overSEAS 2016

This thesis was submitted by its author to the School of English and American Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts. It was found to be among the best theses submitted in 2016, therefore it was decorated with the School's Outstanding Thesis Award. As such it is published in the form it was submitted in **overSEAS 2016** (http://seas3.elte.hu/overseas/2016.html)

ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

Beregi Nóra

Anglisztika alapszak

Angol szakirány

2016

EÖTVÖS LORÁND TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
Bölcsészettudományi Kar

ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

Az önálló angol nyelvfejlesztés lehetséges módjai magyar anyanyelvi környezetben

Informal ways of autonomous English language development in the Hungarian context

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Angol szakirány

2016

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Budapest, 5th April, 2016

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Abstract

This study aims at getting an insight into the out-of-class language learning strategies of a group of relatively successful language learners in the Hungarian context. Since it is frequently acknowledged that autonomous language learning beyond the classroom makes a significant contribution to higher levels of language proficiency, the popularity and the usefulness of various out-of-class language learning activities are worthy of further investigation. After providing a brief overview of the literature on the topic, in which the notion of learner autonomy is defined and following Benson's (2001) categorisation, a distinction is made between the different types of out-of-class language learning – namely self-instruction, naturalistic language learning and self-directed naturalistic language learning –, and the most important findings of previous studies are highlighted, the research carried out for this study is discussed and evaluated. The data, obtained from first-year BA students at Eötvös Loránd University majoring in English and American Studies, was collected by means of a questionnaire. Findings have revealed that although students engage in a variety of activities regularly outside the classroom, they have a tendency to focus on receptive rather than productive activities. Results also indicate that self-directed naturalistic language learning seems to be the most popular form of out-of-class language learning, followed by self-instruction and naturalistic language learning.

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1. Introduction

According to traditional assumptions, effective language learning normally takes place within the confines of the classroom. However, in the past decades the notion of out-of-class language learning has emerged as a new alternative, challenging the idea that classroom-based learning is the norm. Although it is frequently acknowledged that autonomous language learning beyond the classroom makes a significant contribution to higher levels of language proficiency, relatively little research has been carried out in this area, and hence it still remains an interesting topic, worthy of further investigation.

During my language studies I have noticed that students usually have several opportunities to engage in authentic language use outside the classroom. The digital revolution has dramatically expanded both the scope and the nature of out-of-class language learning activities (Nunan & Richards, 2015). As a result, it seems that exposure to English outside the classroom has become an integral part of students' daily life.

The main aim of this study is to investigate the out-of-class language learning strategies of a group of relatively successful language learners in the Hungarian context. Of primary importance are the following questions: "What are the most popular activities carried out by students to improve their English outside the classroom?", "Are activities involving receptive skills or activities involving productive skills more frequently implemented?", "Following Benson's (2001) theoretical framework, which type of out-of-class language learning is the most common?" and "Which activities are believed to be the most useful for improving language proficiency?".

After summarising the literature on the topic in order to explain the notion of learner autonomy, to introduce a categorisation of out-of-class language learning and to highlight the most important findings of previous studies, the results of the research carried out for this

study are discussed and evaluated. The participants in this study, who are first-year BA students at Eötvös Loránd University majoring in English and American Studies, were asked to fill out a questionnaire, which served the purpose of obtaining a general overview of their out-of-class language learning strategies.

Since there is a need to investigate the issue of out-of-class language learning, I hope that this research will contribute to getting a clearer picture about the language learning tendencies of Hungarian university students beyond the classroom. However, it is important to note that, given the small number and the very specific group of participants, the results cannot be considered as generally true for all Hungarian learners of English.

2. Literature review

2.1. Defining learner autonomy

Traditionally, research, theory and practice in language learning and teaching have focused on classroom-based language development (e.g. Brown, 1980; Krashen & Terrell, 1983) and have emphasised how the classroom, together with teachers and learners, promotes successful language learning. However, the limitations of classroom-based learning, for instance an unfavourable class size, time limitations and the test-driven curriculum, have been frequently acknowledged (e.g. Blatchford, Goldstein & Mortimore, 1998; Krashen, 1982; Richards, 2015). In the 1980s, "a new complementary perspective emerged with the notion of learner autonomy, which shifted the focus from the teacher to the learners" (Nunan & Richards, 2015, p. xii) and emphasised the importance of autonomous out-of-class learning in the language learning process.

Since the 1980s, the theory and practice of autonomy in language teaching and learning has been the subject of a large number of academic studies (e.g. Benson & Voller, 1997; Holec, 1981). The term 'autonomy' has been variously defined since the emergence of the idea of learner autonomy. Originally, the term was derived from the fields of politics and philosophy, and it can be best described as "the ability or opportunity for the individual to make his or her own decisions without being controlled by anyone else" (Longman dictionary of contemporary English online).

According to Benson (2007), one of the most remarkably robust and most widely cited definitions of learner autonomy is Holec's (1981) definition. He describes learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). Benson and Voller (1997) adopt Holec's definition and point out that in language education the term 'autonomy' is used in at least five different ways: "for situations in which learners study entirely on their

own, for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning, for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education, for the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning, for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning" (Benson & Voller, 1997, pp. 1-2).

Little (1991, 2000) emphasises the psychological aspect of learner autonomy and defines it as "a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (1991, p. 4) and notes that "autonomous learners assume responsibility for determining the purpose, content, rhythm and method of their learning, monitoring its progress and evaluating its outcomes" (2000, p. 69).

In a relatively recent essay, Krashen (2006) suggests that the 'autonomous language acquirer' is someone who understands "how language is acquired" and "is able to get the input necessary for language acquisition, whether formal programs are available or not" (p.2).

