HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING: A QUESTIONNAIRE STUDY

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Abstract:

This paper deals with the results of a research project conducted among first-year language majors (N = 109) studying at the English and German departments of a university in Budapest, concerning their beliefs about language learning. The instrument employed in the study is a modified Hungarian version of Horwitz's (1987) BALLI (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory). Although numerous similar studies have been conducted since the inventory was first published, the present study is unique as it investigates not only gender effect, but also the differences in learners' beliefs based on their target language. The rationale for examining differences caused by the language learnt is that in the past several decades the English language has emerged to become the global lingua franca (McKay, 2003), while German, which had until recently enjoyed a strong regional significance, has lost a considerable amount of importance. Therefore, 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 results of the study are discussed in terms of the principal components that were established, which 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 gender and target language of respondents.

Keywords: language learning beliefs, gender, target language differences, principal component analysis, authentic material

1 Introduction

The present paper reports on the findings of a study that examined Hungarian first-year university students' beliefs about language learning with the help of an adapted version of a popular self-administered questionnaire, Horwitz's (1987) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Although numerous similar studies have been carried out in the past (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Horwitz, 1999; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; McCarger, 1999; Mori, 1999; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006; Sakui & Gaines, 1999; Yang, 1992; Yang, 1999; Siebert, 2003; Tercanlioglu, 2005), the present study is unique in that rather than discussing the effect of contexts on students' beliefs about language learning, it examines the role target language and gender play in forming those beliefs. Despite the fact that some studies have found a link between gender and target language choice in particular contexts (for example Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006), the present research project does not explore the possible interdependence of gender and target language but examines them separately. The results of the study will be discussed in terms of possible latent dimensions in the data and multi-item scales, which contribute to the reliability of the study. After a brief outline of previous studies of beliefs

about language learning and the validation process of the adapted version of the inventory, this paper will discuss the components established with the help of principal component analysis, and the means of the emerging scales. Finally 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.

2 Literature review

2.1 Beliefs about language learning

In the context of second language acquisition, beliefs are defined by Victori and Lockhart (1995, p. 224) as "general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing learning and about the nature of language learning". Evidence shows that these beliefs play a decisive role in language learners' success, failure and experiences (Cotteral, 1999). Pintrich and De Groot (1990) point out, for example, that learners who perceive their studies as important or interesting show higher degrees of perseverance in their work. Thus, knowledge of students' beliefs about language learning may provide language educators with a better understanding of their students' "expectations of, commitment to, success in and satisfaction with their language classes" (Horwitz, 1988, p. 283). Consequently teachers can make more informed choices about teaching (Bernat, & Gvozdenko, 2005) and adopt "a more sensitive approach to the organization of learning opportunities" (Cotterall, 1999, p. 494) in their lessons.

2.2 BALLI based studies

In the past two decades Horwitz's (1987) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) has been extensively used to investigate, among others, the links between beliefs and proficiency (Mantle-Bromley, 1995), the impact of culture on beliefs (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; McCarger, 1993; Horwitz, 1999), that of gender (Siebert, 2003; Tercanlioglu, 2005; Bernat & Lloyd, 2007), the dimensions underlying language learners' beliefs (Sakui & Gaines, 1999) and strategy use (Yang, 1999) in various countries. The extensive research conducted with the inventory shows that beliefs about language learning are context specific (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006).

Although 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 regarding the validity and reliability of the instrument. For the purposes of the present study, it is the lack of multivariate statistical validation and analysis of the tool that need to be discussed. In order to do this, one must examine the origins of the inventory: the instrument was based on the findings of a brainstorming session hosted by Horwitz, involving 25 language teachers. The participants were asked to collect beliefs that learners often have concerning language teaching. Subsequently, Horwitz compiled a list of possible language learning beliefs based on the suggestions of the participants, and grouped them under various themes. However, since Horwitz (Kuntz, 1996) 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, they cannot be called factors in a statistical sense, as they were not the actual results of factor analysis. Consequently, most subsequent studies using the inventory examine the results of the individual items. This practice does not correspond to the current standards of multivariate statistical analysis. As suggested for example by Dörnyei (2003), due to the fallibility of single items, 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" (p. 36). Taking this into consideration, the current study will not examine the individual items, but will analyze the data that was loaded onto scales as a result of the principal component analysis.

