

Foreign Language Teaching Methodology

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KNOWLEDGE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND PLURILINGUAL COMPETENCE UPON COMPLETING HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

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***Summary** – The article presents the results of the research regarding first year student opinions about knowledge of foreign languages upon the completion of high school and on the level of competence in the first and second foreign language. Two factors that influence competence in a foreign language are tested – the length of studying and use of the language in non-teaching situations. Attitudes on the influence of prior knowledge of the mother tongue (L1) and first foreign language (L2) on learning another foreign language (L3) was statistically analyzed. A significant correlation and their language and language learning awareness have been established. The same goes for the correlation between participants' ability to establish relationships of L1 and L2 with L3 and the role of the teacher in promoting plurilingualism. A positive correlation was also confirmed between participants' language and language learning awareness and the role of the teacher. It can be concluded that there is a need for more intense, theoretical and practical considerations of the possibility of the third language methodology and didactics within both foreign language and mother tongue teaching.*

***Key words:** first foreign language (L2), knowledge of foreign languages, language awareness, language learning awareness, the mother tongue (L1), plurilingual teaching methodology or third language teaching methodology, plurilingualism, second foreign language (L3)*

INTRODUCTION

Awareness of the importance of mobility and language communicative ability of European citizens for mutual understanding, economic and cultural cooperation in processes of European integration has brought about the redefinition

of foreign language knowledge and communicative competence and expectations from foreign language teaching at the level of language policies of European institutions. The Council of Europe in its Recommendations R(82) 18 and R(98) B has indicated the importance of knowing modern languages, as well as the need to develop teaching methodologies with the aim to meet communicative needs and maintain the rich variety of European languages. The European Union also promotes language diversity through various projects and emphasizes the importance of prior knowledge of languages in the context of lifelong learning. „The aim is no longer seen as simply achieving “mastery” of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the “ideal of a native speaker” as the ultimate goal. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. This implies, of course, that the languages offered in educational institutions should be diversified and students given the opportunity to develop plurilingual competence. (CEFR¹, 2005, pp. 2-5). In addition to the expectation that every young European should, besides mother tongue, learn two foreign languages² throughout compulsory education, another aim is the need to teach students how to establish links within their overall language knowledge and experience.

The educational policy in the Republic of Croatia follows the aims of European language policies to an extent. Since 2005, the Council of Europe’s Common European Reference for Languages has been available in the Croatian language (Cro. *ZEROJ*). In the meantime, European language portfolios for various age groups have been prepared and validated. Within the language programs of the Council of Europe they are considered instruments which encourage learning foreign languages and promote multilingualism in general. In the proposal of the *National curriculum framework for preschool education and compulsory education in the primary and high school* (Cro. *Prijedlog Nacionalnog okvirnog kurikulumuma za predškolski odgoj i opće obvezno obrazovanje u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi*), in the context of defining common aims of language-communication subjects, it has been said that in addition to developing language-communicative competence, one of the aims is to „develop language and language learning awareness including strategies and techniques of language learning and the use of prior knowledge of languages and previous experiences in learning languages as well as self-assessment and peer assessment“ (*National curriculum framework...* (proposal), 2008, pp. 25-26). The fact that the first foreign language is introduced in the first grade of primary school and that an elective second foreign language

¹ Common European Framework for Languages

² Through the White paper „Teaching and Learning Towards a Knowledge Society“, 1995, the European Commission defined the aim that all European citizens should speak two foreign languages of the Community in addition to their mother tongue. This was just one of the stimuli for the term plurilingualism to take the center position in discussions on educational and language policies, but also in considerations for foreign language teaching methodologies in further developments of foreign language teaching (cf. Behr, 2007, p. 8).

is offered in grade 4 shows that foreign languages hold an important place in educational programs. Formally, one could say that Croatia is in harmony with European trends in educational and language policies, however, the question that arises is the current state of practice, i.e. what are the achievements of students upon completing compulsory education and what type of teaching practice (mother tongue and foreign language) do they emerge from.

Therefore, the research presented in this article has focused on examining plurilingual competences of students in their initial year of study, i.e. upon completing high school or general education. The aim was to answer two sets of questions:

The first is directed toward the number of languages which students have learned and the evaluation of their competence level in those languages.