Despite the large number of different definitions, several studies suggest that autonomous language learning is an elusive and complex concept. According to Benson (2001), autonomy is a complex notion that has multiple dimensions and takes different forms for different individuals, or even changes for a particular individual in different contexts. Lamb and Reinders (2006) also emphasise that it is impossible to arrive at an adequate definition of learner autonomy, due to the argument that there are only multiple views of autonomy rather than a single characterisation (Aoki, 2002).

2.2. Learner autonomy beyond the classroom

Although, according to the traditional assumption, languages are normally acquired in classrooms, Benson (2007) points out that there are various modes of practice that emerged as new alternatives in order to challenge the idea that classroom-based learning is the norm. He

mentions out-of-class learning as one of the new alternatives, and emphasises that this is a relatively new area in the literature on autonomy. Benson (2007) states that the term 'out-of-class language learning' is used narrowly in the recent literature on autonomy, for instance by Hyland (2004), and Pearson (2004), to refer to "the efforts of learners taking classroom-based language courses to find opportunities for language learning and use outside the class" (Benson, 2007, p. 26). According to Crabbe (1993), classroom-based learning in itself does not guarantee language learning success, because seizing opportunities to learn and use the language outside the classroom is also important. Nunan's study (1991) also concludes that "determination to apply one's developing language skills outside the classroom" (p. 175) is the characteristic of the successful language learner. Similarly, Hyland (2004) argues that language learning is not limited to the classroom, but can take place at any time and in any place. Furthermore, the use and forms of out-of-class language learning may vary from individual to individual.

2.3. The categorisation of out-of-class language learning

Although out-of-class language learning can have a number of different forms, Benson (2011) uses the term broadly to refer to all the activities that have no direct relationship to schooling and are "typically initiated by the learner, make use of authentic resources, and involve pleasure and interest, as well as language learning" (p. 139). Based on the different activities it entails, Benson (2001) divides out-of-class language learning into three categories: self-instruction, naturalistic language learning and self-directed naturalistic language learning.

The first type is self-instruction, which takes place when learners deliberately plan to improve their target language skills and seek out resources that help them to achieve this goal. During self-instruction, learners engage in activities that are explicitly designed for foreign

language learning. A good example of self-instruction is the use of self-study grammar books in order to improve grammar skills.

The second category is naturalistic language learning, which refers to situations when learning occurs mainly unintentionally through direct communication and interaction with the users of the target language. The main difference between self-instruction and naturalistic language learning is "the degree of deliberate intention to acquire language content and skills at the time of the learning event itself" (Benson, 2011, p. 77). For instance, during a conversation with English-speaking friends the focus of attention is on communication, not on conscious language learning. The idea that naturalistic learning is essential for successful foreign language acquisition is supported by Krashen (1982), who argues that participation in conversations is a great way to obtain comprehensible input, which is a necessary component of language acquisition.

The third category of out-of-class language learning is self-directed naturalistic language learning, which occurs when learners create or seek out a language learning situation, but while they are in that situation, may not focus directly on language learning (Hyland, 2004). Benson (2011) emphasises that in self-directed naturalistic language learning "the learner engages in language use for pleasure or interest, but also with the broader intention of learning" (p. 139). For instance, learners may borrow English novels from the library with the underlying aim of improving their vocabulary, but may read them mainly for pleasure without undertaking any specific learning activities.

Despite the widely acknowledged fact that all three types of out-of-class language learning make a significant contribution to higher levels of language proficiency (Benson, 2001), relatively little research has been carried out in this area. Hyland (2004) argues that the reason for this is that out-of-class language learning involves mostly 'private' activities and

thus remains hidden. In the following section the findings of the most important relevant studies are highlighted, in order to concentrate on the activities and effects of the different types of out-of-class English language learning.

2.4. Previous research on out-of-class language learning

2.4.1. Self-instruction

Benson (2007) emphasises that the term 'self-instruction' can be used both in a narrow and in a broader sense. Here the term is used narrowly to refer to the deliberate "use of printed or broadcast self-study materials" (p. 26) for the explicit purpose of language learning outside the classroom. Traditionally, the number of self-instructional sources was fairly limited: the repertoire mainly consisted of self-study grammar and vocabulary textbooks designed for learners of English as a foreign language. However, as the digital revolution has opened up enormous opportunities in the world of education, new forms of self-instructional materials have started to arise. The Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) materials have become extremely popular in the form of self-study language learning software packages and online language learning websites. Both sources offer interactive lessons at all levels of language proficiency. The combination of audio, video and text material with interactive exercises contributes to self-instructional language learning success through improving vocabulary and grammatical knowledge and sharpening skills in pronunciation and listening comprehension (Dunkel, Brill & Kohl, 2002). Among the several websites that aim at teaching English as a foreign language (e.g. BBC Learning English, LearnEnglish by the British Council, or Livemocha), the 'Macmillan Dictionary Love English Award' winner 5Minute English (5perc Angol) is worth noting in the Hungarian context.

In spite of the need for studies in this area (Benson, 2007), self-instruction has received little attention in out-of-school language learning literature. The small amount of research into

self-instructional strategies and activities that has been carried out investigated its role in successful language learning. In their research, Fernández-Toro and Jones (1996) investigated the role of self-instruction in adult foreign language learning and found that it seems to raise language proficiency, but only beyond intermediate level. They pointed out that the drop-out rates are high if self-instruction is chosen at beginner level. However, if it is combined with classroom-based learning, it can make a significant contribution to successful language learning. Similarly, Nielson's study (2011), which explored the way adult learners use self-study language learning software packages, highlights the fact that the use of these CALL materials is not the most effective way of out-of-class language learning, because they are not yet able to offer an alternative to human support or interaction. Similar findings were reported by Umino (1999), who investigated the widespread use of self-instructional broadcast materials in Japan. Benson (2001) also argues that it is impossible to achieve a high level of proficiency using these materials alone. Other research (e.g. Jones, 1994) suggests, however, that self-instructed learners who have developed their own learning strategies easily overcome the drawbacks of self-instructed materials.

