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Csilla Ibolya Sólyom: Transfer of pronominal possessors, differential object marking, and resultative constructions in L3 acquisition of English
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Transfer of pronominal possessors, differential object marking, and resultative constructions in L3 acquisition of English

This paper presents the results of an experimental test conducted with two age- and proficiency-matched groups of English learners: an L2 group (L1 Hungarian L2 English; N = 20) and an L3 group (L1 Hungarian L2 Romanian L3 English; N = 24). The grammatical phenomena under investigation are pronominal possessors, differential object marking, and resultative constructions. The experimental test consists of an acceptability judgement task in English, designed to assess learners' comprehension of grammatical and ungrammatical target sentences in the initial stages of learning English as an L2/L3. The paper contributes to the field of L3 acquisition by the novel combination of languages involved in the experiment and the target grammatical conditions that have not been examined in this context before. The results provide evidence for property-by-property facilitative and non-facilitative linguistic transfer from both previously learned languages (predicted by the Linguistic Proximity Model by Westergaard et al. (2017) and the Scalpel Model by Slabakova (2017)).

Keywords: L3 acquisition, transfer, pronominal possessors, differential object marking, resultative constructions

1. Introduction

The main goal of this paper is to investigate the comprehension of pronominal possessors, differential object marking (DOM), and resultative constructions (RCs) in the initial stages (A2 level of proficiency) of L3 acquisition of English. An experimental test was conducted on two groups of English learners: an L2 group (L1 Hungarian, L2 English) and an L3 group (L1 Hungarian, L2 Romanian, L3 English). The purpose of comparing the two groups was to determine the source of linguistic transfer/crosslinguistic influence (CLI) – whether it be the L1, L2, or both[1]. Hungarian (L1), Romanian (L2), and English (L3) comprise the language combination used in the investigation. The languages in question are typologically distant, falling under the Finno-Ugric, Romance, and Germanic language families.

[1] I use the terms transfer and CLI interchangeably, like other authors (e.g. De Angelis, 2007, p. 19; Odlin, 2003, p. 436).

The target grammatical properties with regard to the three languages involved in the study are discussed in Section 2.

As per the literature, the learner's L1 or L2 can serve as the source of transfer, which can either facilitate or impede the process of learning the intended L3. A variety of L3 transfer models have emerged in the last twenty years, each predicting that the source of transfer would be either the L1 or the L2, or both, of the formerly learned languages. Some models suggest that transfer can be beneficial as it facilitates the acquisition of L3. Others contend that transfer can also be detrimental (non-facilitative), thereby obstructing the acquisition of the target language.

The L1 scenario (Hermas, 2010, 2015; Na Ranong & Leung, 2009) anticipates that the L1 will be the favoured language for transfer. In contrast to the L1 scenario, the L2 Status Factor hypothesis (L2SF; Bardel & Falk, 2007; Falk & Bardel, 2011) posits that the second language is selected for transfer based on its psychological and cognitive significance, as well as its recent origin. L3 syntactic transfer from L1 or L2 is claimed by Cumulative Enhancement Model proponents (CEM; Flynn et al., 2004). Language acquisition is a sequential and incremental process, according to the CEM, and prior language knowledge may be beneficial or irrelevant to the learning process. The Typological Primacy Model (TPM; Rothman, 2011, 2013, 2015) anticipates a complete initial transfer from the language (L1 or L2) that is typologically closest. The model accommodates both positive and negative transfer. The parsing of the new input L3 grammar may require a longer or reduced duration, contingent upon the similarities between the languages.

Proponents of the Linguistic Proximity Model (LPM; Westergaard et al., 2017; Westergaard, 2020) argue that properties are acquired one at a time and permit the use of input from one or both previously acquired languages, allowing it to be both facilitative and non-facilitative. CLI arises when a linguistic feature of a language being taught is structurally analogous to features of languages that have been previously acquired. Nevertheless, this analogy may only be present at the initial stage of the learner's incorrect perception, which prevents the facilitation of a previous language. Similar to the LPM, the Scalpel Model (SM; Slabakova, 2017) predicts property-specific positive and negative transfer from the L1 and/or L2. Westergaard et al. (2017) and Westergaard (2020) emphasize the process of co-activation of all known languages in the learner's mind when acquiring an L3/Ln, whereas Slabakova (2017) emphasises the learner's capacity to make scalpel-like, sharp distinctions between language properties.

The paper aims to present how transfer occurs in the case of the two groups, to identify the source and driving factors of transfer, and ultimately provide support for or contradict predictions of the L3 acquisition models briefly discussed above in relation to the target grammatical properties and languages used in the experiment.

The paper is organized as follows: the target grammatical features in the three languages are introduced in Section 2. The experimental investigation is the primary focus of Section 3, while the results are presented in Section 4. Section 5 serves as the paper's conclusion.

2. Linguistic background

2.1. Pronominal possessors

The three languages manifest variations in the types of pronominal possessors that are the subject of the current study. One of the experiment's objectives was to investigate the possibility of employing the definite article with the third person singular possessive pronoun(s) *his/her* in English (as a result of linguistic transfer by the learners), as well as the variations in word order between Hungarian, Romanian, and English when expressing possession. Within the grammatical category of pronominal possessors, this paper focuses only on some specific forms of expressing possession (out of many), which can be regarded as equivalent and to a certain degree similar structures in the three languages: caseless possessor in Hungarian preceded by the definite article, genitive-marked personal pronouns in Romanian with suffixal definite article, and agreeing possessive pronouns in English which cannot occur with the definite article. The structures are briefly described and illustrated by examples in the following subsections.

2.1.1. Hungarian. The caseless possessor *ő* (his/her) is always preceded by the definite article *a/az* (the), as presented in example (1a). The caseless possessor *ő* (his/her) is optionally used in Hungarian (see example (1b)). However, its use is preferred when the aim is to express contrast.

