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1. Introduction

In the last two decades, as digital communication has developed, the possibility of coming in contact with people from all over the world in the digital space has become a widely accepted and normalized component of everyday life, especially for the younger generations. As a consequence, the importance of the role of English as a *lingua franca* increased significantly in Europe and in the world (Crystal, 2003; Berns et al., 2007; Salomone, 2022). Young people use and incorporate English into their everyday speech, especially in the slang that they borrow from social media platforms (Tóth, 2023).

L2 English is therefore more often acquired not entirely in the context of formal education, but rather combined with a frequent exposure to authentic input through the use of modern technology. As a consequence, the acquisition process of a third language (L3) is going to differ from that of English, because in its case there is significantly less exposure involved outside the school context (Bardel & Sánchez, 2020). When an L3 is introduced in the curriculum, typically at the beginning of high school, a language teacher is expected to take into consideration the role that a previously acquired language (L2) plays in the acquisition process of an L3 (Bardel & Falk, 2007). They must be aware of the fact that second and third languages do not function as separate entities, but rather as complex systems that constantly interact in the multilingual learner's mind, exerting a multidirectional influence on each other (Jessner, 2006). This interaction of language systems is defined by Cenoz (2001) as *cross-linguistic influence*, a term that includes all examples of positive or negative *transfer* (Gass & Selinker, 1992; Murphy, 2002). Transfer happens when certain lexical elements, grammatical correlations are borrowed from an existing language system and implemented in the new one. This can either assist (positive transfer) or hinder (negative transfer, also called *interference*) the acquisition process of an L3 (Badan et al., 2021; Zambichi, 2021).

Italian L3 teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards promoting reflection upon cross-linguistic interactions between the language systems and the use of prior language knowledge as an effective tool for the acquisition of L3 Italian were the subjects on which the current research was focused. A personal interest of mine was to gain a better understanding of the interacting language systems in the students' minds through the experiences that the participants of the study shared with me. While L3 research in Hungary investigated many areas of *third language acquisition* (TLA), such as: learner perceptions (Pál, 2015; T. Balla, 2012), differences between *second language acquisition* (SLA) and TLA (T. Balla, 2012), L3 learning strategies (Sárdi, 2019) or motivation (Sárdi, 2014), little attention was dedicated to the beliefs

and attitudes of teachers that could in fact largely contribute to the multiplication of perspectives in language education, or even to the development of teaching methodologies. The main aim of the research was therefore to explore, through semi-structured interviews, the beliefs and attitudes of pre-service and experienced L3 Italian teachers connected to two major topics of interest: 1) the importance of raising the awareness of students about the possible cross-linguistic influence they might experience while learning a third language, 2) the roles that the L1 and L2 play in their L3 classrooms.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Third Language Acquisition

To understand the possible cross-linguistic interplay in the students' minds, it is important to define the process of TLA and distinguish it from SLA, taking into consideration the most important psycholinguistic elements that present notable differences in connection with the acquisition process, and therefore an L3 teaching methodology includes different practices as compared to an L2 (Jessner et al., 2016; T. Balla, 2012).

Jessner (2006) presented a set of ideas that influenced views on TLA, stating that initially no distinction was made between SLA and TLA. 'Second' language used to "stand as a cover term for any language other than the first language learner by a given learner or group of learners, irrespective of the type of learning environment, and irrespective of the number of other non-native languages possessed by the learner" (Jessner, 2006, pp. 13–14). However, different views imply that TLA is a more complex process than SLA and learners will resort to a different kind of skillset in that case, because "the process of learning and the product of having learnt a second language can potentially exert influence on the acquisition of a third language and this involves a quality change in language learning and processing" (Jessner, 2006, p. 14). Hammarberg (2009) also mentions that learners use less strategies during L2 learning, as they have no prior language learning experience other than their naturally acquired mother tongue (L1), which is the only source of interference. In L3 learning, however, there are more elements that can be transferred, such as lexemes from the L1 and the L2 or learning strategies. Therefore, the level of awareness about the possible interplay between the spoken languages is going to be higher. These differences were expected to be described by the participants in more detail, especially if they were teachers of both English as an L2 and Italian as an L3.

