GENDER AND TARGET LANGUAGE EFFECT ON BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING

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This paper presents the findings of a research project conducted among Hungarian university students studying at the English and German departments at a university in Budapest, with regard to their beliefs about language learning and discusses the results in relation to another study conducted in Hungary. The research instrument employed in the present study is used a modified Hungarian version of Horwitz's BALLI (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory) to gather data from the participants. Although numerous similar studies have been conducted since the inventory was first published, the present study focuses on investigating not only gender effect, but also the differences in learners' beliefs based on their target language in a university setting. The reason for examining differences caused by the language learnt is that in the past several decades the English language has become the global lingua franca, while German, which had until recently enjoyed a strong regional significance in Central Europe, has lost a considerable amount of importance. Thus it has become relevant to examine whether learners' beliefs about language learning are global or rather influenced by the given language they are studying. The researcher had established principal components that are connected to Horwitz's main themes and deal with attitude towards authentic materials, motivation, language aptitude, language difficulty and language learning approaches. These results show a number of significant differences based on the target language and gender of respondents.

Keywords: learner beliefs; authentic materials; gender

The present paper reports on the results of a study that examined Hungarian first-year university students' beliefs about language learning with the help of an adapted version of a widely used questionnaire, Horwitz's (1987) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Although a significant number of similar studies have been carried out in the past (Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; McCarger, 1999; Horwitz, 1999; Mori, 1999; Sakui & Gaines, 1999; Yang, 1992; Yang 1999; Siebert, 2003; Tercanlioglu, 2005; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006; Bernat & Lloyd, 2007), the present study is unique in that rather than discussing the effect of contexts on students' beliefs about language learning, it examines the role that target language and gender play in forming those beliefs. After a brief

outline of previous studies on beliefs about language learning and the validation process of the adapted version of the inventory, the researcher will introduce and discuss the components established with the help of principal component analysis, and the means of the scales. The means of the principal components will be analyzed to examine whether statistically significant differences can be detected with regard to respondents' target language or gender.

Literature review

Beliefs about language learning

Within the realm of second language acquisition, Victori and Lockhart (1995:224) define beliefs as „general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing learning and about the nature of language learning". Cotterall (1999) claims that beliefs play a decisive role in language learners' successes, failures and experiences. Pintrich and De Groot (1990) argue, for example, that learners who regard their studies as important or interesting show higher degrees of perseverance in their work. Thus, knowledge of students' beliefs about language learning may provide teachers of languages with a better understanding of their students' „expectations of, commitment to, success in and satisfaction with their language classes" (Horwitz, 1988:283). As a result, knowledge of these beliefs enables teachers to make more informed choices about teaching (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005) and adopt „a more sensitive approach to the organization of learning opportunities" (Cotterall, 1999:494) in their language lessons.

Previous BALLI based studies

In the past two decades Horwitz's (1987) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) has been widely employed to investigate, among others, the links between beliefs and gender (Siebert, 2003; Tercanlioglu, 2005; Bernat & Lloyd, 2007), proficiency (Mantle-Bromley, 1995), the impact of culture on beliefs (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; McCarger, 1993; Horwitz, 1999), , the dimensions underlying language learners' beliefs (Sakui & Gaines, 1999) and strategy use (Yang, 1999) in various settings. The extensive research conducted with the inventory shows that beliefs about language learning are context specific (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006). Rieger (2008) also conducted a smaller scale BALLI based study investigating the beliefs of Hungarian secondary students, and the effect of target language and gender on their language learning beliefs.

