The Influence of English in the German Learning Process: Transfer, Interference and Conflict

Marina Grilli, São Paulo

ISSN 1470 – 9570

The Influence of English in the German Learning Process: Transfer, Interference and Conflict

Marina Grilli, São Paulo

This study aims to go one step forward in understanding the influence the first foreign language has on the second foreign language learned by the same person. It investigates the influence of English on learning the past tenses of verbs in German in a group of second-term undergraduate students of German at the University of São Paulo who already had some experience of studying English. Data collection took place by administering a questionnaire and test of the English skills of the participants, followed by three other written activities, all executed in the classroom. A first quantitative analysis focused both on the informants' knowledge level of the verb forms of the past in English and on their successes and failures in activities containing verb forms of the past in German. The qualitative analysis of some selected participants' performance showed that the best performance in all activities was obtained by the informant who, despite previous experience of studying English, had no solid knowledge of the language. However, the informants with an intermediate level of English knowledge obtained quite different results, which revealed the importance of not generalizing about German learners with English language skills as if they were all the same standard.

1. Introduction

This work aims to contribute to the research about how knowledge of English, learned as a first foreign language, influences the learning of German as a second foreign language. Object of the investigation is how Brazilian learners of L3 German, or *DaT,*[1] more specifically German after English, or *DaFnE,*[2] deal with situations of transfer and interference between both languages.

English is learned as an L2 in most countries and often as L3 in countries where most of the population is already bilingual. The demand for German as a foreign language has been increasing in Brazil, where the world's second largest German colony is located (Pupp Spinassé 2005) and where the number of German learners grew from 70,000 in 2005 to 134,000 in 2015, according to the German Foreign Office.[3]

Studies of the learning process of German as an L3 began to attract the attention of scholars only in the 1990s. At that time, researchers discovered that the learning

[1] ‚Deutsch als Tertiärsprache'.
[2] ‚Deutsch als Fremdsprache nach Englisch'.
[3] Available at https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/150421-deutschlerner/271036. Accessed on 3.2.2020.

processes in relation to a second and a third language are very different. According to Hufeisen (2001: 649), not only is the L3 learning process more complex, but also qualitatively different from that of L2, because L2 learning lays the foundation for the skill of acquisition and learning of a foreign language. These are the reasons why a multilingual speaker cannot be described simply as a mixture of two or three monolingual speakers.

The term "learning" of a foreign language is used here as opposed to the term "acquisition". Language learning takes place in the classroom, with teaching materials, explicit grammar rules and communication situations that have been previously determined. Acquisition, on the other hand, involves immersion in places where the language is freely spoken. The subject of *DaT* research is a speaker who has learned German in a structured way, as an L3, L4, etc., and has not acquired it (Hufeisen 2001: 648).

In this study, I compare aspects of the English verb forms *simple past* and *present perfect* with the German *Präteritum* and *Perfekt*, as well as the construction of participle forms in both languages. The starting point is the hypothesis that previous experience with the use of past verb forms in English may interfere with the mobilization of past verb forms in German, exerting an influence on the process of learning them in German. The following section presents theoretical considerations on L3 learning related to the Brazilian reality and on the concept of error, as well as a morphosyntactic comparison between the English and German past tenses. Section 3 details the procedures of the empirical research and section 4 proceeds with the analysis, while results are discussed in section 5. The conclusion reveals the importance of not generalizing about German learners with different language learning backgrounds.

The motivation for this study came from my personal perception, as an on-going German L3 learner, that mastering the English past tenses could be a cause of conflict when learning the same topic in German, due to similarities in the formation of the tenses and differences in their uses.

2. Theoretical Considerations

2.1 L3 learning and the Brazilian reality

The difference between the acquisition or learning of L2 and L3 only began to draw researchers' attention in the 1990s. Previously, it was assumed that L3 learning occurred similarly to L2 learning. Hence, the specific concept *Deutsch als Tertiärsprache* [German as a third language] emerged in the foreign language teaching area as a result of the analysis of the specificities of the L3 learner in opposition to the typical characteristics of an inexperienced L2 learner.

Since a bilingual speaker already has a different knowledge of their L1, a different language awareness and a different language processing system from monolingual individuals (Jessner 2008: 20f.), the interaction between the various individual factors that influence the language learning process is quite complex, and it is assumed that this complexity increases when it comes to L3 learning. Moreover, unless the speaker learns or acquires their L3 simultaneously to the L2, they are usually older and more experienced than they were as an L2 learner.

That is why a common quality in L3 learners is a greater willingness to take risks and make mistakes, an attitude that should be encouraged so as to promote learner autonomy. Generally, they deal with texts in a more confident way than L2 learners because they do not feel the need to understand every single detail and have already developed a more critical attitude to learning strategies, textbooks and progression (Marx & Hufeisen 2010: 829). Besides, trying to say something without being able to find the proper words is an already familiar feeling for them (Hufeisen 2001: 648).

It must also be kept in mind that the most common L2 worldwide is English. Neuner (1996) states that the German learner inserted into the European environment is fully aware of the boundaries between the "universe" of the English language and the "universe" of the German language. On the other hand, for learners who are geographically and culturally distant from Europe, the mediation between their reality and the German one takes place through the English language, which functions as a representation of an external reality (Neuner 1996, 2009).

