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The acquisition of L2 Italian in migratory contexts

Experimental testing of a learning unit with illiterate and low-educated adult learners

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Abstract

Immigration has recently become a global phenomenon. In an intercultural view, complete integration in a host country requires a migrant's approach to language, which is a second language in such contexts. The null or low level of education of such learners worsens this difficult and sometimes traumatic process. This is one of the main reasons why low language levels require the design and use of specific didactic material.

Therefore, the present paper aims at placing illiteracy and low education in a theoretical context; as regards Italy, illustrating rights and duties concerning migrants and analysing the attitude of Italian law towards immigration; outlining illiterate and low-educated learners' profiles, based both on international and national research in the field; inserting such learners' profiles in CAD (mixed abilities classes) contexts, where the use of *ad hoc* didactic material acquires utmost importance.

The heterogeneity of adult migrant learners approaching a second language makes the creation of diversified didactic materials necessary. Indeed, the last chapter of the paper is focused on the analysis of an experimental learning unit, structured with stratified tasks and tested with migrant women with pre-A1 and A1 level in two courses within Educittà project.

The aim of the paper is that of providing cause for reflection for future research in the field, given the remarkable diffusion of immigration and illiteracy at global levels.

Foreword

The main purpose of this paper is the deep analysis of a specific branch of L2 Italian teaching to foreign students: L2 Italian teaching to illiterate or low-educated migrant learners.

On the one hand, illiteracy is a phenomenon that is still widespread all over the world, in particular in those countries whose precarious economic condition, political instability and scarce wealth do not allow their citizens to receive an adequate education.

On the other hand, L2 Italian teaching is a key issue in educational programmes in our country, due to the gradual growth of migratory flows towards Italy from 1980s until present day.

Above all, L2 Italian teaching is characterized by flexibility and tries, when possible, to shape the study on the learner. However, some groups of learners turn out to be particularly vulnerable and in need of specific attention: it is the case of illiterate and low-educated learners, whose educational path might be null or incomplete in more than one language, including their L1. In addition, most of these learners are migrants and adults, so L2 learning must be inserted in a broader linguistic and cultural process of integration of the individual.

Therefore, so as to guarantee the best teaching to every kind of learner, it would be appropriate to narrow the field of our focus.

L2 Italian teaching to illiterate and low-educated learners should take several factors into account, among which we can find:

a) The conceptual and pragmatic complexity of illiteracy;

b) The type of learners L2 Italian teaching in migratory contexts is dedicated to;

c) Internal and external factors that determine the classroom environment, the creation of didactic material and lesson planning;

d) The heterogeneity of L2 Italian classes, which are made up of learners with different cultural backgrounds, linguistic needs and individual motivation.

Once made such premises, the present paper will deal with the topic of L2 Italian teaching to illiterate and low-educated learners by taking such factors into great account.

The analysis will be divided in five chapters, respectively concerning:

a) The global diffusion of illiteracy, with data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics; its conceptual definition, drawn from both an international and national review on the field; its pragmatic features, considering that there is not only one kind of literacy, but each case is specific;

b) In the case of Italy, a deep analysis of legislation on immigration from 1980s until today, an overview of migrants' rights and duties in Italy, the organization of L2 Italian courses on Italian territory;

c) The distinction of language levels concerning L2 study, provided by the CEFR of the Council of Europe for L2 learning and from the Borri_Minuz-Rocca-Sola syllabus for L2 Italian; as for the latter, a

description of learners' profiles, with attention to the four levels from language-teaching to A1;

d) A brief introduction of the concept of mixed abilities class (CAD), which in most cases is the environment of L2 Italian learning in migratory contexts; the analysis of didactic strategies used in such cases; an example of a learning unit planning;

e) Examination of an experimental learning unit with stratified tasks, designed for a CAD class made up of illiterate and low-educated migrant learners, tested in two proximity Italian courses within "Educittà" project, in cooperation with Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the municipality of Venice.

With the present work, we hope that research in this field will continue, because L2 Italian teaching is proving to be a key point in migrants' integration paths in Italy.

Chapter 1. Illiteracy: diffusion, definitions and main features

1.1. World illiteracy: data and statistics

According to the UNDP[1] (United Nations Development Programme), human development index is defined as a tool measuring a country's wealth but, by a larger perspective, the definition also includes a country's overall development. The measuring of such index is based on three factors: GDP (gross domestic product) *pro capite*, life expectancy and literacy.

Based on UIS (UNESCO Institute for Statistics) 2017 data, 750 million people in the world are not able to read and write, 63% of which are women. Furthermore, 102 million young people between 15 and 24 years old are illiterate.

Table 1. Global young and adults illiteracy rates in 2017.

