

The role of intercultural contact in learning German in Hungary: a structural equation modelling approach

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Abstract. This study investigates how contact with the German language and its speakers affects language-related attitudes and motivated behaviour in a foreign language context, namely Hungary, by means of structural equation modelling. Questionnaire data were collected from 189 students of German, who were all between 13 and 14 years old and attended the final, eighth, grade of the primary school system. Our results revealed that students' motivated learning behaviour was not only shaped by their attitudes towards the target language and its speakers, but also by the students' experiences about speaking German with visitors to Hungary as well as the perceived importance of these contact situations. Students' experience of direct contact with speakers of German was affected by their linguistic self-confidence whereas all the other contact- and attitude-related dimensions were socially constructed through the influence of the students' immediate learning environment

1. Introduction

For several hundred years, German acted as a lingua franca in Central and Eastern Europe. German continued to be a regionally important language of intercultural communication after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 and even after World War II when in many countries of the region the compulsory foreign language taught at school was Russian. Most members of the generation that attended school in the 1970s and 1980s still studied German as an optional foreign language. The role of German in Central and Eastern Europe, however, started to

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diminish as English gained increasing importance as the language of globalization (see, for example, Hessky 1995). Despite this trend in the past decade, several studies have shown that English and German are the two most popular languages among Hungarian primary and secondary school students (Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh 2006; Nikolov 2007; Halász & Lannert 2000, 2003, 2006). The global position of English seems to be unchallenged in Hungary (Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh 2006) as there are only few regions and educational settings in which students who take up German outnumber those learning English (Vágó 2007). Nevertheless, German has still great regional importance in the country, which is often underlined by the fact that the overwhelming majority of tourists are German-speaking (Central Statistical Office 2006; see also [Note 1](#)) and that Hungary's most important foreign trade partners are Austria and Germany (Central Statistical Office 2006). Despite the apparent relevance of interethnic contact with German speakers and the necessity of foreign language competence in German, intercultural communication in German and its impact on language learning motivation and attitudes have remained under-researched in Hungary (for an exception, see Dörnyei & Csizér 2005; Lamb 2003). Motivation in studying German as a foreign language, however, has been extensively studied in other European countries (see, e.g., Kirchner 2004; König 2006; Lindemann 2007). In terms of motivation of German in relation to other foreign languages in Hungary, Dörnyei, Csizér and Németh (2006) concluded in their study comparing primary school students' motivational dispositions in terms of five target languages – English, German, French, Italian and Russian – that German was the second most popular foreign language among Hungarian pupils, with only English being more popular. This second-place position of German was corroborated by both students' language choices and their intended effort expended on language learning (Csizér & Dörnyei 2005).

Our present investigation is rooted in two different but related research traditions: the social psychological study of intercultural contact and L2 motivation research. The most important subfield of the investigation of the contact-attitude relation within social psychology is called the Contact Hypothesis (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp 2006). In the Contact Hypothesis it is argued that contact changes the attitudes and behaviour of groups and individuals toward one another and, in turn, these changes influence further contact between groups and people. As for the field of L2 motivation, contact was first regarded as a key constituent of motivation by Clément (1980). Recently, intercultural contact has also been the focus of Dörnyei and colleagues' work (Dörnyei & Csizér 2005; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh 2006; Kormos & Csizér 2007). In previous studies conducted in the field of motivation research, interethnic contact was regarded as a unitary concept and no differentiation was made between face-to-face direct contact between students and L2 speakers and other type of contact opportunities, such as written contact through emails, Internet chatting and indirect contact experiences when family members share their contact experiences with their children. Different types of contact experiences, however, might have a varying amount of influence on motivated behaviour and language learning attitudes; therefore it is important to analyze their effect separately.