2.3 Studies about the relationship between beliefs and gender

Concerning gender, Bacon and Finnemann (1992) found that the women in their study were more motivated, more open to authentic input and had a more positive attitude to target language speakers (see also Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005, for similar results in the Hungarian context). While Tercanlioglu (2005) found no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents in Turkey, 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 women did. More male than female students also believed that the learning of grammar was the most important part of language learning, and that practising with audio-visual material was crucial. Bernat and Lloyd (2007) found that the sexes differed significantly in only two BALLI items, as women were more likely to perceive multilingualism as a feature of intelligence than men were, and also enjoyed talking to natives less than their male counterparts did. 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.

2.4 The changing role of German and English in Hungary

Following the end of compulsory Russian language learning in 1989, English and German became the most prominent foreign languages taught in Hungary (for details see Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006). The rationale for looking at differences caused by the language learnt is that during the past several decades the English language has risen to the highest status (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005). As English became the global lingua franca (McKay, 2003), languages which had strong regional significance have lost a considerable amount of importance, such as German had with its proximity to Hungary. This is echoed in the number of secondary school pupils choosing English over German (Csizér, in press).This is why it has become relevant to examine whether learners have

global beliefs about language learning or if these beliefs are influenced by the language they are studying.

3 Methods

The aim of this study was to investigate the following questions in the Hungarian university context.

1. Does gender affect learners' beliefs about language learning?
2. Does target language affect learners' beliefs about language learning?

As the researcher wanted to restrict variables as much as possible to gender and language learnt, she paid close attention to the choice of participants 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.

3.1 Participants

The participants in the study were 109 first-year BA language majors at a university in Budapest. The inventory was administered to 54 English majors and 55 German majors, all participating in various first-year academic writing skills courses at the university. All students 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 they were majoring in, respondents had experience learning other foreign languages: 96.36% (n = 53) of German majors had studied English, 57.41% (n = 31) of 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 indicate that more students studied English than German, as close to all (98.2%, n = 107) participants reported to have studied English at one point in their lives, while only 78.9% (n = 86) claimed to have studied German. Altogether 61% (n = 67) of the participants had taken part in extracurricular language lessons outside their school. Despite the fact that the university is situated in Budapest, only 34.3% (n = 37) of the respondents attended secondary school in the capital, while 63% (n = 68) came from secondary schools in the country and the remaining 2.8% (n = 3) spent their secondary school years abroad. 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, cultural background, setting and instruction influence beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1999). In the present project, as it was administered at the university level, certain factors (such as cultural background or previous instruction) 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 admitted 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.

3.2 Instrument

3.2.1 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 not a test, thus it does not provide overall scores but measures participants' opinions and attitudes towards various second language learning beliefs. Horwitz (1987) defines five major areas dealt with by the inventory: 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 culture, attitude to communicating with non-native speakers and learning through using authentic materials. These new items were intended to tap into information about issues that have become increasingly relevant at present: as English has become 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, as a result of globalization and the spread of the Internet and multilingual DVDs, students today can access a wide variety of up-to-date authentic foreign language material very easily (Items 36 and 37) which they can engage with in or outside their classrooms.

3.2.2 Procedures of validation

The original version of the BALLI has been extensively used over the past twenty years, thus gaining validity through repeated administration; however, since the instrument was supplemented and administered in Hungarian, the validity of the new instrument had to be ensured. This was done by comparing two Hungarian translations and using the think-aloud protocol with two Hungarian language learners and by the checking of the adapted instrument by a first-year language major at the university.