2.4.2. Naturalistic language learning

Naturalistic language learning occurs when the learner uses the language for social interactions with the users of the target language in out-of-class situations. Several studies suggest that the use of English as a written or spoken medium of interaction provides great opportunities for learners to maintain and extend their language proficiency outside the classroom. Bialystok (1981) has investigated the different factors that contribute to language learning success and pointed out that out-of-class exposure to the target language in communicative situations is crucial for language development. Similarly, Rubin and Thompson (1994) emphasise that learners can benefit a lot from out-of-class communication

with native speakers. Ellis (1994) also concluded that natural exposure to the target language, apart from formal instruction, is one of the most important components of successful language acquisition.

Study abroad exchange programmes typically involve naturalistic language learning because the learner is living for a longer period with members of the target language community and has the opportunity to learn through out-of-class spoken interaction. Pearson‘s (2004) study investigated the out-of-class language learning habits of Chinese students studying English at a New Zealand university and found that the students varied greatly in their degree of interaction with the target language community outside the classroom. While some students communicated with native speakers every day and developed their language skills through exposure to English after class, others did not exploit all their out-of-class language learning opportunities and only spoke with other Chinese students. Other naturalistic language learning experiences are reported by Schmidt and Frota (1986) and Campbell (1996), who both carried out a diary study of their own attempts to learn a language in the target language environment and concluded that out-of-class interaction with native speakers significantly contributed to language learning success.

However, not all learners have the opportunity to learn a language in the target language environment. Richards (2015) emphasises the advantages of the online chat room, as an alternative to face-to-face communication. According to Richards, chat rooms enable learners to use their English in a stress-free context and to engage in real-time interaction with native speakers outside the classroom. Similarly, Pellettieri (2000), who investigated the role of chatting in the development of grammatical competence, concluded that, through its use of corrective feedback, out-of-class chat-room participation facilitates mutual comprehension and supports language learning.

2.4.3. Self-directed naturalistic language learning

According to Benson (2001), in most cases out-of-class learning takes the form of self-directed naturalistic learning, in which learners find opportunities to improve their language skills, but at the time of the learning event, the focus of attention is not on conscious language learning, but rather on language use for pleasure or interest. Although self-directed naturalistic learning has several forms, in the following section only some of the most important activities and their effects will be highlighted and briefly described.

A large number of studies (e.g. Vanderplank, 1988; Danan, 2004) suggest that using the television as an out-of-class language learning resource is very popular among learners and supports many aspects of language development. Lin and Siyanova-Chanturia (2015) point out that films, series and TV programmes are, due to the advent of the Internet, easily accessible and provide a useful source of input of authentic, everyday English language use. Webb (2015) emphasises that 'extensive viewing' – an activity that "involves regular silent uninterrupted viewing of L2 television" (p. 159) - helps learners to improve their vocabulary and listening comprehension. However, he notes that in order to truly benefit from extensive viewing, one should have mastered the 2,000 highest-frequency words in English. Danan's (2004) study suggests that audio-visual material enhanced with captions or subtitles is a particularly powerful language learning tool, because it increases language comprehension and leads to greater depth of processing. Similarly, Vanderplank (1988), who investigated the potential benefits of watching subtitled TV programmes, found that subtitled programmes may have a limited value for low-level learners, but by providing large amounts of comprehensible input, they are truly beneficial for post-intermediate level learners.

It is widely acknowledged that out-of-class extensive reading in English makes a major contribution to language development. Previous research has clearly demonstrated that

extensive reading is beneficial for learners in terms of vocabulary acquisition (e.g. Cho & Krashen, 1994), development of writing skills (Tsang, 1996), reading comprehension (Krashen, 1988) and oral/aural language proficiency (Cho & Krashen, 1994). Furthermore, Day and Bamford (1998) suggest that learners who read extensively develop positive attitudes toward reading and increased motivation to learn the target language. Krashen's (1994) 'pleasure hypothesis' proposed that activities which help successful language acquisition – for instance, free voluntary out-of-class reading – are usually enjoyable as well. In spite of the previously mentioned numerous benefits, language learners do not typically take advantage of the power of reading outside the classroom (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Kim & Krashen, 1997). According to Cho and Krashen (1994), there are several reasons for this phenomenon: learners believe that reading is not as useful as consciously learning grammatical rules and practising them, they assume – influenced by classroom experiences – that reading must be hard work, and they have difficulties in finding the right texts, which need to be both interesting and comprehensible.

The advent of the Internet has dramatically expanded the scope and the nature of out-of-class language learning opportunities (Nunan & Richards, 2015). It provides access to a variety of authentic spoken and written material, as well as several useful tools that can be used for language learning purposes outside the classroom. Since the list of the online resources is probably endless, only some interesting examples have been chosen to demonstrate the importance of the Internet in out-of-class language learning. Firstly, writing a blog in English, which is one of the most popular productive web-based activities among language learners (Benson, 2001), significantly improves language skills and fosters autonomy and motivation of the learners (Bhattacharya & Chauhan, 2010). Secondly, the use of social media resources for language learning is emphasised by Righini (2015), who found that reading news articles from the electronic media on topics of interest is truly beneficial

and enhances learner autonomy. Thirdly, Coxhead and Bytheway (2015) describe the advantages of TED Talks – a website containing conference talks and presentations of different lengths, difficulty levels and genres, on almost every topic – for developing different language skills.