The purpose of this paper was to investigate how contact with the German language and its speakers affects language-related attitudes and motivated behaviour in a foreign language context, namely Hungary. In order to describe the relationship between motivational and contact variables we used structural equation modelling. The main research question of our study was how various types of direct and indirect contact situations as well the importance that students attributed to these intercultural encounters influenced Hungarian language learners' motivated behaviour, which is one of the most important factors influencing success in language learning (Dörnyei 2005). Our data comes from a national representative survey of 1,777 thirteen to fourteen-year-old learners of English and German in Hungary. From among the participating students we selected 189 learners of German who had the most intensive contact with target language speakers. This limitation of the sample was necessary because our previous analysis of the data (Csizér & Kormos 2008) had shown that students generally had very few intercultural contact experiences. Therefore we selected students who did indeed take part in encounters with speakers of German and German-language media products. The initially tested model was based on the previously assessed

English-related model (Csizér & Kormos in press). Our investigation is unique in the sense that it covers the various types of intercultural contact situations in a systematic way by exploring the role of perceived importance of contact, direct contact (i.e., when students meet and talk with foreigners), foreign media usage (when students consume cultural products in the target language) as well as indirect contact (when students hear about the target language speakers from significant others). Our results describing the interplay between contact and motivational variables concerning the regionally important German language are also informative as they can be compared to a similar model that we had previously built for English as an international language (Csizér & Kormos in press).

In this paper, we will first provide a theoretical background to our study, which is followed by the description of our initial hypothetical model and the research procedures. Next, we will elaborate in detail how our model was developed and tested. Finally, we will discuss the functioning and the implications of the proposed model.

2. Background to the research

It has been a long established fact in the field of sociology that contact is a key constituent in attitude formation, and therefore contact experiences might shape behavioural choices (for details, see Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp 2006). In the L2 field, however, only Richard Clément's L2 motivation theory, which was developed for multicultural learning contexts, included intercultural contact as one of the antecedent variables affecting language learners' behaviour (Clément 1980; Clément and Kruidinier 1985). In a later study, Noels, Pon and Clément (1996) examined the relationship between contact and self-confidence in terms of identity and psychological adjustment. They found that Chinese university students' interethnic contact with Canadians was positively related to their self-confidence in English and Canadian identity, but correlated negatively with self-confidence in Chinese and Chinese identity. In a similar vein, Clément, Noels and Deneault (2001) concluded that more positive contact experiences not only led to more confident language use, but also affected the identification profiles of language learners, that is, the acculturation process in a multi-ethnic environment. Although the above-cited examples might explain students' learning outcomes, it is only recently that studies in the field of L2 motivation have addressed the important issue of how contact with L2 community groups might affect students' attitudinal dispositions and motivated learning behaviour.

The first study to explore the effect of contact on students' motivated learning behaviour was carried out by Dörnyei and his colleagues in different learning contexts in Hungary as part of a large-scale nationwide study investigating 13-to-14-year-old students' attitudinal and motivational dispositions. In the multi-language research setup, language attitudes towards English, German, French, Italian and Russian were investigated, and the impact of intercultural contact was assessed (for details of the study, see Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh 2006). Dörnyei and Csizér (2005) established a positive linear relationship between contact experiences, language attitudes and motivated learning behaviour. Interestingly enough, this finding was not consistent across all learning contexts. For the largest tourist group, the German-speaking visitors, and particularly in the most frequented tourist localities, that is, the capital city of Budapest and neighbouring villages, the results indicated that the group of language learners whose locality was visited most frequently by speakers of German had the least favourable language attitudes and motivational measures. The negative effect of contact on attitudes was explained by the low level of intergroup salience of tourists (Brown & Hewstone 2005), which means that a relative high number of tourists can remain unnoticed by language learners in large metropolitan cities like Budapest. In addition, learners might not consider contact experiences important because superficial contact experiences are not perceived to be instrumental in reaching a valued goal (Dick et al. 2004). Alternatively, we might refer to the U-model (Pool 1966; Strangor et al. 1996), namely that positive attitudes prior to travelling to the given country or meeting tourists in the host environment are usually replaced by more negative ones at the beginning. If, however, students stay long enough or

intercultural contact is extended, these negative attitudinal dispositions undergo subsequent positive changes as a result of acquiring cross-cultural understanding.