Moreover, while speculations on L3 learning were in vogue in Europe by the early 2000s, research on L3 German teaching and learning carried out in Brazil are still scarce, especially recent publications covering the constellation L1 Portuguese, L2

English, L3 German (see Ferrari 2014; Pickbrenner & Finger 2015; Grilli 2017). Papers on learning German in Brazil usually focus on the roles represented by learners, teachers and textbooks in foreign language classes and on the perceptions the subjects involved have about these classes (see Pupp Spinassé 2005; Bohunovsky 2011; Stanke 2011; Garcia 2012; Schäfer 2013). Another typical research topic is the bi- or multi-lingual contexts that include German dialects in the Brazilian South (see Gärtner 2001, 2011; Pupp Spinassé 2006; Kersch & Sauer 2010).

Some examples of English skills activation in German learning in recent teaching materials are presented by Vicente & Pilypaityté (2013), showing that the lexical, morphosyntactic, spelling and pronunciation levels, always combined with a self-evaluation from the learner, are keys to language awareness. Nevertheless, Salgo (2009) states categorically that both the previous English knowledge of Brazilian German learners and the potential of learning strategies acquired by them while learning English remain largely unused.

In other words, while being geographically and culturally distant from Europe is the Brazilian learner's reality, developing an awareness of the main elements that influence L3 German learning is an essential starting point for planning lessons and teaching materials in accordance with this reality.

2.2 Error and contrast

Dealing with errors – or mistakes, henceforth used as synonyms – while learning a new language has been one of the main areas of investigation over the past decades. As a matter of fact, error analysis is a simple and fast method of data analysis, but combining various types of data collection instruments enables a more valid explanation of the learning processes (Hufeisen 2001: 651). Brdar-Szabó (2010: 519), who defends contrastive linguistics as a basis for investigation of interference phenomena, also affirms that the current state of research in the field demands a more precise definition of the role of contrastive linguistics, beyond the simplistic definitions of transfer and interference.

According to Hufeisen & Neuner (1999: 67-69), in the language-learning classroom the teacher should in the first place identify the error and classify it as belonging to a certain sphere of the language, such as spelling or syntax. Mistakes that impair communication

are to be considered more serious than those that consist merely in deviations from the norm and do not influence the transmission of the message.

The reason why the comparison between English and German should take place in the classroom is the fact that there are areas of more or less clear similarity between the two languages. After all, some errors can be worked on or even prevented by comparing the languages known by the learner and focusing on the differences between them. When the teacher is aware of the differences and false friends that arise during comparison between languages, they are able to develop exercises in order to solve possible difficulties (Kursisa & Neuner 2006: 5).

The word building system for German numerals can be mentioned as an example of an area of clear similarity, because it follows the same logic as in English and the only difference is the order in which tens and units are placed. However, past verb forms do not allow for such a simple comparison between both languages to be made, as while there are prominent similarities regarding, for example, the thematic vowels of the verb forms and how they are built in regular verbs, there are also differences in the possible uses of each past form (see Hall 2010).

Besides, it is necessary to keep in mind that the native language of the learner taken as a reference in this work is Brazilian Portuguese, a language that does not have much similarity to either English or German. This enhances the significance of analyzing the interference between English and German only, in order not to consider all mistakes made by Brazilian learners of German as negative interference from English – they can rather be seen by teachers as clues about how to help learners develop plurilingual competence.

2.3. The English and German verb tenses

According to König (2001: 324), both English and German distinguish two verb tenses: in German, present and past; in English, past and non-past. Hence, all the other verb tenses in both languages are compounds.

In this work, I focus particularly on the English verb forms *simple past* and *present perfect* and on the German verb forms *Präteritum* and *Perfekt*. The choice is due to the fact that these verb forms look similar in both languages (Example: *to drink/drank/drunk* and *trinken/trank/getrunken*), but their uses differ substantially.

Funk (2010: 946) affirms that the German *Perfekt* is broadly used because of its property of covering almost the whole spectrum of the past. Meanwhile, in English there is a clear difference between *simple* and *perfect*: *simple past* is used to describe a completed action or fact. If the action or fact began in the past and still lasts or develops in the present moment, the *present perfect* should be used to report it. In German, the choice of which tense to use depends more on stylistic factors: *Präteritum* is more often used in written and *Perfekt* in spoken language, and it is frequently possible to switch between both (Hall 2010: 553). Thus, it is of great importance to consider comparison as a fundamental procedure in language teaching, as mentioned already.

I shall now proceed to a contrastive analysis of the two following verb tense pairs: *Simple past* and *Präteritum*, *Present perfect* and *Perfekt*. Many recent works that deal with multilingual constellations including both English and German lack such a contrastive section to serve as theoretical ground for the empirical investigation of the usage of verb forms (cf. Grilli 2016).

Although the use of *Präteritum* and *Perfekt* in German is still a controversial issue, and although their presentation in teaching manuals is not always detailed enough, the following sections present what is usually learned in formal school contexts. The fact that recent English presents much variation in this matter does not seem to make a difference to the English spoken in Brazil, so it does not prevent these tenses from providing an optimal basis for testing hypotheses about the usefulness of L2 English in learning L3 German.

2.3.1 The past tenses: *Simple past* and *Präteritum*

German *Präteritum* represents an event that occurred in a moment in the past (Helbig & Buscha 2001: 133) or that used to occur repeatedly in the past (Duden 2009: 511). In general terms, *Präteritum* is the tense used when true or fictional events are reported (Duden 2009: 512), for which reason it is commonly used in literature. In English, the *simple past* is defined simply as the tense used to report events that occurred in the past, and there is the expression *used to* to specify constantly repeated facts or actions. This contrast shows a distinction made in English and not in German, between an isolated fact and a recurrent fact from the past.