Indicator	Adults (15 years old +)	Young people (15- 24 years old)
Global illiterate population	750 million	102 million
Illiterate population, men	277 million	44 million
Illiterate population, women	473 million	58 million
Illiterate population, female %	63%	57%

Adapted from: UNESCO Institute for Statistics report – July 2017

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[1] UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) is a UN programme whose aim is to eliminate poverty and to reduce disparities. As far as empowerment strategies and policies are concerned, the UNDP is a landmark for at least 170 countries in the world.

Globally, the highest illiteracy rates are found in South Asia (49%), Sub-Saharan Africa (27%), Eastern and Southeastern Asia (10%), Northern Africa (9%) and Latin America (4%). At the same time, the highest literacy rates reach 100% in east Europe and Latin America.

As far as literacy rates are concerned, there is not a great disparity between men and women data. It is in illiteracy rates that we can find a gender gap, according to which women feel the effects of illiteracy more than men do. The countries where this tendency is common are the same where illiteracy rates reach their highest peaks.

1.2. What is illiteracy? International definitions

The fight against illiteracy has recently become a global challenge, especially since the start of the new millennium, and it is a key topic of discussion in several world conferences and meetings.

The fight against illiteracy was one of the main topics of the WCEFA (World Conference on Education for All) that took place in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. One of the main objectives of the conference was:

> "(1) to reduce the number of adult illiterates to half of the 1990 level by the year 2000, while reducing the male/female disparity; and (2) to improve learning achievement to an agreed percentage of an appropriate age cohort (which might vary from country to country)."

> (Wagner, 2000, p. 12)

Furthermore, art. 1 of WCEFA (Wagner, 2000, p.12) declaration claims that "basic learning needs or competencies (BLCs), comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and

problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings."

That said, it is easy to infer that illiteracy is a very complex phenomenon, not analysable in isolation, dependent on the context in which it occurs and on the subjects included (Wagner, 2000, p. 18). Illiteracy is characterized by the lack of both theoretical knowledge (such as the mastery of alphanumeric codes) and practical elements (such as the application of such codes to everyday life). Indeed, such difficulty suggests the impossibility to classify illiteracy within a precise semantic and pragmatic category.

On the one hand, the EFA thematic study underlines that literacy is usually associated to a certain degree of wellness, economic and social power, alluding to the fact that the high literacy rate of a country's inhabitants corresponds to political and economic development. This may be sometimes true, because UIS data (2017, p.4) confirm that, in most European and American countries (all politically and economically stable), illiteracy rates and gender gap are almost null.

On the other hand, that of illiteracy is a label that stigmatises all those individuals whose low education corresponds to poverty, poor health condition, political and social disorders in their home countries. Indeed:

> "Literacy is a word that is usually associated with the more positive aspects of human civilization, and is strongly associated with some of the most positive aspects of social and economic development. Indeed, the label of "illiterate" has been used and is today often used to characterize the poverty and lack of education still experienced in many parts of the world. Yet literacy also encompasses a wide variety of attitudes, beliefs, and power relations between individuals and groups of individuals."

> (Wagner, 2000, p. 13)

What is important to underline is that literacy and illiteracy, two faces of the same coin, are not absolute values and do not share universal definitions. Some of them are going to be shown below.

1.2.1. UNESCO

Given the semantic and pragmatic complexity of literacy and illiteracy, a vast terminology to describe individuals with different degrees of education is available. The definition provided by UNESCO (1978) and quoted in the EFA 2000 Thematic study says that:

> "A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life...A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community."

<div align="center">(Wagner, 2000, p. 16)</div>

This definition highlights the great problem of defining the various kinds of illiteracy. Starting from literacy, UNESCO distinguishes:

a) *Literate individuals*, that is to say those people who master an alphanumeric code and who are able to decode short texts containing one or both codes;

b) *Functionally literate individuals*, that is to say those people who not only master an alphanumeric code (thus succeeding in decoding a text), but who are also able to do everyday activities where such codes are requested.

The 1990 WCEFA analyses in depth the meaning of "functional", claiming that:

> "Jomtien influenced the definitional aspect of the literacy goal by broadening the discussion to that of basic learning needs or competencies (BLCs), which are seen not only in terms of mastery of the 3 Rs, but also in terms of other knowledge, problem-solving and life skills. Together, BLCs are thought to promote empowerment and access to a rapidly changing world. They should support independent functioning and coping with practical problems or choices as a parent or worker or citizen, and are seen as critical gatekeepers to job entry and societal advancement in all countries. Thus, when defining BLCs, there is a need to refer both to formal school-based skills (such as ability to read prose text or to understand mathematical notations) and also the ability to manage functional tasks and demands."