In order to fulfil the above objective, we have launched a research project with the intention of investigating the role of intercultural contact in L2 motivation. As the previous project did not provide a full assessment of various contact situations in a monolingual context, the first qualitative phase of the project focused on the systematic mapping of possible contact experiences (Kormos & Csizér 2007). Based on long qualitative interviews with 40 Hungarian school children learning either German or English in primary school (aged 13/14), we could conclude that students regarded contact situations beneficial for a number of reasons. The learners reported that intercultural contact helped the development of their language competence and contributed to the increase of energy and effort which they invested in language learning and the decrease in their anxiety about using the target language. The interviewees also noted that interethnic contact influenced their attitudes to target language speakers in a positive way.

The second phase of our study involved a quantitative investigation in which a nationwide sample of 1,777 learners of English and German was surveyed with the help of a standardized questionnaire. The comparison of the contact experiences of students of English and German revealed that the participants in general only rarely engaged in direct intercultural encounters, but learners of English experienced more frequent direct written contact and contact through media products than students of German (Csizér & Kormos 2008). Our results also led us to conclude that students with high levels of motivational intensity engaged in various types of intercultural contact more frequently than students who invested less energy into language learning. For students of English with the highest level of motivation, the consumption of target language media products was found to be an important contributing variable to motivated behaviour, whereas direct written contact influenced the learning efforts of participants with a medium level of motivation. For students of German, milieu was a predictor variable in the case of highly motivated students, which indicated that in the case of German parental support was needed to ensure that students invested sufficient energy in language learning.

In sum, it can be concluded that intercultural contact, even if not frequently experienced, plays a far more important and complex role in language learning than previously assumed in studies of L2 motivation.

To describe the relationships between various contact measures and students' motivated behaviour, we decided to apply structural equation modelling. Our initial model was based on our previous research with students learning English, which showed that motivated learning behaviour was affected by two main factors: language learning attitudes and perceived importance of contact (Figure 1). The model for English indicated that those students who regard contact opportunities to be important in the process of language learning also attach more importance to the pragmatic benefits of language learning and can be characterized by more favourable attitudes to the language and its speakers. In our model set up for learners of English, perceived importance of contact was entirely socially constructed, as it was affected by milieu and indirect contact, which involves teachers' and parents' accounts of what the target language speakers and their cultures are like. In the case of English, direct spoken contact was only weakly related to instrumentality. Students' linguistic self-confidence (that is, how confident students were in the success they would attain in foreign language learning) was influenced by both direct contact (i.e., actually speaking with foreigners) and English-language media usage. Among the various contact-related experiences, this contact scale was the only to affect students' attitudes to the language and its speakers. In addition, out of the five contact-related dimensions (written contact did not enter the model) only the largely socially constructed perceived importance of contact had a direct effect on motivated learning behaviour in the case of students of English.

We have to underline the fact that the model presented in Figure 1 concerns the English language. As attitudes and contact experiences might be different for German-related encounters, we cannot assume that the model is language-independent; thus there is a need to build another model highlighting intercultural contact as regards the German language. The good model-data fit measures (for details see Csizér & Kormos in press) indicated that the English-related model could serve as a baseline model for the investigation of the role of contact in learning German as an L2. Hence, our research questions in the present study were the following:

1. How can the internal structure of foreign language motivation and intercultural contact be described for students learning German?
2. What are the differences in the internal structure of foreign language motivation and intercultural contact between English and German?