(1) a. az ő könyve — Hungarian
the he/she book.POSS
'his/her book'

(É. Kiss, 2002, p. 158, (14b))

(1) b. a könyve — Hungarian
the book.POSS
'his/her book'

2.1.2. Romanian. According to Dobrovie-Sorin and Giurgea (2013), Romanian uses genitive-marked forms of the personal pronoun for the third person, which are gender-congruent with the possessor (i.e., a masculine or feminine head noun). The genitive case is employed to indicate third-person possessors, as illustrated in example (2).

(2) fata lui / ei / lor Romanian
girl.F.DEF he.GEN / she.GEN / they.GEN
'his girl' / 'her girl' / 'their girl'

Another critical element in this context is the presence of the definite article in the form of a clitic affixed to the noun: *-a* for the feminine noun (example (2)) and *-le* for the masculine noun (as in *frate**le** lui* (his brother)). Additionally, it is important to note that the possessive pronoun is placed after the noun, which results in a word order distinction from English.

2.1.3. English. The inherent gender of the possessor is reflected in the third-person singular possessive determiners for masculine and feminine (Imaz Agirre & Garcia Mayo, 2018, p. 207) in English. The primary focus of this study is the possessive pronouns *his* and *her*, which indicate gender agreement with the possessor in the sentence (see examples (3a) and (3b)).

(3) a. He's talking to **his** mother.
b. She's talking to **her** mother.
(Imaz Agirre & Garcia Mayo, 2018, p. 207-208)

In English, the possessive pronoun and the definite article are not permitted to co-occur (e.g., **the his mother*). Each of these prepositions functions as a determiner in the sentence, and only one can be employed at a time. Furthermore, they are DPs because pronominals like *her* possess a D feature (Koeneman & Zeijlstra, 2017, p. 102). Consequently, the three languages under investigation exhibit an important difference in their use of the definite article. Hungarian and Romanian necessitate its use with possessive structures, whereas English prohibits it.

2.2. DOM

The term *'differential object marking'* (DOM) was first introduced by Bossong (1985). This term is a comprehensive reference for the cross-linguistic strategies that grammars employ to process specific nominal items, such as nouns or pronouns, in (in)direct object position. This grammatical feature is not present in Hungarian or English, but it is compulsory in Romanian. Clitic pronouns (e.g., *lui* (for)) and dedicated elements (e.g., *pe* (on/onto)) can be employed to express DOM. The current investigation concentrates on the particle *pe*, which serves as both a locative preposition and a DOM-marker in Romanian (Onea, 2023).

There is a degree of agreement among scholars regarding the constraints of DOM usage in Romanian: it is obligatory to use DOM with personal pronouns and proper names, it is possible with modified definite animate NPs and indefinite animate NPs, and it is impossible to use with definite specific and indefinite inanimate NPs (Farkas & von Heusinger, 2003; von Heusinger & Onea, 2008; von Heusinger & Chiriacescu, 2009). The current investigation is focused on obligatory DOM with proper names, as illustrated in example (4):

(4) Îl caut **pe** Ion. Romanian
CL.3SG look for.1SG DOM John
'I am looking for John.'

Once again, in Hungarian and English, this particular grammatical characteristic is not present; nonetheless, it is required in Romanian in the target test sentences (here I refer to the Romanian AJT post-test, where I tested the learners' sensitivity to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences with regards to DOM, see Appendix 2). (What do you mean by this? Could you please elaborate on/explain what you mean by target test sentences? It would be essential to explain the role of these sentences, how they have been constructed, and why. You have mentioned them in the Appendix, but the process can be understood only if the procedure is explained here in a few lines.

2.3. RCs

A resultative phrase is defined as "an XP that describes the state attained by the referent of the noun phrase it is predicated of as a result of the action named by the verb" (Levin, 1993, p. 101). Romanian does not employ equivalent RC strategies, whereas Hungarian and English do, with some differences discussed later on in this section[2].

The typology of event lexicalization strategies developed by Talmy (1985, 1991, 2000) distinguishes between satellite-framed languages (e.g., English, German, Dutch, Icelandic, Finnish, Hungarian) and verb-framed languages (e.g., Romance, Japanese, Hebrew). A satellite element that is external to the verb, such as a verbal particle or a resultative secondary predicate, is used to represent result states in English and Hungarian (Kardos & Szávó, 2024). This study focuses on AP RCs, illustrated in example (5):

[2]Baciu (2014) and Farkas (2009) argue that with some special exceptional cases, Romanian does not exhibit strong resultatives. According to Baciu (2014) it is possible that Romanian has weak resultatives (e.g. pseudo-resultatives). *Farkas (2009) argues that 'Romanian RCs are based only on transitive and intransitive unaccusative matrix verbs' in contrast with 'Germanic languages which abound in RCs based on different types of verbs' (Farkas, 2009, p. 70).*

(5) Jones hammered the metal flat.

(Rapoport 1999, p. 669, (38a))

In example (5), the resultative secondary predicate *flat* conveys a result state that is morphologically disassociated from the verb. English and Hungarian are characterized as strong satellite-framed by Acedo-Matellán (2016), in contrast to weak satellite-framed languages, such as Latin (e.g., Romanian) and Slavic languages, which necessitate the expression of results in syntactically autonomous elements that are also prefixed to the verb. However, the word order is a critical distinction between the two languages. In English, resultative phrases are adjuncts and arguably occupy a complement position in the VP, while in Hungarian, they occupy the specifier of an aspectual projection in a preverbal position (Kardos & Farkas, 2022). A Hungarian RC pattern is illustrated in example (6):

(6) Kati laposra kalapált egy vaslemezt. Hungarian
Kati flat.SUBL hammer.PST.3SG an iron_plate.ACC
'Kati hammered an iron plate flat.'