> (Wagner, 2000, p. 17)

Therefore, the notion of functional illiteracy implies the lack of basic learning competencies (BLCs) such as reading and writing, impairing a proper social integration of the illiterate individual (Wagner, 2000, p. 17). Indeed, the lacking mastery of alphanumeric codes prevents the functionally illiterate individual from interpreting a road sign or a complex picture, from filling in a form or reading a newspaper. Such abilities practically reflect a functional thinking, which is representative of a culture dynamically evolving together with society.

Speaking of which, the 2006 EFA Global Monitoring Report conceptualizes literacy as a set of four aspects, all summarizing the theoretical understanding of literacy, which is characterized by:

a) *Skills*: literacy is a set of "tangible" skills, such as reading, writing, numeracy and oral skills, which give a linear shape to human thinking. These skills co-operate together in a *continuum* that

relies on the abilities learners already have (usually oral skills) and focus on the abilities learners have to acquire during the learning process:

"The most common understanding of literacy is that it is a set of tangible skills – particularly the cognitive skills of reading and writing – that are independent of the context in which they are acquired and the background of the person who acquires them. […]
Not only does it allow for the representation of words by signs, but it gives a linear shape to thought, providing a critical framework within which to think analytically."
<div align="center">(EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2006, p.149)</div>

b) *Applied skills*: literacy can also be the application of the abovementioned tangible skills to the context they are required by, and which result in the ability of reading, for instance, a road sign or a newspaper:

"The literacy as applied, practised and situated approach questions the validity of designations of individuals as 'literate' or 'illiterate', as many who are labelled illiterate are found to make significant use of literacy practices for specific purposes in their everyday lives (Doronilla, 1996)."
<div align="center">(EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2006, p. 151)</div>

c) *A learning process*: following Freire's studies (1995), literacy can be interpreted as a kind of learning through the learner's personal experience and culture:

"As individuals learn, they become literate. This idea is at the core of a third approach, which views literacy as an active and broad-based learning process, rather than as a product of a more limited and focused educational intervention. Building on the scholarship of Dewey and Piaget, constructivist educators focus on ways in which individual learners, especially children, make sense of their

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learning experiences. In the field of adult education, some scholars see personal experience as a central resource for learning."

<div align="center">(EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2006, p. 151)</div>

d) *Text*: literacy may vary according to the way speakers express themselves. Since a wide range of texts is available in different forms and registers, language becomes a means to determine literacy itself:

"Language represents one of several modes through which communication is conducted (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). The broader policy question raised by this work is whether the types of literacy taught in schools and adult programmes are relevant to the present and future lives of learners (Gee et al., 1996)."

<div align="center">(EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2006, p.152)</div>

1.2.2. *Canadian Language Benchmarks*

Apart from UNESCO, the Canadian Language Benchmarks[2] provide clear definitions of literacy and illiteracy and give detailed learners' profiles. The Benchmarks have been conceived in the context of L2 English teaching in Canada and, based on the definitions provided by UNESCO, they give a complete outline of those individuals who are considered as *functionally illiterate*. These individuals are:

"Speakers of a language that lacks a written code, so they may not have needed to know how to read or write until coming to Canada; have had very little education (one or two years) in their home countries; have gone to school for up to eight years, although sometimes with sporadic attendance

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[2] The Canadian Language Benchmarks are made up of a series of guidelines drafted by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks and the Government of Manitoba. They have been designed in order to facilitate the integration of ESL learners (L2 English learners in Canada) into a precise category.

for reasons such as family responsibilities, ill health, war, etc; have come from a country with a non-Roman alphabet."

(Johansson *et al.*, 2001, p. II)

Starting from this, the Benchmarks (2000) assume the existence of a *continuum*, a ladder specifying the various steps of literacy, which are:

"Pre-literate: is generally used to describe an individual who lives in an oral culture and whose language does not have a written form or only acquired a written form recently;

Semi-literate: this term describes a person who has some reading and writing skills in her own language but is not functionally literate in her first language;

Non-literate: describes a person who does not read or write at all in any language but lives in a literate society;

Non-Roman alphabet ESL learner: this learner is already literate in her own language but the language uses a non-Roman alphabet such as Russian, Greek, Chinese and Punjabi."

(Johansson *et al.*, 2001, p. III)

As it can be pointed out, the definitions of literacy provided by the Benchmarks follow an ascending order and are part of a *continuum* where, as Minuz (2005) claims, the more years of education an individual has, the more embedded the basic learning competencies will be. Indeed, Minuz (2005, p.21) claims that "analfabetismo e alfabetismo funzionale vanno pertanto considerati come un continuum, in cui la soglia che li separa è stabilita di volta in volta da una valutazione sociale di ciò che è una padronanza sufficiente della lettura e della scrittura."

Moreover, the Benchmarks underline the importance of including calculation abilities in the basic learning competencies (Wagner, 2000),

because, as also stressed by Johansson et al. (2001, p. IV), "sometimes learners are more comfortable manipulating numbers than words on a page. Developing competence in numeracy can help build the confidence necessary to learn to read and write."