The second set of questions is directed to the use of prior knowledge and previous experience in learning languages. The aim was to check whether participants believe that prior knowledge and prior experience in learning the mother tongue and first foreign language help in learning a second foreign language. The second aim was to test whether participants, in addition to knowing two foreign languages, have developed language awareness and language learning awareness as two basic conditions for further development of plurilingual competence within the course of study and lifelong learning.

TERMINOLOGY DIFFERENTIATION

Within this paper, the concept of plurilingualism is used to denote individual or personal plurilingualism of a particular speaker (cf. Mißler, 1999, pp. 6-8) who becomes aware of his/her entire language knowledge in the sense of relating mother tongue knowledge, first foreign language and other languages which he is learning in a chronological way or simultaneously, and the languages are “interrelated and in constant interaction” (CEFR, 2005, p. 4). According to Mißler, referring to M. Wandruszku (Mißler, 1999, str. 7), such plurilingualism cannot be observed as a “state, but a process which keeps recurring and reviving in a person’s head”, which stresses the potential of plurilingualism in the sense of lifelong learning. With the aim of achieving conceptual preciseness, it should be stated that the concept of plurilingualism explained in that way differs from the concept of multilingualism which is used to denote coexistence of different languages in a given society or knowledge of several languages (CEFR, 2005, p. 4). It should also be stressed that in this text plurilingualism as a competence, which should be encouraged and developed parallel to specific knowledge of particular languages, is seen solely in the teaching context within the teaching process – the process of language learning, and not as a competence obtained by acquiring languages in a multilingual community or family community. Sarter (2006, p. 307) stresses that students on their way to plurilingualism should be encouraged when they learn to

observe parallels between languages and can carry out and question hypotheses based on prior knowledge of language.

In the plurilingual approach to language learning, emphasis is essentially given to the difference between learning the first foreign language and learning the second foreign language, that is, any subsequent foreign language, since prior knowledge and experience can have a key role in developing learning strategies starting with the second language. „The difference according to the psychology of learning between the second and third language, i.e. language x, is not so great as the difference between learning the first and second foreign language “ (cf. Mißler, 1999, str.10). In literature the following tags for language are most frequently found and they have also been applied in this paper: L1 mother tongue, L2 first foreign language L3³ second foreign language, L4 third foreign language, etc. (cf. Hufeisen, 1999, p. 47). In literature coming from the German speaking area there is a difference between the so called tertiary language (*Tertiärsprache*) which signifies any foreign language learned after having learned one foreign language, most often German after English, and the third language in general (*Drittsprache*), denoting the third language with which a child has grown up (cf. Hufeisen, 1999, p. 4). The first concept (*Tertiärsprache*) is important being a key part of the didactic approach called – tertiary language teaching methodology (*Tertiärsprachendidaktik*)⁴. Third language teaching methodology is not a completely new didactic concept, but refers to precisely defined teaching and learning of third languages, with respect to the characteristics of teaching and learning each subsequent language (cf. Neuner, 2003, p. 24). The concept of plurilingual teaching methodology is used synonymously although it does not represent a type of teaching methodology of particular languages. What is more, it contains teaching methodology principles which should be integrated into teaching methodologies of various foreign languages and the mother tongue, in order to expand the perspective and to establish links within students’ prior knowledge on the one hand, and on the other hand to create conditions for further acquisition of language knowledge in the sense of lifelong learning (cf. Legutke, 2006, p. 302).

Within the framework of third language teaching methodology there are two concepts that require explanation and which are used in presenting the research results. Those concepts are *interference* and *transfer*. The concept of interference is related to the negative side of interlingual contacts, where one language hinders the learning of another and leads to mistakes. Hufeisen observes that such

³ L3 is sometimes referred to defining acquisition/learning of a second or any other foreign language, not necessarily the third language in sequence (cf. Mißler, 1999, pp. 10-12).

