

## **THE PERCEIVED ROLE OF L2 ENGLISH IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING L3 GERMAN**

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**Abstract:** *The central aim of my research is to investigate the third language learning processes of L1 Hungarian high-school learners learning L2 English and L3 German. More specifically, I aim at revealing to what extent Hungarian learners rely on their knowledge of their L1 and L2 as well as on the learning strategies they have developed while learning their L2.*

**Keywords:** *English, German, Hungarian, perceived distance, third language acquisition, third language learning*

### **1. Introduction**

The past two decades have witnessed an increasing interest in the field of third language acquisition (TLA) research. This interest is rooted in the fact that the majority of the world's population is multilingual (e.g. Crystal 1997) rather than monolingual, and present-day research is focussed on the processes prevailing in multilingual communities and/or among multilingual individuals.

In the past few years, researchers studying third language acquisition processes in the multilingual mind from an educational point of view have concluded that an additional language learnt beyond the mother tongue and the first foreign language makes a qualitative difference, not only a quantitative one. The complexity of TLA is best explained by Cenoz and Genesee's claim that TLA is much more complex than SLA because of the greater number of languages involved, and because of 'the factors and processes associated with second language acquisition and bilingualism as well as unique and potentially more complex factors and effects associated with the interactions that can take place among the multiple languages being learned, and the processes of learning them' (1998:16).

There are several factors that influence third language acquisition processes (e.g., Cenoz 2001, De Angelis 2007, Hall and Ecke 2003, Jarvis and Pavlenko 2007, Odlin 1989). From the point of view of third language learners, cross-linguistic influence seems to be one of the most decisive phenomena due to several reasons. First of all, the existence of similarities and differences between languages in a linguistic sense can occur at basically all linguistic levels; some of the levels, such as the level of lexis, orthography and phonology have been studied more extensively from the perspective of TLA, while others, such as that of syntax, semantics and morphology are explored to lesser degrees. Secondly, beyond the

similarities and differences between languages in a linguistic sense, the importance of the language learners' own perceptions need to be emphasised; it is the perceived similarities and differences between languages that play a role when recognising novel elements of a target language.

The present paper is intended as a contribution to TLA literature with the involvement of L1 Hungarian learners learning L2 English and L3 German. Hungary is a fundamentally monolingual country where a significant number of people are involved in multilingual processes. This is especially true for language learners in the Hungarian education system most of whom have to learn two foreign languages either simultaneously or in succession. While the Hungarian National Core Curriculum regulates the number of languages and the target levels that learners have to reach by the end of their high school education, it does not prescribe any harmonisation of the learning processes of the two compulsory foreign languages. Therefore, foreign languages are typically taught as if the language in question were the only foreign language ever learnt by the learner.

The research results presented in this paper are parts of a larger research project that aims at understanding Hungarian learners' third language learning processes with a long-term aim to contribute to creating a curriculum that acknowledges the differences between learning (and teaching) a foreign language as a second or as a third (or fourth, etc.) language, and thus possibly facilitates and makes more effective the complex task of language learning.

The longitudinal study designed for the above purposes had a dual aim: first, to design materials based on comparing and contrasting the structures and the vocabulary of English and German, and second, to use these materials with two groups of secondary school language learners representing two different age groups and two different levels of proficiency, that is with the two treatment groups of this study. Both the learners' own perceptions of their learning process as well as their objective development were tested at regular intervals in the course of four months. The data presented in this study provides information about the subjects' own subjective evaluation of their learning process.

