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ABSTRACT

This study endeavors to explore the cross-cultural similitudes and contrasts in compliment reactions among Saudi EFL learners (SNNs) and American Native Speakers (ANSs). It is important in linguistic interaction between native and non-native English speakers to reflect the cultural values of compliment expressions as they are of wide variety in terms of their roles and usages. Intercultural competence is necessary to avoid communication failures, and at the same time, to establish a rich ground for expanded communication between native English speakers and their non-native speakers.

Keywords: compliment; intercultural competence; communication failure; saudi non-native speaker; american native speaker.

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Pragmatic Competence and the Production of Compliment among Saudi EFL Learners and American Native Speakers

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ABSTRACT

This study endeavors to explore the cross-cultural similitudes and contrasts in compliment reactions among Saudi EFL learners (SNNs) and American Native Speakers (ANSs). It is important in linguistic interaction between native and non-native English speakers to reflect the cultural values of compliment expressions as they are of wide variety in terms of their roles and usages. Intercultural competence is necessary to avoid communication failures, and at the same time, to establish a rich ground for expanded communication between native English speakers and their non-native speakers. The data will be elicited through a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT), which is embraced and adjusted from Tamimi Sa'd (2015a). The questionnaire consists of 6 real-life academic situations, provoking the speech act of compliment. The data will be categorized as stated by Herbert's (1986) classification and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The researcher believes significant differences are observed as well as similarities in the choice of compliment response types by both groups of SNNs and ANSs, as well as male and female SNSs. Moreover, the results reveal some instances of miscommunication in intercultural interactions because the participants might follow their first cultural norms. Therefore, this paper will help to avoid pragmatic failures and improve language teaching and learning.

Keywords: compliment; intercultural competence; communication failure; saudi non-native speaker; american native speaker.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication with native speakers of another language involves learners memorizing vocabulary items and mastering grammatical rules. Gumperz (1972), Halliday (1973), Robinson (1972), Hymes (1974), Saville-Troike (1996), Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992) emphasize the importance of competing vocabulary, semantics, and syntactic levels, which are the pure levels of linguistics for learning another language, and also the communicative competence based on social norms, values, and relations between individuals. Yalden (1983) has summarized the three systems or aspects of language that any learner of a language should master: (1) formal system; (2) semantic system; and (3) sociolinguistic system. In the meantime, Gumperz (1972) distinguishes these systems into two main competences of language as follows:

Whereas linguistic competence covers the speaker's ability to produce grammatically correct sentences, communicative competence describes his ability to select, from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him, forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behavior in specific encounters (205).

Empirical studies in interlanguage pragmatics (e.g. Thomas, 1983; Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Kasper, 1996, 1997; Kasper & Rose, 1999; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001) indicate that even advanced language learners display pragmatic failure due to the recall of the standards of their native language. This might be

misunderstood by the other language native speakers. That is why the reasons behind pragmatic failure in intercultural communication studies have a very important position. These studies eliminate the gap between native and non-native learners and also improve their systematic knowledge (interlanguage) of the second or foreign language and enable them to use it in real-life situations (socio-pragmatics) in order to acquire an appropriate semi-native language (see Barkhuizen, 2004).

II. RESEARCH AIMS

Since practical knowledge is an essential piece of language capability as characterized by Bachman (1990), studying variations in interlanguage pragmatics of the Saudi non-native speakers of English production of the discourse act of compliment responses needs more in-depth investigation. Therefore, this study plans to explore the discourse act of compliment responses by Saudi native and nonnative speakers of English and American native speakers in an attempt to bridge the gap between the groups under investigation and to point out the cultural similarities or differences in realizing the speech act of compliment responses. It also aims to examine the influence of mother tongue language on Saudi non-native speakers' proficiency in English on their use of this speech act. Moreover, this study intends to find out if there are gender differences among those learners.

III. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

Previous studies have been done in the area of speech acts in general and speech act of compliments in particular. But to the researcher's knowledge, the area of discourse acts of compliment responses among Saudi learners is rare. Only a limited number of studies have examined other discourse acts (e.g., Bajri 2005 and 2008).

This research is an intercultural study of Saudis and Americans, focusing on the pragmatic aspect of the discourse act of compliment responses. Therefore, it will surely help to link these languages together and provide Saudi learners

with linguistic as well as pragmatic knowledge while performing the speech act of compliment responses in the target language. This is to avoid communication breakdown. Moreover, it will shed some light on the similarities and differences in compliment response strategies among Saudi male and female learners. Finally, it is hoped that this study will be beneficial for pragmatic researchers who intend to conduct further studies on the speech act of compliment responses among different Arabic cultures.

IV. RESEARCH STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Due to the cultural differences between Saudi non-native learners of English and the targeted language of English, this study finds it evident that they will face problems when they want to communicate with native speakers in real-life situations due to the cultural differences between their language and the objective language of English. Therefore, the divergence in the awareness of the discourse act norms of compliment responses between these two languages is a matter of concern in the present study, which will help in acquiring the pragmatic performance of this speech act. Wolfson (1981) emphasizes that "speech acts differ cross-culturally not only in the way they are realized but also in their distribution, their frequency of occurrence, and in the functions they serve" (123). Saudi learners have to be aware of how to develop these important things which are issued by Wolfson when addressing native interlocutors.

V. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Accordingly, this current study aims at:

- Examining realistic similitudes and contrasts in the realization types of the discourse act of compliment responses between SNNs and ANNs.
- Investigating how the variables of gender and social status assume a part in the utilization of compliment responses.
- Identifying significant similarities or divergences between Saudi females and males

in their use of the compliment response strategy types.

VI. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study investigates the compliment response behavior of Saudi EFL learners according to Herbert and Holmes's (1986) compliment responses taxonomy. Specifically, the present study is an attempt to find answers to the following research questions:

- What are the pragmatic similarities and differences in the realization types of the speech act of compliment responses between Saudi native speakers (SNSs) and American native speakers (ANSs)?
- Do variables such as interlocutors' gender and social status play a role in the use of compliment responses?
- Is there any substantial similarity or variance between Saudi females and males in their use of the compliment response strategy types?

VII. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Alzebaree (2017) investigates Kurdish EFL undergraduate students' interlanguage pragmatic competence in their use of different discourse acts. He uses a discourse completion task (DCT) that consists of thirty scenarios on the discourse acts of suggestion, opinion, request, permission, offer, apology, questioning, refusal, invitation and advice. The total number of the participants is 97, where 83 are KEFLUS and 14 are native speakers of English. The questionnaire is given twice to the KEFLUS learners; once in English to examine their pragmatic competence in English and then in Arabic to examine the learners' mother tongue effect. After the collection of data, the answers of the members are organized and analyzed. The results show that there are differences between KEFLUS and NSE in using the strategies of the speech acts under investigation. Moreover, the results reveal insignificant differences between females and males in making discourse acts.

Alemi et al. (2014) examine pragmatic assessment and rating criteria of Iranian English language teachers in their production of compliment discourse acts. The researchers used a rating

questionnaire from 60 participants and analyzed the data through descriptive statistics, t-tests, and Chi-squares. The findings indicate that Iranian EFL instructors take seven macro principles into consideration when rating EFL students' pragmatic creations of the discourse act of compliment. These principles are 'politeness', 'interlocutors characteristics and relationships', 'variety and range', 'socio-pragmatic appropriateness', 'sincerity', 'complexity', and 'linguistic appropriacy'. Moreover, the results underpin the importance of rater training regarding the assessment of the production of compliments based on pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic norms.

Similar study has been done by Alemi and Rezanejad (2014) in the field of pragmatic consistency in rating and assessment. The researchers negotiate the importance of the test fairness issue that American native and Iranian non-native English instructors use when rating the standards of non-native learners performing the discourse act of compliment. A rating questionnaire was administered among 60 American native speakers and Iranian nonnative teachers of English. This is done in order to have a common ground and criteria when they rate the learners' pragmatic productions of compliment. The results show that there are nine main criteria while doing the rating and assessment of pragmatic production. These are: 'interlocutors,' 'affective factors,' 'sincerity,' 'strategy use' relationships,' 'politeness,' 'fluency,' 'authenticity,' 'linguistic accuracy,' and 'cultural issues.' To conclude the results, it is noticed that 'strangely use' and 'politeness' are the most frequent standard among the non-native and native raters, respectively.

Jucker (2009) studies pragmatic research methods to examine the speech act of compliment. These methods are: 'armchair,' 'field,' and 'laboratory.' All of them are suitable and depend on the intuited data, whether natural or elicited, in collecting compliments. Furthermore, the participants have been investigated according to different criteria, such as the pattern of the compliment, the demographics of the compliment user and the

compliment recipient, compliment replies, and so on. The results reveal that....

Zayed (2014) investigates male and female AUE learners' performing the speech act of compliment with native speakers of English, the most frequent positive adjectives used by them, and the effect of the selected topic on compliments. The data collection for this study is a questionnaire, which consists of eight situations, and the participants are AUE, 15 male and 15 female learners. The findings show that most of the learners display pragmatic errors that are not familiar with the English language. They use Arabic compliments and jokes. They also adopt two positive adjectives, 'good' and 'nice'. Therefore, the findings reveal no differences between genders regarding their use of compliment strategies or in adopting the most positive adjectives or the topic of the setting, which is not a central factor in conveying the compliments.

Based on cultural values, Solodka and Perea (2018) analyze the techniques of complimenting in Russian, Ukrainian, and English speaking communities. They indicate that many of the cultural values are reflected by performing the speech act of compliment. These values are personal talents, possessions, appearance, new acquisitions, and skills. The aim of this research is to teach Ukrainian and Russian second language learners the ways of compliments used by American native speakers to avoid pragmatic failure. To carry out this research, the method of ethnomethodology is used to collect the data. The researchers interviewed 445 Russian, 231 Ukrainian and 245 American participants online. The results reveal how native speakers of the abovementioned communities use the language context, expressions syntactical structure, attributes praised, and cultural lexicon when complimenting others. They find out that the results of this study help in showing how to teach English to Ukrainians and vice versa, how to teach Russian or Ukrainian to speakers of English.

From a cross-cultural perspective, Al-Mansoob et al. (2019) compare American English native speakers and Yemeni Arabic native speakers in their realization of the discourse act of compliment. A questionnaire is used in order to

collect the data. It consists of six compliment situations. The participants are 30 Yemenis and 30 Americans who are involved in this study. The researchers analyzed the compliment semantic formula responses of 380 Arabic ones and 338 of English. The results reinforce some practical resemblances and variances between the two native sets. The admiration strategy is found in both cultures, which proves its universality across cultures, but there are other strategies that are culturally specific to Arabs, such as exaggeration, gratitude to God, and metaphor. Moreover, the results reveal that the compliment responses used by Americans are steady and formulaic in nature, whereas the ones used by Arabs are varied in formulas and long utterances.

A sociolinguistic study is introduced by Al-Gamal (2017), who attempts to examine compliment responses used by male and female Yemeni native speakers of Arabic. He collects the data by using the technique of Herbert's (1989), which is a questionnaire consisting of eight situations. The researcher has adopted only four of them. A total of 45 female and male learners from different universities in Yemen have participated in this research. The results show that both females and males use different strategies in responding to compliments, although they do not use all the types of compliment responses that were already introduced in Herbert's (1989) technique. Moreover, they both prefer to use 'appreciation token' and 'return' types when responding to compliments.

VIII. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In this part, the methodology utilized to answer the research questions is described. Detailed information about participants and from where and what is the tool for eliciting the data is described. Moreover, the procedures that are followed in analyzing the data and also the techniques or taxonomies used to scheme code the strategies used by the participants in their production of compliment responses were treated as well.

1. Participants

Participants of the present study consist of three groups of Saudi university learners of English: Saudi non-native speakers of English (SNNs), American native speakers (ANSs), and Saudi native speakers (SNSs). The first group is of BA and MA students, ranging from 18 to 25 in age, at Jeddah, King Abdulaziz, and Oum Al-Qura universities. It comprises 84 males and 99 females speaking English as a non-native language. The second group is composed of 20 American native speakers of English living in Saudi Arabia. They are asked to respond to the same questionnaire in order to correlate with the appropriate production of compliment responses pragmatically. Finally, the third group is the same as the first, but this time they will respond using their Saudi mother tongue language.

The participants are asked to fill in a section relating to their personal information and then to the situation in a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) questionnaire, and they are informed of the common objective of this study, but they are not told the exact purpose, which is to examine their compliment strategies and get neutral responses. This is done during the academic year 2020.

2. Instrument

Kasper and Dahl (1991), as well as Billmyer and Varghese (2000), emphasize that in interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatic studies, many researchers use Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT) as their data collection tool, while Beebe and Cummings (1986) indicate that this method is time consuming for gathering a large corpus of data. Hence, the data for the current study were gotten using a DCT, adopted and adapted from Tamimi Sa'd (2015a), which consisted of 5 real-life academic compliment situations, given by either unequal-status interlocutors where the speaker is lower status (-P) as in situations 2 and 4 or equal-status interlocutors where the speaker and hearer are equals (=P) as in situations 1, 3, and 5 (see Table 1 & Appendix 1 & 2). These situations are of two versions to elicit data on compliment responses in English and Arabic (see methodology used in Takahashi and Beebe, 1987; and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1986), and they are sent via an online system. Furthermore, the participants are told to imagine themselves involved in these situations and write their responses as they would give them in the provided blank space after each described situation.

Table 1: Description of the DCT Situations

No.	Situation	Power	Gender	Description
1	Class Presentation	=P	Speaker = Male/Female Hearer = Female	Speaker = Hearer
2	Exam Postpone	-P	Speaker = Male/Female Hearer = Female	Speaker < Hearer
3	Academic Seminar	=P	Speaker = Female/Male Hearer = Male	Speaker = Hearer
4	Class Project	-P	Speaker = Male/female Hearer = Male	Speaker < Hearer
5	School Conference	=P	Speaker = Male/Female Hearer = Female	Speaker = Hearer

3. Procedure

In analyzing the data of compliment responses, some steps are used in order to accomplish this study. These are as follows:

- Using Herbert's (1986) compliment responses taxonomy as in Tamim Sa'd (2015) to test the compliment reply patterns that appeared (see Table 1).

Table 2: Herbert's (1986) Compliment Responses Taxonomy

Response Type	Examples
A. Agreement I. Acceptances 1. Appreciation Token 2. Comment Acceptance 3. Praise Upgrade	Thanks; thank you; [smile] Thanks, it's my favorite too. Really brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it?
II. Comment History	I bought it for the trip to Arizona.
III. Transfers 1. Reassignment 2. Return	My brother gave it to me. So's yours.
B. Non-agreement 1. Scale Down	It's really quite old.
II. Question	Do you really think so?
III. Non-acceptances 1. Disagreement 2. Qualification	I hate it. It's all right, but Len's is nicer.
IV. No Acknowledgement	[silence]
C. Other Interpretations I. Request	You wanna borrow this one too?

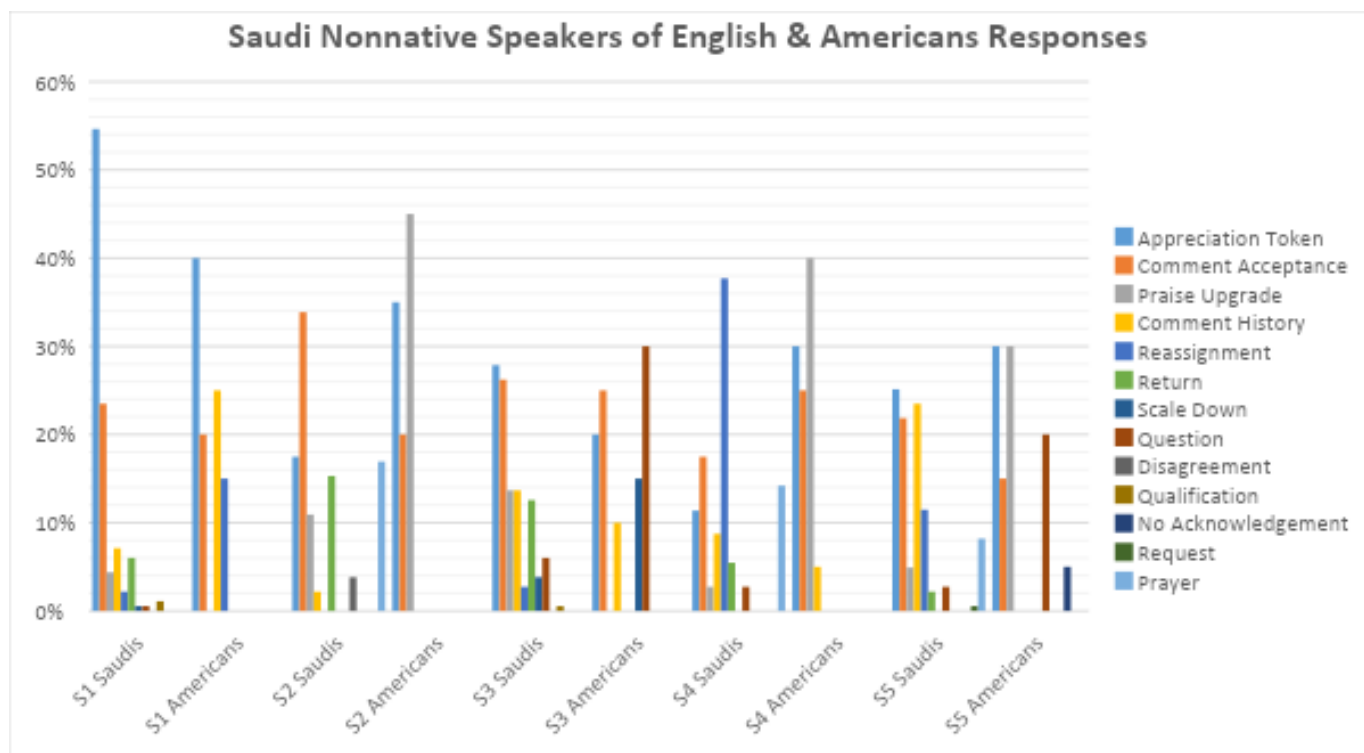
The study uses quantitative analysis of the data collected by discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and qualitative analysis by describing the tactics used to reply to compliments regarding the samples used by SNNSs and ANSs in order to examine their intra-lingual similarities and differences. The codification of all the three groups of compliment strategies has been carried out based on Herbert's (1986) compliment responses taxonomy. Furthermore, there are other variables, such as gender, social status, education, or age, which are believed to affect the strategies used for compliment responses. The Arabic compliment responses of the SNSs group are used to compare between the Arabic and English languages and at the same time to test the pragmatic transfer in compliment answers by Saudi students of English.

IX. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using Herbert's (1986) compliment responses taxonomy, Table 3 and Graph 1 show the strategies of SNNSs and ANSs when responding to compliments.

Table 3: Compliment Responses of SNNs of English and ANSs

Response Type	S1 Saudis	%	S1 Americans	%	S2 Saudis	%	S2 Americans	%	S3 Saudis	%	S3 Americans	%	S4 Saudis	%	S4 Americans	%	S5 Saudis	%	S5 Americans	%
A. Agreement																				
I. Acceptances	100	54.64	8	40	32	17.48	7	35	51	27.86	4		21	11.37	6	30	46	25.13	6	30
1. Appreciation Token	43	23.49	4	20	62	33.87	4	20	48	26.22	5	20	32	17.48	5	25	40	21.85	3	15
2. Comment Acceptance																				
3. Praise Upgrade	8	4.37	0	0	20	10.92	9	45	25	13.66	0	25	5	2.73	8	40	9	4.91	0	0
II. Comment History	13	7.1	5	25	4	2.18	0	0	25	13.66	2	10	16	8.74	1	5	43	23.49	6	30
III. Transfers																				
1. Reassignment	4	2.18	3	15	0	0	0	0	5	2.73	0	0	69	37.7	0	0	21	11.47	0	0
2. Return	11	6.01	0	0	28	15.3	0	0	23	12.56	0	0	10	5.46	0	0	4	2.18	0	0
B. Non-agreement																				
1. Scale Down	1	0.54	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	3.82	3	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
II. Question	1	0.54	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	6.01	6	30	5	2.73	0	0	5	2.73	4	20
III. Non-acceptances																				
1. Disagreement	0	0	0	0	7	3.82	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Qualification	2	1.09	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.54	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
IV. No Acknowledgement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
C. Other Interpretations																				
I. Request	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.54	0	0
2. Prayer	0	0	0	0	31	16.93	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	14.2	0	0	15	8.19	0	0



Graph 1: Compliment Responses of SNNs of English and ANS

1. Quantitative Results and Discussion of SNNs and ANSs of Compliments

Situation 1: You have given a presentation in the class. After class, one of your female friends says, “Your presentation was great.”

For the response type of agreement, the data shows that 54.64% of SNNs of English frequently use the appreciation token, while 40% of ANSs use this agreement. For the comment acceptance, 23.49% of SNNs frequently used this, while 20% for the ANSs. For the praise upgrade, 8 respondents, or 4.37%, frequently used this response type. Meanwhile, 25% of ANS respondents and 7.1% of SNNs frequently use the comment history in an agreement response type. In the transfer stage of the response type, 15% of ANSs and 2.18% of SNNs of English frequently use the reassignment response, while 6.01% of SNNs use the return response type. For the non-agreement response type, the data shows that only 0.54% of SNSs use the scale down and question response, while for non-acceptance, 1.09% of SNNs use this type.

Situation 2: You are not ready for the exam. You ask your professor to postpone the examination and she says, “I’ll postpone it just because you are a good student.”

In the response to situation 2, the data shows that comment acceptance is the frequently used agreement response by SNNs (33.87%), followed by appreciation token (17.48%), and 10.92% of praise upgrade. For ANSs, appreciation token is still the most regularly used agreement answer at 51%, followed by remark recognition at 48% and only 13.66% for praise upgrade. Meanwhile, for comment history, only 2.18% of SNNs use this response. For the transfer stage of agreement, there are still 28 respondents, or 15.3% of SNNs, using this response type. Furthermore, for the non-agreement response type under non-acceptance, there are 3.82% of respondents that use disagreement and 16.93% of prayer under other interpretations.

Situation 3: You and a friend of yours attend an academic seminar. After that, he says to you, “I liked the questions you asked in the seminar.”

SNNS respondents of 27.86% frequently use the appreciation token under agreement response in this situation, while ANNs respond with a percentage of 20%. The data shows that in comment acceptance, 26.22% of SNNSs use this response type, compared to and 20% for ANNs. The praise upgrade and comment history response each receive a similar percentage of 13.66% SNNSs, while 10% of the respondents of ANNs use this response. For the transfer stage, reassignment and return receive 2.73% and 12.56%, respectively, for SNNSs. For the scale down under non-agreement response, the data shows that 3.82% of SNNSs use this response, compared to only 15% of ANNs. For question under non-agreement, 6.01% of SNNSs and 30% of ANNs use this response type.

Situation 4: You accomplish a classroom project successfully. Later, a male professor says, “Your project was the best one in the university.”

SNNSs of the percentage 17.48% frequently use the comment acceptance as the response type, followed by appreciation token of 11.37% and 2.73% for praise upgrade, while ANNs frequently use the praise upgrade response of 40%, followed by appreciation token and comment acceptance of 30% and 25%, respectively. In comment history under agreement response, SNNSs of 8.74% use

this response, while only 5% of the respondents of ANNs use this response. Meanwhile, in the non-agreement response type, it is evidently shown in the data that 2.73% of SNNSs use the question response type in this situation, compared to 14.2% for the prayer response under other interpretations.

Situation 5: You are coordinating a school conference with a classmate. She says to you, “Wow, you are really handling things very well.”

SNNSs frequently use the appreciation token of 25.13%, 21.85% for comment acceptance, and 4.91% use this response type. ANNs frequently use the appreciation token of 30% and comment acceptance of 15% in this situation. For the comment history under agreement response, 23.49% of SNNSs use this response type, while 30% of ANNs use this type of response. For the transfer stage under agreement response, reassignment and return response receive 11.47% and 2.18% of SNNSs, respectively. In addition, under non-agreement response, the data shows that 2.73% of SNNSs and 20% of the ANS respondents use this response type. For other interpretation responses, SNNSs frequently use the prayer response of 8.19% and only 0.54% for the request.

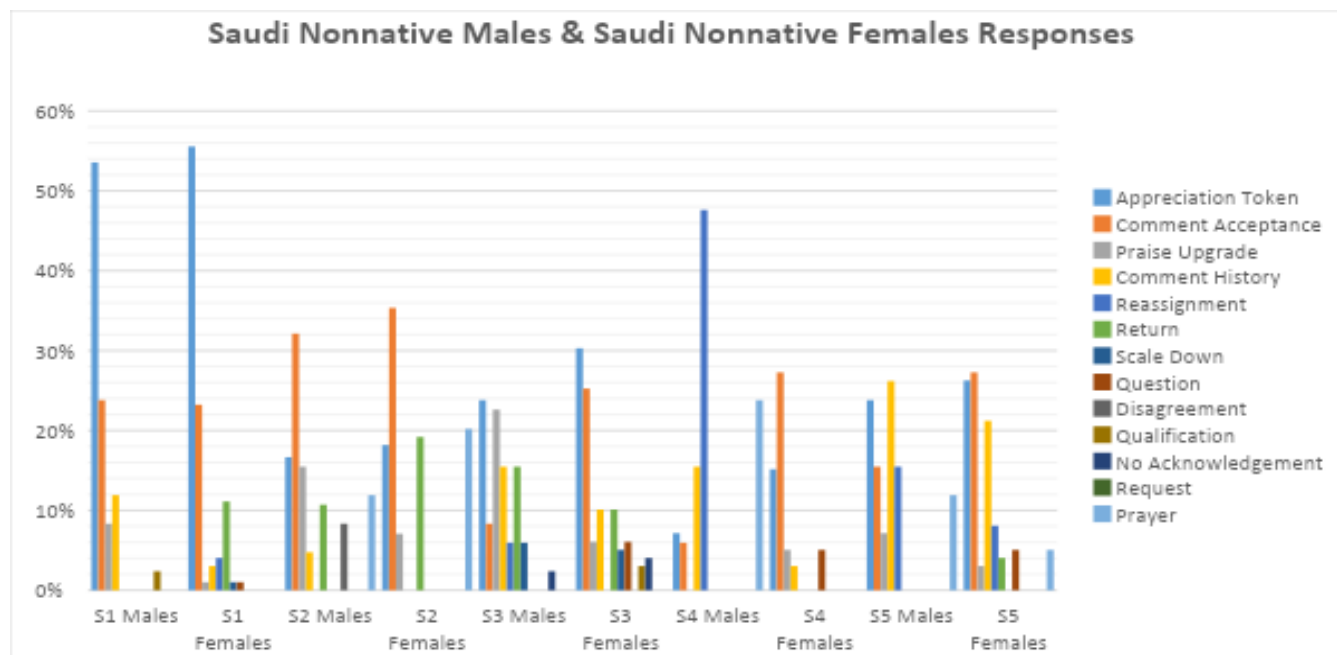
Table 4: Compliment Responses of Male SNNSs

Response Type	S1	%	S2	%	S3	%	S4	%	S5	%
A. Agreement										
I. Acceptances										
1. Appreciation Token	45	53.57	14	16.66	20	23.8	6	7.14	20	23.80
2. Comment Acceptance	20	23.80	27	32.13	7	8.33	5	5.95	13	15.47
3. Praise Upgrade	7	8.33	13	15.47	19	22.61	0	0	6	7.14
II. Comment History	10	11.90	4	4.76	13	15.47	13	15.47	22	26.19
III. Transfers										
1. Reassignment	0	0	0	0	5	5.95	40	47.61	13	15.47
2. Return	0	0	9	10.71	13	15.47	0	0	0	0
B. Non-agreement										
1. Scale Down	0	0	0	0	5	5.95	0	0	0	0
II. Question	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
III. Non-acceptances	0	0	7	8.33	0	0	0	0	0	0

1.Disagreement	2	2.38	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.Qualification										
IV. No Acknowledgement	0	0	0	0	2	2.38	0	0	0	0
C. Other Interpretation										
I. Request	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Prayer	0	0	10	11.90	0	0	20	23.80	10	11.90

Table 5: Compliment Responses of Female SNNs

Response Type	S1	%	S2	%	S3	%	S4	%	S5	%
A. Agreement										
I. Acceptances										
1. Appreciation Token	55	55.55	18	18.18	30	30.30	15	15.15	26	26.26
2. Comment Acceptance	23	23.23	35	35.35	25	25.25	27	27.27	27	27.27
3. Praise Upgrade	1	1.01	7	7.07	6	6.06	5	5.05	3	3.03
II. Comment History	3	3.03	0	0	10	10.10	3	3.03	21	21.21
III. Transfers										
1. Reassignment	4	4.04	0	0	0	0	28	28.28	8	8.08
2. Return	11	11.11	19	19.19	10	10.10	10	10.10	4	4.04
B. Non-agreement										
1. Scale Down	1	1.01	0	0	5	5.05	0	0	0	0
II. Question	1	1.01	0		6	6.06	5	5.05	5	5.05
III. Non-acceptances										
1.Disagreement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.Qualification	0	0	0	0	3	3.03	0	0	0	0
IV. No Acknowledgement	0	0	0	0	4	4.04	0	0	0	0
C. Other Interpretation										
I. Request	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Prayer	0	0	20	20.20	0	0	6	6.06	5	5.05



Graph 2: Compliment Responses of Male and Females SNNSs of English

2. Quantitative Results and Discussion of Male and Female SNNSs of Compliments

Situation 1: The most momentous result in the recent study is that the recipients answer to compliments by utilizing agreement plans more recurrently than the other tactics. As seen in Tables 4 and 5, 97.60% of male SNSs and 97.97% of female SNSs frequently use the agreement response to compliments. It is evident in the data that the percentage of 53.57% of males and 55.55% of females frequently use the gratitude symbol under agreement to reply to compliments. Meanwhile, they frequently use praise upgrade of 1.01% as one of the strategies under agreement respond to compliment by both Saudi males and females.

Situation 2: In this situation, it is noted that comment acceptance is the frequently used response to compliment by both Saudi males and females. However, the return type of compliment under transfer is preferred by females with a percentage of 19.19% compared to males with the percentage of 10.71%. It is also noted in the data of other interpretation responses, specifically the prayer response to compliment, is also used by

both the Saudi males and females with a percentage of 11.90% and 20.20%, respectively.

Situation 3: It is evident in the data that the agreement gratitude symbol is still the most regularly used kind of response to compliments. Both the males and females garnered the highest data percentages of 23.8% and 30.30%. The finding shows that 25.25% of the females prefer the use of comment acceptance to respond to compliments than the males, at only 8.33%. Meanwhile, it is overwhelming for both males and females to have the same percentage of comment history and return under agreement to respond to compliments of 15.47% and 10.10%, respectively. Moreover, for non-agreement, there are still respondents who use the 'no acknowledgement' or 'silence' response to compliment. For males, it is 2.38% and for females, it is 4.04%.

Situation 4: The findings reveal that 47.61% of males prefer the reassignment as a response to a compliment. While in this situation, females still frequently use the comment acceptance of agreement of 27.27% than males of 5.95%. In addition, 15.15% of females prefer the use of appreciation token agreement to respond to

compliments than only 7.14% of males. In other interpretation responses, 23.80% of males frequently use the prayer response to compliment than females of only 6.06%.