2.2 Cross-linguistic influence

Hammarberg (2009) underlines that bi- and multilingualism are more common in the world than monolingualism, and therefore cross-linguistic influence occurs very frequently, in many speech situations. While Hungary continues to remain a predominantly monolingual speech community (Szabó, 2022), many students begin to acquire English as a second language at an early age, given that it is introduced in the curriculums as a subject in elementary school. Additionally, their increased exposure to English outside the educational context also leads to an increased influence on any third language (typically Italian, Spanish, French or German) acquired in high school. Multilingual competence has therefore become a part of the National Core Curriculum (NAT) in the last few years (Chrappán, 2022; NAT, 2020).f

Wang (2013) mentions the idea that third-language learners instinctively assign two distinct roles to their previously acquired languages: the *instrumental* role and the *default supplier* role. The instrumental role is given to the language (either L1 or L2) that the speaker identifies with and that the interlocutor associates with the speaker, both in terms of language and culture: in the case of Hungarian learners this is going to be their mother tongue. On the other hand, the default supplier role is attributed to the language (L1 or L2) that ranks highest based on four criteria discussed by Cenoz (2001): *psychotypology*, *L2 status*, *proficiency*, and *recency*. This model has been frequently used for describing the cross-linguistic phenomena that are in progress in the mind of a multilingual speaker, its four components (discussed in more detail below) are in close connection with *metalinguistic* and *cross-linguistic awareness* (Gass & Selinker, 1983; Angelovska, 2018). In the present study, English acquired as an L2 by Hungarian learners is expected to accomplish the role of default supplier, and to express a high level of the previously mentioned four factors that are discussed below, based on the research conducted of Cenoz (2001).

Psychotypology refers to the perceived relatedness of two languages and it may affect the learners' expectation of the amount of time needed to acquire the language, as well as the perceived number of transferrable elements, while also influencing how they anticipate and interpret language interactions.

The *L2 status* refers to the relative importance of the second language (L2) compared to the first language (L1), meaning that certain learning strategies and attitudes could possibly be imported from previous language learning experience.

A high *proficiency* and *recency* of use are regarded by Cenoz (2001) as principles that increase the effect of cross-linguistic influence, especially in the case of a second language. As

a consequence, a student whose L2 English is highly proficient can be expected to transfer a larger number of elements to the newly introduced L3.

2.3 Cross-linguistic awareness

Cross-linguistic influence can manifest itself on various linguistic levels, beginning from the pronunciation and different foreign accents (related to phonology), through the advantage of linguistic proximity, or the disadvantage that *false friends* (Koessler, 1928; Dominguez, 2002) might create (related to lexis) all the way to the variation in pragmatic or sociolinguistic patterns across different cultures (Kollár, 2007). This opens up the space to one of the most important implications of the present study, which underlines the suggestion that a language teacher should assist the learners in navigating the spaces between their linguistic repertoires correctly and effectively so that they can reach their communicative goals with less effort, while constantly reflecting on and comparing their own language and culture to the target one. Raising attention to cross-linguistic interplay is therefore an essential part of the language learning process (Illman & Pietilä, 2018).

The role of the teacher in this procedure is to assist students in continuously monitoring themselves through the activation of *metalinguistic awareness* (MLA). The monitoring effect is present in the earlier definitions of MLA, with Gass (1983, p. 277) defining it as “the ability to think and talk about language” or as put forward by Huang (2018, p. 331), “the understanding that language is a system which can be analyzed”.

The conscious use of the mother tongue in the foreign language classrooms can be traced back to the paradigm shift that brought about a ‘bilingual reform’ more than a decade ago (Carless, 2008), and more recent research has already led the way for innovative, multilingual teaching methods, such as translanguaging, which is generally applied in multicultural contexts where the students and the teacher may or may not share the same L1 (Zhou, 2023).

In a Turkish study about the role of the L1 in the acquisition of L2 English the majority of the teachers agreed on consciously implementing and using the mother tongue during English lessons. Some of the participants suggested using the L1 in the early phase of learning and gradually decreasing it as the students’ proficiency progresses (Kayaoglu, 2012). Based on these findings, it can be said that using the L1 can facilitate the acquisition process, reduce anxiety and provide help when teaching complex grammatical structures or new vocabulary (Kayaoglu, 2012; Iamroz, 2018).

A Chinese study that focused on cross-linguistic reflections of students suggests the acceptance and conscious recognition of the potential of the L1 as a beneficial tool for the

acquisition of foreign languages (He, 2012). The positive effect of this aspect is expected to be more pronounced in contexts such as the Hungarian one, where the students and the L2/L3 teacher share the same L1 in an overpowering majority of the cases.

