and RMLs, which was later extended to a full master's thesis. Alongside her studies, she worked at the University of Bristol International Office within the Erasmus and Study Abroad team to gain a greater understanding of the mechanics of the Erasmus scheme in British HE institutions. She currently works within Professional Services at the University of Bristol.

Keywords

Regional and Minority Languages, Linguistic diversity, Sociolinguistics



Map I, II, III: Maps of the host countries with target RML areas circled in red. Participants were also requested from Corsica and any French speaking DOMs not shown on the map of France.

France	Germany	Spain
<p>Alsatian (Alsace), Basque (Pyrénées-Atlantiques), Breton (Brittany), Catalan (Languedoc-roussillon), Franco-Provençal (Rhône-Alpes), Guadeloupean Creole (Guadeloupe), Occitan (Midi –Pyrénées), Provençal (PACA), Reunion Creole (Reunion).</p>	<p>Danish (Schleswig-Holstein), Low German (Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein, Brandenburg, North Rhine-Westphalia and Saxony-Anhalt), Lower Sorbian (Brandenburg), North Frisian (Schleswig-Holstein), Romani (nationwide), Saterland Frisian (Lower Saxony), Upper Sorbian (Free State of Saxony) and Low German.</p>	<p>Aragonese (Aragon), Aranese (Catalonia), Asturian and Galician-Asturian (Asturias), Basque (the Basque Country & Navarre), Catalan (the Balearic Islands & Catalonia), Galician (in Galicia) and Valencian (Valencia).</p>

Table I: Showing which RMLs were encountered by participants and thus included in this research.

Country	Total number of respondents	Number of respondents France	Number of respondents Germany	Number of respondents Spain
England	201	71	54	76
Ireland	5	1	2	2
Scotland	50	22	13	15
Wales	16	5	6	5
Unknown	3	1	0	2

Table II: Number of respondents from universities located within the countries of the UK.

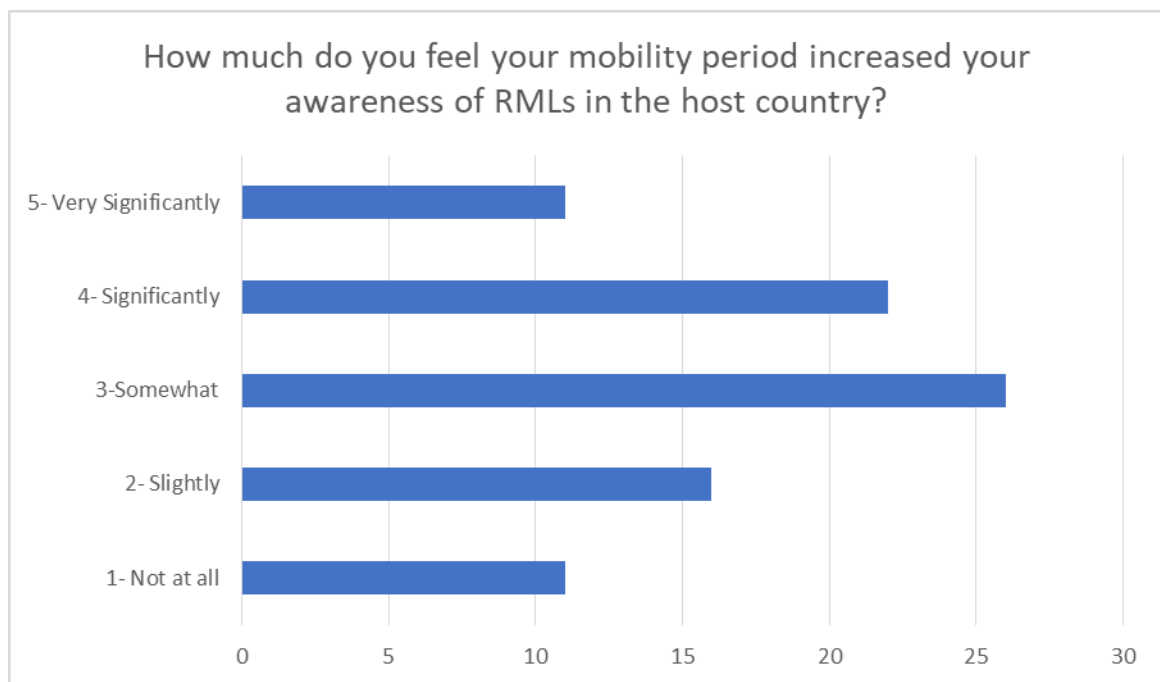


Figure I: Percentage responses to increase in RML awareness.

	Did you encounter RMLs in the host country whilst on your year/ semester abroad?								
	France			Germany			Spain		
	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No
Total		61% (61)	39% (39)		29% (22)	71% (53)		96% (96)	4% (4)
1 – Not at all	23% (23)	3% (2)	54% (21)	48% (36)	9% (2)	64% (34)	8% (8)	4% (4)	100% (4)
2 - Slightly	26% (26)	25% (15)	28% (11)	8% (6)	9% (2)	8% (4)	12% (12)	13% (12)	0% (0)
3- Somewhat	27% (27)	34% (21)	15% (6)	23% (17)	32% (7)	19% (10)	28% (28)	29% (28)	0% (0)
4- Significantly	16% (16)	26% (16)	0% (0)	19% (14)	41% (9)	9% (5)	31% (31)	32% (31)	0% (0)
5- V. significantly	8% (8)	12% (7)	3% (1)	3% (2)	9% (2)	0% (0)	21% (21)	22% (21)	0% (0)
Mean Score	2.6	3.2	1.7	2.2	3.3	1.7	3.45	3.6	1

Table III: Cross tabulation of level of encounter with reported increase in RML awareness by country.

