Multilinguals' perceptions of crosslinguistic similarity and relative ease of learning genealogically unrelated languages

Letica Krevelj, Stela

Source / Izvornik: **Studia Romanica et Anglica Zagrabiensia, 2016, 61, 175 - 205**

Journal article, Published version
Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:131:598993

Rights / Prava: In copyright / Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-03-29**

Filozofski fakultet
Sveučilišta u Zagrebu

Repository / Repozitorij:

ODRAZ - open repository of the University of Zagreb
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

dabar
DIGITALNI AKADEMSKI ARHIVI I REPOZITORIJI

UDC 81'243:371.3
Original scientific paper
Received on 15 December 2016
Accepted for publication on 2 March 2017

Multilinguals' perceptions of crosslinguistic similarity and relative ease of learning genealogically unrelated languages

Stela Letica Krevelj
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Zagreb
stela.letica@gmail.com

It is widely accepted that learners' previous linguistic knowledge and language learning experience play an important role in the process of acquisition and use of an additional foreign language. One of the factors purported to facilitate or constrain the exploitation of previous background knowledge in the process of acquisition of an L3 is psychotypology, learners' perception of the typological proximity between the language systems in their repertoire. It is claimed that the most prominent features of similarity between languages are similarities at the lexical level, or the existence of cognate forms between languages regardless of whether they owe their existence to genealogy or contact (Hall et al. 2009; Ringbom 2007). However, similarity can be determined only in relative terms (depending on a particular language constellation) and its position depends on both typological similarity and language contact.

The present study aims to examine psychotypological beliefs of 189 multilingual high school learners of English as L3 living in officially bilingual Croatian-Italian communities in Istria County in Croatia. More precisely, we examine what the learners with background knowledge of Croatian and Italian base their judgments on in the assessment of similarity between English and other languages in their repertoire, and how they form judgments about the ease or difficulty of learning English depending on which of the two background languages is their mother tongue.

The data were collected using a multiple-choice psychotypology questionnaire based on Hall et al. (2009), which was slightly modified and supplemented with open-ended questions in which the learners were asked to explain in more detail the reasons behind the choices made in the questionnaire. The results are analyzed taking into consideration the language constellation of three genealogically unrelated languages, sociolinguistic and socioeducational context and both theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Key words: crosslinguistic similarity, language typology, multilingual learners, multiple language acquisition, psychotypology

1. Introduction

The notion of psychotypology, learners' perception of language relatedness, has been most commonly associated with the phenonmenon of crosslinguistic

influence (CLI) in second and thrid language acquistion and use. It is claimed to be one the most important factors which determine the frequency and source language of CLI in target language processing. Even though the notion of psychotypology has been evoked in the study of CLI since 1980s (see Kellerman 1983) the construct itself has not been studied with enough rigour. Furthermore, as reasearch on CLI in third language acquisition has shown that learners tend to rely on a previously acquired closely related language in their production in a third language (L3) (e.g., De Angelis 2005; De Angelis/Selinker 2001) this tendency was often, with more or less substantiated evidence, attributed to learners' psychotypology or learners' *perception* of relatedness between languages.

We believe that it is important to tap further into learners' perceptions of similarities and differences between the languages in the mind of multilinguals for several reasons. On a more general note, given that learning of an additional language is assumed to be based primarily on similarities rather than differences that exist between languages (Ringbom 2007: 1), further research into learners' perceptions of language relatedness can complement research on receptive multilingualism and promotion of intelligibility between related languages. Relevant studies look into differences between objective and perceived similarity between different languages at the level of individual items and structures (e.g., Kaivapalu/Martin 2014) in order to gauge the extent to which particular linguistic forms or structures promote or inhibit learners' perceptions of the similarity. Furthermore, it is necessary to have more data on the construct of psychotypology itself and its relationship with linguistic awareness, or crosslinguistic awareness (Jessner 2006) in particular, which would, in turn, provide us with a more detailed insight into ways psychotypology may play out in terms of frequency and the source language of CLI in a target language.

Studies on the relative weight of psychotypology in determining the frequency and source language of CLI in L3 production have been most commonly conducted in contexts where at least one of the languages in the multilingual mind was genealogically related to the target language (but see e.g., Cenoz 2001; Ó Laoire/Singleton 2009). We believe, however, that studying psychotypology in more detail in cases where three languages in the minds of multilinguals are genealogically unrelated may provide valuable insight into how the objective reality of language distance and language typology (Falk/Bardel 2010; see also below) play out in learners' perceptions of similarity between languages and, consequently, into the role they may play in multilple language acquisition and use.

2. Language typology

Typology, or the typological distance (determined by genealogy) between languages known and languages being learned, is an important factor in language acquisition and, in particular, in determining the extent of CLI in target language acquisition and use. However, when referring to the variable of typology as a

factor influencing CLI in language acquisition, researchers do not always refer to the same notion (Falk/Bardel 2010), as illustrated below.

Falk and Bardel (2010) make a distinction between language relatedness and language typology. According to them, language relatedness refers to a more general categorization of languages in terms of their origin or the language family they belong to, while typology refers to differences and more specifically to similarities of particular linguistic structures between languages that are not genetically related. Even though the task of determining language relatedness and language typology is not without controversy, the research conducted within the field of typology studies and the data produced within the contrastive linguistics studies shows that typological distance between languages and objective similarity between languages can be objectively measured.

While there are numerous objective similarities between languages that are closely related, such as in the case of Italian and Spanish (both being Romance languages), numerous similarities can also be found between languages which are genealogically distant, such as English and Finnish (Ringbom 2007: 77-78; section 4.3. below).

3. Psychotypology

The notion of psychotypology was introduced by Kellerman (1983) and defined as the similarity or distance as perceived by language learners/users. The learners may or may not be aware of the instances of objective similarity between languages, or they may not even be aware of language relatedness as defined by Falk and Bardel (2010) suggested above. Kellerman suggested that it is psychotypology, learners' perception of similarity that guides learners in their acquisition and use of particular languages.

The importance of learners' perception was further elaborated by Ringbom (2007) and Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008), who claim that learners' assessment of similarity, and their subsequent decisions on transferability of previous linguistic knowledge, is guided by *perceived* or *assumed similarity*. Perceived similarity is the similarity that a learner perceives based on the existing knowledge of the languages, while assumed similarity is the similarity the learner only assumes to exist on the basis of previously perceived similarities and differences.

The distinction between objective and perceived similarity is most obvious in the case of cognates between languages. The mere existence of cognate relation between items in two languages does not imply that a learner is aware of this relation and that it would have a faciltative effect in the process of language acquisition and use. Additional evidence for the importance of the distinction between objective and perceived similarity is the finding that not all cognates are equally easy to identify, and that the same cognate may not be perceived as such to the same degree by all learners (Kaivapalu/Martin 2014; Vanhove 2014). The difference between perceived and objective similarity is also evidenced in the asymmetrical relations that exist in intelligibility of particular lexical items in two languages. While objective similarities are symmetrical across the languages,

perceived similarity is found to be greater in one direction than in the other (Kaivapalu/Martin 2014; Ringbom 2007; see also below).

Defining psychotypology as perception, we are dealing with a process that psychologists define as a *subjective* process 'of acquiring, interpreting, and organizing sensory information' (Nelson 2008: 580) that does not lend itself to a straightforward analysis. As previously mentioned, the notion of psychotypology has been often rightly related to the notion of linguistic awareness (for a detailed elaboration of the concept see Jessner 2006) in as much as it presupposes the presence of learner's attention to and reflection on a language. However, we would like to emphasize that we do not know to what extent psychotypology may be informed by the objective reality of language relatedness or language typology. There are quite a few empirical studies that suggest that similarity most easily perceived by learners is at the level of lexis (see Letica Krevelj 2014) and regardless of whether formally similar forms are due to genealogy or contact (Hall et al. 2009; Ringbom 2007). However, both perceived and assumed similarity need to be a part of the construct of psychotypology, and assumed similarity, identified in learner production as CLI due to the existence of accidental cognates, has to be further examined in terms of its relationship with language relatedness (for further discussion see Letica Krevelj 2014).

3.1. Measuring psychotypology

In studies on CLI in second or third language acquisition, psychotypology was measured to examine to what extent it affects learners' linguistic behaviour or, more specifically, the source and frequency of CLI from in target language production. So far two different approaches to measuring psychotypology have been used in these studies. Some studies that tried to provide more concrete evidence of learners' perceptions have used introspective methods. For example, in their case study Bardel & Lindqvist (2007) and Singleton (1987) asked their participants about the relationship between the languages they know and their usefulness in the process of learning and using a target language. Some studies also used introspective methods to tap further into psychotypology by examining learners' perceptions in reference to the data found in their target language production (e.g., Letica Krevelj 2012; O'Laoire/Singleton 2009). Most commonly, on the other hand, psychotypology was measured on a more general level through a questionnaire in which participants were asked to report on which languages known to them they found more similar (Hall et al. 2009; Kresić/Gulan 2012; Letica/Mardešić 2007; Letica Krevelj 2012, 2014; Lindqvist 2015).[1] The above mentioned studies aimed in particular to see whether the perceptions reported corresponded to the path CLI took in learners' production. The psychotypology variable used in questionnaires was often measured with one or two items that

[1] The level of linguistic description that the learners are supposed to refer to in their judgements was sometimes specified (e.g., at the level of lexis), and sometimes it was not, depending on the aim and focus of the study.

referred strictly to the similarity perceived between two or more languages, but some studies provided for more qualitative data through an open-ended question in which participants were asked to explain their choices in more detail (Letica Krevelj 2014). Hall et al. (2009) introduced additional questionnaire items for the purpose of tapping further into learners' perceptions in reference to the beliefs they held about the relative ease or difficulty of learning particular languages, as well as an item that examined learners' awareness of the genealogical relation between the languages.