In the context of TLA however, another element is added: the prior language knowledge and language learning experience will eventually influence the newly started language learning “journey” and the perception of the language itself. Angelovska (2018) referred to the learner’s perception of cross-linguistic influence as a subtype of metalinguistic awareness called *cross-linguistic awareness* (CLA). She claimed that CLA “gives L3 learners the possibility to exploit all available prior language resources” (Angelovska, 2018, p. 137).

Explained in terms of Cenoz’s (2001) model, to benefit from *psychotypology* in the case of English and Italian, a student can easily notice more similarities between the two, given the fact that they are both Indo-European languages, distancing them from Hungarian. The role of the teacher in this case is to ensure and facilitate positive transfer of linguistic elements in all areas of language knowledge (Rothman, 2010; Badan et al., 2021), and also the transfer of learning strategies, which can be linked to the *L2 status* factor.

Raising students’ cross-linguistic awareness can therefore be considered as one of the main components of multilingual education (Irsara, 2017). Directing the learners’ attention towards false friends, or similarities and differences in grammatical structures (for example: verb tenses) is an activity that a language teacher is expected to do on a daily basis

2.4 The role of loanwords in the acquisition of L3 Italian

Heath (1984) defines *language contact* as the interaction between speakers of different languages, which can lead to various linguistic changes. As Thomason and Kaufman (2001) illustrate in their book, it can happen for various reasons, for instance if the members of two speech communities live in the same geographical area, and it can induce a variety of language contact-related phenomena, such as code-switching, lexical borrowing, grammatical replacement, pidginization and in many cases bilingualism.

Crystal (2003) illustrated the global influence of English two decades ago, and the general experience today clearly shows an exponential amplification of the cultural significance that English holds (Crystal, 2003; Salomone, 2022). The younger generations in Hungary as well are almost constantly exposed to the English language both through institutionalized language education and through the consumption of English media (typically series, TV shows or social media). This constant exposure could possibly lead to an increased level of recency and proficiency (Cenoz, 2001; Bardel & Lindqvist, 2007), and therefore also increase the

influence that the L2 plays in the acquisition process of the L3 (Rose et al., 2021), as mentioned previously in section 2.2.

The language contact dynamics between English, Hungarian and Italian were expected to be an important aspect of third language acquisition in Hungarian classrooms because they can have an influence on the kind of language that is taught in classrooms (navigating between the different varieties of English, for example), which ideally replicates the language that is used in the present day and follows the changes that might occur within a language or in between languages through contact. As Hickey (2020) points out, language contact nowadays is dominated by globalization and happens in international settings, often without speaker contact. Communication through the internet is dominated by English, with a transnational influence on all languages. In Hickey's book, Durkin (2020) claims that "lexical *borrowing* denotes the process by which lexical items from one language (the donor language) are replicated in another language (the recipient language)" (p. 169). With the significant influence that English exerts on other languages, Italian is also affected by lexical borrowing, and modern Italian contains a rich and expanding corpus of English loanwords, which are called *anglicisms*.

Italian has been in contact with English for centuries (Domokos, 2001; Rogato, 2008), but in recent years, a highly anglicized version of Italian seems to prevail, particularly in the context of the different media: television, journalism, social media. As a consequence, Italian is flooded by English lexemes such as *call center*, *serial killer* or *sit-com* (Doró, 2002) that are adapted directly, without changing their spelling. Russo (2023) identified an increasing frequency of anglicisms such as *covid free*, *drive through*, *lockdown* appearing in Italian newspapers increasingly in the last few years.

When applied to the L3 learning environment and the potential support that English might offer in acquiring Italian, a teacher's high level of metalinguistic awareness could indicate their thorough understanding developments within the language, such as language contact and the use of loanwords. This awareness enables them to make informed decisions about whether to encourage the use of anglicized expressions or to caution students against their overuse (Vargolomova, 2024).

2.5 Teacher cognition and teachers' language awareness

The beliefs and attitudes of teachers are part of *teacher cognition* (TC), a term that Borg (2003) defines as "what teachers think, know, and believe and the relationships of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom" (p. 81). He constructed a teacher cognition framework with three main themes: 1) cognition and prior language learning

experience, 2) cognition and teacher education, 3) cognition and classroom practice (p. 81). In the context of Italian L3 teaching, these components of teacher cognition were expected to have an influence on the personal experiences that the teachers in the current study shared.