The positive benefits of the use of music and song lyrics for language learning have been the subject of several previous studies (e.g. Medina, 1993; Kerekes, 2015). Since listening to popular music seems to be learners' most frequent exposure to English outside the classroom (Domoney & Harris, 1993), it plays an important role in out-of-class language learning. Kerekes (2015) emphasises that listening to music and reading the lyrics have several advantages for language development: songs and lyrics can be used to learn pronunciation, to improve grammar and vocabulary – due to the repetitions of words and structures –, to broaden cultural knowledge and even to increase memory recall. Similarly, Boothe and West (2015) argues that songs and lyrics can develop grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and listening skills, and that they have proved to be useful for learning idiomatic language. In the digital age, an incredibly wide collection of music and lyrics is easily accessible and can be used effectively for out-of-class language learning purposes.

Recent studies (e.g. Chik, 2015) investigated the issue of language learning through digital games with growing interest. Playing computer games is a popular free-time activity of young people and offers opportunities for entertainment as well as language learning (Richards, 2015). Chik's (2015) study investigated the contribution of the digital gameplay to successful language learning, focussing especially on the ways in which games develop familiarity with topics and vocabulary that are usually not covered in regular language courses. Gee (2012) argues that digital games "associate words with images, actions, goals and dialogue, not just with definitions or other words" (p. xiv), and therefore learners enrich their vocabulary by learning the words in context.

According to Benson (2001), achieving proficiency in a foreign language is a complex, long-term process, in which besides formal instruction all these three types of out-of-class language learning play an important role. Similarly, Nunan and Richards (2015) suggest that all forms of out-of-class language learning provide an important complement to classroom-based learning and that there is a need to integrate formal learning with out-of-class learning since they mutually support each other. They emphasise that the role of the teacher is to provide opportunities for the learners to engage in authentic language use outside the classroom, in order to help them to develop not only their language proficiency, but also autonomous learning skills.

2.4.4. Receptive vs. productive out-of-class language learning activities

Besides the above-mentioned classification, previous studies on out-of-class language learning also investigated whether activities involving receptive skills or productive skills are more popular and common among language learners. Pickard (1996), who looked at the out-of-school learning strategies of proficient German learners of English, found that activities involving the receptive skills such as reading and listening are much more common among learners than productive activities such as speaking and writing. Pickard's findings are supported by Littlewood and Liu (1996) and Yap (1998), who also reported that learners of English in Hong Kong tend to engage in receptive rather than productive activities, including watching television and reading newspapers. Similar findings were reported by Hyland (2004), who also found that receptive rather than productive activities were more frequently carried out and that the most common activities, such as reading academic books and surfing the Internet, did not involve face-to-face interaction.

Smith's (2001) findings, however, differed from the observations of the above-mentioned studies. His Japanese participants were noticeably creative in engaging in several

productive out-of-class activities, such as talking in English with peers and international students and making overseas phone calls. Similarly, Gao (2009) also found that Chinese students tend to engage in face-to-face interaction in English outside the classroom by voluntarily organizing ‘English corners’, which are regular meetings in public places, in order to improve their speaking skills.

In conclusion, previous research has highlighted the fact that, with the emergence of the notion of learner autonomy, out-of-class language learning has become an important factor of language learning success. According to Benson’s (2001) framework, three different categories of out-of-class language learning exist, and all of them make a major contribution to language development. Previous studies have also investigated whether activities involving receptive or productive skills are more popular among language learners, and most of them have pointed out the learners’ preference for receptive out-of-class language learning activities.

3. Research design

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study are first-year BA students at Eötvös Loránd University majoring in English and American Studies. These students are considered to be relatively successful language learners, as they were able to gain admission to a prestigious Hungarian university. Their admission presupposes that they have passed their A-level English secondary school-leaving exams with good results, and that they are particularly interested in English language learning. It is for this reason that their out-of-class language learning strategies, activities and preferences are worth investigating.

3.2. Instrument

The data collection instrument of this study is a questionnaire, which served the purpose of obtaining a general overview of students' out-of-class language learning strategies and identifying to what extent the activities of the already defined three types of out-of-class language learning – self-instruction, naturalistic language learning and self-directed naturalistic language learning – are important according to the participants. The questionnaire investigated a number of different areas, including information on the students' language learning background, the role of English in their daily lives, the frequency of the different activities in which they engage in English outside the classroom, and the activities they found most useful for improving their language skills. (For a sample of the questionnaire, see Appendix A.)

The questionnaire consisted of 7 questions. A few introductory questions, such as "How long have you been learning English?" and "Have you ever spent more than a month in an English-speaking country?", were included in order to gain more detailed information about

the participants' language learning background. The purpose of Question 4 was to introduce students to the topic in research and to investigate the role of English language in their daily life outside the classroom. Question 5, which consisted of 10 out-of-class language learning activities that had to be ranked according to the frequency with which students carried out them, was intended to analyse the participants' out-of-class language learning preferences. The suggested activities used in the ranking question were partially based on the findings of previous studies (e.g. Hyland, 2004; Pearson, 2004), and the list included activities of all three types of out-of-class language learning (Benson, 2001). Furthermore, this question provided an opportunity for students to share information on any additional activity of theirs that was not included in the list. Question 6 was included in order to summarise the participants' evaluation of the frequency of their own out-of-class language learning activities in general, after considering a list of activities in the previous question. The last question was intended to investigate the usefulness of the previously mentioned activities, and therefore students were asked to rate them on a 5-point scale ranging from "Very useful" to "Not useful at all".

3.3. Procedures

The questionnaires were distributed and filled out by two groups of students during the first ten minutes of their 'Language Practice 2' seminars. Due to the personal in-class distribution, the return rate was 100%: all 36 students returned their questionnaires completely filled out. Although the number of the participants is relatively small in proportion to the number of all first year BA students, which means that general conclusions cannot be drawn from the opinion expressed by them, the sample is large enough to provide an insight into some of the most important out-of-class language learning tendencies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Background information about the participants

The average age of the students answering the questionnaire was 20 years old (age range 18-25). Given the gender ratio of the university students in the BA programme in English and American Studies, it is not surprising that a large majority of the respondents (83.3%) were female. The participants have been learning English for 10 years on average, and most of them (83.3%) have never spent more than a month in an English-speaking country. Thus it may be deduced that the majority have learnt English as a foreign language in a Hungarian environment. Only a few of the respondents (16.7 %) had the opportunity to live with members of the target language community for a longer period. The most popular destinations were England, Scotland and the United States.