Situation 5: Of the 84 respondents, 26.19% of the males frequently use the comment history to respond to compliments, while a near equal percentage of 21.21% of females respond to this type. It is evident in the data that comment acceptance is the most frequently used agreement response type by females (27.27%), followed by appreciation token (26.26%), while only 23.80% of males use the appreciation token agreement for situation 5. In other interpretation response type, 11.90% of males use the prayer response to agreement, while 5.05% of females use it.

3. Qualitative Results and Discussion of SNNSs and ANSs of Compliments

The results of the current study show that the compliment responses of SNNSs and those of ANSs are similar, and both of them use agreement strategies more than non-agreement ones and other strategies, but there are differences. The under agreement strategies are acceptance, appreciation token, comment acceptance, and praise upgrade. It is found that SNNSs prefer to use the appreciation token 'Thank you' and comment acceptance more than ANSs. However, praise upgrade is only used by ANSs. Both SNNSs and ANSs express thanking in response to compliments.

These results are associated with the results of related studies that aimed native and non-native speakers of English, such as Al-khatib and Farghal (2001) and Herbert (1990). They indicate the same similarities in which their participants prefer agreement strategies. In this study, the compliment responses of SNNSs and those of ANSs are similar in that both of them favor utilizing agreement plans more than non-agreement plans. Under agreement, plans are acceptance, gratitude symbol, comment acceptance, and compliment upgrade. It is found that SNNSs prefer to use the appreciation token 'Thank you' and comment acceptance more than ANSs. Further, compliment upgrade is preferred

by ANSs. In the studies of Leech (1983) and Wolfson (1989), Americans are found to regularly concur with the complimenter or else try not to show conflict, even when they truly do contradict the speaker (cited in Karimnia and Afghari, 2011).

However, there are ways in which the two groups perform differently. For example, SNNSs are likely to accept the compliment that there are patterns of agreement. SNNSs are inclined towards mitigating the force of a compliment for an achievement or success by applying a combination of strategies (acceptance and comment history), especially when the participants are the compliments recipients from higher-status speakers (e.g., a university lecturer praising his/her scholar on the article that the scholar wrote), for example:

'Thank you, professor, for your kindness. I usually don't postpone my studies, but I really have been in a difficult situation.' While in other situations, they receive respect from equal-status speakers (e.g., a student praising a classmate on his/her worthy presentation on a task), they use one strategy.

The present study supports the findings of Al-Batal, Nelson and Bakery (1996) that "the Arab culture tends to favor longer forms of compliments" (cited in Alqarni, 2020, 248). However, Al-rousan et al. (2016) claim that "people use elaborate compliments to convince the addressees about the sincerity of their praises" (32). Further, Al-Shorman (2016) adds that most Saudi speakers use "elaborated example because they wanted to make sure that they get the message across to the hearer without any ambiguity" (223).

Meanwhile, all ANSs respond by giving short answers, but SNNSs answer by giving explanations, because the presence of modesty and humility are cornerstones of Saudi culture, especially with higher-status interlocutors, who prove to be quite conscious of the importance of the role of speakers' power and societal position in agreeing interactions by using honorifics such as 'Dr., Professor', for instance: 'Thank you,

Professor' 'شكرا أستاذ'. According to Amel (2019), "[t]his is part of politeness and respect in the Arabian culture due to the social distance that exists between the two interlocutors" (52).

Moreover, the results reveal that the SNNSs apply a mitigating force of compliment on certain types of compliment more than the ANNs do. This is done by choosing non-agreement strategies such as non-acceptances, question, scale down (qualification or disagreement), no acknowledgement, or other explanations (prayers or request), which are used more by SNNSs than ANNs.

However, we find SNNSs try not to create target-like compliment replies. Their cultural knowledge influences their replies. They plainly interpreted Saudi formulaic terms utilized in compliment replies, and these terms are not permanently appropriate for the compliment given in English. For instance: 'Honestly, I prepared it hardly and my focus was on it. الحمد لله'

In the studies of Wolfson (1980), Kasper (2000), Farghal and Haggan (2006), Qanbar (2012), and Manes and, Arabic speakers will generally utilize a proper example of praise use (cited in Alqarni, 2020). They tend to incorporate their cultural norms into their interaction, attempting to tie the compliment response directed to their religion, particularly when they are praised on their success. Using 'Alhamdulillah' 'الحمد لله' is evidence that students' language proficiency does not embody in their performance of native-like praise formulas in English. Moreover, Alqarni (2020) states that "the socioreligious rules that dominate the highly conservative culture of Saudi Arabia do influence the way that compliments are used" (248).

4. Qualitative Results and Discussion of Male and Female SNSs of Compliments

The third research question in this study sets out to investigate whether there are significant similarities or disagreements between Saudi females and males in their use of the praise response strategy types. It is noted that both females and males favor using agreement plans more than non-agreement. However, female

participants use agreement strategies more frequently than their male counterparts. This finding is supported as well by the findings of Al-rousan et al. (2016), who indicate that "female students tend to use the agreement strategies that can help show the positive face to the complimenter by accepting compliments" (30).

Subsequently, when the participants are complimented by a higher-status female, they prefer to use comment acceptance forms strategy that show respect for the complimenter. Al-rousan et al. (2016) claim that "to prevent self-praise, female students [use] comment acceptance strategy while male students simply [favor] accepting the compliment" (30). Moreover, in such a situation, females prefer to utilize return plans to respond to praises offered by females rather than those offered by males. Saudi males and females also use other interpretations, specifically the prayers after their expression of thanks, to respond to compliments offered by females of higher status. According to Soleimani and Mohajerniya (2013), "appearing generous will maintain and enhance the face and image" (15).

Meanwhile, it is overwhelming for both males and females to use comment history and return under agreement to respond to the compliment of a male friend. Moreover, the findings display that females prefer to employ comment approval more than males. Further, female members are found to employ 'no acknowledgement' to respond to praises more than males.

The findings of the data reveal a great difference when responding to compliments offered by males of higher status. In this case, males prefer the reassignment strategy as a response to compliment, while females frequently prefer the comment acceptance of agreement. In addition, females prefer the use of appreciation token agreement to respond to compliments than males, which contrasts with Herbert's (1998) study, in which he states that females disagree with compliments. In other interpretation responses, more males frequently use the prayer response to compliment than females. Another significant finding is that both female and male members

employ comment history, gratitude symbol, and prayer strategies to respond to compliments offered by a female friend.

X. CONCLUSION

The current study falls under intercultural communication research. It investigates and compares the sociopragmatic appropriacy of the compliment response of SNNSs and ANNs. Regardless of the general similarities between SNNSs and ANNs, the outcomes show significant differences that cause communicative failure due to pragmatic transfer of SNNSs in using compliment responses in the target language, which is English. This conclusion is compatible with many studies in which cultural diversity leads to misunderstandings, such as Soleimani and Mohajerniya (2013), Abdul Sattar and Che Lah (2011) or Yu (2005). They all focus on the importance of acquiring the right sounds and forms of the target language, and most importantly, acquiring the communicative competence of this language. In order to be able to communicate appropriately in a language, it is necessary to learn the pragmatic norms and cultural routines of that language. Therefore, this study results will comprise some implications for English teachers and material designers. They should sensitize the learners to the genuine representations and provide opportunities to practice role plays of natives like contextual atmospheres while performing different speech acts. Likewise, students ought to be trained to distinguish the context and can select a suitable form out of a variety of linguistic forms or strategies based on well-known code schemes.

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APPENDIX 1

Thank you for giving us the time to participate in this questionnaire. You are kindly requested to fill in the section relating to personal information, which will be totally confidential.

Please read all the situations below carefully and write down the possible form of response you would use for each compliment in such natural settings.

Nationality:	Saudi	American
Sex:	Male	Female
Age:	18-22	23-26
Level of education:	Undergraduate	Graduate
Mother tongue:	Arabic	English
Have you been abroad in English mother tongue language: Yes No		
If yes, then how long have you been?	3 months	More than 3 months

Situation 1: You have given a presentation in the class. After class, one of your female friends says, "Your presentation was great."

You would say:

Situation 2: You are not ready for the exam. You ask your professor to postpone the examination and she says, "I'll postpone it just because you are a good student."

You would say:

Situation 3: You and a friend of yours attend an academic seminar. After that, he says to you, "I liked the questions you asked in the seminar."

You would say:

Situation 4: You accomplish a classroom project successfully. Later, a male professor says, "Your project was the best one in the university."

You would say:

.....

Situation 5: You are coordinating a school conference with a classmate. She says to you, "Wow, you are really handling things very well."

You would say:

.....

APPENDIX 2

نشكر حضراتكم على اقتطاع الوقت للمشاركة في هذا الاستبيان، ونرجو منكم ملئ الجزء الخاص بالبيانات الشخصية والذي سيعامل بسرية تامة، ثم التكرم بقراءة وصف المواقف التالية ثم أكتب/ أكتب ما ستقولُه/ ستقولينه تلقائياً باللهجة العامية في الفراغ أسفل كل موقف.

الجنسية:	سعودي	أمريكي
الجنس:	ذكر	أنثى
العمر:	22-18	26-23
المستوى العلمي:	خريج	لم تتخرج بعد
اللغة الأم:	العربية	الإنجليزية
هل سافرت بلد اللغة الأم فيها اللغة الإنجليزية:	نعم	لا
إذا نعم، هل المدة 3 شهور	إذ نعم، هل المدة 3 شهور	أكثر من 3 شهور

الموقف الأول: لقد قمت بتقديم عرض أمام الفصل الدراسي. وبعد الإنتهاء من الدرس قالت إحدى صديقاتك: "لقد أبليت بلاء حسنا في تقديمك للعرض"، فماذا تقول/تقولين؟

.....

الموقف الثاني: لم تكن مستعد للاختبار في مادة ما، فسألت الأستاذة عن إمكانية تأخير الاختبار. فقالت لك/لك: "سوف أُجّل الاختبار فقط لأنك/لأنك تلميذ/تلميذة جيدة"، فماذا تقول/تقولين؟

.....

الموقف الثالث: أنت/أنتِ وصديق لك/لكِ حضرتما حلقة بحث، بعد الإنتهاء قال: "لقد أعجبتني السؤال الذي طرحته/طرحته في حلقة البحث"، فماذا تقول/تقولين؟

.....

الموقف الرابع: لقد حققت/حققت مشروعاً تعليمياً ناجحاً. وبعد ذلك قال أحد الأساتذة: "لقد كان المشروع الأفضل على مستوى الجامعة"، فماذا تقول/تقولين؟

.....

الموقف الخامس: لقد قمت/قمتِ بإعداد مدهش لمؤتمر سيعقد في المدرسة. فقالت أحد/أحدى الزملاء/الزميلات: "واو... لقد أعددت/أعددتِ كل ما يلزم لعقد المؤتمر بشكل رائع"، فماذا تقول/تقولين؟

.....

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Entrepreneurship in Innovation Clusters of Franconia: The Case of Variety in Expectations of Participants

Simon Kiesel & Annette Craven

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this research was to explore the needs for which new ventures seek support from regional innovation clusters in Franconia.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative, embedded case-study approach was implemented to investigate startup company cases within a regional innovation cluster.

Keywords: cluster; ecosystem; entrepreneurship; franconia; startups; regional innovation system.

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Entrepreneurship in Innovation Clusters of Franconia: The Case of Variety in Expectations of Participants

Simon Kiesel^α & Annette Craven^σ

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this research was to explore the needs for which new ventures seek support from regional innovation clusters in Franconia.

Design/methodology/approach:

A qualitative, embedded case-study approach was implemented to investigate startup company cases within a regional innovation cluster. Semi-structured interviews were used to question ten innovative German startup founders located in Franconia. A nonprobability purposive sampling technique compilation of the surveyed startups resulted from a list of Center for Digital Innovation Franconia clients, classified into five foundation phases.

Findings: The analysis showed a significant dissonance between the resources required by entrepreneurs and the services offered by innovation clusters.

Research limitations/implications: The results of the study provide further insights into the increasingly digital startup culture in Franconia. Results are limited to startups founded by German entrepreneurs and their network within a local innovation cluster. A comparison with other areas and (less digital/service-oriented) industries is the logical continuation of this research.

Practical Implications: The study provides essential indications for private and public stakeholders of innovation centers to optimize the support factors for business startups. Furthermore, the findings may be helpful for decision-makers to understand that digital startups need different and faster support than in the past.

Originality: Unlike many other studies that examined the economic impact, innovativeness of a region, and usability for established companies, or impact on jobs, this study is one of the few focusing directly on young entrepreneurs and their needs. The paper shows that there is a gap in the literature on this topic, and this analysis is intended to fill this gap by comparing the founders' needs with the actual support provided by innovation clusters.

Paper type: Qualitative embedded case study.

Keywords: cluster; ecosystem; entrepreneurship; franconia; startups; regional innovation system.

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I. INTRODUCTION

According to Schumpeter (1943), economic change and technological innovation start with the action of an individual entrepreneur. Groth, Esposito, & Tse (2015) saw the economic renewal in Europe as being outdated; it was “no longer in line with the needs and speed of today’s business landscape” (p. 263), and the researchers argued for an update, calling “for an entrepreneur-driven innovation ecosystem (EDIE) in Europe” (p. 263). Although Germany’s ranking on the *World Innovation Index* at ninth place in 2019 was above average (Global Innovation Index, 2019), the country “identified its weakness in commercializing innovation through entrepreneurship” (Maritz, Koch, & Schmidt, 2016, p. 8). Both the overall number of startup companies and the percentage startup ratio fell in Germany during the period 2000-2015 (Heilman, Jung, &

Reichart, 2015). While many studies have discussed innovation clusters and regional innovation systems from a general perspective, relatively little is known about why entrepreneurs build on external support and what are the most needed support factors for success (Brown, Gregson, & Mason, 2015; Engel, 2015; Groth et al., 2015; Heilman et al., 2015; Loué & Ben Slimane, 2017; Maritz et al., 2016; Mubarak AL-Mubarak & Busler, 2014; O'Dwyer, O'Malley, Murphy, & McNally, 2015; Pinkwart, 2016; Sonn & Kang, 2015; Thomas, Passaro, & Quinto, 2019; Tsai & Chang, 2016; Uzlov & Li-chun, 2017).

This research focused on a specific innovation cluster in Bavaria, Germany, and the article is structured as follows. The introduction presents the main topic of the paper, some background information about the Franconian innovation cluster, startups, and the importance for the economic landscape. The second section introduces a theoretical framework that connects a resource-based view on companies to entrepreneurship followed by a comprehensive literature review on cluster and entrepreneurship theories, from which a conceptual framework is adopted to start the analysis. The general research question was, *which support from a local innovation cluster is useful for startups and which is less important*. To answer this, the expectations of individual entrepreneurs were identified using a qualitative interview technique. Finally, the expectations of the interviewed founders were examined and discussed regarding selected elements of cluster theories. Conclusions, limitations, and research implications complete the picture.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The region of Franconia is adjacent to the economically important area of the Rhine-Main east of Frankfurt, Germany. Not only did Frankfurt host the world's largest internet exchange point (in terms of traffic), the region was often compared to Silicon Valley (Elbert, Müller, & Persch, 2009). Analyzing IT clusters in the USA, Finland, India, and Germany, Elbert et al. (2009) concluded that the Rhine-Main area as a cluster for information and communication

technology was leading in Germany, but it was still in the development stage in a global comparison. Compared with other IT clusters, there was a particular backlog in the field in terms of providing startup capital, immigration of highly qualified professionals, software patents, and cultural factors such as job-hopping (Elbert et al., 2009). The *Global Startup Ecosystem Report* listed Frankfurt as one of the hot spots, especially for financial technology entrepreneurs, called FinTech (Startup Genome Project, 2017). Considering the potential, economic dynamics, and digitization, the *Wirtschaftswoche* magazine listed the cities of Frankfurt, Würzburg, and Erlangen in the top ten cities with the best future prospects, followed by Fürth and Nuremberg in 15th and 16th place as an axis through Franconia in the middle of Germany (Losse & Crocoll, 2019). In 2017, the new Center for Digital Innovation Franconia was founded in Würzburg (Andersen, 2018). Focusing on digital innovations was supported by the fact that most German startups in the second decade of the 21st century were based on IT/Software (31%), eCommerce (7%), and other digital topics like Online-Platforms (10%), FinTech (5%), or Gaming (1%). Previously typical German business domains such as Hardware/Industrial Engineering (9%) or NanoTech/BioTech (5%) lagged far behind (Kollmann, Stöckmann, Hensellek, & Kensbock, 2017). Local companies, universities, cities, the Bavarian government, and organizations like the chamber of commerce and business incubators formed a founding support ecosystem to increase the start-up activity in the field of digitization. It was the umbrella structure for several business incubators and co-working spaces for entrepreneurs in different stages, the science park with laboratories, entrepreneurship lectures, networking events, contests, startup coaching, and funding or legal advice (Andersen, 2018). Furthermore, regular workshops were organized to connect the various groups of students, founders, entrepreneurs, and public institution representatives. Topics included design thinking, funding sources, digital innovation, and digitization intellectual property rights (Andersen, 2018). Equivalent structures were initiated in the Franconian cities of Schweinfurt and Bad

Kissingen, and similar institutions in the cities of Aschaffenburg, Nürnberg, Erlangen, Schwabach, Ansbach, Bamberg, and Hof (Walther, 2018). With regard to the literature, this seemed to be a mixed approach of a traditional cluster with elements of a regional innovation system (Häfner, 2014).

Through innovation systems, politicians expected greater regional innovation and economic growth, and a dynamic within the cluster that enhanced productivity, innovativeness, and networking among universities, startups, and established businesses (Rösler, 2012; Engel, 2015). Elsewhere in Germany, similar facilities sprouted up, and politicians hoped for a new *Silicon Germany* (Keese, 2016). Amorós, Felzensztein, and Gimmon (2011) noted that governments worldwide were increasingly trying to support entrepreneurship in peripheral regions. Engel (2015, p. 36) saw the regional economic scene “littered with Silicon Valley imitators” while Fritsch and Wyrwich (2013) found a positive relationship in Germany between business startups and regional population density. Consequently, attempts were made in this study to address the questions of (a) whether it would make more sense to concentrate efforts to a few hot spots in Germany, Berlin for example, to consider the needs of the local startup culture more closely, and (b) which external support factors are relevant to make startup companies successful.

The “easy adoption of a one-size-fits-all solution in regional strategy production” has been criticized scientifically (Makkonen & Inkinen, 2014, p. 216). Makkonen & Inkinen thought that instead of an unbiased adoption and cloning of competitiveness rhetoric, it might be better to differentiate among the underlying compositions of the regions (2014). While Groth et al. (2015) compared innovation ecosystems in Europe with California’s Silicon Valley, Häfner (2014) remembered that in Silicon Valley the roots were grounded more in defense policy and did not represent an explicit cluster policy, which was supported in the historical analysis of O’Mara (2019). Engel (2015) attributed the success of Silicon Valley, among other things, to the

entrepreneurial spirit and willingness to take big risks among the population during the California Gold Rush days. Engel felt it was still not clear if top-down activities, supported and financed by the government, could compete with the bottom-up infrastructures and networks that originated (2015). Consequently, there were examples of terrific failed regional innovation policies like Scotland’s *Intermediate Technology Initiative* (Brown et al., 2015). As a result, the need for more research regarding policymaking in regional entrepreneurship ecosystems has been continuously expressed (He, MacNeill, & Wang, 2014; Amorós et al., 2011; Brown et al., 2015; Sonn & Kang, 2015).

Purpos of the study

Innovation-driven ecosystems for entrepreneurs require a variety of factors such as “knowledge and intellectual property (IP), capital, talent, relationship, and trust among multiple stakeholders, such as governments, corporations, startups, private equity, private laboratories, public laboratories, and universities” (Groth et al., 2015, p. 265). This study focused on external resources and support for early-stage innovators. Specifically, the research explored the needs for which new ventures seek support from regional innovation clusters in Franconia. Groth et al. suggested that an excellent start would be to ask all actors about activities, interactions, and interests to identify possible “gaps and hurdles in order to understand motivations and possible ways to add value” (2015, p. 265). Monsson and Jørgensen (2016, p. 224) likewise recommended further research “in order to learn which elements provide the different kinds of entrepreneurs with a critical factor in determining their success or failure.” Thomas et al. (2019, p. 15) formulated the literature gap in the following way:

Future surveys should focus their analyses at least on three directions. Firstly, a clear individuation of the needs and resources requested by digital firms and startups in the light of their own specificities; secondly, the detailed examination of the operative mechanisms of existing ecosystems precisely focused on digital technologies; and lastly, an investigation on the coherence among digital

technologies with the local background of competencies and knowledge to individuate possible gaps to fill.

The aim of this study was to help fill this gap by comparing a group of founder's needs with the offered and experienced external support by innovation clusters. Special attention was given to the Franconian environment and the field of digital industries. The strategy to find out why and how startups accept external support was through the use of an embedded case study (Yin, 2017). This embedded case study involved a major unit (Franconian Innovation Cluster) and individual subunits (digital startups).

III. RELATED RESEARCH

In the first decades of the 21st century, scientists of various disciplines repeatedly dealt with the phenomenon of innovation clusters around the world. Ibata-Arens (2008) described it as a *critical mass* that had to be reached to transform Kyoto, Japan's conservative and traditional capital into a vibrant, successful startup ecosystem. Likewise, network governance seemed to have an encouraging effect on supporting entrepreneurship in regional clusters of Romania (Dodescu & Pop-Cohut, 2012).

However, analyzing the success factors within incubators, the finding of the Salvador, Mariotti, and Conicella study was that the physical location in a science park or incubator and the virtual participation in an innovation cluster could be more a supplement than a substitute (2013). This correlated with the Heilman et al. study which suggested integrating incubators into a larger innovation cluster in order to exploit strengths successfully (2015).

Exploring entrepreneurship at the periphery in Chile, Felzensztein et al. (2013) observed that those startups miss entrepreneurial resources and access to markets, but surprisingly, saw more significant business opportunities in the region. He, MacNeill, and Wang (2014) concentrated on the core elements of networks and embeddedness for regional innovation systems in the UK, identified weaknesses in the cluster policy and for

the overall network structure, and formed a model of regional development based on learning.

Makkonen and Inkinen (2014) described innovation systems and clusters as "the most widely used concepts found in recent economic geography literature focusing on innovative industrial production and locational agglomeration" (p. 216). However, several researchers also critically explained political activism with which regional economic development was conducted in a populist and short-term manner (Makkonen & Inkinen, 2014; Häfner, 2014). In the meantime, scientific policy advice with its theories and models could not catch up fast enough. Economic geographers feared an improper application of the cluster concept, which could lead to unsatisfactory results (Häfner, 2014) or the reduction to buzzwords in policymaking (Makkonen & Inkinen, 2014). General criticism of Porter's cluster theory came mainly from the ill-defined spatial classification of clusters and the insufficient consideration of social processes. It was difficult to fathom that the activities in a cluster on the scale of a city triggered the same effects as on the state or country level (Häfner, 2014).

Consistently, studies about regional innovation systems highlighted "the weakness in the theoretical underpinnings of policy making, particularly regarding the overall network structure" (He et al., 2014, p. 1555). Thus, researchers pleaded for the cluster theory to be supplemented by a theory of cluster politics (Häfner, 2014).

In Germany as well, the development of clusters has become one of the most popular goals of regional economic development since 2000 (Häfner, 2014). This is also apparent from the publications of the *Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy* (Rösler, 2012). Likewise, in Bavaria exists a funding program called *Cluster-Offensive Bayern* (Häfner, 2014).

Fritsch and Wyrwich (2013) investigated regional differences in Germany in terms of new business formation from 1925 to 2005. It turned out that

the regional culture of entrepreneurial independence was persistent throughout the 80-year period in spite of profound changes in the political and economic environment. Engel (2015) compared Silicon Valley with different worldwide approaches to promote innovation clusters and concluded that the “major reason why efforts to transplant the ecosystem of Silicon Valley to other locations have not been successful is that the local context – key players, economic strengths and weaknesses, political realities, and cultural norms – have been ignored rather than incorporated” (p. 47). Unlike a planned approach, Engel (2015) knew that many of the vibrant, innovative clusters “evolved rapidly from a startup history” (p. 37). He emphasized that “resources of people, capital, and know-how are fluidly mobile, and the pace of transactions is driven by a relentless pursuit of opportunity, staged financing, and short business model cycles” (p. 37).

Disappointing experiences were made with the RIS in South Korea (Sonn & Kang, 2015). They accused politics of abusing academic concepts “to legitimize the continuation of its old politics” (p. 548). The reinterpretation of RIS theories led to bureaucrats picking out individual measures that served individual interests.

Nevertheless, there exist successful examples like *The Lowry* in Salford/Manchester or *The Guggenheim Museum* in Bilbao where lighthouse projects in a region could initiate a “culture-led regeneration” (Sonn & Kang, 2015, p. 549). This is supported by Florida’s theory of the *creative class* (Florida, 2014). Florida saw an advantage in those places where technology, talent, and tolerance could be combined. Creative people were most likely to settle where these three factors are encouraged (2014).

Numerous studies and analyses highlighted individual aspects that helped to develop and support innovative new businesses. Thus, studies have examined the importance of external networking within business incubators (Cantù, 2015), which in turn could be an integral part of an innovation cluster. While multinationals within innovation clusters can mobilize multiple resources (O’Dwyer et al., 2015), startup

companies face major challenges regarding financing, legal issues, bureaucratic startup formalities, staffing and space issues, building a technical infrastructure, supplier relationships, or access to markets and marketing support. As a result, startups were heavily dependent on external support, especially in the initial phase (Heilman et al., 2015).

Brown et al. (2015) analyzed the reasons why the Scottish regional innovation policy failed after ten years and an initial budget of 450 million Euro. It had its critical point in the commercial exploitation of the inventions. University spin-offs just did not meet expectations. Furthermore, it turned out that regional SMEs in Scotland did not have the technology and knowledge to take advantage of the market opportunities. They were not able to utilize enough generated intellectual property so that there could be an economic benefit to the regional environment. Moreover, some academic high-technology ideas were not immediately ready for commercialization. They would have needed global players to advance platform technologies with further research and development work, for which no multinationals existed in Scotland. In the end, Scottish intellectual property (funded by the regional program) ended in acquisitions of the new ventures by US global players (Brown et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, an entrepreneurship-friendly ecosystem could also be identified as a growth factor for emerging countries such as Morocco (Kabbaj, Hadi, El Ouazzani, Elamrani, & Lemtaoui, 2016). A key benefit for science parks in Taiwan seemed to be a good relationship with partner and parent companies (Tsai & Chang, 2016).

Moreover, scholars outlined differences in the use of the possibilities within a business incubator network, depending on the entrepreneurs’ characteristics and experience (Monsson & Jørgensen, 2016). One of the few studies that reviewed success factors in a larger scale by direct interviews with entrepreneurs was carried out in Berlin. Nearly 200 internet technology startups were interviewed about fostering and hindering factors (Richter, Schildhauer, Volquartz, &

Neumann, 2016). However, the focus was encouraged by a methodology that took Human Resources, Financing, Marketing, Sales, and the Business Model into account. External support, for example from innovation clusters, was queried only marginally.

With reference to the *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD), Brown et al. (2015) confirmed that “the focus of industrial and technology policies has shifted from science and technological development in favour of interventions that help build innovation systems, foster networks, develop institutions and align strategic priorities” (p. 1261). Businesses fail much faster today than in the past (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2016). This was confirmed by a study that examined the survival of companies. Companies that had been admitted to the US market prior to 1970 had a 92% chance of surviving the next five years. For those that had been listed between 2000 and 2009, there was only a 63% chance of survival, although the researchers adjusted the findings for the impact of the collapsed internet bubble and the 2008 financial crisis. One reason is that today's startups, in percentage terms, spend twice as much money on organizational capital as older companies. On the one hand, new business models, such as digital services, can be started and distributed very quickly and are very flexible. On the other hand, digital companies are much more susceptible to imitators (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2016).

IV. METHOD

The entrepreneurship ecosystem for startups in Franconia is still in need of improvement (Kollmann, Hensellek, Jung, & Kleine-Stegemann, 2019; Rudolph, 2019). Furthermore, there is little, if any, evidence that some current offers within the cluster network were not needed or were hardly ever claimed. These offers may have resulted, in part, from initiatives based on prestige reasons, political motives, or simply because of the eligibility for state funding. The overarching research question for this study was *which support from a local innovation cluster is*

useful for startups and which is less important. The ancillary research questions were as follows.

- *Research Question 1:* Why do startups build on external support?
- *Research Question 2:* What are the most needed external support success factors?
- *Research Question 3:* How was support from local digital innovation clusters experienced in the past?
- *Research Question 4:* What makes the ecosystem in Franconia special for startups?

Case Study Method

For this research, a qualitative, embedded case-study approach was implemented (Yin, 2017) because it is grounded on an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the startup company cases) with in-depth-interviews (qualitative approach) within its context (regional innovation cluster). Case studies include descriptive and explanatory research methods to understand the complexity of a problem (Yin, 2017). Hence, primary and secondary data were applied. The exploratory design of this case tried to get insights into the structure of the phenomenon startup support in order to develop a model. Its product should be a holistic and intensive description of the relationship between startups and their local digital innovation cluster, and could answer questions related to why and how external support was experienced by the new companies (unlike for example a survey). Proceeding from *why* and *how* questions were the focus of the study, Yin recommended to think about the “extent of control over behavioral events and degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events” (2017, p. 8). For this research, the case study method was the preferred approach in examining contemporary events, but where the relevant behavior could not be manipulated (unlike for example in an experiment).

V. RESEARCH STRATEGY

The process of preliminary considerations, data acquisition, and the continuous approach to the topic resembles the model of a hermeneutic circle. Such an approach lends itself to qualitative

investigations since the comparability among the cases was not in the foreground, but the object of investigation, and should be illuminated as profoundly as possible (Paterson & Joy, 2005).

First, background material was examined, notably reports from the local center of digital innovation, business plan competitions, chamber of commerce records, and documents describing the services and intentions of the innovation center. Because the documents were not publicly available on the internet, reports for research were provided by Dr. Christian Andersen, Director of the Center for Digital Innovation Franconia. Second, a workshop was organized at the Center for Digital Innovation. Several startups and representatives of local supporters within the startup network discussed how to improve cooperation. Third, using semi-structured in-depth interviews with startup companies (n = 10), multiple sources could be used as evidence.

The execution of the empirical investigation was as follows. After preparatory work based on scientific literature and research in various documents, a generally recommended first field test interview took place (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). An ideation workshop at the Center for Digital Innovation with startups and supporters suggested further topics for the development of the interview guide. The workshop at the Center for Digital Innovation was co-organized with the participation of several startups and representatives of the local supporters and startup network. It was discussed how the cooperation in the network with startups could be improved. Topics and insights were derived for the research interviews with an observation protocol.

Following the advice of Kallio et al. (2016), the results of the field test were used to prepare the next interviews. Changes were made regarding questions about the Franconian environment, since most startups had no real comparison but could undoubtedly be queried about loyalty to the region. Because the research also sought which available external startup support was not or not so much needed, some offers were explicitly mentioned in a last question (unless the offers

were already mentioned in the open questions). Other examples were the bureaucratic hurdles and tax aspects mentioned in one of the first interviews. However, specifically addressed, state bureaucracy turned out to be less problematic for all other nine startups in the following interviews.