To summarize, the Canadian Language Benchmarks see literacy and illiteracy as the various steps of a continuum where the progression goes at the same pace as the degree of reading, writing and calculation mastery. The Benchmarks are a good starting point to monitor a student's improvement in the various levels of language learning.

1.2.3. Council of Europe

As we have seen for the Benchmarks, the Council of Europe[3] as well divides adult learners into four main categories according to their educational background, in order to facilitate learner-oriented courses. The four profiles are:

a) *Group A*: these people belong to a culture whose language does not have a written form; they did not receive a proper education in their home country; they do not know the semiotic value of writing, so they are not able to understand that a written text conveys meaning. These people can be compared to the pre-literate profile provided by the Benchmarks:

"Adults who did not receive an adequate education in their country of origin, whose mother tongue is generally not written down or is not the medium of instruction in their country of origin.

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[3] https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/literacy-profiles (last accessed on July 2018)

Some individuals in this group may not have developed any notion of writing as a semiotic system, so it may be difficult for them to understand how a written text, or a word, carries meaning. Members of this group can be referred to pre literate learners;"

(https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/literacy-profiles)

b) *Group B*: these people have never learnt to read or write and can be compared to the "illiterate" profile provided by the Benchmarks; among this group, other subgroups can be distinguished in terms of the alphabet of their mother tongue, which are:

"Migrants who speak a language with a logographic writing system (e.g. Chinese);
Migrants who speak a language with an alphabetic script unrelated to the main language of the host community (e.g. Arabic in Western Europe);
Migrants who speak a language with a script related to the main language of the host community (e.g. Vietnamese in Western Europe)."

(https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/literacy-profiles)

c) *Group C:* these people have received little education in their L1, so they are not able to read and write in the majority of cases, but may be able to decode certain kinds of texts; this group is similar to the "semi-literate" provided by the Benchmarks and to the "functionally literate" provided by UNESCO:

"Adult migrants who have had limited schooling in their mother tongue (in general, less than 5 years) can be described as 'semi-literate'.

These are learners who are no longer able to read or write in most everyday situations, although they may be able to read or write certain things; for this reason they can also be considered 'functionally illiterate'."

d) *Group D:* this is a heterogeneous group, because learners among group D may differ in terms of their level of age, mother tongue, education or motivation. They are all literate, at different stages:

"Literate migrants also differ in terms of their level of education, mother tongue, age, motivation and other personal and sociolinguistic factors.

With such learners the learning process can focus on communicative language learning from the beginning and can include writing and reading."

If, on the one hand, the Council of Europe focuses its attention on second language learning in general, without any references to a language in particular, in the next section we will see how illiterate and low-educated learners are divided as regards Italian language.

1.2.4. The Borri- Minuz-Rocca-Sola syllabus for Italian language

If the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is an effective tool for language teaching, learning and evaluation, it cannot account for all kinds of learners' profiles, their motivations and objectives.

Second language learners make up a heterogeneous group, whose members differ from each other in age, gender, level of education, job and mother tongue. The creation of a syllabus that organizes the levels of

language learning for migrants is even a bigger challenge. Among the members of this group, there are socially vulnerable individuals (Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014, p. 5), such as illiterates, who need a specific literacy-teaching course, eventually leading to the A1 level provided by the Council of Europe.

This is the background where the L2 Italian literacy syllabus (Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014) for Italian language use in migratory contexts was born. It provides detailed learners' profiles from language teaching to A1 level, in addition to those already provided by the Council of Europe. The syllabus was designed to fulfil illiterate or low-educated migrant students' needs, in order for them to fully integrate in their host country's culture and society. The Borri-Minuz-Rocca-Sola (2014) syllabus underlines the steps that come before the mastery of A1 competencies in Italian; such steps differ in terms of the education level of learners, which may be:

a) *Pre-literate*: unschooled people, whose language has only an oral form, who do not know that written language has a meaning just like oral language. They need an introduction to reading and writing, with exercises that compare pictures to written or oral words:

"Questo tipo di apprendente non ha sviluppato la nozione di scrittura come sistema semiotico; fatica a comprendere che un testo scritto, o anche una parola, portano un significato. Oltre che alla primissima alfabetizzazione strumentale, una parte del lavoro didattico deve essere perciò dedicata a sviluppare la nozione di scrittura e di parola."

(Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014, p. 10)

b) *Illiterate*: totally unschooled people, who need specific didactic paths, including phonological awareness and writing exercises, the

relation between writing and the surrounding space through common and simple signs, documents and texts, the acquisition of a study method:

"Tra gli obiettivi del primo tipo si ricorda lo sviluppo dei prerequisiti alla lettura quali il "principio alfabetico" (cioè la consapevolezza della relazione tra suoni e segni grafici) e le capacità strumentali di base, come il saper tracciare le lettere, abbinare segni e suoni e saperli legare in sillabe e parole. Tra gli obiettivi classificabili come linguistico-comunicativi rientra un'ampia gamma di competenze e capacità: saper leggere e scrivere parole e semplici frasi ricorrenti attribuendo loro significati e intenzione comunicativa, sviluppare la consapevolezza in primo luogo dello spazio che la lingua scritta ricopre nella realtà italiana ed europea più in generale, in secondo luogo degli usi sociali della lingua scritta (competenza sociolinguistica); cominciare a orientarsi in semplici documenti, insegne, cartelli e i vari testi scritti che compongono il paesaggio visivo imparando gradualmente a fare ricorso alla scrittura come mezzo di relazione con il mondo che circonda ciascuno di noi."

(Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014, p.11)

c) *Low-educated*: probably one of the most heterogeneous group of learners, low-educated learners may be people with little education (less than 5 years) in their mother tongue or people who lost the mastery of reading and writing; they can be divided in sub-categories on the basis of the years of education and their literacy level:

"Le condizioni di alfabetismo e di analfabetismo, infatti, rappresentano i poli di un continuum all'interno del quale è possibile individuare livelli di competenza profondamente diversi; inoltre, la capacità di comprendere o di scrivere un testo scritto può variare anche in relazione alla familiarità con determinati generi testuali. Rispetto al sistema di scrittura della prima alfabetizzazione e alla distanza fra L1 e LT, anche nel caso di apprendenti debolmente scolarizzati è quindi opportuno distinguere tra: a) adulti debolmente scolarizzati, alfabetizzati in un sistema di scrittura logografico; b) adulti debolmente scolarizzati,

alfabetizzati in un sistema alfabetico non-latino; c) adulti debolmente scolarizzati, alfabetizzati nel sistema latino."

<div align="center">(Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014, p. 13)</div>

d) *Literate*: this is a mixed group in terms of education, age, mother tongue and motivation of learners. At this stage, it is important to focus on the communicative value of language, grammar and the analysis of texts, since learners already master the use of alphanumeric codes:

"Gli apprendenti alfabetizzati costituiscono un tipo ampio, in relazione al grado di scolarizzazione, alla lingua madre, all'età, alla motivazione e ad altre variabili soggettive e di ordine sociolinguistico; per quanto riguarda l'apprendimento della LT scritta, tuttavia, non richiedono un percorso preliminare che risponda alle scarse competenze alfabetiche o dalla scarsa abitudine allo studio. In altri termini, il percorso di apprendimento può concentrarsi da subito sugli obiettivi linguistico-comunicativi, fare ricorso alla scrittura e lettura di testi, alle spiegazioni esplicite di regole grammaticali."

<div align="center">(Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014, p. 15)</div>

National and international language teaching research draws inspiration from these categories to distinguish the various steps of literacy. As we have already seen, these steps may be determined by a series of internal and external factors, and the design of specific didactic strategies should consider each of them.

1.3.   Illiteracy's main features

Before analysing in detail the processing of low-educated and illiterate thinking, it will be appropriate to linger on the conceptual meaning of

literacy. As we have already seen, literacy has not only to be intended as a mix of practical abilities, but also as a lifestyle, a permanent condition that can change according to the context. Banzato (2013, p. 15) claims that "il termine literacy non ha un corrispettivo perfetto in italiano e, a seconda del contesto, potrebbe essere tradotto letteralmente con alfabetizzazione, abilità, competenze, educazione, apprendimento, cultura."

The fact that the term literacy has several translations that may vary according to the context sheds some light on its conceptual complexity: in the case of written languages (those with an alphabet), writing was intended as a support of an oral culture and thinking, as a tool to give an independent thinking a written form (Banzato, 2013, p. 6). For instance, literature is the perfect example of oral culture put into writing. The incredible value of writing as an independent tool, which is detached from orality, has been learnt only recently, as Banzato (2013) points out:

> "La conquista dell'alfabeto come forma mentis sembra essere in realtà molto recente e, quando ancora questa transizione dalla cultura orale a quella scritta non è del tutto conclusa, stiamo assistendo a un analogo passaggio alla literacy digitale capace di modificare e di riconfigurare le specializzazioni del nostro cervello."
>
> (Banzato, 2013, p. 6)

Banzato (2013, p. 8) claims that literacy can shape the cognitive webs of human brain. Starting from this quotation, it can be easily noted that literacy and illiteracy reflect two opposite ways of thinking, abstract and concrete:

"Unschooled people perform as they have throughout history and most of them have no cognitive deficiencies. However, schooled people have acquired cognitive "efficiencies" that give them certain advantages. Learning to read and write during childhood, listening to stories and answering questions, creates neuronal connections among parts of the brain that might normally not be directly connected. Thus, literate people have neural networks that are missing from the brains of unschooled people. These are related to attention span, memory, data use, and ultimately decision making."

