

Responses to Prof. Lesznyák's review comments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Márta Lesznyák for her meticulous and thoughtful review of my dissertation. Her thoughtful observations and insightful comments were both constructive and pivotal in helping me identify areas of further improvement. I greatly appreciate the time and effort she invested in carefully reviewing the dissertation and providing valuable feedback. I am also grateful for her recognition of the strengths, originality, and importance of the study within the field of multilingualism and language learning motivation. In what follows, I provide a detailed, point-by-point response to the comments, indicating the modifications (for future publication) and clarifying the rationale behind specific decisions in this version of the dissertation.

Regarding the structure of the dissertation, I would like to thank Prof. Lesznyák for her valuable observation with connection to the perceived dual focus of the study. I fully understand the concern that the dissertation may appear to have two separate lines of inquiry, namely metalinguistic awareness and motivation. However, the main focus still remains on metalinguistic awareness and one of the explicit goals of the research was indeed to investigate the relationship between the latter variable and motivational dispositions within a multilingual context. I tried early in the study to state this objective in the research questions and reflect on it in the conceptual design of the study. Throughout the research process, I remained actively engaged with the literature and came to realize that re-examining the original structure of the motivation questionnaire was necessary to ensure greater construct validity and theoretical alignment within the study's setting. I reckon that PLS-SEM is a very thorough, space-intensive procedure but its inclusion aimed to provide a more robust, valid, and empirically grounded model of motivation before investigating its connection with metalinguistic awareness. I also made a consistent effort to conceptually and empirically bridge between both constructs since that was one of the research aims. I agree that these two strands of inquiry could each form a stand-alone study given the thoroughness of the analysis related to each. To this end, in my published papers based on this research, I have separated the focus between MLA and motivation. However, bringing these strands together may perhaps provide a more holistic and interdisciplinary perspective on how multilingual learners navigate a new linguistic system.

Prof. Lesznyák raises an important point regarding my claim of “monolingual mindset” in the Hungarian educational system. Although I am aware of this judgment or characterization based on conversations with my Hungarian students, colleagues, and professors, I must agree that as

an outsider, I still need to exercise caution when making such claims and not to rely on my own or anecdotal observations. In response to this concern, I have added the necessary references that justify the use of this phrase throughout the dissertation. I would also like to thank Prof. Lesznyak for her positive feedback concerning the use of objective and academic English and for highlighting few inconsistencies in the abstract that I already solved. I acknowledge that precision in reporting is important, particularly when it comes to characterizing statistical findings. The phrase “robust connection” has now been revised to reflect the moderate strength of the correlation, as accurately described in the main body of the dissertation. However, I would like to note that the unfamiliar language test served as a tool to quantify metalinguistic abilities. Its design, which is based on the literature, required participants to analyze an unfamiliar language (Italian) using knowledge drawn from their existing known languages. The test required them to use their existing linguistic background to deduce meaning, identify patterns, and hypothesize grammatical rules. It elicited reasoning based on lexical, syntactic, morphological, and phonological cues, prompting the participants to apply analytical strategies grounded in metalinguistic and crosslinguistic awareness. Admittedly, the test scores alone would not capture the full extent of these abilities or how exactly learners used their existing linguistic background, but when used in conjunction with the qualitative data from the retrospective questionnaire as is the case in a couple studies in the literature, a clear pattern emerges: participants who engaged more deeply in reflective crosslinguistic reasoning tended to score higher. Therefore, I believe it is appropriate to interpret the Italian decoding test as an operational measure. Yet, I have taken the necessary steps to ensure that the abstract does not include overstatements or perhaps misleading statements.

Regarding explaining the operationalization of meta- and crosslinguistic awareness in the Introduction, I would like to note that it was already explicitly mentioned in Section 1.2. in the first two paragraphs. But in order to make it easier for the reader to follow, I made sure to make it more explicit through adding few more details. With regard to the rationale behind certain hypotheses mainly H4 and H5 related to the participants’ motivation towards French and English and the structure of the new motivational model, I believe that these hypotheses or the assumption that students would be more motivated to learn French since it’s the language of instruction and that the factor structure of the motivational questionnaire would change in this specific context is reasonable and conceptually well-grounded. Students were hypothesized to be more motivated to learn French based on the expectation that sustained exposure, instructional immersion, and curricular relevance and importance would positively influence