(Kardos & Szávó 2024, p. 108, (18a))

3. The experiment

3.1. Research questions and hypotheses

RQ1: How does transfer from the L1 and L2 occur in the comprehension of pronominal possessors, DOM, and RCs in the initial stages of learning L3 English?
RQ2: What factors determine the choice of transfer source selection? Does transfer happen property-by-property (as argued by the LPM) or wholesale (as predicted by the TPM)?
H1: It is predicted that in the case of all three grammatical conditions, transfer would have non-facilitative effects on the target English grammar (in the initial stages of learning) due to differences between the learned languages with regard to the target structures. Learners may incorrectly believe that a property is shared between the L3 and one or both of the previously acquired languages, which leads to non-facilitative influence (Westergaard et al., 2016, p. 6).
H2: It is anticipated that perceived structural similarity among the languages would drive transfer source selection, predicted by the LPM and TPM. Property-by-property transfer from various sources (L1 and L2) is predicted in line with the LPM (as shown in previous research on pronominal possessors by Imaz Agirre and Garcia Mayo, 2018; on DOM by Giancaspro et al., 2015, and on RCs by Slabakova, 2002, and Whong-Barr, 2005).

Table 1. Predictions of language transfer for the L3 group at the initial stages of L3 English derived from five scenarios.

	Conditions & Transfer source			**Type of transfer**
	Pronominal Possessors	**DOM**	**RCs**	
1. L1 Scenario	Hungarian	-	Hungarian	Facilitative or non-facilitative
2. L2 Status Factor (L2SF)	Romanian	Romanian	-	Facilitative or non-facilitative
3. Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM)	Romanian	-	-	Facilitative
4. Linguistic Proximity Model (LPM) & Scalpel Model (SM)	Romanian/& Hungarian	Romanian	Hungarian	Facilitative and /or non-facilitative
5. Typological Primacy Model (TPM)	Romanian	Romanian	-	Facilitative or non-facilitative

Table 1 summarises the predictions of five L3 acquisition models of transfer for the L3 group across the three experimental conditions. The L1 Scenario predicts positive or negative transfer solely from the L1, so learners are expected to transfer pronominal possessors and RCs from their L1. However, in the case of DOM, they cannot transfer from their L1 because Hungarian does not have this structure. Evidence of transfer from the L2 would contradict the L1 Scenario. The L2SF predicts facilitative or non-facilitative transfer from the L2 Romanian. However, this cannot be the case with regard to RCs, because Romanian does not allow RCs in the case of the test sentences. The L2SF would be disproved by evidence of transfer from both previously learned languages.

The CEM only hypothesises positive transfer from any or both known languages. Therefore, the model would predict facilitative transfer from the L2 in the pronominal possessor condition, and no transfer for DOM and RCs (as it could only be non-facilitative, which the model does not predict) due to the fact that only Romanian bears some similarities with the English pronominal possessors (e.g. gendered pronominal forms). Evidence of non-facilitation would be against the model. The LPM and SM anticipate property-by-property positive and negative transfer from both L1 and L2 based on actual or perceived structural similarities with L3. Thus, pronominal possessors may transfer non-facilitatively from the L1 and/ or L2, DOM may transfer non-facilitatively from the L2 (the only possible source), and RCs may transfer non-facilitatively from the L1. Evidence of wholesale transfer

(positive or negative) across all three conditions from one of the languages would contradict the models and provide support to the TPM, which predicts the complete initial transfer of the L1 or L2 as a primary hypothesis in the minds of learners upon starting to acquire an L3.

The TPM predicts complete transfer (positive or negative) from the typologically closest language (judged correctly or not). Regarding the target conditions, pronominal possessors and DOM would transfer from Romanian due to some specific linguistic similarity (e.g., gendered pronominal possessors in Romanian and English) and perceived similarity (e.g., obligatory DOM in Romanian, illustrated in ungrammatical test sentences in the English AJT). The model does not predict transfer of RCs from Hungarian, because learners are expected to transfer the Romanian grammar wholesale, as it is structurally more similar to English. Property-by-property transfer for various conditions from both L1 and L2 would be evidence against the TPM.

3.2. Participants and procedure

There were two groups involved in the experiment:
i) An L3 group – consisting of 24 L1 Hungarian, L2 Romanian, L3 English learners from the fifth grade (11-12 years old) from a school in Romania.
ii) An L2 group of 20 L1 Hungarian L2 English learners from the fifth grade from a school in Hungary.
Additionally, 12 native adult English speakers from the UK, 1 native Romanian speaker from Romania, 4 native Hungarian speakers from Hungary and Romania helped with validating target sentences and possible translations. The native English speakers also completed the experimental task, performing at a ceiling level.

Learners were chosen based on the following criteria: for the L3 group B1/B2 proficiency level in Romanian, an initial A2 proficiency level in English, and no prior knowledge of any languages other than these three (Hungarian, Romanian, English); for the L2 group A2 proficiency level in English and no prior knowledge of any other languages. All learner participants completed background questionnaires and online placement tests for Romanian (only the L3 group; https://www.17-minute-languages.com/en/learn-romanian/placement-test/) and English (Test your English - Young Learners (cambridgeenglish.org)) prior to the experiment. Additionally, the L3 group completed a Romanian post-test to ensure that they were familiar with the target structures (pronominal possessors and DOM) in their L2. The specific number of participants from the L3 group whose results were considered varied across conditions (due to their achievement in the Romanian AJT), and their precise number is indicated in the results' interpretation.

After selection, the learners received the link to the Google Forms in which the acceptability judgement task (AJT) was designed. The English experimental AJT and the Romanian post-test (also an AJT in Google Forms) were both completed online in the school's computer laboratory.

3.3. Test instruments

When designing the target test sentences, I considered the potential translations in the learners' L1 and L2 to make sure that the grammatical phenomena under investigation were present in the source languages (Hungarian and/or Romanian). In the case of ungrammatical test sentences, I aimed to test the learners' sensitivity to unacceptable structures. As I mentioned in Section 3.2, I used an English AJT as the experimental test, and a Romanian AJT as a post-test to verify that learners knew the target grammatical phenomena (pronominal possessors and DOM) in their L2. See the short description of the two tests as follows:

i) English AJT with Acceptable/Unacceptable answers, using four experimental conditions (pronominal possessors with Hungarian word order, pronominal possessors with Romanian word order, illustrative DOM, RCs with Hungarian word order) comprised of grammatical and ungrammatical sentence pairs. The total number of test sentences was 50, which consisted of 32 target sentences and 18 unrelated filler sentences (grammatical and ungrammatical pairings). The sentences were presented in the Google Form in a randomized order to prevent learners from copying from each other. Table 2 provides examples of the grammatical and ungrammatical test sentences for each test condition. For a complete list of the test sentences, see Appendix 1.