(Abadzi, 2005, p. 5)

Therefore, the brain of an illiterate individual does not develop those "cognitive efficiencies" (such as attention span, memory, data use and decision-making) analysed by Abadzi (2005) that the literate brain naturally acquires during the process of education. This results in:

"A different brain architecture. Schoolwork modifies the wiring of the brain. Illiterates show less dominance of the left hemisphere in language than literate people and are likely to be more affected by strokes on speech centers.

Though illiterates have normal language development, they often do not understand how individual sounds make up words (a skill called phonological awareness). Educated people use more complex sentences, sophisticated words and tend to refer to abstract concepts more often.

Schooling influences the ability to identify three-dimensional figures (called visuo-spatial discrimination), such as recognizing and naming pictures of objects (which exist in schoolbooks) in newspapers, or posters.

Many illiterates may have prodigious long-term memory, a skill used to transmit epic songs or events through generations."

(Abadzi, 2005, p.5)

According to WCEFA, the cognitive efficiencies (Abadzi, 2005) we have analysed so far allow an individual to cope with the problems of everyday life:

"Together, BLCs are thought to promote empowerment and access to a rapidly changing world. They should support independent functioning and coping with practical problems or choices as a parent or worker or citizen, and are seen as critical gatekeepers to job entry and societal advancement in all countries. Thus, when defining BLCs, there is a need to refer both to formal school-based skills (such as ability to read prose text or to understand mathematical notations) and also the ability to manage functional tasks and demands."

(Wagner, 2000, p. 5)

Consequently, difficulties in decoding a written code lead the illiterate individual to social exclusion. Since the mastery of alphanumeric codes, text decoding and manipulating abilities are everyday required in more than one occasion (sociolinguistics, anthropology, communication, technology), it is possible to talk about more *literacies* (Banzato, 2013, p. 7).

Besides the various contexts that require literacy as external factors, the degree of literacy of an individual may depend on internal factors too. These are explained in the EFA Thematic study on literacy and adult education (Wagner, 2000, p. 23-24), and are:

a) *Age*: illiteracy rates are higher among individuals that are more than 45 years old, maybe because of the few years of education; on the contrary, the highest literacy rates are detected in young people;

b) *Gender*: as we have seen before, the highest illiteracy rates concern women, because, in some countries, women are not allowed to go to school, and because their only duty is to reproduce;

c) *Life in rural or urban areas*: illiteracy rates are higher in rural areas, which are far from the city centres; in urban areas, illiteracy rates are higher among the groups of migrants living in big cities where literacy rates are high;

d) *Wealth*: literacy is usually widespread in those countries that live in economic stability; consequently, the highest illiteracy rates are detected in those countries where this stability does not exist.

In short, literacy is not only made up of individual abilities: it has to be intended as a kind of *lifelong learning*. This is a "spiral-shaped" learning (Bertolotto, 2014, p.114) that a person has to pursue in his entire life and that consists in the application of individual abilities to everyday life:

> "La literacy, per il suo carattere multidisciplinare, non è più intesa come il risultato dell'istruzione formale, o come l'acquisizione di un dato sistema semiotico in un certo momento della propria esistenza, quanto piuttosto come un processo continuo ed evolutivo basato sia sugli apprendimenti formali e informali maturati dagli individui durante il corso della vita sia sulle esperienze derivate dall'interazione e partecipazione alla vita dei gruppi e delle realtà sociali con cui si entra in contatto. Si può parlare in questo senso dell'alfabetizzazione come di "un processo che si sviluppa a spirale" cioè attraverso l'accumulazione e l'esercizio delle competenze alfabetiche funzionali nel tempo."

> (Bertolotto, 2014, p. 114)

These are the reasons why the concept of literacy (and, of course, of illiteracy) cannot be restricted to only one context.

In the next chapter, we will analyse the condition of migrants in Italy before examining educational policies for low-educated and illiterate migrants.

Chapter 2. Immigration in Italy: legislation, required documentation and language courses

2.1. Italian legislation on immigration from 1980s until today

Italian legislation on immigration has a very recent history; this is due to two main reasons:

a) From the first decade of 20th century, Italian people used to migrate to foreign countries such as the United States, Latin America and Northern Europe in search of better life conditions. As a matter of fact, the topic of immigration has not been of Italy's concern until the 1980s;

b) Because of point a), the Italian Government has not dealt consistently with the problem of immigration until the 1980s.