## **2. Research Question**

The general question I aim to answer is whether L1 Hungarian language learners benefit from a special teaching material designed with the purpose of outlining cross-linguistic similarities and differences between the two foreign languages learnt by them, namely, their L2 English and L3 German. In the present paper I aim to answer the following sub-questions:

- a) What is the learners' own perception of the effects of their L1 and L2 on their third language learning? Do language learners rely more on their L1 Hungarian, at which they are more proficient, or their L2 English, which is typologically closer to their L3 German? Will their perception change as the result of the instruction?
- b) Does the length of time spent on learning languages (both L2s and L3s) as well as proficiency level have an impact on the foreign language awareness and the language learning strategies of learners? That is, is there a difference between more versus less experienced learners?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Subjects**

As I have mentioned above, it is secondary school learners who frequently learn two languages simultaneously, therefore, I have chosen the following groups of secondary school learners as subjects of my research:

1. *Treatment group 1, henceforth Group T1*: 15 secondary school learners in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade with English L2 at the start of learning L3 German.
2. *Treatment group 2, henceforth Group T2*: 10 secondary school learners in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, who have been studying L2 English and L3 German simultaneously for at least 2.5 years.

When selecting the groups, the most important consideration was Lindemann's (1998:164-165) suggestion, that longitudinal studies should optimally be conducted with learner groups who are as homogenous as possible from the point of view of their linguistic biographies in order to eliminate the effects of languages beyond the L1 and L2. Here, the learners within the groups were at very similar levels in German, since the groups were created as beginner German language groups by the school and were instructed by the same German teacher. As regards their English lessons, the learners were regrouped in different English language groups, therefore their knowledge of English shows a greater variety, but all the learners are more proficient in English and in German.

#### **3.2 Procedure**

The research was conducted in the 2009/2010 academic year. The four-month data collection period in the spring semester (February through May, 2010) was preceded by a preparatory phase in the fall semester (September through December). At the start of the spring semester, in February, 2010, all subjects were asked to fill in a questionnaire on their linguistic biographies and placement tests both in English and in German. The information on the linguistic biographies and the proficiency levels of the subjects was analysed in order to ascertain that the subjects within the individual groups are similar and that the groups are comparable.

As the next research phase, the special treatment sessions started with Groups T1 and T2, whom I met on 10–12 occasions throughout the spring semester for a 45-minute session in one of their German lessons approximately once in a fortnight. The learners in each group had three German lessons a week, meaning that I met the treatment groups for the special sessions approximately every sixth lesson. I instructed them with the help of a teaching material designed in a way that English and German were constantly compared and contrasted, but at the same time, as regards the contents (both grammatical and lexical), it fit the curriculum. (This was especially important, as the two treatment groups' achievement was

contrasted against those of two control groups. The results of this comparison are, however, not reported in the present paper.)

### **3.3 Research Instruments**

The subjects' own perception of their learning processes was assessed with the help of questionnaires. Using Winters-Ohle and Seipp's (2001) questionnaire as a basis, I asked the subjects to report on their own views in connection with influence from other languages. The questionnaire was filled in three times by both groups (at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the data collection period). The results of the Likert-scale type of questionnaire are compared across the two groups as well as within the treatment groups in order to trace the changes in the learning strategies of the subjects as a result of the instruction.

The questionnaire contains information on the learners' own perceptions on the roles of their L1 Hungarian and L2 English while learning L3 German. The answers to the questions on understanding a new word, learning a new word, learning grammatical rules, spelling and pronunciation were expressed by the subjects in terms of a numerical scale, frequency was indicated as 1 = (almost) never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often and 5 = (almost) always. In order to answer the research questions, the group means achieved by the treatment groups were analysed in all ten aspects across the three data recordings.

## **4. Results**

I will present the data obtained with the help of the questionnaires as follows: in section 4.1 the results of the younger and less advanced treatment group (T1) will be presented, while in 4.2 the results of the older and more advanced group (T2) will be discussed. Finally, the difference in the results of the two treatment groups, T1 and T2 will be contrasted in 4.3.

### **4.1 Results of Group T1**

I have summarised the results achieved by Group T1 in the individual categories in Tables 1 and 2. In the first line of Table 1 information is presented on the facilitating role of English and Hungarian on learning German as perceived by the subjects in Group T1 prior to the treatment sessions in February 2010. In the second and third lines of Table 1 we can see how the values have changed by the middle of April 2010, that is, by the middle of the data collection period, after the subjects have participated in five comparative sessions, and by the end of May 2010, after the data collection period ended. In Table 2 we can see the values reflecting the perceived hindering role of English and Hungarian on learning German across the same three periods of time that is February, April and May 2010. Tests of statistical significance were carried out at  $p \leq .05$  in order to see whether there was a significant change between the initial February results compared to the final results in May.