Here are some examples of similar uses of the tense in both languages:

I played football yesterday. (Beaumont & Granger 1992: 12)
Gestern schneite es den ganzen Tag. (Marschall 1995: 155 *apud* Duden 2009: 511)

The garden was beautiful last year. (Pavlik 2004: 57)
Er lag im letzten Jahr mehrere Male für längere Zeit in einem hauptstädtischen Krankenhaus. (Helbig & Buscha 2001: 133)

However, because of the difference between *simple past* and *present perfect* in English that is not applicable to German, both of the following sentences are possible in German:

Er arbeitete gestern den ganzen Tag.
Er hat gestern den ganzen Tag gearbeitet. (Helbig & Buscha 2001: 134)

But the same is not valid for English.

He worked all day long yesterday.
*He has worked all day long yesterday.[4]

2.3.2 The past tenses: *Present perfect* and *Perfekt*

German *Perfekt* encompasses three variations of meaning, one of them being the function of reporting an event that took place in the past, in a way similar to *Präteritum* (Helbig & Buscha 2001: 135). Therefore, in spite of contextual specificities, all three sentences in both groups below carry the same basic meaning:

I was at the concert. (Pavlik 2004: 51)
Ich war im Konzert.
Ich bin im Konzert gewesen.[5]

The first airplane flight took place in North Carolina, on December 17, 1903. (Pavlik 2004: 54)
Die erste Flugreise fand am 17. Dezember 1903 in North Carolina statt.
Die erste Flugreise hat am 17. Dezember 1903 in North Carolina stattgefunden.[6]

Nevertheless, building a variation of these sentences in *present perfect* would involve more than the simple exchange of the verb tense, because *present perfect* is not used when it comes to a completed fact in a definite moment of the past. That means one would have to modify the original structure to make the sentence plausible:

* The first airplane flight has taken place in North Carolina, on December 17, 1903.
The first airplane flight has taken place in North Carolina.

[4] My translation.
[5] My translations.
[6] My translations.

Another use of *Perfekt* is to report an event in the past with resultative character, that is, when it has some influence on the present. The main use of *present perfect* also refers to a connection between past and present.

> I have lost my wallet. (= I have not got the wallet now) (Beaumont & Granger 1992: 26)
> Someone has broken the window. (= The window is now broken) (Beaumont & Granger 1992: 18)
> Der Besuch ist angekommen. (= Der Besuch ist jetzt da)
> Peter ist eingeschlafen. (= Peter schläft jetzt) (Helbig & Buscha 2001: 135)

An extension of the connection with the current moment represented by *present perfect* is the use of this verb tense to report a recent event or to provide new information (Murphy 1997: 14; Swan 1995: 417). *Perfekt* can be used with the same purpose, for it indicates the resultative character of an action.

> The police have arrested two men in connection with the robbery. (= The men are now in jail) (Adapted from Murphy 1997: 14)
> Der Reisende hat sich einen neuen Koffer gekauft. (= Der Reisende hat jetzt einen neuen Koffer) (Helbig & Buscha 2001: 135)

Some adverbs in English also demand the *present perfect* tense most of the time, because they connect the moment when the action occurred with the present moment, namely: *just*, *already*, *ever*, *never*, *yet*, *since* and *for*. In German, even though such a rule does not exist, *Perfekt* may be used for semantic reasons if one of the following adverbs or adverbial phrases is present: *schon*, *schon oft*, *schon immer*, *noch nie* (Helbig & Buscha 2001: 134).

> I've already posted [the letter]. (Murphy 1997: 14)
> Er hat das Buch schon gelesen. (Helbig & Buscha 2001: 134)

The last possibility of *Perfekt* use refers to an event in the future and does not find equivalence in English; only *future perfect*, corresponding to German *Futur II*, carries this connotation.

Based upon all the examples above, it is possible to assert that the uses of the simple and compound verb tenses of each language present similarities and differences, and this is the fact that justifies our hypothesis that the *DaFnE* learner faces a conflict while trying to accommodate both sets of content in their mind.

3. Procedures

3.1 Delimitation of the group and instruments

The group of German learners observed consisted of 23 German undergraduates at the University of São Paulo (USP) between their second and third semester studying the language. Since German is not a popular FL in Brazil, knowing German is not a pre-requisite in most Brazilian universities that offer German Studies which means students have compulsory German classes in the first 2-3 undergraduate years.

The students already had a solid idea of how *Perfekt* works but had not yet begun studying the *Präteritum*. The textbook used in their German classes, *DaF-kompakt A1-B1* (Braun 2001), consists of thirty units of content. *Perfekt* comes in lesson 4 (Braun et al. 2011: 5) i.e. during the first term, and *Präteritum*, in lesson 12 (Braun et al. 2011: 7) i.e. in the second term.

3.2 Knowledge of English

3.2.1 Questionnaire

We decided to begin with a self-evaluation by the informants of their contact with the English language and the approximate proficiency level reached, based on the classifications proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001), together with a brief English test to verify their actual knowledge level, focusing on past verb forms. One key question in the questionnaire was about English helping or interfering while learning German, fundamental for providing an understanding of our informants' suppositions and leading the research towards confirming or refuting them. This first part will be called activity A.

The questionnaire consisted of five questions and was the only element of all four activities in Portuguese. The first four questions, about habits in English learning, were open, and the last question required respondents to determine their English level from A1 to C2, based on a two-line description of each level.

3.2.2 English test

The second part of activity A was the English test, consisting of three questions. The first one contained alternatives, with correct or incorrect past verb forms to be chosen from in order to complete a sentence. In the second question the students were required

to complete twelve sentences more freely, using verbs in the past. The third one was an open question that required the students to write a paragraph relating what had changed in their lives since they started the undergraduate course.

Thus, the first question elicited the recognition of verb forms, the second one was related to practice, and the third one to production. Activity A was completed by 17 students.