A further step in examining and measuring the construct of psychotypology is in studying learners' perception in terms of other learner-related variables. It has been noticed in some studies (e.g., Frankenberg-Garcia/Pino 1997; Kellerman 1986) that psychotypology is dependant on the target language proficiency.[2] The studies showed that with the increase in the target language proficiency, the learners' perceptions of similarity tend to change, and the same was found, for example, in the case of recognition of cognates between two languages (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2011).

Psychotypology seems to be influenced by the number of languages learners have in their repertoires. The awareness of presence of cognates in two languages has been taken as a way of measuring metalinguistic awareness and psychotypology of multilingual and bilingual learners in the study by Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2011). She found that the multilingual Polish learners of English in her study tended to notice, or be aware of, more cognates between Polish and English than the bilinguals. The multilingual learners were providing more sophisticated comments on the similarity between the languages and its usefulness in the language learning process than their bilingual counterparts.

Tsang (2015) compared psychotypology ratings of two groups of participants; bilingual Cantonese-English speakers and bilingual Cantonese-English speakers who knew an additional language (French as L3). Tsang (2015) asked both groups of participants to try to determine on a 1 to 10 scale the proximity between English and Cantonese and to provide the explanation for their choices. According to the author, the advanced learners of L3 French (the group with the highest proficiency level in French) showed more technical and more elaborated comments on the similarity and differences between the two languages, which was attributed to the enhanced crosslinguistic experience and the level of knowledge of L3 French. An interesting finding, which points to the relative nature of perceptions of similarity, is that the same group, the one with the highest proficiency in L3 within the multilingual sample, gave the lowest similarity rating to the two languages (Cantonese and English).

One line of research that seems more than promising when it comes to trying to define the construct of psychotypology is the one that looks at perceptions of similarity between languages at the smallest level of linguistic description, i.e., levels of individual lexical items and morphemes. Kaivapalu and Martin (2014)

[2] For further reference to the perceptions of similarity in relation to proficiency see Kaivapalu and Martin (2014).

emphasize the fact that similarity is a relative concept and argue that it should be judged on a continuum. They devised a taxonomy of the construct of similarity in order to be able to come up with a precise definition, and the taxonomy was tested in terms of perceived similarity at the morphological level between two closely related languages (Finnish and Estonian). One of the important findings was that the percieved similarity between particular lexical items in two languages was asymmetrical. Similarity between the two languages was perceived more frequently by the Finnish speakers than by the Estonian ones in cases where the other language was unknown to both groups of speakers. Asymmetry has been found also in other language pairs (see e.g., Gooskens/Heeringa 2014). Furthermore, Gooskens and Heeringa (2014) attributed this asymmetry partly also to the knowledge of dialectal varieties of L1. It was found that greater variability present in learners L1, rather than the overall language awareness, had an impact on perceptions of similarity between two closely related languages (see also Berthele 2008).

All of the above studies that dealt with the perception of similarity when more than two languages were present in the participants' repertoires seem to confirm an importan claim made by Aronin and Jessner (2015): looking through the lens of *two* languages may be entirely different from looking through the lens of *three* languages. They suggest that:

> On the basis of *two* things, we attempt to make predictions with some confidence. But with *three* things, the possibilities of the human mind penetrating deeper into the matter of things, increase exponentially. The range of findings, outcomes and interconnections opens up. (268)

As for the ways of measuring psychotypology in future studies, Bardel & Lindqvist (2007) pointed out that psychotypology is difficult to examine using qualitative studies, but Letica Krevelj (2014) argued that even large-scale studies may be more informative if coupled with qualitative data that looks into learners' psychotypology at the language system level and at the level of specific items or structures. It is clear from the empirical data provided above that in case where multiple languages are involved psychotypology may add to the complexity of relations. However, we believe that they are important to explore further as different combinations of languages involved in studies looking into psychotypology may provide important grounds for comparison when more or less related languages are involved both in terms of language relatedness and language typology.

4. A study on perceptions of crosslinguistic similarity and relative ease of learning genealogically unrelated languages

4.1. Aim of the study and research questions

The study aimed at examining perceived similarities between three languages by two groups of multilingual learners with the same genealogically unrelated languages in their linguistic repertoires but with different languages in the role of L1 and L2. We were looking at their perception of similarity at the level of language systems. We were interested in examining what the participants would base their perception on when assessing proximity between languages. Furthermore, we also compared their assessment of similarity relations to their beliefs about the ease of learning English (their L3) taking into consideration different variables related to differences in their language learning background and sociolinguistic environment.

More specifically, we aimed at providing answers to the following research questions:

1. How do multilingual speakers assess proximity between three genetically unrelated languages in their repertoires and what level of linguistic description are they referring to?
2. Are there differences in the assessment of similarity between the languages in relation to the participants' language learning background, or more specifically in terms of the language in the role of L1?
3. To what extent is the perception of similarity between languages represented in the participants' assessment of the ease of learning English (L3) in respect of other languages in their repertoire.

4.2. Particpants

The participants in our study were multilingual high school learners of English in Istria County, Croatia, who started learning their L2s after the age of three. All participants were users of the same three languages (Croatian, Italian and English), while some also had an additional (fourth language) in their repertoire. They had been learning English as their L3 (in terms of the order of acquisition), but they formed different groups in terms of the language they had in the role of L1 and L2.

The first group (CroL1) consisted of 126 3rd- or 4th- grade high school students whose native language (L1) was Croatian and who had started learning Italian as a foreign language (L2) in the 2nd grade of primary school (at age 8), and English as the third language in the 4th grade of primary school (at age 10). In the second group (ItaL1) there were 63 3rd- or 4th -grade high school students whose native language (L1) was Italian, and who had started learning Croatian as the 'national language' (L2) in the 1st grade of primary school (at age 7), and English as a third language in the 4th grade (at age 10) of primary school.

The CroL1 group was recruited from the *Croatian*-medium upper secondary schools in the town of Buje, while the ItaL1 group of participants was recruited from the *Italian*-medium secondary schools in the towns of Buje and Rovinj. Having in mind the complexity of assigning linguistic nominations and defining languages as L1 or L2, especially in contexts where vertical bilingualism is assumed to be possible with both officially recognized standard languages in the community, the participants in this study were selected on the basis of the labels they assigned to their L1. In terms of their L1, the CroL1 group had standard Croatian as their L1 (native speakers of the local Štokavian-Čakavian dialect were excluded from the study), but the ItaL1 group were almost exclusively L1 speakers of the Istrovenetian dialect,[3] meaning that they were in command of both the dialectal idiom and the standard language.[4]

For the majority of L1 Italian speakers, the Istrovenetian dialect was their mother tongue, and their first contact with standard Italian was through formal education; in kindergarten or in pre-school. It is important to point out that the use of the standard Italian language in Istria County is limited to formal education, mass media (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines), and other formal/cultural activities related to Italian institutions, whereas in private domains L1 Italian speakers use the Istrovenetian dialect (Milani Kruljac 1990, 2003). Milani Kruljac (1990) argues that the standard Italian language is felt by Italophone speakers as the elaborated version of the native idiom. Therefore, in psycholinguistic terms, there is no conflict between Istrovenetian as the language of the community in which they live and the Italian language as the means of communication of a larger community that goes beyond the Croatian national border.[5] At the same time, L1 Italian speakers were also largely competent speakers of Croatian, as it is the language of 'the majority', but they were rarely equally competent in both languages (Scotti Jurić/Poropat 2012).

Besides the difference in the languages that were in the status of their L1 and L2, the two participant groups were homogeneous in terms of gender, age and the grade they attended at the time study was conducted and the length of learning of the three languages. Both groups of participants had had at least ten or 11 years of formal instruction in their L2 (Italian or Croatian, depending on the group),[6]

[3] There were only four participants (out of 63) in the ItaL1 group who reported standard Italian as their L1.

[4] Two towns, Rovinj and Buje, where the research was conducted, are the ones in which Italian is used in everyday communication to a greater extent than in most parts of Istria County. In the town of Buje 33.25 per cent of the population speaks Italian as L1, and the same was reported by 10.39 per cent of the population of Rovinj. At the same time, the speakers of L1 Croatian in these towns are generally speakers of standard Croatian rather than dialectal idioms of the Croatian language (2011 census).

[5] 'La lingua [italiana] è sentita come elaborazione privilegata di un mezzo di comunicazione linguistica sostanzialmente affine alla parlata che si apprende inizialmente. Non vi è contrasto, insomma, tra l'adesione alla parlata materna e l'adesione a quello che appare come un livello superiore di quella parlata' (Milani Kruljac 1990: 79).