Participants

Because startups are a recent phenomenon, it did not make it easy to select a representative target group among the population (Talaia, Pisoni, & Onetti, 2016). In fact, there exist several definitions in Germany of what a startup is and how it distinguishes itself from normal business foundations of established business models. For this study, *startups* were defined as companies less than ten years old, based on an innovative technology or innovative business model, and geared to significant growth. These proposed elements were in line with the definition of the *German Startups Association* (Kollmann et al., 2017).

Franconia, the northern half of Bavaria (and some adjacent areas of Germany around the cities of Frankfurt and Heilbronn), was for centuries independent until the territorial reorganization by Napoleon Bonaparte beginning in 1803 and is still today called Franconia (Planert, 2006). Culturally it is in many ways different from South-Bavaria and thus justified a clear demarcation for this study.

Sampling Design

For this research, a nonprobability purposive sampling technique was applied due to the number of startup companies, limited resources, and time (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). A purposive sampling strategy helped “to identify and select the information-rich cases for the most proper utilization of available resource” (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 2), and the emergent critical cases were sampled during the process of collecting data. Etikan et al. (2016) recommended purposive sampling to concentrate on people with particular characteristics (in this case *innovative startup founder, located in Franconia, integrated in a support network, and already experienced support within the last years*) as these

participants were better able to help answer the research question.

The compilation of the surveyed startups in this study resulted from a list of clients, supervised by

the Center for Digital Innovation Franconia, as of February 2019 (Burger, 2019). It was restricted to founding projects in the field of digitization. The 42 startups were also classified into five foundation phases:

Table 1: Number of startups in five different foundation phases

Stage	Foundation Phase	Total of the companies
A	Idea Stage	1 founding project
B	Concretization Stage	2 founding projects
C	Business Plan Implementation Stage	7 startups
D	Set-Up Phase	15 companies
E	Financing Stage	17 companies

With the use of this official source, a neutral preselection and evaluation of the current startups took place. The author focused on the 17 companies in the most advanced financing stage (E, Table 1) because these companies already experienced support of the local innovation network within the significant first early-stage phases. Purposive sampling methods focus primarily on saturation, i.e. gaining a comprehensive understanding rather than generalization as in convenience sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). Among several models of saturation for qualitative research, this study was based on the inductive thematic saturation which focuses on the identification of new codes or themes (Saunders et al., 2018). Saturation was indicated by the extent to which new topics could be identified, and theoretical insights could be gained from the data. Due to the regional limitation, this saturation point could be reached with ten interviewed startups that represented 59% of the advanced stage companies and 24% of the total population of supported startups in the targeted region.

VI. DATA COLLECTION

For this research, semi-structured interviews were used, because these offer participants a conversational manner in which to explore issues perceived to be important (Kallio et al., 2016). A

list of predetermined questions was prepared and adapted after field testing. The semi-structured interviews took 34 minutes on average. All interviews were done personally, either by telephone or face-to-face. The interview period was from March 2019 until September 2019. The focus was on the founder or Chief Executive Officers (CEO) to the extent the early-stage companies already had organized job descriptions. While the first entrepreneur was addressed directly for the pilot interview (March 2019), the order of further interviews was no longer subject to the author's decision. Instead, the remaining startups received an invitation by e-mail to participate in the investigation. Participants could select the interview day and time. Thus, the randomly selected order of the interviews ensured no influence on the examination results. Following the advice of Kallio et al. (2016), within a second interview round with two more interviews (June 2019) all results were briefly reflected upon and the findings used to prepare the rest of the interviews. After this round, the data obtained was evaluated and interpreted intensively for the first time, regarding the research questions to be answered. As a result, some study categories have been adapted, and previous gaps in knowledge identified. Finally, the CEOs of the remaining seven startups were interviewed (July to

September 2019) and the data analyzed in the third round of interviews.

To establish credibility and dependability, Brislin’s method of back-translation was adopted as a well-known method for cross-cultural research (Brislin, 1970; Jones, Lee, Phillips, Zhang, & Jaceldo, 2001; Son, 2018). The interviews were conducted in German, and then translated to English by a bilingual German and English native speaker. Finally, the transcript was back-translated to German and compared with the original answers by another person (Brislin, 1970). If there were differences from the original transcript of the interview, these were corrected in the English translation. This was the only way to ensure that technically correct translated words with multiple connotations in the respective languages also corresponded to the original meaning. For example, the German term *aus der Gründerzeit* was once translated as the Wilhelmine Period (period at the beginning of the 20th century in Germany) when actually it meant the first months of the newly founded company. Although all interviews were conducted in German, the company founders used many English terms from the IT sector (*software development; product-market-fit*) or the startup scene (*risk hatch; elevator pitch*), which could be attributed to the strong American influence. These words were already marked in the German transcript of the interviews to keep the English translation as close as possible to the original word choice.

Ethical Considerations

A sign off sheet for companies was not used, because the results of the interviews were

anonymized. All entrepreneurs voluntarily participated in the study, agreed to audio recording, and were informed about the nature of the research.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated, back translated, and then analyzed with the help of the computer tool NVivo12. The structuring and summarizing qualitative content analysis, according to Mayring (2015), was used as the evaluation method. The qualitative content analysis is used to analyze texts of all kinds by a systematic procedure. In deductive category formation, also called structuring by Mayring, categories were developed from existing theories and studies. For the inductive category formation, these were derived directly from the material, without referring to previously used theory concepts. Mayring calls this type of category formation a summary content analysis (Mayring, 2015).

VIII. RESULTS

8.1 Descriptives

There were 10 participants. The participants were 32 years old on average (ranging from a minimum of 24 to a maximum of 41), 20 percent were female, 80 percent male, and 100 percent had a university degree. All participants were founders and in an executive role in the company. Table 2 presents a composite summary of participant characteristics.

Table 2: Participant Characteristics

Participant	Age	Gender	Educational background	Position	Duration of interview
A	37	Male	University business graduate	CEO	42 minutes
B	25	Male	Bachelor of Science E-Commerce	CEO	21 minutes
C	34	Female	PhD in Computer Science / Robotics	Co-Founder	68 minutes

D	34	Male	Master of Business Administration (MBA)	CEO	25 minutes
E	32	Male	Bachelor of Arts Digital Media	CEO	22 minutes
F	32	Male	Master of Science Software Engineering	CTO	44 minutes
G	27	Male	Master of Science Business Management	CEO	18 minutes
H	24	Female	Bachelor of Science E-Commerce	COO	26 minutes
I	31	Male	Bachelor of Science Business Informatics	CEO	48 minutes
J	41	Male	PhD Molecular Biology	CEO	24 minutes

All startups were founded in Franconia, and the companies were between one and five years old at the time of the interview. Regarding the number of employees, there was a wide range from eight full time equivalents (FTE) up to 100 FTEs. Regarding the industry sector, all startups had a primary IT focus; 80 percent were purely oriented towards a business-to-business (B2B) market, and

20 percent addressed both consumers (B2C) and businesses with a marketplace platform. Except for one startup, all operated as limited liability companies. At the time of the interview, one startup was still operating as a private partnership (company constituted under civil law). The startup company characteristics are captured in Table 3.

Table 3: Startup Characteristics

Participant	Foundation Year	Located in	Number of employees	Market orientation	Field of activity
A	2013	Würzburg	19	B2B	Digital Sensor Technology
B	2018	Rottendorf	9	B2B/B2C	Car Sharing E-Commerce Platform
C	2017	Würzburg	20	B2B	Life Science Software Virtual Reality (VR) / Augmented Reality (AR)
D	2015	Würzburg	100	B2B	Industrial Software Artificial Intelligence
E	2015	Würzburg	49	B2B	Customer Relationship Management Software
F	2016	Würzburg	16	B2B	E-Commerce Consultancy
G	2016	Würzburg	9	B2B	Drone Tech Experts
H	2017	Würzburg	20	B2B	Chatbot Communication
I	2017	Würzburg	8	B2B	E-Commerce Logistics
J	2016	Würzburg	18	B2B/B2C	eSport Game Platform

IX. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The following thematic analysis dissects the qualitative data. This chapter is based on the descriptive approach in coding the data into dimensions and categories of the content analysis. It provides a purely qualitative, detailed look, focuses on examining patterns of meaning within the data, and is built around the four research questions and the sub-themes (highlighted in bold and italics). Analyzing the results, a model was developed based on observations, previous academic work and work experience with startups inside the local innovation cluster.

Research Question 1: Why do startups build on external support?

Research question 1 was addressed with responses to interview questions 1-6. Three themes and six sub-themes emerged from the data. The first theme to emerge was reasons for external assistance.

Nine of the ten participants mentioned *contacts into new networks* “for exchange” (Participant E). Some of the reasons to build on external support included a “cluster meeting,” or “the network of other companies” (Participant A), contacts to supporters that later became customers, the press and the industry (Participant B), “networking stories” which resulted in cooperation partners (Participant C), or contacts to angel investors (Participant J). Institutions like the Center for Digital Innovation helped “a lot to connect with the right people” (Participant D) or established the contact to project partners and sponsors (Participant G). It turned out that sometimes “the most trivial events at the end of the day are the ones where the most important contacts are made” with “interesting people who can help” (Participant H). Some of the founders pointed out the importance of private contacts (Participants F and I) and the need to have the courage to approach people and “simply ask” (Participant I). One founder emphasized that the concrete origin or the basis for the success of a good network contact could not always be pinned down to one particular entity (Participant I). Hence, to be

open-minded for new contacts was described as a fundamental prerequisite for founders, “because the contacts really come from many corners” (Participant C), “a whole host of multipliers” (Participant B), and even from unexpected locations like at a wine festival (Participant A). According to Participant I, founders need to take care of themselves. “Nobody comes to me and rings the doorbell or calls me and says: Look, you are a founder and I would like to support you on xyz!” (Participant I).

Although all startups had only been on the market for a few years, *know-how* in the core competencies of the business area was mentioned only once as a reason for external support: “We just came from the *eCommerce* sector and had no idea about car sales. And then we got a lot of input from them” (Participant B). From a technical point of view, most of the startups thought hardly anyone could hold a candle in the IT sector. Statements like “we first have to find someone better” (Participant C), “we develop everything from scratch” (Participant B), “we don’t really have any real cooperation partners for know-how” (Participant E), “we don’t really have anybody there” (Participant G), “in *eCommerce* zero” (Participant F), “it’s more like we support others” as “hardcore technicians” (Participant J), or “not at all. Nothing. We built it all ourselves” (Participant D), testified a high opinion of information technology abilities. Nevertheless, startups also relied on external skills with the help of “freelancers” (Participant E), cooperation partners who were experts in sales (Participant F), financial services (Participants F, G, H, and I), or partnerships with other IT companies (Participants A and H).

Multiple participants (A, D, E, F, and I) claimed to *keep processes in the startup as lean as possible*. While in the beginning, startups tried to make everything themselves (Participant A), outsourcing was later an adequate means for bringing external partners on board. This allowed peaks to be captured (Participant E) where additional capacity was needed to concentrate on

core areas (Participants E and F), and sometimes even to save money (Participant I).

Many years of *business experience* were welcomed when sub-areas such as sales (Participants E and F) were outsourced, or angel investors had been entrepreneurs themselves (Participant J). Some young founders mentioned the lack of business experience (Participants B and H).

An external view of the project could provide valuable, *constructive feedback* (Participants A and F). Additionally, *partnerships* often served as door openers, which especially at the beginning increased trust with more substantial companies (Participants B and E).

The second theme to emerge in response to research question 1 was *first contact and awareness of support institutions*. As shown in Table 2, all entrepreneurs had an academic background. Therefore, it is not surprising that half of the startups (Participants A, B, C, H, J) stated that the *contact and awareness for support offers* came through the university. Special founding lectures (Participant A), but also individual professors (Participants B and H) introduced the founders to the support offers. According to some older founders (Participant C), the perception of startup offers in the network has improved significantly during the last ten years. However, competitions (Participants D and G), events (Participant I), and the financial funding programs arranged by these agencies (Participant E) also appeared to offer an attractive entry into the support network for founders in Franconia. Nevertheless, among the participants, there was also one founder who had only a vague idea about the network and how his startup had even made it onto the ZDI's list (Participant F).

The third theme to emerge was *selection process of external partners*, which turned out to be very different. While some startups tended to be more influenced by the first initial contact (Participant B), others proceeded very systematically: "As usual, we created a matrix and contacted five or six" (Participant F).

Research Question 2: What are the most needed external support success factors?

Research question 2 was addressed with responses to interview questions 7-15. Two themes and 14 sub-themes emerged from the data. The first theme to emerge was *external support factors*. A good *network* represented the most important *external support factor* for the interviewed startups (Participants A, B, C, D, E, G, H, I, and J). Good support (Participant B) and "reciprocal effects" (Participant C) could be drawn from network partners. In addition, sometimes decisive milestones were traced back to them, for example, an investor could be convinced (Participants B and J), a major customer could be won (Participants D and I), political issues with permissions could be solved (Participant E), key personnel could be hired (Participant J), or it enabled participation in an accelerator program (Participant H). "Meeting the right person at the right time and the right place" (Participant H) seemed essential for the initial company success.

Almost all the startups interviewed (Participants A, B, C, D, E, F, H, and I) were able to name at least one very close relationship with another company that had helped to set up the new venture. A *cooperative relationship to another company* expressed itself, for example, in customers who made exceptional deals. Particularly in the initial phase, it helped when customers guaranteed sales for several years and thus contributed to planning security (Participant A). A *proof of concept* could also help initially to test the planned business model on the market (Participant B). One venture even used the term to be *in love*, because the first customer made "incredible lot possible" and came up "with lots of ideas" (Participant C). Others mentioned to be happy that someone was willing to upgrade from a free basic version to certain premium features (Participant E). Of course, the product must also fit. In the best case, both profited from a win-win situation (Participant D). A professional accelerator initiative of a large company also brought beneficial support and advice for the first months (Participant H). However, the help of medium-sized companies, for example, with rooms for events, infrastructures such as hosting a

test server, or the temporary assumption of bookkeeping services were rated as extremely valuable in retrospect (Participant I). Over time, customers could develop into partners who were ultimately even responsible for parts of the startup, for example, as sales representatives (Participant F).

What half of the startups also mentioned was the *contact to successfully scaled other startups* (Participants A, B, D, E, and J): “We need the other big players that have made it” (Participant A). Whether it was the mediation of customers (Participant A), already existing learnings, experience with scaling a company, or introductions to investors (Participant B), and higher credibility towards venture capitalists: “whenever a portfolio company of a VC gives an intro to its VC, it is always a very positive signal for the VC. Then they will definitely look at the case” (Participant B). Expertise how startups above a certain level were built could not be found in any offered university course or education course (Participant D). As concrete examples, participants mentioned the selection of technologies, the establishment of a startup in the form of a cascaded GmbH (limited liability company) (Participant D), an employee participation program with virtual shares (Participant J), or “expansion into neighboring European countries” (Participant E). Franconian startups were currently more likely to get into contact with such a “*top-notch* expert to impart further knowledge” (Participant D) in Munich or Berlin through conferences, for example (Participants D and E). “However, the local exchange is of little help to us” (Participant E). Even startups that needed venture capital over a long period in order to grow described themselves more like a “test case” for the region, the relationship to local supporters as a “two-way learning” and had to look for national contacts at a similar level (Participant J).

For half of the founders interviewed (Participants A, B, C, F, and I), *family and friends* played an important role in the first months. Whether convertible loans as *seed-funding* (Participant A), subordinated loans (Participant C), other financial support (Participant B), general encouragement in

decisions (Participant I), or simply “little things like building a table” or the repair of a toilet bowl, were warmly welcomed when money was too tight to pay a craftsman (Participant F).

In the beginning, the conviction of major *pilot customers* was seen as a milestone, built credibility, a certain name, and gave trust for the negotiations with other potential customers (Participants A, B, E, F, and H): “This has already helped us to get into a class of bigger customers” (Participant E). “Big-name customers like *Bosch, Innogy, Porsche, Telekom*. That always leaves an impression” (Participant H).

Finally, yet importantly, the initial *team-building process to establish a startup* was often supported by an external factor. Thus, some of the teams got to know each other through joint studies at the university, which was part of the founding network cluster (Participants B, C, F, H, and I). Nevertheless, spin-offs of teams out of companies should not remain unmentioned (Participant J).

The second key theme to emerge for research question 2 was *challenges within the first years*. Especially in the early years, all startups referenced confrontation with great challenges. Several startups had issues with *human resources* (Participants A, D, F, I, and J). Serious problems with personnel once even ended with the expulsion of a founder (Participant A). Situations in which founders were not involved full-time at the beginning were challenging regarding the work-life balance (Participant C). It turned out that for startups it was difficult to get experienced employees (Participants J, I, F, D, and H). From a technical perspective, the startups were very far ahead – “this means that there is no training on the market that would fully accommodate” (Participant F). “Getting the first good developer is really hard. We didn’t have the option of hiring a *headhunter* in any way” (Participant H). People with many years of professional experience did not apply to a young startup (Participant I). It was a huge problem to acquire top talents, to convince them to come to Franconia instead of hotspots like Berlin or Munich with lots of alternative jobs (Participant D). Of course, it must be possible to pay the salaries for such experienced people

(Participants C and D). Working with freelancers turned out to be a good compromise (Participant C). The basic need for employees did not usually pose a problem (Participants B, C, D, and E). Still, close ties to the university not only helped with interns, working students, the awarding of bachelor and master theses, doctoral students (Participants A, B, C, E, F, G, H, I, and J), but also unusual training cooperation such as with the *German Federal Armed Forces* (Participant A). The work in agile and virtual teams with many rights of co-determination (Participant C), a good working environment (Participants C, D, F, E, H, and J), and the spread of a good employee climate via word-of-mouth propaganda, good ratings on internet platforms and social media (Participants C, D, F, and E) made working attractive, especially for job starters. It helped to give the employees a high level of responsibility right from the start, to develop skills, an interesting “hip” topic (Participant J), “value” to work on a “cool” product and to see “how happy people are because they have an app built” (Participant C), something “meaningful” that really matters (Participant D), or “to work on something moving, and not on the hundredth pizza ordering app. If you give them the option of moving something big with large amounts of data, then they actually get an intrinsic motivation to move something like that” (Participant D).

One of the greatest challenges identified by the participants was “entering the *scale-up* area” (Participant A). This growth process of startups was characterized not only by acquisition efforts to increase the number of customers (Participants A, B, C, E, and I), but also by personnel and organizational changes (Participants D, E, and H). The day-to-day work of a founder shifted from operational matters and work on the product increasingly into a strategic direction to lead the organization (Participant D). Sometimes the business model had to be rethought and developed from individual support to standard products (Participants H and F). However, the founders sometimes viewed the generally prevailing expectation and pressure on a startup to scale quite critically and not sustainable: “what really annoys me about the general startup

support is the focus on pure scaling” (Participant C).

Problems with debtors could pose serious challenges for some startups, such as customers that suddenly canceled large order volumes (Participants A and I) or did not pay bills (Participants A and C), “even though they are a large corporation and not particularly known for money problems” (Participant A). Payment problems were also caused by funded projects, in which the authorities with a delay (Participant C) released subsidies. Only a few institutions allowed “upfront funding, for example from the *BMBF*” such as the *Federal Ministry of Education and Research* (Participant C). Marketplaces also had the problem of making two customer sites happy (Participant B). Furthermore, the corporate lifecycle for decisions was often perceived as very slow (Participants C, D, and H).

This naturally also had an impact on the overall very unstable *liquidity situation* of the startups. It was important to get a supply of money at short notice (Participant A), to plan finances according to sales cycles of months or even years (Participant D), to constantly fill the project pipeline (Participant H), to find investors (Participant J), and to become aware as a founder of the responsibility toward employed personnel and remuneration (Participant I).

In other cases, participants perceived several *loops* to meet the *product-market fit* (Participants D, E, G, and I). “It’s about really growing a product that someone likes and coping with the fact that mostly your idea is not what the market needs” (Participant D). By repeatedly obtaining feedback from customers, a kind of *trial-and-error* principle finally led to the desired result. “But you still have to offer something that somebody needs.” (Participant I).

High customer requirements for documentation, certifications and a lengthy onboarding process with customer audits resulted in *barriers to market entry*. Such hurdles occurred for example in the medical devices sector (Participant C), but also for complex sensor technologies (Participant

A), and highly sensitive purchasing processes in corporations (Participant D).

One startup also had considerable *creditor problems*. “We once had a supplier who completely let us down” (Participant A). Such a disappointment especially in an early phase of the startup led to serious problems.

The complex German *tax system* also posed a severe challenge to one startup. “Tax is a disaster. Tax is a horror catastrophe for startups” (Participant F). However, when this challenge was addressed in the other interviews, it turned out that most other startups saw it rather as an annoying standard problem that could easily be solved by a good service provider (tax office). “Everybody has that by default” (Participant A); “the standard: tax advice” (Participant B), “no, we didn't have that problem (...), and we also had an accountant with us” (Participant D) or “I'm not really worried about that. Besides, you also have a tax advisor behind you” (Participant I). The fundamental problems with tax law issues were also confirmed. “I can already imagine that this is a pain in the neck for other startups” (Participant E). However, it was pointed out that there are special offers for startups within the founding network (Participant G), or at least an advantageous financing, such as special prices at the beginning of business (Participant H), the willingness of partner companies to cooperate (Participant I) and a generally ready offer on the market. “We simply get that from the market” (Participant C).

Research Question 3: How was support from local digital innovation clusters experienced in the past?

Research question 3 was addressed with responses to interview questions 16-26. Eleven themes and five sub-themes emerged from the data. The first theme to emerge was *attitudes towards subsidized office spaces*.

The provision of *state-subsidized discounted office space for startups* was one of the core services of the Franconian startup and innovation cluster. In Würzburg alone, two buildings were available supervised by the Center for Digital

Innovation. At the same time, further subsidized premises were provided by the *Technology and Startup Center (TGZ)* of the *Chamber of Industry and Commerce* and another building by the *Innovation and Startup Center (IGZ)* in Würzburg. Two additional co-working spaces were provided the city of Würzburg supplemented by private co-working space offers from various companies. Other Franconian cities such as Schweinfurt, Bamberg, and Nuremberg housed similar infrastructures. It is even more surprising, however, that only half of the startups interviewed made use of these offers (Participants A, C, G, I, and J). One startup (Participant B) used the *Cube* of the *ZDI* for the first three months but then moved out very quickly. Instead, another startup (Participant I) used premises at a befriended company for the first year and then moved into the *IGZ*. Asked about the reasons, it turned out that the advantages mentioned on the one hand like price (Participant J), flexibility to expand (Participants A, C, and J), and exchange with other startups (Participants C, I, and J) were sometimes even seen as disadvantages by the non-users. Thus, Participant B mentioned the flexibility to grow as the reason for moving out after three months, ultimately into the building of an investor. Other companies also felt that the opportunities for expansion on the free market were better (Participants D, E, F, and H). “We knew that we would grow quickly. Therefore, *coworking* was not really an option for us at first. Precisely, we wanted a real office” (Participant H), or “we have office space in the city center with an option to expand even further” (Participant E). For some (Participants D and F), even the prices of the subsidized office buildings were still too expensive compared to cheap free market offers. “We went to Bergtheim to a village and rented a small apartment for 250 Euro” (Participant D). It turned out that, especially in the first months, there were enough possibilities to use premises of the university (Participant H) or in private surroundings (Participant F) for the setup and meetings. Volume and clairaudience in co-working spaces were also identified as disadvantages (Participant C). This even went so far that the interaction with other startups was perceived as annoying and distracting from the

actual core business. “It would have been the worst poison, which we could have made, to go into an incubator or the startup hub where the startups advise each other, all day long” (Participant F). For two companies, it was probably just convenience and proximity to the university that tipped the scales (Participants C and G).

Opinions were also divided on the second key theme for research question 3, the use of *financial sponsorship programs*. Five startups were happy to take advantage of various support programs such as *EXIST* (Participant J), a program of the *Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy*, so-called innovation vouchers (Participant D), a program of the Bavarian government, *ZIM* (Participants A and G), a program of the *Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs*, and several programs of other state ministries (Participant C). The rest of the startups perceived these programs as inappropriate, not needed (Participants B, E, H, and I), or the application process too time-consuming and bureaucratic (Participant F). Even among the recipients, subsidies were elementary on the one hand – “without state support, it wouldn't have been possible” (Participant C) – while on the other hand, subsidies had more of a deadweight effect, “of course a drop in the ocean” (Participant D). One founder even went as far as to claim, “in our case funding would even have had a negative influence. I even go that far” (Participant F). Nevertheless, these startups were not averse to using discounts for new ventures, for example, for exhibition stands (Participant I).

The third key theme to emerge for research question 3 was the *openness for financial investments*. At the time of the interviews, all the startups were on a list of the Center for Digital Innovation in phase five, which represented the highest stage of development, and recommended for financing rounds. In the end, however, only one company was *open to financial investments* by angel investors or venture capital firms (Participant G), and three more had already raised external capital (Participants B, D, and J). The reluctance was partly expressed clearly. “I don't want anybody to talk us into it” (Participant

C), or “we simply don't want it” (Participant F), or “we have no money from outside” (Participant A). In some cases, despite good development, it was considered too early for investors to get involved. “I think it's still too early at the moment” (Participant H).

Offered workshops and seminars turned out to be another key theme for research question 3. Most startups (Participants A, B, C, D, G, H, I, and J) could remember having *participated in workshops and seminars*. While some startups found these offers helpful, especially soft skill topics about team-building, leadership, or personnel management (Participants H and I), at the same time several founders emphasized that the offered workshops “were not suitable for raising IT companies” (Participant D) or were at a basic level and not helpful (Participants E and F).

In contrast, the *events on offer*, such as the regulars' table for founders, network events, conferences, and trade fairs with startup focus, such as *MobileMediaDay* or *WürzburgWebWeek*, were positively evaluated across the board. This also correlated with the urgent need for networks expressed above. At such events, contacts with customers (Participants B and C) and multipliers (Participants A, F, and I) were established. These platforms were used for talent acquisition (Participants D and E), to get constructive feedback (Participant F), or contact to accelerators (Participant H) and investors (Participant J). Some startups also actively offered events and meetups (Participants D, E, and F). Nevertheless, in the opinion of one or the other, more could happen here. “It is a very small community compared to Berlin, Cologne, Leipzig, or Munich” (Participant D) or “it is too uncoordinated” (Participant G).

A sixth key theme for research question 3 was the *exchange with regional startups*. In the beginning, the exchange with other regional startups seemed to be quite important for most of the founders, for example, to share know-how (Participant H) and feedback (Participant J) from a benchmark perspective (Participant D) or in order not to get out of the startup mentality with increasing growth (Participant A). Over time, the

founders often concentrated more on the exchange with nationwide startups on the same level and with similar challenges (Participants C, D, and E). “When it comes to the regular get-together for founders, many startups are still in the idea phase and we need companies with whom we can talk about expansion into neighboring European countries” (Participant E). One tenant in the *IGZ* complained that the startup exchange was not even supported in the special startup facilities. “Networking with other startups, if it were to happen! That really won't happen. So apart from the fact that there is a Christmas drink during Christmas, or that you might run into each other in the stairwell or something like that. Because if I don't approach other people on my own, there won't be a great exchange between us” (Participant I). However, there were also established companies who generally refused the exchange with other startups. “We don't have contact with a single startup” (Participant F) or “startup-exchange or similar with other tenants – maybe that's not the case. Rather less important. Or at least that had less impact” (Participant G).

The seventh key theme to emerge for research question 3 was *competitions*. Founders who took part in competitions (for example, *Business Plan Competition North Bavaria* or *Startup-Prize Würzburg*) generally found this helpful, although some apparently “were actually talked into it” (Participant A). Here, too, the resulting network (Participants A and J) and the accompanying publicity (Participants B, H, and E) were particularly beneficial. Even here, there were critics who found the “monothematic story” approach and the “typical *pitching* act” difficult, especially for “nerds” in technology startups (Participant C).

An eighth key theme concerned *consulting, mentoring, and legal advice* that were experienced from consultants at *ZDI / IGZ* (Participants A, B, C, D, E, H, and J), *BayStartUp*, the Bavarian startup association (Participants B, G, and J), professors at the universities (Participants A, B, H, I, and J), tax consultants and law firms (Participants B, F, I), banks (Participant B) and the *IHK* (Participants C and G) *Chamber of Industry and Commerce*

Würzburg which provided, for example, patent consulting. However, *IHK* got rather a bad report. “*IHK* not at all. I think we were there once, and I had the feeling that they themselves had no idea. It is always difficult to talk to people who have never founded a company themselves” (Participant B) or “There was a lot from the *IHK*, but there one learned decisively how to set up a small business, but not how to build up a large IT corporate and how the fundamental structure of this company should be built up” (Participant D). The traditional approach of covering a single topic and describing its business model with a business plan was also criticized (Participant C). Furthermore, the consultants overcharged when it came to advice for fast-scaling IT companies. “It was no real help, I must say. There are just so many pitfalls that the founder simply cannot know. For example, there was the issue of establishing a cascaded GmbH [limited liability company]” (Participant D). Regarding “legal advice and technology consulting on a very, very high level,” one would have wished even better for the region (Participant D). A venture capital structure was felt as “rather unusual for the *ZDI*” consultants, and topics like an employee stock option pool were new for both sides (Participant J).

In a ninth key theme *dependency on institutional support* was identified. In addition to the founding institutional support already mentioned above, the universities (*University Würzburg*; *University of Applied Sciences Würzburg*) played an important role for many startups, for example in the use of premises (Participants B and J), test facilities such as a flight lab (Participant G), but also in the form of joint work projects (Participants C, E, I, and J). Furthermore, the cooperation with scientific laboratories such as the *Center for Telematics* in Würzburg was mentioned positively (Participant C).

The *usefulness of a “Makerspace” infrastructure for prototyping and “Design Thinking”* was acknowledged by only three startups (Participants C, G, and J). It forms the tenth key theme. For most of the interviewed startups with innovative digital background without a haptic product, such offered support was of no importance. “I think it's

awesome for people who create a product. We just don't have a product" (Participant F).

Finally, the interviews on experienced external support in the Franconian startup and innovation cluster also revealed a certain *clash of cultures with the attitude of young startup founders* as eleventh key theme which was analyzed in the following five sub-themes. The first sub-theme to emerge was *lean startup thinking*. In comparison with the business world in medium-sized companies and corporations as perceived by the author of this study, *strong lean management thought prevailed* and was mentioned in many of the interviews as a distinguishable approach (Participants A, D, E, F, and I). Based on Eric Ries' theory (Ries, 2011) the new ventures tried "to start lean" (Participant D), kept "processes as lean as possible and as digital as possible" (Participant F), and outsourced peaks (Participant E), to "minimize the risk and increase scalability" (Participant A). Obviously, there was a concrete world view behind it, as the following statements showed. "We simply see this idea of cooperation as a future perspective for all companies that are more closely linked and deal with each other much more openly. We believe that this is the way of the future, and that is why we want to take it today" (Participant A), or "Everything that can somehow be given away for little money, better give it to somebody else. Instead of trying to acquire this internally for hours on end, I'd rather ask someone quickly" (Participant I). Of course, care was taken to keep core competencies *in-house* and to build up the necessary skills to be able to communicate adequately with external partners and to exercise control (Participant A).

Some startups also missed the *need for change management and digital transformation* among medium-sized cooperation partners (Participant C). This was also expressed by unsuccessful sales attempts with the help of traditional distribution partners. "Normal salespeople just can't manage to do that properly" (Participant A). Although founders saw a great potential for the cooperation with startups, especially for "our traditional industries" and "classic medium-sized" companies (Participant C), the starting points for modern digital technologies often turned out to be

difficult. "If somebody still walks off with packing slips that are printed out and then somehow picks up goods, then he is far away from what is actually *state of the art*" (Participant I).