While Horwitz's (1987) BALLI has been widely used in the research of learners' language learning related beliefs some authors (for example Kunz, 1996) have raised concerns relating to the validity and reliability of the inventory as a research instrument. In this paper the lack of multivariate statistical validation and analysis of the research tool will be discussed. In order to do this, one must observe the origins of the inventory: the instrument was based on the results of a brainstorming session hosted by Horwitz, involving 25 language teachers. The participants were asked to list beliefs that learners often have concerning language learning. Later, based on the suggestions of the participants, Horwitz compiled a list of possible language learning beliefs, and grouped them under various themes. However, since Horwitz only used descriptive statistics to examine the results of the inventory, the factors according to which she collected items

were not generated statistically from the items (Kuntz, 1996), they cannot be defined as factors in a statistical sense, as they were not the actual results of factor analysis. As a consequence, most subsequent studies using the inventory examine the results of the single items. Due to the fallibility of individual items, research experts now argue that multi-item scales should be used thereby maximizing "the stable component that the items share and reduc[ing] the extraneous influences unique to the individual items" (Dörnyei, 2003:36). Based on this argument, the present study will not examine the single items, but will analyze the data that was loaded onto scales via principal component analysis.

The status of German and English in Hungarian education

After the end of compulsory Russian language learning in grammar and secondary schools in 1989, English and German became the leading foreign languages taught in Hungary (for details see Dörnyei & Csizér & Németh, 2006). Since the early 1990s, Hungary has also experienced the steady rise of English to the highest status in language education (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005). This trend is not unique to Hungary. McKay (2003) also writes that as English became the global lingua franca, languages which had strong regional significance have lost a considerable amount of importance, such as German had with its proximity to Hungary. According to Csizér (in press), this can also be detected in the number of Hungarian secondary school pupils choosing to study English rather than German. Rieger (2008) found that Hungarian secondary school aged learners of German were significantly less motivated. Also, unlike their English learning counterparts, German learners did not believe that their target language was important for Hungarians. Given that the afore mentioned study worked with a smaller sample that did not allow for principle component analysis, the researcher finds it relevant to examine whether learners have global beliefs about language learning or if these beliefs are influenced by the language they are studying.

Studies concerning the connection between beliefs and gender

With regard to the effect of gender on beliefs about language learning, past studies have yielded very different results. Bacon and Finnemann (1992) found that the female participants of their study were more motivated, more open to authentic input and had a more positive attitude to target language speakers. Rieger (2008) also found that Hungarian female secondary school students were significantly more open to the use of authentic materials in the target language than their male counterparts (see also Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005). Siebert's (2003) BALLI-based study, examining international university students in the United States, showed significant gender-related differences. The author found males rated their own fellow citizens' abilities more highly, and believed that a language could be learnt in a shorter time than female participants did. More male than female students also believed that the learning of grammar was the most crucial part of language learning, and that practising with audio-visual material was important. Bernat and Lloyd (2007) found only two statistically significant gender based differences: as women were more likely to perceive multilingualism as very intelligent than men were, and also enjoyed talking to natives less than did their male counterparts. Contrary to the studies mentioned above, the results of Tercanlioglu's (2005) BALLI study, set in Turkey, showed no statistically

significant difference between male and female respondents. Since the role of gender is context specific and the results of previous studies yielded such a variety of different results, the effect of gender seems to be an area worth examining in the Hungarian context. Also, through using multiple-item scales, the results are less likely to be subject to extraneous influences.

Method

This study set out to invesigate whether gender or target lagnuage has an effect on learners beliefs about language learning. As the researcher wanted to restrict variables as much as possible to gender and language learnt, the she paid close attention to the choice of participants and as well as to the adaptation of the original instrument to suit the Hungarian context. Furthermore, a careful design and validation process preceded the implementation of the instrument to ensure its appropriacy for Hungarian foreign language learners.

Participants

The participants in the study were 109 first-year language majors at a university in Budapest Hungary. The inventory was administered to 55 German majors and 54 English majors and, who were all partaking in first-year academic writing skills courses at the university. All participants had several years of experience learning the given language and had studied the language they were majoring in, English or German, for 9.8 years on average (N= 108; std= 3.12). Apart from the language of their majors, respondents had experience learning other foreign languages: Nearly all (96.36% ;n=53) of the German majors had studied English, while over half (57.41%; n=31) of the English majors had studied German, while several students reported to have experience learning French (n= 18; 10.1%), Spanish (n=14; 7.9%), Italian (N=10; 5.6%) or other foreign languages (n=25; 14%). The numbers also show that more students studied English than German, as close to all (98.2%, n=107) participants reported to have studied English at one time in their lives, while only 78.9% (n=86) claimed to have studied German. This finding corresponds to the claims made earlier concerning the popularity of English over German in Hungarian education.