Table 1 reveals that at the time of the first assessment (and prior to starting the teaching sessions), in February 2010, the members of Group T1 on average found that, on a scale of 1 to 5, English helped them to a greater extent than Hungarian in four out of the five aspects, that is, when trying to understand new German words, when trying to learn new

German words, when learning spelling and pronunciation, but that, however, Hungarian had a greater facilitating role when learning grammar rules than English. On the whole, by the end of the treatment period, there was a statistically significant increase in T1 subjects' perception of the facilitating role of English, whereas there is a non-significant extent of decrease in T1 subjects' perception of the facilitating role of Hungarian.

Analysing the results in detail, if we consider the values associated with the facilitating role of English, we can find that it is in connection with vocabulary – both as regards understanding and learning – that the learners have reported the highest values. Compared to the means on the facilitating role of English when understanding and learning German vocabulary, the subjects in Group T1 perceived the helping role of English to lesser degrees.

The questionnaire was re-administered for the second time in April 2010 after five comparative sessions designed with the intention of instructing the subjects on the similarities and differences in English and German. A comparison of the February and the April lines of Tables 1 and 2 reveals that changes in the subjects' perceptions about the role of English in their learning German have started to operate. There is a conspicuous increase in the T1 group means in all aspects, both regarding the helping and the hindering factors. The total means scores assessing the helping role of English increased by 0.45 points, while the totals means of the hindering role increased by 0.35 points (Tables 1 and 2).

Although the purpose of the comparative lessons primarily was to facilitate L3 language learning with the help of the L2, it seems that the conscious comparison and contrasting of the two languages resulted in a raised awareness in the relationship between the two languages, with the result that not only the facilitating role increased, but also the difficulties, although the latter did only to a lesser extent.

By the time the questionnaire was administered for the third time, at the end of May 2010, all the treatment sessions were over. As regards the facilitating nature of English, the results show a remarkable tendency, namely, that after a major increase at the time of the second data collection, the values decreased somewhat to reach higher levels than the initial February results. As the mean column of Table 1 shows, the total mean started out at 2.68, shot as high as 3.13, and finally settled at 3.01. In my opinion, the increase between the first and the second data collection sessions can be explained by the initial interest of the subjects in the new method and the heightened levels of awareness in the new method's wake. The fact that no linear increase can be pointed out may be attributable to the method losing its 'novelty' in the eyes of the subjects and becoming a regular and routine-like way of approaching language. However, it needs to be emphasised that all five of the values describing the helping function of L2 English when learning L3 German are higher at the end of the experiment and the difference between the February and the May results. With the help of paired sample T-tests I calculated whether the differences between the February and the April results reveal a significant difference concerning mean scores. The alpha decision level was set at  $p \leq .05$ . The results indicate that the differences between the February and April results are significant at the 0.05 level in the case of Group T1. Comparing the February results with the ones in May – despite the drop in the scores – they still remained significant at the 0.05 level.

As we have seen above, the L2 English seems to play a more important role in L3 learners' German than their Hungarian mother tongue, and this role seems to have gained even more significance by the end of the treatment period. As the data reveals, however, there have also been changes in the learners' perception of the role of their L1 Hungarian during their German studies. It needs to be emphasised that the treatment sessions did not include any material on the comparison and contrast of Hungarian and German (nor Hungarian and English). If we compare the February results in Tables 1 and 2, as presented above, we can see that even initially, prior to the treatment sessions, the learners themselves assigned a higher facilitating role to their L2 English than to their L1 Hungarian. The values are higher in four categories (understanding and learning new words, spelling and grammar) and lower