Previous studies on language TC have taken into account both instructors' views and their impact on instructional practices. Spaliviero (2024) emphasizes that teacher cognition plays an important role in shaping the functioning of language teaching. She underlines that “TC exerts a profound impact on teachers’ professional lives” (p. 28), and it has an effect on classroom practice as well. The goal of the current study was to investigate the metalinguistic awareness of Italian L3 teachers, and their beliefs about its possible benefits for language teaching and learning – which also partially belong to teacher cognition – with a particular focus on the cross-linguistic phenomena they experience in connection with their students or themselves.

Otwinowska (2017, pp. 306–310) refers to teacher’s *language awareness* as a skill that is composed of several key elements, such as *metalinguistic*, *psycholinguistic*, *sociolinguistic* and *cross-linguistic awareness*, all of which contribute to effective language learning. Her research was based on the investigation of teachers’ attitudes towards multilingual pedagogy, and to examine whether their multilingualism had an effect on their language awareness. The results demonstrated that “the degrees of multilingualism have an impact on the teachers’ noticing of cross-linguistic similarities and their readiness to use cross-linguistic comparisons when teaching” (Otwinowska, 2017, p. 318). In the present study, all the teachers can be considered multilingual speakers, and it was expected that their multilingualism would positively influence their understanding of cross-linguistic phenomena and the attitudes they have towards the development of their students’ metalinguistic awareness through frequent comparison of the languages spoken by them.

The constantly developing nature of the attitudes of teacher trainees are illustrated by Doró and T. Balla (2019), suggesting that the teachers’ own learning experience, the methodology classes at the university, lesson observations and finally their initial teaching experience are all factors that contribute to a change of perspective. In the current study, this is directly linked to the acceptance of the mother tongue and a shift towards more multilingual approaches.

2.6 L3 research in Hungary

Research on students’ L3 learning motivations and teachers’ attitudes toward cross-linguistic interference in Hungary remains limited, particularly with regard to English and

Italian. Previously mentioned in the section on TLA, T. Balla conducted a study (2012) that investigated the interaction between English and German in the context of acquiring German as a third language, which also incorporated elements of student perception. In addition, Pál (2015) in her dissertation explored students' perceptions of their prior language knowledge—most frequently English—followed by either German or Italian. After the analysis of a questionnaire, she concluded that the majority of the 100 student participants considered their prior language knowledge to be a positive and beneficial influence on further language learning. (Pál, 2015). Although the perspective of the students is not directly part of the current study, it is viewed through the lenses of the teachers and it is important to mention as student and teacher cognition, are going to evidently interact with each other all the time.

Szabó (2022) investigated teaching practices and attitudes of teachers of German and English either as an L2 or an L3, connected to the use of the mother tongue and prior language knowledge in their classrooms. Her findings indicate that teachers incorporate the mother tongue frequently, for various reasons such as translation, clarification of meaning or discussing administrative issues. They also use their students' prior language knowledge, but do not rely on it entirely. The intention of the current study was to approach Italian L3 teachers' awareness and attitudes towards awareness-raising with a similar focus, expressed by qualitative data that emerge from face-to-face interviews.

A recent study closely aligned in structure and objectives to the present research was conducted by Burai (2022), focusing on the interplay between English and French. The primary data for her study were collected through focus-group interviews with French L3 teachers. The findings indicated that the teachers generally expressed a positive and receptive attitude toward the use of prior language knowledge to enhance language learning opportunities.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

Having partially adapted the model used by Burai (2022) and considering the literature review above, the research questions share similar objectives but diverge in their focus. Unlike Burai's work, which is more concentrated on teaching methodology, the current study seeks to explore general perceptions and attitudes toward cross-linguistic awareness and the utilization of prior language knowledge. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the attitudes of Italian language teachers towards cross-linguistic awareness-raising in the learning and teaching of Italian as a third foreign language?

2. What are their beliefs about the role of the L1 (Hungarian) in Italian classes?
3. What are their beliefs about the role of the L2 (English) in L3 Italian classes?
4. How do they perceive the effect of anglicisms in Italian on the learning and teaching of the language as an L3?