Altogether 61% (n= 67) of the participants had taken part in extracurricular language lessons outside their school. Only 34.3% (n=37) of respondents attended secondary school in Budapest, while 63% (n=68) came from secondary schools in the country and the remaining 2.8% (n=3) spent their secondary school years outside Hungary. Both female (n=86) and male (n=23) students took part in the survey, and their average age was 19.3 (N=109; std=1.57).

A number of different learners' characteristics, such as age, language proficiency, setting, cultural background and instruction influence beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1999). Because the inventory was administered at a university level, certain factors such previous instruction or cultural background were impossible to control. However, the vast majority of respondents were close in age, as 97.3% (n=106) of all respondents were between 18 and 22, and had recently been accepted to the same university. Based on the information provided by the teachers of the respondents, the language proficiency of the respondents ranges from upper-intermediate to advanced.

Instrument

Questionnaire

The instrument used as a research tool in the present study is a modified Hungarian version of Horwitz's (1987) inventory. The original BALLI consists of 34 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", and was designed to assess language learners' opinions on a variety of issues connected to language learning. The instrument is called an inventory and not a test because it measures participants' opinions and attitudes towards various second language learning beliefs rather than providing overall scores. Horwitz (1987) distinguished five major areas that the inventory set out to investigate: foreign language aptitude; difficulty of language learning; the nature of language learning; and learning and communication strategies and motivation. Along these lines, the author of the present article added five new items to the inventory that related to attitude towards communicating with non-native speakers and learning through using authentic materials and culture. These new items were intended to tap into information about issues that have become increasingly relevant at present: because English is the language of international communication, communicating with non-native speakers of the language is just as likely as communication with native speakers (Items 22 and 39), this however also questions the importance or place of teaching culture as a part of language education (Item 38). Also, due to globalization and the spread of the Internet, digital television services and multilingual DVDs, students today have access to large amount and wide variety of up-to-date authentic foreign language material very easily (Items 36 and 37) which they can use both in and outside their foreign language classes.

Procedures of validation

As mentioned above, the original version of the BALLI has been extensively used over the past twenty years, thereby gaining validity through repeated administration. Nevertheless, due to the modifications of the instrument for the purposes of the project the validity of the new instrument had to be ensured. This was done in the following way:

1. comparing two Hungarian translations of the inventory
2. use of the think-aloud protocol with two Hungarian language learners.
3. member-check (by a first-year language major at the university)

The instrument had previously been translated into Hungarian by Albert (2004) and Piniel (unpublished). With the help of a Hungarian and English language teacher, the more suitable translation of each item was chosen from on the two Hungarian versions of the instrument. Despite the fact that backward translation is the most common way of ensuring reliability in such cases, context sensitivity and appropriacy were perceived as greater issues by the researcher: It seemed more important that items be meaningful to members of the target population rather than being precise translations of the original inventory items.

The items that were chosen were further tested for reliability using the think-aloud method with a Hungarian learner of English and a Hungarian learner of German. The two think-aloud sessions were supplemented by short follow-up interviews as advised by Elekes (2002) in order to enhance the reliability of the results. Communication with the two informants was

very fruitful. The informants provided advice on wording and made comments concerning a number of the items. Both of the respondents felt the same items were problematic or confusing. The think-aloud sessions resulted in a number of changes were made and new items were added: an additional question (Item 38) was written about everyday culture as both students interpreted the original culture question (Item 8) to be about the high culture ("Geothe" or "Shakespeare") of the target countries. Both informants claimed that they felt less anxiety when speaking in the target language with non-native speakers than with native speakers, consequently the original item "I feel shy when I speak in English/German" was substituted by two separate questions about communication with "I feel shy when I speak in English/German with native speakers" and "I feel shy when I speak in English/German with other non-native speakers" and separate items about wanting to have native and non-native speaker friends. Items about the importance of practising with authentic materials were added, as they seemed relevant based on the literature (for example Bacon & Finnemann, 1992), and seemed to complement the theme of learning and communication strategies well. The adapted questionnaire was also checked by a member of the target population of this study.