T1	when trying to understand a new German word		when trying to learn a new German word		when learning grammar rules		with German spelling		with German pronunciation		MEAN	
	EN helps	HU helps	EN helps	HU helps	EN helps	HU helps	EN helps	HU helps	EN helps	HU helps	EN helps	HU helps
February	3.47	3.00	3.20	3.14	2.43	2.64	2.29	2.07	2.00	1.86	2.68	2.54
April	3.80	3.20	3.53	3.33	3.27	3.07	2.53	2.40	2.53	2.40	3.13	2.88
May	3.67	2.67	3.47	2.87	3.13	2.33	2.40	2.07	2.40	2.00	3.01	2.39
p (Febr. – May)											0.038*	0.932

Table 1. The facilitating effect of L1 Hungarian and L2 English while learning L3 German (Group T1). Results that are statistically significant at  $p \leq .05$  are marked with an asterisk (\*).

T1	when trying to understand a new German word		when trying to learn a new German word		when learning grammar rules		with German spelling		with German pronunciation		MEAN	
	EN causes difficulty	HU causes difficulty	EN causes difficulty	HU causes difficulty	EN causes difficulty	HU causes difficulty	EN causes difficulty	HU causes difficulty	EN causes difficulty	HU causes difficulty	EN causes difficulty	HU causes difficulty
February	2.57	1.86	2.29	1.43	2.53	2.15	3.14	2.15	2.79	1.92	2.66	1.90
April	2.87	2.40	3.00	2.40	2.60	2.27	3.47	2.27	3.13	2.40	3.01	2.35
May	2.47	1.93	2.60	1.80	2.73	1.93	3.20	1.73	3.27	2.00	2.85	1.88
p (Febr. – May)											0.484	0.531

Table 2. The hindering effect of L1 Hungarian and L2 English while learning L3 German (Group T1). The results are statistically not significant at  $p \leq .05$

only in the category of learning grammar. The patterns of the values obtained at the second and third data collection are the same, as in the case of the facilitating factor of English when learning German, that is, they are significantly higher at the second time and fall back at the third time. It is interesting to note, however, that the values in the case of the facilitating effect of Hungarian all drop under or to the same level as the February values (except for the case of pronunciation). If we compare the May results with the February scores, we can see that by the end of the treatment period the facilitating effect of Hungarian was perceived at lower rates than that of English.

Regarding four of the factors associated with L1 Hungarian causing difficulties when learning L3 German, the same phenomenon can be observed as with the facilitating factors: after the increase in April, they fall back to results higher than originally in three cases (learning new German words, spelling and pronunciation) and fall below the original score in one case (understanding new German words), while there is a more linear increase in the perception of difficulties when learning German grammar. A possible reason for this pattern of the results will be discussed later, when T1 and T2 are compared in section 4.3.

The results on the role of L1 Hungarian can be explained by the fact that even though Hungarian is the learners' mother tongue, and, therefore, their Hungarian proficiency is at a native level, because of the typological distance of Hungarian from both English and German, it causes less (positive or negative) cross-linguistic influence in the learners' minds. Therefore, I argue that research question (a) with respect to Group T1 can be answered in a way that typological closeness seems to be the decisive factor for them when attempting to find facilitating factors when learning L3 German; thus, this part of the hypothesis is verified. The instruction results in an increased awareness of the facilitating role of English; however, at the same time, the perception of the hindering effects of English also increases. The English-German instruction seems to have caused a change in the awareness of the role of Hungarian, too. As regards both the facilitating and the hindering factors, the role of Hungarian decreased by the end of the data collection period.

## **4.2 Results of Group T2**

Tables 3 and 4 represent the mean scores of Group T2 in the individual categories associated with the facilitating and hindering roles of L1 Hungarian and L2 English across the three testing periods. As we can see, in two categories (understanding and learning new German words) the scores slightly decreased by April and reached the original levels again in May. There is a linear increase as regards the values in grammar, and an increase and a decrease to levels above the original values in spelling and pronunciation. None of the values are significant at the 0.05 level.

As far as the difficulties caused by English are concerned, we can see that as the result of the treatment sessions, the subjects perceived more difficulties by the end of the treatment period than initially in four categories (understanding new words, learning grammar, spelling and pronunciation), the only decrease occurred in the category of 'learning new words'. Again, the results are not significant at the 0.05 level.