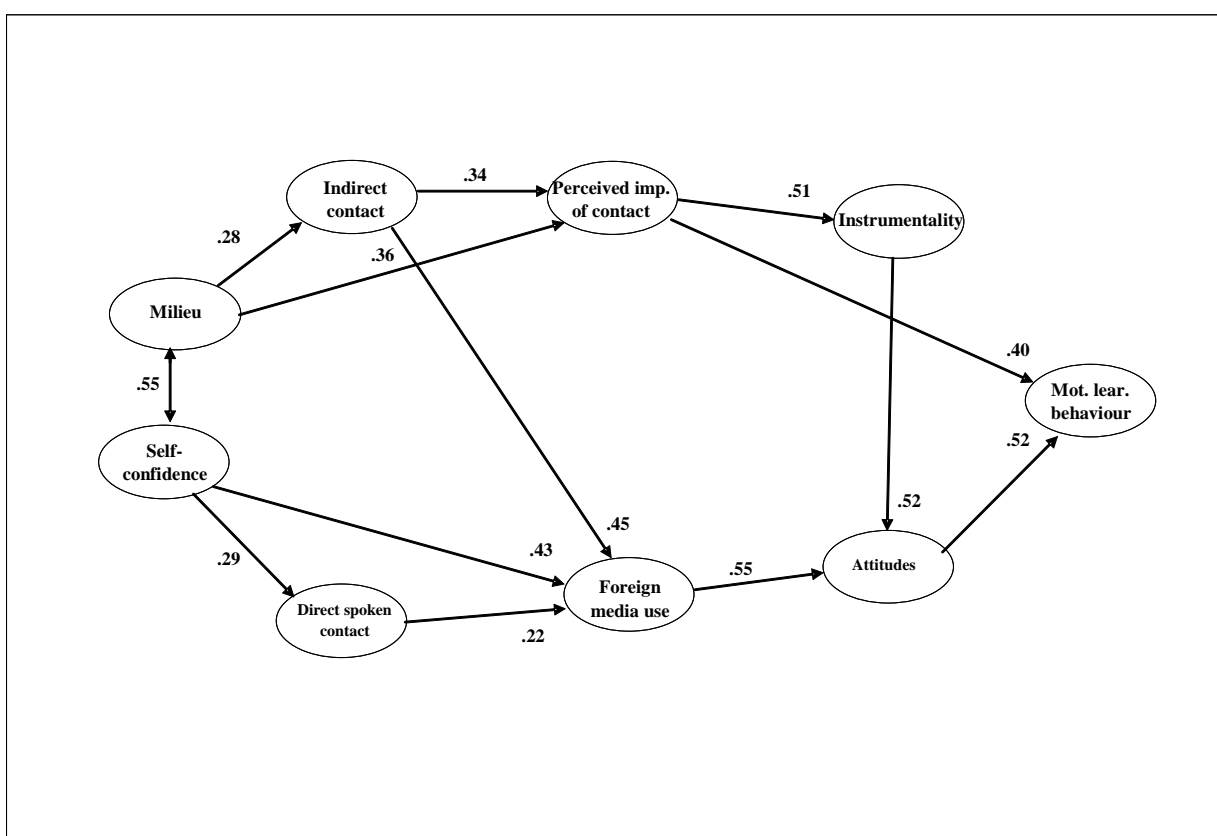


Figure 1: Schematic representation of the role and effect of contact variables on the motivational process to learn English with standardised coefficients (based on Csizér & Kormos in press)

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants in the survey were 189 students of German, 41% of whom were boys and 59% girls. 14 of the respondents lived in Budapest, Hungary's capital, 118 in other large cities, and 57 participants studied in elementary school in villages. The students typically started learning German between the age of 6 and 9. They were all between 13 and 14 years old and attended the final, eighth, grade of the primary school system. This means that they all studied within a relatively homogenous curricular and organizational framework (i.e., the national primary school system). By sampling students from this cohort, we did not need to be concerned with the modifying influences of various specialized school types. The participants in the study reported in this paper were selected from a national representative survey (N=1,777, with 737 students learning German and the remainder, English), which sampled students evenly from each main region and type of settlement (stratified sampling). We computed a composite contact scale (Cr. Alpha=.78), and selected students from the top 20 percent range of the scale. Thus, this sub-sample consisting of 189 students meets the generally advised sample size of around 200 for structural equation modelling (Thompson 2000), and the impact and role of intercultural contact could be investigated, as the sample includes students who actually experienced contact situations.

3.2 Materials

The questionnaire consisted of 71 items. Apart from eight open-ended items at the end of the questionnaire asking about students' foreign language learning background, all items used 5-point rating scales. The items in the questionnaire came from two sources. First, some questions were borrowed from the questionnaire used in the survey reported in Dörnyei et al. (2006). Other questions were based on the results of Kormos and Csizér's (2007) interview study. We piloted the questionnaire with 100 students prior to the main study.