3.3 Working with the past tenses in German

The next three activities – B, C, D – consisted in collecting data about the German learning process itself, following the progression of the content during German classes.

The order of the activities was based on three very well-known PPP steps for learning a new topic in a foreign language: presentation of the topic, practice through exercises and free production. Although aware of the critique directed at the PPP sequence (see Tomlinson 1998: 12), I decided to follow the steps with the purpose of performing a clearer data collection and evaluation, taking into account that the informants had already begun studying the past verb forms in German months before and that they were much more in contact with the German language than students in a regular language course would be.

For this reason, all the verbs used in the activities B, C and D were strategically selected, based on what learners should already have mastered by then and on the similarity to English, with the purpose of observing possible differences between the answers from those who knew English well and those who had little knowledge of the language. Data analysis focused on transfer and interference, usually present on the path towards overcoming possible conflicts and mastering the rules for using the past verb forms in German without any influence of English.

3.3.1 Activity B

The following activity contained two texts and short activities related to each of them. Both texts were written upon request by former German undergraduate students at USP and relate the exchange experiences they had during the course.

After reading the first text, students were required to answer a true/false question with four items and then organize all past verb forms in three columns: *Präteritum*, *Perfekt*

and *Plusquamperfekt*. The latter had not yet been mentioned in class but, since there was an occurrence of a verb in *Plusquamperfekt* in the text, such a column was necessary.

The second text had a more formal tone, which means it was largely written in *Präteritum*. The students were only required to mark all *Präteritum* forms.

Both texts had around 300 words each. Activity B was completed by 14 of the students who had also completed activity A.

3.3.2 Activity C

Firstly, students were asked to read a tale by the Grimm Brothers with 253 words, written in *Präteritum*, and complete a chart with the infinitive forms of the verbs from the text. The *Präteritum* forms were highlighted in the text in order to facilitate the task.

The second task presented 12 verbs in infinitive and three *Präteritum* forms to choose from for each of them. In the third task, students were required to write the conjugated *Präteritum* forms of the given verbs in the infinitive.

Therefore, activity C elicited students' knowledge of *Präteritum* progressing from receptive to active mobilization. It was completed by 11 of the students who had also completed both previous activities.

3.3.3 Activity D

The focus in activity D was production using past verb forms in German. It presented a list of the actions of Peter Härtling between the years 1933 and 1980, a German writer the students had heard of during the regular German classes. The list contained few verbs, all of them in the present. The students were required to write a text about the author.

There was no explicit instruction regarding the use of *Präteritum* in the text, but the first two sentences were given as an example. Besides, the students should have learned by this point that a such text is most usually written in *Präteritum*.

Seven students completed all four activities, always in just under 40 minutes.

4. *Corpus* Analysis and Results

4.1 English

Activity A was carried out by 17 informants. Five of them declared and showed advanced English knowledge (C1 or C2); ten of them, intermediate knowledge (B1 or B2); one of them, basic knowledge (A1 or A2); and one last informant declared English knowledge "below A1".

In relation to the question as to whether English helps or hinders German learning, 65% of the participants declared that they believe knowing English helps in learning German; another 23% indicated that it helps partially, and only 12% believed English does not help in learning German. The 88% of informants who believe English helps gave examples of the similarities between languages to justify this statement which included nouns, verbs and grammar structures with modal verbs. The examples can be grouped into the following areas:

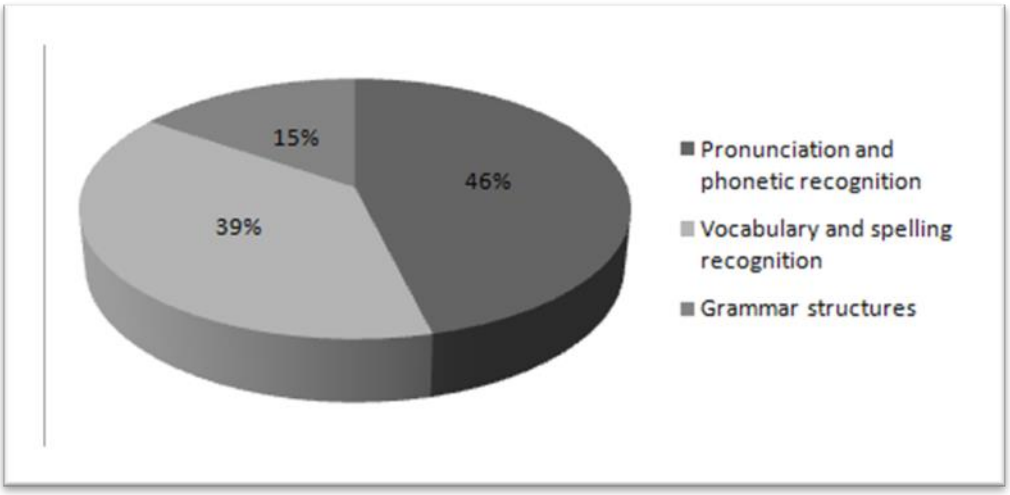

Chart 1. Areas in which English knowledge helps in learning German, according to informants.

Some of the responses related to these beliefs are listed below:

> Informant 2: "[English] sometimes merges with German, so it hinders (i.e. pronunciation)."
>
> Informant 4: "It helps with vocabulary issues, for example, when it's possible to associate words of both languages."
>
> Informant 6: "It sometimes helps, because there are similar words (such as *Vater*), and it makes it easier to memorize vocabulary. Besides, there are similar structures, with auxiliary verbs, etc."

