

## **Experience Report about Internship at the Laboratoire de Psychologie Cognitive in Marseille (France) from 25th August to 25th October 2023**

### **I. Preparation: internship search, apartment search**

When I learned that I had to do an internship for my Master's degree (Empirical Bi- and Multilingual Studies), the first idea I had was to do it abroad. Since I specialize in French philology and I studied French during my bachelor's degree, I wanted to go to France. My French professor, who is also the International Mobility Manager of the Ruhr-University Bochum (Kentin Le Provost), told me about the possibility of doing an internship abroad through the Erasmus + program. So he gave me some tips on how to find an internship, how to apply for a program and how to find a place to live in France. The main requirement for my internship was to take part in an ongoing research project, so I started looking for a place in a psycholinguistic laboratory. I translated my CV, wrote a motivational letter in French and sent it to some labs in Paris, Grenoble, and Marseille. Within a week, a PhD student from the Laboratoire de Psychologie Cognitive in Marseille wrote me back saying that he needed help collecting experimental data for his project. After a Zoom meeting with my future internship mentor, I started to prepare all the necessary documents (and I have to say, it was not always easy, especially due to some bureaucratic differences between France and Germany). At the same time, I was looking for a place to stay in Marseille. Since I only needed a room for two months, it was not easy to find something in a "Wohngemeinschaft", which I was used to in Germany. So I found a French woman who rented a room in her apartment on a French website called "Cohebergement" <https://www.cohebergement.com/>. Later I learned that this option was more expensive than renting a room in an apartment with other students, but I did not regret it at all because I was more than satisfied with my room, the people who lived there, and the location (two metro stations away from the lab where I worked). Finally, I bought tickets for a train from Bochum to Marseille (via Paris). I chose this option because it is environmentally friendly and I like traveling by train. So on my way to Marseille, I stopped in Paris for a day and then continued my journey. The trip was very pleasant and the French high-speed trains (so-called TGVs) work perfectly!

### **II. Internship: tasks, gained skills**

In the first week of my internship, I attended the summer school organized by the Institute for Language, Communication and the Brain (ILCB) at the Centre International de Rencontres Mathématiques (CIRM) in Marseille. This was an interdisciplinary summer school covering different fields such as linguistics, neuroscience, psychology, computer science, and

mathematics. I had the opportunity to attend introductory and advanced courses given by ILCB researchers as well as external colleagues.

In the second week, I started working in the lab. The goal of my internship was to assist a PhD student in the preparation and execution of a motor/language syntax experiment in children aged 9 to 11, and more specifically to help collect data. In the beginning, I was shown the procedure for data collection, which I would then do on my own. I documented the whole procedure by taking videos with my phone and making notes. Based on the videos I made, I prepared a script and a checklist to be used during data collection. I then trained with some of the PhD students in the lab, simulating a real experiment. This helped me to identify the mistakes I could make and the steps I had forgotten, as well as to practice giving all the explanations to the children in French. I was quite shy and felt insecure at first, but I got better with the training.

Over the next few weeks, I was introduced to some of the professors and people working in the lab. I had useful discussions about the current projects that might interest me. I also participated in some of the studies using the EEG method and learned about the purpose of these studies. At the end of the week, I had a control session with my mentor, where he watched me do the experiment with someone from the lab and told me what I was doing wrong. I was ready to go into schools and collect real data. I felt more confident not only with the experimental procedure, but also with the language.

After collecting some data and doing statistical analysis, we realized that we did not have the expected results. One of the possible reasons could be that the children were tired until the end of the experiment and lost their attention, which affected their scores in the last part of the experiment. So we decided to split the experiment into two sessions so that it did not take too long and the children could concentrate until the end. So I learned to always think about the variables that could affect the results, the possible pitfalls, and how to solve the problems you encounter.

Apart from this main experiment, I also had the opportunity to acquire new skills, such as familiarizing myself with Python programming and the PsychoPy platform. Thanks to my mentors, I was able to learn from them. They also helped me to create my own small project from scratch, which I am proud of because it is the first small step in this complicated process. With their help, I programmed a lexical decision experiment using the Psychopy software. Specifically, I selected 190 French word stimuli from the Lexique 3 database and created 190 French non-word stimuli according to a number of linguistic criteria. I then obtained responses

from 20 adult French-speaking participants (mainly people from the lab) and analyzed the results using statistical tools.

In my opinion, the most important skills I gained during my internship were how to plan and design my own experiment, what problems a researcher might encounter, and how to solve them. I realized that the hardest part of conducting an experiment is not even the technical part, as I used to think (e.g. writing code in a program or using statistical tools), but thinking through all the steps ahead, thinking about all the variables that might confound your data and keeping the variables constant. The more elaborate the experiment, the more complicated it is to take everything into account (or even not possible).

Throughout my internship, I did not have any conflicts with my mentors, people from the lab, or participants. I also had no conflicts with people from my apartment. I do not know how to explain this: whether it was luck or coincidence or maybe my personal qualities, but I only met nice people with whom it could be difficult to have conflicts. I would also like to mention that my internship mentors were not only competent researchers, but also people with outstanding human qualities, who tried not to overwhelm me with tasks, explained everything to me step by step, praised me for every little success, and supported me in every way. We also went out together, had drinks, and talked a lot about topics not related to my work. They were interested in my culture (Russian) and my life in Germany. I think they were happy to have an Erasmus student and took the opportunity to get to know a person from a different cultural background.