Administration of the instrument

Data was collected from participants during their first semester as language majors in one of the two departments. The inventory was administered by the researcher at the beginning of the regularly scheduled Academic Skills seminars. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, the researcher gave a short overview of the nature and aim of the research project and also promised anonymity to the participants.

Methods of Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 13.0) was used to analyze the data. Initially, the data underwent principal component analysis. Principle component analysis is a statistical procedure whereby a set of variables are transformed into a smaller number of variables. The new variables, called principle components, account for as much of the variability in the information as possible (Székelyi & Barna, 2002). This method of data analysis was used order to test the existence of the five original themes identified by Horwitz's (1987). Once these principal components were established, scales were set up and mean averages were calculated.
The researcher employed independent sample t-tests to find any statistically significant differences in the responses to the questionnaire items that could be linked to the gender or to the target language of participants. Apart from principle component analysis and t-tests, SPSS 13.0 was also used to calculate Frequencies and descriptive statistics when analyzing the biographical data of the participants.

Results and Discussion

Defining latent dimensions

Principle component analysis was employed to decrease the number of variables that need to be analyzed and thereby to increase the reliability of the findings. A large number of the original items had to be discarded during the process. Table 1. shows Horwitz's (1987) division of the original items

into her five themes under which one can find the summary of the results of the principle component analysis, including the place of the items added by the researcher. For reasons of clarity, the results of the analysis will be will be discussed under Horwitz's (1987) themes below.

Author(s)					
Horwitz (1987)	Language Aptitude 1 2 6 10 11 16 19 31 34 5	Difficulty 3 4 15 26 35	Nature of Language Learning 8 12 17 24 28 29	Learning and Communication strategies 7 9 13 14 18 21 23 27	Motivation 20 25 30 32 33
Rieger (2008)	Component 1 1 6 31 34	Component 2 4 35	Component 3 12 17 24 29	Component 4 27 *36 37*	Component 5 25 30 33 *39*

Table 1. Summary of principal component analysis results in the light of Horwitz's (1988) themes

Note: Numbers indicate the statements in researcher's own version of the instrument
Note: The numbers in bold refer to items designed by the researcher

Foreign language aptitude

As a result of the principle component analysis the ten items that were originally included under the theme of foreign language aptitude were reduced to four. The paragraph below will discuss both the eliminated and the remaining items, and consider the possible reason for the loss of over 50% of the original items.

The four remaining items dealt with young learners learning languages with greater ease than adults (Item 1), Hungarians are good at learning languages (Item 6), individuals' speaking more than one language as a sign of intelligence (Item 31) and the notion that anyone can learn a foreign language (Item 34). Six variables (Items 2; 5; 10; 11; 16; 19) had to be removed from the original group of items about beliefs related to foreign language aptitude. These items claimed that certain individuals possessed more language aptitude than others in general (Item 2), based respectively on their mathematical proficiency (Item 11) and on their gender (Item 19). The remaining lost items probed whether the participants felt they themselves had language aptitude (Item 16) or believed that they would be able to speak a given language well (Item 5). The established component (Component 1) deals with the existence of language proficiency and the belief that while it is possible for anyone to learn a foreign language, the ability to master more than one foreign language indicates intelligence. Overall, it seems that the items that loaded onto the first principle component made more general inquiries the items that did not.

Difficulty of language learning

Even a greater chuck of the original six items listed under the theme of difficulty of language learning was lost after Component 2 was established. The only two items that did load onto the component dealt with the difficulty of the given foreign language respondents were studying (Item 4) and stated that reading and writing is easier than speaking and listening in the given target language (Item 35). Items claiming that certain languages are easier to learn than others (Item 3), speaking is easier than understanding (Item 26) and others inquiring into the amount of time respondents thought it takes to learn a language well (Item 15) had to be omitted from the component.