3.2 Participants

The participants were contacted either personally or online, using videochat software. They all agreed to have their interviews recorded, after being reassured about the anonymity of the research. They maintained a positive attitude as colleagues, and most of them were glad to contribute to research in the field that they also work in. Furthermore, the teacher-trainees approached the interviews with an especially welcoming attitude, as they claimed that the interview helped them in the reflection on their teaching methodology, and explored some areas that were still in development. Common past experience in the professional and personal field has contributed to the authenticity of their opinion-giving, as they were sharing insights with a colleague whom they had known personally. All the participants were of Hungarian mother tongue, and all of them were proficient (B2-C2) in at least two foreign languages. Their more detailed data is shown in the table below:

Participant	Gender	Spoken foreign languages	Teachers of	Years of experience
1	female	English (B2) Italian (C2) Finnish (A2)	Hungarian and Italian	25
2	female	English (C2) Italian (C2) Spanish (B2) French and Latin (passive knowledge)	English and Italian (actively), also a teacher of Hungarian as a foreign language	20
3	female	English (C1) Italian (C1)	English and Italian	first year
4	female	English (C1) Italian (C1)	English and Italian	pre-service
5	female	English (C1) Italian (C1)	English and Italian	pre-service

3.3 Data collection

As it has already emerged from the theoretical background, a variety of data collection approaches can be used in the field of teacher beliefs, from questionnaires that tend to quantitatively express the general tendencies of teachers (Otwinska, 2017) to semi-structured interviews that can be executed in a focus-group format (Burai, 2022), or individually (Dégi, 2016). The aim of the current study was to thoroughly explore the beliefs, attitudes and experiences of Italian teachers by gaining insight into their daily teaching situations. For this reason, the preferred format were individual, semi-structured interviews that partially followed Dégi's (2016) approach. The interview questions were grouped in three major categories: the role of the mother tongue, the impact of the students' previous language knowledge, and the role of the second language in Italian lessons. A relatively high level of freedom was allowed for them, as important and authentic data was intended to be extracted, without interrupting an episode of narrating personal experience and reflecting upon it. As a consequence, the duration of the interviews varies between 30 and 60 minutes.

3.4 Data analysis

The interviews were recorded, and the audio files were transcribed using an online software (TurboScribe). The extracted data were then coded both deductively and inductively (Saldana, 2009) using QDA Miner Lite qualitative analysis tool, based on their belonging to the different themes: metalinguistic awareness, the role of the mother tongue, the role of the second language, attitudes towards multilingual pedagogy. Quotes that contain information of primary importance were then manually selected from the entire corpus, and then finally translated before appearing in the current paper.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Metalinguistic awareness and the mother tongue

The first important element that defines the learners' linguistic background and therefore influences the acquisition process of the L3, is their metalinguistic awareness, which initially is going to be linked to the L1, before transitioning to the cross-linguistic level (Angelovska, 2018).

This aspect of the mother tongue appears to be a focal point in the belief system and the teaching methodology of the participants as well. English-Italian pre-service teachers expressed that their first expectation of the role of the L1 in the L3 was for it to be secondary, because in

the initial part of their teaching practice they often had the intention to apply communicative methods similarly to what they usually do during English lessons:

Transcript 1:

I always thought that I should limit my Hungarian, but during my teaching practices I realized that it's not like in the case of English where they can already communicate. Here it's a bit different, you have to use it [the mother tongue] because otherwise they will not understand how the language works. (Participant 5)

Also, they were preoccupied about the fact that using the L1 'too much' could potentially hinder communication in the target language, and translation tasks were generally not regarded as something that develops communication skills and language proficiency inductively and interactively. Transcript 1 demonstrates the attitude of another teacher trainee who claimed that the teaching practice was a helpful experience for developing her belief system:

Transcript 2:

I think it [the mother tongue] does [play an important role]. And it's interesting, because at university we were very often taught to use our mother tongue as little as possible in class. Obviously, it came up that there are times when you have to use it, although in practice I would have gone in the direction of not using it much, but I'm starting to realize that the reality is a bit different, so it [the first teaching experience] definitely helped in developing my approaches. (Participant 4)

It can be noticed that Participant 4 initially had the intention to transfer the communicative approaches to L3 teaching, but the teaching practice assisted her in answering dilemmas connected to the use of the mother tongue in the L3 classroom, and made her reevaluate the importance of Hungarian as a tool for the enhancement of cross-linguistic awareness. While the preoccupation might have been a legitimate source of teaching anxiety, as the teaching practice progressed, the initial expectation became dismantled and she began to incorporate the L1 into her lessons in an effective and proactive way, as she may have started to understand the differences between the dynamics of an English group that is generally able to communicate in the target language, and an Italian one that is starting from an absolute beginner level. The different dynamics that she noticed are in line with the general similarities and differences between SLA and TLA, as illustrated by Jessner (2006) and T. Balla (2012).