[6] According to the curriculum, both L2s are taught for four hours a week from the first/second grade of primary school until the end of the secondary school programme.

and 8 or 9 years of formal instruction in their L3 English. Descriptive data on the above mentioned characteristics of the two groups is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Distribution of participants across the two groups in terms of gender, age and school grade attended

Participant group	N	Gender (%)		Age		Grade attended (%)	
		M	F	M	(SD)	3rd	4th
CroL1	126	39.7	60.3	17.33	(.66)	56.3	43.7
ItaL1	63	38.1	61.9	17.29	(.61)	57.1	42.9

Although all of the participants in the sample were learning the same three languages, some of them were learning an additional modern language as L4, and some (those attending grammar school programs) had learned Latin in the first two years of their secondary school education. The percentages of learners who has studied Latin and an additional L4 across both participant groups were rather similar, and exact percentages are given in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2. Percentage of participants in each group who had studied Latin

Participant group	**Latin (%)**
CroL1	33.3
ItaL1	44.4

Table 3. Percentage of participants in each group studying German, French, or Spanish as L4

Participant group	L4			Total
	German	French	Spanish	
	%			
CroL1	47.6	7.1	3.9	58.7
ItaL1	44.4	4.8	3.2	52.4

Two different measures were taken to try to establish the participants' proficiency; self-reported proficiency in each language and the final grade in each language obtained at the end of the previous school year. However, due to the fact that the school curriculum imposed different criteria in grading L2s (Croatian and Italian) in the Croatian- and Italian-medium schools, the self-assessment values were taken as the measure of proficiency in the participants' L2 in both subsamples. It was believed that self-assessment in a context where the language could be put to use outside of the school environment provided for a more realistic picture of their competence in that particular language. On

the other hand, both grades and self-assessment values were taken together to represent the measure of participants' proficiency in their L3 (English).[7]

Table 4. Relative proficiency in participants' L1, L2, and L3 and statistical difference in proficiency between the two groups

Participant group	N	Proficiency in L1 (M/Sd)		N	Proficiency in L2 (M/Sd)		N	Proficiency in L3 (M/Sd)	
CroL1 group	126	4.17	.57	124	3.63	.1.08	126	3.79	.76
ItaL1 group	63	4.32	.62	60	3.87	.72	63	3.56	.87
T (df)		-1.655 (187)			-1.759 (182)			1.899 (187)	
p		.100			.080			.059	

From the Table 4 above, we see that the differences in the mean values of proficiency in each language of the two groups were not statistically significant.

4.3. Language relatedness and typology

The three languages that the study focused on, Croatian, English, and Italian, belong to the Indo-European group of languages, but to three different sub-groups. Croatian is a Slavic language, English is a Germanic language, and Italian is a Romance language. The typological distance between each of the three languages is less easily defined, and for the purposes of this study, we believe it is enough to say that there are different degrees of similarity and difference between each language combination that reflect the characteristics of the three major groups of languages within the larger group of Indo-European languages. However, the languages are not equally distant from each other at the lexical level, mostly due to the fact that English may be considered 'a semi-Romance language' (O'Laoire/Singleton 2009: 82-3; but see also Jucker 2000).[8] This very fact makes it closer to the Italian language,[9] even though the Croatian language

[7] There was a significant positive correlation between the two measures of proficiency in L3 English ($r=.539$, $p<.001$), so we decided to merge them into a single one that could potentially be more accurate than either of the measures alone.

[8] Some studies that have examined the distribution of cognates and false friends in different European languages have confirmed that English has characteristics of both Romance and Germanic languages. A similar number of cognates were found between English and other Germanic languages (German and Dutch) as between English and French, English and Spanish, and English and Italian. For example, it has been found that English and French have a number of orthographically *identical* cognates comparable to other closely related languages such as Italian and Spanish, but also that Italian and English have both more identical cognates and more false cognates than French and Italian or than French and Spanish (Schepens 2008; see also Schepens/Dijkstra/Grootjen 2012).

[9] The greatest part of the lexical repertoire of the Italian language is composed of lexemes of Latin origin that were either directly passed down from spoken Latin or those that entered into Italian in the Medieval period (Lorenzetti 2010).

also has many words that are borrowed from Latin.[10] One should also take into consideration the great amout of borrowing from the English language into other European languages (including Italian and Croatian) in the more recent past that is due to globalisation, which also makes the typological distance difficult to define. Nevertheless, it should be safe to say that the English and the Italian languages are closer than English and Croatian, or Italian and Croatian, precisely because of the Romance aspect of the English lexicon. While the English loanwords in Croatian are fairly great in number, they do not come close to the common component in the vocabularies of Italian and English, where the number of words shared by the two languages is also increased by additional English loanwords that entered Italian in the twentieth century.[11]

Due to the fact that ItaL1 participant subsample in our study had Istrovenetian dialect as their L1 it is important to define it in relation to both the Italian and Croatian languages. Istrovenetian has evolved separately from other Italian dialects within the political borders of Italy and was in contact with other Slavic languages and dialects. Therefore, there are some important differences between the Istrovenetian dialect and standard Italian. The differences between the two idioms are present at the phonological level (e.g., the pronunciation of certain consonants and vowels), at the morphosyntactic level (e.g., in the use of the subjunctive mood), and at the lexical level even though the Istrovenetian dialect and Italian share a great part of the lexis. The differences at the lexical level are mostly due to the intense borrowing from Croatian (standard and dialect) in the period after WW II and related to concepts and activities that were not familiar to the original Venetian culture (relating to occupation, socio-political practice, and administration) (Milani Kruljac 1990).

4.4. Instruments and procedure

The language learning background questionnaire used in the study was partly based on the Language History Questionnaire (a web-based interface for collecting language history information online) developed by Li, Sepanski, and Zhao (2006) and the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q) developed by Marian, Blumenfeld, and Kaushanskaya (2007). The questionnaire was further adapted to the sociolinguistic background of the

[10] The lexical repertoire of the Croatian standard language is of proto-Slavonic lexical heritage and based mostly on the Štokavian South Slavic dialect group with a mixture of vocabulary from the other two Croatian dialect groups (Čakavian and Kajkavian). However, unlike the other South Slavic languages, and due to its contact with Romance languages (in the coastal regions of Croatia) the Croatian language has received significant lexical influence from Romance languages (Tadić/Brozović-Rončević/Kapetanović 2012).

[11] Evidence of the great inventory of words shared by English and Italian is also indicated by the fact that there are a number of dictionaries of false friends between the two languages (e.g., Andrews 1997; Browne/Mendes/Natali 2009).

participants in the study (see Letica Krevelj 2014). The questionnaire items covered the participants' socio-demographic information, language learning histories, current language use, self-assessments of proficiency in all the languages, and school grades in each of their languages at the end of the previous academic year. All these variables were taken into consideration and used for the purpose of making two samples of participants as homogenous as possible, as visible from the description of the participant sample above.

The psychotypology questionnaire used in the study was largely based on the questionnaire devised by Hall et al. (2009) with an addition of open-ended question that allowed for the qualitative analysis of all the items that aimed at inspecting participants' psychotypological beliefs. The participants were asked to report which language (Croatian or Italian) they found to be more similar to English, as well as which language combination they found most similar. Furthermore, they were asked to report which language they thought would be easier to learn for an L1 Italian speaker (Croatian or English), and an L1 Croatian speaker (Italian or English). All questionnaire items were in the form of multiple-choice question and after each they were asked to explain their choice in more detail (see Appendix). The questionnaires were distributed to the participants during regular English or Italian language classes and they were in either Croatian or Italian depending on the language that was the medium of instruction in the particular school. The study received ethics clearance at Zagreb University before the start of the data collection stage. Prior to completing in the two questionnaires, the participants were asked to sign a written informed consent for participating in research (see Letica Krevelj 2014).

5. Results and discussion

As the language constellation in this study involved the three languages which belong to different subgroups within the Indo-European language family, the greater similarity between English and Italian, than between English and Croatian, was assumed to be less obvious than in case one of the background languages belonged to the Germanic subgroup of languages, i.e., if background languages were, for example, Croatian and German. Therefore, we found it particularly interesting to examine the participants' perception of relative similarity between their background languages and English. We were interested to see on what grounds the participants would base their perception of similarity between the languages, and whether their perception of similarity would match the objective similarity between the languages. We will first provide quantitative data on the participants' psychotypology (the perception of whether Croatian or Italian is more similar to the English language) and point to differences found across the two participant subsamples. Then we will provide qualitative data on the reasons provided for the choice of a particular language as more similar to the target language.

5.1. Which language is more similar to English: Croatian or Italian? Quantitative data: the whole sample.

Overall 184 participants provided an answer to this questionnaire item, while five participants failed to do so. From Figure 1 below, we see that, quite expectedly, the great majority of the participants rightly perceived English and Italian as closer than Croatian and English.