The reason for the loss of so many items after principle component analysis can probably be attributed to the problem that is true throughout the instrument, namely that the items that were originally listed under the given themes (in the present case, difficulty of language learning) rather than being variations on the same idea, deal with various separate issues. Of course, these items are not entirely separate: Horwitz's original grouping is correct in the sense that 'difficult of language learning' can easily be used as an umbrella term to list the six items. However, this method of grouping does not necessarily translate into the clustering that is needed for advanced statistical analysis.

Nature of language learning

Four of the original six items loaded onto the third component which was established along the lines of the nature of language learning theme. These items, state that the target language can be best learnt in a target language speaking country (Item 12), the most important part of learning a foreign is learning the vocabulary (Item 17), learning the grammar (Item 24) and learning how to translate from one's mother tongue into the target language (Item 29). Only two of Horwitz's (1987) original items had to be discarded after principle component analysis, namely, "foreign language learning is different from other school subjects" (Item 28) and it is "important to know about target culture to learn a language" (Item 8). Due to the fact that participants are no longer in secondary school, the participants in this study might have found the question irrelevant or confusing. The latter item is the only item in the original group that represents a cultural approach to the nature of language learning, which may be the cause of its omission.

On the surface level, this theme might be seen as the most success, as the majority of the original items were able to load onto the same component. However, at closer examination one can see that the results of this component carry little useful information to language teachers. Since most of the loaded items state a different aspect of language learning to be the "most important", all that can be concluded is that language learners have some conceptions about how to approach learning a foreign language. In practice, this is not the kind of information that language teachers can make use of when planning their lessons, which was one of the aims of the inventory.

Learning and communication strategies

The eight items listed by Horwitz's (1987) under the theme of learning and communication strategies theme were supplemented by three items designed by the researcher, enquiring into shyness felt by respondents when talking to non-native speakers of the target language (Item 22) and the importance of practicing the target language with authentic audiovisual (Item 36) and authentic written material (Item 37). The results of the principal component analysis showed that only one of the original items (Item 27) connected with the importance of using audio materials for language practice loaded onto the fourth component, while two of the new items (36 and 37) were included in this component by the statistical procedures. In total, nine items had to be omitted. Among others, these variables asked respondents about the perceived importance of correct pronunciation (Item 7), not speaking in the foreign language until one can express oneself correctly (Item 9), enjoying practicing via speaking to native target language speakers (Item 13), shyness experienced when talking with native or non-native speakers (Item 21 and

27) of a given language. Two further items inquired into respondents' sensitivity towards making mistakes (Items 14 and 23).

The cause for the loss of such a great number of variables is similar to that of component 2: the original items collected under the theme of learning and communication strategies do not make enquiries relating to the same matters. Indeed, at closer inspection three separate issues emerge: the importance of practising with authentic materials, sensitivity to imperfect language use and contact with native speakers. However, although these are all important and relevant topics for research, not enough items deal with each issue. Unfortunately, the results of the principle component analysis could only establish a component for one of these topics, namely, the importance of practising with authentic materials.

Motivation and expectations

Three of the original items and one new item loaded onto the last component dealt with in this paper. The new item asked respondents to report on their hopes of making friends with non-native target language speakers. The established motivation component included variables dealing with both integrative and instrumental motivation (Dörnyei, 1990; Kormos & Csizér, 2008). These items asked respondents about their wishes to make native (Item 33) and non-native speaker friends (Item 39), to learn the language in order to get to know members of the target culture better (Item 25) and a statement that learning the target language would provide them with a better position in the job market (Item 30).

Only two of the original items, Items 20 ("People in Hungary think learning English/German is important") and 35 ("I want to learn to speak English/German well.") did not load onto the fifth component. The former is more general than the other items relating to motivation, while the latter about speaking the given target language well may be seen as irrelevant to respondents as, having been accepted to language programmes at the university, they may feel that they already speak the languages they are majoring in well. Nonetheless, despite the loss of these two items, a higher percentage of the original items loaded onto the fifth component than the majority of the previously discussed components.