⁴ In order to emphasize the difference between the concepts *Tertiärsprache* and *Drittsprache* we suggest that in the Croatian language we use the term tertiary language and third language. The term *Tertiärsprachendidaktik* suggests the use of the plural form third languages in the Croatian language, since the principles of this didactic approach are made up of the characteristics of learning and teaching each subsequent language after the first foreign language and not only the third language chronologically. The plural form indicates the prospective future and potential for broadening the overall knowledge of language.

understanding could be found in the literature on teaching methodology especially during the 1960s of the last century, and the consequence was the recommendation that languages should be separated in the minds of students so as to avoid mistakes (cf. Hufeisen, 1999, pp. 4 – 5; Neuner, 2003, p. 16). However, firstly students cannot separate language from other knowledge in their minds, and secondly they learn from mistakes if they become aware of them (cf. *ibid.*, p. 26). Hufeisen (1999, p. 5) concludes that „gradual coexistence of languages does not lead to mistakes only, but that foreign language teaching can profit from the coexistence of different foreign languages (transl. I.H.Č.). The concept of *transfer* encompasses two types of transfer. On the one hand this can refer to transfer of specific language elements from one language to another⁵, while on the other hand it can refer to transfer of learning and communication strategies. Neuner differentiates two areas of transfer. The first area refers to the expansion of the overall knowledge of language and development of transfer bridges (*Transferbrücken*) between L1 – L2 – L3 – Ln, where language affinity in the sense of language typology has an important role. Suitable areas for transfer, especially among related languages, are the vocabulary, including word meaning and their formation, but also areas of grammar structures, relating to basic syntactic rules of difference, e.g. statements and questions, etc. The second area of transfer refers to raising language learning awareness through conversation about language learning process and experience, which is an important element of the third language teaching methodology concept, in the sense of relying on the existing experience and strategies in learning the mother tongue and foreign language at the time when facing a new foreign language (cf. Neuner, 2003, p. 26.).

RESEARCH RESULTS

Starting from the above mentioned conceptual settings, the further passages of the paper focus on the research results conducted on a sample of 237 participants, first-year students of the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb. After explaining the manner in which data obtained from questionnaires were analyzed and elaborating on general participant information, the research results of plurilingual competence will be structured according to the mentioned sets of questions: a) knowledge of foreign languages at the end of secondary education and use of the same and b) participants' attitudes as to whether prior knowledge and experience in L1 and L2 learning has helped them in learning L3 and whether there is an indicator of the developed language and learning language awareness.

⁵ For example, students know how to form comparative in the English language using the suffix –er and whether consciously or unconsciously the transfer of that linguistic element will help in acquiring the comparative in German as a second foreign language.

Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire used for obtaining data consisted of two parts. The first part obtained data on general participant information, gender, age mother tongue, participant education and their possible longer stay abroad. The first part also included participant foreign language, the order in which they have learned them and the duration of learning as well as the self-evaluation in their language skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) for each of the languages mentioned. The participants also had to mark the frequency of language use in non-teaching situations (e.g., Internet searches, electronic mail, reading professional literature and other areas). At the end of the first part participants evaluated their motivation for learning foreign languages, marking it on a scale of 1-5 according to the importance of knowing foreign languages.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of three subsets of questions and focused on plurilingual experiences of participants. The questions also encompasses experiences from foreign language classes, experiences relating to the relationship between languages in general and experience relating to the relationship between particular languages which the participants use. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using the statistical program SPSS (*Statistical Package for Social Sciences*), and the most frequently used methods were statistical descriptive analysis, T-test, ANOVA and correlation.

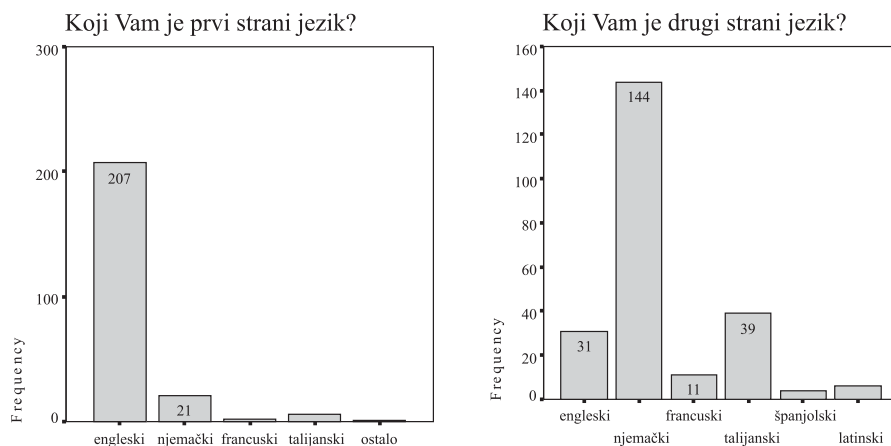
General participant information: gender, age, mother tongue, education