4.2. The role of English in students' daily lives outside the classroom

Even though these students are planning to obtain a degree in English and American Studies, not all of them regarded the English language as playing an extremely important role in their daily lives outside the classroom: fewer than a third of the participants (30%) viewed it as very important, using it practically every day in various contexts. Half of the students (50%) claimed that English was quite important in their daily lives, but a surprisingly large number, 17 %, said that it was not very important and they only used it occasionally. (See Chart 1 in Appendix B.)

With regard to the frequency of using the opportunities outside the classroom specifically for developing language proficiency, more than half of the students (55%) chose the answer 'often'. 17% of the participants very often deliberately engage in out-of-class language learning activities, but only slightly fewer than a third of the participants (28%) only

sometimes improve their English outside the classroom. (See Chart 2 in Appendix B). The answers indicated that most of the students were able to exercise learner autonomy beyond the classroom to some extent.

4.3. The frequency of out-of-class language learning activities

The questionnaire data analysis has revealed which are the most frequent and which are the least frequent out-of-class language learning activities carried out by the participants. (See Chart 1 and Chart 3 in Appendix C.) The results suggest that students rated watching films/series/TV programmes, surfing the Internet and listening to English music/radio channels as their most common activities. All three of these activities belong in the category of self-directed naturalistic language learning. This is consistent with previous findings (Benson, 2001; Hyland, 2004) suggesting that in most cases out-of-class learning takes the form of self-directed naturalistic learning. The ranking is not surprising, since students engage in these activities mainly for pleasure or interest and these activities might actually be an integral part of their daily routines. These findings are similar to Pickard's (1996), who found that the primary reason for choosing particular out-of-class language learning activities was the intrinsic interest value of the activities. It is obvious that technology, quite predictably, comes to the fore as the most popular instrument and channel for out-of-class language learning.

It is an interesting finding that the participants chose the use of self-study grammar/vocabulary books as their fourth-most common activity. Although several studies (e.g. Wu, 2012) suggest that self-instruction is not a very popular form of out-of-class language learning, Hungarian students do in fact tend to use self-instructional materials, such as self-study grammar/vocabulary books, language learning websites and software packages, quite regularly.

The participants, despite being BA students at the Faculty of Humanities, do not read outside the classroom as much as one might expect: the overall opinion ranked reading novels and reading English newspapers/magazines as their fifth- and sixth-most frequent out-of-school language learning activities. This is not consistent with previous findings (Hyland, 2004), according to which reading books and articles were one of the most common activities of university students.

The summary of the answers suggests that naturalistic language learning in the form of speaking/chatting with native English speakers is not particularly common. It is possible that students rarely find opportunities to interact with native English speakers in the Hungarian context. However, Hyland (2004) suggests that students usually do have the opportunity to interact with native speakers, but fail to seize them due to their fear of negative judgement. It would be interesting to investigate, by means of personal interviews, the actual reasons behind Hungarian students' avoidance of interaction with native speakers.

The ranking of the out-of-class language learning activities in order of frequency suggests that activities involving receptive skills are much more frequently carried out by Hungarian students than productive activities. The top three out-of-class language activities that respondents indicated they participated in most frequently involved receptive rather than productive language use. Furthermore, productive activities, such as speaking/chatting with native speakers, or writing e-mails and blogs, are among the least frequent activities. These findings are consistent with previous research (e.g. Hyland, 2004; Pickard 1996) suggesting that learners tend to engage in receptive rather than productive activities. However, it is important to note that few students mentioned any additional frequently implemented activities that were not included in the list, such as "writing short-stories in English" and "working in English" , which are productive activities involving writing and speaking.

In conclusion, the questionnaire data analysis has revealed that self-directed naturalistic language learning seems to be the most popular form of out-of-class language learning, followed by self-instruction and naturalistic language learning. In addition, receptive activities involving listening and reading are much more frequently carried out by the participants than productive ones.

4.4. The perceived usefulness of out-of-class language learning activities

Concerning the usefulness of the above-mentioned activities for improving language skills, the summary of the answers given to Question 7 established a ranking that differed from the ranking in order of frequency to some extent. (See Chart 2 and Chart 4 in Appendix C.) When asked to indicate the usefulness of these various out-of-class activities, students rated watching films/series/TV programmes and speaking/chatting with native English speakers as most useful. While watching films/series/TV programmes is the number one activity both in terms of frequency and usefulness, some qualification is necessary on this point: students found that watching them with English subtitles was more beneficial for improving language skills.

It is especially interesting that although speaking/chatting with native English speakers was ranked as one of the most useful out-of-class language learning activities, it was rarely implemented by the participants. Similar findings were reported by Hyland (2004) and Wu (2012), who found that activities involving speaking are ranked highly in terms of usefulness, but much lower in terms of frequency.

Another important finding is that although students very often surf the Internet and listen to English music/radio channels to improve their language skills outside the classroom, these activities regarded as being less useful for language development. The questionnaire

data analysis clearly demonstrates that these activities are popular free-time activities of the participants, but they assume that other out-of-class activities contribute to successful language development more effectively.

Although respondents frequently use self-instructional materials, such as self-study grammar/vocabulary books, or language learning websites/software packages, these instruments are not rated highly in terms of their usefulness.