The BALLI was translated into Hungarian by Albert (2004) and Piniel (unpublished). Drawing on the two Hungarian versions of the instrument, and with the help of a Hungarian and English language teacher, the more suitable translation of each item was chosen. Although backward translation is the most common way of ensuring reliability in such cases, the researcher felt that context sensitivity and appropriacy were

greater issues. It seemed more important that items be meaningful to members of the target population rather than being exact translations of the original items.

The chosen items were further tested for reliability using the think-aloud method with a Hungarian learner of English and German respectively. The two think-aloud sessions were followed by short follow-up interviews as suggested by Elekes (2002) to enhance the reliability of the results. The informants gave advice on wording and made comments concerning several of the items. Interestingly, the same questions caused confusion or triggered strong responses from both informants. As a result of the think-aloud sessions a number of changes were made and new items were added: an additional question (Item 38, see Appendix A) was written to probe low culture or everyday culture as both students interpreted the original culture question (Item 8, see Appendix A) to be about the classic literature of the target cultures. Both informants claimed that they felt less anxiety when speaking in the target language with non-native 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 native and non-native speakers and separate items about wanting to have native and non-native speaker friends. Questions about the perceived importance of practising with authentic materials were added, as they seemed relevant based on the literature (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.

3.2.3 Administration of the instrument

Data was collected from participants in autumn 2008, during their first semester as language majors in one of the two departments. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher at the beginning of the regularly scheduled Academic Skills seminars. Before the inventory was passed out, the researcher guaranteed the anonymity of the participants and provided a brief overview of the nature and aim of the study.

3.3 Methods of data analysis

Data gathered during the study was analyzed with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 13.0). As the first step, principal component analysis was employed to confirm the existence of the themes identified by Horwitz (1987). 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). Once these principal components were established, scales were set up and mean averages were calculated. In order to find out if there were 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, the researcher analyzed

the data using independent sample t-tests. Frequencies and descriptive statistics were used to analyze biographical data.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Defining latent dimensions

In order to reduce the number of variables to be analyzed and thereby enhance the reliability of the results, the researcher carried out a principal component analysis of the data. During the process of applying this mathematical procedure, several items had to be discarded. Table 1 summarizes the results of the principal component analysis of the data gathered in this study as well as Horwitz's (1987) separation of items under her five themes. The results will be discussed under Horwitz's (1987) themes below.

Horwitz (1987)	Language Aptitude	Difficulty	Nature of Language Learning	Learning and Communication strategies	Motivation
	1 2 6 10 11 16 19 31 34 5	3 4 15 26 35	8 12 17 24 28 29	7 9 13 14 18 21 23 27	20 25 30 32 33
Rieger (2009)	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Component 4	Component 5
	1 6 31 34	4 35	12 17 24 29	27 ***36 37***	25 30 33 ***39***

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

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

4.1.1 Foreign language aptitude

According to Horwitz's (1987) grouping of inventory items, ten separate variables were linked to the theme of foreign language aptitude. However, through principal component analysis, only four items loaded onto this component. These items dealt with children 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. Altogether 6 variables (Items 2; 5; 10; 11; 16; 19) were eliminated from the original pool of items probing beliefs related to foreign language aptitude. These items stated that certain individuals have more aptitude than others in general (Item 2), based on their mathematical proficiency (Item 11) and on their gender (Item 19) respectively. Other items questioned whether the participants felt they themselves possessed language aptitude (Item 16) or believed that they would be able to speak a given language well (Item 5). All in all, this component deals with the perceived existence of language proficiency and the belief that while learning a language is not impossible for anyone, the

ability to master more than one foreign language indicates intelligence. It could be argued that the items that loaded onto the first principle component were more general in their inquiry than the ones that did not.