As regards the facilitating effect of L1 Hungarian when learning L3 German in Group T2, as we can see in Tables 3 and 4, there is only a minor decrease between the February and



the May results. The results indicate that in the case of four factors (understanding and learning new words, learning grammar and spelling) the values are lower than those describing the facilitating effect of L2 English. In the case of pronunciation, subjects in Group T2 perceived initially that their L1 Hungarian helps more when pronouncing German words than their L2 English. These values equalized by the end of the data collection period and, therefore, the difference is not significant statistically.

At the same time, the values describing the hindering effects of Hungarian changed in different directions from February to May. With a minor decrease in April, the values for L1 Hungarian causing difficulties when understanding new L3 German words remained unchanged. L1 Hungarian's hindering effect decreased by April, but increased again by May in learning new German words and in pronunciation, while the values increased linearly in spelling. There is, however, an obvious decreasing tendency of Hungarian's hindering effect on learning German grammar.

If we compare the values representing the hindering effect of L1 Hungarian with those describing the hindering effects of L2 English on learning L3 German, we can find that the values are higher as regards the hindering role of English in the case of all factors in all three stages of the data collection, with only two exceptions. The February values for the hindering effect of English versus Hungarian on the German pronunciation are the same, however, while the hindering role of Hungarian decreased, the hindering role of English increased by the end of the data collection period. The other exception is the factor of the hindering effects in learning the German grammar rules. Prior to the treatment period, the learners in Group T2 perceived higher values as regards the hindering role of their L1 Hungarian in learning L3 German than that of their L2 English. The results indicate that values regarding the hindering role of Hungarian decreased by the end of the data collection period, while those regarding the hindering role of English increased.

Based on the above, I claim that research question (a) with respect to Group T2 can be answered in the same way as in the case of Group T1, namely, that typological closeness seems to play a more important role when attempting to find facilitating factors when learning L3 German. It is interesting to note that the comparative instruction seems to have had no effect on T2 subjects on the lexical level; the general increase was brought by the increase of the remaining three factors with a special emphasis on grammar. Just as in the case of the younger treatment group, the instruction results in an increased awareness of the facilitating role of English in general and, at the same time, the role of the hindering effects of English also increases. As regards both the facilitating and the hindering factors, the role of Hungarian decreased slightly by the end of the data collection period.

T2	when trying to understand a new German word		when trying to learn a new German word		when learning grammar rules		with German spelling		with German pronunciation		MEAN
	EN helps	HU helps	EN helps	HU helps	EN helps	HU helps	EN helps	HU helps	EN helps	HU helps	
February	3.40	2.40	3.20	2.70	2.30	2.00	1.80	1.60	1.40	2.00	2.42
April	3.20	2.60	3.10	2.40	2.90	2.50	2.50	2.40	2.30	2.50	2.80
May	3.40	2.40	3.20	2.30	3.10	2.20	2.00	1.70	1.70	1.70	2.68
p (Febr. – May)											0.081
											0.661

Table 3. The facilitating effect of L1Hungarian and L2 English while learning L3 German (Group T2). The results are not statistically significant at  $p \leq .05$ .

T2	when trying to understand a new German word			when trying to learn a new German word			when learning grammar rules			with German spelling			with German pronunciation			MEAN
	EN	causes difficulty	HU	EN	causes difficulty	HU	EN	causes difficulty	HU	EN	causes difficulty	HU	EN	causes difficulty	HU	
February	2.50	2.10	1.90	3.20	3.20	3.50	2.33	2.33	3.10	1.80	2.50	2.50	2.73	2.73	2.36	2.36
April	2.80	2.00	1.70	2.80	2.80	2.60	2.80	3.50	2.10	2.10	3.20	2.10	3.02	3.02	2.10	2.10
May	2.60	2.10	2.00	3.00	3.20	2.70	3.20	3.20	2.60	2.60	3.20	2.30	3.04	3.04	2.34	2.34
p (Febr. –May)																0.951

Table 4. The hindering effect of L1Hungarian and L2 English while learning L3 German (Group T2). The results are not statistically significant at  $p \leq .05$

### **4.3 Comparison of T1 and T2**

In order to find out about differences between L3 learners as regards their age and/or proficiency level, Groups T1 and T2's members own perceptions about the effects of their L1 Hungarian and L2 English need to be compared. In the present section I will show, by presenting the gain scores achieved by Groups T1 and T2, what the differences of the facilitating role that L1 Hungarian and L2 English are in the language learning processes of Group T1 and Group T2.