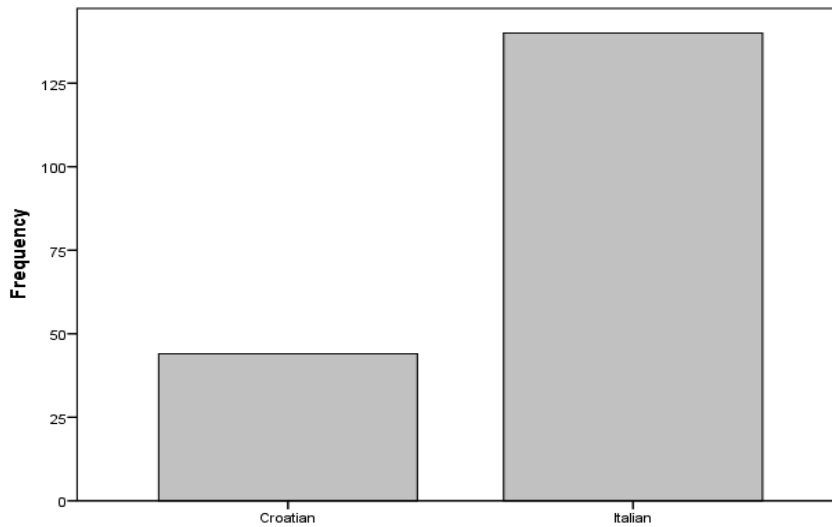


Figure 1. Background language more similar to English (whole sample)

One hundred and forty participants (74.1%) found English and Italian closer, and 44 participants (23.9 %) thought that Croatian and English were closer (see Figure 1).

5.2. Which language is more similar to English: Croatian or Italian? Quantitative data: two participant groups

The distribution of answers across two different groups of participants allowed us to see whether there were any differences in the perception of similarity of either Croatian or Italian with English in terms of the status of background languages (as either L1 or L2). From Figures 2 and 3 below, we see that the participants in the ItaL1 group more often found Italian closer to English than the participants in CroL1 group.

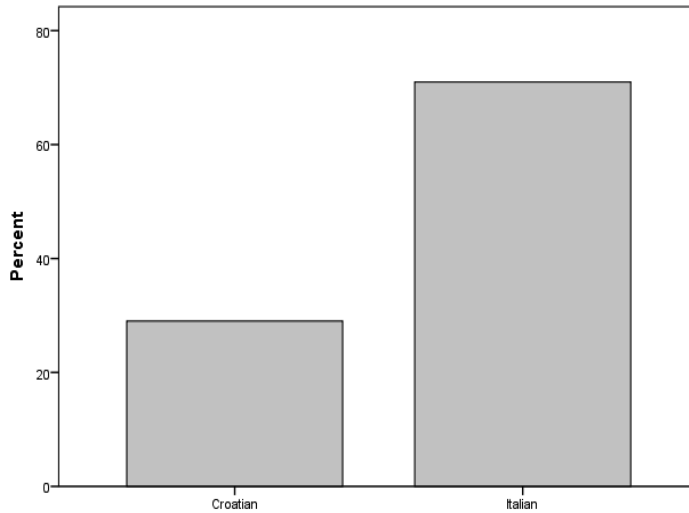


Figure 2. Background language more similar to English: CroL1 group

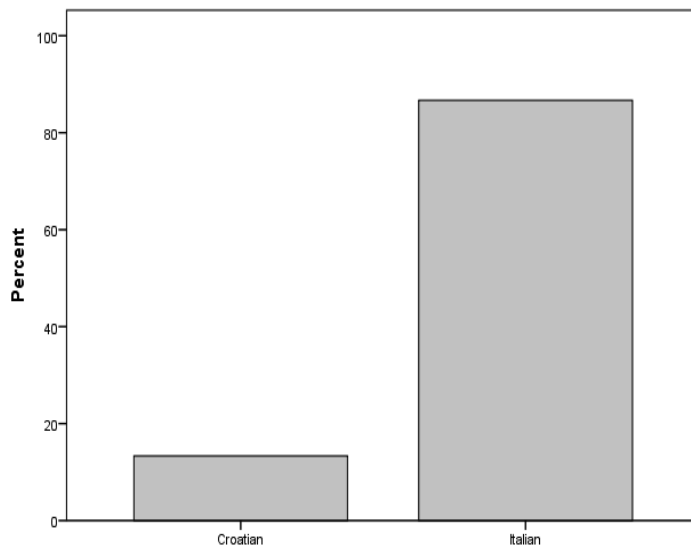


Figure 3. Background language more similar to English: ItaL1 group

Out of 60 participants in the ItaL1 group, 52 (86.7%) reported that Italian was more similar to English than Croatian, and the same was reported by 88 out of 124 participants (71 %) in the CroL1 group. A Pearson chi-square test showed that the difference in the distribution of answers was statistically significant (χ^2=5.48, p=.026).

5.2.1. Why is Croatian / Italian more similar to English?

Overall, 170 participants (90%) provided an explanation for their choices through the open-ended question item: 115 participants (91.3%) from the CroL1 group, and 55 participants (91.7 %) from the ItaL1 group. The high percentages allowed us to make some conclusions about the nature of perceived similarity between particular languages. We will first show the results in terms of how often the participants referred to the similarity at the lexical level, as opposed to other levels of linguistic description, and then we will present the other reasons provided in the questionnaire item. We wanted to see whether the explanations provided by each participant group may also help in explaining previously established differences between the two groups of participants in their perception of the language that is more similar to English.

5.2.2. Why is Italian more similar to English? Qualitative data: two participant groups

In the ItaL1 group, 83.7 per cent of the participants referred to the similarity of English and Italian at the lexical level, reporting that the languages had 'similar words' or that they shared 'word roots'. Exactly the same explanations were provided by the CroL1 group, but in this group the percentage of the participants who referred to the similarity at the lexical level was lower: 67.1 per cent.

There were only eight participants in the ItaL1 group (the remaining 16.3%) who did not specifically refer to similarity at the lexical level. Three of them referred to similarity at the level of morphosyntax: 'there are no cases as in Croatian' and 'Croatian grammar is much more complex'. Two participants referred to the level of phonology, emphasizing the fact that the words in these two languages are not written the same way they are pronounced (as is the case in the Croatian language), and one participant reported not knowing why he chose Italian as more similar to English.

The same three reasons appeared also in the answers provided by CroL1 group of participants. Out of 27 participants who did not refer specifically to similarity at the lexical level (the remaining 32.9 %), 18 mentioned at least one of the three reasons found in the answers of the ItaL1 sample. However, we also found three additional reasons: six participants said that they thought English and Italian were more similar because they were both foreign languages for them, two believed that they were similar because English and Italian cultures were in contact, and one explained that he/she did not know why he/she chose Italian, as no two of the three languages were typologically similar. The exact distribution of answers across the two participant subsamples, with the number of occurrences and percentages, is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Reasons provided for the perception of English and Italian as more similar languages: CroL1 and ItaL1 group

Why do you think English and Italian are more similar?	CroL1		ItaL1	
	N	%	N	%
They have similar words/word roots	55	67.1	41	83.7
They have similar grammars	10	12.2	3	6.1
Words are not spelled the same as they are pronounced	4	4.9	2	4.1
Do not know	4	4.9	3	6.1
Both are foreign languages	6	7.2	/	/
Cultures in contact	2	2.5	/	/
Neither is similar	1	1.2	/	/
Total	82	100	49	100

From Table 5 above, we see that the participants in both groups in the majority of cases referred to the similarity of English and Italian at the lexical level, which suggests that they were aware of the existence of cognates between the two languages. However, a chi-square test showed that participants in the ItaL1 group referred to lexical similarity significantly more often than the CroL1 participants (χ^2=4.32, p=.043). Other reasons provided were the similarity between 'grammars' of two languages, and the fact that there is no one-to-one letter-phoneme correspondence in neither of the two languages. From their answers it is clear that the perceived similarity between the two languages was assessed relative to the fact that, according to the participants' comments, the Croatian language is a language with difficult grammar and straightforward phoneme-grapheme correspondence. Another interesting reason for the perception of English and Italian as more similar is the one referring to the fact that both languages were the participants' foreign languages, which may suggest that language status may be in some way related to the perception of similarity between two languages at the language system level.

5.2.3. Why is Croatian more similar to English?

Among the explanations provided for the choice of Croatian and English as more similar languages, similarity at the lexical level again featured as the most often-mentioned reason. While similarity at the lexical level between English and Italian was explained by the existence of similar words/word roots in the two languages, the perception of the similarity between Croatian and English at the lexical level was explained by the existence of words that were borrowed from English.

Table 6. Reasons provided for the perception of English and Croatian as more similar languages: CroL1 and ItaL1 groups

Why do you think English and Croatian are more similar?	CroL1 N	ItaL1 N
Croatian has words borrowed from English	16	3
Do not know	11	1
Know Croatian better	6	0
They have similar grammars	0	2
	33	6

Nevertheless, it is interesting that 11 participants (33%) from the CroL1 group were not able to explain the reasons behind their choice, while some reported that the fact that they knew their L1 better than L2 was decisive in their judgment of Croatian (their L1) as the language more similar to English. The reasons provided are presented in Table 6 above.

5.3. Which of the three language combinations do you find most similar?

The second item in the psychotypology questionnaire aimed to examine whether the perception of similarity between three language combinations would be different from those reported in the first item where the perceptions of similarity were examined through the prism of the English language and did not allow for the assessment of similarity between Croatian and Italian.