the participants' motivation towards the language. As for the factor structure, the existent body of research that used Dörnyei et al.'s (2006) questionnaire is scarce and has shown context-dependent and inconsistent results about these attitudinal and motivational constructs; so, given the unique characteristics of the Hungarian-French bilingual program in which English is taught as an L3, it was assumed that the original factor structure would change. I recognize that the original phrasing might have lacked sufficient explanation. Thus, I revised this part of the introduction to provide a clearer explanation of how each hypothesis was derived. Prof. Lesznyák points out some important cultural and historical clarification when it comes to the change of the regime and the introduction of bilingual programs. My intention was indeed to refer to the 1987 regulation issued by the Ministry of Culture, which allowed the implementation of bilingual education programs in Hungarian secondary schools.

In response to the comment about elaborating on the distinction between bilingualism and multilingualism in the literature review, I deliberately chose not to delve deeper into an exhaustive contrast between the two phenomena, as my aim was to foreground the dynamic complex nature of multilingualism. I simply opted to stress complexity as the primary distinguishing feature, citing it as the central construct that differentiates multilingualism from bilingualism in terms of physiological, cognitive, emotional, pedagogical, and social perspectives without providing many details. As for the section discussing the connection between metalinguistic awareness and motivation, which preceded the full discussion of motivation itself, I intentionally chose to start with that section to establish the empirical and conceptual rationale for why motivation should be treated as an important relevant variable in this study. Highlighting the connection between both variables first aimed to build a bridge between the two constructs, before elaborating on motivation as a theoretical framework on its own. Furthermore, the section on motivation is exhaustive in itself and placing it before building its connection with metalinguistic abilities might have disrupted the logical flow of the chapter in my opinion.

Following Prof. Lesznyák's suggestion about cross-referencing and in order to enhance clarity and navigability throughout the dissertation, I included consistent cross-referencing to appendices and relevant sections where necessary. Regarding the insightful question about the choice of Italian and the absence of attitudinal data concerning it, the decision to use Italian as the unfamiliar language was made in consultation with my supervisor after carefully considering its pedagogical and psycholinguistic appropriateness for this context. We were also aware that Italian is politically and emotionally neutral and provides a non-threatening and

objective linguistic choice. I added a brief explanation about this in Section 3.5.4 and a recommendation concerning the same point in Section 6.5. Additionally, the success in decoding Italian is more meaningfully tied to learners' linguistic self-confidence, their meta- and crosslinguistic awareness, their reflection on specific linguistic patterns, and their L2/L3 motivation which might potentially reveal the way they view multilingualism. Italian is a neutral testing tool aimed at revealing underlying metalinguistic abilities. However, I agree with the statement that task performance, in a different context where for example a politically charged language is used, might be influenced by learners' attitudes towards that language. I appreciate this observation that will certainly inform future iterations of similar research designs.

Regarding the languages used for each test and questionnaire, an explicit description of the rationale behind the choices made, which Prof. Lesznyák described appropriate, was added early in the research (section 3.2) for more clarification. As for the validity of the retrospective questionnaire, section 3.5.5 explains that the instrument was based on two previous research studies (Gibson & Hufeisen, 2003; Smidfelt & van de Weijer, 2019). However, in section 3.6.4, I made sure to repeat this information for more clarification and I also add that I consulted with my supervisor during its adaptation which provided expert input to ensure its validity. As for reliability of the English, French, and Italian tests, they were fully adapted from standardized validated exams. Testing them in a similar educational context on a small sample further showed their reliability. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that reporting on the reliability results of the final sample would strengthen the results. This is an excellent point that will be considered for future studies.

In response to the comment about studying the significance of the difference between French and English proficiency and motivation scores in the results, I would like to clarify that while I acknowledge that reporting on such statistical tests to compare the scores would have further strengthened the empirical grounding of the interpretation, I opted for a descriptive approach especially when it comes to proficiency. The difference between French and English proficiency scores was indeed significant as a comparative statistical test was conducted. However, this significance was not reported on as the central aim here was not to thoroughly compare the two languages per se, but rather to understand the participants' profiles and examine how these linguistic profiles relate to their decoding performance in Italian. Regarding motivation, I believe that the loadings, path coefficients, and their significance drawn from PLS-SEM analysis give a deeper insight into the differences in motivation across both languages. Adding

a t-test could perhaps distract from the model-based analysis or seem unnecessary. However, I will definitely consider this suggestion in future publications derived from the dissertation as it could add another layer of insight.