Despite the fact that previous research (Chik, 2015; Richards, 2015) suggests that playing computer games is both a popular free-time activity among young people and one that is beneficial for language practice, the overall opinion ranked “playing computer games” both as their least frequent and as the least useful activity. Computer games are probably much more popular among younger learners than among the participants in this research. It is also possible that the gender ratio plays an important role in the relative unpopularity of this activity.

5. Conclusion

All things considered, the summary of the answers given in the questionnaires seems to reflect most of the points made in the literature review. The study clearly demonstrates that in order to achieve a high level of language proficiency, one has to become an autonomous language learner, who seizes the opportunities to learn and use the language outside the classroom. The results suggest that although students are aware of several potential methods of out-of-class language learning and engage in a variety of activities regularly outside the classroom, they have a tendency to focus on receptive and private activities that do not involve spoken or written interaction.

The questionnaire data analysis has revealed that students rated watching films/series/TV programmes, surfing the Internet and listening to English music/radio channels as their most frequently implemented activities. Concerning the usefulness of the activities, watching films/series/TV programmes and speaking/chatting with native English speakers are believed to be the most useful for improving language proficiency.

Following Benson's (2001) framework, in the present study, self-directed naturalistic language learning activities were found to be the most popular and most frequently implemented activities. However, self-instruction seems to have a significant importance in the out-of-school language learning strategies of Hungarian students. Naturalistic language learning activities, despite being perceived as extremely useful for improving language skills, were not frequently carried out.

An aspect that seems important for me to remember as a future teacher is the need to encourage learners to develop autonomous learning skills in order to use and improve their English outside the classroom effectively. It should be emphasised more that an important role of the teacher as a facilitator rather than an instructor is to provide opportunities for the

learners to engage in authentic language use both in and outside the classroom and direct them towards out-of-class language learning activities which are both beneficial for the learning process and likely to engage their interest.

It is surprising that despite the fact that previous research and the findings of this study clearly demonstrate that successful language learners regularly find opportunities for language learning and use outside the classroom, out-of-class language learning has received little attention in the literature. Since both formal and informal ways of language learning make a significant contribution to higher levels of language proficiency, it is obvious that there is a need to integrate classroom-based learning with out-of-classroom learning, since they mutually support each other.

It is important to note that the present study has some limitations: given the small number and the very specific group of participants, the results cannot be treated as generally true for all Hungarian learners of English. Further research could investigate the out-of-class language learning tendencies and activities of students of different age groups and different levels of language proficiency in the Hungarian context. It would also be interesting to conduct the same study in different cultural and social contexts, in order to examine whether those students have the same out-of-school language learning preferences as the participants in this study.

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Dear Students!

This survey is being carried out to investigate the types of strategies and activities used by BA English major university students to improve their English language skills outside the classroom. You would help me a lot by taking a few minutes to fill it in, naturally anonymously.

Thank you very much in advance,

Beregi Nóra, ELTE, BA English major

Gender: Male / Female

Age: ……

1. How long have you been learning English? For …….. years.

2. Have you ever spent more than a month in an English-speaking country? yes / no

3. If so, where were you and how long did you stay there? …….....

4. How important is English in your daily life outside the classroom?

- **a)** Very important: I use it practically every day in various contexts.
- **b)** Quite important: I often use it in different situations.
- **c)** Not very important: I only use it occasionally.
- **d)** Not important at all: I hardly ever use it outside the classroom.

5. Please, put the following answers in order according to which are the most frequent and which are less frequent activities that you do to improve your English outside the classroom! 1.=the most frequent, 10.=the least frequent

... **a.** Watching films/series/TV programmes in English

… **b**. Reading novels in English

… **c.** Listening to English music/radio channels

… **d**. Speaking/chatting with native English speakers

… **e**. Using self-study grammar/vocabulary books

… **f.** Surfing the Internet

… **g**. Playing computer games

… **h.** Reading English newspapers/magazines

… **i.** Using self-study language learning websites/software packages

… **j.** Writing e-mails/blogs

(… **k**. Other:……..)

6. How often do you do anything outside the classroom (in addition to your homework assignments) specifically in order to improve your English?

a) very often
b) often
c) sometimes
d) rarely
e) never

7. Please indicate how useful you find these activities for improving your English language skills!

	Very useful				**Not useful at all**
a. Watching films/series/TV programmes in English	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
a./1. Watching films with English subtitles	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
a./2. Watching films without English subtitles	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
b. Reading novels in English	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
c. Listening to English music/radio channels	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
d. Speaking/chatting with native English speakers	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
e. Using self-study grammar/vocabulary books	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
f. Surfing the Internet	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
g. Playing computer games	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
h. Reading English newspapers/magazines	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
i. Using self-study language learning websites/software packages	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
j. Writing e-mails/blogs	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