Quantitative results showed once again that the participants perceived English and Italian as languages with greatest similarity (67.4 % of participants).

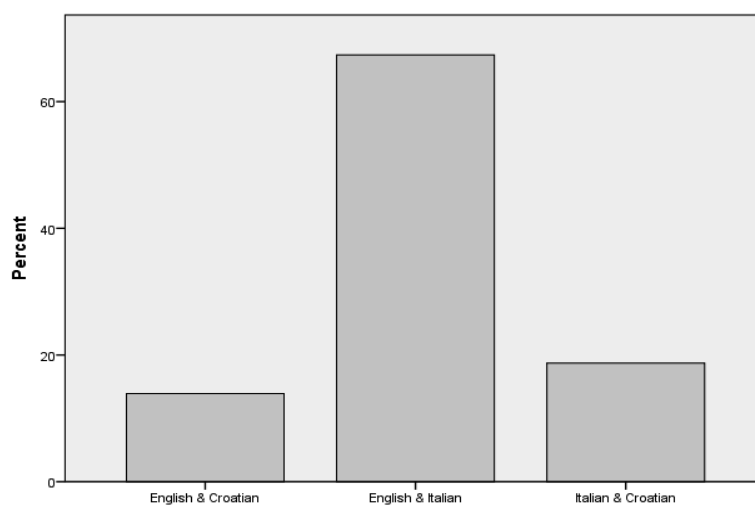


Figure 4. Languages perceived by the participants as most closely related (whole sample)

Croatian and English were perceived as the closest languages by 13.9 per cent of the participants, but 18.7 per cent of the participants perceived Croatian and Italian as closest of the three (see Figure 4 above).

We were particularly interested into the distribution of answers in terms of the language they previously reported as most similar to English. Exact percentages and the distribution of answers in terms of language previously chosen as more similar to English are given in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Perception of similariy between three language combinations with respect to the language (either Croatian or Italian) previously reported as closer to English

		Similarity between three language combinations			Total
		English & Croatian	English & Italian	Italian & Croatian	
Language similar to English	Croatian	23	2	18	43
	Italian	3	123	14	140
Total		26	125	32	183

Out of 140 participants who previously reported Italian as more similar to English 123 (87.9%) perceived the same languages as the most similar ones. Three participants seemingly changed their mind and opted for English and Croatian as the most similar combination, but also 14 participants (10%) thought Croatian and Italian were the languages with greatest resemblance. Out of 43 participants who previously reported that Croatian was more similar to English, 23 participants (53.5%) chose the same language combination as the most similar one, while 18 participants (41.9%) opted for Italian and Croatian as the most similar of the three.

As we had identified significant differences between the two groups of participants in terms of the language they found most similar to English, here we wanted to see whether there were further differences in terms of perception of similarity across the three language combinations. Figure 5 and 6 below show the distribution of answers to the second questionnaire item separately for each group of participants.

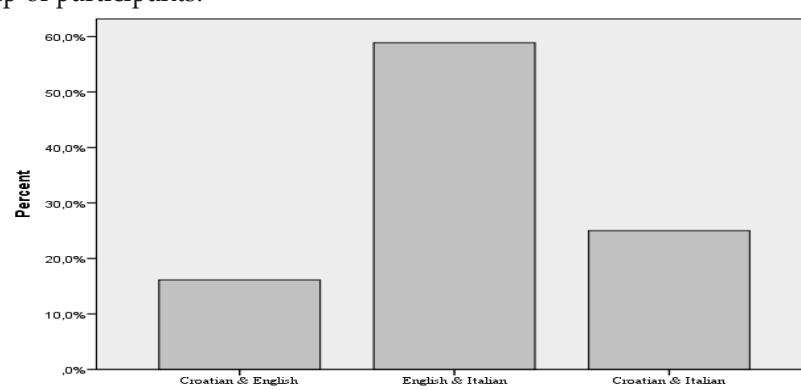


Figure 5. Languages perceived as most similar: CroL1 group

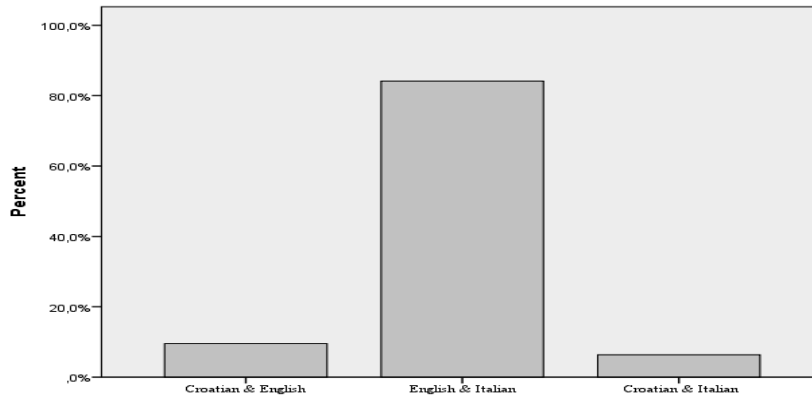


Figure 6. Languages perceived as most similar: ItaL1 group

From the visual representations above, it is clear that the participants who opted for Croatian and Italian as the most similar language combination were almost exclusively the participants in the CroL1 group. More precisely, the two languages were perceived as the most similar by 25 per cent of the participants from CroL1 group, and only six per cent of the participants from the ItaL1 group. Figure 7 below seems to be even more revealing; the answers provided by the participants in the ItaL1 group practically did not change with respect to the answers previously given in the first psychotypological item. The participants in the ItaL1 group repeatedly perceived English and Italian as the most similar languages.

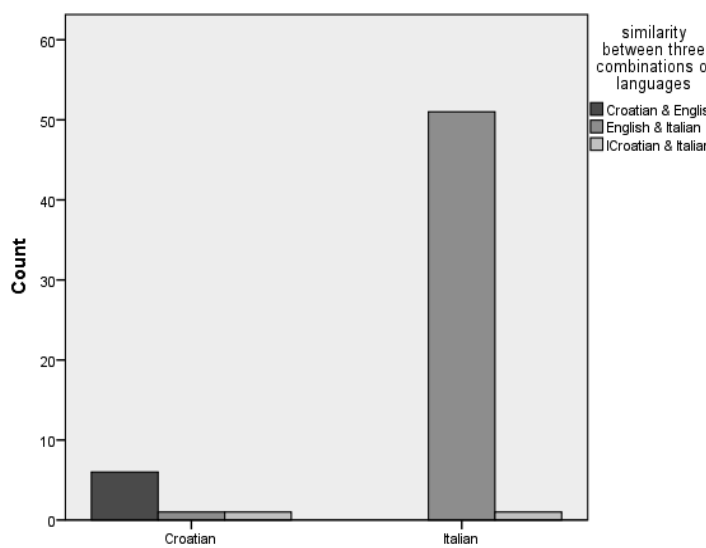


Figure 7. Language combination perceived as most similar with respect to the language previously reported as similar to English: ItaL1 group

On the other hand, Figure 8 shows that given the option to choose between three combinations of languages there was a certain number of participans in the CroL1 group who chose Croatian and Italian as most similar languages over previously reported either Croatian or Italian as more similar to English. The fact that only few participants from the ItaL1 group thought that Croatian and Italian were the most similar languages is a curious one and it will be further discussed with respect to the nature of overall perception of similarity between the languages.

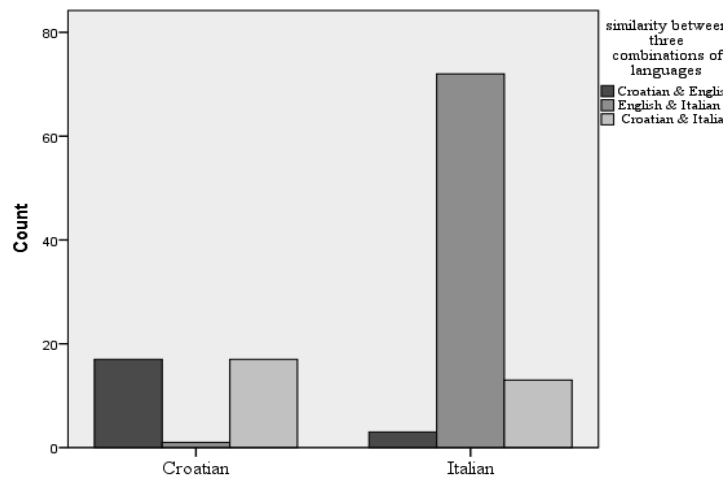


Figure 8. Language combination perceived as most similar with respect to the language previously reported as similar to English: CroL1 group

5.3.1. Reasons provided for the choice of the most similar combination of languages

The participants who chose either Croatian and English or English and Italian as the most similar languages provided the same reasons as in the first questionnaire item, or they simply referred to the their previous answer in the questionnaire. We will here report only on the reasons provided by the participants who found Croatian and Italian as the most similar languages (the reasons were provided by 81.3% of participants). In Table 8 we classified the 26 reasons into six categories and showed the distribution across both groups of participants regardless of the fact that there were overall only three participants in the ItaL1 group who thought Croatian and Italian were the most similar languages.