The number of young women 65.8% was almost doubled in comparison to young men 34.2% among the participants. The majority, 73% of the participants were born in 1989, which means that at the time of the research in January 2009, they were between 19 and 20 years old. 24.5% of the participants is a year younger (born in 1990), and only 2.5% of the participants do not belong to any of the two major groups according to age. The mother tongue of all participants is Croatian. Referring to high school education, the largest group 79.7% are students who have completed general or another type of grammar school, while 33% of the participants have completed language grammar schools. Only 5.9% of the students were enrolled in vocational schools or schools of art, and one student (0.4%) was enrolled into another school. A negligible number of 4.2% of participants spent some time during compulsory education abroad, and therefore that element was not considered important for the analysis. However, in the analysis of the entire language experience, the preschool education with foreign languages seemed to be important. Almost half of the participants 48.5% gave an affirmative answer to the question: *Did you attend a foreign language program during your preschool education in kindergarten or playschools?* English holds first place with 43.5% as the foreign language program attended, followed by Italian with 2.5% in second place and German with 1.8% in third place.

Results according to the knowledge of two foreign languages at the end of high-school education, and level of competence in L2 and L3

All of the participants learned one foreign language in compulsory education, and only two of 237 participants did not learn a second foreign language. Therefore, we can say that almost the entire sample N=237 learned two foreign languages in their compulsory education.

Graph 1: Languages learned as L2 (first foreign language) and as L3 (second foreign language)



Graph 1 clearly shows the dominance of English as the first foreign language, 87.3% of the participants as opposed to German 8.9% (21 participants). Regarding the second foreign language, German holds a dominant position with 144 participants or 60.8%. What can be observed is that Italian comes in second place with 16.5% as L3 and English comes in third place with 13.1%.

Of the other data gathered, Latin as a classical language holds the status of the third foreign language (L4) with 68.8%, however if this is disregarded and the first live language is taken into consideration the results show that Italian with 12.7% is clearly the third foreign language for the majority participants. With the research conducted the following order of languages was obtained: English L2, German L3 and Italian L4 and this corresponds to the research of the European Commission *Eurobarometer* dating from 2005⁶, according to which English has a 43% of representation, German with 33% and Italian with 12% are the three languages which Croatian citizens speak besides their mother tongue, Croatian.

The primary conclusion coming from the data analyzed is that there is a dominant constellation in the first two foreign languages – German as L3 after English L2, while the greatest percentage as third live foreign language (L4) is

⁶ *Eurobarometer* 2005 encompasses 25 countries, members of the European Union and countries awaiting membership including Croatia. The agency Puls conducted the research on a sample of N=1000 participants older than 15.

Italian. This confirms the trend in Croatia which is evident in some other European countries, and that is that German is more often learned as the second foreign language L3 after English (Neuner, 1999, p. 15).

It was established statistically and formally, that participants upon the completion of high-school have the knowledge of two foreign languages which brings Croatia closer to the European standard that every young European should learn at least two foreign languages in compulsory education. The question that arises is how they evaluate their knowledge within the receptive and productive language skills for both languages. In other words, can it be expected that participants will have adequate knowledge and use of both languages in written and spoken communication. The following tables (Graph 2) offer an overview of self-evaluation for each of the four language skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking English (L2) and German (L3). The participants marked their competence in each of the skills on a scale from 1-5⁷.