Another four participants expressed some doubt regarding the role of English in the German learning process and pointed out some areas where English helps and others where it interferes with the process, as shown in the following table.

Informant	***Spelling***	***Phonetics***
9	helps	interferes
13	not sure	not sure
14	helps	interferes
15	helps	interferes

Table 1. Areas in which English knowledge may either help or interfere with learning German.

Most informants with a lower level of English reported that this knowledge impacts positively on learning German. The way in which this initial belief develops throughout the research and these students' learning process will be examined.

4.2 Recognition of verbs in the past

The chart below shows how many times the following verb forms were recognized as *Präteritum* forms by the participants in the first reading task of activity B:

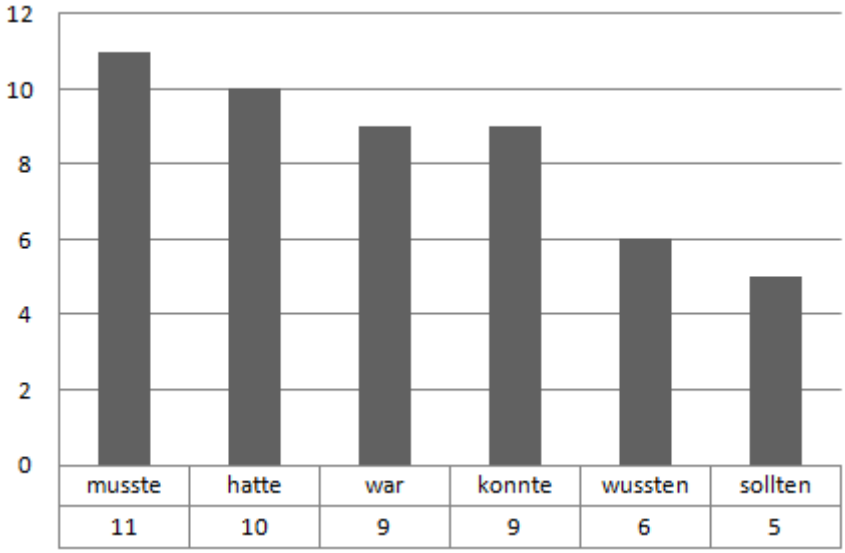

Chart 2. Number of times each verb of the reading exercise was recognized as *Präteritum*.

As can be seen, five out of six verbs build the *Präteritum* by simply adding *-te* to a root. *War*, the only fully irregular form in the group, is one of the first *Präteritum* forms the students had contact with, along with *hatte*. Why then does it only appear in third position?

Drawing a parallel between these verb forms and their infinitive forms and comparing them to the corresponding verbs in English gives the following results:[7]

Präteritum	***Infinitiv***	**Infinitive**
musste	müssen	must
hatte	haben	have
war	sein	be
konnte	können	can
wussten	wissen	know
sollten	sollen	should

Table 2. Verbs from the exercise *Präteritum*, with infinitive forms and equivalent English forms.

The similarity to English plays a clear role for most of the informants when recognizing these words as *Präteritum* verb forms: the form recognized by the highest number of informants is *musste*, a past form for a modal verb very similar to its equivalent in English, *must*, followed by *hatte* and *war*, both of which they had been previously introduced to. *Hatte* appears before *war*, possibly because it is more easily recognizable as *Präteritum*, since it ends in *-te*. The same applies to the next three verbs, but the informants were still not familiar with them and were not able to relate them to their equivalents in English.

In the words of one of the participants himself, answering the question as to whether English helps or hinders German learning, "it helps, because some words are similar […] for example, the verb *müssen*, similar to the English *must*".

However, the answers given to the second reading and recognition task in activity B vary considerably in terms of quality, raising doubt about the participants' own initial hypothesis that knowing English helps learning German:

- the informant who had reported English knowledge below A1 obtained satisfactory results in both stages of activity B;
- most of the informants with B1/B2 and C1/C2 English obtained unsatisfactory results in both stages;
- among the eight informants with B1/B2 English, only one demonstrated an understanding of the German irregular verbs in the past;

[7] English modal verbs do not have infinitive forms since they do not vary according to person and number, as do German modal verbs.

- among the four informants with C1/C2 English, only one recognized various irregular verbs in the exercise.

At this point, it remains open whether the initial hypothesis that L2 English might confuse the L3 German learner has been confirmed. This hypothesis is summed up in the following words of another participant in the initial questionnaire: "To a certain extent, [English] hinders, because when I studied German without having any contact to another foreign language (English), I had a better development in German". The statement is consistent with my personal perception as a *DaFnE* learner, described in the beginning of this article and serving as a starting point for this research – and this is despite the fact that most informants with a lower level of English reported that this knowledge has a positive influence on learning German.

4.3 Contrasts

When correcting activity C, *Präteritum* forms containing the appropriate root and ending were considered correct, even when there were slight spelling mistakes. The following table shows the percentage of correct answers amongst the participants, their level of knowledge in English and their opinion about the influence of this knowledge on learning German.

Informant	***Correct answers***	***English level***	***Does English help or interfere?***
1	67%	below A1	helps
3	34,50%	B1	helps
4	44%	B1	helps
5	52%	B1	helps
10	34,50%	B2	helps
11	63,50%	B2	helps
12	25%	B2	helps

Table 3. Number of correct answers and information about participants of activity C.

Two pieces of data are particularly noteworthy: the fact that the two best performances were obtained by learners with knowledge levels A1 and B2 in English and the fact that the B2 learners obtained such different results.

At first glance, these observations seem neither to fit the general belief that knowing English helps in learning German, nor my personal hypothesis that knowing English

might cause a certain conflict when learning German. However, a different picture emerges if we consider not only the number of correct answers, but also the number of answers attempted, even the ones which may have resulted in error, because they indicate the learner is not trying to avoid making mistakes, as shown in table 4 below.