Since then, the Italian Government has drafted several legislations on the subject, each of them dealing with a particular aspect of the topic of immigration:

a) The first law tackling immigration was law n. 943/ 1986, which introduced the release of residency permit for study and tourism reasons and the possibility for family reunification:

"La Repubblica italiana, in attuazione della convenzione dell'OIL n. 143 del 24 giugno 1975, ratificata con la legge 10 aprile 1981, n. 158, garantisce a tutti i lavoratori extracomunitari legalmente residenti nel suo territorio e alle loro

famiglie parità di trattamento e piena uguaglianza di diritti rispetto ai lavoratori italiani."

<div align="center">(Law n.943/1986, art. 1)</div>

Unfortunately, this law dealt with immigration in an inconsistent way, that is to say the Government resorted to it only in case of necessity;

b) Law n. 39/ 1990 was the first law systematically dealing with immigration: after its promulgation, the Italian Government started the regularisation and integration of migrants already occupying Italian territory and took appropriate legal measures regarding "dangerous migrants":

"Il decreto-legge 30 dicembre 1989, n. 416, recante norme urgenti in materia di asilo politico, di ingresso e soggiorno dei cittadini extracomunitari e di regolarizzazione dei cittadini extracomunitari ed apolidi già presenti nel territorio dello Stato, è convertito in legge con le modificazioni riportate in allegato alla presente legge."

<div align="center">(Law 39/1990, art. 1)</div>

c) Following law n. 39/ 1990, law 40/ 1998[4] played a fundamental role in immigration management, because it contains all the measures to be taken regarding immigration; it is still in force, it provides for the regularisation and integration of migrants within the Italian territory and it contrasts irregular immigration; directly linked to law n. 40/ 1998, law 189/ 2002 formalized the structure of residency contracts, it specified the cases when family reunification is permitted and it introduced special offices for immigration in each city Prefecture:

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[4] Law 40/ 1998 is best known in Italy as "Testo Unico" (T. U.), because it contains all the procedures regarding the topic of immigration Italy, which is why it is still in action.

"È istituita, presso il Dipartimento della pubblica sicurezza del Ministero dell'interno, la Direzione centrale dell'immigrazione e della polizia delle frontiere con compiti di impulso e di coordinamento delle attività di polizia di frontiera e di contrasto dell'immigrazione clandestina, nonché delle attività demandate alle autorità di pubblica sicurezza in materia di ingresso e soggiorno degli stranieri. Alla suddetta Direzione centrale è preposto un prefetto, nell'ambito della dotazione organica esistente."

(Law 189/2002, art. 35, subsect. 1)

d) During Berlusconi's mandate (2008- 2011), a very harsh immigration policy was introduced; according to this legislation, deportation was provided for those migrants who had been sentenced to more than two years of detention and illegal entrance and residency within the Italian territory was considered a crime;

e) The last law dealing with immigration was law 129/2011, which introduced fines for those employers giving work to illegally residing immigrants and established a standard procedure for the residency permit release.

This is how Italian law has faced the topic of immigration so far and how it still does. In the next section, we will analyse the two kinds of residency permit Italian law offers to immigrants and how immigrants should behave with respect to Italian law.

2.2. Short-term and long-term stay: kinds of residency permit, rights and duties of immigrants in Italy, Integration Deal

Non-UE immigrants who can access the Italian territory should be provided with residency permit, a document that legitimizes a migrant's residency in Italy. However, Italian law distinguishes two kinds of residency permit, depending on the reasons and the duration of stay, which can be short or long-term.

Migrants who wish to stay in Italy for more than three months must apply for residency permit in special offices for immigration, which are located in the city Prefectures; moreover, in case of first entrance, the Italian law requires, together with residency permit, an integration deal as well. As regards short-term stays, such deal establishes that:

> "L'accordo in questione delinea un percorso d'integrazione obbligatorio che porta lo straniero a rispettare alcuni obblighi per non essere, nel peggiore dei casi, allontanato dall'Italia. In altri termini, l'accordo prevede, per un verso, l'impegno dello straniero a raggiungere specifici obiettivi di integrazione da conseguire nel periodo di validità del permesso di soggiorno e rappresenta la condizione necessaria per il successivo rinnovo di quest'ultimo. Per altro verso, si prevede l'impegno dello Stato (assieme a regioni, enti locali e altri soggetti) a offrire corsi di lingua italiana nonché di formazione ed educazione civica. In particolare, lo straniero deve acquisire una conoscenza della lingua italiana parlata equivalente almeno al livello A2 del Quadro comune europeo di riferimento per le lingue del Consiglio d'Europa."