Table 8. Reasons provided for the perception of Croatian and Italian as most similar languages

	CroL1	ItaL1
	N	N
Similar words	6	2
Both present in the community	6	
Geographically close	4	
Know well both languages	3	
Similar in morphosyntax	2	
Do not know	2	1
Total	23	3

The participants again referred to the similarity perceived at the lexical level, but the second and third most often mentioned reasons referred simply to the fact that both languages were present in the community and that they were geographically close. Additionally, only three participants explained their choice by the fact that they knew those two languages well, and only two referred to the objective fact that Croatian and Italian, with respect to English, were more similar at the level of morphosyntax.

5.4. The ease or difficulty of learning English for L1 Croatian and L1 Italian speakers

Items 3 and 4 in the questionnaire aimed at examining the participants' beliefs on the relative ease or difficulty of learning the three languages depending on the speakers' L1 (either Croatian or Italian). Given that in the process of acquisition there are numerous variables that can affect the process of language learning, we were interested to see to what extent the perception of similarity between the languages in particular would feature in the perception of the language that is relatively easier to learn.

When asked about whether Italian or English would be easier to learn for a Croatian L1 speaker, out of 187 participants, 139 (74.3%), opted for English while 48 (25.7%) opted for Italian. When the same question was asked about Italian L1 speakers, again English was perceived as the easier language to learn, and this time, rather expectedly, by an even greater number of participants. Out of 184 participants, 161 participants (87.5%) found English easier to acquire, and Croatian was perceived as easier only by 23 (12.5%) participants. It is important to mention that the participants were not asked specifically to refer to the L1 Croatian learners living in their community, but to the L1 Croatian speakers in general.

The reasons provided for the choice of English over Italian as the easier language for Croatian L1 speakers suggest that the participants were referring to the fact that English was present in the media, that it was a global language, as well as easier of the two (see Table 9). Therefore, rather expectedly, the exposure to the English language through the media, as well as the motivation to learn it due to the fact it was the global language, were found to be the most important factors in the choice of English as the language that L1 Croatian speakers would learn more easily.

Table 9. Reasons provided for the choice of English over Italian as the language easier to acquire for Croatian L1 speakers

	Answers provided	
	N	**%**
It is present in media	45	33.8
It is easy	32	24.1
It is a global language	22	16.5
It is global and easy	18	13.5
Personal experience	12	9
Do not know	4	3
TOTAL	133	100

As the participants more often reported English being easier to learn for L1 Italian speakers than for L1 Croatian speakers, we were interested to see to what extent this perception was based on the perceived similarities between English and Italian. The reason most often provided for the choice of English over Croatian as the easier language to learn for L1 Italian speakers was the fact that the English language itself was easier than Croatian (by 46.4% of participants). The similarity between Italian and English, previously perceived at the level of lexis, was reported as the reason by only 22.2 per cent of the participants. The remaining reasons provided mainly suggested that the participants in this case also found the status of English as a global language and thereby its significant amount of presence in the media as important in facilitating the acquisition of English. All the reasons provided are presented in Table 10 below.

Table 10. Reasons provided for the choice of English over Croatian as the language easier to acquire for Italian L1 speakers

	Answers provided	
	No.	**%**
It is easy	71	46.4
It is similar	34	22.2
It is a global language	18	11.8
It is global and easy	13	8.5
It is present in media	13	8.5
Do not know	3	2
Personal experience	1	0.7
TOTAL	153	100

It is important to point out that the difference in percentages with which the participants referred to the presence of English in the media as a faciliatative effect for Croatian L1 and Italian L1 speakers (33.8% and 8.5%, resepctively) truly

reflected the reality of Italian and Croatian media. More precisely, the participants were aware that the Croatian speakers are more exposed to the English language through TV programmes than the Italian speakers. This difference in exposure to English is due to the fact that English programms are dubbed in Italian TV channels while in the Croatian TV channels they are only subtitled and presented in the English language.

As previously pointed out, the participants were not asked to refer specifically to the sociolinguistic environment in which they lived when assessing the ease of learning English relative to the other language. However, the reasons provided for the choice of either Croatian or Italian, over English, as the language that is relatively easier to learn did reflect the fact that the participants were referring to either Croatian L1 or Italian L1 speakers, or more particularly speakers of Istrovenetian dialect, living in their community. As can be seen from Tables 11 and 12, the participants perceived the presence of both languages in the community as the most important factor facilitating language acquisition (in 36.4 % of answers for L1 Croatian speakers, and 52.5% for speakers of L1 Italian). The difference in the percentages most probably also reflects the reality of the exposure to the two languages in the community; the Croatian language is the language of 'majority', whereby the speakers of L1 Italian (Istrovenetian) are more exposed to Croatian, than the speakers of L1 Croatian are exposed to either Italian or Istrovenetian.

Table 11. Reasons provided for the choice of Italian over English as the easier language to learn for Croatian L1 speaker.

	No.	%
It is present in the community	16	36.4
It is easier	16	36.4
It is similar to the dialect	7	15.9
It is in close contact	5	11.4
Total[12]	44	100

Table 12. Reasons provided for the choice of Croatian over English as the easier language to learn for Italian L1 speaker.

	No.	%
It is present in the community	10	52.5
It is easier	4	21.1
It is similar to the dialect	3	15.8
It is in close contact	1	5.3
Do not know	1	5.3
Total[13]	19	100

[12] Four participants did not provide an explanation of the choice of Italian over English as the language easier to learn for L1 Croatian speakers.

[13] Four participants did not provide an explanation of the choice of Croatian over English as the language easier to learn for L1 Italian speakers

Interestingly enough, the reasons provided for the choice of either Croatian or Italian as easier to learn, appear in the same order of frequency when assessing the realative ease of language acquisition. In both cases, as previously mentioned, it is the exposure to the language in the community, followed by the perception that the language itself is easier, and only the third reason is the perceived similarity between the two languages. What is more important, the categories of reasons match the ones provided for the choice of English as the language that is easier to learn for either Croatian L1 or Italian L1 speakers.

5.5. Overall discussion

As the participants' three languages are typologically unrelated, their perceptions of the relative similarity between the three languages were difficult to anticipate. From the data on the participants' perception of whether Croatian or Italian were closer to the English language, we see that the participants were largely aware of the fact that Italian and English were more similar than Croatian and English, and that they were aware of the similarity between the languages at the lexical level. The participants who thought that Croatian and English were more similar also referred mostly to similarity at the lexical level, but the perceived similarity was explained by the existence of more recently borrowed English loanwords in Croatian. Even though the explanation is entirely valid, it is important to say that there is no reason to assume that the number of more recent English loanwords is greater in Croatian than in Italian.

What matters the most at this point is the fact that there was a tendency to assess relative distance between languages primarily in terms of similarity at the lexical level, which corroborates previous findings (e.g., Ringbom 2007) suggesting that the perception of relative distance between languages is perceived on the basis of formally similar words, or cognates, shared by two languages. Therefore, the reasons provided by the participants for their perception of either of the background languages as being more similar to English than the other reflect the participants' awareness, sensitivity, and recognition of interlingual cognates.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the ItaL1 group perceived greater similarity between Italian and English significantly more often than the participants in the CroL1 group, and that they also referred more often to similarity at the lexical level. At this point we may assume that the difference in the percentages of the participants in the two groups who referred to the similarity of Italian and English at the lexical level may have been related to their relative proficiency in the Italian language: the participants with Italian as L2 (i.e., CroL1 group) might have been less likely to perceive the similarity of English and Italian at the lexical level due to their lower proficiency in Italian in comparison with the participants with Italian as L1 (ItaL1 group). The answers of six participants in the CroL1 group who perceived Croatian and English as more similar only because they knew Croatian better (than Italian) may be an indication in favour of this assumption. Nevertheless, we would like to point out

that there is the possibility that the mere presence of the dialect in the repertoire of all ItaL1 speakers may have had an effect on the perceptions of crosslinguistic similarity. Since this variable cannot be clearly isolated in this study, we would like to emphasize that it may be worth exploring further as it may be related to the existence of asymmetrical relations in perception of similarity between the same languages found in cases where participants were in command of dialectal varieties of L1 (Berthele 2008; Gooskens/Heeringa 2014).

While the participants predominantly perceived English and Italian as the most similar languages even when given the option to choose between three language combinations, the fact that the CroL1 group of participants more often opted for Italian and Croatian as the most similar of the three than the ItaL1 group, is a curious one. The fact that Croatian and Italian are indeed closer than English and Italian, and English and Croatian at the morphosyntactic level was perceived only by two participants, and the most- often mentioned explanation was the similarity between the two languages perceived at the lexical level. However, we believe that it is logical to assume that it was again the lower level of proficiency in Italian of the participants in the CroL1 group that constrained their assessment of crosslinguistic similarity whereby they mostly referred to the Istrovenetian dialect and its similarity with the Croatian language, rather than with Italian. Nevertheless, given that there was no clear differentiation between the reference to either the Italian language or Istrovenetian dialect, we do not know to what extent the answers were the result of the similarity perceived or only an assumption that those should exist on the basis of the fact that they are in close contact in the community.