4.1.2 Difficulty of language learning

Originally six items (Items 3; 4; 15; 26; 35) were listed under the theme of difficulty of language learning; however, four of the original variables did not load onto the second component established through principal component analysis. The two items that did load onto the component asked respondents about the difficulty of the given foreign language they were studying (Item 4) and stated that reading and writing in the given language is easier than speaking and listening (Item 35). Items stating that some 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 that the principal component analysis yielded such poor results was probably due to the fact that the items Horwitz (1987) listed under the theme of difficulty, rather than being variations on the same idea, ask respondents to report their beliefs about various separate issues.

4.1.3 Nature of language learning

The third component that could be established after statistical analysis is a collection of variables initially listed under the theme of nature of language learning. Four items loaded onto the third component, namely, English/German can best be learnt in an English/German speaking country (Item 12), the most important part of language learning 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). Compared to the results of the principal component analysis in the other dimensions, the loading of the third component seems to be the most successful as only two of Horwitz's (1987) original items had to be discarded: "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). The former of the two items may not have loaded onto the component due to the fact that participants are no longer in secondary school and might not have found the question relevant. The latter item exemplifies a different (cultural) approach to the nature of language learning than any of the other items, which may be the cause of its omission. However, if one examines the variables of component 3 more closely, one can see that the results of this component carry little useful information to language educators. Since most of the loaded items state a different *aspect* of language learning to be the "most important", all that can be derived is that language learners have some conceptions about how to approach language learning. 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.

4.1.4 Learning and communication strategies

Horwitz's (1987) learning and communication strategies theme consisted of eight items. These variables were complemented by three items designed by the researcher, enquiring into shyness experienced when talking to non-native speakers of the target language (Item 22) and the importance of using authentic audiovisual (Item 36) and authentic written material (Item 37) when learning a foreign language. The results of the principal component analysis showed that only one of the original items (Item 27) dealing with the perceived importance of practising with audio material loaded onto component 4, while two of the new items (36 and 37) were included in this component by the statistical procedures. Altogether nine variables had to be discarded, these probed the perceived importance of correct pronunciation (Item 7), practice (Item 13), not speaking until one can express oneself correctly (Item 9), finding encounters with native speakers pleasurable (Item 13), shyness experienced when talking with native (Item 21) or non-native speakers (Item 27) of a given language. Two further items inquired into respondents' sensitivity towards making mistakes (Items 14 and 23). The reason why only three of the eleven items collected under strategies by Horwitz loaded onto a component is that these items do not make enquiries relating to the same issues. In fact, there are three separate issues that are touched upon: importance of practising with authentic materials, sensitivity to imperfect language use and contact with native speakers, but since not enough items deal with each issue, only one topic, namely, the importance of practising with authentic materials, could be established as a component.

4.1.5 Motivation and expectations

The five original items in the theme of motivation and expectations were supplemented by an item inquiring about respondents' hopes of making friends with non-native English or German speakers. This item, along with three of the original items, loaded onto the fifth component. The motivation component consisted of the items dealing with both integrative and instrumental motivation (Dörnyei, 1990; Kormos & Csizér, 2008). These items touched upon respondents' 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 enhance their chances in the job market (Item 30). Items 20 ("People in Hungary think learning English/German is important") and 35 ("I want to learn to speak English/German well.") had to be discarded as they did not load onto the motivation component 5. Item 20 is more general than the other items relating to motivation, while the Item 35 may be seen as irrelevant to respondents as, having been accepted to language programmes at the university, they may already see themselves as successful learners of the given target languages. Nevertheless, even with the loss of these two items, a higher percentage of the original items loaded onto the motivational component than most of the other components.

4.2 Comparison of the scales

With the help of the principal component analysis, five scales were established, each corresponding to one of Horwitz's (1988) themes. In this section, the means of these five scales will be discussed. Table 2 provides a summary of the results.