The main variable groups in the questionnaire were as follows:

Items concerning the target languages (English) (five-point rating scales where 5 represented "very much" and 1 stood for "not at all"):

- *language-related attitudes*, that is, the attitudes students display towards the L2, its speakers and cultures
- *instrumentality*, that is, to what extent students attach pragmatic values to the learning of the language

Items concerning the direct and indirect aspect of cross-cultural contact (five-point scales where 5 represented "very much" and 1 stood for "not at all"):

- *direct spoken contact* both in the target language country and in Hungary
- *direct written contact*, regular mail and e-mails as well as chatting
- *indirect contact*, that is, seeing foreigners but not talking to them and receiving information on them from others
- *media consumption* (e.g., watching L2 TV programs, films, reading magazines)

Items using Likert scales (five-point scales where 5 represented "absolutely true" and 1 stood for "not true at all"):

- *linguistic self-confidence* in L2 learning and use
- *language learning milieu*, that is, the extent of the parents' support and the friends' attitudes toward L2 learning
- *perceived importance of contact*, that is, why students find it important to be involved in intercultural contact situations
- *motivated learning behaviour*, that is how much effort learners invest into L2 learning, how persistent they see themselves as language learners, and the enjoyment students derive from L2 learning

3.3 Procedures

The data collection for this study followed the established routes of similar studies conducted earlier in Hungary by the authors. We first approached the selected schools with an official letter from Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest (which hosted the project). In the letter we provided information about the purpose of the survey and the details of the actual administration of the questionnaires. Once permission was granted by the principal of the school, we contacted the form-masters of the selected classes individually and asked for their co-operation. The questionnaires were filled in during class time, with a representative of the university always present to provide the introduction and oversee the procedure. Answering the questions took the students approximately 20 minutes, on average.

We applied structural equation modelling (SEM) to evaluate the relationships between the various latent variables investigated in the study. The analyses were carried out with the help of the software AMOS 4.0. First, *measurement models* were drawn up in accordance with the earlier factor-analytical results reported in Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) and Dörnyei et al. (2006) on similar data sets and our earlier findings concerning intercultural contact experienced by learners of English (Csizér & Kormos in press). Subsequently, the various latent variables were combined into a *full structural model* on the basis of theoretical considerations as well as the different statistical analyses conducted in the previous phases of the research. To assess the overall model fit, we used indices most often advised in the SEM literature (Byrne 2001), and besides the chi-square statistics and the CMIN/df (chi-square divided by the degrees of freedom), we report additional fit indices: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (Fan, Thompson & Wang 1999; Hu & Bentler 1999), the Bentler-Bonett normed fit index (NFI), the Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Browne & Cudeck 1993; Fan et al. 1999; Hu & Bentler 1999), and the Parsimony-adjusted Comparative Fit Index (PCFI).

4. Results

4.1 The final model

After the initial model had been submitted to evaluation using maximum likelihood estimation, we found that although the hypothetical model provided acceptable model-data fit indices, there were several relationships that turned out to be not significant. These were removed from the initial model. Thus, the final model contains ten significant relationships. Figure 2 is a schematic representation of the final model with the standardised estimates.

The chi square/df ratio is below the usually recommended value of 2 (chi sq/df=1.702) (Byrne 1989); but it is advisable to rely on more than one fit index; therefore, we also focused on alternative fit indices. These all indicate a very good fit (CFI=.977, NFI=.946, NNFI=.938, RMSEA=.055, PCFI=.857), and thus we can conclude that the model in Figure 2 provides an adequate representation of our data.