To be more specific, many of the participants answered only the questions about which they were quite sure, while others tried not to leave any blank spaces, even when they seemed not to know the answer. Those who tried to build the past forms of unknown verbs did it using the strategy of comparing them to verbs they found similar.

It was also observed that the informants who had intermediate English knowledge completed less than half of the third exercise and got more than half of their answers correct which shows they were not just trying, but sure or almost sure about their answers. Ultimately, there were almost no attempts to build unknown *Präteritum* verb forms in answers from the informants with an advanced English knowledge.

Behaving in an autonomous way and taking risks when using a language while still in the learning process have been highlighted by scholars as more frequent characteristics of L3 learners than of L2 learners. According to Marx & Hufeisen (2010: 828), L3 learners have a tendency to take more risks, especially when they find themselves confronted with an unknown word, being more creative and worrying less about formal correction. Following this thinking, it might be supposed that the more confident a German learner is about their English knowledge, the higher their number of incorrect tries. Nonetheless, the following results obtained by three informants in activity C stand out:

Informant	***English***	***Tries***	***Correct answers***
1	A1-	28	14
11	B2	13	13
12	B2	3	1

Table 4. Number of attempts and correct answers by informants in the third exercise of activity C.

We notice here a great performance by informant 1, that is, the German learner who claimed not to know English. He tried his best to complete the exercise, achieving the highest number of fully correct verb forms. This suggests that I1 acted in accordance

with what was initially expected, based on literature about L3 learning. On the other hand, I11's and I12's willingness to take risks was much lower.

A brief profile of these three informants according to their performance in activities A, B and C can be set out as follows:

- I1 has hardly any English knowledge and great performance in German;
- I11 has intermediate English knowledge and had a good performance in the activities in German;
- I12 also has intermediate English knowledge, but unlike I11 he shows difficulty in systematizing the past verb forms in German.

Activity D was not about deduction and taking risks, but about constructing a biographical report in *Präteritum*. Even if the learner did not know the *Präteritum* of the verbs used, the condition for a successful text was showing confidence about rules governing German past forms. In this activity, *Präteritum* forms consisting of a correct root and verb ending were considered correct answers, even in the case of subtle spelling mistakes, as they do not impair the transmission of the message (see section 2.2).

Grammar mistakes in the *Präteritum* building process were considered errors, as well as the use of other past forms, because both the purpose of this activity and the biography genre do not allow for verb forms other than *Präteritum*. The informants interpreted some unknown words as verbs These were considered neither correct nor incorrect answers and were not included in the following table.

Informant	***English***	***Correct answers***	***Mistakes***
1	A1-	10	2
11	B2	5	5
12	B2	0	0

Table 5. Number of correct and incorrect answers in *Präteritum* forms in activity D.

The qualitative analysis may be deepened by considering each of the three selected participants individually.

5. Discussion

5.1 Participants' profiles

I1 exemplifies Selinker's statement (1972: 212) that "attempted learning" does not necessarily mean "successful learning". The informant claimed in activity A to have studied English for four years, learned very little and, five years after stopping, to have forgotten most of what he used to know. I1 was also of the opinion that English helps in learning German to the extent of both vocabulary/spelling recognition and pronunciation/phonetic recognition. Regarding the acquisition of new words, I1 reported that he learns words in English by comparing them with German words, the opposite situation to that of the other informants. In all three following activities, I1 answered all of the questions and got most answers correct.

I11 has studied and/or practiced English for seven years and reached level B2, and he believes it helps in learning German because it "facilitates the intuition" of some word meanings, that is, in relation to vocabulary/spelling recognition. I11 also worked as an English teacher for a while. In activity B, he had the best results amongst the three participants. In activities C and D, more than half of his attempts were correct, which means he most probably answered only the questions he was sure or almost sure about, without taking risks with unknown words.

I12 has been studying English for only two years, besides practicing it by listening to songs and watching movies, and has already reached a level close to B2. He affirms that English helps in writing and listening, that is, in vocabulary/spelling recognition and pronunciation/phonetic recognition. In activities B and C, his poor performance and lack of attempts were noticeable. In activity D, none of the verbs produced by I12 was in *Präteritum*, but rather all of them were in *Perfekt*, and only two of these *Perfekt* forms were correct. This means that I12 has not yet been able to learn the German *Perfekt* rules, taught to the group months before the application of this activity, and that I12 needs a slower pace to master them before moving to *Präteritum*.

Regarding the small number of informants, the fact that they had very heterogeneous learning backgrounds and performed very differently from one another speak in favor of the results obtained.

#5.2 Does English help or hinder learning German?

Given that the focus of this work is an aspect of German grammar, it is possible to compare learners' hypotheses about the impact of English on German with what they actually demonstrated in the activities. In the initial questionnaire, none of the three informants mentioned grammar structures as an area in which English knowledge might help in learning German. Even so, I1 and I11 showed no difficulty concerning German grammar structures. However, I12 has not yet managed to learn them successfully, even though he is aware that German structures differ from English structures and makes this clear when he positions the verbs in *Perfekt* sentences in accordance with German rules.

The analysis of the first two steps of data collection showed that an intermediate level of English knowledge may represent a negative influence, causing a conflict for the learner between English and German. Results from the two following steps slightly changed this conclusion. By observing the three selected participants' performance in all four activities of this research, it was possible to understand that:

- the higher the English knowledge of a German learner, the greater the number of possibilities they have to deduce the rules of German grammar;
- the greater this number of possibilities, the more insecure the learner may feel.