Components	Items	Mean Average	Standard Deviation
4. Importance of practice with authentic materials	27; 36; 37	4.12	0.51
5. Motivation	25; 30; 33; 39	3.79	0.59
3. Approaches	12; 17; 24; 29	3.34	0.54
1. Language aptitude	1; 6; 31; 34	3.33	0.52
2. Difficulty	4; 35	3.04	0.74

Table 2. The means of the established components

According to the statistical analysis, Component 4 received the highest mean average, 4.12, (N = 109, *st.d.* = 0.51) among the components. This indicates that the respondents believed that practising the target language through engagement with materials (audio, visual or written) including authentic materials is a very important part of language teaching. Furthermore, this reflects the fact that in foreign language learning contexts, the role of authentic materials is viewed as a crucial aspect of successful language learning (Lee, 1995; Mishan, 2004). Participants also reported high degrees of motivation, as Component 5 had the second-highest mean. The mean average of this scale was 3.79 (N = 109, *st.d.* = 59), indicating that on the whole respondents felt motivated. This is not entirely surprising, given the fact that all participants were language majors (see similar results in Kormos, Csizér, Menyhárt, & Török, 2008).

With regard to Components 1 and 3, both the averages and the standard deviation of these scales were very close. The mean average of Component 3 was 3.34 (N = 109, *st.d*. = 0.52) which implies that respondents lean towards believing that there are certain approaches, such as focus on learning vocabulary or grammar, that make language learning successful. The results for Component 1 (m = 3.33, N = 109, *st.d*.= 0.54) suggest that respondents are more likely to acknowledge the existence of language aptitude and agree that while everyone is capable of learning a foreign language, the ability to speak at least two foreign languages indicates intelligence.

The second 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. As the average for this component was 3.04 (N = 109, *st.d*.=0.74), it suggests that the population of respondents as a whole feels that their target language is of medium difficulty, and does not perceive a difference between the difficulty of various language skills. However, this finding will be re-examined in the next section.

4.3 Language and gender-related differences

The data was analyzed with the help of independent sample t-tests to explore if the gender of the respondents or their target language affected their responses. The results of the t-tests indicate the existence of both gender and target language effect on a number of components, as these differences have proved to be statistically significant.

4.3.1 Target language effect

Based on the foreign language that the respondents were studying, statistically significant (ρ <0.05) differences emerged in relation to two components (See Table 3 for summary).

Component	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

Table 3. Differences caused by target language effect

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 verbal communication skills as difficult than English majors (n = 54, m = 2.77, *st.d.*= 0.66). These results correspond to the findings of the researcher's earlier study (Rieger, unpublished) among German and English learners in a Hungarian secondary school where the results were tested with another statistical procedure, the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test. This test also found statically significant differences between the results of German and English learners with regard to perceived difficulty of target language and the relative ease of reading and writing over speaking and listening. This strong 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) may lie in the language teaching approaches practiced by the teachers of the two languages (Nikolov & Józsa, 2006). 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.

The results of the t-test of Approaches (Component 3) showed 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 learning the words, the grammar and how to translate, than learners of English were (n = 54, m = 3.12, *st.d.*=0.52). In the

context of English and German language learners, 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 statement implies that one can best learn through communication with members of the target culture. It may be suggested that this seeming discrepancy might be due to the fact that English has become the global lingua franca, and thus learners of English have ample opportunity to practice the language whenever they leave Hungary, while this is more or less restricted to German-speaking countries in the case of German.

4.3.2 Gender effect

The independent samples t-test indicated only one statistically significant difference (ρ <0.05) that could be linked to gender, which was in relation to Component 3. According to the results, the mean of female respondents (n = 83, m = 3.41, *st.d.*=0.52) was significantly higher than that of male respondents (n = 23, m = 3.09, *st.d.*=0.56). Thus, female participants were more likely than their male peers to agree that certain approaches were important in language teaching (see Table 4 for summary).