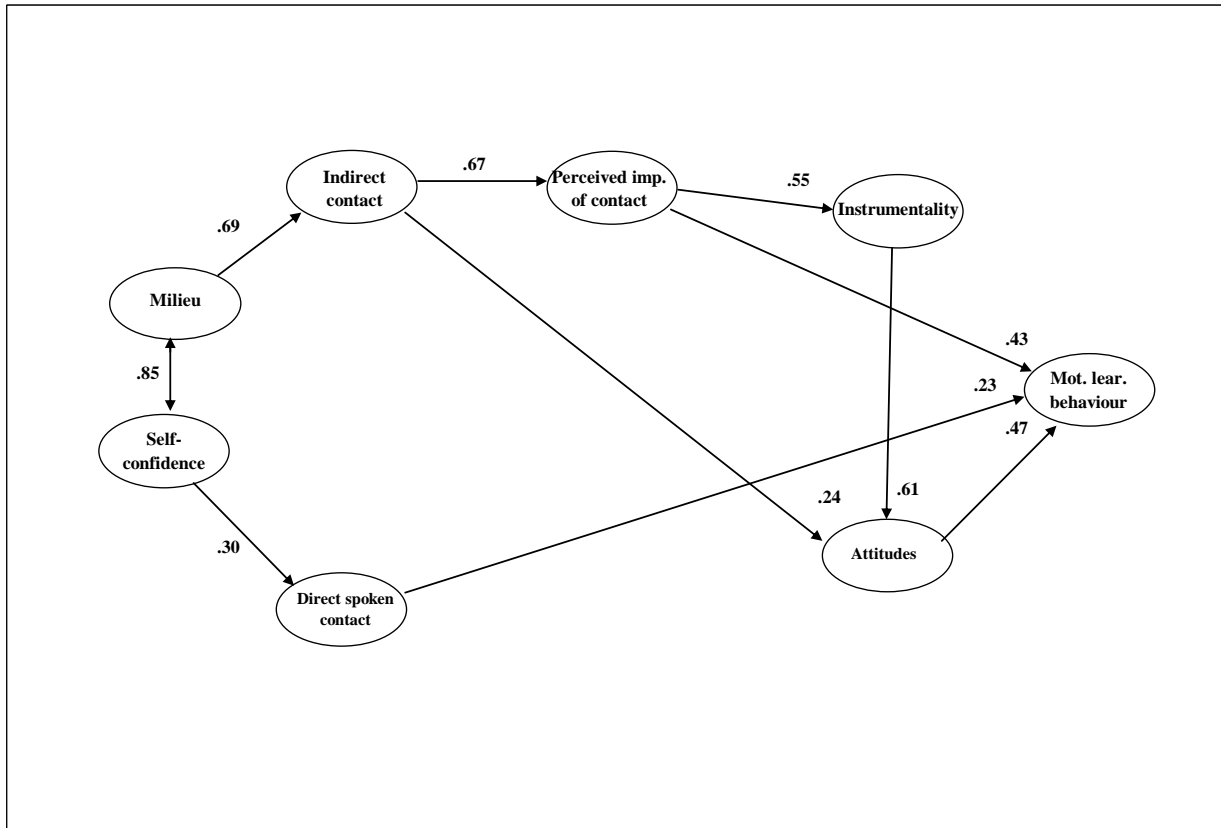


Figure 2: Schematic representation of the final model with the standardized estimates (chi sq/df=1.702, CFI=.977, NFI=.946, NNFI=.938, RMSEA=.055, PCFI=.857)

5. Discussion

Our model shows that motivated learning behaviour is directly affected by three latent variables: attitudes, perceived importance of contact and direct spoken contact. The direct link between a contact variable and a behavioural-type of variable lends support for the Contact Hypothesis (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp 2006), which claims that contact-related experiences have an influence on behaviour. The finding that this relation is not mediated by attitudes, however, contradicts social psychological theories, which emphasize the direct impact of attitudinal dispositions on human behaviour. The explanation for this discrepancy might be that in social psychological research contact is usually measured in the context of different ethnic and cultural groups living together, and attitudes are investigated in terms of stereotyping processes (Pettigrew 1998). In our case, intercultural contact primarily involves meeting foreign visitors to the country, and behaviour means language learning effort. In this context, intercultural contact might be seen as an end to learning because contact experiences provide opportunities for using the language (Dörnyei & Csizér 2005), hence their different influence on motivated behaviour. We have to note, however, that the link between motivated behaviour and direct spoken contact is not very strong. Nevertheless, the relationship between direct spoken contact and effort invested in lan-

guage learning shows that situations and conditions outside the language learning classroom might play a relevant role in motivation.