The cooperation with external supporters sometimes even failed due to the *selection of communication channels*. "In our agency, which is very digital, we have certain ways. You cannot call us, for example! For a tax consultant, that is actually per se a *no go*. He always wants to call if there is a problem" (Participant F). Digitally oriented companies had to search for a long time "to find someone who is primarily integrated into our systems" (Participant F). A service provider that was willing to assimilate existing IT programs such as a ticket system, online chats and the retrieval of documents in an electronic enterprise resource planning software commented, "We said: We only take a tax consultant who uses our system, who doesn't work with a telephone, who doesn't work by e-mail, but who goes into our system" (Participant F). This required the *will to learn new things on both sides*. This was also evident in other topics such as new sales channels via an interface to the *Amazon* platform, where processes were strongly automated. Founders expected service providers to be "motivated to grow with us and break new grounds" (Participant F). For partners, the *sometimes-unusual hierarchical levels and responsibilities* required some getting used to. "We are eight shareholders, equal partners... Some of the shareholders are part of the team but do not have an employment contract. So, every now and then on a contract basis or something." (Participant C).

Research Question 4: What makes the ecosystem in Franconia special for startups?

Research question 4 was addressed with responses to interview questions 27-31. Three themes and five sub-themes emerged from the data. The first theme to emerge was *entrepreneurship environment in Franconia in general*.

While not all the interviewed entrepreneurs were able to make a direct comparison with other regions, it was certainly possible to ask about dependency on the regional ecosystem in

Franconia. All ten startups interviewed felt that the *entrepreneurship environment in Franconia*, in general, was pleasant and developed well. “There is hardly an area in Germany, whether it is Munich, Stuttgart, or Berlin, where one can find a more solid (...) foundation” (Participant A). The winning of several national start-up prizes in recent years for Franconian startups (Participant A), the many support facilities within the founding network (Participants A, B, C, G, H, I, and J), and the generally high quality of life with a dynamic structure (Participants A, D, F, and J) were highlighted. Besides, there were good transport connections to all major centers in Germany mentioned (Participants A and J). “From Würzburg to Stuttgart, Munich, Frankfurt, Hamburg – we have a good position to achieve everything” (Participant A). Several founders had lived and worked in other areas (Participants C, D, F, I, and J). Compared to hotspots like Berlin, it seemed easier for startups “to somehow break out of the masses” (Participants B and E). On the other hand, it appeared simpler to access capital and corporations in larger cities (Participants F and I). With a view to possible further development, it was suggested that Franconia should not necessarily orient itself to the American market. “*We’re all doing it like Silicon Valley* is such a stupid idea (...) There are completely different mechanisms at work there” (Participant C). In contrast, others, inspired by the well-known vine variety, wished for a future *Silvaner Valley*, which would make a name for itself nationwide (Participant B).

A second key theme to emerge for research question 4 were *missing support factors*. The founders interviewed in *Franconia* mostly lacked *major local companies* (Participants C, F, G, and I), certain *risk appetite of local clients* to give startups a chance for example,

- with a proof-of-concept (Participants A, E, G, H, and I),
- a *general entrepreneurship spirit* in society for example, open-minded trying out startup innovations like robotics in agriculture, small craft firms or bakeries (Participants C, D, G, and H),

- more *spin-off-intensions at the universities* to encourage students (Participants C, G, H, and J),
- and *venture capital* (Participants D and J).

However, the desire for more industry and large corporations was also contradicted. “If you need large companies that are not based here, you’re on the road nationally, if not internationally anyway. For them, it doesn’t matter, and the traffic situation is top” (Participant A).

A third key theme to emerge for research question 4 was the *solidarity to the region Franconia*. The literature analysis showed that some regions could hardly profit from the success of startups because prosperous companies switched to hotspots or were bought up by large American companies. *Regarding the solidarity to the region Franconia*, it was therefore surprising that all founders intended to remain with the region in the long term. Although all founders could imagine opening further locations in capital cities or abroad, and some already had, founders believed the headquarters or at least essential core areas of the company should, in any case, remain in Franconia.

The following graphic visualizes the results of the thematic analysis. Figure 1 sliced each category in a sunburst diagram. The color intensity represents the number of coded objects/interviews, the legend also explains the number of coded references.

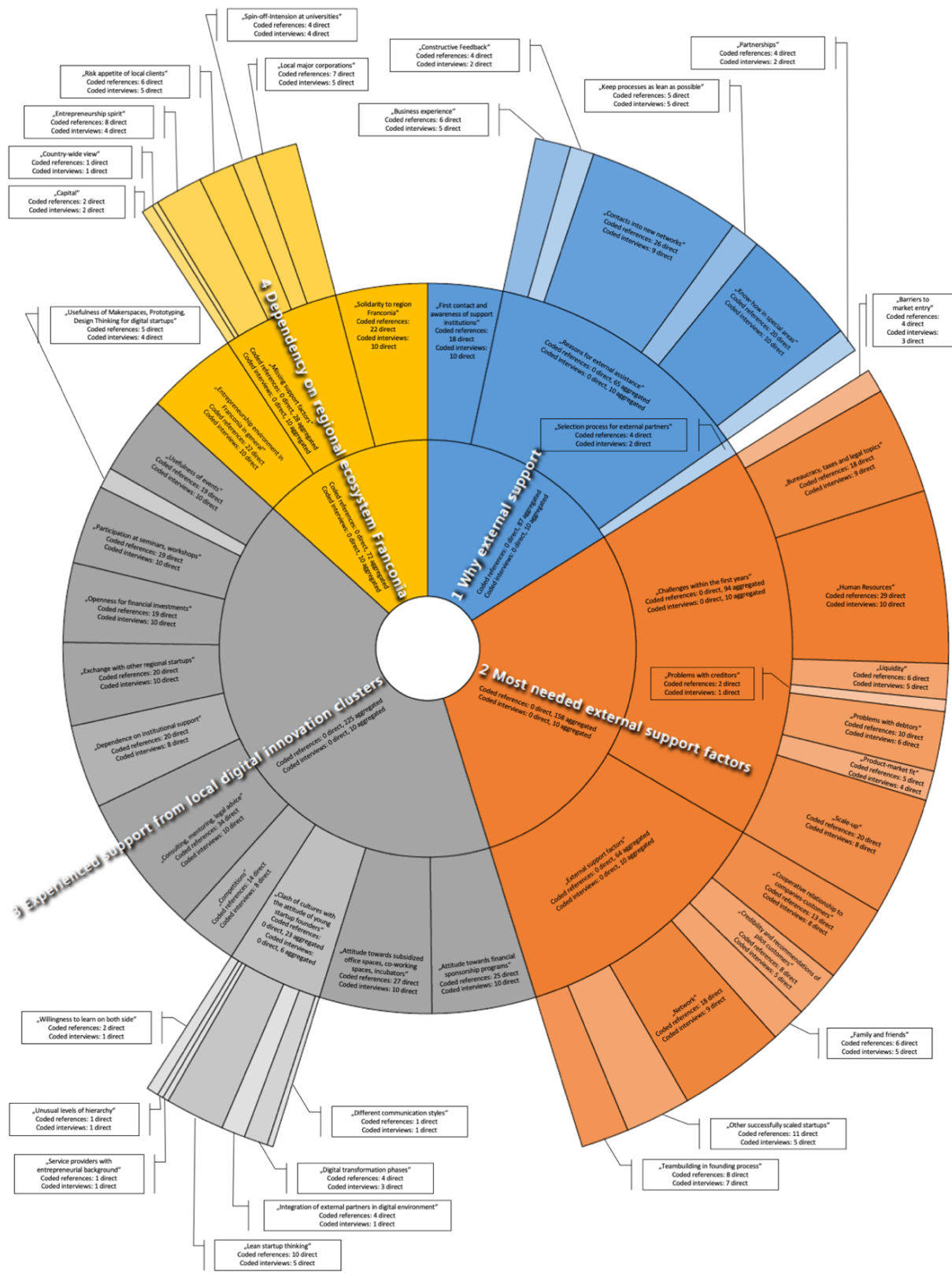


Figure 1: Sunburst diagram, analyzed with NVivo12

X. DISCUSSION

The results of this study show accordance, indicate dissonance, and raise new questions

about the resources required by entrepreneurs and the services offered by innovation clusters, compared in Figure 2.

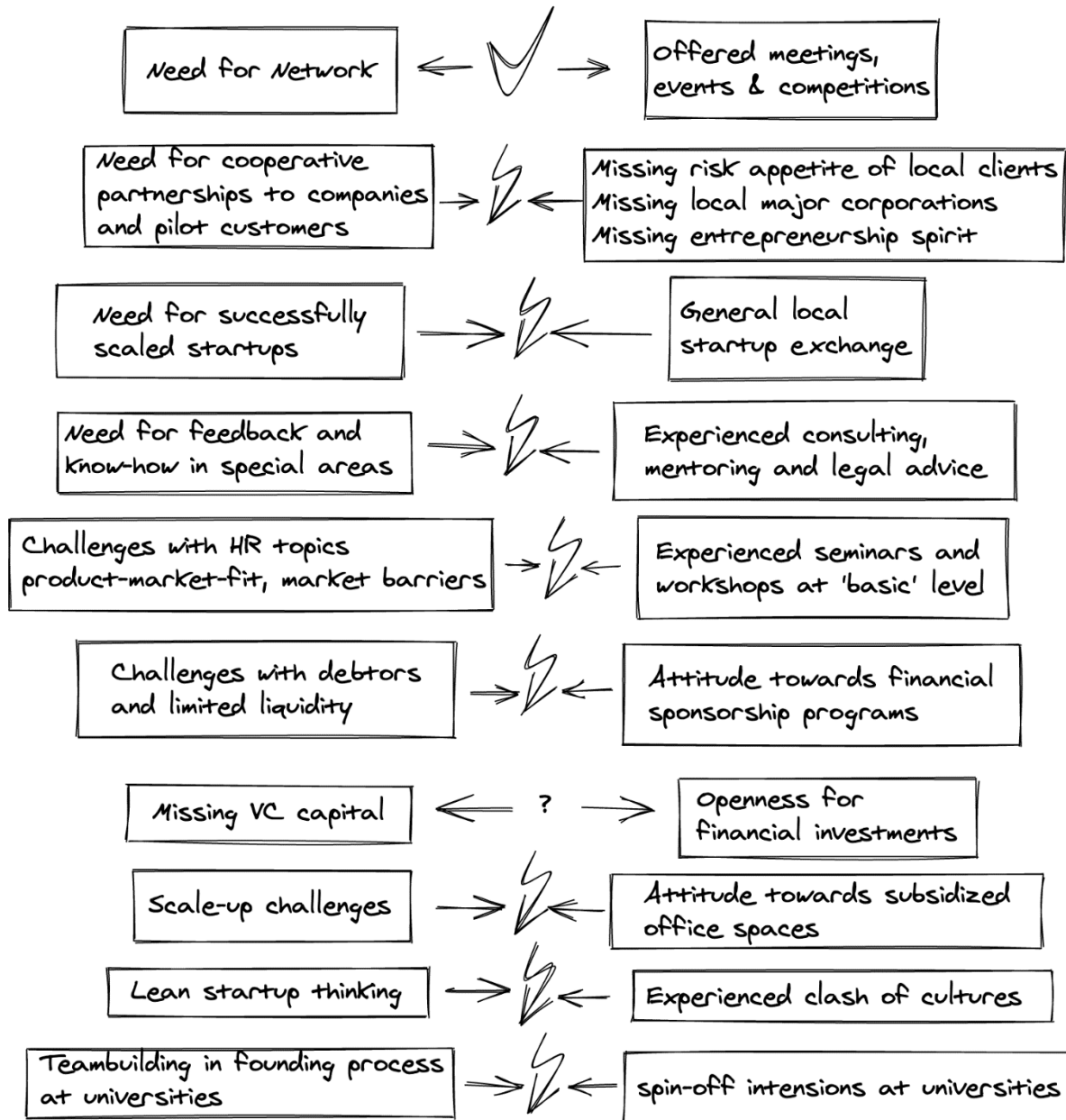


Figure 2: Comparing entrepreneurial needs and challenges with experienced external support

However, entrepreneurs needed much support during the start-up phase. Founders were dependent on external help. It turned out that the main reason for building on external support was to network with people who can supplement knowledge. Technology-oriented founders often had an academic background in computer science or engineering. As a result, the team often lacked a degree in business administration. Management and finance skills were welcome, but startups also

needed access and contacts with larger companies. This demand was mainly satisfied with the many networking events and competitions offered. These were assessed as extremely valuable and decisive in the first months of each company's foundation. As a result, the founders' expectations of an entrepreneurship-friendly environment were largely fulfilled.

All new ventures found good cooperative collaboration with a larger company, some partners, and some pilot customers as very helpful. This contrasts with the urgent desire of many founders for more such companies, whether larger corporations in the region, a little more willing to take risks with medium-sized companies, or a general entrepreneurship spirit, and to be open to the innovative achievements of startups even in smaller companies. Here the region could be even more open-minded. This is also where different attitudes towards the organization of companies sometimes clash, such as lean startup thinking, digital communication channels, or flat hierarchies, which are perhaps not yet so distinctive in traditional companies.

In view of these results and the literature, a critical discussion would conclude on the one hand, that the typical elements of a regional innovation system still need improvement (Häfner, 2014), particularly with regard to the classic resources of a firm (Groth et al., 2015). The fact that a larger population density in conurbations promotes the activity of startups (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2014) leads here in return to a disadvantage for Franconia. On the other hand, the lively further training and initiative on the part of the founders testify to the fact that today's *Multipreneurs* create innovation in a social process requiring interaction with others (Harkiolakis, 2014).

Networking events were popular. These provided contacts to other new ventures, but also to investors and entrepreneurs. However, in the growth phase of the companies interviewed, the general local exchange with people interested in setting up a company was no longer sufficient. Decisive progress could only be made with the exchange of successfully scaled other startups at a similar level. It will, therefore, be decisive for the Franconian region to bring such successful companies into permanent contact. The recommendations of Engel (2015) for global clusters of innovation were also largely valid from the point of view of young entrepreneurs in Franconia. Founders demanded a local adaptation of actions, building on strength instead of establishing new concepts from scratch, access to

the resources of educational institutions, the acceptance of an export dependency for digital innovations and networks to multinational players in a globalized world. This is in line with the cluster theory in regional innovation systems (Elbert et al., 2009).

The experienced consulting, mentoring, and legal advice could be more aligned with the growth and size of IT startups. Preferably free training events around the creation of business plans, elevator pitch exercises, legal topics, funding applications, and financing were well attended. Nevertheless, offered seminars were too much on a base level. Instead, offered workshops could focus not only more on the frequently mentioned challenges with human resources topics, but also to fulfill the product-market-fit and to overcome market barriers. This corresponds to the local competitive environment, often described by the five forces model (Pinkwart, 2016).

Especially with digitally-oriented startups, a fast market launch was essential (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2016). As a result, resources were urgently needed to test digital ideas quickly, bring these ideas to market, and grow as fast as possible. Scale-up challenges were both product-related and in terms of the growth of the company itself (space, employees). However, unlike the industrial sector, most startups needed no hardware development. Mechanical workshop areas, offered by several innovation hubs in Franconia and equipped with 3D-printers, laser cutters, or wooden prototyping construction machines were therefore hardly used. For other offers, such as *Design Thinking* workshops, it has yet to be seen if these fit the digital target audience. An important phase of design thinking is prototyping, while similar user-interface-tests are much more commonplace for digital services. In the end, quite different innovation methods and support options could turn out to be more successful.

Only half of the startups did draw from resources like subsidized office spaces that were often offered in incubators or science parks. On the one hand, founders happily fell back on low-cost rents for offices in co-working spaces or incubators at a

later development stage. On the other hand, most of them would be buildable at any place with fast internet. Many early-stage IT startups unofficially used rooms of university libraries, cafés, or worked from home, especially in the first few months. Some even considered office space available on the free market as more flexible and cheaper. In this respect, showcase buildings (which are so welcome in politics) must be called into question. On this point, the results support skeptical voices that criticized political programs to copy Silicon Valley at any price (Engel, 2015; Häfner, 2014; Keese, 2016; Makkonen & Inkinen, 2014).

On the one hand, the limited liquidity in the thrifty founding period was mentioned repeatedly, and there were defaults with debtors. On the other hand, offered financial sponsorship programs were described as unsuitable or insufficient. It turned out that most startups were financially quite well positioned as soon as corresponding orders and partnerships with customers were available.

Cases varied regarding external capital. While most of the new ventures trusted in turnover, current income, and no more than initially grants or smaller seed financing (mostly from the family environment), only three of the ten startups actively watched for venture capital. These, in turn, found the supply of VC and angel investors in the region insufficient. Entrepreneurs still saw much catching up to do when it came to high venture capital investment that enabled rapid scaling. This correlates with statements by Carsten Rudolph, the Managing Director of *BayStartUp*, who believed that the investor scene is well-positioned for the early phase in Bavaria, but saw a hole in the middle of the market and from ten million euro upwards, for example expansion abroad (Rudolph, 2019). However, it depended a lot on the business model.

Half of the startup teams were made up of people who had met during studies. Nevertheless, only two teams (both students of the *University of Applied Sciences Würzburg*) were introduced to the startup network by professors and specifically supported in building the company. The spin-off

intentions of the *University of Würzburg* were rather criticized. The interest on the part of the faculties might not be as strong.

However, regarding the key framework conditions, summarized by the *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor*, Franconia seemed to offer all essential parts: access to entrepreneurial finance, government support, entrepreneurship programs, educational background, research and development transfers, commercial infrastructure, market dynamics, physical infrastructure and social and cultural norms (Bosma et al., 2020).

Frightening was the high degree of the unfamiliarity of services within the cluster. While consulting meetings, events, and competitions were usually immediately mentioned as offers, facilities that are more specialized, workshops, and offers were unknown, or the interview partners only commented on them when explicitly asked. However, this coincides with the *German Startup Monitor 2017*. The researchers (n = 1,254) found that one-third of German startups do not even know if there is a local founder network or innovation cluster. Of the young entrepreneurs who are informed about such a network, only half agree to be part of it (Kollmann et al., 2017).

Implications

Founders should feel encouraged to build up the largest possible network. Offered meetings, events and competitions have often led to amazing support for startups. With all the external support required, it also seemed to be an advantage to keep processes as lean as possible. Furthermore, the exchange with other founders should not be limited to the local startup scene. Rather, it is important to orientate supra-regionally also at already successfully scaled startups of similar fields. In order to take the biggest challenges in the personnel area in the first years, it is advisable to attend offered additional courses in the area of soft skills, which may sometimes be neglected in technical and business studies.

Practitioners must come to terms with the fact that working with young founders often involves cultural differences. A little concession from both

sides will certainly not hurt here, for example regarding preferred communication channels. Especially for medium-sized companies it often does not seem clear that a close cooperation with a startup can be beneficial for both sides. Particularly in the case of digital transformation, which many established companies find difficult to deal with, a learning effect has emerged in the examples examined.

Policy makers ought to increase efforts to bring founders into contact with larger companies, rather than focus on infrastructural support. Instead of giving money away but tying funding programs to strict (and in some cases inappropriate) conditions, government institutions should perhaps consider providing some form of default guarantee. This would minimize the risk for potential customers and partners as mentioned above and help startups in the long run more like a one-time start-up financing (*EXIST* scholarship or innovation vouchers). Because, if the order situation is right, all other problems are usually solved as well. The identified gap for high venture capital investment that enables rapid scaling should also be taken into account at events or even competitions, where startups have always been considered as an investment case. Furthermore, the supra-regional exchange with already scaled startups could be promoted more. In any case, more public relations work should be done to transparently communicate the support services offered by various institutions.

XI. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Future researchers are invited to expand the findings. This study intended to compare the founders' needs with the actual support provided by an innovation cluster. A limitation was in the selection of entrepreneurs based on the list of the Center for Digital Innovation Franconia and the local conditions near the city of Würzburg. This could affect the generalization of results. It could be addressed in the investigation of other startups. A comparison with other areas or a cross-country comparison is recommended. Moreover, further research work could investigate other (less digital/service-oriented) industries as

the logical continuation of this research. It would also be conceivable to investigate the influence of startup cooperations in medium-sized partner companies. However, more research about the needs and resources requested by digital startups is required in order to learn which external support provides the best catalyst, as it has already been demanded by other researchers (Groth et al., 2015; Monsson & Jørgensen, 2016; Thomas et al., 2019).

XII. CONCLUSION

This research focused on the factors that were needed for entrepreneurs regarding external support, provided by local innovation clusters in Franconia. The literature review underlined a lack of empirical studies analyzing which offers for startups were essential during the early-stage development and which were not. The innovativeness of this study was framed in the direct questioning of young entrepreneurs with in-depth interviews about the already used and experienced offers and urgent external support needs. In the past, innovation clusters were more likely to be prearranged by institutions (universities, chambers of commerce), local companies, politicians, or groups of consultants. Not surprising that the interests of these groups were more critical in the selection of the services offered. For the first time in Franconia, the target group itself was questioned in detail. Although there has been a recent online questionnaire survey asking for interests, only an in-depth interview could reveal the actual motivations of young people. Consistent with previous studies, the strong orientation of innovation clusters to the functional relationships in the cluster, and the interests and expectations of the members, leads to very context-specific funding and has limited effects (Häfner, 2014).

In conclusion, this study provided further insight into the relationship between startup entrepreneurs and innovation clusters in Franconia. Policy makers and practitioners who have either a role or vested interest in startups should consider the results in the future planning of offers for this target group. It would be desirable if young entrepreneurs would not only

act as supplicants within innovation clusters but also contribute through self-initiative and support each other more strongly.

Declaration Of Conflicting Interest

The author declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

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Biography of the Authors

Since 2010, Simon Kiesel, DBA, is a volunteer judge for the *Business Plan Competition of Northern Bavaria*, organized by *BayStartUp*. He is a consultant and coach for startups and organizes and awards the *Würzburg Startup Prize* each year. Furthermore, the author works in the IT environment as a Head of Marketing and Customer Relationship Management for a German publishing company that has gone through the transition from telephone directory production to various digital service offerings.

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APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

1. How did you become involved with the ZDI and their local innovation cluster?
2. Why are you counting on support from ZDI?
3. In which cases does your startup build on external assistance?
4. Why does your startup build on external support?
5. How did the contact come about to cooperation partners with technical support and know-how?
6. How did you select external partners?
7. How has your development been in the last few years, from the idea of founding a new company, to the implementation of a business plan, up to the first years?
8. What are the most needed external support success factors?
9. Which external partners have brought you the most progress?
10. When you think of all the services and offers of the local startup network, what helped you the most so far?
11. What were the biggest challenges for your company within the last years?
12. How did you get first (pilot) customers?
13. How do you get qualified experts in a currently tense IT job market?
14. How did you get publicity, reach multipliers?
15. Do you remember any other external support factors from the first years in your company that might be relevant?
16. How was support from the local digital innovation cluster experienced in the past?
17. Why are you not in one of the state subsidized office spaces, a co-working space or an incubator?
18. How do you finance your company?
19. Why didn't you benefit from any financial funding?
20. To what extent do you plan to bring in outside capital from angel investors or VCs?
21. Who helped you with the business plan preparation, legal advice, or mentoring?
22. What do you think about the offered seminars, training workshops and events?
23. In what way did winning competitions help you?
24. How important is it for you to network with other startups?

25. How was the offered support with these external partners experienced?
26. What problems arose in the collaboration with external partners?
27. How would you describe the entrepreneurial environment in Franconia for founders in general?
28. Could you describe in your own words what a regional innovation cluster in Franconia means for new ventures now and what is missing to make founders even more successful?
29. How connected is your company with the region of Franconia?
30. What makes the ecosystem in Franconia special for startups?
31. Let us assume that your company continues to grow so successfully in the next few years. How likely is a move to another hotspot for startups like Berlin or even a foreign country?

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Relevance of Gandhi Today with Reference to Russia-Ukraine War

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ABSTRACT

In his broadcast to the nation on 30 January 1948, after Gandhi's assassination, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, said:

The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that has shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later, that light will still be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts.

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Relevance of Gandhi Today with Reference to Russia-Ukraine War

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I. INTRODUCTION

In his broadcast to the nation on 30 January 1948, after Gandhi's assassination, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, said:

The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that has shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later, that light will still be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts. For that light represented something more than the immediate present; it represented the living, the eternal truths, reminding us of the right path, drawing us from error, taking this ancient country to freedom. (qtd. in Gopal 107)

How true was Nehru? Yes, that light still illuminates us with the same vigour and vitality. Gandhi was an iconoclast who vociferously attacked the superstitious beliefs, dogmas and practices of the Indian religions and rejected untouchability, bitterly. It was under Gandhiji's leadership that the freedom struggle of India gained momentum and reached its final destination. He was the man who relentlessly fought for Indian independence and who spent many years of his life in prison so that India may breathe the fresh air of freedom.

Born on 2 October 1869, Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi's contribution cannot be limited to India alone. Beginning from fighting fearlessly for the

emancipation of Indians settled in South Africa, a struggle which continued for almost 20 years, Gandhi came back to India not quite aware of the prevailing conditions in India. Under the great leadership of Dadabhai Naorojee and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Gandhi began to understand and realize the temper of the Indian people. The miserable conditions of the Indian people and their sufferings stirred Gandhi to such an extent that he decided to sacrifice his life for their emancipation and upliftment. He made his mark in India by successfully leading three significant struggles – at Champaran in Bihar, at Ahmedabad and at Kheda in Gujarat. The death of Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1920 gave opportunity to Gandhi to become the unrivalled leader of the freedom movement. His protest "*hartal*" against the Rowlett Act of 1919 was a huge success. And this evidenced his potential before the other leaders of the Indian freedom movement. There was no looking back. Gandhi started the non-cooperation movement by surrendering the title of "*Kaiser-e-hind*" bestowed upon him by the British. On the 1st of August 1920, signaling the non-cooperation campaign, Gandhi surrendered his decorations and titles including the *Kaiser-e-hind* Gold Medal and wrote to Lord Chelmsford, the then Viceroy of India, thus:

It is not without a pang that I return the *Kaiser-e-hind* Gold Medal granted to me by your predecessor for my humanitarian work in South Africa, the Zulu War medal granted in South Africa for my services as officer in charge of the Indian Volunteer Ambulance Corps in 1906 and the Boer War medal for my services as assistant superintendent of the Indian Volunteer Stretcher Bearer Corps during the Boer War of 1899-1900. . . . Events that have happened during the past month have confirmed me in the opinion that the Imperial Government have acted in the

Khilafat matter in an unscrupulous, immoral and unjust manner and have been moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend their immortality, I can retain neither respect nor affection for such a Government. (qtd. in Tendulkar 1).

The non-cooperation movement was a turning point in India's struggle for freedom. The excitement of the Indian people was unprecedented. But due to the unfortunate incident at Chauri-Choura, wherein an encounter between the police and the *satyagrahis*, after the police open fire, the *satyagrahis* burnt the police-station which killed 23 policemen; Gandhi had to withdraw the non-cooperation movement in 1922. Gandhi was arrested and indicted on the charge of disaffection towards the Government and of instigating others to overthrow it. Sir J.T. Strangeman, Advocate General of Bombay, in his arguments, held Gandhi responsible for the bloodshed at Bombay and at Chauri-Chaura. The great leader overflowing with exemplary strength and courage accepted the charges levied against him by the Advocate General before the British Court:

I knew that I was playing with fire, I ran the risk, and if I were set free, I would still do the same. I felt this morning that I would have failed in my duty if I did not say what I say here just now.

I wanted to avoid violence, I want to avoid violence. Non-violence is the first and foremost article of my faith. It is the last article of my creed. But I have to make my choice. I had either to submit to a system which I considered had done an irreparable harm to my country or incur the risk of the mad fury of my people bursting forth when they understood the truth from my lips. I know that my people have sometimes gone mad. I am deeply sorry for it, and I am, therefore, here to submit not to a light penalty, but to the highest penalty. I do not ask for mercy. I do not plead any extenuating act. I am here, therefore, to invite and cheerfully submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a

deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen. The only course open to you, Judge, is either to resign your post or inflict on me the severest penalty. (qtd. in Rolland 116-18)

This was followed by the imprisonment of Gandhi for a term of six years though he was released after two years on health grounds. At the Lahore Session of the Congress Party, Gandhi declared the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1929. The movement started with the famous Dandi March of Gandhiji in 1930. The defiance of salt law was followed by the spread of the Civil Disobedience Movement all over the country. There were demonstrations, *hartals*, boycotts of foreign goods, and later refusal to pay taxes. Even the women of the country participated in this movement in large numbers.

Another important movement I would like to name here is the "Quit India Movement." Addressing a gathering in Bombay on the 8th of August 1942, Gandhi gave a slogan which had a remarkable electrifying effect on the people of India:

Here is a *mantra*, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breadth of yours give expression to it. The *mantra* is 'Do or Die.' We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery. (qtd. in Chandra et. al. 459-60)

This movement is important because here one can visualize the feeling of absolute sacrifice in the Indian people for liberation from British rule and secondly it has made the British realize that their days were numbered in India.

With the end of the II World War in 1945 India's freedom movement reached its final phase. Clement Attlee declared that a cabinet mission be sent to India to facilitate the transfer of power to India. And eventually, we find that India became free on the 15th of August 1947.

Let us briefly analyze the source of Gandhi's strength and his indomitable spirit. And such an analysis makes us realize that it was his extreme

faith in the concept of truth and non-violence. Truth for Gandhi was God and realizing this truth as God was the ultimate purpose of his life. He expounded that truth could be realized only through nonviolence. "Truth is the end and nonviolence the means." It was this phenomenon which Gandhi preached and practiced throughout his life and which became the weapon for India to attain its freedom.

Gandhi believed in simple living high thinking. There was absolute harmony in his thoughts, words and actions. "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony," he said. He was a messenger of truth and love. Hate the sin and not the sinner was the precept he believed in. And this was the reason that despite opposing their imperialistic policies and actions he nursed no grudge or ill will against the British. Gandhi believed that the weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

On January 28, 1948, Gandhi had a premonition of his death. Sitting outside his room in Birla House, he told Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, "If I were to die by the bullet of a mad man, I should do so smilingly. There must be no anger within me. God must be in my heart and His name chanting on my lips" ("If I were to die by the bullet of a mad man, I should do so smilingly"). Two days later, on his way to the prayer ground, a young man approached him with folded hands and bowed in greeting. The man's name was Nathuram Godse. He had a gun in his pocket. He took it out and pointed straight at the Mahatma, fired three shots. Blood seeped through the white cotton in which Gandhiji was clad. The father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, the man whose name is inextricably linked with *ahimsa*, i.e., nonviolence, the world over, had himself become a victim to *hinsa*, i.e., violence. He died exactly the way he had wished- with God on his lips, "*He Ram.*" A man of prayer, he died in prayer.