Component	**Group**	**Mean Average**	**Stanard Deviation**
Approaches (Component 3)	Female	3.41	0.52
	Male	3.09	0.56

Table 4. Differences related to gender effect

The results of the current research project do not correspond with the findings of earlier studies about the relationship between beliefs and gender. Contrary to the reports of Bacon and Finnemann (1992), no statistically significant differences were measured on this population in terms of motivation (Motivation, Component 5) or attitude to practising with authentic materials (Importance of practising with authentic materials, Component 1). Nor were the responses of male and female participants significantly different regarding their beliefs about language aptitude (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007). This may be because gender roles are strongly influenced by culture and contexts as well as the relatively small number of male respondents in the current sample or the questionable reliability of analyzing single items.

5 Conclusion and limitations

The present study aimed to examine whether or not gender and target language play a role in forming the beliefs Hungarian university students majoring in English and German have about language learning. Analysis of the five established principal components (Language aptitude, Difficulty, Approaches, Importance of practising with authentic materials and Motivation) shows that there are significant differences that can

be linked to gender and the language studied by participants. Target language seems to affect how learners perceive the difficulty of the foreign language they are studying and the importance they attach to some approaches towards language learning. With regard to gender, statistically significant differences also arose in relation to the perceived importance of some language learning approaches or techniques.

The sample size of this study (N = 109) is quite small which entails that more research into this topic needs to be conducted with a larger sample of Hungarian university students, non-language majors and, since beliefs may be influenced by age, other age groups. Also, as suggested above, the inventory has to be re-examined and revised in order for it to become a more reliable instrument. Although principal component analysis did establish five separate scales or components, the number of items that loaded onto any of the components was low: out of the 34 items of the original BALLI inventory (Horwitz, 1987), only 13 could be included in the present study.

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Appendix A

The questions of the questionnaires translated into English and collated into one single list

Part 1. Statements to be judged along a five-point scale

The possible answers for questions 1-3, 5-14 and 16-39 are:
completely agree / agree/ both agree and disagree/disagree/completely disagree
The possible answers for question 4 are:
very difficult / difficult / of medium difficulty / easy / very easy
The possible answers for question 15 are:
less than a year / 1-2 years / 3-5 years / 5-10 years / you cannot learn a language 1 hr/day

1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.
2. Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.
3. Some languages are easier than others.
4. The English/German language is:
5. I believe I will learn to speak English/German very well.
6. People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.
7. It is important to speak English/German with an excellent pronunciation.
8. It is necessary to learn about English/German speaking cultures to speak English/German.
9. You shouldn't say anything in English/German until you can say it correctly.
10. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.
11. People who are good at maths or science are not good at learning foreign languages.
12. It is best to learn English/German in an English/German speaking country.
13. I enjoy practicing English/German with the native English/German speakers I meet.
14. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in English/German.
15. If someone spent 1 hr/day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak the language very well?
16. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.
17. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning new words.
18. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.
19. Women are better than men at learning languages.
20. People in my country feel that it is important to speak English/German.
21. I feel shy speaking English/German with English/German native speakers.
22. I feel shy speaking English/German with non-native speakers.
23. If beginning students are allowed to make mistakes in English/German, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.
24. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning grammar.
25. I would like to learn English/German so that I can get to know native English/German speakers better.
26. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.
27. It's important to practice with audio-material.
28. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.
29. The most important part of learning English/German is learning how to translate from my own language.
30. If I learn to speak English/German very well, I will have better job opportunities.
31. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.
32. I want to learn to speak English/German very well.
33. I want to make friends with English/German people.
34. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.
35. It is easier to read and write English/German than to speak and understand it.

36. It's important to practice with English/German speaking films.
37. It is important for language learning to read newspapers and magazines in English/German.
38. It is important to understand English/German speaking people's way of thinking to learn a language.
39. I want to make friends with non-native English/German speakers.

Part 2. Personal questions

1. Your gender? Male / Female (Please circle the correct answer!)
2. How old are you? _____
3. How long have you been learning English/German? _____
4. What other languages have you studied? _____
5. Where did you go to secondary school? _____
6. Did you participate in extracurricular English/German lessons? Yes / No (Please circle the correct answer!)