#### **4.3.1 A comparison of the facilitating factors**

A comparison of the values recorded at the time of the initial, February data collection in Groups T1 (Table 1) and T2 (Table 3), we can see that three of the factors (the facilitating effect of L2 English when trying to understand and learn new L3 German words and learning L3 German grammar rules) are evaluated similarly by the two groups. In the case of the remaining two factors (the facilitating effect of L2 English on L3 German spelling and pronunciation) the difference between the two treatment groups was greater: in both cases Group T1 achieved higher values. This indicates that initially Group T1 attributed a larger facilitating role to their L2 English than Group T2.

Similarly, the members of Group T1 (Table 1) scored higher when evaluating the facilitating role of their L1 Hungarian mother tongue than subjects in Group T2 (Table 3) in all aspects at significant levels.

In my view, a possible explanation for the differences between Groups T1 and T2 is that the majority of the members of Group T1 started learning German a few months before the data collection began. Learning German was a new and interesting experience for them, their motivation was clearly visible in the observed lessons. Because of their lower proficiency level in German they are used to making continuous efforts to make discoveries in the new language, and, while doing so, they rely on their knowledge of other languages familiar to them. The above results indicate that while they activate their knowledge of L1 Hungarian and L2 English, they are often successful. The April results are indicators of the processes that started to take place in the subjects' minds, however, more important is the data collected at the end of the treatment period, in May. If we look at the May rows of Tables 1 and 3, we find that Group T1's values increased in all five aspects, while Group T2's values increased in three of the aspects and settled on their original values in two other aspects. The differences of the initial February and the final May values are summarised as gain scores in Tables 5 (the facilitating effect of L2 English) and 6 (the facilitating effect of L1 Hungarian). The figures are marked positive (+) in the tables if there was an increase in the values, marked negative (–) if there was a decrease, and marked zero (0) if there was no change in the given period.

As we can see, the values of Group T1 increased to a significant extent, while those of Group T2 remained unchanged in the case of the facilitating effect of L2 English on understanding and learning new words in German and on the German pronunciation. In the case of grammar and spelling, the values of Group T2 rose to a greater extent, however, the increase did not reach a statistically significant level. This suggests that during the treatment

period the subjects in Group T2 did not perceive development as regards their judgment on how their knowledge of English helps them when encountering and learning new German words. Possibly, by the third year of their German studies they have had plenty of experience with German and, therefore, they are accustomed to a certain amount and way in which they benefit from their English vocabulary knowledge. The values in spelling and in pronunciation, however, did increase in the case of both treatment groups, indicating that a conscious comparison of e.g. the sound-letter correspondences in both languages has proved to be advantageous for the learners.

<b>English helps...: difference between the February and May values</b>							
<b>T1-T2</b>	understand a new German word	Learn a new German word	learn grammar	German spelling	German pron.	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>T1</b>	+0.20	+0.47	+0.70	+0.11	+0.40	<b>+0.33</b>	0.038*
<b>T2</b>	0	0	+0.80	+0.20	+0.30	<b>+0.26</b>	0.081

Table 5. Differences in the initial and final values of the facilitating effect of L2 English while learning L3 German (Treatment groups T1 and T2). The results that are statistically significant at  $p \leq .05$  are marked with an asterisk (\*).

The values indicating the increase in the perception of the facilitating factor of L2 English grammar rose highest in the case of both treatment groups as a result of the treatment sessions. The reason for this might be the fact that while the word-to-word correspondences can in many cases be considered salient, overseeing similarities in the grammatical structures may require more practice and insight into how the languages are structured.