The presence of the dialect of the Italian language may be seen as a confounding variable in the study, but the tendency to equate the Italian language with the Istrovenetian dialect, obvious from the answers provided by some of the participants in the CroL1 group, may also testify to the lower level of proficiency in Italian in the CroL1 group of participants. However, the same previously established tendency turned to be rather useful in identifying the factors the learners perceive as the most facilitative in assessing the ease of learning of a particular language. Regardless of which of the three languages the participants perceived as the easiest to learn, and regardless of the learners' L1, the participants perceived the exposure to the language as the most important factor, followed by the assessment of the difficulty of the language itself (e.g., Croatian being a difficult and English an easy language) and only then the relative similarity between the languages.

5.6. Conclusion

Based on the findings discussed above we may safely say that the multilingual speakers of three geneologically unrelated languages, Croatian, English and Italian, provided us with rather interesting insights into their perception of similarity between the languages in their repertoires as well as their perceptions on the ease of learning of the three languages.

In assessing the similarity between the languages, the participants most commonly referred to the similarity perceived between the languages at the level of lexis. While this finding is in line with previous findings about similarity being most prominent at this level of linguistic description, this study showed that the similarity at the level of lexis was rather important even in assessing the similarity between unrelated languages. Even though the greater similarity perceived at the lexical level between the Italian and the English language reflects the objective reality of English and Italian being more similar than English and Croatian, the participants who referred to the similarity between Croatian and English were also referring to the similarity at the lexical level that was due to extensive borrowing from the English language into Croatian.

Given that the participants were asked to assess the similarity in relative terms, rather than between two languages alone, the study showed that the learners' perception was clearly affected by other factors. The comparison between the perceptions of two groups of participants with different languages in the role of L1 showed that the participants who had the Italian language as their L1 were more likely to perceive Italian and English as relatively closer languages and they also more often referred to the objective similarity that exists between these two languages at the level of lexis. Since both groups of participants were balanced in terms of proficiency in L3 English we assumed that this tendency could be explained by different variables which are related to the participants' language learning background. More precisely, we suggested that the greater perception of similarity reported by L1 Italian speakers (ItaL1) could be attributed to a greater proficiency in Italian (the language that is objectively more similar to English) which allowed for a greater array of objective affordances that could be perceived. However, we could not exclude the possibility that it may be due to the fact that the objectively more similar language was the one in the status of their L1, whereby the status of the language itself may have had an effect on the perception of similarity. Additionally, we suggested that this tendency of the ItaL1 group of participants to perceive more similarity between the languages that were also objectively more similar at the lexical level may be due to the fact that the participants in this group were at the same time speakers and users of an additional idiom, the Istrovenetian dialect.

It is important to say that in accounting for the perception of similarity between the three languages the participants were also referring to similarities that existed between languages at different levels of linguistic description; they referred to phonology, ortography, morphology and syntax. While the objective similarity in these instances could have rarely been disputed their answers clearly showed the importance of examining psychotypological beliefs in the contexts where there are three languages available for comparison (Aronin/Jessner 2015). The study showed that the perception of similarity between two languages was clearly affected by the participants' familiarity with the third language as the qualitative data provided evidence that a particular language combination was perceived as similar merely on the account that fewer similarities with the thrid language were perceived.

Overall, the study confirmed previous findings suggesting that psychotypology can be determined only in relative terms. The findings suggest that the perception of similarity is flexible and dynamic (it changes relative to the number of languages available for comparison), but it also reflects knowledge of objective reality of similarities and differences between languages, or language relatedness. Furthermore, the homogeneity of participants in this study with respect to quite a few learning-, and language- related variables allowed as to conclude that the perception of similarity can be greatly affected by language proficiency, as well as the language contact, or more precisely, the extent to which the speakers' lives are affected by the contact.

The findings on the perception of the ease of acquiring particular languages showed that the participants did not take crosslinguistic similarity as the most important facilitating factor. In the case of the Italian or Croatian language, the exposure to the language, or its dialect used in the community, was perceived as having the most facilitative effect in the process of language acquisition. In the case of the English language, it was the presence of the language in the media and wider society, as the consequence of globalization. Therefore, the exposure to a language as well as the assessment of the language as either easy or difficult were perceived as having facilitative effect in the process of language acquisition. The perceived crosslinguistic similarity featured only as the third factor in the perception of the ease of learning of each of the three languages.

Given that in this study the perception of similarity between languages was far from being the most important factor in assessing the relative ease of learning a particular language, we believe that importance of similarity, being the basic notion in the learning process (Ringbom 2007), should be emphasized in the process of language teaching. This finding may bear relevance in particular to the area of research that deals with 'receptive multilingualism' (e.g., EuroCom project 2008), or the promotion of interlingual comprehension on the basis of crosslinguistic similarities. In this study, due to the sociolinguistic context, the acquisition of L2s (Croatian or Italian) of two groups of participants was of mixed nature. To the majority of the CroL1 participants the Italian language (L2) was a foreign language learned at school rather than the second language acquired in the community, as was the case with L2 Croatian of the ItaL1 group of participants. If we assume that the explicit instruction of a particular language may provide learners with more declarative knowledge and the opportunity to develop the tendency to focus on form more than in the case of acquisition in the natural context, we see that the context did not seem beneficial for the CroL1 group of participants in perceiving the similarities between English and Italian to a greater extent in the context where the two were objectively more similar. The results of this study provide additional evidence for the arguments (e.g., Jessner 2006, 2008) that in the process of language teaching, teachers should be made aware of learners' language learning backgrounds and encourage learners to identify and exploit opportunities for crosslinguistic comparisons or to use their previous linguistic knowledge as a linguistic resource.

6. References

Andrews, Daniela (1997). *I Falsi Amici: False Cognates in Italian and English*, Macquarie University.

Aronin, Larissa / Jessner, Urlike (2015). Understanding current multilingualism: What can the butterfly tell us?, in: The multilingual challenge [Clare Kramsch / Urlike Jessner (eds.)], Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 271–291.

Bardel, Camilla / Lindqvist, Christina (2007). The role of proficiency and psychotypology in lexical cross-linguistic influence. A study of a multilingual learner of Italian L3, in: *Atti del VI Congresso Internazionale dell'Associazione Italiana di Linguistica Applicata* [Kenneth Hyltenstam (ed.)], Perugia: Guerra Editore, pp.123–145.

Berthele, Raphael (2008). Dialekt-Standard Situationen als embryonale Mehrsprachigkeit. Erkenntnisse zum interlingualen Potenzial des Provinzlerdaseins. Sociolinguistica 22, 87–107.

Browne, Virginia, / Mendes, Elena / Natali, Gabrielle (2009). *More and more False Friends,Bugs & Bugbears. Dizionario di ambigue affinità e tranelli nella traduzione tra inglesee italiano* (2nd edition). Bologna: Zanichelli.

Cenoz, Jasone (2001). The effect of linguistic distance, L2 status and age on cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition, in: *Cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition: Psycholinguistic perspectives* [Jasone Cenoz / Britta Hufaisen / Urlike Jessner (eds.)], Clevedeon, UK: Multilingual Matters, pp. 8-20.

Census 2011 of the Republic of Croatia. Retrieved from: http://www.dzs.hr/default_e.htm

De Angelis, Gessica (2005). Interlanguage transfer of function words, in: *Language Learning, 55*, pp. 379-414.

De Angelis, Gessica / Selinker, Larry (2001). Interlanguage transfer and competing linguistic systems in the multilingual mind, in: *Cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition: Psycholinguistic perspectives* [Jasone Cenoz / Britta Hufeisen / Urlike Jessner (eds.)], Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, pp. 42-58.

European Commission 2008. Multilingualism: An Asset for Europe and a Shared Commitment. Retrieved Spetember 3, 2010, from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/pdf/com/2008_0566_en.pdf

Falk, Ylva / Bardel, Camilla (2010). The study of the role of the background language in third langauge acquisition. The state of the art, in: *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 48*, 2/3, pp. 185-219.

Frankenberg-Garcia, Ana / Pina, Maria Fernanda (1997). Portugese-English Crosslinguistic Influence, in: *Actas do XVIII Encontro da Associação Portugesa de Estudos Angl0-Americanos*, Instituto Politécnico da Guarda. Retrieved November 28, 2016, from http://anafrankenberg.synthasite.com/resources/FGPina1997PortugueseEnglishCrosslinguisticInfluence.pdf

Gooskens, Charlotte /Heeringa, Wilbert (2014). The role of dialect exposure in receptive multilingualism, in: *Applied Linguistics Review*, 5 (1), pp. 247–271.

Hall, Christofer / Newbrand, Denise / Ecke, Peter / Sperr, Urlike / Marchand, Vanessa / Hayes, Lisa (2009). Learners implicit assumptions about syntactic frames in new L3 words: The role of cognates, typological proximity and L2 status, in: *Language Learning*, 59, pp. 153-203.

Jarvis, Scott / Pavlenko, Aneta (2008). *Cross-linguistic influence in language and cognition*. New York: Routledge.

Jessner, Urlike (2006). *Linguistic awareness in multilinguals: English as a third language.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Jessner, Urlike (2008). Teaching third languages: Findings, trends and challenges, in: *Language Teaching, 41*(1), pp. 15–56.