Comparison of the scales

Due to the fact that the five principle components established have partly changed their focus compared to the original five themes, the researcher has renamed them. Table 2 provides a summary of the results. The numbers in the first row indicate the number of the components, these numbers are followed by the new name of the components in brackets.

Table 2. The means of established components

Components	Means	Standard Deviation
Importance of practice with authentic materials (Component 4)	4.12	0.51
Motivation (Component 5)	3.79	0.59
Approaches (Component 3)	3.34	0.54
Language Aptitude (Component 1)	3.33	0.52
Difficulty (Component 2)	3.04	0.74

As it can be seen from Table 2, Component 4 (Importance of practicing with authentic materials) received the highest mean average, 4.12, (N=109, st.d. = 0.51) among the components. The mean average indicates that the participants in the survey believed that practising the target language through engagement with materials (audio, visual or written) including authentic materials is a very important part of language learning. This result echoes the claims made in theoretical papers stating that authentic materials play a crucial role in foreign language learning (Lee, 1995; Mishan, 2004).
Component 5 had the second-highest mean as respondents also indicated high degrees of motivation. The mean average of this scale was 3.79 (N=109, st.d. = 0.59), shows that on the whole respondents reported that they felt motivated. However, due to the fact that all of the respondents were language majors, high motivation was not completely unexpected (see similar results in Kormos & Csizér & Menyhárt & Török, 2008).

The means of Components 1 (language aptitude) and 3 (Approaches) were very close. The mean of Component 3 was 3.34 (N=109, st.d.=0.52) which suggests that respondents lean towards believing that there are certain approaches, such as focus on learning vocabulary or grammar, that make language learning successful. The average for Component 1 (m= 3.33, N=109, st.d.=0.54) implies that participants are more open to the possibility that language aptitude exists and agree that while everyone is capable of learning a foreign language, the ability to speak at least two foreign languages indicates intelligence.

Component two received the lowest average (m=3.04, N= 109, st.d.=0.74) among the components. This component deals with the perceived difficulty of language learning and the relative difficulty of mastering reading and writing skills over speaking and listening skills in a foreign language. This result seems to imply that the participants of the survey felt that their target language is of medium difficulty, and that respondents not notice a difference between the difficulties of different language skills. However, this result will be re-examined in the following chapter.

Differences linked to gender and taget language

The researcher used independent sample t-tests to investigate differences that could be linked to gender or target language. The results of the t-tests suggest that the both gender of the respondents and target language have effect some of the components, as a number of statistically significant differences were found.

Gender effect

In connection to gender, the independent samples t-test found only one statistically significant difference ($\rho<0.05$) which was in relation to Component 3. The statistical analysis showed that the mean of male respondents (n=23, m=3.09, st.d.=0.56) was significantly lower than that of female respondents (n=83, m=3.41, st.d.=0.52). Therefore, it seems that female participants were more likely than their male peers to believe that some approaches were important in language learning (see Table 4 for summary).

Table 3. Differences related to gender effect

Component	Sub-group	Mean	Stanard Deviation
Approaches (Component 3)	Female	3.41	0.52
	Male	3.09	0.56

These findings did not correspond with the findings of earlier studies about the relationship between beliefs and gender. Contrary to the reports of Bacon and Finnemann (1992) and Rieger (2008), the results of the present research project do not indicate statistically significant differences in the attitudes of males and females in connection to practising with authentic materials (Component 1). Nor, was there any evidence of gender effect on language learning motivation (Bacon & Finnemann, 1992). The results also failed to suggest significant gender based differences regarding respondents beliefs about language aptitude. The reason for this may be due to the relatively small number of male respondents in the current sample or the questionable reliability of analyzing single items or to a certain extent attributed to the fact that gender roles are culture bound.