In this model for learners of German, the existence of the link between direct contact and motivated behaviour, however, is in contrast with our previous results concerning the role of direct contact in learning English. The model for learners of English showed that direct spoken contact only affected foreign media consumption and influenced attitudes indirectly (Csizér & Kormos in press) and indicated no relationship between direct spoken contact and motivated learning behaviour. These differences between the two languages might be due to the differing international status of English and German. As English is an international language, its attitudinal impact is mainly exerted by indirect means, and this happens primarily through the globalized English language media. German, on the other hand, does not have the international status of English, but its regional importance in Hungary is substantial as the number of German-speaking tourists still outnumbers visitors from other countries¹. Therefore, in the case of German, direct contact opportunities might play a more important role in influencing students' language learning behaviour than in the case of English. Further differences concerning English and German include the fact that for German, German media consumption by Hungarian primary school students had to be eliminated from the model because no latent variables could be linked to media use in German in this context. This finding lends support to the results of our qualitative interview study, in which students of German rarely reported to read German media products and texts in German on the Internet (Kormos & Csizér 2007). On the other hand, English language media products in Hungary are omnipresent and enjoy great popularity among teenagers (Dörnyei et al. 2006).

Our model suggests that direct contact lacks social construction as neither milieu nor indirect contact are related to students' direct contact experiences. It is only students' level of linguistic self-confidence that has a moderate effect on how frequently students engage in intercultural contact experiences. This relationship shows that the extent to which students are confident in their language learning abilities might potentially influence whether they are willing to take advantage of the encounters with tourists and use the opportunity for practicing the language. This finding indicates that self-confidence, which is an important constituent of the construct of willingness to communicate (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels 1998), is a relevant factor in intercultural encounters. This indirectly suggests that students might live in areas that are frequently visited by German-speaking tourists, but if they do not perceive themselves competent enough in the L2, they might not seize the opportunity to interact with target-language speakers.

The influence of language-related attitudes on motivated learning behaviour in our model is not surprising as several previous studies have indicated that positive attitudinal dispositions toward foreign languages enhance students' willingness to study the language (Edmondson 1997; Dörnyei 2005). The role of perceived importance of contact has been anticipated based on findings regarding English in Hungary (Csizér & Kormos in press), which also showed that students' perception of the usefulness and importance of intercultural contact opportunities had a direct impact on their learning behaviour. Nevertheless, this result is notable because it contradicts international research findings and respective models of intercultural contact (van Dick et al.'s 2004; Wagner et al.'s 2003), in which the perceived importance of contact indirectly affects behaviour through the mediation of attitudes. The difference might be explained by the conceptualization of perceived importance of contact. Van Dick et al. (2004) and Wagner et al. (2003) defined perceived importance of contact somewhat vaguely as the personal relevance of engaging in intergroup contact, whereas our construct is wider in the sense that it involves how the students in our preliminary interview study viewed the importance of contact (Kormos & Csizér 2007). In our research perceived importance of contact included students' beliefs that contact opportunities are important in enhancing motivated behaviour, in getting to know the culture of the L2 speakers as well as in decreasing anxiety. These different meanings of importance might explain why this scale plays a relevant role in our model. As the model reveals,

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perceived importance of contact is relatively strongly related to instrumentality. Our results indicate that those students who regard contact opportunities important in the process of language learning also tend to attach more importance to the pragmatic benefits of language learning.

The position of attitudes in the model is strengthened by two latent dimensions that have an impact on it. The interrelationships of these variables suggest that language-related attitudes for German in Hungary stem from a socially constructed contact variable, which describes significant others' opinion of the target country and its speakers (indirect contact) and from the instrumental value (i.e., better job, higher salary) attached to proficiency in German. Neither direct spoken contact nor the perceived importance of contact could be linked to attitudes in a direct way. The fact that only indirect information of the target country affects students' attitudes might be due to the limited travel experience of our young population.

Instrumentality is the key antecedent of language-related attitudes, which result is similar to Dörnyei et al.'s (2006) finding concerning the same age group of Hungarian learners. This indicates that even for relatively young teenage learners, the pragmatic benefits related to learning German have an important role in influencing attitudes to the L2 and its speakers. In our model, instrumentality is not directly related to the effort learners are willing to invest in language learning; therefore we might hypothesize that instrumentality plays a role in affecting motivated behaviour through the internalization of instrumental values into language learning attitudes.