Table 2. Examples of test sentences (English AJT)

	Conditions	**Examples**
1.	Pronominal Possessor (Hungarian word order)	John drives Sarah's car because **his car** is broken. *John drives Sarah's car because **the his car** is broken.
2.	Pronominal Possessor (Romanian word order)	John helps **his mom** when she sets the table. *John helps **the mom his** when she sets the table.
3.	DOM	I understand Maria when she speaks German. * I understand **to** Maria when she speaks German.
4.	RCs	He **burns** the toast **black**. *He **black burns** the toast.

ii) Romanian AJT for pronominal possessors and DOM conditions. There were 16 target sentences used. Sentences were randomly presented. Table 3 shows examples from the Romanian AJT.

Table 3. Examples of test sentences (Romanian AJT)

	Conditions	**Examples**
1.	Pronominal Possessor	Sarah folosește **stiloul lui** Ben pentru că **stiloul ei** este Sarah uses pen.DEF he.GEN Ben because pen.DEF she.GEN is.3SG acasă. Romanian home 'Sarah uses Ben's pen because her pen is at home.'
2.	DOM	Ion o ajută **pe** mama lui când aceasta pune masa. John CL. helps DOM mother.DEF he.GEN when this sets table.DEF Romanian 'John helps his mother when she sets the table.'

4. Results

In order to interpret the results, chi-square statistical tests were performed to compare correct and incorrect answers within and between the groups. Accuracy rates are presented in percentages, and figures illustrate the performance of the groups. Results are interpreted in relation to L3 acquisition models, with special focus on transfer effects from previously learned languages. The following subsections discuss the results of each test condition separately.

4.1. Pronominal possessors

In order to accommodate potential transfer from both L1 Hungarian and L2 Romanian, the experimental condition of pronominal possessors was divided into two sections. The word order of Hungarian and Romanian was replicated by constructing ungrammatical sentences. It is essential to note that the total number of L3 participants for this condition was 16 out of 24, as 8 learners were eliminated based on the selection criteria (they were unable to demonstrate knowledge of pronominal possessors in L2 Romanian in the post-test). Pronominal possessors were expected to transfer non-facilitatively from the L1 or the L2 due to structural and word order differences.

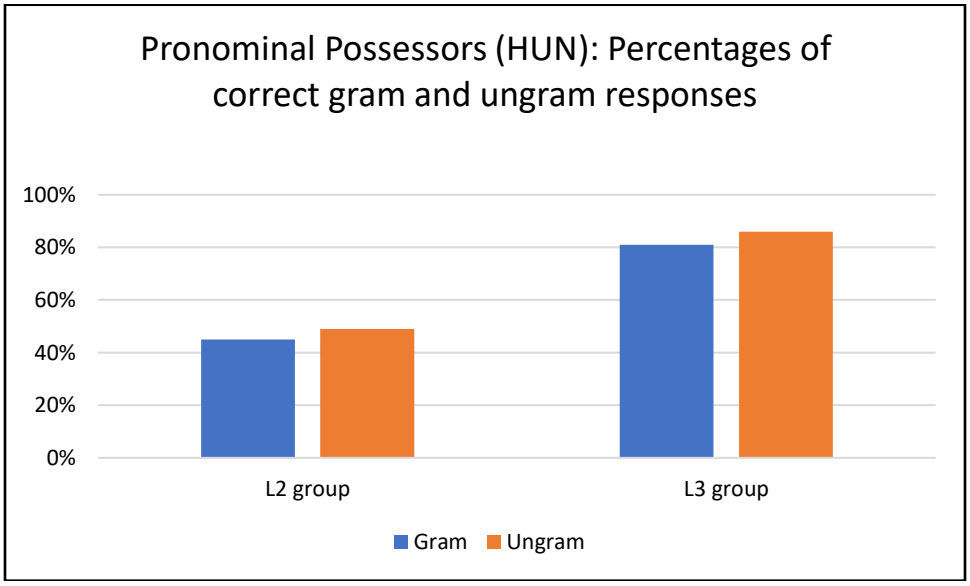
4.1.1. Hungarian word order

The L2 group demonstrated low overall accuracy, with 47% of their answers correct and 53% incorrect. They performed slightly better at rating ungrammatical sentences (49% correct answers) than grammatical sentences (45% correct answers). However, the chi-square statistical test did not produce a significant result (chi-square statistic: 0.2259, the p-value is .634594, not significant at $p < .05$). The results may indicate nonfacilitative transfer effects from the learners' L1 Hungarian due to the lack of natural and grammatical gender and the obligatory use of the definite article in Hungarian. If we examine the ungrammatical test sentences in detail, we find that

over half of the learners accepted the ungrammatical sentences with pronominal possessors preceded by the definite article (copying the Hungarian structure) in three out of four sentences. The results of the L2 group also show that they have not yet fully set the parameters of their L2 English in the case of pronominal possessors at this level of proficiency (A2).

The L3 group (N = 16) exhibits high accuracy rates, with 84% of their answers being correct and only 16% incorrect. Similarly to the L2 group, they performed slightly better at rating ungrammatical sentences (86% correct answers) than grammatical sentences (81%). However, the difference is not statistically significant (chi-square statistic: 0.5127, p-value = 0.473979, not significant at $p < 0.05$). The highly accurate results may indicate facilitative transfer from the learners' L2, Romanian, due to some similarities between Romanian and English, such as the presence of gendered pronominal possessors. Due to their probable frequent exposure to the grammatical structure, the learners may have identified this similarity between their L2 and L3 at an early stage and learned to inhibit non-facilitative transfer effects of their L1. The chi-square test yielded a statistically significant result (chi-square statistic: 41.2212, p-value < 0.00001, significant at $p < 0.05$) when comparing the correct and incorrect answers between the two groups, indicating a considerable difference between them, with the L3 group being more accurate. Figure 1 shows the proportions of correct answers of the two groups in the case of grammatical and ungrammatical test sentences.