From the perspective of teacher cognition and in line with Otwinowska's (2017) considerations, it can be argued that Participant 4's language awareness and teaching methodology were still in development at the time of the interview. Using Borg's (2003) terms, the connection of cognition to teacher education and classroom practice is clearly visible in Transcript 2, and also the teacher trainee's own experience with language learning, as she mentioned later in the interview. All of these factors contribute to the constant development of the teachers' language awareness.

An important difference can be noticed between the experienced and the pre-service teachers, as the two participants with decades of experience both strongly recommended an explicit development of metalinguistic awareness, with the deliberate inclusion of the mother tongue in the L3 lessons for translation or for explaining grammatical differences. Transcript 3 and 4 illustrate the strong stance of the experienced teachers in this subject:

Transcript 3:

I absolutely agree with that [including the mother tongue in the L3 lesson]. Mother tongue competence is important. And that's why I think that, for example, in the 80s, when we had communicative language teaching, that everything was in the target language, it was not enough. We can do much more than that if we also use the mother tongue. (...) And here it is very, very important to make a reference, so that the language teacher is also aware of what they learn in Hungarian language lessons in primary school and in secondary school. So, in practice, I am projecting their knowledge of Hungarian grammar onto Italian, and they can translate it for themselves, and they have a totally transparent system. (Participant 1)

Firstly, Participant 1 shares her views on the development of the tendencies in foreign language teaching throughout the years, and states that using the mother tongue (or other languages, as she declared later in the interview) is a helpful tool for language teaching. By mentioning the importance of the students' knowledge of Hungarian grammar she intends to underline the crucial role that the L1 plays in the L3 classroom, as the teacher constantly encourages reflection upon similarities and differences. Finally, her last sentence confirms that the development of cross-linguistic awareness through placing two languages next to each other and encouraging the noticing of connection points is a practice that she often incorporates into her lessons. Research that mentions a bilingual paradigm shift (Carless, 2008), or advocates the implementation of bi- and multilingual methods (Kayaoglu, 2012; Iamroz, 2018) also emphasizes that the continuous comparison and reflection upon grammatical, lexical or

conceptual differences between languages is a crucial part of successful institutionalized language acquisition.

Focusing on a different aspect of the mother tongue, Participant 2 claimed that receptive language skills (reading and listening comprehension) should be trained from an early age, as they can facilitate the acquisition of foreign languages later on:

Transcript 4:

A child who is not necessarily good at language as a subject, but who has read a lot, has a rich vocabulary, has been read a lot of stories from a very young age, will have a better grasp of those structures in their head, because he will be able to relate them better. So, the knowledge of the mother tongue – not necessarily conscious – it certainly makes a difference, yes. (...) When there are direct parallelisms, I always underline them. Many times, I actually teach them a Hungarian word. (Participant 2)

A somewhat unexpected, or less discussed aspect of L3 teaching, as her last two sentences suggest, is the L3 teacher's involvement in the development of students' metalinguistic knowledge of the mother tongue. Referring back to Jessner (2006), this further demonstrates that the language systems in a learner's mind are in constant interaction with each other. Additionally, in the present case cross-linguistic awareness-raising in itself demonstrates a certain degree of multidirectionality.

In other words, one result of learning a third language is going to be a higher level of the students' metalinguistic awareness of the L1, and the role of developing this skill is attributed to the L3 teacher, which might be a surprising discovery at the beginning of the career (Transcript 1 and 2), but becomes a highly valued element of teaching later on (Transcript 3 and 4).

4.2 The facilitator role of English

When asked about their beliefs on prior foreign language knowledge, all the participants presented a relatively positive attitude, and they highlighted many features that according to their views characterize the acquisition process of the L2 and the L3, with some notable differences between the two. In this section, the ideas that were regarded as focal points could potentially be expanded to a larger scale, meaning that a quantitatively expressed representative sample could serve as a data source for measuring the agreement on the nature of language

teaching and learning. These insights provide an insider's perspective, and many of the considerations call for the need to reevaluate certain attitudes towards teaching methodologies.