The first of these propositions is related less to the answers given in all the activities than to their absence. I11 and I12, in spite of having made a different number of attempts to answer the questions in activity B, have in common a high percentage of correct answers. That means both have decided to answer only the questions they were quite sure about, and from the moment there was no clue as how to resolve the given exercise, their attempts stopped.

The number of attempts made in the third and fourth data collection activities was noted as well. In activity C, in spite of the difference between I1's ten correct answers and the other two informants' lower number, the number of attempts each made is not as discrepant as in the previous activity. In activity D, I1 and I11 used some *Präteritum* forms that had been previously worked on during class and tried to form some others based on their knowledge. But I12 used only *Perfekt* in the last activity, having not made any clear attempts to use *Präteritum*.

This information leads to the second point: insecurity. In German *Präteritum*, regular verbs end in *-te* plus a personal ending, and irregular verbs undergo modification in the

thematic vowel, which follows certain patterns according to the verbs. I1 had only this information in mind when formulating his hypotheses about the *Präteritum* of the verbs in the activities. I11 and I12, on the other hand, had English structures in mind, a language partially similar to German in which regular verbs in the past gain the termination *-ed* without a personal ending, while irregular verbs undergo change in the thematic vowel. This factor may have made it more difficult for them to deduce the *Präteritum* forms, without any additional information that might function as a clue.

Many researchers in the field affirm that the previous study of English can serve to facilitate learning German and this also seems to be a commonsense assumption. However, De Angelis (2007: 115) points out that the question regarding "what proficiency level is required in a language so that bilingualism becomes an asset for the learner" has not yet received a satisfactory answer, while Craik & Bialystok (2010: 126) admit the possibility that bilingualism can lead to disadvantages regarding lexical access. Most of the informants in this research, however, did not share this opinion in the questionnaire that was part of the first activity. In the first questionnaire, as already mentioned, most informants with a low level of English knowledge reported that knowing English represents a positive influence in learning German. It is possible that their unfamiliarity with the particularities of the English language led them to believe this, while the results show that it is not easy to find evidence to support this contention. The results obtained through this research, however, might lead us to question well-known hypotheses such as that of Marx & Hufeisen (2010), according to which L3 learners take more risks.

6. Conclusions

At the beginning of this project, the expectation was to obtain a profile of the German learner with a level of knowledge in the English language, as well as to map some difficulties and possible conflicts encountered by the latter when learning the past verb forms in German.

On the one hand, the German learner who has already been in contact with the learning process of another foreign language, even if only for a brief period of time, might show a greater willingness to take risks. I1 studied English for four years and might not have developed his German knowledge so well or made so many attempts in the exercises if he had not had this previous experience, because his is not a first foreign language

learner's profile. This shows that a negative experience with L2 learning may result in better experiences with L3, leading to more effective strategies, so that the learning experience is a factor of greater influence than the level reached in the L2.

On the other hand, negotiating solid knowledge of English while gaining new knowledge of German may result in a conflict in the process of mastering the German language. Evidence of this is provided by the fact that the informants I11 and I12 achieved different results in the activities, but both took fewer risks with unknown words than I1, who did not have solid knowledge of the L2 English.

While it may be difficult to generalize from these results due to the small number of informants, it is interesting how heterogeneous *DaFnE* learners can be. It is a consensus that generalizing about L2 and L3 learners as if there were a standard profile for foreign language learners is inadequate – however, there are also different profiles in which the L3 learner may be classified. A detailed investigation of such profiles may be set as goal for further continuation of this research.

Bibliography

Beaumont, Digby; Granger, Colin (1992) *The Heinemann ELT English Grammar*. Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann.

Bohunovsky, Ruth (2011) Alemão para brasileiros: projeto, produção e avaliação de um livro didático nacional. In: Ruth Bohunovsky (ed.) *Ensinar alemão no Brasil: contextos e conteúdos*. Curitiba: Editora UFPR, 83-98.

Braun, Birgit et al. (2011) *DaF Kompakt A1-B1. Deutsch als Fremdsprache für Erwachsene*. Stuttgart: Klett.

Council of Europe (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Strasbourg: Cambridge.

Craik, Fergus I. M.; Bialystok, Ellen (2010) Bilingualism and aging. Costs and benefits. In: Lars Bäckman; Lars Nyberg (eds.) *Memory, Aging and the Brain. A Festschrift in Honour of Lars-Göran Nilsson*. Hove-New York: Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 115-31.

Duden (2009) *Die Grammatik*, 8th ed. Mannheim: Dudenverlag.

Ferrari, Bianca (2014) A influência do inglês no processo de ensino/aprendizagem de alemão por aprendizes brasileiros de terceiras línguas: Abordagens e métodos de investigação. *Pandaemonium Germanicum* 17.24, 175-97.

Funk, Hermann (2010) Methodische Konzepte für den Deutsch als Fremdsprache – Unterricht. In: Hans-Jürgen Krumm et al. (eds.) *Deutsch als Fremd- und Zweitsprache. Ein internationales Handbuch* 1, Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 940-52.

Garcia, André Ming (2012) 'Was hast du heute gelernt?', ou o que você aprendeu hoje? Crenças discentes acerca do conteúdo programático de aulas comunicativas de alemão como língua estrangeira. *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, 51.2, 341-59.

Gärtner, Angelika (2001) Textproduktion bei bilingualen DaF-Studierenden - erste Analysen und Ergebnisse einer Forschungsarbeit zum Deutschunterricht am IFPLA in São Leopoldo (RS). *Pandaemonium Germanicum*, 5.11, 241-62.