With this very brief political biography of Gandhi, let me connect his relevance in the present times. Today's world condition, especially after the Russia-Ukraine war, is no different from what has been described by Romain Rolland in 1924. Let

me be permitted to quote a paragraph from Rolland's biography of Mahatma Gandhi, titled, *Mahatma Gandhi (The Leader of Universal Peace & Liberty)*:

The world is swept by the wind of violence. This storm which ravages the harvest of our civilization did not break out from a clear sky. Centuries of brutal national pride, whetted by the idolatrous ideology of the Revolution, spread by the empty mockery of democracies, and crowned by a century of inhuman industrialism, rapacious plutocracy and a materialistic system of economics where the soul perishes, stifled to death, were bound to culminate in these dark struggles where the treasures of the West succumbed. . . All- be they Nationalists, Fascists, Bolsheviks, members of the oppressed classes, members of the oppressing classes - claim that they have the right to use force, while refusing this right to others. Half a century ago, might dominated right. To-day things are far worse. Might is right. Might has devoured right. (128)

And exactly, this is what is happening in Ukraine. There is flesh and blood all over. Blood rushes in search of veins, flesh craving to reunite. A dead woman is getting identified by the colour and texture of her nail polish. Shrieks, screech, scream and cry all around. Dying innocent faces, questioning the cause of their state! At least tell us our fault, our crime! What have we done? Where did we go wrong? Why are you killing us? At least let us know the reason, why? What will happen to our children? Who would take care of them? At least show some mercy. Aren't you afraid of God? All such questions being suppressed under the sound of bomb blasts and the clamour of bullets!

The deadening wind blows the ash particles, at times sky high. Its sound merges with the wail and moan of the dying ones. No one to help, no one to hospitalize, no one to treat! Humanity cries for existence. Complete catastrophe!

Anyone can witness such scenes on television as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war. Extreme violence, distrust and lack of truthfulness, exemplifies itself everywhere.

Russian attack on Ukraine has opened the doors for a, would be, III World War. A feeling of insecurity besiege almost all the countries. Despite all requests and their rejection followed by strict sanctions against Russia, her stubbornness exhibits the zenith of inhumanity. The dispute between Russia and Ukraine has been continuing for a long time. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the states which came into independent existence had severed their ties with each other. Ukraine, in order to attain its sovereignty, balanced its foreign policy with both, European Union and Russia. In the year 2014, Ukraine witnessed wide protests against its decision of not signing the European Union-Ukraine Association Agreement after it was approved by the Ukrainian parliament by majority. Very naturally, Russia was opposed to this decision. The removal of Yanukovich, the President of Ukraine, and the installation of an interim government by the opposition was followed by Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine as a counter attack. Tension continued between the two countries and finally Russia invaded Ukraine on 24th February 2022 with the aim of ending Ukraine's desire to join NATO.

I am convinced that the Russian feeling of insecurity from NATO is the primary cause of his devastating aggression against Ukraine leading to its holocaust. Even if Ukraine survives the war, it will take many years for him to recover from this immeasurable catastrophe. As I was writing this paper today, i.e., 14.05.2022, I saw the news that Russia is now threatening Finland to not join NATO. I am surprised as to how many countries do Russia wish to threaten alike.

Such testing times remind one of world leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. It takes one to Gandhi's philosophy of truth and non-violence and Nehru's principles of *Panchsheel*. The five principles of *Panchsheel* formally signed by the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru and the first Premier of China, Chou En-Lai, on 29th April 1954 and unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1957, had been the basis of the Non-Aligned Movement established in Belgrade in 1961. These five principles have virtually defined the inter-relationship between

the different countries of the world. It is a different matter that China herself did not stick to the principles of *Panchsheel* when it attacked India in 1962. These five principles of *Panchsheel* are; mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence. Had the world believed and practiced these principles there would have been no war.

Coming to Mahatma Gandhi, we get reminded of the principles of non-violence and truth which Gandhi had practiced throughout his life. These two principles are a part of the five essential vows or principles, viz. non-violence, truth, not stealing, non-possessiveness and sexual continence, which Jainism (Jain religion) preaches. Therefore, there was nothing original in this thought of the Mahatma. What was original of Gandhi was to make these five principles of Jainism as enunciated by Mahavir and as expanded by Buddha, strong and potent weapons to fight for the freedom struggle of India. What was original of Gandhi was that he infused fresh life and blood into what has already been present in the soul of India but was lying dormant. Throughout his life Gandhi practiced these five principles. Throughout his life Gandhi preached these principles to India and to the world.

It would be incorrect to criticize Great Britain all the time and in all respects as is the habit of the rustics of India. The concept of democracy which includes the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity arrived in India via Europe, particularly, Great Britain. Before the advent of democracy, India was governed by more than 500 kings and kingdoms having their own laws, rules and procedures, many a times, illogical, unreasonable, unjust and brutal. These Rajahs, Maharajahs, Emirs, Sultans and Nawabs as they were called were autocratic despots and were deft to the groans and cries of their subjects. The scions of the kings were the particles around which debased snobbery of the royalty would conjugate. Mahatma Gandhi along with his associates in the freedom struggle, like, Lala Lajpat Rai, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhai

Patel, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and many more was a votary of democracy, justice, liberty, independence, inequality, fraternity and brotherhood in India. Lala Har Dayal, the founder of *Gadar* Party, during the freedom struggle of India, describing democracy in his book, *Hints For Self-Culture*, writes:

The true criterion of good government is not the increase of population or wealth; it is the criterion of character and personality. That government is the best which produces the best type of men and women. This ethical test will establish the indisputable superiority of Democracy over all other forms of government. Democracy is the mother of the highest Virtue and Wisdom, of true Philosophy and religion, of free and progressive Humanity. Without it mankind would decay and dwindle with no hope of recovery. Long live Democracy! (342)

The behavior of Russia or to be more precise, Mr. Putin, is absolutely against freedom, liberty and progressive humanity. In the present situation, Mr. Putin is behaving like a despot monarch with no room for liberty and independence in thoughts and actions for his neighbours in the name of, would be, danger to Russia, thereby justifying his spectacular atrocities being inflicted in the name of Russian nationalism. Have our conscience not been awakened even after the disastrous impact of two World Wars? Do we await the final extermination of mankind by the use of nuclear weapons? The words of Lala Har Dayal once again become pertinent here:

The World-State will not be founded by Force or on Force. It will abjure, eschew, abhor, and abolish organized brute-force in all its forms. Nature has given us deft hands and feet, not sharp claws and talons. Nature thus says to man: "Work! Don't fight and wound and slay." Force has been the sworn foe of justice and equality at all times. (353)

Deliberating on Gandhian thoughts with respect to international affairs, J.B. Kripalani in his book, *Gandhi His Life and Thoughts*, opined:

In the international field, Gandhiji was the greatest advocate of world peace in modern times. He held that injustice and tyranny exercised by one nation over another were intolerable and must be resisted, since individuals, as also groups, could not remain for long under such conditions without revolt. Gandhiji, as we have already stated, wanted this revolt to be open and peaceful. Also humanity has now in this nuclear age no other way left. It must, however, be remembered that this fundamental reform in the international field, as in every other sphere of life, would need 'the martyrdom of man'. . . . A *satyagrahi* has to face voluntary martyrdom, when all other forms of non-violent resistance have failed. In Gandhiji's scheme of world peace, not only individuals but also groups and nations will have to be prepared for martyrdom, if need be. The martyr may appear to be defeated but he conquers death. Moral conduct does not pay high dividends. Everybody may not have to make the supreme sacrifice of life; but one has to suffer every day for the faith that is in one, unless one is fortunate. Even then one must be prepared to pay the highest price.

Gandhiji does not believe that world peace can be achieved through a policy of balance of power or through the fear of utter destruction induced by the threat of the use of nuclear weapons. He does not believe purely in a world organization keeping international peace. But a world organization for peace must consist of nations whose politicians are genuinely anxious for peace and do not aspire to dominate other nations. World organizations will be effective only when there is a change of heart in big and powerful nations and their politicians. (364-365)

How relevant are these thoughts of Gandhi in the present world situation, expressed by him more than 80 years ago. The reader would excuse me for the length of the quotation. Today, the powerful nations need to initiate a change in their overall attitude. Had Gandhi been alive he would have not only condemned Russia for its monstrous behavior but would have awakened the

world community against such acts of hideousness of hers and would have left for Ukraine to make his supreme sacrifice. The world today needs a leader like Gandhi. The world today lacks a leader of the stature of Gandhi. It's high time that the leaders of the world unite, forgive and forget and leave all enmity aside and make untiring efforts to meet Mr. Putin, communicate with him, hear him out, convince him, and assure him so that humanity and the world could be saved from another disaster. Let no nation forget, that no nation or individual can prosper without peace or in violence. Material wealth and brutal force might dominate the physical body of a nation or an individual, but it does not have the power to dominate its soul. Human history evidences the fact that man has eventually conquered the brutal force. Violence breeds violence. And this cycle is unending. It will only lead to the disaster of the participating ones. The only path to peace and development is what the Mahatma taught us; the path of truth and nonviolence.

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords: contemporary literature, spanish society, social criticism, journalistic articles, crisis.

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Una Mirada A La España Pre Y Pospandemia A Través De La Prosa De Elvira Sastre

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a reflection of society and continues to serve as a powerful voice in order to denounce diverse social problems. The journalistic articles written by Elvira Sastre, a contemporary Spanish writer, have been chosen in order to better analyse and understand the current society, with old problems as the precariousness in many fields and emerging issues such as the importance of working collectively in the fight for social rights or the impact of the COVID pandemic in our lives. The study allows to better understand current literature, contemporary society and the relationship between the two aspects, not only in Spanish society but in a global context marked by the crisis.

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RESUMEN

La literatura, como fiel espejo de la sociedad de cada época, continúa en la actualidad sirviendo como un potente altavoz para dar voz a determinados problemas. En ese sentido, se han tomado como objeto de estudio los artículos periodísticos de la escritora contemporánea Elvira Sastre para conocer mejor la realidad social de la actualidad, con viejos problemas, como la precariedad vital en múltiples ámbitos, y la aparición de nuevas cuestiones, como la importancia de la colectividad en la lucha por los derechos humanos básicos, así como los efectos que la pandemia ha supuesto en nuestras vidas. Como resultado, el estudio permite conocer mejor la literatura actual, la sociedad contemporánea y la relación entre ambas, no solo en la sociedad

española, sino en un contexto mundial en el que el concepto de crisis vuelve a estar muy presente.

Palabras clave: literatura contemporánea, sociedad española, crítica social, artículos periodísticos, crisis.

I. INTRODUCCIÓN

La literatura siempre ha funcionado como un espejo que refleja la sociedad de su tiempo y sus problemáticas, dependiendo del momento, haciendo más visibles algunas de ellas o minimizando otras, al igual que si los contempláramos en los espejos cóncavos y convexos de Valle Inclán localizados en el Callejón del Gato de su célebre novela *Luces de bohemia*.

Desde el anterior artículo «Sociedad y literatura: la poesía actual en una España en crisis» (García 2016) han pasado ya más de cinco años. Por ello, el objetivo de este trabajo es volver a realizar una radiografía de la sociedad española a través de su literatura actual, analizando qué problemas que por aquel entonces se denunciaban se han mantenido en el tiempo, cuáles han ido perdiendo relevancia y han pasado a un segundo plano y qué otros motivos de preocupación han ido surgiendo, reflejándose, por tanto, en las composiciones literarias.

En el presente trabajo se ha tomado como fuente de estudio los artículos de opinión de la sección *Madrid me mata* de Elvira Sastre publicados en el diario *El País* durante dos años y medio y compilados recientemente en la obra del mismo nombre (Sastre 2022).

Se ha decidido elegir este corpus de estudio en prosa ya que, debido a su diversidad temática, funciona como una eficaz crónica de la época, al

estilo de las crónicas decimonónicas de Benito Pérez Galdós, durante años también afincado en la capital española.

Se considera, asimismo, que se trata de un adecuado objeto de estudio debido al equilibrio que presenta entre la crítica social y el elemento autobiográfico, ya que aparecen situaciones que tanto la autora como gente próxima a ella han vivido en primera persona, lo que reviste toda esa crítica de una gran verosimilitud.

Por otro lado, a pesar de su título, no solo aborda problemas del ámbito local sino que, partiendo de anécdotas personales vinculadas a un territorio muy concreto, en este caso, Madrid, ha logrado trascender las fronteras debido a la universalidad de los temas planteados, cosechando también un gran éxito de lectores al otro lado del océano, especialmente, en países de América Latina, como Argentina, Chile, México o Colombia, un éxito también impulsado por la difusión de los textos en la redes sociales, poderosas formas actuales de comunicación que permiten tender puentes entre los distintos territorios¹.

II. EL CONCEPTO DE CRISIS EN LA SOCIEDAD EUROPEA ACTUAL

En primer lugar, debe seguir hablándose del concepto de *crisis* desde una perspectiva amplia:

- Crisis económica: en la actualidad, dos grandes problemas inundan todos los noticieros no solo europeos, sino de todo el mundo, con numerosas consecuencias en diversos ámbitos de nuestra vida: la pandemia, por un lado, y la guerra en Ucrania, por otro. Ambos están ocasionando repercusiones económicas de gran gravedad en los países europeos, como una fuerte inflación motivada por el incremento de los precios de muchos productos básicos, el encarecimiento de las distintas fuentes de energía, además de un aumento del desempleo

¹ Daniel Mesa (2020) analiza por su parte la publicación y difusión de la narrativa hispanoamericana en España, así como las consecuencias de la última crisis mundial en la reconfiguración de este campo.

ya que, a causa de la pandemia, muchos negocios han tenido que cerrar y, debido al incremento en los precios de los combustibles, muchos otros no han podido tampoco resistir.

- Crisis política: Inevitablemente, debe mencionarse como un fallo de la diplomacia internacional el reciente inicio de la guerra de Ucrania. Por otro lado, en los últimos tiempos, se sucede un desencanto generalizado de buena parte de la sociedad hacia la política, unido a un claro ascenso de los populismos en Europa, con la aceptación de ideas más conservadoras en países como Hungría, el ascenso de la ultraderecha francesa de Marine Le Pen e, incluso, en otros lugares que en los últimos años se habían mantenido más alejados de estas ideologías, como sucede en Portugal o España, con el auge en este último del partido VOX en las elecciones más recientes. Todo ello ha puesto en peligro no solo el tradicional modelo de bienestar de Europa, sino también logros ya muy asentados en nuestra sociedad como la igualdad de género o la libertad de orientación sexual.

No obstante, a pesar del ambiente de crispación política que parece imperar en la actualidad, el bipartidismo clásico sigue estando en crisis y cada vez es más necesario llegar a puntos de acuerdo en gobiernos de coalición formados por partidos de distintos signos políticos.

- Crisis climática: El ya citado incremento de los precios de las fuentes de energía está obligando a los políticos a buscar otras formas de abastecimiento que permitan una mayor autonomía. Como crítica a ese antiguo modelo abocado a la crisis, surgen diversos colectivos que defienden otro modelo más sostenible. En ese sentido, cada vez cobra mayor relevancia el activismo climático, impulsado por grandes referentes juveniles como Greta Thunberg, y ocasionando que las protestas en contra del cambio climático se sucedan por todo el mundo con lemas como: «No hay planeta B». además, los partidos ecologistas cada vez adquieren un mayor peso en la política.

- Crisis social: Todos los problemas económicos están originando un gran malestar social que se evidencia en protestas cada vez más numerosas en las calles en contra de las subidas de los precios y del aumento de la precariedad. Frente a ello, también se suceden grandes muestras de solidaridad hacia el pueblo ucraniano en un continente que cada vez tiene que ofrecer una respuesta más rápida a los flujos migratorios actuales. En el caso de España, no solo a los refugiados ucranianos y de otros conflictos aún en desarrollo como la guerra de Siria o la situación política en Afganistán, sino que no debe perderse de vista que también funciona como un importante destino para muchas personas procedentes de América Latina, debido a la inestabilidad en muchos de estos lugares a causa de tensiones políticas, sociales o por la violencia, y también procedentes de África, por la proximidad geográfica, y que deciden embarcar a Europa en busca de un futuro mejor.

En este contexto global marcado por la crisis, es importante analizar cómo se refleja esta en la literatura, a qué temas se da prioridad y qué mecanismos lingüísticos se emplean para ello, ya que:

En tiempo de crisis, como la que hemos vivido cuando lo real sorprende, cuando la existencia se acelera y se detiene en el mismo movimiento, la lengua se despliega, exige alertas y detenciones para decir lo aún no nombrado, no narrado; se interroga y busca cómo: extrae del archivo de formas conocidas pero olvidadas, desechadas o consideradas obsoletas. (Olea 2020)

III. ANÁLISIS TEMÁTICO DE LOS ARTÍCULOS DE ELVIRA SASTRE

La diversidad temática se puede sistematizar en dos grandes secciones: temática de los sentimientos y temática de crítica social aunque, como podrá comprobarse, a menudo las relaciones entre ambos planos resultan indivisibles.

3.1 Temática de los sentimientos

3.1.1 El amor

Se trata de un amor concebido en un sentido amplio, ya que este concepto no solo abarca el amor de pareja, sino también al amor hacia la familia, los amigos e, incluso, los animales.

En lo que respecta al amor de pareja, la expresión amorosa se caracteriza por la autenticidad y la normalidad. En sus distintos recuerdos amorosos, la autora se muestra vulnerable, en otras palabras, humana, lejos de la idealización que durante siglos caracterizó al tratamiento del amor en la literatura. Además, se presentan los diversos matices del sentimiento amoroso en las distintas etapas vitales, percibiéndose claramente una evolución en consonancia con el propio crecimiento personal. De esa forma, a su llegada a la ciudad, en plena juventud, el amor era más efímero, cambiante, con ese anhelo sobre todo de experimentar nuevas emociones: «Fue un tiempo de amores locos, emociones jóvenes y personas cruzadas. Quizás es cierto eso de que uno vive a los veinte lo mismo que el resto de su vida.» (Sastre 2022: 129).

Después de ese *amour fou* que lleva a distintas experiencias amorosas, la autora parece haber llegado a la estabilidad, gracias a su amada de ojos color yerba. Aparece así el amor como sinónimo de tranquilidad y refugio: «Yo no sé a dónde iba. No tenía ni idea. Solo sabía que quería estar con ella». (Sastre 2022: 96). El amor como brújula que nos guía en nuestra vida.

También se expresa un gran sentimiento amoroso hacia los animales, en el caso de la autora, hacia sus perros:

Hay una mujer gritándole te quiero a su perro. Parece que está sola, que nadie la mira con extrañeza. Y es verdad. Nadie la mira así porque todos hablamos a nuestros perros, todos conocemos sus miedos y los evitamos. Así los cuidamos y los protegemos. (Sastre 2022: 42)

En lo que respecta a las relaciones de amistad, esa familia que uno elige, están muy presentes a lo largo de los escritos. La autora se dirige a sus amigos por sus nombres, los individualiza, por

ejemplo, aquellos a los que vio por primera vez después del fin del confinamiento:

Pero en Madrid aparecieron Fran y Andrés por la puerta, escuchamos la sonrisa de Conta, aplaudimos a una Sara mucho más sana y fuerte, vino Vero a contarme que por fin podía volver a la calle a ayudar a la gente sin hogar, celebramos con Alberto que regresaba a casa con su abuela, Irene volvió conmigo para no irse nunca, me reí con Andrea igual que cuando dormíamos pared con pared y todo era mucho más sencillo. (Sastre 2022: 239)

En otras ocasiones, aparece una auténtica oda a la amistad, como la que ofrece a su amigo, el compositor Andrés Suárez, quien la acompañó desde el inicio de su carrera y con quien compartió escenario en recitales poético-musicales, ayudándola a superar el miedo escénico:

Yo continuó mirándole con admiración, así será siempre. [...] Cuando le miro y asiente, sé que todo va bien. Si no lo hace, sé que no le dejará pasar sin arreglarlo. Así es fácil hasta lo que yo creía imposible: dar botes en un escenario, rapear un poema, llevar la palabra a un estadio. Te quiero, Andrés. Lo hemos conseguido. (Sastre 2022: 152)

En el ámbito del amor familiar, se pone de relieve la importancia del hogar familiar como un refugio: «Son –somos– gente con suerte, que cuidamos a nuestras familias como lo que son: un refugio.» (Sastre 2022: 167)

No obstante, desde ese tratamiento realista que la autora nunca abandona, también se contempla la concepción de la familia como una fuente de disputas, especialmente evidente en determinadas épocas del año, como las celebraciones navideñas, sinónimo siempre de reencuentros familiares:

Otros aparentan una simpatía que está marcada por los hilos de la tensión, que son palpables bajo la algarabía y el frenesí de las reuniones familiares. Leo comentarios de personas de distintos géneros e identidades que vuelven a la casa de sus padres disfrazados de otros y esperan que todo termine para marcharse un poco más

rotos, un poco más solos; mujeres que se preparan los días antes para ser cuestionadas por su falta de deseo maternal; vegetarianos a los que les ponen un plato de carne encima de la mesa con sorna; encontronazos con el pariente de turno, ese que solo ves los días señalados; la intolerancia como postre y una necesidad inconfundible de volver al círculo creado. (Sastre 2022: 167)

La falta de instinto maternal, la no identificación con los géneros e identidades tradicionales, las opciones alimentarias alternativas, es decir, todo aquello que se aleje del canon oficial es a menudo cuestionado y fuente de malentendidos, en el seno de una familia que ya no se concibe como un solaz de calma y apoyo, sino como un espacio del que huir para poder llegar a ser uno mismo.

3.1.2 La soledad

Otro de los sentimientos clave en la sociedad actual, sin duda, es la soledad. A la hora de abordar este sentimiento se asiste a un tratamiento muy diverso dependiendo del tipo de soledad del que se hable: no es lo mismo la soledad elegida que la soledad impuesta, que será analizada más adelante, ya que afecta, en especial, a una parte muy concreta de la sociedad: los ancianos.

En el primer caso, se trata de un sentimiento necesario, indispensable para conocernos mejor a nosotros mismos y desarrollar nuestra autonomía e independencia. Pese a ello, a menudo el disfrute de la sociedad sigue siendo contemplada desde una perspectiva negativa, especialmente, dentro de entornos más pequeños. En ese sentido, Elvira Sastre destaca el gran alivio que sintió al llegar a Madrid y poder disfrutar de planes en solitario:

En aquel tiempo, Madrid me enseñó a amar mi soledad, que es un buen comienzo para amarse a una misma. Cuando le contaba a alguien de fuera que disfrutaba de los planes a solas, regresaban las miradas críticas. Sin embargo, aquí nadie me juzgaba o me miraba distinto, pues esta ciudad está llena de almas solitarias que se van cruzando las unas con las otras. (Sastre 2022: 10-11).

3.1.3 El miedo

Otro sentimiento siempre presente en la vida es el miedo. Desde la Antigüedad, uno de los temores más recurrentes que el ser humano ha plasmado en la literatura es el temor hacia la muerte. En la actualidad, este miedo sigue presente: «Siempre temí la muerte. Me da pavor pensar en ella: no en la propia, sino en la de mis queridos.» (Sastre 2022: 191)

En ese sentido, uno de los principales miedos que ha surgido en la actualidad es la convivencia con la pandemia de COVID-19: «Estamos viviendo una época de miedo porque lo que hay ante nosotros es desconocido.» (Sastre 2022: 193)²Aunque, a continuación, esa expresión se matiza y se intenta buscar causas en la actitud negligente del ser humano en su relación con la naturaleza. «El mundo venía avisando: cambio climático, fuegos incontrolados, inundaciones desoladoras, hábitats destruidos... Y no es hasta ahora que salta de la naturaleza a nuestros cuerpos que nos lo tomamos, quizá, un poco más en serio.» (Sastre 2022: 193)

Ese desconcierto hacia una crisis de salud pública sin precedentes en los últimos años se describe de forma desgarradora: «Hay persianas bajadas y ventanas que ya no se abren y es me da tanto miedo como el sonido de las ambulancias que rompe la tarde en dos.» (Sastre 2022: 214). Dicho sufrimiento causado por la pandemia se ejemplifica con la imagen simbólica de un balcón abandonado:

Es un balcón anciano, de toldo verde y desgastado, de esos que pueblan Carabanchel, aunque podría ser de cualquier ciudad. La pareja de ancianos que cuidaba de sus plantas, a seguro bien queridas, ha fallecido por COVID-19. (Sastre 2022: 228)

² En su poema «Incertidumbre», la autora chilena Soledad Fariña (2020) a través de las interrogaciones alude al distanciamiento social impuesto por la pandemia: «No hay respuesta. Solo barbijos, mascarillas, guantes/ ¿Abrazos? (no) ¿Caricias? (no)/ ¿Piel contra piel? (Jamás!/) ¿Tocarse los labios? (no) ¿Siquiera levemente? (no!)».

Durante el periodo de confinamiento, se experimentó todo tipo de temores. Por ello, a veces era necesaria la evasión a otros lugares que nos hicieran olvidar lo terrible de la cotidianidad, como el mar, siempre elemento de calma: «Entonces pienso que es el mar y todo, aunque escuece, cicatriza.» (Sastre 2022: 196)

Con respecto a esta etapa de confinamiento, las reflexiones parecen llevar a la triste conclusión de que ese tiempo vivido no ha servido para hacernos mejores personas, como se esperaba:

Lo que yo veo es gente sufriendo mientras otros protestan por lo suyo; médicos que han muerto por salvarnos mientras otros escupen en sus tumbas sin miramiento; confrontación y debates de colegio en las altas esferas que me provocan bostezo y desidia; una mirada puramente egoísta sobre las consecuencias de todo esto. [...] Pero si este confinamiento no nos ha enseñado a cuidarnos entre todos, entonces de qué ha servido todo esto, aparte de para convertirnos en mejores cocineros o mejores familiares. ¿De qué narices ha servido? (Sastre 2022: 220).

3.1.4 La vinculación con el espacio

A menudo, en la literatura los lugares que habitamos a través de la personificación adquieren casi una identidad humana, son testigos silenciosos de innumerables historias; de ahí que cobren tanto protagonismo en nuestra vida y, por ende, en la literatura:

Las ciudades son testigos históricos, la mayoría imbatibles. Han visto de todo y no se callan: hay heridas, restos de otros momentos, hay daños y también homenajes. En las ciudades hay restos de vida. El polvo de las calles sigue siendo el mismo que décadas atrás, estoy segura. Eso es algo que se percibe. Sin embargo, la gente que las ocupa es radicalmente distinta. El discurso que escuchan es diferente. La ropa, los besos, los locales, incluso el olor son desiguales. (Sastre 2022: 23-25).

Como ya se ha señalado, el lugar que predomina en la obra, hasta el punto de otorgarle el título, es Madrid. La relación con la ciudad a menudo es compleja y diversa y va evolucionando con el paso

del tiempo, aunque, por lo general, lo positivo suele predominar en la balanza.

De entre esos aspectos positivos, se destaca sobre todo la idea de movimiento, entendido en sentido amplio: como una fuerza motora que nos hace comprometernos con nuestra realidad, participar en ella y mejorarla. De esa forma, se alude a movimientos colectivos de reivindicación como el 15M con sus acampadas frente a la Puerta de Sol o las manifestaciones a favor de la igualdad de género y de la diversidad sexual.

No obstante, se ofrece un análisis del espacio desde una perspectiva que aborda una realidad compleja, poliédrica en sus muchas caras. Por eso, a veces, como en toda relación personal, es necesario también tomar un respiro, poner espacio de por medio y liberarse: «He necesitado tomar aire, otro aire, y expulsarlo en ti. Irme para volver. Marcarme para aprender a buscarte. Cerrar los ojos para verte.» (Sastre 2022: 53).

Valiéndose del recurso de la antítesis para expresar esta dualidad, se ponen de manifiesto sentimientos negativos y positivos que mantienen a la autora vinculada con esta ciudad:

Me has dado amor profundo y real, me has dado ilusión de la que daña, me has dado pasión incontrolable y una libertad que defenderé hasta que muera, me has dado tristeza absoluta y también la manera de comprenderla, me has dado la nostalgia que se enciende con las farolas por la noche, me has dado rabia y la fuerza necesaria para combatirla, me has dado voz, me has dado palabra. (Sastre 2022: 54)

Y se mencionan algunos de los rasgos menos positivos que con frecuencia suelen relacionarse con la ciudad:

Hay muchas personas que te detestan, que piensan que eres una ciudad saturada, llena de ruido molesto y gente con prisa. Que solo tienes conciertos multitudinarios, espectáculos de fuego y parques de atracciones. Que únicamente sirves de paso para alcanzar otros destinos y que eres, de manera irremediable, una casa por accidente, el sitio donde el trabajo aflora y de donde huyen cuando el tiempo se libera. Muchos te ven como

una gran nube gris, peligrosa en las esquinas, cansada y envidiada al mismo tiempo, casa de muchos y hogar de pocos. (Sastre 2022: 53)

Contaminación, exceso de ruido, deshumanización...rasgos generalizables a muchas otras ciudades en todo el mundo. Por ello, Madrid, y por ende otras grandes capitales, no es un lugar para todos, no todas las personas encuentran ahí su hogar definitivo.

Dentro de esa diversidad de tratamiento, no obstante, Madrid no solo es vista como un lugar lleno de prisa, gente diversa y cientos de oportunidades, sino que además de todo eso también puede convertirse en un refugio si se sabe buscar bien:

Es cierto, no me cabe duda, que no está hecha para todo el mundo: es muy complicado saber encontrarse en medio de los agobios y las prisas de una capital como esta, pequeña y grande al mismo tiempo, es igual de difícil que ser capaz de distinguir la nota que compone una melodía. Pero se puede. A mí me llevó un tiempo acomodar mi silencio a su ruido, encajar el paso lento del tiempo en un reloj que nunca duerme. Pero lo hice. (Sastre 2022: 11)

Y este hallazgo viene cargado de un gran triunfo a nivel personal:

Y lo que descubrí, lo que descubro, es un triunfo, es la cruz del mapa, es lo que se observa desde el punto más alto de la montaña. En cierto modo, Madrid me ha reconciliado conmigo misma. Es la única ciudad del mundo en la que no me siento sola cuando me quedo sola. (Sastre 2022: 11)

Esta aparente paradoja de no sentirse sola a pesar de estarlo físicamente refleja muy bien ese estado de plenitud vital.

Además del vínculo con Madrid, también aparecen referencias a otros lugares, especialmente, Segovia, ciudad natal de la autora, que a menudo es vista como una especie de Arcadia, vinculada a los sentimientos positivos de su infancia y adolescencia. La autora recuerda sus vivencias familiares, como su introducción en el mundo de la lectura, convirtiéndose así en una

especie de *locus amoenus* que le permitió afianzar unas sólidas bases para poder ser quien es hoy en día. «Tengo un recuerdo muy claro de cuando era pequeña y que rescato, a veces, cuando los días me ahogan: los viernes por la tarde siempre subía a la biblioteca de Segovia después de comer y me pasaba toda la tarde leyendo hasta que llegaba la hora de quedar con mis amigos.» (Sastre 2022: 61)

O la evocación de las rutinas del verano desde su infancia: «mañanas en casa de mis padres, siestas breves, baños en la piscina bajo la atenta mirada de mis abuelos, novelas compartidas y charlas familiares cuando el calor segoviano se va desvaneciendo según pasan las horas de los dos meses más tranquilos.» (Sastre 2022: 120)

Sin embargo, a medida que pasaban los años, la autora necesitaba algo más que en ese lugar ya no podía encontrar, necesitaba ampliar sus horizontes, abrir sus alas, y decide elegir Madrid como su destino: «Apenas cumplía veinte años y tenía ganas de comerme el mundo empezando por ti». (Sastre 2022: 54); «Quería respirar el aire que solo existe aquí, ver cómo se ampliaban las grandes avenidas, salir de las esquinas. Quería ver otras caras, otros cuerpos: gente libre, con prisa, seguir siendo». (Sastre 2022: 10). Y ese anhelo se resume muy bien en la siguiente frase: «Madrid, para mí, fue al principio esa hambre de vida» (Sastre 2022: 10).