Figure 1. Percentages of correct responses for Pronominal Possessors – Hungarian patterned condition



4.1.2. Romanian word order

The L2 group's accuracy rate was 53% correct and 47% incorrect answers. They performed slightly better at rating grammatical sentences (66% correct answers) than ungrammatical sentences (40% correct answers). The chi-square statistical test gave significant result when comparing the number of correct and incorrect grammatical and ungrammatical answers (chi-square statistic: 11.0682, the p-value is .000878, significant at $p < .05$). The results may indicate non-facilitative transfer effects from the learners' L1 Hungarian due to the lack of natural and grammatical gender and the obligatory use of the definite article in Hungarian. Their error rates are high, similar to the results with the Hungarian-patterned test sentences. The overacceptance of ungrammatical sentences is likely a result of low proficiency in L2 English.

The accuracy rate of the L3 group was 74% correct and 26% incorrect answers, much higher than the L2 group's rates. Similarly to the results of the L2 group, L3s performed slightly better at rating grammatical sentences (78%) than ungrammatical sentences (70%). However, upon comparison of correct and incorrect answers, the chi-square statistical test did not produce a significant result (chi-square statistic: 1.0207, p-value = 0.312345, not significant at $p < 0.05$).

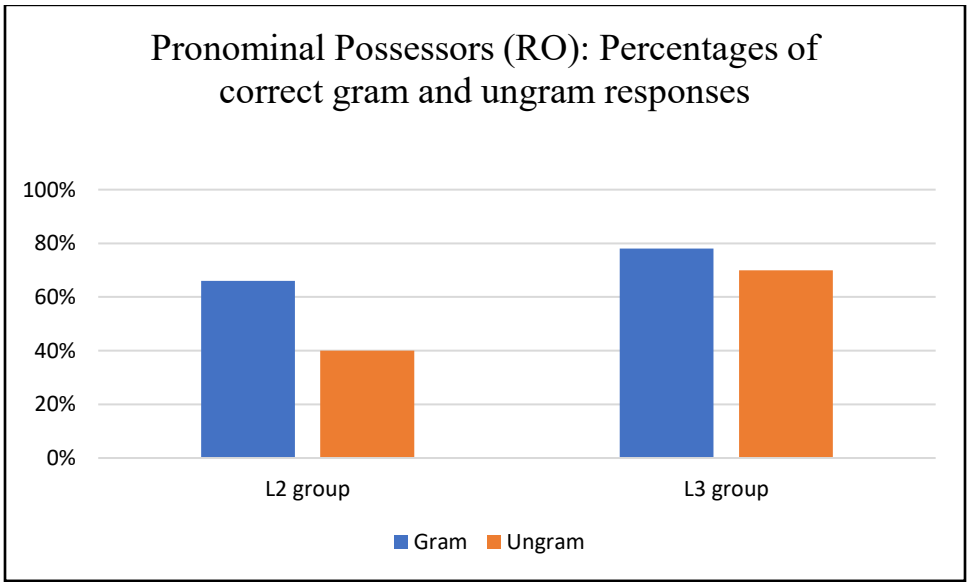
Contrary to the predictions, learners did not overaccept ungrammatical sentences with the Romanian pronominal possessor pattern, so it is highly probable that there was no significant non-facilitation of the L2 in this case. It is reasonable to assume that the L2 had a facilitative effect due to structural similarity, similar to the ratings of the ungrammatical sentences with a Hungarian pattern. The high accuracy rates indicate that L3 learners have already set the parameters of the target L3 English grammar, with regard to the ungrammaticality of using the definite article with pronominal possessors and the correct word order, which differs from their L1 and L2. Also, the learners may have identified and exploited the similarity between the gendered pronominal possessor forms that agree with the possessee in Romanian and English during the experimental testing. Concerning the acquisition of pronominal possessors in the literature, in a study Sólyom (2023) looked at animacy and gender agreement effects in the case of the same language combination (L1 Hungarian L2 Romanian and L3 English) and the results indicated that natural gender of the head nouns helped learners establish correct gender agreement with the possessee. It can be assumed that in the present study the learners could identify this structural similarity regarding the role of natural gender and agreement in pronominal possessor forms, the word order differences between the L2 and L3 and they could also inhibit the non-facilitative effect of the L1 and L2 related to the use of the definite article.

The chi-square test yielded a statistically significant result (chi-square statistic: 13.5, $p < 0.05$) when comparing the correct and incorrect answers between the two

groups, indicating a considerable difference between them, with the L3 group being more accurate. The data show evidence for facilitative effects of the L2 Romanian. Thus, the overall results of the pronominal possessors (Hungarian and Romanian patterned) condition are in line with the predictions of the SM, and LPM in the sense that learners are capable of transferring properties from the structurally more similar language and separating them with scalpel-like precision (as predicted by Slabakova, 2017).

Figure 2 illustrates the accuracy rates of the two groups with regard to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences with pronominal possessors with Romanian word order in the ungrammatical test sentences.

Figure 2. Percentages of correct responses for Pronominal Possessors – Romanian patterned condition



4.2. DOM

The L2 group's accuracy rate was 49% correct and 51% incorrect answers. They performed slightly better at rating grammatical sentences (59% correct answers) than ungrammatical sentences (39% correct answers). The chi-square statistical test yielded a significant result (chi-square statistic = 6.404; p-value = 0.011386; significant at $p < 0.05$). The L2 group's low accuracy can be attributed to their limited proficiency in English and the lack of structural similarity with regard to DOM structures in Hungarian.