It is interesting to note that while there was an increase in the perception of the facilitating effect of the L2 English over the treatment period, the facilitating effect of Hungarian has slightly decreased in both treatment groups overall (Table 6). It seems that as the treatment sessions' primary aim was to compare L2 English and L3 German, the role of the mother tongue somewhat withdrew by the end of the treatment period.

<b>Hungarian helps...: difference between the February and May values</b>							
<b>T1-T2</b>	understand a new German word	learn a new German word	learn grammar rules	German spelling	German pronunciation	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>T1</b>	-0.33	-0.27	-0.31	0	+0.14	<b>-0.15</b>	0.932
<b>T2</b>	0	-0.40	+0.20	+0.10	-0.30	<b>-0.08</b>	0.661

Table 6. Differences in the initial and final values of the facilitating effect of L1 Hungarian while learning L3 German (Groups T1 and T2). The results are not statistically significant at  $p \leq .05$ .

#### 4.3.2 Comparison of the hindering factors

A comparison of the February values in Tables 2 and 4 reveal the differences between the two treatment groups prior to starting the treatment sessions. As we can see, in four factors Group T1 experienced negative cross-linguistic influence to slightly greater degrees than Group T2 prior to the data collection.

By the end of the data collection period in May, there was an increase in four of the values in both groups to varying degrees and a decrease in one factor in each group. This means that the treatment sessions did not only contribute to the subjects' discovery of the facilitating effect of L2 English when learning L3 German, but, as a negative outcome, the perceived negative cross-linguistic influence also increased. If we compare the total means in Tables 1 and 2, we can see that the extent of increase in the facilitating factors exceeds the hindering ones in the case of Group T1, but the hindering factors are slightly higher in the results of Group T2 (see Tables 3 and 4). This latter result is due to the fact that the perceived hindering effect of the English grammar while learning German grammar rules is particularly high. This is an interesting and contradictory finding, since, as we have seen, the perceived facilitating role of the English grammar is similarly high.

English causes difficulty...: difference between the February and May values							
T1-T2	understand a new German word	learn a new German word	learn grammar rules	German spelling	German pronunciation	MEAN	p
T1	-0.10	+0.31	+0.20	+0.06	+0.48	<b>+0.19</b>	0.484
T2	+0.10	-0.20	+0.87	+0.10	+0.70	<b>+0.31</b>	0.403

Table 7. Differences in the initial and final values of the hindering effect of L2 English while learning L3 German (Treatment groups T1 and T2). The results are not statistically significant at  $p \leq .05$ .

As regards the hindering role of L1 Hungarian, a comparison of the February values in Treatment groups T1 and T2 shows that both in February and in May, Group T1 attributed lower values to the hindering role of Hungarian (Tables 2 and 4). Comparing the initial and the final values we can find that the total means only changed to the extent of minus 0.02, however, there is considerable variation in the individual values, as indicated in Table 8.

Hungarian causes difficulty...difference between the February and May values							
<b>T1-</b>	understand	learn a	learn	German	German	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>T2</b>	a new	new	grammar	spelling	pronunciation		
	German	German	rules				
	word	word					
<b>T1</b>	+0.07	+0.37	-0.22	-0.42	+0.08	<b>-0.02</b>	0.531
<b>T2</b>	0	+0.10	-0.80	+0.80	-0.20	<b>-0.02</b>	0.951

Table 8. Differences in the initial and final values of the hindering effect of L1 Hungarian while learning L3 German (Treatment groups T1 and T2). The results are not statistically significant at  $p \leq .05$ .

## 5. Conclusion

The findings in the present paper indicate that L3 German learners attribute greater facilitating roles to their L2 English than to their L1 Hungarian. The facilitation can be enhanced with special instruction that compares the learners' L2 and L3. The results show that the comparative instruction has different roles at the various stages of instruction, and that it facilitates L3 learning especially at an earlier stage of instruction.

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