3.2 Temática de crítica social

Se abordan problemas actuales que afectan a la sociedad, en especial, a la población más joven:

3.2.1 Problemas económicos

En la actualidad, los jóvenes continúan conformando uno de los sectores de la población más marcados por la precariedad, lo que les lleva a menudo a emigrar a otros lugares en una búsqueda de mejorar sus horizontes de futuro.

En ese sentido, tradicionalmente, siempre se ha producido una migración a las ciudades, ya que se han asociado con la idea de éxito en el ámbito laboral, por un lado, y en el ámbito personal, por otro, pues permitían ampliar los círculos sociales,

así como optar, por ejemplo, a una mayor posibilidad de oferta cultural y experiencias vitales.

En relación a aquellos territorios más despoblados, especialmente, territorios del interior y del norte del país, surge el concepto de *la España vaciada*, que cada vez está más presente en la actualidad, por ejemplo, a través de pequeñas iniciativas que han llegado, incluso, a corporeizarse en partidos políticos en defensa de estos territorios a menudo olvidados dentro de esa perspectiva más centralista y, sobre todo, urbana, que ha imperado en los últimos años³.

La propia autora, que, como ya se ha señalado, nació en Segovia, una pequeña ciudad en la Comunidad Autónoma de Castilla y León, ciudad próxima a Madrid, decidió trasladarse a la capital. Esta proximidad a la capital conducía casi inexorablemente a su traslado hacia ella si se quería cumplir con las expectativas de vida creadas, pues la ciudad era considerada el destino para triunfar, una idea que se venía inculcando desde la infancia:

Es algo que todos hemos oído desde el instituto, al menos los que vivíamos próximos a Madrid: la importancia de estudiar y de trabajar en la capital. Nos lo vendieron –y así lo compramos– como un paso imprescindible en el crecimiento personal de cada uno. (Sastre 2022: 174)

Sin embargo, con el paso del tiempo, a menudo la realidad se aleja bastante de lo esperado y muchos de estos jóvenes deben enfrentarse a una existencia marcada por la precariedad:

Viven en pisos minúsculos, trabajan en multinacionales y van con su primer traje a reuniones donde solo escuchan. El sueldo es mínimo, el horario, estrambótico, tienen cesta de Navidad pero no les dan vacaciones completas y guardan en la cartera una promesa de dejar de ser becario antes de verano. (Sastre 2022: 52)

³ En muchas de sus novelas, como *La lluvia amarilla* (2021), ya desde hace años, el escritor Julio Llamazares aborda temas como el éxodo rural y el despoblamiento de esa *España vaciada*.

El choque entre esas expectativas creadas y la realidad es especialmente relevante en el siguiente fragmento:

Sus padres los abrazan con orgullo, dispuestos a pasearlos por el pueblo con el pecho hinchado aunque todavía no sepan bien lo que hacen, lo que les habrá costado pedir esos días para estar con ellos, la penurias que pasarán para cubrir el alquiler, los cuerpos flacos que se esconden debajo del traje. Son mis primos, mis amigos, mis conocidos. Es una parte de mi generación: los “afortunados que consiguen trabajo. (Sastre 2022: 52)

Dentro de esa perspectiva económica, sin duda, uno de los principales problemas que surge tiene que ver con el precio del alquiler, que a menudo imposibilita la opción de contar con un hogar digno en los entornos urbanos debido a los sueldos precarios, aun entre jóvenes con una gran formación académica a sus espaldas. De hecho, las alusiones a las problemáticas asociadas al alquiler en las grandes urbes se repiten a lo largo de los artículos:

Huí de Lavapiés agobiada por un alquiler que se multiplicó de un año para otro sin razones aparentes. Me negué a formar parte de ese canibalismo inmobiliario que sigue creciendo indomable y me largué. Cada vez más ruido, cada vez más basura, cada vez más edificios. (Sastre 2022: 55)

Por ello, las primeras elecciones de viviendas de estos jóvenes distan bastante de un modelo de confort:

Visitaríamos unos cuantos más antes de llegar al definitivo: un piso viejo, con muebles heredados, en el que tres habitaciones se encajaban como en una partida de Tetris. El suelo, de parqué antiguo, crujía a cada paso. El gotelé de las paredes arañaba y encontramos pruebas de otras vidas debajo del sofá. Estaba en una de esas típicas corralas madrileñas y para llegar teníamos que subir tres pisos y atravesar pasillos angostos. Sufrimos bichos, ruidos nocturnos, vecinos molestos. (Sastre 2022: 18-20).

No obstante, en este caso, todas esas deficiencias materiales quedan neutralizadas por la posibilidad de optar a una nueva vida en esa ciudad deseada. La idea de libertad e independencia está por encima de todo: «Insisto: nos daba exactamente igual. Fue el primero. Fue el mejor piso del mundo» (Sastre 2022: 20).

Este tipo de descripciones realistas son una constante en las viviendas de todos sus amigos:

He ido a visitar a mi amigo Chris a su casa. Vive solo, en La Latina, en un cuarto sin ascensor. Esto puede llegar a ser un drama, pero uno pronto se acostumbra por resignación, porque si algo escasea en la capital son los pisos de alquiler con montacargas. (Sastre, 2022: 25)

En relación con lo anterior, aparece otra problemática cada vez más patente en las grandes ciudades: el incremento de los alquileres, propiciado en ocasiones por la proliferación de pisos turísticos, que hacen que en muchas zonas céntricas los vecinos que llevan residiendo en ellas buena parte de su vida deban abandonarlas ante la imposibilidad de pagar los altos costes. «Estuve un año. Me negué a contribuir a la subida de alquiler de casi trescientos euros del año siguiente que terminaría por destrozar el barrio» (Sastre 2022: 33).

Por todo ello se habla de una especie de futuro truncado de toda una generación:

Pero es verdad que ha pasado el tiempo, me acerco a los treinta y veo en la gente de mi alrededor una vida muy diferente a la que nos prometieron cuando estudiábamos y nos decían que Madrid era la única opción. Me resulta inevitable pensar que quizá ese sueño no fuera real, que crecimos engañados. (Sastre 2022: 175)

A veces este engaño aparece ligado a una cierta idea de sobreprotección en las generaciones más jóvenes:

Nuestra generación, acordamos todas, ha crecido sobreprotegida: alguien nos hizo creer que éramos especiales, nos metió en una burbuja y nos lanzó al mundo real con la promesa de un trabajo fijo, un sueldo digno y todos, absolutamente todos

nuestros sueños cumplidos. Así crecimos, despreocupados, bajo el amparo de una economía boyante y unos padres felices que nos creyeron capaces de todo. (Sastre 2022: 181)

Pero entonces llegó la crisis financiera de 2008 y toda ese castillo de naipes se derrumbó.

La acumulación de todas las dificultades mencionadas, a menudo genera una huida de las grandes urbes. Por un lado, se trata de personas que ya han vivido la aventura urbana y por diversas cuestiones deciden irse: no era lo que esperaban, han perdido su empleo, su precariedad no les ha permitido disfrutar de un buen nivel de vida, etcétera. Se asiste así a una ruptura de dichas expectativas de triunfo personal y laboral vinculadas a las ciudades, con la consiguiente frustración de sus deseos:

El otro día hablaba con Sara, una amiga que vino a Madrid en busca de eso que no es trabajo ni una oportunidad, sino un hogar. Ella no lo encontró aquí. Solo conoció lugares equívocos, encuentros forzados, situaciones complejas. Puertas que no levaban al sitio adecuado, voces desconocidas, días de angustia. Aguantó unos meses, los justos para sentir la asfixia de las ciudades que nunca se aprenderán tu nombre, y se marchó. (Sastre 2022: 80)

En ese sentido, empieza a cobrar cada vez más fuerza otra alternativa: el retorno a los lugares de origen. Las grandes ciudades pierden así parte de ese atractivo que durante décadas han ofrecido a las personas, especialmente jóvenes, como destinos de inigualables posibilidades de ascenso social y estabilidad vital. En su lugar se menciona, por un lado, a jóvenes que han decidido quedarse en sus entornos próximos, algo sin duda beneficiado en la actualidad por las nuevas tecnologías y el aumento del teletrabajo, tras la pandemia. Muchos de estos jóvenes deciden incluso emprender pequeños proyectos en estos lugares.

Los beneficios de estas decisiones son muchos, por ejemplo, la opción de optar a una vivienda propia mucho más asequible económicamente, así como las diferencias de salarios y el abaratamiento de todos los gastos del día a día:

El sueldo de sus amigos, trabajadores de industria, superaba con creces los mil. Aquí, con suerte y esfuerzo, podrían trabajar con un contrato de becario por trescientos o cuatrocientos euros. Varios de ellos ya contaban con propiedades pagadas de su bolsillo. El menú del día, seis euros. La cerveza, uno. Y así un largo etcétera. (Sastre 2022: 175)

Por último, hay que hablar de otro factor que también ha propiciado cambios en la movilidad de las personas: la pandemia de COVID. Como consecuencia, muchas personas que tuvieron que vivir el confinamiento en las ciudades, a menudo en viviendas de reducidas dimensiones, han decidido cambiar de domicilio y buscar otros lugares más amplios y luminosos, por ejemplo, en las afueras de las ciudades o en pequeños pueblos. Esto es lo que le ha sucedido a la propia autora, primero dentro de la propia ciudad, decidió mudarse a una zona más tranquila y con detalles más humanos:

Así di con Acacias: un barrio tranquilo, sin pretensiones, con niños que juegan a la pelota y personas mayores que conocen tan bien las calles que saben cuál es el mejor banco para sentarse al sol y charlar de esto y de lo otro. (Sastre 2022: 57)

Y después mudándose definitivamente a una casa al norte de Madrid:

En casa llevábamos un tiempo hablando de mudarnos. En nuestro sueños, siempre nos vislumbrábamos con muchos perros adoptados y muchos otros de acogida en una casa con jardín a las afueras de Madrid, pero el paso era tan grande como el vértigo a darlo, así que la conversación siempre terminaba formando parte de un futuro que no llegaba. (Sastre 2022: 285)

Ese nuevo destino proporciona a la autora la calma anhelada: «Soy feliz aquí. Es un pueblo amable, tranquilo. Me he deshecho de parte de los descuidos del centro de Madrid» (Sastre 2022: 285). Se convierte así este nuevo destino en otro *locus amoenus*, del que destaca sobre todo el cambio de ritmo que ha impuesto a su vida: «La gente pasea de una manera que no había visto antes en esta ciudad. Van sin prisa, como si

hubieran llegado a su destino y solo les quedara disfrutar» (Sastre 2022: 285).

3.2.2 Problemas de igualdad

Como ya se ha señalado, el ascenso de ideologías conservadoras en el espectro político han hecho peligrar algunos de los principios asentados después de décadas de lucha en Europa, como sucede con la igualdad de género y la libertad de orientación sexual. El mejor antídoto frente a ello es seguir impulsando el poder de la lucha colectiva, como sucede con los movimientos feministas; de ahí la importancia que adquiere el término *sororidad*.

En 2018 ocurrió algo histórico. En un momento político y social de gran división, de gran enfrentamiento, siento que la causa feminista logra, entre otras cosas, lo que no logran las demás: unió. Salí a las calles de la capital sin saber que aquello establecería un precedente y una energía que no queríamos canalizar jamás. Supe que algo había pasado porque los días posteriores tuve un viaje a Pamplona y en el tren el tema de conversación había cambiado. Todo vibraba. Las mujeres nos mirábamos y nos sentíamos compañeras sin conocernos. (Sastre 2022: 70)

Trascendiendo los límites de nuestro objeto de estudio, no debe pasarse por alto la importancia de la temática feminista en la literatura, como sucede, por ejemplo, en América Latina, donde el feminismo ha adquirido en los últimos años una repercusión inaudita, de la mano de campañas como la lucha por la despenalización del aborto, el «Ni una menos» en Argentina o el colectivo feminista chileno Las Tesis y que se ha traducido en movimientos análogos en otros rincones del continente, especialmente, en países como México o Colombia⁴.

⁴ Por primera vez se pone voz a los feminicidios, como en la obra de Selva Almada (2015), aunque a menudo el lenguaje se queda corto para expresar esas situaciones tan terribles, como denuncia la escritora mexicana Cristina Rivera Garza (2021: 34), sobre todo antes de que el feminicidio se tipificara en el Código Penal Federal mexicano en 2012: «A gran parte de los feminicidios que se cometieron antes de esa fecha se les llamó crímenes de pasión. Se les llamó andaba en

Todo ello se relaciona con ese nuevo rol femenino que desde hace años lucha por hacerse un hueco en la literatura: mujeres con un papel activo en la sociedad, que luchan conjuntamente por sus derechos, con formación y aspiraciones laborales y con una gran conciencia social, ya que saben que solamente gracias a las reivindicaciones colectivas podrán conseguir sus aspiraciones.

Destaca también el importante activismo de mujeres de mayor edad en la lucha contra la violencia machista: «También me sorprendió la cantidad de ancianas que marchaban al mismo paso que los demás y gritaban con más fuerza que algunas jóvenes». (Sastre 2022: 154). El feminismo se presenta así como un movimiento transversal que traspasa fronteras, edades y clases sociales.

Dentro de esta reivindicación feminista, también se hace alusión a otras situaciones a menudo más relegadas a un segundo plano, como el escaso protagonismo de las mujeres en los deportes de competición. Se alude en este caso al fútbol femenino, a partir de los sentimientos de la autora cuando acudió a ver su primer partido:

Iba sin recelos, consciente de que el apoyo era lo que más importaba. Me daba igual el resultado: quería verlas a ellas jugando al fútbol ante un estadio lleno. Disfrutar de su triunfo, del de todas las mujeres deportistas que lucha por verse reconocidas y valoradas. (Sastre 2022: 79)

malos pasos. Se le llamó ¿para qué se viste así? Se le llamó una mujer siempre tiene que darse su lugar. Se le llamó algo debió haber hecho para acabar de esta forma. Se le llamó sus padres la descuidaron. Se le llamó la chica que tomó una mala decisión. Se le llamó, incluso, se lo merecía. La falta de lenguaje es apabullante. La falta de lenguaje nos maniató, nos sofocó, nos estranguló, nos disparó, nos desuella, nos cercena, nos condena». Por su parte, Tamara Tenenbaum (2021) analiza el rol femenino en la actualidad en relación a muchas otras cuestiones, como la amistad, la cultura del consentimiento, las relaciones amorosas, la soltería o la maternidad. En el ámbito anglosajón, Siri Hustvedt (2017) también relaciona en sus ensayos el feminismo con disciplinas como el arte o la ciencia.

De la misma forma, la reivindicación por la diversidad sexual está también muy presente en la obra:

He ido a muchas celebraciones del Orgullo en Madrid. Recuerdo que todavía vivía en Segovia y cogía el autobús a la capital con unos amigos contentos, con ganas de celebrar en las calles principales, donde seguiremos haciéndolo. Era adolescente y nunca me sentí tan viva, tan capaz. No hay mayor escudo que un miedo comprendido, y durante el Orgullo nos sentimos próximos, unidos, entendidos. (Sastre 2022: 110) De nuevo la lucha colectiva como un motor de cambio, tanto a nivel individual como social: «Aquellos años me dieron la seguridad que tengo hoy. A todos los que vinieron antes les debo mi libertad. Por eso no voy a dejar de celebrar, ni un solo día y a voz en grito, que sentimos orgullo, libertad y poder». (Sastre 2022: 112)

Por ello, es importante no olvidarse de esa lucha, ya que todavía queda mucho por conseguir:

La gran mayoría de las personas LGTBTIQ+ que conozco tienen problemas en casa –casi todos con su padre–, han visto cómo anulan su género, han sido discriminados en la escuela o en el trabajo por su condición sexual o han sufrido agresiones en la calle por ir de la mano con su pareja, sin encontrar protección suficiente en las autoridades competentes. Todos sentimos miedo. Todos miramos a nuestro alrededor antes de besar a quien queremos. O bajamos las personas. O disimulamos la caricia. O nos conformamos con los ojos. (Sastre 2022: 236)

3.2.3 Problemas medioambientales

En el artículo anterior sobre literatura y sociedad españolas (García 2016), la defensa de la naturaleza y la lucha por el cambio climático no constituían una de las principales preocupaciones. No obstante, como ya se ha señalado, en la actualidad los movimientos ecologistas cada vez van adquiriendo una mayor fuerza en todo el mundo.

Las crónicas analizadas se hacen eco de esa conciencia ecológica, por ejemplo, a través de la defensa del pequeño comercio de proximidad, como los mercados, a pesar de la dificultad para

mantenerse en los tiempos actuales: «Me apasionan los mercados y la tristeza que rodea los locales que van cerrando». (Sastre 2022: 138)

Otro motivo recurrente es la búsqueda de otras formas de movilidad más sostenibles especialmente en el entorno urbano, como el uso del transporte público o de medios ecológicos individuales, como la bicicleta:

Desde que me saqué el bono, no he dejado de utilizar el servicio de bicicletas eléctricas de Madrid. Es distinto: no contamina, no hace ruido ni ocupa, tiene un precio muy asequible, es individual y no huele por las mañanas, hay cada vez más estaciones, fomenta un transporte alternativo y, además, te permite ver. Solo eso: ver.

La bici me ha descubierto un Madrid diferente. (Sastre 2022: 26).

En relación con lo anterior, a medida que pasa el tiempo, dentro de ese inevitable devenir vital hacia una mayor tranquilidad, se empiezan a valorar cada vez más otras zonas menos conocidas– y concurridas– de la capital:

De repente, existían otros barrios, un Madrid totalmente distinto. Había otras calles largas y extensas, con tiendas pequeñas de horario fijo que cerraban a su hora, árboles frondosos y protegidos, personas mayores haciendo la compra a paso lento. Había parques llenos de perros felices, un aire menos contaminado, bares clásicos con su menú del día por diez euros y sus parroquianos clavados en la barra. (Sastre 2022: 30)

El sintagma nominal *un aire menos contaminado* de nuevo hace alusión a esa mayor concienciación ecológica y se comprueba así cómo en esas zonas menos bulliciosas de la capital también se puede encontrar un auténtico *locus amoenus*.

En la misma línea, se incluye el siguiente fragmento:

Madrid es mucho más que lo que hay dentro de la M-30. Es mucho más que una gran avenida llena de tiendas enormes, de restaurantes abarrotados, de atascos interminables. No es justo reducirla a

una maqueta sin personalidad donde solo destaca lo que se conoce. ¿Y qué hay de todo aquello que no está a la vista? No me cabe duda: los tesoros hay que buscarlos. Para mí, esta ciudad es un lugar ruidoso con rincones de silencio. (Sastre 2022: 30).

Dentro del respeto a la naturaleza y en relación con el ya mencionado sentimiento amoroso hacia los animales, aparece también el tema de la lucha contra el abandono animal:

Se acercan las Navidades. Y habrá familias que quieran por fin hacer ese hueco en el sofá a un animal y esperar con ansias, igual que yo, el fin de semana para darles a sus perros ese rato de libertad juego e instinto.

- No voy a insistir: no abandonen.
- No voy a hacerlo: no compren.
- No voy a repetirlo: adopten.
- No hay mas.
- (Sastre 2022: 44)

3.2.4 Problemas políticos:

Se realiza una crítica a la vieja forma de hacer política, entendida a menudo como una herramienta para el enriquecimiento personal, de lo que derivan numerosos problemas relacionados con la corrupción. Por el contrario, se defiende una política útil, que de verdad atienda los problemas de los ciudadanos. Elvira Sastre apoya la participación activa de los ciudadanos en la política y el deber cívico de votar, una afirmación especialmente relevante en un momento de desencanto generalizado de los jóvenes hacia la política: «Votar me parece uno de los actos más hermosos que existen, sigo creyendo en su valía, sigo pensando que todo se decide en un ato tan arcaico como meter un sobre en una urna» (Sastre 2022: 147).

Aunque admite la dificultad de coincidir plenamente con los postulados de un determinado partido político, es muy consciente de lo que no quiere: «Haga frío, sol o caigan piedras del cielo. Porque es mi derecho, es mi poder, es un acto de bondad, de rechazo y de defensa» (Sastre 2022: 149). Se trata de una política más vinculada a la acción cotidiana, en definitiva, una política más

humanizada. Ya no se trata tanto de militar en un partido político sino de colaborar en nuestro día a día en iniciativas sociales o proyectos ciudadanos.

3.2.5 Problemas de desigualdad social:

Aparecen alusiones a la pobreza, más evidente en las grandes ciudades y se hace una crítica muy directa a la sociedad, que a menudo parece vivir anestesiada frente a este tipo de injusticias sociales y no se implica lo suficiente para intentar paliar estos problemas:

Leo un comentario a propósito de la nueva Gran Vía que se queja de que los “mendigos no dejan pasear tranquilamente a los peatones” y no sé si siento tristeza o rabia. Creo que últimamente son dos emociones que se entrecruzan, que ocupan una gran parte de mi cuerpo contra la que no puedo luchar y no me permiten caminar erguida. Lo que no entiendo se hace hueco dentro de mí hasta que lo resuelvo. El mundo cada vez me pesa más. (Sastre 2022: 40)

Este tipo de diferencias sociales son especialmente acuciantes en determinadas épocas del año, como en las celebraciones navideñas. De ahí que se critique el despilfarro de dinero en la iluminación navideña, mientras existen familias en riesgo de desamparo e, incluso, muchas personas que no tienen ni siquiera un techo bajo el que guarecerse: «En la calle, con frío, sin un techo, pero con cientos de luces navideñas que les alumbran el camino de vuelta a ningún sitio. Esa es la realidad de estas Navidades» (Sastre 2022: 155).

No obstante, al mismo tiempo, hay personas que intentan contribuir a diario para que mejore dicha situación:

Trabaja en una ONG que se encarga de mejorar la calidad de vida de las personas refugiadas y durante los meses de invierno se acentúa su labor. En noviembre comienza una realidad que hiela: es un refuerzo, un abrigo, de aquellas personas sin hogar que viven en la capital durante los meses de invierno. (Sastre 2022: 40)

Sin duda, la intensificación de las nuevas oleadas migratorias hacia el territorio europeo impulsada por distintos factores económicos, políticos y

sociales da lugar a nuevos retos demográficos que dejarán su huella en nuestro día a día y, por ende, en las manifestaciones literarias.

En ese sentido, la actualidad de la obra se refleja también en la atención que se proporciona a esa nueva dimensión de la pobreza, la de las personas refugiadas que se ven obligadas a dejar su hogar de manera repentina debido a factores muy diversos:

Vero también trabaja con refugiados, personas que tienen que abandonar su país de un día para otro sin idioma, sin familia, sin dinero, sin trabajo, sin casa. Gente que llega a una Europa que los acaricia con mano mientras los señala con la otra. Le pregunto y me cuenta que hay huidos de países en guerra, mujeres que vienen de América Latina, homosexuales perseguidos por sus gobiernos acusados de amar a quien o deben, de latir por quien no pueden. Historias que nos suenan tan lejanas que vuelvo a pensar en ese frío absurdo que nos gusta porque no pensamos en los que no lo resisten. En una ocasión, un refugiado camerunés le dijo a mi amiga, a raíz del virulento giro a la derecha más radical que nos persigue estos días: «Se avecinan más cuerpos en el mar».

¿Quién puede huir de esas frases?

¿Quién puede quedarse impasible, inactivo, más frío que nunca al escucharlas?

(Sastre 2022: 40-41)

En definitiva, todos los aspectos analizados, tanto las ventajas como los inconvenientes que definen la actualidad, no solo se vinculan a un espacio concreto, en este caso Madrid, sino que constituyen una auténtica crónica general de la sociedad actual y la autora así evidencia su afán de universalidad:

Supongo que tiene una magia común a otras grandes ciudades. Yo quisiera que este libro sirviera de puente, pero también de recuerdo, aunque no la conozcáis, aunque no sepáis de que hablo: todos tenemos una gran ciudad en el corazón. (Sastre 2022: 288)

IV. LA INCORPORACIÓN DE OTROS MOTIVOS TEMÁTICOS

Frente a otros temas que parece que han perdido protagonismo si se compara con los corpus anteriores (Marwan 2015, Ojeda 2015), como la crítica al sector financiero, entendible porque la anterior crisis económica estuvo muy ligada a determinados comportamientos excesivos de ciertas entidades bancarias, otros temas han adquirido en su lugar un mayor protagonismo:

4.1 El racismo

en relación con los citados movimientos migratorios, cobra fuerza el problema del racismo y se alude, por ejemplo, a un incidente xenófobo que tuvo lugar en el metro de Madrid. El auge de ideas más reaccionarias en la sociedad europea actual parece que está teniendo su impronta en la sociedad:

Algunos medios y políticos exponen la raza antes que el nombre. Con eso lo que consiguen es que nosotros, en la calle, veamos razas y no nombres. La manipulación es que nosotros, en la calle, veamos razas y no nombres. (Sastre 2022: 253)

Por ello, en estos momentos de desunión, la autora necesita buscar refugio en detalles positivos:

Y frente a estos discursos de odio: Y tanta desunión, tanta ansia por la separación, tanta fobia a la libertad, tanto *todo vale*, tanta desigualdad expresada en voz alta sin ningún tipo de reparo, consigue sacarme de la cama. Necesito salir a la calle y cerciorarme de que existen lugares amables. (Sastre 2022: 270)

En contraposición a estas ideas, se alude a la diversidad racial y al enriquecimiento que aporta la multiculturalidad. No obstante, a pesar de la denuncia hacia los guetos que con frecuencia tienden a proliferar en las grandes ciudades, la autora también muestra una actitud de entendimiento al hecho de que las personas tiendan a buscar aquellos elementos y costumbres que les resultan familiares. La necesidad de hallarse entre iguales, de sentirse a salvo:

Nunca entendí los guetos de las capitales. Me gusta la mezcla, la distinción escasa, que sea necesario escucharnos para reconocernos. Pero qué narices sé yo. Quién narices soy yo. Nunca he tenido que dejar mi país o mi familia. El otro día entendí lo necesario que puede ser para el que se marcha encontrarse en otra ciudad tan distinta el detalle que te devuelve al hogar: un acento, un batido de mango, la bachata nocturna, los colores en un balcón, un *carajo* en mitad de la noche, los frijoles en un bar por la mañana, el vecino que comparte tu historia. (188-189)

4.2 El papel de los ancianos en la sociedad actual

se trata de una cuestión que también ha ido cobrando un mayor protagonismo en los últimos años y sobre la que se ha puesto el foco, especialmente, durante la pandemia, ya se que ha puesto de manifiesto la vulnerabilidad de este sector de la sociedad: ha sido la franja de edad más castigada en las primeras olas de la pandemia, además de quedar patentes las deficientes infraestructuras y la escasez de personal en muchas residencias de ancianos.

Aparecen así alusiones a los estragos de la pandemia en la gente mayor: «Sé que las noticias que os llegan son malas, que las bajas os traen recuerdos de guerras recientes, que sois una generación herida a la que la vida parece insistir en no dejar de descansar». (Sastre 2022: 199)

Se insiste mucho en el tema de la soledad que afecta a los ancianos, pero a diferencia de aquella soledad enriquecedora que la autora disfruta en la ciudad, se trata de una soledad no elegida: «Cuantos ancianos estarán en sus hogares tan solos como siempre, tan solos como nunca, contemplando el verano como una estación más en la que tampoco van a bajarse, porque su vida es un viaje sin paradas». (Sastre 2022: 242)

Todo ello ha hecho evidente la necesidad de invertir más dinero en residencias públicas que garanticen las comodidades vitales, así como el surgimiento de otras iniciativas ciudadanas como *Una carta para un abuelo*, el teléfono de atención a personas solas, etcétera.

Se reflexiona también sobre la vida en las residencias de ancianos:

Tras la puerta de entrada, un hombre acariciaba la mano de su mujer, en silla de ruedas. Ambos miraban hacia los columpios, pensando quizá en el pasado. Él, vestido de domingo e impecable, le susurraba cosas a la anciana, abrigada con una manta y con los ojos en otro lugar. Parecía que ese hombre no necesitaba nada más que ese momento, breve, a su lado. (Sastre 2022: 156)

Se destaca, sobre todo, el indispensable papel que los ancianos ejercen en nuestra sociedad y se realiza una llamada para su cuidado: «Que el abrazo de un abuelo o una abuela es para nosotros un billete de vuelta a casa, el olor a tierra mojada, la seguridad de saber que todo va a salir bien, y eso no se puede encontrar en ningún otro lugar». (Sastre 2022: 275)

4.3 La importancia de la salud mental

se trata de uno de los temas de mayor actualidad. En especial durante la pandemia se puso de manifiesto la importancia de dar prioridad a los cuidados para prevenir estos problemas de salud y esta reivindicación ha pasado incluso a la esfera política. Cada vez se visibilizan más testimonios reales de personas para intentar desestigmatizar este ámbito de la salud. En ese sentido, la autora narra su propia experiencia:

Fue de las peores épocas de mi vida. El dolor era abismal, una suerte de inicio de trauma del cual me costaría horrores deshacerme. Como todo daño emocional, terminó trascendiendo a lo físico y mi cuerpo se convirtió en una especie de cárcel sin rejas. (Sastre 2022: 178)

La lucha por los sectores públicos: especialmente se expresa un homenaje hacia la gran labor llevada a cabo por el sector sanitario durante la pandemia: «No son superhéroes: son personas buenas, que es mucho mejor. Esas que consiguen, por fin, que el mundo recupere su equilibrio». (Sastre 2022: 206).

A raíz de esta grave crisis sanitaria se ha puesto de relieve el debilitamiento que desde hace años sufren los servicios públicos:

El sistema está más debilitado de lo que creíamos y eso sí que es un aprendizaje, esa sí que es una respuesta a todo esto. Hay mucho que hacer y siento que nada de esto ocupa el espacio necesario, que debería ser enorme. (Sastre 2022: 218).

4.4 La revalorización y dignificación del sector cultural

Es otro tema que adquiere en la actualidad un mayor protagonismo. Durante la pandemia, se ha asistido a un fenómeno complejo, por un lado, el aumento del consumo de medios audiovisuales. Todas las entidades culturales se volcaron y pusieron su granito de arena para acercar sus propuestas a nuestros hogares: los grandes museos ofrecieron visitas virtuales a sus exposiciones y numerosos artistas formaron parte de recitales literarios o musicales a través de las redes sociales, como el proyecto Poesía en tu Sofá.