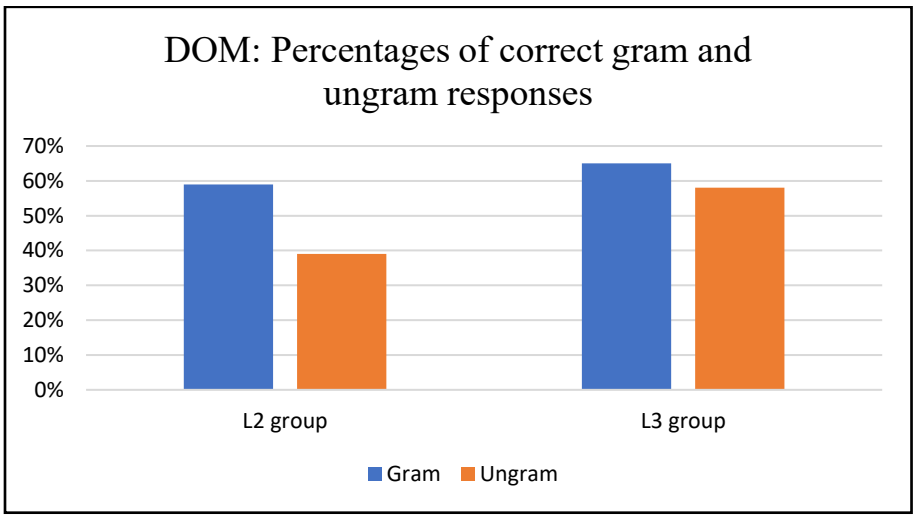
The L3 group's (N = 15) results also show low accuracy levels: 61% correct and 39% incorrect answers. Similarly to the L2 group, they performed slightly better at rating grammatical sentences (65% correct answers) than ungrammatical sentences (58% correct answers). However, the chi-square statistical test did not produce a

significant result (chi-square statistic: 0.564, the p-value is 0.452636, not significant at $p < 0.05$). The results of the L3 group may possibly indicate non-facilitative effects of the L2 Romanian, where DOM is obligatory in the case of the test sentences. Due to high exposure and frequency of the structure in Romanian, learners at the initial stages of L3 learning might have perceived wrong structural similarity and transferred DOM property into their target L3 English (acceptance of 42% of the ungrammatical test sentences with artificial DOM in English may lend support to this hypothesis).

The results of the English AJT, paired with those of the Romanian AJT regarding the availability of DOM for transfer in the learners' L2, provide significant evidence for potential non-facilitative transfer from the L2 Romanian, in line with the predictions of the SM, LPM, TPM, and L2SF. To cite exemplary research that yielded comparable outcomes, Giancaspro et al. (2015) conducted a study on the acquisition of DOM in L3 Brazilian Portuguese (BP) by L2s who simultaneously spoke Spanish and English. The study examined Spanish/English successive L2s and Spanish/English heritage speakers. They employed a grammaticality judgement task (GJT) in both written and oral formats. In both groups, they observed non-facilitative transfer from Spanish, which they interpreted as supporting evidence for the TPM (Rothman 2010, 2011, 2013), indicating that learners transferred the most structurally/typologically similar language during the initial stages of L3 acquisition.

The chi-square test gave statistically significant result (chi-square statistic: 4.2708, the p value is .038772, significant at $p < .05$) when comparing the two group's correct and incorrect answers, showing that there is a considerable difference between the answers of the two groups, the L3 group being more accurate here, too. Figure 3 illustrates the accuracy rates of the two groups with regard to DOM condition.

Figure 3. Percentages of correct responses for DOM condition



The results of the L2 and L3 groups might seem contradictory because one would expect the L2s to reject the ungrammatical test sentences to a greater degree. After all, neither their L1 Hungarian nor their L2 English allows DOM structures. Learners of L2 English may know that a lack of DOM is grammatical without knowing that the presence of (illustrative) DOM is ungrammatical in English. Thus, instances of accepting ungrammatical test sentences may be evidence of linguistic development in the case of the L2 group (see a similar finding regarding DOM in Cabrelli et al. 2020). Moreover, the L3 group's superior performance in all test conditions may be attributed to the extensive evidence of the metalinguistic advantage of multilingual learners, whose knowledge of more grammatical systems makes learning a new language easier (e.g., Bialystok, 2001).

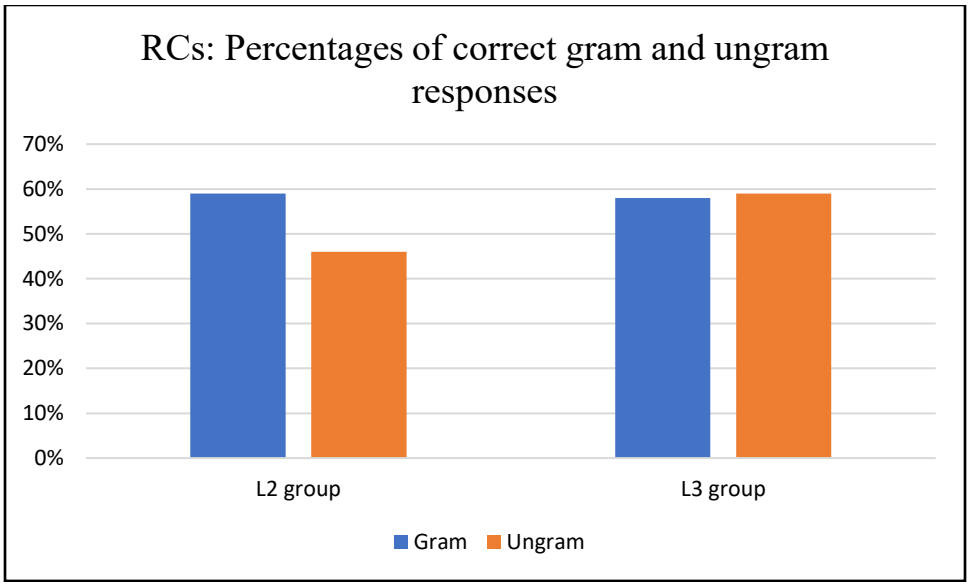
4.3. RCs

The L2 group's accuracy rate was 53% correct and 47% incorrect answers. Learners performed better at rating grammatical sentences (59% correct answers) than ungrammatical sentences (46%). However, the difference is not statistically significant (the chi-square statistic is 2.5063, and the *p*-value is 0.113394, which is not significant at $p < 0.05$). They accepted the ungrammatical sentences that copied Hungarian RC word order in 54% of the answers. This low accuracy could be explained by non-facilitative transfer effects from the L1 Hungarian, where RCs appear in different word order. Also, they have limited exposure to the structure in their L2 English at low proficiency levels.