Target language effect

The independent sample t-tests found two statistically significant differences ($\rho<0.05$) that could be linked to the target language of the participants. These differences were found in respondents' beliefs about target language difficulty and language learning approaches. (Table 3 summarizes these results.)

Table 4. Differences caused by target language effect

Component	Sub-Groups	Mean	Standard Deviation
Difficulty (Component 2)	English majors	2.77	0.66
	German majors	3.31	0.71
Approaches (Component 3)	English majors	3.12	0.52
	German majors	3.57	0.47

In terms of Difficulty (Component 2), German majors were more likely (n=55, m=3.31, st.d.= 0.71) to view their target language and speaking or listening in that language as difficult than English majors (n=54, m=2.77, st.d.=0.66). This result echoes Rieger's (2008) study among Hungarian secondary school students, where upper-intermediate learners of German also found their target language to be significantly more difficult than their English learning schoolmates. This significant difference between how learners of German and English perceive the difficulty of the two languages in general and in terms of given skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) due to the popularity of the communicative language teaching approach among English teachers, which is echoed in most EFL course books, stresses the importance of speaking and listening and learning through communicating, this provides the learners of English as a foreign language with more opportunities to practice speaking and listening than perhaps learners of German would have. Also, the presence of for example noun inflections in the German language which is absent from Hungarian and English grammar might also be accountable for the difference of perceived difficulty to a certain degree.

With regard to the independent t-test results of Component 3 (Approaches), it seems that learners of German (n=55, m= 3.57, st.d.=0.47) were more inclined to agree that certain approaches to language learning were useful, such as translation, learning the grammar or memorizing the vocabulary than learners of English were (n=54, m= 3.12, st.d.=0.52). In the context of English and German language learners in Hungary, these beliefs may also suggest a more traditional attitude to language education than the communicative approach of learning by doing. However, it is important to note that this component also included an item which stated that one could learn a language best in the target country. This item implies that one can learn a language best through communicating with members of the target culture. There might seem to be a discrepancy between this statement and the statement about the communicative teaching of English language. However, the researcher would suggest that while learner of English have ample opportunity to practice the global lingua franca whenever they leave Hungary, this type of practice is more or less restricted to German-speaking countries in the case of German.

Although due to the small sample size and the lack of multivariate scales, Rieger's (2008) earlier project was not as reliable as the present study, the researcher found a significant difference in the motivation of learners of English and German in a secondary school setting. Such a great difference could not be detected in the case of language majors, who seem to all be quite motivated, hence choosing the given language programmes.

Conclusion and limitations

This research project investigated the beliefs university language majors held about language learning, and tested the possible effect of gender and target language on these beliefs. The outcome of the study indicated that both gender and target language play a role in the language learning beliefs of first year German and English majors.

In the hopes of obtaining more reliable results, the researcher employed principle component analysis and established five multi-item scales, namely, Language Aptitude, Difficulty, Approaches, Importance of practising with authentic materials and Motivation. Each of these scales corresponds to one of Horwitz's (1987) themes, some more loosely than others. Out of the five components, the importance of practicing with authentic materials and motivation received the highest means, which suggests that the participants of the survey were motivated and felt authentic materials to be important in language learning.

Results of the independent sample t-tests suggested gender related differences in connection with the perceived importance of some language learning approaches and techniques. Moreover, the t-tests also showed that target language had an effect on the importance learners attach to some approaches towards language learning as well as on how learners view the difficulty of the foreign language they are studying.

Due to the size of the sample (N=109), more research is needed to investigate these issues. Further research could examine a larger sample of university students, students majoring in other languages or non-language majors, and given that beliefs may be influence by age, other age-groups. The researcher would like to encourage research with secondary school learners to examine the differences in motivation that seemed to be very much present at secondary school (Rieger, 2008) but have a detrimental effect on language learning.

Also, as suggested above, the inventory needs to be re-examined and revised so it can become a statistically more reliable research instrument. Despite having been able to establish five separate components, a great part of the original BALLI items was lost in the process: only 13 out of the 34 original items loaded onto the components. This unfortunately meant that many relevant and interesting topics were discarded.

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