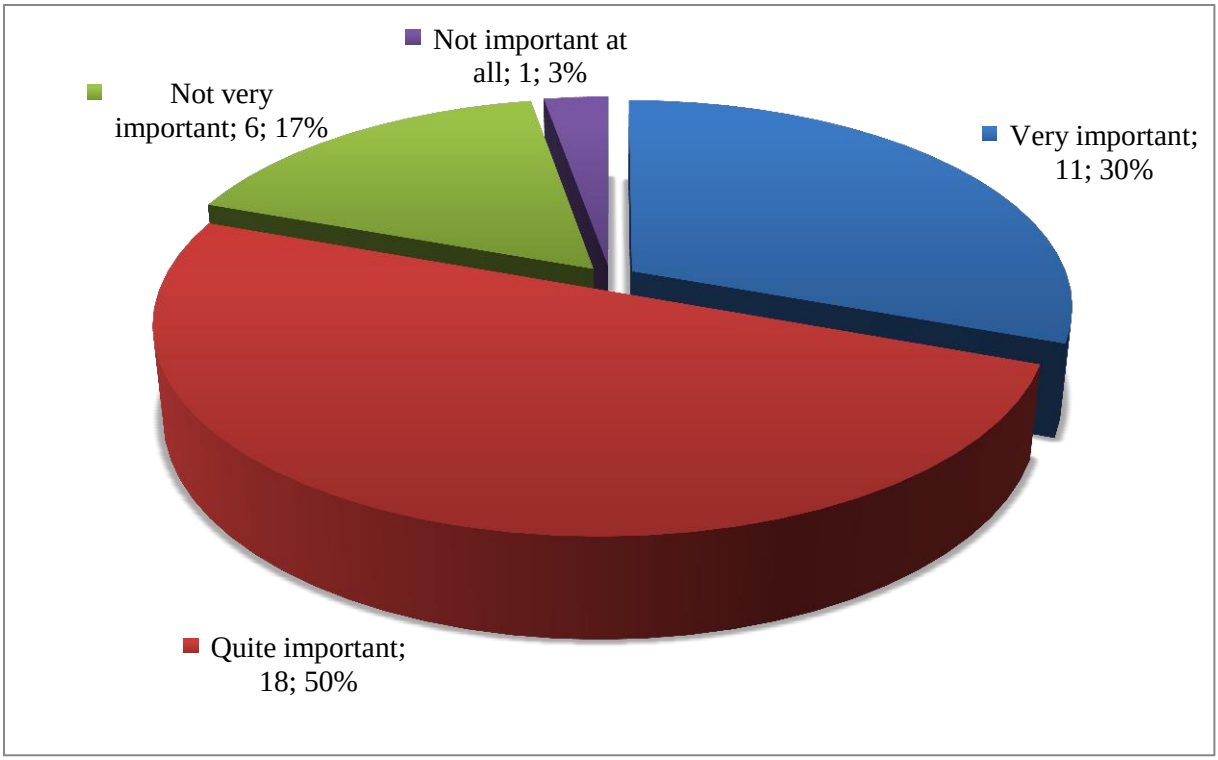

Chart 1: Summary of the answers given to the question "How important is English in your daily life outside the classroom?"

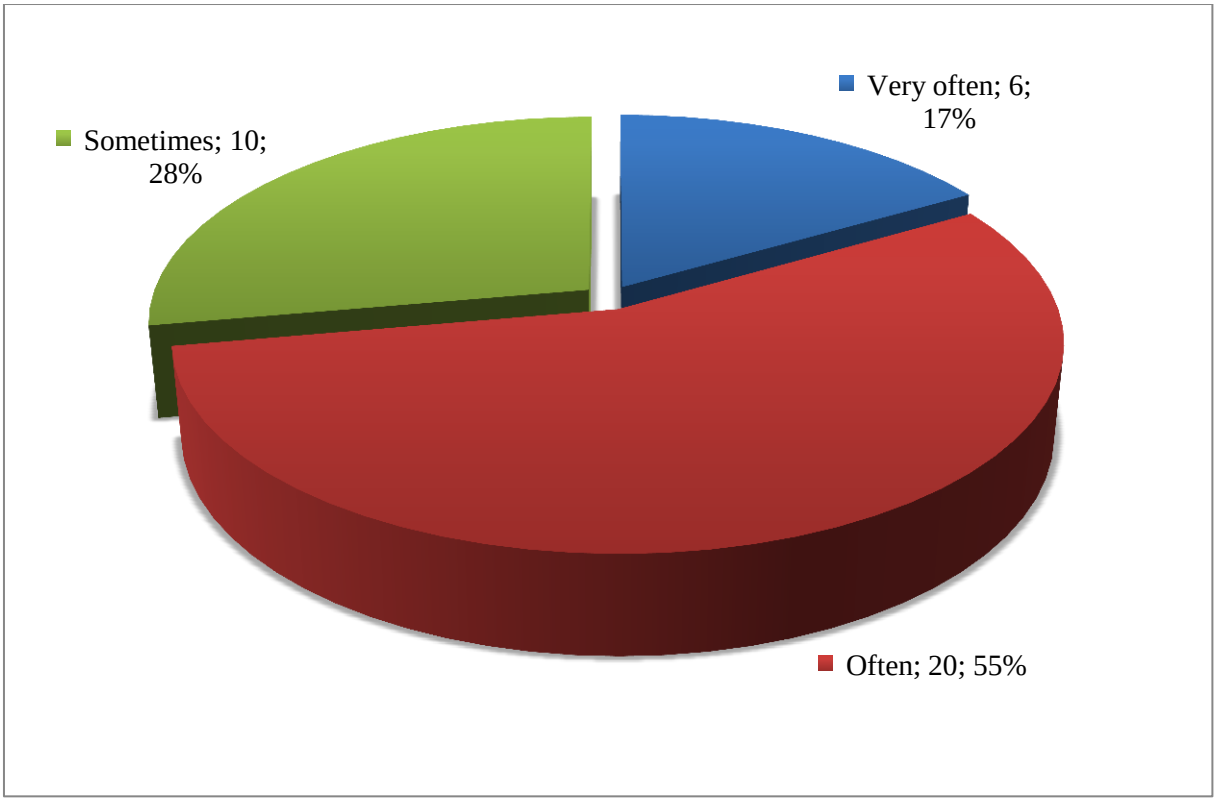

Chart 2: Summary of the answers given to the question "How often do you do anything outside the classroom specifically in order to improve your English?"