The L3 group's ($N = 24$) accuracy is similar to the L2s': 59% correct and 41% incorrect answers. They performed very similarly when rating grammatical (58% accurate) and ungrammatical sentences (59% accurate), and the chi-square statistic did not give statistically significant result (the chi-square statistic is 0.0215, the *p*-value is .883404, not significant at $p < .05$). The learners accepted the ungrammatical sentences that copied Hungarian RC word order in 41% of the answers. Therefore, it is possible that L2 learners also resorted to their L1, as they might have perceived structural similarities in the case of RCs in Hungarian and English. However, due to word order differences, this perception resulted in non-facilitative transfer from the L1 Hungarian. Similarly to the L2 group, they have limited exposure to the structure in English at low proficiency levels (and RCs are never explicitly taught in schools), and they could not turn to their L2 because there are no RCs in Romanian (with some exceptional cases not used in the test sentences of the experiment). The chi-square test did not yield a statistically significant result (chi-square statistic = 1.4298, *p*-value = 0.113394, not significant at $p>0.05$) when comparing the two groups' correct and incorrect answers, indicating that there is no significant difference between the two groups.

The results of the RCs condition are compatible with the predictions of the LPM, and also confirm the study's hypothesis that predicted non-facilitative property-by-property transfer from the learners' L1 due to perceived (and actual) structural similarity between Hungarian and English. The entirety of the results (from all three conditions) appears to be more compatible with the predictions of the LPM, as learners transfer from various sources (both L1 and L2) both facilitatively and non-facilitatively, suggesting property-by-property transfer. Figure 4 shows the accuracy rates of the two groups regarding the RCs condition.

Figure 4. Percentages of correct responses for RCs condition



5. Conclusions

This paper aimed to examine the role of transfer in the development of two groups: L2 learners (L1 Hungarian, L2 English) and L3 learners (L1 Hungarian, L2 Romanian, L3 English), at the initial stages of learning English. The two groups were age- and proficiency-matched from two different countries: Hungary and Romania. By comparing the two groups, it was possible to locate both the source and the nature of linguistic transfer, especially in the case of the L3 group (which was the primary focus of the study). The results show that the L3 group significantly outperformed the L2 group in two out of the three test conditions. This result may show evidence of the metalinguistic advantage of the L3 group, stemming from their knowledge of more than one previously learned language, as well as increased cognitive performance and awareness.

Regarding the first research question and hypothesis, the predictions were partly confirmed. It was predicted that the L3 group would only show non-facilitative

transfer effects due to differences between the grammatical structures. However, the L3 group's accuracy (over 80%) pointed to a possible significant facilitative impact due to some similarities between the L2 Romanian and L3 English in the case of pronominal possessor condition (which similarities were not considered in the initial predictions). The learners may have realised the presence of gendered pronominal possessor forms in both languages, which helped them to provide correct answers in the English AJT. Turning to the second research question, in the case of the pronominal possessor condition, the determining factor for transfer source selection was actual structural similarity between the L2 and L3. Four of the five transfer models specified in Table 1 (see Section 3.1) are compatible with facilitative transfer from the L2, with the exception of the L1 Scenario.

Confirming the hypothesis, the L3 group demonstrated non-facilitative transfer effects from the L2 Romanian in DOM condition. They were unable to reject the ungrammatical test sentences with illustrative DOM in the English AJT. Perceived structural similarity between the L2 and L3 might have driven their choice; additionally, they could not use their L1 because Hungarian does not have DOM structures. Results are compatible with the L2SF, LPM, SM, TPM, and contra the L1 Scenario (with evidence of L2 transfer) and the CEM (with evidence of negative transfer).

In RCs condition, the hypothesis was confirmed as the data from the L3 group presents significant non-facilitative transfer effects from L1 Hungarian. Actual structural similarity between Hungarian and English RCs might have driven the selection of the transfer source language; however, word order differences resulted in non-facilitation (as learners were unable to reject ungrammatical sentences with Hungarian RC word order). The data provides evidence for the L1 Scenario (but only for the RC condition), LPM, SM (non-facilitative transfer from the L1) and contra the L2SF (with transfer from the L1), CEM (with negative transfer), and TPM (which would not predict transfer from the L1 after wholesale transfer of the L2 – as discussed in Section 3.1).

The entirety of the data regarding all three conditions provides significant evidence of both positive and negative CLI and it can be concluded that the LPM and the SM can account for most of the results, with property-by-property facilitative transfer (for pronominal possessor condition) and non-facilitative transfer (for DOM and RCs conditions) from the L1 and the L2. Perceived linguistic proximity was the driving force behind transfer source selection (except for the pronominal possessor condition). An unexpected finding of the study was evidence for metalinguistic advantage of multilinguals (Bialystok, 2001), as the L3 group had higher accuracy rates in the English comprehension task (AJT) in all test conditions than the L2 group (for pronominal possessors and DOM the difference was statistically significant

between the two groups)[3]. The combination of languages (Hungarian, Romanian, English) from different language families (Finno-Ugric, Romance, Germanic) and the analyses of three target grammatical features within a single experiment make a substantial contribution to the field of linguistics, particularly in the field of L3 acquisition and language teaching in general.[4] This analysis provides insight into learners' processing, with a special focus on linguistic transfer during the early stages of learning an L3.

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[3] Bialystok (2001) contends that bilingual children may develop executive functions and the control over attention and inhibition in a distinctively and more advantageous manner due to the constant management of two competing languages.

[4] A reviewer commented that both Romance and Germanic language families are sub-branches of the Indo-European language family, and there is a strong grammatical influence on English coming from Latin and French, and Romanian also has a Latin grammatical core structure. If I understand it well, the reviewer suggests that the languages I work with do not necessarily belong to different language families. However, I contend that even though there are common influences from Latin, the grammatical phenomena under investigation differ in the three languages, and therefore they can be used for examining transfer and testing L3 models of language acquisition.