Jucker, Andreas, H. (2000). *History of English and English Historical Linguistics*. Stuttgart: Ernst Klett.

Kaivapalu, Annekatrin /Martin, Maisa (2014). Measuring Perceptions of Cross-Linguistic Similarity between Closely Related Languages: Finnish and Estonian Noun Morphology as a Testing Ground, in: *Language Contacts at the Crossroads of Disciplines* [Heli Paulasto /Lea Meriläinen / Helka Riionheimo / Maria Kok (eds.)], Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 283–318.

Kellerman, Eric (1983). Now you see it, now you don't, in: *Language transfer in language learning* [Susan Gass / Larry Selinker (eds.)], Rowley, MA: Newbury House, pp. 112-134.

Kellerman, Eric (1986). An Eye for an Eye: Crosslinguistic Contraints on the Development of the L2 Lexicon, in: *Crosslinguistic Influence in Second Language Acquisition* [Eric Kellerman / Michael Sharwood Smith (eds.)], New York: Pergamon Press, pp. 35-48.

Kresić, Marijana / Gulan,Tanja (2012). Interlingual identifications and assessment of similarities between L1, L2, and L3: Croatian learners' use of modal particles and other modalising elements, in: *Cross-linguistic Influences in Multilingual Language Acquisition* [Danuta Gabryś-Barker (ed.)], Heidelberg: Springer, pp. 63-80.

Letica, Stela / Mardešić, Sandra. (2007). Cross-Linguistic Transfer in L2 and L3 Oral Production, in: Empirical Studies in English Applied Linguistics [József Horváth / Marianne Nikolov (eds.)], Pécs: Lingua Franca Csoport, pp. 307-318.

Letica Krevelj, Stela (2012). Multilinguals' Exploitation of Affordances: Evidence from the Use of Compensatory Strategies, in: *UZRT 2012: Empirical studies in English applied linguistics* [Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović/ Marta Medved Krajnović (eds.)], Zagreb: FF press, pp. 113-130.

Letica Krevelj, Stela (2014). *Crosslinguistic interaction in acquiring English as L3: role of psychotypology and L2 status.* Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Zagreb, Croatia.

Li, Ping/ Sepanski, Sara /Zhao, Xiaowei (2006). Language history questionnaire: A web based interface for bilingual research, in: *Behavior Research Methods*, *38*(2), pp. 202-210.

Lindqvist, Christina (2015). Do Learners Transfer from the Language They Perceive as Most Closely Related to the L3? The Role of Psychotypology for Lexical and Grammatical Crosslinguistic Influence in French L3, in: *Crosslinguistic Influence and Crosslinguistic Interaction in Multilingual Language Learning* [Gessica De Angelis /Urlike Jessner / Marijana Kresić (eds.)], London: Bloomsbury, pp. 231-251.

Lorenzetti, Luca (2010). Lessico, in: *Enciclopedia dell'italiano* [Raffaelle Simone (ed.)], Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, G. Treccani, 1, pp.778- 784.

Marian, Viorica / Blumenfeld, Henrike K. / Kaushanskaya, Margarita (2007). The Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q): Assesing Language Profiles in Bilinguals and Multilinguals, in: *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, *50*, pp. 940-967.

Milani Kruljac, Nelida (1990). *La comunità' italiana in Istria e a Fiume fra diglossia e bilinguismo*. Rovigno: Centro di Ricerche Storiche di Rovigno, Etnia.

Milani Kruljac, Nelida (Ed.) (2003). *L'italiano fra i giovani dell'istro-quarnerino*, Pola-Fiume: Pietas Julia-EDIT.

Nelson, Traci Lynne (2008). Perception Question, in: *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods 1* [Paul J. Lavrakas (ed.)] , Sage Publications, pp. 580-581. Retrieved 7 March, 2009. http://www.sage-ereference.com/survey/Article_n374.html.

Ó Laoire, Muiris / Singleton, David (2009). The role of prior knowledge in L3 learning and use: Further evidence of psychotypological dimensions, in: *The Exploration of Multilingualism: Development of Research on L3, Multilingualism and Multiple Language Acquisition* [Larissa Aronin / Britta Hufeisen (eds.)], Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 63-77.

Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, Agnieszka (2011). Awareness and affordances: Multilinguals versus bilinguals and their perception of cognates, in: *New trends in crosslinguistic influence and multilingualism research* [Gessica De Angelis / Jean-Marc Dewaele (eds)], Bristol: Multilingual Matters, pp.1–18.

Ringbom, Håkan. (2007). *Cross-linguistic Similarity in Foreign Language Learning.* Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Schepens, Job (2008). Distribution of cognates in Europe based on the Levenshtein Distance. Unpublished bachelor thesis. Submitted at Radbound University Nijemegen, Department of Artificial Intelligence.

Schepens, Job / Dijkstra, Ton / Grootjen, Franc (2012). Distribution of cognates in Europe as based on the Levenshtein Distance, in: *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 15*(1), pp. 157-166.

Scotti-Jurić, Rita / Poropat, Nada (2012). Bilingual official policy and ideologies in formal interactions and development of plurilingualism and interculturalism in informal interactions among the young Croatian-Italian bilinguals in Istria, in: *Journal of Teaching and Education, 1*(6), pp. 415–432.

Singleton, David (1987). Mother and other tongue influence on learner French, in: *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *9*, pp. 327-346.

Tadić, Marko /Brozović-Rončević, Dunja / Kapetanović, Amir (2012). *The Croatian language in the digital age: Hrvatski jezik u digitalnom dobu.* Berlin: Springer. Retrieved from: http://www.meta-net.eu/whitepapers/e-book/croatian.pdf

Tsang, Wai Lan (2015). Learning more, perceiving more? A comparison of L1 Cantonese–L2 English–L3 French speakers and L1 Cantonese–L2 English speakers in Hong Kong, in: *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *12*(3), pp. 312-337.

Vanhove, Jan (2014). Receptive multilingualism across the lifespan. Cognitive and linguistic factors in cognate guessing. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Fribourg (Switzerland). Retrieved October 15, 2016 from: http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.795286.

Appendix

Questionnaire on psychotypology

1. In your opinion, which of the languages is more similar to English? *(circle)*

a) Croatian b) Italian

Why? Explain your answer in more detail.

_____
_____
_____
_____

2. In your opinion, which languages resemble each other more closely? *(circle)*

a) Croatian and English b) Italian and English c) Croatian and Italian

Why? Explain your answer in more detail.

_____
_____
_____
_____

3. In your opinion, which language is easier to learn for a Croatian L1 speaker? *(circle)*

a) Italian b) English

Why? Explain your answer in more detail.

_____
_____
_____
_____

4. In your opinion, which language is easier to learn for an Italian L1 speaker? *(circle)*

a) Croatian b) English

Why? Explain your answer in more detail.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Percepcije višejezičnih govornika o međujezičnoj sličnosti i relativnoj lakoći usvajanja genetski nesrodnih jezika

Prethodno jezično znanje i iskustvo u usvajanju jezika imaju važnu ulogu u procesu usvajanja i uporabi trećeg jezika. Psihotipologija, percepcija učenika o sličnosti između jezičnih sustava, jedan je od faktora koji određuje u kojoj mjeri učenik iskorištava svoje prethodno jezično znanje u procesu učenja i uporabi trećeg jezika. Istraživanja pokazuju da je sličnost između jezika najočitija na leksičkoj razini, odnosno da se srodnice između dvaju jezika najlakše uočavaju bez obzira na njihovo genetsko porijeklo (Hall et al. 2009; Ringbom 2007). Međutim, sličnost između jezika može se odrediti samo u relativnom smislu (ovisno o jezičnoj konstelaciji) i prikazati na kontinuumu pri čemu njeno mjesto ovisi i o tipološkoj sličnosti i o jezičnom kontaktu.

Ovo istraživanje ispituje psihotipologiju, percepciju o sličnosti između jezika, kod 189 višejezičnih učenika engleskog kao trećeg jezika koji žive u službeno dvojezičnim hrvatsko-talijanskim zajednicama u Istri. Kreiran je homogeni uzorak ispitanika koji je podijeljen u dva poduzorka s obzirom na materinski jezik (hrvatski ili talijanski (istroveneteski)). Pokušalo se ispitati na čemu učenici s prethodnim znanjem hrvatskog i talijanskog jezika temelje svoju percepciju o sličnosti između tih jezika i engleskoga jezika te na čemu baziraju svoje stavove o lakoći usvajanja pojedinoga jezika.

Za prikupljanje podataka korišten je modificirani psihotipološki upitnik (Hall et al. 2009) kojem su pridodana pitanja otvorenog tipa u kojima se od ispitanika tražilo da detaljnije objasne svaku psihotipološku česticu u upitniku. U analizi rezultata uzeli smo u obzir jezičnu konstelaciju triju genetski nesrodnih jezika, sociolingvističko okruženje u kojem je provedeno istraživanje te objasnili teorijske i praktične implikacije rezultata ovog istraživanja.

Ključne riječi: jezična tipologija, međujezična sličnost, psihotipologija, višejezični govornici, višejezičnost