Frente a esa sensación de júbilo que parece caracterizar a ciertos sectores culturales debido al incremento de las ventas, se muestra también otra realidad más pesimista que no se puede pasar por alto: el cierre de pequeños negocios, especialmente, librerías de barrio, que no pueden competir con las grandes empresas del sector. En sus artículos, Elvira Sastre se refiere también a estas tristes pérdidas:

Algo triste sucede cuando una librería cierra. No es pasajero ni tampoco casual: es algo sintomático propio de una sociedad herida de muerte. Las librerías no son un establecimiento más: son el lugar en el que se reúne el saber, la cultura, la información, el entretenimiento. (Sastre 2022: 60)

Cuando esto falla, y una librería quiebra por la falta de ventas debida a una injusta imposibilidad de batallar contra las plataformas online, la ciudad se oscurece ligeramente, lo suficiente como para tener que buscar la luz en otro sitio. (Sastre 2022: 61)

Precisamente, narra cómo una de sus primeras salidas posconfinamiento fue para acudir a una pequeña librería:

No entiendo bien la obsesión de llenar las terrazas y el olvido a otros comercios que nos nutren y alivian de igual manera que una caña al sol. No comprendo que se descuide otro tan fundamental como es el librero cuando son los libros los que nos han abierto todas las ventanas que esta pandemia ha cerrado. (Sastre 2022: 224)

Extiende asimismo su apoyo a otros ámbitos del sector cultural, como el cine y el teatro:

Tras ver el maltrato que está sufriendo la cultura, lo primero que hice cuando volví fue ir al teatro y al cine con toda la seguridad y tranquilidad que da un sector que se está dejando la vida para que el peligro sea nulo. Porque la cultura siempre es segura, haya pandemias o tristezas, la cultura siempre cura. (Sastre 2022: 254)

Para finalizar con un auténtico alegato a favor de la cultura (Sastre 2022: 255):

- Abran la puerta del teatro de su barrio.
- Escojan una película que los mueva por dentro.
- Vayan a por el último libro de su autor favorito a la librería más pequeña que conozcan.
- Dense un beso en un museo.
- Canten a grito pelado en el concierto de su vida.
- Apúntense a clases de danza.
- Pero no se dejan apagar por el miedo: eso nunca. (Sastre 2022: 255)

Se puede comprobar que todos los temas anteriores han cobrado una mayor relevancia tras la pandemia. Existe otro motivo temático que no guarda relación con la crisis sanitaria, pero sí se ha actualizado debido a determinados acontecimientos políticos recientes. Se trata de la concienciación sobre la memoria histórica: la exhumación de los restos del dictador Francisco Franco en 2019 y la polémica que suscitó en algunos sectores de la sociedad volvió a poner de manifiesto la importancia de velar por la memoria histórica del país:

No puedo dejar de pensar en la suerte que tiene la familia Franco: al menos ellos van a saber dónde está enterrado su pariente. No me quito de la

vergüenza que no puedo expresarla. (Sastre 2022: 142)

Se alude en especial a las familias que todavía no han podido recuperar los cuerpos de sus familiares enterrados en fosas comunes: y se aboga por la necesidad de seguir reivindicando ese derecho: «Hay heridas imborrables, sin duda. Quedan silencios que escuecen, miradas asustadas y familias sin cuerpo amado ni homenaje que calme» (Sastre 2022: 186).

V. VALORACIÓN ESTILÍSTICA DE LOS ARTÍCULOS

En cuanto a su forma, estos artículos de opinión están escritos con un estilo claro, directo y fácilmente comprensible, con ciertos rasgos de la oralidad, como coloquialismos que contribuyen a crear una mayor espontaneidad, dentro de ese término acuñado de *lirismo de lo cotidiano* (García 2016).

A diferencia de lo que ocurre con los corpus textuales basados en la poesía, no abundan los recursos estilísticos, a excepción de aquellos empleados con una determinada finalidad expresiva, como comparaciones, metáforas e hipérboles, especialmente referidos a la expresión del sentimiento amoroso en sentido amplio.

De esta forma, se intercalan pasajes cargados de un gran lirismo: «El caso es que nos mirábamos y, aunque sabíamos que nos íbamos a estrellar, fuimos capaces de respirar sin espasmos» (Sastre 2022: 96). Y a continuación para seguir profundizando en ese sentimiento amoroso, destacan las comparaciones: «Los besos caían uno detrás de otro como si fueran las notas de una balada pegadiza o de un discurso aprendido» (Sastre 2022: 96).

En ocasiones, aparecen comparaciones dotadas de una gran originalidad en cuanto a su temática, vinculándolas como sucede en el siguiente ejemplo con movimientos colectivos y con el mundo animal:

Apretaba su mano como si me fuera la vida en ello, igual que aprieto la de mi hermana cuando nos abrimos paso en una manifestación en Cibeles

o igual que aprieto el lomo de mi perro cuando pasan patines y se asusta y ladra. (Sastre 2022: 96)

Abundan también las hipérboles para intensificar el sentimiento amoroso: «Caminas un par de centímetros por encima de las baldosas y sé que sonríes aunque la mascarilla no me deja verlo porque tú siempre sonríes con todo el cuerpo» (Sastre 2022: 240), en un ejemplo marcado claramente por la actualidad de la pandemia. Así como numerosas metáforas: «No recuerdo lo demás. Solo sé que el baile se convirtió en un río que nos llevó hasta su portal, donde los besos, salados, se nos caían de los ojos» (Sastre 2022: 98).

A menudo se combinan los recursos estilísticos para intensificar la expresividad, como las hipérboles y las metáforas: «Todas las canciones me parecían dolorosas cuando la besaba y aun así su espalda en movimiento era un oasis». (Sastre 2022: 96)

Por su parte, el acercamiento a la realidad social con sus diversas problemáticas no necesita embellecimiento si se pretende crear conciencia, ni tampoco exageración, pues a menudo la realidad ofrece una visión ya de por sí demoledora.

VI. CONCLUSIONES

La reciente pandemia ha puesto de manifiesto la vulnerabilidad en muchos aspectos de nuestro sistema de bienestar, por eso se ha evidenciado la necesidad de invertir en políticas que garanticen el mantenimiento y mejora de los sectores públicos básicos. La literatura se convierte así en un importante altavoz de concienciación colectiva. Por tanto, de nuevo el binomio sociedad-literatura continúa resultando indisoluble.

En el corpus literario analizado, se ha podido comprobar que se mantiene una perspectiva crítica tanto a la hora de abordar distintas problemáticas sociales como a la hora de hablar de cuestiones más sentimentales, por ejemplo, no se puede gozar de una plenitud amorosa si pensamos en todas aquellas personas que en alguna parte del mundo, incluida España, no

gozan de la libertad suficiente para amar. En esa línea, se huye de la idealización en todos los aspectos de la vida y se ofrece una visión más realista, no solo en el sentimiento amoroso, sino a la hora de abordar otras relaciones humanas, como la familia, o incluso en la vinculación con el espacio a través de las antítesis.

Se recogen también problemáticas sociales con una gran presencia en los últimos años, como el desencanto con la política y, en especial, la precariedad laboral que afecta a muchos sectores de la población, sobre todo jóvenes, así como las dificultades de acceso a la vivienda por el alto costo de vida de los alquileres en las grandes ciudades. Estos factores, unidos a una mayor concienciación ecológica y a la reciente pandemia están produciendo un fenómeno migratorio contrario a lo que era frecuente en las últimas décadas: el retorno a los lugares de origen y la huida de las grandes urbes, con la consiguiente descentralización del poder que eso supone.

Mientras otros problemas pierden protagonismo en el corpus actual, como la crítica a las entidades bancarias, un motivo muy presente en la anterior crisis, pues estamos inmersos en una crisis que, aunque de índole económica, está muy marcada también por el componente social, adquiere en cambio mayor protagonismo el papel de la colectividad para cambiar ciertos aspectos de la sociedad. Ahí se sitúa, por ejemplo, el ecologismo, las luchas por las diversas identidades sexuales y en contra de los comportamientos racistas y, sobre todo, el feminismo, cada vez más presente en la literatura contemporánea en todo el mundo. Existe, asimismo, una mayor preocupación, no solo por la pérdida del estado vital de bienestar, sino por el retroceso que se está viviendo con respecto a esos derechos sociales básicos de igualdad, independientemente de cuál sea nuestra procedencia, género u opción sexual.

Del mismo modo, también adquieren un mayor protagonismo otros aspectos que han logrado una mayor visibilidad a raíz de la pandemia, como la importancia de los sectores públicos, la dignificación del sector cultural, la atención brindada a los ancianos o la preocupación por la salud mental.

Como se ha podido comprobar, en la actualidad se está asistiendo a realidades que parecían muy lejanas para la sociedad europea: pandemias mundiales, guerras en el corazón del continente, crisis de refugiados, retroceso en ciertos derechos sociales... Como consecuencia de todo ello, se experimenta una enorme incertidumbre hacia el futuro:

¿Quién puede asegurarnos que nuestros hijos no tendrán que nacer en otros territorios, que no me apresarán si beso a una mujer, que no tendremos que acudir a un albergue que nos dé techo por la noche, que ningún hombre que decida adueñarse de mi cuerpo saldrá impune, que no tendremos que lanzar a nuestros bebés al mar y meter nuestras casas en una bolsa de basura?

¿Quién puede decirme que eso no va a suceder?

¿Quién puede decirme que eso no está ya sucediendo?

(Sastre 2022: 41).

No obstante, también se entrevé un cierto sentimiento de optimismo: concienciando a la gente, trabajando de manera conjunta, se pueden cambiar las cosas, aunque sea mínimamente, en la línea de la famosa frase atribuida a Eduardo Galeano de: «Mucha gente pequeña, en lugares pequeños, haciendo cosas pequeñas, puede cambiar el mundo».

Dentro de esta etapa actual marcada por la crispación política y social, se hace una crítica de la desunión generalizada: «Debemos huir de la disputa y de la confrontación para poder compartir espacios. Creo que se llama tolerancia, y nos falta mucha» (Sastre 2022: 151), así como un llamamiento a favor del consenso y del respeto: «Quizás si acentuáramos lo que nos acerca y no lo que nos separa podríamos encontrar un lugar donde vivir todos tranquilos» (Sastre 2022: 147). Ya que, como señala la autora: «Creo que en la tolerancia se encuentra la paz». (Sastre: 2022: 222). Ojalá que así sea. Quedémonos con eso.

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In Defense of the Research with Human Issues Matters the Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

During years the Scientific Investigation seemed to be a space preserve to restricted spaces, laboratories, numbers and exceptional minds; its results were sober and intelligent, with charts and graphics with precise figures. But its applicability was already another thing, the numbers are not applied with easiness to the human complex matters, and they are in fact the human problems and its solution, those that demand of the social investigator. It constituted it basement for the emergency of the qualitative, numerically weak investigation but strong to cope with the complexity of the "real world research".

Keywords: qualitative investigation, "real world research", case studies.

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In Defense of the Research with Human Issues Matters the Case Studies

En Defensa de la Investigación de Asuntos Humanos. Los Estudios de Caso

Dr. Miguel Angel Roca Perara

ABSTRACT

During years the Scientific Investigation seemed to be a space preserve to restricted spaces, laboratories, numbers and exceptional minds; its results were sober and intelligent, with charts and graphics with precise figures. But its applicability was already another thing, the numbers are not applied with easiness to the human complex matters, and they are in fact the human problems and its solution, those that demand of the social investigator. It constituted it basement for the emergency of the qualitative, numerically weak investigation but strong to cope with the complexity of the "real world research". Without being exclusivity of the Qualitative Investigation, one of their most important traditions reside in the "Case Studies", a procedure that deserve their domain on the part of the social investigators and in particular the psychologists.

Keywords: qualitative investigation, "real world research", case studies.

Author: Profesor Titular. Facultad de Psicología. Universidad de la Habana.

RESUMEN

Durante años la Investigación Científica pareció ser un espacio vedado a espacios restringidos, laboratorios, números y mentes excepcionales; sus resultados eran sobrios e inteligentes, con tablas y gráficos con cifras precisas... pero su aplicabilidad ya era otra cosa, no se aplican los números con facilidad a los complejos asuntos humanos, y son precisamente los problemas humanos y su solución, los que mas demandan del investigador social. Ello constituyó

basamento para la emergencia de la investigación cualitativa, débil numéricamente pero fuerte para lidiar la complejidad de la "investigación en el mundo real". Sin ser exclusividad de la Investigación Cualitativa, una de sus mas importantes tradiciones radica en los "Estudios de Caso", un proceder que amerita su dominio por parte de los investigadores sociales y en particular los psicólogos.

Palabras clave: investigación cualitativa, investigación en el "mundo real", estudio de casos.

I. INTRODUCTION

Cuenta Carl Rogers que tuvo un excelente profesor que gustaba decir a sus eruditos alumnos: "¡No sea un maldito vagón repleto de municiones,... sea un FUSIL!"; tengo la impresión que con ello no descalificaba la importancia del abundante, actualizado, valioso, diverso y enciclopédico conocimiento, sino que apelaba a lo imprescindible de SABER QUÉ HACER con el. En un mundo actual donde la profusión de la tan valiosa información para cualquier sociedad nos inunda, donde incrementa su vigencia el consejo del conejo del libro de "Alicia en el País de las Maravillas" de Lewis Carroll, cuando afirmaba que "hoy día hay que correr mucho para permanecer en el mismo lugar", la afirmación del Profesor de Rogers adquiere especial significación; hoy las personas, son hostigadas por un enorme volumen de información, tanto que con frecuencia inhabilita el pensamiento creativo y original y la gestión eficaz y eficiente (Bunge, 1997), o para ser mas precisos como diría un agudo colega es cierto que "tener información nos pone inteligentes", a lo que me atrevería añadir

“pero no saber qué hacer con ella nos pone imbéciles”.

Tras este preámbulo hago una toma de partido: le he dedicado 35 años de mi vida a la Educación Superior, orgullosamente a la Universidad de la Habana, y eso hace de mi un hombre de la ACADEMIA, sin temor a las suspicacias y sospechas de elitismo e intramuros que en ocasiones adquiere el término, porque itodo lo contrario!, soy un convencido de que en el mundo moderno las universidades están cada vez mas llamadas, si no quieren fenecer o convertirse en fábrica de diplomas y reproductora de contenidos, a tener un activo protagonismo en la vida social. Y el Tercer Milenio, en sus poco mas de diez escasos primeros años, parece ser la confirmación de que cada vez mas el entorno universitario y de sus egresados no debe estar signado por la mera reproducción de abundantes y valiosas teorías o tecnologías, sino por la PRODUCCIÓN de las mismas, por la búsqueda de SOLUCIONES a los mas apremiantes problemas presentes y emergentes en los contextos sociales en que se desenvuelven, mas allá de los en ocasiones inamovibles planes de estudio.

En este contexto, la INVESTIGACIÓN, tanto la básica como la aplicada privilegiando la Investigación Acción, deviene una NECESIDAD en la misión de formación de egresados de la Educación Superior. Decía críticamente Mario Bunge que “nuestra universidad no ha sido diseñada para investigar sino para enseñar lo que otros descubrieron o inventaron en épocas pasadas” (1997, p. 38), es este uno de sus pecados capitales que no se puede perpetuar, aunque tampoco se puede revertir por decreto. Como decía el propio autor “la investigación y la invención son enemigas de la obediencia y del dogma, y exigen un mínimo de libertad” (1997, p. 20)

Por ello no basta con querer hacer de la investigación un afán cotidiano, es importante HACERLO, y hacerlo con una mentalidad abierta, sin pretender reproducir la falacia de la Investigación como algo privativo de unos pocos elegidos que pareció distinguir al reinado del positivismo o aquello definido como

“Imperialismo Cuantitativista”. En contraposición con este emergió la Investigación Cualitativa de amplia acogida en las Ciencias Sociales¹, tal vez en sus inicios con una evasiva esquivada de los números y una ingenua creencia de una mas *fácil* forma de investigar cuando itodo lo contrario!, ver al objeto de la investigación como algo VIVO, constantemente cambiante, expuesto a la inteligente ironía de que “cuando me aprendí la respuesta me cambiaron la pregunta”, supone mucho mas rigor aún y ética profesional ante variables que pocas veces se pueden *controlar*, pero que aún así resulta imprescindible conocer.

Si alguna duda quedara al respecto, amerita citar las palabras de Mario Bunge, uno de los más prestigiosos científicos de la investigación comprometida en su momento con el número, cuando propone que “Me interesa la búsqueda de la verdad, aunque sea aproximada. Pero esto no quiere decir que proponga estudiar los objetos sociales exactamente de la misma manera que los naturales. Los hechos sociales, aunque reales, son efectos de acciones humanas, y los seres humanos sentimos, deseamos, pensamos e imaginamos. Ergo, quien no tenga en cuenta esas experiencias subjetivas no podrá explicar las acciones humanas, ni por tanto los hechos sociales”.

La emergencia de la Investigación Cualitativa, con una mirada triunfalista no siempre justificada, supone (Neuman) como su misión la COMPRENSIÓN y descripción de la acción social significativa, definida por fluidas circunstancias y escenarios creados por la interacción humana, entre Individuos cuya naturaleza es la creación de significados de sus mundos que continuamente tienen sentido. La tradicional posición *neutral* del investigador desaparece y se conciben los «valores» como parte integral de la vida social; no hay grupos de valores erróneos, sólo diferentes.

La postmodernidad trascendió aún más esta mirada de la investigación social aplicada y

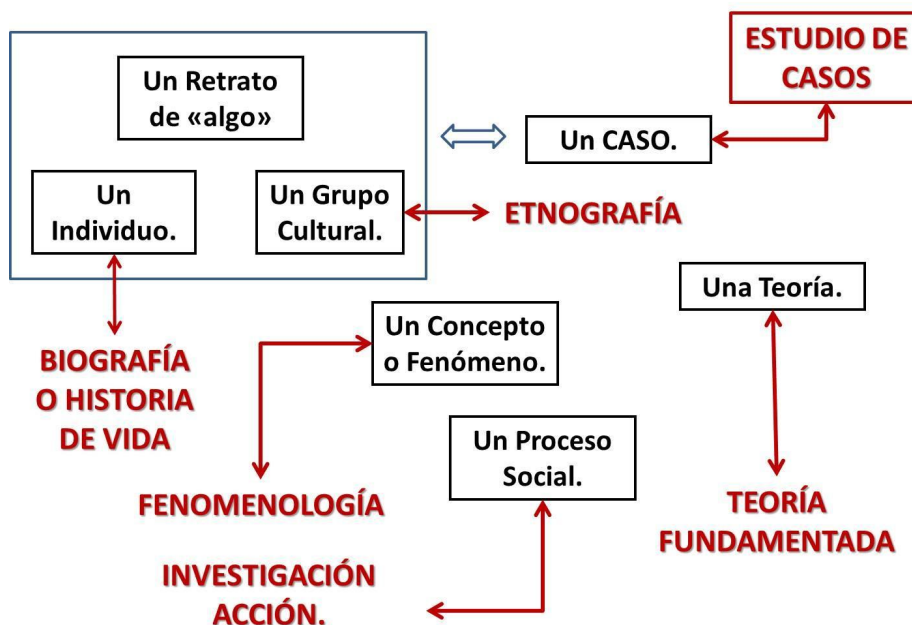
¹ Aunque no menos en otras Ciencias de las llamadas “Duras” en las que la influencia de la “Teoría de la Complejidad” ha llevado cada vez mas a replantearse muchos de sus clásicos paradigmas de investigación.

legalizando el concepto de PODER (Reason & Bradbury) propuso una perspectiva, coherente con la Investigación Acción, de Teoría Crítica Social en que resulta imprescindible no sólo la comprensión sino el cambio, es decir desmontar mitos y «empoderar»² a las personas para cambiar radicalmente una realidad social repleta de conflictos y regida por ocultas estructuras subyacentes, en aras de fomentar la participación de individuos creativos, adaptativos, con un potencial no concientizado, de aquí que una explicación «cierta» es aquella que suministra los enseres necesarios para transformar el mundo, y de aquí que toda Ciencia esté convocada a empezar con una posición de valores; algunos serán correctos, otros erróneos.

Obviamente estamos entonces en presencia de un diverso y heterogéneo proceso, donde han sido muchas y en ocasiones superpuestas las diversas miradas y tradiciones con que se ha llevado a cabo la Investigación Cualitativa, como se puede apreciar en el siguiente gráfico:

² Concepto que ha adquirido enorme vigencia en los últimos decenios

DIFERENCIANDO LAS TRADICIONES POR SU FOCO APROXIMADO



En este contexto, una de las más importantes tradiciones que requiere la atención de los profesionales que trabajamos e investigamos con personas y grupos humanos es el ESTUDIO DE CASOS, una forma de investigar fundamentada en el paradigma constructivista, pero de existencia muy anterior, cuyo presupuesto fundamental es que la verdad es relativa y que está en función de la perspectiva individual de los participantes, pero sin rechazar en su propio derecho cualquier noción de objetividad. Hace hincapié en el pluralismo y el relativismo, focalizándose sobre la dinámica circular, sistémica y compleja del sujeto y el objeto, ambos, PARTICIPANTES.

La información disponible acerca del uso del método de Estudio de Caso en la investigación científica resulta escasa en sentido general, a lo que se añade que su credibilidad y validez ha sido cuestionada por diversos autores, sobre todo aquellos que privilegian la investigación empírica, asentada básicamente en métodos cuantitativos, quienes consideran que su reputación es baja y muy sesgada por la subjetividad, de aquí que no suelen considerarla como una buena estrategia para efectuar la investigación científica. Obviamente ello genera malestar, derivado de la exclusión, entre aquellos investigadores, por lo general aquellos comprometidos con la Investigación Aplicada, que SI usan el método de

Estudio de Caso por considerarlo una herramienta valiosa de investigación.

En otras palabras, aunque el Estudio de Casos, legítimo en sus propósitos desde su propia definición, es una forma característica de la investigación empírica, no menos que los experimentos o encuestas, muchos peritos desdeñan esta estrategia de investigación y la ven como una forma menos deseable de poner en práctica. ¿A qué puede deberse esto?, quizás la razón mas importante ha residido, no en lo que se ha hecho, sino en el **CÓMO** se ha hecho, en particular a la falta de rigor cuando el investigador de Estudio de Casos ha sido negligente, no ha seguido metódicamente los procedimientos sistemáticos, o ha permitido que evidencias equívocas o miradas parciales y/o sesgadas por altas dosis de subjetividad influyan en la construcción de sus conclusiones. Quizás en ello haya influido el hecho de que en la literatura, la investigación de Estudio de Casos ha recibido una atención mínima dentro de las variadas metodologías –sobre las que son abundantes los textos- en el arsenal de investigación del científico social, cuando solamente algunos documentos se ocupan de ella como tema principal, y pocas referencias enciclopédicas suministran una visión general minuciosa del diseño y los métodos de Estudio de Casos para quienes tratan de incluir

tales procedimientos con seriedad dentro de un riguroso y difícil proyecto de investigación o programa.

Esta supuesta imagen de no científicidad de los Estudios de Caso ha conducido a muchos al ingenuo criterio de que es “fácil” de ejecutar, sin embargo, según Yin, “a pesar de que el Estudio de Caso ha sido considerado como la estrategia más *suave* de investigación, es también considerada la más difícil de hacer”.

A pesar de reticencias y objeciones, la metodología de Estudio de Casos tiene una historia relativamente larga dentro de las ciencias, las ciencias sociales, y las Humanidades. Incluso, en la investigación médica, la investigación de Estudio de Casos ha sido vista como útil para ayudar a los investigadores a hacer legítimas inferencias de los eventos que acontecen en condiciones naturales, de manera no siempre compatible con la rigurosa metodología de la “ciencia de laboratorio”. Aunque inicialmente arraigada dentro de un enfoque de las Ciencias en general, el Estudio de Casos ganó la popularidad más amplia dentro de las ciencias sociales y ha sido concebido como especialmente valioso en campos orientados a la práctica y la “vida real” de personas (Robson) tales como la salud, la educación, la dirección, la administración pública, y los servicios humanos. Ha ganado así progresivamente en importancia como estrategia de investigación para identificar a fuentes ricas y complejas de datos, transformándose en un

procedimiento susceptible de combinar rutinas tanto cualitativas como cuantitativas.

Una de las ventajas de este enfoque es la estrecha colaboración entre el investigador y los participantes, en la medida que permite a estos últimos no sólo contar o narrar sus historias, sino recontarlas y reestructurarlas. A través del conocimiento e interpretación conjunta de estas historias los participantes son capaces de describir mejor sus perspectivas de la realidad y ello le permite al investigador un mejor comprender las acciones de las personas.

Sin embargo, a pesar de su frecuente, creciente y casi natural uso dentro de las demandas prácticas y profesionales, desde una mirada científica incluida la investigación en el mundo real, existe una considerable confusión acerca de lo qué es y lo que no es un Estudio de Caso, acerca de en qué consiste la metodología del Estudio de Caso, así como acerca de cómo pueden ser utilizados los Estudios de Caso para producir datos y resultados creíbles dentro de los elevados cánones científicos trascendiendo la mera narrativa, y consecuentemente, acerca de cómo deberían ser redactados sus informes para su diseminación y respetuosa aceptación por la comunidad científica.

De acuerdo con Yin (2009), junto con Stakes, tal vez el más relevante autor actual dentro de esta tradición de investigación cualitativa,

El uso de un diseño de ESTUDIO DE CASOS debe ser considerado cuándo:

- (a) el propósito del estudio es contestar a preguntas "¿Cómo" y "Porqué?";**
- (b) el investigador no puede manipular el comportamiento de aquellos involucrados en el estudio;**
- (c) el investigador pretende abordar las condiciones contextuales en tanto las considera relevantes para el fenómeno bajo estudio; o**
- (d) los límites no están claros entre el fenómeno y el contexto.**

Así, sin pretender una definición acabada, prestigiosas autoridades (Yin, 2009) consideran legítimo aventurar que un Estudio de Caso es un método de aprendizaje acerca de una situación

compleja, una investigación empírica que Indaga un fenómeno contemporáneo en profundidad y dentro de su contexto de la vida real cuyas características distintivas son que; (1) se basa en

el entendimiento comprensivo de dicha situación (2) el cual se obtiene a través de la descripción extensiva y (3) el análisis de la situación, la cual es tomada como un conjunto y dentro de su contexto, cuándo los límites entre el fenómeno y el contexto resultan difusos y cuyas relaciones no son palpablemente evidentes. Se utiliza, en otras palabras, el Método de Estudio de Casos porque se quiere comprender («verstehen») un fenómeno de la vida real en profundidad, pero tal conocimiento abarca la consideración de condiciones contextuales importantes y una nutrida diversidad de influencias, muy pertinentes para la comprensión del fenómeno de estudio.

Lo anterior resulta coherente con el hecho de que, a diferencia de la tendencia a imaginar que un Estudio de Caso resulta mas bien reducido y sumamente contextualizado, lo cierto es que la dimensión de las situaciones a estudiar puede variar significativamente ante la emergencia de nueva información relevante como suele acontecer en la investigación cualitativa, y entonces el caso deviene mas bien extenso.

No sólo la extensión es un rasgo que parece estar presente en los Estudios de Casos bien realizados; la intensidad y sobre todo la profundidad son elementos que le distinguen. Por lo regular, aquello que sugiere la necesidad de realizar

Estudios de Casos surge de la intencionalidad de comprender fenómenos sociales complicados, permitiendo al mismo tiempo a los investigadores conservar las características holísticas y significativas de los eventos que acontecen en la vida. Es por esta razón que muy a menudo los investigadores de Estudio de Casos son confrontados con agudos cuestionamientos tales como ¿cómo definir el caso a ser estudiado?, ¿cómo determinar los datos relevantes a ser recogidos?, ¿qué hacer con los datos una vez recolectados?

En la misma medida que el investigador está considerando cuáles serán sus preguntas de investigación, también debe considerar CUÁL ES EL CASO. Aunque puede parecer simple, pero determinar cuál será el caso (la unidad de análisis) resulta ser un importante desafío tanto para principiantes como para investigadores experimentados. El Caso es definido por Miles y Huberman (1994) como, *Un fenómeno de cierto tipo que ocurre en un contexto limitado. El caso es "en efecto la UNIDAD DE ANÁLISIS", es decir el QUÉ quiero describir, analizar y, sobre todo, comprender.* El Caso deseable debe ser algún fenómeno o proceso de la vida real, capacitado para representar conceptos abstractos.

El Estudio de Casos desde la perspectiva de los fenómenos subyacentes a «estudiar».



El Estudio de Casos desde la perspectiva de los procesos o situaciones subyacentes a «estudiar».



La selección de la apropiada unidad de análisis, la cual resulta un concepto clave en la Metodología de Estudio de Casos, empezará a ocurrir cuando se especifiquen las principales preguntas de investigación con exactitud. Si las preguntas del investigador no conducen a favorecer una unidad de análisis sobre otra, probablemente las preguntas estarán siendo demasiado vagas o demasiado numerosas y ello puede dificultar el hacer un buen Estudio de Casos. Sin embargo, cuando finalmente se llega a una definición de la unidad de análisis, la misma no debe considerarse estática o permanente; la elección de la unidad de análisis, como tantas otras facetas del diseño de investigación, puede ser reconsiderada como consecuencia de descubrimientos durante el proceso de recolección de datos.

Una vez definida la Unidad de Análisis, existen razones contundentes como para apelar de preferencia a esta tradición de investigación, así ocurre con los ESTUDIOS DE CASO SIMPLES cuando éste representa el caso crítico en la evaluación de una teoría bien formulada -llevado al lenguaje coloquial de la práctica profesional de los psicólogos clínicos y psiquiatras, es frecuente escuchar la expresión: “es un caso de libro, ilindísimo!” para referirse a un tipo de cuadro inconfundible, en que la teoría ha especificado una serie clara de proposiciones, así como las circunstancias dentro de las cuales las proposiciones también son juzgadas como verdaderas, y el caso representa la prueba crítica de dicha teoría. Un caso simple crítico, cubriendo todas las condiciones para evaluar la teoría, puede

confirmar, desafiar, modificar o extender la teoría. El caso simple puede ser, entonces, utilizado para determinar si las proposiciones de una teoría son correctas o si alguna serie alternativa de explicaciones podría ser más relevante.

II. OTRAS RAZONES CONCURREN

- Cuando la Unidad de Análisis representa un Caso Extremo o Único, donde un proceso o fenómeno específico podría ser tan infrecuente que cualquier caso simple que apareciese es digno de documentarse y analizarse;
- Cuando la Unidad de Análisis es el Caso Típico o Representativo, también conocido como caso promedio en que el objetivo es captar las circunstancias y condiciones de una situación diaria o común;
- Cuando la Unidad de Análisis es el Caso Revelador, en que un investigador tiene la oportunidad de observar y analizar un fenómeno previamente inaccesible al estudio de las ciencias sociales;
- Cuando la Unidad de Análisis es el Caso Longitudinal, en el que, estudiando el mismo caso en dos o más puntos diferentes en el tiempo, se busca especificar cómo ciertas condiciones cambian a lo largo del tiempo.

Metodológicamente no menos importantes resultan los Estudios de Casos Múltiples en que el investigador, sin apelar a criterios de muestreo lógico, busca una mayor certeza de sus resultados a través de Replicaciones Literales de CASOS lo

que lo convoca a la búsqueda de cinco, seis, o más reproducciones, hasta que se “saturen” los criterios de búsqueda y no aparezca ninguna información novedosa o relevante. Cuando se tiene la elección (y recursos), los diseños de Estudios de Casos múltiples resultan preferibles sobre los diseños de Estudios simples.

III. ¿CÓMO RECOGER LA INFORMACIÓN EN UN ESTUDIO DE CASOS?

El proceso de preparación para la recolección de datos puede ser complicado y difícil. Si no se ha hecho un trabajo preparatorio suficientemente bueno acerca de cómo recopilar la información, la investigación de Estudio de Casos en su totalidad puede estar en riesgo, y todo el trabajo previo, tal como definir las preguntas de investigación y diseñar el Estudio de Casos, habrá sido en vano. Una buena preparación empieza con las HABILIDADES Y DESTREZAS DESEADAS por parte del investigador de Estudio de Casos. Aunque tales destrezas sólo ocasionalmente han sido tema de atención específica en el pasado, algunas son críticas para el “buen investigar”, con la ventaja de que pueden ser aprendidas o entrenadas.