Gärtner, Angelika (2011) "Der schnodert em alemão" – Beispiele portugiesischer Entlehnungen und deutsch-portugiesischer Sprachmischungen aus Südbrasilien. *Pandaemonium Germanicum*, 14.18, 248-82.

Grilli, Marina (2016) Alemão como língua estrangeira e a didática do plurilinguismo no Brasil e na Europa. *Pandaemonium Germanicum* 19.27, 175-202.

Grilli, Marina (2017) A abordagem contrastiva no ensino de alemão após inglês e os desafios na graduação em Letras. In: Dörthe Uphoff et al. (eds.). *O Ensino de Alemão em contexto universitário: modalidades, desafios e perspectivas*. São Paulo: Humanitas, 145-67.

Hall, Christopher (2010) Kontrastive Analyse Englisch-Deutsch. In: Hans-Jürgen Krumm et al. (eds.) *Deutsch als Fremd- und Zweitsprache. Ein internationales Handbuch* 1. Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 550-61.

Helbig, Gerhard; Buscha, Joachim (2001) *Deutsche Grammatik – ein Handbuch für den Ausländerunterricht*. Berlin et al.: Langenscheidt.

Hufeisen, Britta (2001) Deutsch als Tertiärsprache. In: Hans-Jürgen Krumm et al. (eds.) *Deutsch als Fremdsprache. Ein internationales Handbuch* 1. Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 648-53.

Hufeisen, Britta; Neuner, Gerhard (1999) *Angewandte Linguistik für den fremdsprachlichen Deutschunterricht: Eine Einführung*. Berlin et al.: Langenscheidt.

Jessner, Ulrike (2008) Teaching third languages: Findings, trends and challenges. *Language Teaching* 41, 15-56.

Kersch, Dorothea Frank; Sauer, Carina Maria (2010) A sala de aula de alemão LE para falantes de dialeto: realidades e mitos. *Linguagem & Ensino* 13.1, 183-203.

König, Ekekhard (2001) Kontrastive Analysen Deutsch-Englisch: eine Übersicht. In: Hans-Jürgen Krumm et al. (eds.) *Deutsch als Fremdsprache. Ein internationales Handbuch*, 1. Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 324-30.

Kursisa, Anta; Neuner, Gerhard (2006) *Deutsch ist easy! Lehrerhandreichungen und Kopievorlagen "Deutsch nach Englisch" für den Anfangsunterricht*. Ismaning: Hueber.

Marx, Nicole; Hufeisen, Britta (2010) Mehrsprachigkeitskonzepte. In: Hans-Jürgen Krumm et al. (eds.) *Deutsch als Fremd- und Zweitsprache. Ein internationales Handbuch* 1. Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 826-31.

Marschall, Matthias (1995). Textfunktionen der deutschen Tempora. Genf: Slatkine.

Murphy, Raymond (1997) *English Grammar in Use*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Neuner, Gerhard (1996) Deutsch als zweite Fremdsprache nach Englisch. Überlegungen zur Didaktik und Methodik und zur Lehrmaterialentwicklung für die ‚Drittsprache Deutsch'. *Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, 33.4, 211-17.

Neuner, Gerhard et al. (2009) *Deutsch als zweite Fremdsprache*. Berlin et al.: Langenscheidt.

Pavlik, Cheryl (2004) *Grammar Sense 2*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pickbrenner, Minka; Finger, I. (2015) O multilinguismo em sala de aula: o ensino/aprendizado de alemão como segunda língua estrangeira (L3). *Caminhos em Linguística Aplicada*, 13.2, 22-46.

Pupp Spinassé, Karen (2005) *Deutsch als Fremdsprache in Brasilien: Eine Studie über kontextabhängige unterschiedliche Lernersprachen und muttersprachliche Interferenzen*. Berlin: Peter Lang.

Pupp Spinassé, Karen (2006) As interferências da Língua Materna e o aprendizado do Alemão como Língua Estrangeira por crianças bilíngues. *Pandaemonium Germanicum*, 9.10, 339-62.

Salgo, Anna (2009) *Die Tertiärsprachendidaktik als ein Beitrag für den DaF-Unterricht in Brasilien: Zur Entwicklung einer brasilienspezifischen L3-Didatik. Erste Ideen für ein Dissertationsprojekt*. Kolloquium der externen und internen DoktorandInnen von Frau Prof. Dr. Hufeisen. Technische Universität Darmstadt. Available at https://www.daf.tu-darmstadt.de/media/daf/dateien/pdfs/kolloq2009/annasalgo_abstracttud.pdf . Accessed on 13.2.2020.

Schäfer, Anna Carolina (2013) A gramática alemã sob a perspectiva de seus aprendizes: crenças discentes e estratégias de aprendizagem. *Pandaemonium Germanicum* 16.21, 190-213.

Stanke, Roberta Cristina Sol Fernandes (2011) O papel do professor no ensino de alemão para o fim específico da leitura. *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, 11.4, 935-61.

Swan, Michael (1995) *Practical English Usage*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tomlinson, Brian (ed.) (1998) Glossary of basic terms for materials development. In: *Materials Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vicente, Sara; Pilypaityté, Lina (2013) Mehrsprachigkeitsdidaktik in Lehrmaterialien. *Fremdsprache Deutsch*, 25.50, 52-57.

Biographical information

Marina Grilli is a Master in German and PhD Student in Education at the University of São Paulo (USP). Her research interests include German as a foreign language and solutions for teaching and learning German in heterogeneous contexts. Some of her work has been presented in Latin-American and international Congresses. Email: marina.grilli.silva@usp.br.

Key words

second foreign language, multilingualism, German after English, past tense