

Final Report- Doctoral Thesis Noémi Szabó
**Metalinguistic awareness and cross-linguistic interaction in
third language learning: English and German as L3 in the
Hungarian classroom**

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Thematic focus

The main focus of the present doctoral thesis is on meta- and cross-linguistic awareness in TLA and multilingualism. The candidate gives an overview of the research in the field discussing bi- and multilingualism, and key factors (including psycho/typological, meta/cognitive, affective-emotive, sociolinguistic, and educational factors) which previous research reliably found to influence multilingual acquisition, and she shines a light on the specific context of Hungary which is where her study is set. Some of the aspects dealt with have been written about extensively in the past and more recent literature and do therefore not provide much new data. This said, Noemi does supply details on Hungary which are clearly of interest to an audience not too familiar with this specific context, the structure of the Hungarian primary school system, the number of officially recognised minority languages, and the recommendations (regarding the teaching of German vs English as L2) given by the Hungarian ministry in its 2012 White Paper being some such examples.

Theoretical framework

Noemi proposes the adoption of a Complex Dynamic Systems Theory and more specifically, a DMM (short for Dynamic Model of Multilingualism) perspective for the study of multilingual development (Herdina & Jessner 2002). A complexity approach is most welcome, particularly in combination with the DMM since multilingual development and multilingual awareness, which are major foci of the study/thesis are highly dynamic and complex phenomena and the role of complex multidimensional factors/factor bundles has been widely acknowledged in the research community and beyond. The topic is timely, particularly so with regard to the Hungarian context where, as the candidate notes, multilingualism is not promoted satisfactorily, and relevant in that regard.

Scientific value

Noemi's study contributes to our understanding of multilingual development in so far as it presents new interesting findings which go some way to corroborating extant

research in the field (though as she herself concedes, generalisability is at this stage not possible). In that sense Noemi's research has the potential to give important impulses to social and educational policies in Hungary, and may well help to improve the teaching and learning of second and third languages in the Hungarian school system.

Structure

This final version of the candidate's thesis is a clear improvement from the first one. The overall structure is more coherent. The parts are better connected and more balanced in terms of the contents dealt with; pertinent explications guide the reader through the single chapters and subchapters. The research questions are clearly stated, the procedures transparently outlined. As well, more recent research is now included (e.g., Spechtenhauser 2024). The appendixes provided in the final part of the thesis are particularly helpful and insightful. They give a good idea of the test procedures administered in the study (e.g. the Multicompetence Test which was adapted for the Hungarian context and the sample answers produced by the study participants). They also provide insightful information about how the participants approached and disambiguated the various meta- and crosslinguistic tasks, what their metacognitive reflections were and how they verbalised these latter.

Limitations

Naomi's study supplies the research community with important findings, but her thesis also presents several limitations which reduce its quality and impact. While the language has become clearer, awkward (p.54 It then discusses...), cumbersome and erroneous bits (see for example p. 44 exposure to, several errors on p. 15 meanwhile/ such as L3; p. 57), typos among them, do remain, as do simplistic statements (e.g. on page 44 the author states „some authors also claim that language exposure plays a significant role in TLA“ giving the impression that only a negligible percentage of scholars do believe this to be the case and as if she herself did not share that view. To be fair, Naomi does then later in the passage explain better), and conclusions drawn are not always relevant or logical (p. 4 contradiction: far too little attention has been paid to ...; p.42 CLI is a cornerstone element...). Some passages lack precision (p. 31; p. 34 Jessner's article 2006; p.31 Allgäuer-Hackl in Vorarlberg). Having said this, Naomi does herself acknowledge several of the limitations pertaining to her study.

Final reviewer statement

Overall, the dissertation meets the scientific standards and can be released for public defense. I herewith recommend that Noémi Szabó be awarded a PhD degree.

PD Dr. phil Mag.Mag.phil. MA Barbara Hofer
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