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Appendix 1
Test sentences for the English AJT

Target sentences
i) Pronominal Possessor - Romanian word order
1 Brian is eating from Emily's lunchbox because his lunchbox is empty.
*Brian is eating from Emily's lunchbox because the lunchbox his is empty[5].
2 Sarah uses Ben's pen because her pen is at home.
*Sarah uses Ben's pen because the pen her is at home.
3 Sue is having lunch and she asks her dad for some bread.
*Sue is having lunch and she asks the dad her for some bread.
4 John helps his mom when she sets the table.
*John helps the mom his when she sets the table.

ii) Pronominal possessor - Hungarian word order
1 Emma borrows Tom's phone because her battery is running low.
*Emma borrows Tom's phone because the her battery is running low.
2 Mike is reading Lisa's book because his copy is missing.
*Mike is reading Lisa's book because the his copy is missing.
3 Rachel is staying at a friend's house because her apartment is being painted.
*Rachel is staying at a friend's house because the her apartment is being painted.
4 John drives Sarah's car because his car is broken.
*John drives Sarah's car because the his car is broken.

iii) DOM
1 Paul visits Sam every Sunday.
*Paul visits to Sam every Sunday.
2 Mike hugs Nelly when they meet at school.
*Mike hugs to Nelly when they meet at school.
3 I understand Maria when she speaks German.
* I understand to Maria when she speaks German.
4 I know Cory from kindergarten.
*I know to Cory from kindergarten.

iv) RCs
1 Grandma wipes the dirty table clean.
*Grandma clean wipes the dirty table.
2 Danny hammers the metal flat.

[5] The * symbol marks the ungrammatical sentences.

* Danny flat hammers the metal.
3 He burns the toast black.
*He black burns the toast.
4 Meggy sweeps the kitchen floor clean twice a week.
*Meggy clean sweeps the kitchen floor twice a week.

Filler sentences
1 The water is warm at the swimming pool.
*The water is warm the at swimming pool.
2 There are some offices on the fifth floor.
*There are some office on the fifth floor.
3 We usually have dinner at 8.
*We have usually dinner at 8.
4 Ben's bike has got a flat tire.
*Ben's bike got has a flat tire.
5 My grandma can cook really well.
*My grandma can cooks really well.
6 I tidy my room every day.
*I my room tidy every day.
7 Megan likes horse-riding very much.
*Megan very likes horse-riding.
8 There is a lot of water on the carpet.
*There a lot of water is on the carpet.
9 Dan plays the piano very often.
*Dan play the piano very often.

Example of a test sentece as it appeared in the AJT Google Form:

Please read each sentence carefully and under each sentence select the option that you consider correct: ***Acceptable*** *(if it feels correct in English) or* ***Unacceptable*** *(if it feels incorrect in English).*

Grandma wipes the dirty table clean.
☐ Acceptable
☐ Unacceptable

Appendix 2
Test sentences for the Romanian AJT

Target sentences

i) Pronominal Possessor - Romanian word order

1 Brian mănâncă din cutia Emiliei, deoarece cutia lui de prânz este goală.
Brian eats from box.DEF Emily.GEN because box.DEF he.GEN of lunch is empty
'Brian eats from Emily's box, because his lunchbox is empty.'

*Brian mănâncă din cutia Emiliei, deoarece lui cutia de prânz este goală.
Brian eats from box.DEF Emily.GEN because he.GEN box.DEF of lunch is empty
'Brian eats from Emily's box, because his lunchbox is empty.'

2 Sarah folosește stiloul lui Ben pentru că stiloul ei este acasă.
Sarah uses pen.DEF he.GEN Ben because pen.DEF she.GEN is home
'Sarah uses Ben's pen because her pen is at home.'

*Sarah folosește stiloul lui Ben pentru că ei stiloul este acasă.
Sarah uses pen.DEF he.GEN Ben because she.GEN pen.DEF is home
'Sarah uses Ben's pen because her pen is at home.'

3 Susana ia prânzul și îi cere tatălui ei niște pâine.
Susana has lunch.DEF and CL.3SG asks father.DEF she.GEN some bread
'Susana is having lunch and asks her father for some bread.

*Susana ia prânzul și îi cere ei tatălui niște pâine.
Susana has lunch.DEF and CL.3SG asks she.GEN father.DEF some bread
'Susana is having lunch and asks her father for some bread.4 Ion o ajută pe mama lui când aceasta pune masa.
John CL.3SG.F helps to mother.DEF he.GEN when this.F sets table.DEF
'John helps her mother when she sets the table.'

*Ion o ajută pe lui mama când aceasta pune masa.
John CL.3SG.F helps to he.GEN mother.DEF when this.F sets table.DEF
'John helps her mother when she sets the table.'

ii) DOM

1 Paul îl vizitează pe Samuel în fiecare duminică.
Paul CL.3.SG.M visit DOM Samuel in every Sunday
'Paul visits Samuel every Sunday.'

*Paul îl vizitează Samuel în fiecare duminică.
Paul CL.3.SG.M visit Samuel in every Sunday
'Paul visits Samuel every Sunday.'

2 Nicolae o îmbrățișează pe Nora când se întâlnesc la școală.
Nicolae CL.3SG.F hugs DOM Nora when CL.3PL meet at school
'Nicolae hugs Nora when they meet at school.'

*Nicolae o îmbrățișează Nora când se întâlnesc la școală.
Nicolae CL.3SG.F hugs Nora when CL.3PL meet at school
'Nicolae hugs Nora when they meet at school.'

3 O înțeleg pe Maria când vorbește germană.
CL.3SG understand.1SG DOM Maria when speak.3SG German
'I understand Maria when she speaks German.'

*O înțeleg Maria când vorbește germană.
CL.3SG.F understand.1SG Maria when speak.3SG German
'I understand Maria when she speaks German.'

4 O cunosc pe Corina de la grădiniță.
CL.3SG.F know DOM Corina from nursery
'I know Corina from nursery.'

*O cunosc Corina de la grădiniță.
CL.3SG.F know Corina from nursery
'I know Corina from nursery.'