### **III. Everyday life, free time, linguistic and cultural experiences**

I have to say that my working hours in the lab were very flexible and sometimes I did not even have to go there because we had no participants or my mentors were not there. So sometimes I could work from home (my mentors always gave me the tasks) or enjoy the free time and explore the city. On weekends, I usually went swimming in the sea or hiking, walking in the city, or going to museums. At this point, I would like to move on to the linguistic and cultural part of my internship.

Starting with language, I used French intensively to communicate with my internship mentors, people in the lab, and in everyday life (although I sometimes switched to English when easier and faster communication was needed). In general, I believe that my level of French improved during the internship, at least in the areas of speaking and listening. In addition, I got many cultural insights: I tried national food, communicated with local people, visited some museums, explored the city, and even had the opportunity to go to nearby cities (Aix-En-Provence, Cassis, and Arles). In my case, it was a complete immersion in the culture and I also tried to write down my observations and interesting French words and phrases in a small notebook. I was

lucky enough to rent a room from the French woman who was very kind to me, listening to me, correcting me when necessary and giving me lots of tips on where to go and what to see in this region. The house was always full of other people: her husband, cousins, friends, children and other visitors, none of whom spoke English. So it was a perfect opportunity for me to speak French with them as I had no other option. I also learnt about the traditional food of the region from her and was even able to taste it as she cooked a lot and always invited me to try it (panisse, tropezienne cake, madeleines). As Marseille is very rich in nature, I also went hiking in the Calanques, took the opportunity to swim in the sea, and watched the most beautiful sunsets I have ever seen from the height of Notre Dame de la Garde. I realized why the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters chose Provence to paint their famous landscapes: the combination of the southern sun and the light reflections of the sea give very specific colors that one wants to capture. However, I cannot say that I would like to live in Marseille because it is too noisy (especially because of the scooters) and dirty. For me, this city is a paradoxical combination of chaos and peace: noisy and dirty streets mixed with quiet and beautiful parks, beaches, and mountains.

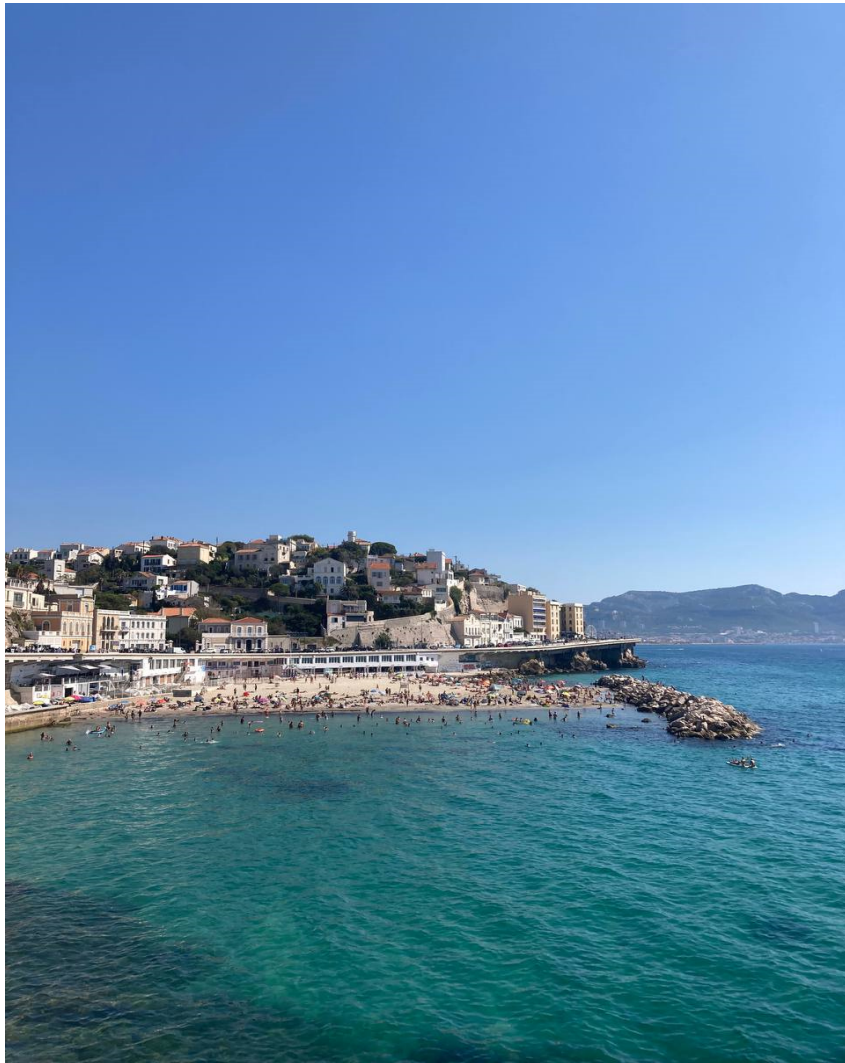
#### **IV. Evaluation: best and worst experience**

In my opinion, this internship was successful in all respects. Not only did I manage to acquire useful skills in my professional field, but I also benefited from the opportunity to immerse myself in a different culture and get an impression of life in France. My best experience in this internship was communicating and learning from my mentors and discovering the city and life here. It is difficult to write about the worst experience because I consider all kinds of experiences as good ones and even if I made mistakes, I learned from them. I look forward to continuing to improve my French when I return to Germany. I also have a lot to tell my fellow students and professors about my experience in a psycholinguistic lab and what I learned there. It was an unforgettable experience for me and I thank the Erasmus+ program for giving me this opportunity!

**Picture 1. Calanques**



**Picture 2. One of the beaches in Marseille**



**Picture 3. My room**





**Picture 4. EEG experiment in the lab**