4.2.1 L2 proficiency: a positive influence with partial importance

Another important idea is the shared belief that a high proficiency in English is a positive influence, but far from being enough to guarantee a successful acquisition. Instead, they argued that other elements, such as the students' attitudes, their interest in the Italian language and culture, their motivation and willingness to invest effort in learning a new language, combined with the constant awareness-raising on linguistic differences and similarities together constitute pieces of the learning process, and there might not necessarily be an order of importance. This idea was shared among all the participants, independently of the taught subjects or the years of experience. Participant 2 and 3 both underline this aspect in Transcript 5:

Transcript 5:

So, the claim that the more proficient you are in English, the more proficient you will be in Italian... No, I don't think that it is necessarily a direct proportionality. This is because, first of all, English starts at a very early age... (Participant 2)

Even though they already had a level in English and there might also be a level difference between them, the dynamics are completely different in an Italian group. (Participant 3)

Participant 3 mentions a level difference between the students who start high school and the fact that the patterns are not necessarily repeated in an Italian group that starts from entry level. In other words, as expressed by Participant 1 as well, proficiency and recency (Cenoz, 2001) on their own do not ensure that elements will be transferred from one language to another. Instead, students are more likely to acquire a greater level of openness towards reflection upon the language systems and the best way to make use of the interaction between them (Jessner, 2006) if guided by a plurilingual teacher who is expected to be equipped with the necessary degree of psycholinguistic awareness (Otwinowska, 2017). Therefore, the difference in the dynamics of the groups that Participant 3 mentions might be the result of individual differences that are not only related to the ability to communicate in the L2, but more to the attitude of the students that contains determination, motivation, discipline, and the willingness to make metalinguistic reflections.

4.2.2 Teachers' beliefs about the differences between SLA and TLA

Participant 2 started to explain her views on the potential reasons behind English proficiency not being a deterministic factor on its own in the acquisition of Italian, immediately shifting her focus to the age at which these two languages are introduced, and the different ways in which the students are exposed to the languages. She describes English as a language that students are constantly exposed to, as Transcript 6 shows:

Transcript 6:

And then it's somehow acquired differently there [English teaching]. So, they don't think in terms of consciousness, they just get the blocks, they get the panels, they use it, they've seen it on TV, they've played a videogame, so English goes into their heads almost like their mother tongue, in these totally unconscious ways of using it. (Participant 2)

The two important comments she makes in connection with English are its early introduction (Transcript 5) and the language's dominant presence in the media (Transcript 6), both of which can be considered factors that contribute to a lower level of metalinguistic awareness relative to the level of proficiency they reach in the L2 until they start learning the L3. Although through the introduction of various written and digital authentic materials it might be possible to establish a language-rich environment for Italian as in the case of English, the degree of exposure cannot match the automaticity and the certain ease that English comes with.

Learners will be required to actively seek opportunities to engage with Italian media, which is a process that entirely relies on the teacher in terms of guidance and monitoring. These considerations reflect what the previous studies about TLA (Burai, 2022; Irsara, 2017) suggest in terms of differences in the level of awareness during the acquisition of the L2 and the L3. Participant 2 further distinguished the learning process of the L3 from that of the L2 stating that unconscious acquisition is not possible to the same extent in the case of a third language (Transcript 7):

Transcript 7:

And here [L3 teaching], we expect them in 9th grade to conduct an analytical study of the language. So, the third language is a bit harsher in that sense... That's because you have to work for it. (Participant 2)

By attributing a degree of ‘harshness’ to third language acquisition she intends to emphasize that the learning process of the L3 is much more analytical and linear, as compared to English that follows a spiral approach, with elements that are repeated many times for a time period of over a decade. The time frame that is dedicated to TLA is only a four-year period. Another aspect of English is that it is present both as a school subject and as a language that students come in contact with outside of school, while the same is not possible with a third language. As a consequence, it can be said that the conscious decision to learn a third language, combined with positive attitudes and high motivation can be considered as key features for the acquisition of a third language, in the present case Italian.