En realidad, las demandas de un Estudio de Casos sobre el intelecto, el ego y las emociones del investigador, son mucho mayores que los de cualquier otro método de investigación, debido a que los procedimientos de recolección de datos no tienen un rutinario y preestablecido algoritmo, analíticamente aburrido. La conducción de Estudios de Casos no brinda semejante opción; en términos de experticia profesional, mas bien, resulta necesario un investigador bien entrenado y experimentado para dirigir un Estudio de Casos de buena calidad, debido a la interacción ininterrumpida entre los asuntos teóricos que están siendo estudiados y los datos empíricos que se están coleccionado, cuya emergencia puede confirmar, pero también cuestionar mucho de lo que se suponía previamente.

Durante la recolección de los datos, es legítimo suponer que solamente un investigador más experimentado será capaz de aprovechar las oportunidades inesperadas de recopilar

información sensible y/o relevante, en vez de ser atrapado por lo sorprendente de la misma, al tiempo que también estará inmunizado, o al menos preparado, para el cuidado suficiente contra procedimientos potencialmente sesgados, lo que supone las referidas destrezas.

Sin pretensiones de credo en este sentido, resulta legítimo coincidir con Yin en que un buen investigador de Estudio de Casos debe: ser capaz de «preguntar buenas preguntas» e interpretar las respuestas; ser un buen «oyente» y no dejarse atrapar por sus propias ideologías o ideas preconcebidas; ser «adaptable y flexible» para que las situaciones recién tropezadas puedan ser vistas como oportunidades y no como amenazas; tener una «comprensión firme de los asuntos estudiados», incluso en un modo exploratorio que de manera eficiente reduce los eventos relevantes y la información a ser buscada, a proporciones manejables; ser «imparcial y no sesgado por las nociones preconcebidas», incluyendo aquellas derivadas de la teoría. Por lo tanto, debe ser sensitivo y receptivo a las evidencias contradictorias.

Por sólo comentar uno de estos “deberías”, más que con otros métodos de investigación, los Estudios de Casos requieren una mente indagatoria durante la recolección de datos, no sólo antes o después de la actividad, sino durante todo el curso de la misma. La habilidad de proponer y hacer *buenas preguntas* es por lo tanto un requisito esencial para investigadores de Estudio de Casos. No sólo es inteligente el investigador, también lo son las personas a las que se investiga, quienes se percatan de las competencias o incompetencias del investigador, y en función de ello le ofrecerán mayor o menor credibilidad y tendrán mayor o menor disposición para colaborar y brindar información sensible, con el impacto que ello tiene para los resultados de la investigación.

Desde otra perspectiva, dado el vínculo humano particularmente intenso con los participantes que suponen los Estudios de Casos, un tópico particularmente sensible en este contexto se refiere a la Ética y la protección de Asuntos Humanos, en que el investigador es responsable

de dirigir su Estudio de Caso con especial cuidado y sensibilidad, yendo más allá de las formalidades del diseño de investigación y otras consideraciones técnicas. Tales cuidados en sus mas elementales expresiones generalmente implican: adquirir el consentimiento informado de todas las personas que pueden ser parte de su Estudio de Casos, alertándolos sobre la naturaleza del Estudio y pedir su voluntariedad oficialmente para participar en el mismo; proteger a aquellos que participan en el Estudio de cualquier daño, incluyendo evitar el uso de cualquier decepción derivada del mismo; proteger la privacidad y la confidencialidad de aquellos que participan en el Estudio, de modo tal que, como consecuencia de su participación, no sean inconscientemente puestos en posiciones no deseadas; y tomar las precauciones especiales que podrían ser necesarias para proteger grupos especialmente vulnerables (por ejemplo, la investigación con niños).

Un importante elemento a considerar en el Estudio de Casos es la Recolección de las Evidencias, el coleccionar datos sobre el comportamiento y los eventos humanos reales, en que nuevamente el Investigador tiene un sustancial protagonismo en la definición y uso del Instrumental a utilizar, es decir aquellos procedimientos mediante los cuales se busca obtener las evidencias que legitimen los resultados encontrados.

Las evidencias de Estudios de Casos, al estilo del tradicional Método Clínico de esencial connotación multimétodo, pueden provenir de las mas diversas fuentes instrumentales entre las que se destacan: (1) las entrevistas, (2) la observación directa, (3) la observación participante (4) los documentos, (5) los registros de archivos, y (6) cualquier estrategia emergente que decida el entrevistador, como cuestionarios y situaciones cuasi experimentales que no hacen ajeno el Estudio de Casos a procedimientos cuantitativos. En cualquier caso, se puede apreciar que ninguna fuente única tiene una ventaja completa sobre las otras. De hecho, las diferentes fuentes, susceptibles de ser utilizadas todas en el mismo Estudio, son altamente complementarias, y en un buen Estudio de Casos sería deseable el uso de

tantas fuentes como fuera posible como resultado de la intencionalidad de triangulación metodológica.

En adición a la atención brindada a las referidas fuentes, ciertos principios primordiales son importantes para cualquier voluntad de colección de datos al hacer Estudios de Casos. Éstos incluyen el uso de (a) múltiples fuentes de evidencias (las evidencias de dos o mas fuentes, convergen en los mismos hechos o hallazgos), (b) una base de datos de Estudio de Casos (un formal ensamblaje de pruebas distintas del informe de Estudio de Casos final), y (c) una cadena de evidencias (enlaces explícitos entre las preguntas hechas, los datos coleccionados, y las conclusiones extraídas). Refiriéndonos a uno solo de ellos, resulta altamente deseable el uso de diferentes fuentes de información que confirmen o complementen la información obtenida por una sola de ellas. A tal intencionalidad se le ha definido como TRIANGULACIÓN, un procedimiento que es la racional para utilizar fuentes múltiples de evidencias. La incorporación de estos principios en un Estudio de Casos incrementará su calidad y validez considerablemente.

El ANÁLISIS DE EVIDENCIAS es uno de los aspectos menos desarrollados y más difíciles de hacer en los Estudios de Casos en función de que las técnicas existentes todavía no han sido bien definidas y con frecuencia, los investigadores empiezan sus Estudios de Casos sin tener la más mínima noción sobre cómo serán analizadas dichas evidencias. Al tener un monto considerable de información, es deseable que el investigador se apoye en las mas diversas estrategias que le brinden solidez a su análisis y entre las cuales podemos señalar (1) el Descansar en Proposiciones Teóricas, (2) desarrollar una Descripción nítida y extensa del Caso, (3) Usar datos tanto cualitativos como cuantitativos y particularmente (4) Examinar las explicaciones rivales.

Las estrategias generales referidas (Yin, 2009) tienen su expresión operativa a través de diversas técnicas analíticas fundamentales como (1) la Búsqueda de correspondencias, (2) la

Construcción de Explicaciones, (3) el Análisis de Series Temporales, (4) el uso de Modelos Lógicos, y (5) la Síntesis a través de “Casos Cruzados”. Ninguna de las técnicas analíticas debe ser considerada fácil de usar, y todas necesitarán mucha práctica para ser usadas sólidamente.

En cualquier caso, no importa qué estrategia o técnica analítica específica haya sido escogida, se debe hacer todo para asegurarse que el análisis sea el de mejor calidad. Así, según Yin, al menos cuatro principios subyacen y requieren atención a toda buena investigación de Estudio de Caso en Ciencias Sociales: (1) El análisis debe mostrar que se prestó atención a todas las evidencias, (2) el análisis debe dirigirse a todas las interpretaciones rivales o alternativas, (3) el análisis debe abordar los aspectos más importantes del Estudio de Casos y (4) se deben usar la experticia y los propios conocimientos anteriores del investigador en la conducción de Estudios de Casos.

IV. REPORTE DEL ESTUDIO DE CASOS: COMPARTIR LA INFORMACIÓN. ¿QUÉ Y CÓMO COMPONER?

Por último, la fase de composición del Informe Final impone grandes demandas sobre un investigador de Estudio de Casos. El informe de Estudio de Casos no sigue una forma estereotipada y pautada, como un artículo de revista en Psicología o una Tesis Convencional, lo que supone un fuerte entrenamiento, disuasivo para algunos, en redactar con precisión y casi con un ilustrativo estilo literario a través de NARRATIVAS que no sólo sean comprensibles sino justificadamente creíbles. Ello conlleva mucha práctica; para hacer buenos Estudios de Caso el investigador no sólo debe hacerlo, sino hacerlo bien.

La elaboración del Informe debe prever desde el inicio tener una idea clara acerca de la audiencia hacia la que se dirige, incluidos muchos no especialistas, y los señalamientos probables que se recibirán. Cada audiencia tiene necesidades diferentes, y ningún informe único servirá para todas las audiencias simultáneamente; la exitosa comunicación con más de una audiencia podría

representar la necesidad de más de una versión de un informe de Estudio de Casos.

En tiempos en que es difícil prescindir de la cibernética y la Informática el Informe de Estudio de Casos puede incluso asumir el formato de un video u otro dispositivo multimedia y no de un informe narrativo convencional. La utilidad de los Estudios de Casos, así, va más lejos del papel del típico informe de investigación, que es dirigido a colegas de investigación en vez de a no especialistas en general.

La intencionalidad de este trabajo no permite abundar en su especificidad, pero la composición de Estudios de Casos, presuponiendo en todos los casos habilidades de redacción y concreción, puede seguir diferentes estructuras como: Analíticas Lineales, Comparativas, Cronológicas, de Construcción de Teorías, de Suspense y no Secuenciadas. De igual manera, para contribuir a que el Estudio de Casos sea una contribución valiosa y perdurable para investigar, al tiempo que admisible en la comunidad científica, resulta deseable la presencia de cinco características expresadas en forma de “deberías” generales: ser importante o «significativo», estar «Completo», considerar perspectivas alternativas, exhibir evidencias suficientes y ser escrito de una manera cautivadora. En cualquier caso, no son nunca suficientes los esfuerzos para la construcción de un Estudio de Caso de Excelencia y ejemplaridad.

Las ideas expuestas acerca de la Metodología de Estudios de Caso son una Guía para su realización, pero el hecho de tratarse de una de las formas de investigación por excelencia en el “Mundo Real” hace que la labor del investigador, que de preferencia combine con la de profesional, sea mucho más creativa que la aplicación formal de predeterminados y/o inflexibles algoritmos y sistematizaciones y, por ende, supone que las aplique con toda la creatividad, implicación y ética de la que presume la investigación en, con y para humanos,... ese ha sido el propósito de la presente Ponencia.

Quiero cerrar mi Exposición -llamémosle si así lo consideran mi “apología de los Estudios de Casos”- retomando mi convocatoria a la necesidad

de nuestros profesionales de desmontar la falacia de la Investigación como algo privativo de unos pocos elegidos e investigar, investigar e investigar, fusionando esa compleja franja entre Ciencia y Profesión, y no temer a su pariente cercano, *el publicar*, para divulgar los hallazgos de su diario quehacer. Sin ningún chovinismo, hace unos años, en un evento celebrado en un momento en que proliferaban los aportes y experiencias de nuestra Psicología de la Salud, recuerdo un colega extranjero cuya nacionalidad no refiero por obvias razones éticas, que me decía: “en mi país sería formidable que de verdad mis colegas hubieran hecho todo lo que escriben, ... pero mucho más formidable sería que en el suyo sus colegas publicaran lo mucho que hacen”

Hay no sólo una, sino muchas, variadas y legítimas formas de investigar, cada una de ellas con su alcance y limitaciones, pero todas válidas, aunque aún haya quienes montados en “blancos elefantes” asépticos, subestimen la investigación en el “Mundo Real”, aquella en que el mas importante instrumento de investigación y producción de conocimientos y soluciones a problemas reales, son los investigadores y los propios participantes. Puede y de hecho lo es, convertirse en un importante sesgo científico... pero ello se compensa con la enorme dosis de realismo que nos ofrece, ¡aunque sea a través de la subjetividad!

Por ello no basta con querer hacer de la investigación un quehacer cotidiano, es importante estar dispuesto a HACERLO, y hacerlo con una mentalidad abierta, sin pretender reproducir dogmáticas posiciones funda mentalistas absolutas acerca del cómo investigar; cada método tiene su espacio y su legitimidad en función del objeto de investigación de que se trate y es ello lo que justifica y valida la presencia de los Estudios de Caso, mas allá de reticencias, en la Investigación Científica,... en este sentido, tal vez hasta habría que repensar el concepto de Ciencia y de Investigación Científica alejándolos de la ponzoñosa ortodoxia, porque como afirmara George Orwell –en una frase que mucho disfruto y en consecuencia gusto de redundar- “la ortodoxia es el arte de no pensar”, y todo científico pero sobre todo un científico social está convocado a

ser un PENSADOR, aunque a algunos les duela lo que piense y demuestre. Decía Albert Ellis que en “En nuestra sociedad un niño, forzosamente, llega a ser un PENSADOR CORRECTO antes de aprender a pensar” ... insistiendo en que mucho mas importante que “pensar correctamente” es PENSAR.

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Contrastive Analysis of Inflectional Morphemes in English and Fur Nouns

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to compare and contrast inflectional morphemes of English and Fur languages with a view to identify the areas of similarities and dissimilarities. The researchers have adopted contrastive methodology to conduct this research. They compare and contrast inflectional morphemes in English and Fur languages. The results of the research revealed that the both languages almost share the same inflectional morphemes with which they form their plural nouns and there are irregular nouns in two languages.

Keywords: inflectional, morphemes, plural, nouns, form.

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Contrastive Analysis of Inflectional Morphemes in English and Fur Nouns

Dr. Mohyeldeen Mohamed Babiker^α & Dr. Ahmad Muhammad Ahmad^σ

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to compare and contrast inflectional morphemes of English and Fur languages with a view to identify the areas of similarities and dissimilarities. The researchers have adopted contrastive methodology to conduct this research. They compare and contrast inflectional morphemes in English and Fur languages. The results of the research revealed that the both languages almost share the same inflectional morphemes with which they form their plural nouns and there are irregular nouns in two languages. Moreover, it displays that Fur language has got tonic nouns and morphemes whereas, English language lacks. However, English has got about four inflectional morphemes with which it forms plural nouns; meanwhile, there are eight inflectional morphemes in Fur language that form plural ones. In addition, Fur language characterises by the unique formation of irregular plural by changing initial inflectional morpheme and omitting the final one whereas, English lacks such. The differences in inflectional morphemes between two languages result in problems encountered by the Fur language learners in learning English and vice versa.

Keywords: inflectional, morphemes, plural, nouns, form.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive Analysis (CA) contrasts and compares the two languages that are genetically distinct with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. Thus, CA studies the structures of two languages from two different

language families. English is an Indo-European language family as the source language whereas; Fur is Nilo-Saharan as the target language so as to determine the points where they are different. These differences are the main cause of problems in learning a second language.

1.2 Contrastive Analysis and Language Teaching

The background of contrastive analysis, as applied to language teaching, is the assumption that the native language plays a crucial role in learning a second language. When people have written textbooks for learners of foreign languages, there has regularly been an element of contrast between the native language and the foreign language to be learned. Bilingual dictionaries are of course also contrastive. But when we refer to CA, we think particularly of a systematic comparison of the mother tongue and the foreign language in order to describe similarities and differences, to identify points of difficulty which might lead to interference.

CA has often been done for *practical/pedagogical* purposes. The aim has been provided better descriptions and better teaching materials for language learners.

What is Morphology?

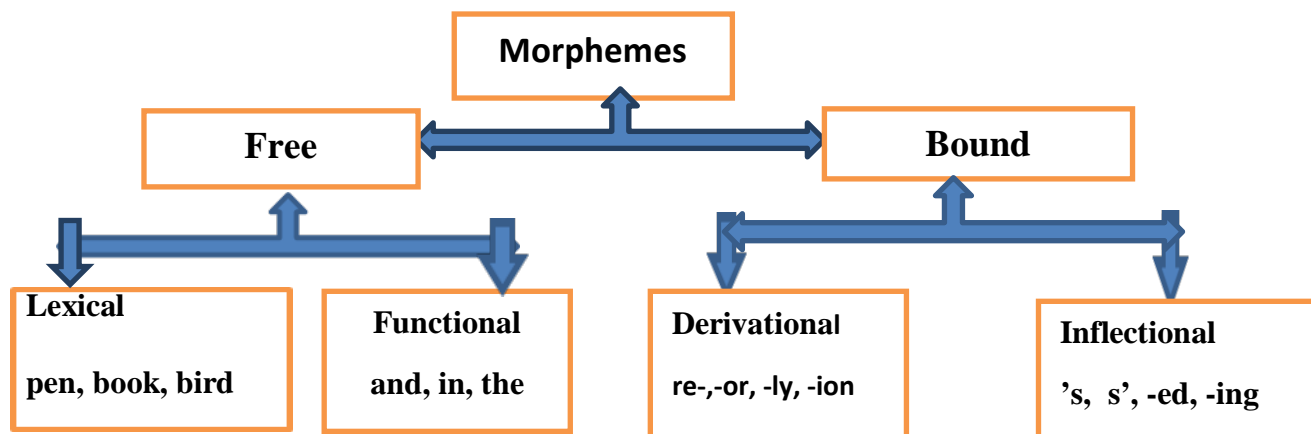
Morphology refers to the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed (Mark A. and Kirsten F.1:2011).

II. MORPHEMES

Mark A. and Kirsten F.(1:2011) state that a major way in which morphologists investigate words, their internal structure, and how they are formed is through the identification and study of morphemes, often defined as the smallest linguistic pieces with a grammatical function.

2.1 Kinds of Morphemes

Morphemes are mainly divided into following categories:



2.1.1 Free Morphemes

There are free morphemes, that is, morphemes that can stand by themselves as single words, for example, open and tour.

Free Morphemes Fall into Two Categories:

a. Lexical Free Morphemes

The lexical morphemes refer to nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs .

b. Functional Morphemes

Functional morphemes are the functional words such as the language such conjunctions, prepositions, articles and pronouns.

2.1.2 Bound morphemes

Bound morphemes are those forms that cannot normally stand alone and are typically attached to another form, e.g. as re-, -ist, -ed, -s. These forms are described in as affixes. That is to say that all affixes (prefixes and suffixes) in English are bound morphemes. The bound morphemes are classified into:

a. Derivational Bound Morphemes

The derivational morphemes are used to create new word class or to change the meaning. For example, the addition of the derivational morpheme -ness changes the adjective “good” to the noun “goodness”, un- happy, unhappy.

b. Inflectional Bound Morphemes

Inflectional morphemes change what a word does in terms of grammar, but does not create a new word. They are used to show if a word is plural or singular, if it is past tense or not, and if it is a comparative or possessive form. In English, all the inflectional morphemes are suffixes.

- Noun + -'s, -s
- Verb + -s, -ing, -ed, -en
- Adjective + -er, -est

III. THE STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The approximately 29 million inhabitants of Africa’s largest country, Sudan, speak at least 135 distinct languages belonging to three different language families, Afro-asiatic, Niger–Congo, and Nilo–Saharan (A.R. Mugaddam and G.J. Dimmendaal 265;2006).

Every language of the world has its own sound system. This is due to difference of linguistic backgrounds. It is obvious that the morphological differences in English and Fur nouns create difficulties in the teaching and learning of English, the target language. This research attempts to find out the similarities and differences which exist between the two languages as well as the effects which this linguistic difference may have on the process of teaching and learning of English, the foreign language in Sudan. It is to be expected that speakers of the languages experience

difficulties due to the fact that the morphological structure of the two languages are slightly different in nature. In this context, it is expected that contrastive analysis of English and Fur morphology will be of pedagogical advantages to the Fur learners of English as a foreign language in particular and the other Nilo-Saharan languages speakers in general. Because very a few studies have been conducted on this area therefore, this research focuses on this issue in depth.

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

This research will enrich the students of a language, particularly those who concern morphological structure of language. It will provide them with an example of how different findings of the field can be exploited to examine a form of language in use. This will enable the learners to master English language easily. The curriculum designers and text book writers will find roadmap in this research to design school curricula and syllabuses to reflect inflectional morphemes of Nilo-Saharan languages particularly in Darfur region schools. Consequently, the research will serve as a source of further studies of this field. Moreover, this research will shed lights on both English and Fur languages, by analyzing the inflectional morphemes of the two languages. Therefore, the research guides teachers to focus on the areas of differences to enable the learners to overcome the problems of the morphology of the target language (English).

V. THE OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

This research aims to:

- identify the areas of similarities in the inflectional morphemes of the English and Fur nouns;
- describe the dissimilarities between the English and Fur inflectional morphemes;
- point out the pedagogical effects of the similarities and dissimilarities in English and Fur morphology.

VI. THE QUESTIONS OF RESEARCH

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

- To what degree do the English and Fur inflectional morphemes differ from one another?
- How far do English and Fur inflectional morphemes have similarity with one another?
- What are the pedagogical problems which the Fur learner of English will encounter with English?

VII. THE METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The researchers have adopted contrastive analysis methodology to conduct this research. They contrast and compare some examples of inflectional morphemes of Fur and English nouns. The data was collected from English morphology books, grammar book of Fur language as well as related websites and journals. Population of this research includes nouns in both English and Fur languages.

VIII. THE HYPOTHESES OF RESEARCH

This research hypothesizes the following:

- The English and Fur inflectional morphemes differ from each other.
- English and Fur inflectional morphemes have similarity with one another.
- The pedagogical problems which the Fur learner of English will encounter with English morphology.

IX. THE SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF RESEARCH

Every language has several aspects that can be studied. These aspects include phonetics, phonology, syntax, pragmatics, semantics and morphology. However, this research sheds lights on the area of morphemes, which is a part of morphology. It focuses only on comparing and contrasting of inflectional morphemes between Fur and English nouns.

X. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section is about constructions and analysis of inflectional morphemes in Fur and English languages in terms of forming plural nouns.

XI. PLURAL FORMATION

As you will note below the number grammatical category of nouns in the Fur language is very similar to that of English. In both languages nouns are inflected for grammatical number that is, singular or plural. Both languages have a regular and irregular plural of nouns.

11.1 Regular Plural Nouns

For most English nouns the inflectional morphemes for the plural are (-s, -es) that are added to the singular form of the noun, however, there are also a few words with irregular plural morphemes. On the other hand, the most Fur nouns inflectional morphemes for the plural are (-a, -á, -ገa, - ገá, -ta, tá, -nta, -ገta) which are added to the singular form of the noun, but there are some words with irregular plural morphemes.

Table 1: English singular noun+ suffix(s).

Kona Inጊliiz'iny asá kieጥ suጥጥâ kí (s) agíጥtía.

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suጥጥâ
a book	books
a pen	pens
a donkey	donkeys
a camel	camels

Table 2: Fur noun +suffix (a), when Fur nouns end in consonant we add (a) to form plural.

Kona Poor'iny asá kieጥ suጥጥâ kí (a) agíጥtía

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suጥጥâ
kawal	kawala
suun	suuna
boot	boota
beter	betera
basal	basala

As shown from, above tables (1&2) the both languages share the same morphological features with which they form their plural nouns consequently; the Fur speakers could not face any morphological difficulty when learning English language.

Table 3: Fur noun +suffix (á) when Fur singular tonic nouns end in consonant we add the tonic morpheme (á) to form plural.

Kona Poor'iny asá kieጥ suጥጥâ kí (á) agíጥtía

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suጥጥâ
biis	biisá
su nín	su níná
turíl	turílá
ru ús	ru úsá
wáár	wáárá

From the above table (3), it obvious that English lacks the characteristics of tonic morphemes (the smallest vertical mark /' above the morpheme that indicates tone) which Fur language has got, it causes problem to the English learners of Fur language.

Table 4: English singular noun+ suffix (es). When English singular nouns end in(s/ss, -z, -sh, -ch, -x, -o) we add (es) to form plural.

Kona Inጊliiz'iny asá kieጥ suጥጥâ kí (es) agíጥtía.

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suጥጥâ
a bus	buses
a truss	trusses
a fox	foxes
a church	churches
a brush	brushes
a mango	mangoes
a blitz	blitzes

Table 5: Fur noun +suffix (ገa), when Fur nouns end in vowel sounds we add (ገa) to form plural.

Kona Poor'iny asá kieጥ suጥጥâ kí (ገa) agíጥtía

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suጥጥâ
karga	kargaጥa
lúgu	lúguጥa

nyíre	nyíreṅa
jile	jileṅa
bū ṛḡu	bū ṛḡuṅa
bīdi	bīdiṅa
roo	rooṅa

As can be seen from above tables (4&5) the both languages share almost the same inflectional morphemes with which they form their plural nouns, consequently; the Fur speakers could not face any difficulty of inflectional morphemes when learning English language.

Table 6: Fur noun +suffix (ṅá), some Fur singular tonic nouns take the tonic morpheme (ṅá) to form plural.

Kona Poor'iny asá kien suṅṅâ kí (ṅá) agíntía

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suṅṅâ
tū úru	tū úruṅá
ziidí	ziidíṅá
bísá	bísáṅá
pū gó	pū góṅá
bütté	büttéṅá

The above table (6) shows that Fur language has got tonic words and morphemes which are combined to form plural nouns, whereas, English lacks such ones.

Table 7: English singular noun+ suffix (ves). When English singular nouns end in (f/fe) we change (f/fe into v+es) to form plural

Kona Inḡliiz'iny asá kien suṅṅâ kí (f/fe) agíntía.

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suṅṅâ
a half	halves
a leaf	leaves
a wife	wives
a knife	knives

Table 8: English singular noun+ suffix (ies). When English singular nouns end in consonant followed by (y) we change (y into i+es) to form plural.

Kona Inḡliiz'iny asá kien suṅṅâ kí (ies) agíntía.

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suṅṅâ
a baby	babies
a army	armies
a country	countries
a party	parties

It is obvious from above tables (7&8) some of English nouns that end in (f/fe) change into (v+es) as well as those which end in consonant +y change (y into i+es) to form plural nouns, whereas, the Fur language lacks this characteristic, this poses problem of inflectional morphemes to Fur speakers of English learning.

Table 9: Fur noun +suffix (ta), some Fur nouns take morpheme (ta) to form plural.

Kona Poor'iny asá kien suṅṅâ kí (ta) agíntía

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suṅṅâ
pay	payta
roo	roota
răy	Păyta

As can be seen from the above table (9) the English inflectional morphemes which form regular plural nouns are almost similar to Fur ones.

Table 10: Fur singular noun+ suffix (tá). Very a few Fur singular nouns take tonic morpheme (tá) to form plural.

Kona Poor'iny asá kien suṅṅâ kí (tá) agíntía

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suṅṅâ
ray	răytá
baw	băwtá
baw	băwtá

The above table (10) shows that Fur language has got tonic words and morphemes which are combined to form tonic plural nouns however, English lacks these features.

Table 11: Fur singular noun+ suffix (nta/ŋta)). Very a few Fur singular nouns take two kinds of the morphemes (nta/ŋta) to form plural.

Kona Poor'ŋ asá kien suŋŋâ kí (nta/ŋta) agíntía

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suŋŋâ
zargan	zarganta/ zarganŋta
kewra	kewranta /kewranŋta
kewna	kewnanta /kewnannŋta

The above table (11) shows that there are very a few singular nouns in Fur language which take two kinds of the morphemes (nta/ŋta) to form plural.

11.2 Formation of Irregular Nouns

Both languages have a regular and irregular plural of nouns.

English Irregular Plural Nouns

Iŋgliiz'ŋ Kona miineŋa

The irregular plural formation of nouns in English language:

Table 12: By changing sound

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suŋŋâ
a man	men
a woman	women
a mouse	mice
a louse	lice
a foot	feet

The above table (12) shows that some English irregular singular nouns form their plural by changing sounds of middle morphemes, whereas, Fur language lacks this characteristic. So this offers problem of inflectional morpheme to Fur speakers.

Table 13: by adding morpheme (en/ren)

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suŋŋâ
a child	children
an ox	oxen

The above table (13) shows that very a few English irregular singular nouns form their plural by

adding (en/ren) morphemes at the end, whereas, Fur language lacks this characteristic. Therefore, they are problematic to Fur speakers when they learn English.

The irregular plural formation of nouns in Fur language:

Table 14: Poor'ŋ Kona miineŋa

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suŋŋâ
kóór	kóórí
sooraŋ	soora
ú	kuu
diw	léwá/liá
kwě	dogólá

Table 15: Some Fur singular nouns that begin with (N) we change (n into k) to form plural.

Kona asá tog naa jaiŋŋeli

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suŋŋâ
nuŋí	kuŋí
nooŋa	kooŋa
numti	kumti
nányu	kányú
nuuŋ	Kuuŋ

Table 16: some Fur singular nouns that begin with (d) we change (d into k) to form plural.

Kona asá tog kí daa jaiŋŋeli

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suŋŋâ
darma	Karma
daŋlo	Kaŋlo

Table 17: very a few Fur singular nouns that begin with morpheme (n) and end in morpheme (ŋ) we change (n into k) and omit the final morpheme (ŋ) to form plural.

Kona asá tog kí naa na ŋaa jaiŋŋeli

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suŋŋâ
nínánŋ	kíná
numanŋ	kuma

Table 18: some Fur singular nouns that begin with morpheme (d) and end in morpheme (ŋ) we change (d into k) and omit the final morpheme (ŋ) to form plural.

Kona asá tog kí daa na ŋaa_jaiŋŋeli

Singular Noun Kona tog	Plural Noun Kona suŋŋá
dewnaŋ	kewna
dewraŋ	kewra
dáwlaŋ	káwla
díaŋ	kía

As shown from the above tables (14, 15, 16, 17 and 18) Fur language characterises by very complicated irregular rules that form plural nouns, whereas, English language lacks these ones. Therefore, they are problematic to English speakers when they learn Fur language.

XII. FINDINGS

The contrastive analysis of English and Fur inflectional morphemes that form plural nouns has revealed that there are differences and similarities between English and Fur nouns as the following:

Similarities

- The both languages almost share the same inflectional morphemes with which they form their plural nouns.
- There are irregular nouns in two languages.

Differences

- Fur language has got tonic nouns and morphemes whereas, English language lacks.
- English language has got about four inflectional morphemes with which it forms plural nouns; meanwhile, there are eight inflectional morphemes in Fur language that form plural nouns.
- There are few irregular plural forms of nouns in English however; there are many irregular plural nouns with very complicated rules in Fur language.
- Fur language characterises by the unique formation of irregular plural by changing initial inflectional morpheme and omitting the final one whereas, English lacks such.

XIII. CONCLUSION

This research paper has done a contrastive analysis of the inflectional morphemes of English and Fur nouns. The analysis began with comparing and contrasting of the inflectional morphemes of plural nouns in languages. In the light of contrastive analysis (CA) the morphological difficulties for the learners of Fur language were predicted based on the differences in the inflectional morphemes the two languages. There are errors arising from interference, interlanguage phenomenon, unproficiency of first language(L1) before learning (L2) moreover, the errors are due to linguistic differences between two languages, English belongs to Indo-European language family, whereas, Fur belongs to Nilo-Saharan family. The tutors should be acquainted with the results of CA for both languages, it enables them to teach accurate morphology to the foreign language learners in general and Fur learners in particular consequently, the problems of inflectional morphemes can be solved, and the Fur learners of English will become proficient in English and vice versa.

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