

Visit to Berlin

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Elina interned at the Humboldt Universität in Berlin where she investigated what influence language similarity between German and Dutch has on the acquisition of Dutch gender.

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From November 2019 up until January 2020, I did my internship at the Humboldt Universität in Berlin. Under the supervision of Prof. Artemis Alexiadou, I did research on Dutch heritage speakers whose dominant language is German. These bilingual speakers learned both Dutch and German from an early age, but since they live in Germany, their Dutch proficiency often differs from native speakers of Dutch living in a Dutch-speaking country. I investigated what influence language similarity between German and Dutch has on the acquisition of Dutch gender in this group. After finishing my bachelor's degree in German, I also wanted to use this opportunity to intern in a German-speaking country, which is one of the reasons why I went to Berlin.

During my internship I shared an office in a building that is typical for the German Plattenbau from the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In other words, it was quite ugly and old. Nonetheless, I was very happy to have a place to work where other researchers were working on similar topics. In this way, I also got a sneak peak of what it is like to work in academia and I could ask them questions if I ran into any difficulties. Every Monday, there was a meeting from the research group. It was interesting to hear in these meetings what other researchers were doing. I also presented my own pilot study. I designed this study from scratch. This meant a lot of reading, creating items, and finding participants. The latter was difficult, since I was looking for a very specific participant group. After many emails I found some participants. Although I did not gather very much data, I got some interesting results, which I hope to explore further in my thesis.

Not only did I enjoy my internship, but the city itself was also very enjoyable. Berlin is a city with a lot of history and many contrasts. If you see a nice building, there often is a ugly building next to it. My first full day in Berlin was exactly 30 years after the fall of the wall, which was special. There was a concert at the Brandenburger Tor and commemorations were held. In addition, Berlin's history is visible all around you every day when walking through the city. There are for example several museums on the history of the Second World War or the Cold War, as well as on older periods like the antiquity. I also did a guided tour in which stories of people who tunnelled to freedom in the GDR were told and I saw an original escape tunnel. An advantage of being in Berlin in December is that there are many Christmas markets, which I loved to visit. Something that made my stay unforgettable as well were my roommates. This was not only a very nice opportunity to talk in German, but we had a lot of fun together as well. I taught them some Dutch, we went jogging and had dinner together.

In conclusion, I really enjoyed my internship! Doing this abroad made it a special memory for me! If you doubt interning or studying abroad, I would definitely recommend it. Of course there are difficult moments during which you miss home, but it is also a special experience in which you learn more about yourself. It is important to start organizing it early, since some forms need to be filled in and you have to find a room. Once you are abroad, start doing fun things from the beginning. Time flies and before you know it, you already have to go home. ■