Regarding the factor analysis, both KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were conducted and confirmed the adequacy of the data for factor analysis. I have now made these values explicitly visible in the revised version of the dissertation to enhance methodological transparency. As for the loading threshold, the .30 cut-off was used as this was an exploratory model in an under-researched context with a relatively medium sample size (for this sort of analysis). Items retained at this level were also theoretically consistent with the underlying factors. Although only few variables received a loading between .31 and .39, I have now added an explanation as to why I made this choice in section 4.5.1. In the last section of the dissertation, I also highlighted that these findings should be interpreted and generalized with caution. Regarding the low reliability of some motivational factors, as acknowledged in the dissertation, these low Cronbach's alpha values are largely due to the small number of items within those factor bundles (only 2 or 3 items). It is well established in the literature that scales with few items tend to produce low reliability estimates. It is also important to note that the reliability of these factors was already demonstrated in the original study by Dörnyei et al. (2006). Thus, the decision to keep these items and follow the current factor structure was also informed by theoretical considerations. Nonetheless, in the last chapter of the dissertation, I highlighted that these particular findings need to be interpreted and generalized with caution. When it comes to the relationship between French and English motivation and the Italian scores, Italian here served as a tool to quantify participants' metalinguistic and crosslinguistic abilities. The instrument allowed for a neutral testing ground where learners' ability to rely on and reason across languages, without prior exposure, could be measured. Performance on the Italian decoding task reflected the way learners drew on their knowledge of previously learned languages. The retrospective questionnaire offered qualitative insights into the strategies, reflections, and reasoning processes the participants engaged in during the decoding process. In this light, L2 and L3 motivation is considered conceptually relevant to metalinguistic development. Learners with stronger language learning motivation might engage more deeply with languages, linguistic structures, and crosslinguistic processing, which are important in developing metalinguistic and crosslinguistic awareness. Some studies in the literature have already shown a relationship between motivation and multilingual awareness. However, as suggested by Prof. Lesznyák, I added an explanation as to why the other motivational factors,

apart from linguistic self-confidence, might not have shown correlations with metalinguistic abilities. This might be explained by the nature of the decoding task. Deciphering Italian tended to measure reasoning abilities and crosslinguistic processing in an unfamiliar linguistic context. Ergo, confidence in one's immediate language-processing ability played an influential role in decoding Italian and thus showed a direct connection with multilingual awareness. The other motivational factors like Ideal Ln Self or Instrumentality usually reflect long-term aspirations rather than cognitive engagement per se. That's probably why no other associations were found.

I would like to thank Prof. Lesznyák again for pointing out the strengths of the Discussion chapter. Regarding the use of English in the participants' daily lives, I tried to objectively and faithfully interpret the findings the way they were reported on. The frequency of the reported interactions with family and friends in English was always interpreted in contrast to the use of French. The aim was to highlight relative differences and not to generalize the use of English as a dominant household language or a dominant language in their everyday lives in general. I acknowledge that the wording of the quote on page 120 may have unintentionally implied broader generalizations as I did not explicitly state the contrast between English and French use. However, I tended to explain this right after. I have now modified the wording as my intention was not to overstate the use of English. As an outsider researcher, I agree that it's important to remain cautious in interpreting these practices. I aimed to report these results objectively, grounding my interpretation in the statistical findings. While Hungarian is certainly the primary language of interaction, my comparative statements were strictly intended to reflect the difference in reported use between English and French. That said, students might have perhaps overstated the frequency of their English use in daily interactions, particularly with family and friends. Thus, as suggested, it is indeed important to critically consider the potential discrepancy between students' perceptions and their actual language use, hence the potential discrepancy between social desirability and reality. I will definitely consider this important suggestion for future research.

Prof. Lesznyák has insightful reflections on the practical implications of promoting a multilingual approach in language education in Hungary. While the results offer valuable insights into the importance of multilingual education and the need for a revamped pedagogical approach to language teaching, my intention was not to suggest a standard one-size-fits-all solution, but rather to raise awareness about the advantages that come with drawing on learners' existing linguistic repertoires in bilingual or trilingual educational contexts. I'm advocating for cross-language approaches that include the activation of any prior language in the multilingual