Graph 2: Results of the self-evaluation of language skills for English as L2 and German as L3

L2 – ENGLISH		Your reading skills in English?	Your listening skills in English?	Your writing skills in English?	Your speaking skills in English?
N	Valid	237	237	237	237
Mean		4,5823	4,4895	4,1435	4,2321
Std. Deviation		,58093	,66135	,76779	,71969

L3 – GERMAN		Your reading skills in German?	Your listening skills in German?	Your writing skills in German?	Your speaking skills in German?
N	Valid	177	177	177	178
Mean		3,7740	2,9492	3,0904	2,7079
Std. Deviation		1,03617	1,02398	1,10924	1,07043

The table shows that participants believe that they are highly skilled in all four skills in the English language, and that the reading skills received an average grade of 4.58 shows a tendency for good use. The data that the writing skill received the lowest grade 4.14 is interesting and could serve as a starting point for further research such as the effect of writing using a word processor and computer tools for checking spelling on independent writing or the representation of tasks focused on the writing skill in teaching materials or in English language teaching. As can be seen from the cumulative graph 3 there is a somewhat lower level of competence in productive skills than in receptive skills.

⁷ The 1-5 scale had the following explanations: 1 –inadequate knowledge; 2– minimal knowledge, 3 – average knowledge, 4 – good knowledge; 5 very good knowledge.

In German as the second foreign language (L3) the level of competence is in general significantly lower. As opposed to writing in English as the first foreign language (L2), in German, the oral skill is evaluated as the area with the lowest level of competence. For both languages there is a tendency of lower competence in productive skills as opposed to receptive skills (Graph 3).

When the total level of competence for L2 and L3 is compared a significant difference is observed which can be formulated in the following way: „I have a good level of competence in the English language as opposed to average competence in German“. That difference was established by applying the T-test (Graph 3) which showed a statistically significant difference, for the tested variables, total level of competence in L2 and total level of competence in L3.

Graph 3: Descriptive statistical presentation of the results of self-evaluation and the results of the T-test of the difference between knowledge in L2 and L3

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
L2 ENG – receptive skills	237	2,50	5,00	4,5359	,53061			
L2 ENG – productive skills	177	2,00	5,00	4,0028	,68153			
L3 GER – receptive skills	177	1,00	5,00	3,3616	,93802			
L3 GER – productive skills	177	1,00	5,00	2,9040	1,00104			
L2 ENG – total level of competence	177	2,50	5,00	4,2768	,51847	109,746	176	,000
L3 GER – total level of competence	177	1,00	5,00	3,1328	,90729	45,937	176	,000

The considerations for the cause of such differences can lead in several directions. However, considering the limited space of the paper the presentation focuses on two factors, the difference in the length of study of L2 and L3 and the difference in using both languages in a non-teaching situation.

The hypothesis for the first factor was that longer learning of a particular foreign language should result in better use of that language (a), and for the other that the frequency of using a particular language in a non-teaching situation should have a positive impact on developing competences in that language (b).

a) Referring to the duration of foreign language learning the following structure of participants was established: 45.6% had been learning English for twelve of more years, 10.5% for ten years, 37.1% eight to nine years, and only 5.9% for four years. The majority of the participants 36.3% learned German as the L3 for four years, followed by 32.9% of the participants who have learned it for eight to nine years, and only 5.1% learned German for twelve of more years. However, where it has been learned for twelve or more years and in cases where

it has been learned eight to nine years German was L2, whereas it had been L3 for four years of learning. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that in the case of the English language the starting hypothesis on the relationship between the length of study and the competence level in a foreign language is not justified, because a statistically significant difference among the subgroups of participants according the length of learning English as L2 or L3 was not established (Graph 4). In participants' self-evaluations it was observed that the length of learning the English language has no major role. Participants who have learned English for four years and those who have learned it for eight years evaluate themselves as having good competence of the language.

Different results were obtained for German as L2 or L3 (Graph 4). ANOVA showed that the initial hypothesis was correct in establishing a statistically significant differences between subgroups of participants according to years of learning a language. The table shows that participants with four years of study say that they have minimal knowledge of the language, while participants with eight or nine years of learning mark their knowledge as average with a tendency towards good (3.52).