Region	RML exposure	Mean Score	1- Not at all	2- Slightly	3- Somewhat	4- Significantly	5- Significantly V.
Galicia	100% (14)	4	0% (0)	7% (1)	21% (3)	36% (5)	36% (5)
Catalonia	93% (26)	3.6	7% (2)	14% (4)	14% (4)	36% (10)	29% (8)
Valencia	100% (32)	3.4	6% (2)	9% (3)	38% (12)	28% (9)	19% (6)
Basque Country	100% (7)	3.3	14% (1)	14% (1)	29% (2)	14% (1)	29% (2)
Asturias	83% (5)	3.0	17% (1)	0% (0)	50% (3)	33% (2)	0% (0)
Navarre	100% (3)	3.0	0% (0)	33% (1)	33% (1)	33% (1)	0% (0)
Aragon	88% (7)	2.8	13% (1)	25% (2)	38% (3)	25% (2)	0% (0)
Balearic Islands	100% (2)	2.5	50% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	50% (1)	0% (0)

Table IV: Breakdown by Spanish host region of the number of students reporting RML exposure and the subsequent degrees of increase of their RML awareness due to their mobility period.

Region	RML exposure	Mean Score	1- Not at all	2- Slightly	3- Somewhat	4- Significantly	5- V. Significantly
Schleswig Holstein	100% (5)	3.6	0% (0)	0% (0)	40% (2)	60% (3)	0% (0)
Bremen	38% (3)	2.4	38% (3)	0% (0)	50% (4)	12% (1)	0% (0)
North Rhine Westphalia	25% (7)	2.1	43% (12)	14% (4)	21% (6)	14% (4)	7% (2)
Saxony	14% (1)	2.1	57% (4)	0% (0)	14% (1)	29% (2)	0% (0)
Hamburg	50% (1)	2	50% (1)	0% (0)	50% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Mecklenburg Vorpommern	0% (0)	2	50% (1)	0% (0)	50% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Lower Saxony	18% (3)	1.9	65% (11)	6% (1)	6% (1)	23% (4)	0% (0)
Brandenburg	40% (2)	1.6	60% (3)	20% (1)	20% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Saxony-Anhalt	0% (0)	1	100% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)

Table V: Breakdown by German host region of the number of students reporting the varying degrees of increase of their RML awareness due to their mobility period.

Region	RML exposure	Mean Score	1- Not at all	2- Slightly	3- Somewhat	4- Significantly	5- V. Significantly
Guadeloupe	100% (1)	5	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100%(1)
Reunion Island	100% (7)	4.4	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	57% (4)	43% (3)
Brittany	50% (2)	3	25% (1)	25% (1)	0% (0)	25% (1)	25%(1)
Midi-pyrénées	76.5% (13)	3	12% (2)	18% (3)	35% (6)	18% (3)	12% (2)
Basque Country	100% (1)	3	0% (0)	0% (0)	100%(1)	0% (0)	0% (0)
PACA	61% (17)	2.5	14%(4)	37% (10)	29% (8)	18% (5)	0% (0)
Alsace	100% (8)	2.5	0% (0)	50% (4)	50%(4)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Rhône-Alpes	24% (7)	2	45% (13)	21% (6)	24% (7)	7% (2)	3% (1)
Languedoc-Roussillon	80%(4)	1.8	40% (2)	40% (2)	20% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)

Table VI: Breakdown by French host region of the number of students reporting the varying degrees of increase of their RML awareness due to their mobility period.

	Before your year/ semester abroad did you have any awareness of RMLs?					
	France		Germany		Spain	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Total	74% (74)	26% (26)	33% (25)	66% (50)	84% (84)	16%(16)
1 – Not at all	18% (13)	38% (10)	12% (3)	66% (33)	6% (5)	19% (3)
2 - Slightly	23% (17)	35% (9)	0% (0)	12% (6)	10% (8)	25% (4)
3- Somewhat	34% (25)	8% (2)	48% (12)	10% (5)	32% (27)	6% (1)
4- Significantly	18% (13)	12% (3)	36% (9)	10% (5)	32% (27)	25% (4)
5- V. significantly	8% (6)	8% (2)	4% (1)	2% (1)	20% (17)	25% (4)
Mean Score	2.8	2.2	3.2	1.7	3.5	3.1

Table VII: Correlation of pre-awareness of RMLs generally pre mobility and degree of increase in RML awareness due to mobility by country.

	Before your year/ semester abroad did you have any awareness of RMLs?					
	France		Germany		Spain	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Total	74% (74)	26% (26)	33% (25)	66% (50)	84% (84)	16%(16)
Combined 'Not at all' and 'Slightly'	41% (30)	73.% (19)	12% (3)	78% (39)	16% (13)	44% (7)
Combined 'Significantly' and 'V. significantly'	26% (19)	20% (5)	40% (10)	12% (6)	52% (44)	50% (8)

Table VIII: Collated highest and lowest increase in RML awareness scores by country.