Milieu is also an important factor in our model as it affects indirect contact as well as self-confidence. This means that the extent to which family members and friends value the knowledge of German strongly predicts to what extent they will convey information about the target country and culture to our participants but also how the students see their own potentials in language learning. This important role which Hungarian language learners' milieu seems to play in our model is also in line with the findings of our qualitative interview study conducted on the role of parents' in influencing L2 learning motivation (Kormos & Csizér 2005). The influence of milieu, which is exerted both through the attitudes the students' environment has towards German and through the amount of information that learners receive about the target language culture and speakers, indicates that motivation to learn a language is related to factors external to the students. Therefore students' goals, attitudes and motivated behaviour need be seen in a social context which takes into account both the students' immediate environment as well as the broader national setting which determines the instrumental values related to speaking a particular language.

6. Conclusion

The structural model presented in this paper offers some important insights into how contact-related variables shape students attitudinal and motivational dispositions and how contact experiences influence motivated learning behaviour concerning the German language. Our study revealed that students' motivated learning behaviour was not only affected by their attitudes towards the target language and its speakers, but also by students' experiences about speaking German with visitors to Hungary as well as the perceived importance of these contact situations as they contributed to motivated learning behaviour. Contrary to our expectations, perceived importance of contact was not related to students' direct contact experiences with target language speakers, but it was influenced by the students' milieu and indirect contact. In our Hungarian setting, it seems that benefits associated with intercultural contact are formed by the students' teachers, parents and significant others in their social environment. This indicates that both teachers and parents have an important role in establishing and maintaining L2 learners' motivation. In addition, the effect of direct contact with speakers of German was not mediated through students' attitudes, but its effect was direct on the learning behaviour. As for students' actual attitudes, they were influenced by indirect contact experiences of their immediate learning environment. These findings partly support Hamberger and Hewstone's (1997) work, who also found that superficial contact experiences with tourists in one's host country

did not contribute to enhanced intercultural understanding; however, the fact that it still invigorates students' learning behaviour should call for more specific research on the issue.

Our model indicates that the individual variable of motivation that was recently conceptualized by Dörnyei (2005) as a primarily psychologically constructed characteristic of an individual in which in addition to students' self-concepts only learning experiences play a role needs to be seen in a wider social context. Contact experiences typically take place outside the language learning classroom and as our results indicate, they show a direct relationship with students' self-reported learning behaviour. The students' immediate social environment was also found to have an effect on both students' self-confidence as well as on learners' attitude to language learning. Therefore in future studies of motivation it would be important to investigate in more detail how these social influences affect the processes of goal-setting, learners' L2 self-concept and their learning behaviour. As language learning is both a psychological and social process, the learner is also a person with individual psychological traits whose motives are strongly shaped by the social environment.

Our results suggest that in the case of German in present-day Hungary, teachers should make attempts to encourage learners to exploit the opportunities for contact with German-speaking visitors. Not only do these contact experiences provide students with a means of practicing their knowledge and thus foster second language acquisition, but they also enhance students' motivated behaviour. It is also important that teachers become familiar with the attitude of the family to their children learning German because just as the students' environment can promote that they invest sufficient energy into language learning, an unsupportive family atmosphere can also serve as an impediment in the process of language acquisition.

Our research is naturally not without limitations. The model we devised can probably only be generalized for Hungarian students of the same age who have at least some contact experiences and not for the whole Hungarian language learner population. The limited size of our sample also warrants caution: the study might be replicated using a larger sample size. In addition, our study is based on survey data, and therefore it is only able to provide an overview of students' self-reported behaviour, attitudes and contact experiences, and it does not give an in-depth analysis of the role of contact in language learning. Although in an earlier study (Kormos & Csizér 2007), we conducted qualitative interviews to investigate the role of contact in language learning motivation, further research using observational and diaries techniques might give a more detailed insight into how contact experiences affect language learning motivation.

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Notes

1. In 2003, for example, 745,000 German-speaking visitors entered Hungary, while the combined number of tourists from the US and UK was 512,000.

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