Graph 4: Results in establishing the relationship between length of learning L2 and L3 and the overall level of competence in L2 and L3

Dependent variable: ENGLISH (L2) – overall level of competence

How long have you been learning English?	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	df	F	Sig.
12 or more years	4,3301	,45136	78	4	1,845	,122
Ten years	4,4706	,49119	17			
Eight to nine years	4,2164	,59971	67			
4 years	4,0769	,38709	13			
2 years	3,8750	,53033	2			
Total	4,2768	,51847	177			

Dependent variable: GERMAN (L3) – overall level of competence

How long have you been learning German?	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	df	F	Sig
12 or more years	3,8409	,91701	11	5	11,779	,000
Ten years	3,5000	,00000	2			
Eight to nine years	3,5230	,74294	76			
4 years	2,7500	,83055	82			
2 years	1,9167	,87797	3			
Other	2,0833	,52042	3			
Total	3,1328	,90729	177			

b) The results of the research proved the hypothesis about the importance of using the foreign language outside of the teaching context for language competence. A statistically significant difference was established in the use of German and English language⁸ relating to the use of L2 and L3 in everyday situations such as: Internet searches, electronic communication, chat, reading professional literature, reading literary texts, reading magazines, watching TV programs, listening to conversational radio programs, listening to music, travel, etc. For German as L3 not one of the activities mentioned obtained a mean higher than 3, which means that the participants rarely use the German language in all of the situations cumulatively. Considering the type of activity the greatest level of frequency of occurrence was established in watching TV programs (2.68). For English, in four out of 10 activities have a mean lower than 3 (chatting, reading professional literature, reading literary texts and listening to radio), three activities are between 3.02 and 3.72 (reading magazines: 3.02; electronic correspondence: 3.37 and travel: 3.72) while the remaining three activities, listening to music (4.74); Internet searches (4.58) and watching TV programs (4.34) are frequent to very frequent at frequency of occurrence level.

From the data mentioned it can be seen that participants use the German language almost never or rarely in non-teaching situations, while English is used often. Regarding the English language, there are four activities that occur within the “very often” category which are mentioned in that order: listening to music (81%), Internet searches (67.1%), watching TV programs (56.1%) and travel (32.5%). Considering that the percentage of participants within the “very frequent” category for the German language is between 0.8 and 5.5 it is more beneficial to elaborate on the category “frequent”. The same activities as for English can be found in that category however in different order: watching TV programs (12.2%), travel (8.4%), listening to music (5.5%) and Internet searches (4.6%).

From the above mentioned, it can be concluded that both languages are primarily used for the same activities but with a different frequency of occurrence. Therefore, the relationship between the frequency of use and the entire level of knowledge in the skills in their first and second foreign language has been tested. For both languages a statistically significant correlation between language use in non-teaching situations and the total language competence in that language was established (Graph 6). We can therefore conclude that higher exposure to authentic language sources can contribute to better knowledge in that language, but also that bigger self-confidence in one language can be related to frequent use of that language outside conscious language learning environment.

⁸ On a scale from 1-5 participants were supposed to mark the frequency of use of each of the two languages in particular situations. The descriptive values were: 1 – never, 2 – almost never, 3 – rarely, 4 – often, 5 – very often.

Graph 5: Correlation between the overall level of competence L2 and L3 and using L2 and L3 in an extracurricular context

	Internet searches	Watching TV	Listening to music	Travel
ENG (L2) –overall level of competence	,219**	,316**	,325**	,260**
G (L3) – overall level of competence	,474**	,501**	,445**	,481**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Participant attitudes on the influence of prior knowledge and experience in L1 and L2 on learning L3

Starting from the principle of plurilingual teaching methodology that mother tongue (L1) and each consecutive foreign language should be interrelated i.e., integrated (cf. Neuner, 2003, p. 28), the answers relating to the influence of prior knowledge and mother tongue experience on learning another foreign language were analyzed, i.e. the influence of Croatian and English on learning German. Regarding the influence of English (L2) on German (L3) the assumption is that the influence could be more prominent than the influence of Croatian (L2) with respect to L2 and L3 belonging to the group of Germanic languages⁹.