Appendix C

Watching films/series/TV programmes in English	2	3	3	4	3	1	8	1	2	1	10	1	4	1	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	10	8	3	1	6	10	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	**106**	**2,94**	**1.**
Reading novels in English	2	6	2	4	7	6	6	5	3	3	9	5	3	6	9	1	7	4	5	1	8	1	10	7	2	5	4	3	8	5	6	6	4	7	4	4	**178**	**4,94**	**5.**
Listening to English music/radio channels	7	4	6	1	1	4	4	3	7	1	8	2	1	2	1	4	8	5	1	6	2	8	2	1	5	3	5	5	2	1	5	9	2	9	2	2	**139**	**3,86**	**3.**
Speaking/chatting with native English speakers	8	1	10	9	9	9	5	6	1	3	7	6	7	5	10	3	10	2	10	4	3	7	9	10	4	1	9	9	9	10	1	1	8	10	5	8	**229**	**6,36**	**8.**
Using self-study grammar/vocabulary books	3	0	4	2	5	3	10	7	8	3	2	4	5	10	3	5	1	8	4	2	10	2	7	8	6	8	1	7	4	8	3	5	5	1	3	6	**173**	**4,81**	**4.**
Surfing the Internet	1	2	1	1	2	2	7	2	4	1	6	3	2	3	1	7	4	3	3	7	1	6	6	2	3	4	7	2	3	1	4	4	3	2	6	3	**119**	**3,31**	**2.**
Playing computer games	9	10	9	1	8	10	3	4	10	0	5	10	10	7	10	10	9	10	8	9	10	9	3	5	10	10	3	10	10	2	8	10	10	10	9	10	**281**	**7,81**	**10.**
Reading English newspapers/magazines	4	9	7	9	6	8	2	9	9	8	1	9	8	9	5	6	6	6	6	8	2	3	2	6	7	2	6	6	5	3	7	8	6	6	7	9	**220**	**6,11**	**6.**
Using self-study language learning websites/software packages	4	5	5	6	10	5	9	10	5	7	3	7	6	4	3	9	2	9	7	5	10	4	5	9	8	9	2	8	6	1	10	3	7	8	8	7	**226**	**6,28**	**7.**
Writing e-mails/blogs	5	7	8	2	4	7	1	8	6	7	4	8	9	8	5	8	5	7	9	10	5	5	1	4	9	7	8	4	7	10	9	7	9	10	10	5	**238**	**6,61**	**9.**

Chart 1: Summary of the answers given to Question 5

1= the most frequent, 10=the least frequent

Watching films/series/TV programmes in English	1	5	1	2	1	1	1	4	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**1,36**	**1.**
Watching films with English subtitles	1	3	1	2	1	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	5	1	1	2	3	1	1	1	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	**1,64**	**2.**
Watching films without English subtitles	2	3	1	3	2	2	1	4	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	3	2	1	2	2	3	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	2	2	1	1	1	**1,81**	**3.**
Reading novels in English	1	5	1	1	5	1	1	5	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	5	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	1	**1,83**	**4.**
Listening to English music/radio channels	1	5	2	4	1	2	1	2	3	1	4	4	3	2	1	2	2	1	2	3	5	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	4	3	1	2	3	**2,22**	**6.**
Speaking/chatting with native English speakers	1	5	2	2	5	3	1	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	**1,64**	**2.**
Using self-study grammar/vocabulary books	2	5	1	2	5	2	1	4	1	1	4	2	3	3	1	1	1	3	2	2	4	1	2	3	3	2	2	1	2	3	1	2	3	3	3	4	**2,36**	**7.**
Surfing the Internet	2	5	3	4	1	3	1	3	1	1	3	3	3	3	1	2	3	3	2	2	4	1	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	2	2	3	**2,50**	**9.**
Playing computer games	3	3	4	4	5	4	1	3	3	3	3	4	5	3	1	4	4	5	4	2	2	1	3	4	3	3	2	4	4	3	5	5	4	3	5	5	**3,44**	**11.**
Reading English newspapers/magazines	3	4	3	3	3	3	1	4	3	1	3	2	2	3	1	1	1	2	2	2	4	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	3	1	2	3	1	1	4	**2,14**	**5.**
Using self-study language learning websites/software packages	2	4	1	2	4	3	1	5	2	1	4	2	3	3	1	2	1	3	2	1	5	1	2	4	4	2	3	1	3	2	1	3	3	3	2	5	**2,53**	**10.**
Writing e-mails/blogs	3	5	3	3	1	2	1	4	3	1	3	2	2	3	1	2	2	2	3	4	2	1	3	3	1	2	2	1	3	4	1	4	4	1	1	5	**2,44**	**8.**

Chart 2: Summary of the answers given to Question 7

“How useful you find these activities for improving your English language skills?” 1=Very useful, 4=Not useful at all

1.	Watching films/series/TV programmes in English	**2,94**
2.	Surfing the Internet	**3,31**
3.	Listening to English music/radio channels	**3,86**
4.	Using self-study grammar/vocabulary books	**4,81**
5.	Reading novels in English	**4,94**
6.	Reading English newspapers/magazines	**6,11**
7.	Using self-study language learning websites/software packages	**6,28**
8.	Speaking/chatting with native English speakers	**6,36**
9.	Writing e-mails/blogs	**6,61**
10.	Playing computer games	**7,81**

1=the most frequent, 10=the least frequent

Chart 3: The frequency of out-of-class language learning activities

1.	Watching films/series/TV programmes in English	**1,36**
2.	Watching films with English subtitles & Speaking/chatting with native English speakers	**1,64**
3.	Watching films without English subtitles	**1,81**
4.	Reading novels in English	**1,83**
5.	Reading English newspapers/magazines	**2,14**
6.	Listening to English music/radio channels	**2,22**
7.	Using self-study grammar/vocabulary books	**2,36**
8.	Writing e-mails/blogs	**2,44**
9.	Surfing the Internet	**2,50**
10.	Using self-study language learning websites/software packages	**2,53**
11.	Playing computer games	**3,44**

1=very useful, 5=not useful at all

Chart 4: The perceived usefulness of out-of-class language learning activities