system, content-based approaches that use the L2 or L3 as a medium of instruction, and an overall dynamic multilingual pedagogy that transcends monolingual norms to bridge all languages and create synergies. Going beyond traditional monolingual instructional norms which require the separation of a learner's different languages is what I am aiming to underscore. Incorporating multilingual pedagogy into teacher training and curriculum design would also be beneficial. However, I acknowledge that multilingual practices might perhaps be challenging to implement. I agree that different cognitive and linguistic profiles and educational contexts play a role in how such approaches might succeed, but this calls for differentiated instruction and teacher training, which can take time to implement as well. I believe that in L2 English classrooms where no other foreign language is being taught, teachers can still encourage students to reflect on their L1 Hungarian through tasks that target for example grammatical structures. Moreover, teachers can facilitate learner-driven discovery/discussion of language patterns. The same can be applied in L3 learning classrooms where students might have different L2s. Although these multilingual teaching strategies and pedagogical reforms might take time and effort to implement, they are possible to realize; perhaps starting by enriching the current practices with tools that promote multilingual awareness and multilingualism in general might be beneficial. Ultimately, this does indeed call for further research. As recommended by Prof. Lesznyák, I've started reading Agnes Balla's work on L3 learning processes, specifically how Hungarian learners rely on their L1 and L2 knowledge as well as on the learning strategies they have developed while learning their L2 in learning L3 German alongside the teaching method that she tested in L3 German learning context. I'm thankful for this suggestion as it seems highly relevant considering the current study.

Regarding the formatting inconsistencies mentioned (characters appearing incorrectly on page 68 and issues with figure captions), I believe that these issues may have resulted from software-related differences when opening the Word document on different devices. I have double-checked the official PDF and Word versions and can confirm that these issues do not appear on my end. Concerning Figures 3 and 4, while they may appear similar at first glance, I would like to clarify that these are two different figures that represent separate sets of results. As for Figure 7, I included an in-figure legend that clearly identifies the meaning of the different colors used for two particular factors i.e., Milieu and Linguistic self-confidence (non-Ln specific factors).

Finally, I am very thankful to Prof. Lesznyák for her positive recognition of both the theoretical and methodological dimensions of the study as well as the study's contributions to the fields of multilingual awareness and motivation. I am thankful for her suggestions and constructive

feedback that enhanced the quality of the dissertation. I am most grateful for all her positive comments that always preceded the noted minor shortcomings.

Questions:

1. Beyond language proficiency, linguistic self-confidence, as proven, is another determinant that has influenced the decoding process. Metalinguistic and crosslinguistic awareness are clearly associated with the ability to decode Italian. It is also plausible that other factors like degree of task engagement, linguistic curiosity, language learning aptitude (grammatical sensitivity and phonemic coding), general intelligence, language anxiety, reading strategies (using contextual clues for example), typological distance between the languages involved, and working memory capacity (complex processing/ decoding of a new language) can be influential in the decoding process.
2. I believe that in world dominated by AI and Large Language Models (LLMs), incidental learning will just take a different shape from the traditional reading contexts. Rather than only occurring through reading printed texts or natural conversations, it will possibly begin to occur more through interactive digital environments, including AI chatbots, personalized content feeds, and learning platforms. LLMs provide a fertile ground for incidental learning of vocabulary, idioms, collocations, and grammatical structures if the student is cognitively engaged with the AI output and plays an active role in the interaction. In a recent study conducted on the effects of Generative AI on incidental language learning, Daly (2023) reports on three interacting factors that influence the amount of incidental learning: proficiency level of the language learner, approach to AI tool usage (e.g., translator, student, apprentice), and amount of the target language used in the students' interaction with the tool. By reading and engaging with the AI output, students might notice repeated phrases that they can incidentally learn as in the case of Aria in Daly's study. However, if students rely heavily on AI tools like ChatGPT to generate content without engaging in deeper processing, incidental learning is harder to occur. Human-AI interactions need to be cognitively active and not reduced to passively consuming the output for incidental learning to happen. Teachers thus need to encourage or rather guide students to engage in meaningful, cognitively active interactions with LLMs for deeper and further language development. Furthermore, platforms like Character.AI where users interact with AI-powered personas (simulated personalities or fictional characters) can provide ample opportunities for naturalistic language use where learners might unconsciously absorb new information (e.g., vocabulary, grammatical structures). I think that sustaining the benefits

of incidental learning in this AI era depends on critically and actively engaging with written texts whether in their traditional form or AI-powered platforms and apps.

September 24th, 2025

Rabeb Ghanmi

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Rabeb Ghanmi', written in a cursive style.