Referring to the question: *How much does knowledge of Croatian help you in learning German?* The majority of the participants 40.9% replied that their L1 neither helps nor distracts them. The second highest percentage of participants 16% replied that L1 helps them and only 4.2% replied that it helps them very much. In addition to questions about the influence of the mother tongue on L3 learning, there was a question on a separate area of vocabulary: *How much does knowledge of Croatian help in understanding particular words in German?* The results obtained show no significant difference in relation to the first question. 44.3% of the participants believe that L1 does not help them nor hinders them, while 18.1% of the participants believe that it helps them in understanding words. The percentage of participants who believe that L1 hinders their learning of L3 is relatively low. The cumulative percentage for both questions in the category “is a big obstacle” is 8.2% and in the category “is an obstacle” is 7.2%. The above mentioned leads to the conclusion that the influence of prior knowledge and experience of mother tongue in learning German as a second foreign language is

⁹ Neuner (2003, p. 25) comments on that assumption: „When there is a narrow language-typological affinity (...) – such as in the case of English and German – based on the same or similar language forms there are relatively broad transitions between languages (*Übergänge zwischen den Sprachen*) which students recognize easily – e.g. in the area of vocabulary but also in the area of grammatical structures (sentence structure, word formation) which lead to recognition transfer (*Wiedererkennstransfer*) in the form of setting hypotheses on similarities (with respect to the form and meaning in language)“ (transl. I.H.Č.)

neutral since the established percentages do not show a high level of transfer, or a high level of interference.

The participants' answers in this research did not confirm the assumption on higher influence of the English language as L2 on the learning of German as L3. 48.1% of the participants believe that English neither helps them nor hinders them in learning German. Only 17.7% believe that L2 helps them in learning L3. From the results obtained a significant level of interferences cannot be observed since only 7.2% of the participants believe that English hinders them in learning German. However, if attention is given to participants' answers on the influence of L2 and L3 on understanding vocabulary, syntax and texts which in third language teaching methodology is considered the basis and foundation for learning¹⁰, the results are somewhat different. The question: *To what extent does knowledge of English help you in understanding individual words in German?*, 25.3% of the participants answered that it helped, and 35.4% has a neutral attitude. It is in this area, vocabulary, that the participants' replies in the direction of positive transfer and replies with neutral attitude come closest. Replies to the question: *To what extent does knowledge of English help you in understanding sentences, i.e., texts in German?* again show greater differences between the neutral mean and the possible positive transfer. With sentences, 47.3% of the participants are neutral, and 11.4% see a positive influence of L2. In global understanding of texts, the first group consists of 46.0% of participants and the second 16.0% of participants. The above data shows that the sample tested did not yield a considerable number of participants who had an actual experience in relating prior knowledge of L1 and L2 while learning L3.

These results should certainly be viewed in relation to the language and language learning awareness of participants, which has been tested through the following two questions: *How often have you observed similarities and differences between languages while learning a foreign language?* and *How often have you asked for explanations/comments from your teachers relating to language relatedness, similarities and differences between two or more languages?*. 42.6% of the participants answered the first question with "often", and 25.7%, answered "rarely". 12.2% of the participants answered the second question with "often", and 28.7% with „rarely“. The conclusion is that a significant number of participants observe similarities and differences; however they have not developed the habit and skill of talking about language and the process of language learning.

The answer to the question about the experience of connecting languages which participants should have acquired within foreign language learning was obtained through the following questions: *How often have your foreign language teachers warned you of the differences between languages?* and *How often did*

¹⁰ Neuner (2003, pp. 27 – 32) differentiates between five basic principles of third language teaching methodology: cognitive learning, understanding as the basis for learning, focus on content, focus on text, beign economical in the learning process.

you have a chance to solve tasks and exercises with the aim of relating knowledge of different languages? The first question was answered by slightly more than a third of the participants (36.7%) with “often” and somewhat less than a third (31.6%) with “rarely”. The question referring to actual tasks was answered by only 11% with “often” and 28.3% with “rarely”. Based on that it can be concluded that, from the student perspective, a particular number of teachers warn about the similarities and differences between language, however does not reach for third language teaching principles and methodologies in order to develop plurilingual competences in students in the sense of relating cumulative knowledge of language and development of transfer bridges which can make language learning more efficient and economical (cf. Neuner, 2003, p. 31).