4.2.3 Teachers’ attitudes towards loanwords

It emerged from the interviews that Italian student’s books contain numerous anglicisms, and their positive impact was underlined by Participant 5 (Transcript 8), who also remembered how these elements influenced her own learning experience:

Transcript 8:

Or in the ‘Progetto’ book for example, as I’ve looked at these introductory tasks, they start by bringing up with words that they already really know about the topic. And I think that can be a little bit of a positive kind of impression at the beginning, that they already have words that they know. I’ve experienced it myself as well. (Participant 5)

A thorough analysis and comparison of a large corpus of didactic material in Hungary and other countries could constitute the basis of another study. The intention of the current research is only to mention some examples from the manual *Nuovissimo Progetto Italiano* by Telis Marin, the most recent version of the book series that has been widely used in Hungary in the last two decades and is currently used by all the teachers who participated in this study. The first page of every chapter constitutes an introductory lesson in which the primary vocabulary elements appear for the first time. To familiarize students with the topic that comes next, the book very often relies on anglicisms that they are expected to be familiar with. This is especially true for themes that are linked to online communication, such as Unit 3: *In contatto* [In contact] or television and media, such as Unit 10: *Che c’è stasera in TV?* [What’s on TV tonight?] (Telis, 2020). In these chapters a noticeable frequency of anglicisms (*i social network, fare lo shopping, le soap opera, il talent show*) compared to the other ones, which means that the book follows the English lexical borrowing tendencies in Italian discussed in section 2.4.

Participant 2 also referred to anglicisms with a welcoming attitude, claiming that they can function in an encouraging and motivating way, being elements that they are already familiar with (Transcript 9):

Transcript 9:

Then there are a lot of such anglicisms in Italian, like: fare lo shopping, scegliere l'outfit which are beautiful words [irony]. I like to mention them in my lessons. Obviously, I underline the fact that there was a law [a law suggestion] a few years ago that they shouldn't be used so wildly anymore. Still, I believe that these elements can make the information stick even more. (Participant 2)

The attitude that Participant 2 presents in connection with anglicisms presents two roles that contradict, yet complement each other. As a linguist, she second-guessed whether the exaggerated application of anglicisms in the modern era is correct, and refers back to a recent controversy where an Italian political party suggested sanctioning journalists who use anglicisms.¹ As a teacher, on the other hand, she recognized the facilitator role of anglicisms. These considerations coincide with the ones that appear in Spaliviero's (2024) empirical study. In that study the participating teachers stated that they compare anglicisms with words in Italian, Spanish, and other languages and learn about word origins with their students. This is a valuable tool to foster reflection in multilingual classrooms. (p. 35). Taking into consideration the current state of language contact between Italian and English, the language elements that appear in the didactic material and present-day teacher attitudes, it can be deduced that Italian anglicisms are yet another important aspect of the ways in which English is involved in an L3 classroom.

4 Conclusion

The main goal of the current study was not only to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of L3 Italian teachers in relation to multilingual awareness-raising, but also to explore their attitudes towards using prior language knowledge for teaching a third language. To conclude the findings, it can be claimed that teachers' language awareness about the multilingual systems in their learners' minds and the sociolinguistic phenomena that happen in between languages is a crucial part of language teaching. The interaction between language

¹ The suggestion was rejected by the Italian linguistic academy *Accademia della Crusca*. Source: https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/proposta-fdi-difesa-lingua-italiana-multe-fino-100mila-euro-AEn1YJCD?refresh_ce, accessed on 14th of October, 2024

systems in the students' minds are influenced by the mother tongue, their cross-linguistic awareness, the role of loanwords in their L3 classroom or the teacher's attitudes towards raising cross-linguistic awareness. In the current research, all the teachers showed a high level of language awareness, and expressed a welcoming attitude towards the possibility of multilingual teaching that involves the elements mentioned previously. In the beginning of the teaching career, initial dilemmas and questions might arise that can conflict monolingual and multilingual ideas, but the teaching experience in itself contributes to a clearer distinction between L2 and L3 teaching and to the development of a more stable and effective teaching style.

The implications of the current research are expected to be connected to the field of language teaching, especially in the development of curricula and teaching methods. The recency of the significant influence gain of English on such a large scale as nowadays indicates that more research is needed on cross-linguistic phenomena that the young generations experience in Hungary or other parts of Europe. This study identified some tendencies connected to the role of the mother tongue and the L2, but one limitation of this qualitative research is that the tendencies cannot be generalized, and therefore it would be useful to collect data from a larger sample of participants that includes teachers with varying years of experience in order to see the full spectrum and make quantitative deductions. Another important aspect to consider in further research is the perspective of the students, which could also largely contribute to a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes in language acquisition.

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