Through correlation analysis, a significant correlation was established between participant awareness of the language and language learning and the influence of L1 and L2 on learning L3, between the role of teacher and influence of L1 and L2 on L2 and the highest degree of correlation significance between the role of the teacher and participant awareness of language and language learning (Graph 6).

Graph 6: Correlation between the influence of L1 and L2 on the learning of L3 and participant awareness of learning and the role of the teacher in motivating the development of that awareness

Transfer bridge between	Participants' language and language learning awareness	Teacher role	Participants' language and language learning awareness
L1 CRO and L3 GER	,301**	,216**	
L2 ENG and L3 GER	,314**	,247**	
TEACHER ROLE			,545**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

These results allow for the following conclusions:

1. Openness of foreign language teaching to plurilingual perspective and stimulating plurilingual competence would influence the development of language awareness and awareness of the language learning process.
2. This awareness could help in better use of prior language knowledge and experience from L1 and L2 in learning L3, consequently, learning languages and development of communicative competence in the context of life-long learning could be more effective.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research results showed that the participants have knowledge of two foreign languages at the end of their high-school education, and German as the second foreign language (L3) after English as the first foreign language (L2) is the

dominant constellation of foreign languages. Italian is the third most often learned live foreign language. Referring to first and second foreign language competence, a significant difference was established which can be summarized as good English language use abilities, and average abilities in using the German language. In examining the influence of length of learning a language on abilities in using English a statistically significant difference was not established, while with the second foreign language, i.e. German there is a statistically significant difference. The analysis of the results relating to the use of both languages in non-teaching situations showed that participants rarely use German in all situations and often use English. However, in both languages four identical activities were established in which participants most often use their knowledge of foreign languages: for watching TV programs, Internet searches, listening to music and travel. For the four activities mentioned, the relationship between language use and level of ability in language use was examined. For English as L2 and for German as L3 a significant statistical correlation was established. The above mentioned leads to the conclusion that the possibility of obtaining a higher level of competence in second foreign language (L3) use should be considered as well as its more frequent application in non-teaching situations, since the results obtained do not necessarily imply an efficient use of time and space given to the second foreign language throughout the educational process.

Relating to the attitude of participants on the influence of prior knowledge and experience in L1 and L2 on learning L3, it was established that in the influence of Croatian as L1 there is a neutral attitude, i.e., Croatian language does not help nor does it hinder participants in learning German. In spite of the relatedness between the two languages, English and German, participants, in general also have a neutral attitude about transfer and interference between the two languages, and in the area of vocabulary a significant number of participants point to the possibility of positive transfer. Relating these results to the question of language awareness and awareness of the language learning process one can conclude that a large number of participants observe similarities and differences between languages, but they do not have a developed skill of talking about language nor the process of language learning. As for the role of teachers in raising awareness of language, the analysis showed that from the student perspective, a certain number of teachers point to the similarities and differences between languages, but do not seek actual methods or principles of third language teaching methodologies within teaching a particular language with the aim of encouraging development of students' plurilingual competences. This leads to the hypothesis that neither mother tongue teaching, nor foreign language teaching are characterized by the inclusion of other languages or the preparation of class work which surpasses the level of one language (*sprachübergreifender Unterricht*), (cf. Sartre, 2006, p. 306; Behr, 2007., p. 162). Considering that the results obtained in the research are based on the self-perception of the participants, the justification of the above hypothesis should be established by further research which would include the

perspective of teachers, course book analysis and teaching observation. It should also be mentioned that the results of the self-evaluations of foreign language and plurilingual competences of participants do not have to match their factual competency. Therefore, the next step of the research could be the implementation of tests of foreign language and plurilingual competence of an objective type on the same participants and the comparison of the results of both researches. Despite the possible limitations of the empirical approach to the research described in this paper, there are elements which point to a significant need for discussion on the theoretical and practical possibilities of third language teaching methodology and the integration of its principles into foreign language and mother tongue teaching within the system of general education in the Republic of Croatia.

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