(Morgese, 2015, p. 14)

On the other hand, as far as long-term stay is concerned, the integration deal establishes that:

"Il permesso per lungosoggiornanti è a tempo indeterminato e consente di entrare in Italia senza visto, di circolare liberamente nell'area Schengen entro i 90 giorni, di svolgere un'attività lavorativa subordinata o autonoma (a esclusione di quelle espressamente riservate ai cittadini italiani o comunque precluse agli stranieri), di soggiornare in un altro Stato Schengen oltre i 90 giorni nel rispetto delle norme di ingresso e soggiorno di quel Paese, di godere delle prestazioni di assistenza sociale, di previdenza sociale, delle erogazioni in materia sanitaria, scolastica e sociale, dell'accesso a beni e servizi a disposizione del pubblico (compreso l'accesso agli alloggi di edilizia residenziale pubblica, salvo ove espressamente vietato), di partecipare alla vita pubblica locale e di usufruire di servizi e prestazioni erogate dalla pubblica amministrazione. Il titolare di un permesso per lungosoggiornanti rilasciato da un altro Stato membro può rimanere in Italia oltre i 3 mesi, previo ottenimento di un permesso di soggiorno italiano, per svolgere un'attività economica regolare, frequentare corsi di studio o di formazione professionale e soggiornare con mezzi di sostentamento sufficienti e previa stipulazione di un'assicurazione contro le malattie. Si noti, infine, che il d.lgs. 13 febbraio 2014, n. 12, ha previsto il rilascio del permesso di soggiorno UE di lungo periodo anche ai beneficiari di protezione internazionale e ai loro familiari, a condizioni peraltro più agevolate rispetto a quelle degli altri stranieri."

(Morgese, 2015, p. 17)

As highlighted in the previous lines, both short and long-term residency permits demand the complete observance of some integration norms from migrants asking for them. As far as long-term residency permit is concerned, according to the Ministry of the Interior's website (http://www.prefettura.it/roma/contenuti/Il_permesso_di_soggiorno_c.e._di_lungo_periodo-4944.htm), a migrant can apply for it if "sei titolare di permesso di soggiorno e regolarmente soggiornante in Italia da almeno 5 anni; hai un reddito minimo, pari all'importo dell'assegno sociale."

Once the permit is obtained, the document is:

> "È a tempo indeterminato;
> è valido come documento di identificazione personale per 5 anni (successivamente il richiedente può chiederne il rinnovo producendo nuove fotografie);
> non può essere rilasciato allo straniero pericoloso per la sicurezza dello Stato e l'ordine pubblico;
> non può essere richiesto dai titolari di permesso di soggiorno per studio, formazione professionale, protezione temporanea, motivi umanitari, richiesta asilo quando il relativo status non è ancora riconosciuto, né dai titolari di permesso di soggiorno di breve periodo."

(http://www.prefettura.it/roma/contenuti/Il_permesso_di_soggiorno_c.e._di_lungo_periodo-4944.htm)

A migrant can apply for residency permit in cases of family reunification as well. The Italian law considers familiar unity in a positive way because every citizen, migrants included, has the right to have his/her family reunited, resulting in socio-cultural stability.

Residency permit for family reunification reasons can be allowed:

> "Allo straniero che ha fatto ingresso in Italia con visto di ingresso per ricongiungimento familiare, oppure con visto di ingresso al seguito del proprio familiare;
>
> Agli stranieri regolarmente soggiornanti da almeno un anno che abbiano contratto matrimonio nel territorio dello Stato con cittadini italiani o di uno Stato membro dell'Unione Europea, o con cittadini stranieri regolarmente soggiornanti. Occorre dimostrare la sussistenza dell'effettiva convivenza a seguito del matrimonio. La mancata convivenza comporta la revoca del

permesso di soggiorno per motivi familiari, a meno che i due coniugi abbiano avuto figli a seguito del matrimonio;

Al genitore straniero, anche naturale, di un minore italiano residente in Italia, a condizione che questi non sia stato privato dalla potestà genitoriale secondo la legge italiana.

Il permesso di soggiorno per motivi familiari viene rilasciato per una durata pari al permesso di soggiorno del familiare straniero che ha richiesto il ricongiungimento familiare."

(http://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it/normativa/procedureitalia/Pagine/Ricongiungimento-familiare.aspx)

To summarize, the types of residency permit and the duties migrants have towards their host country may vary according to the type of stay and the reasons why a migrant asks for residency in Italy.

In general, an immigrant who asks for a residency permit lasting for more than one year has to make an Integration Deal with the Italian Government. Such deal, entered into force in 2012 and asking mutual commitment to both the immigrant and the hosting country, regards all those immigrants who ask for residency permit for the first time. The Deal's main points are:

a) The Italian Government provides the migrant with 16 credits, which correspond to the achievement of the A2 level of the CEFR and the knowledge of Italian culture and civics, as DPR 14 september 2011, n. 179, art. 2, subsect. 3 states: "all'atto della sottoscrizione dell'accordo, sono assegnati allo straniero sedici crediti corrispondenti al livello A1 di conoscenza della lingua italiana parlata ed al livello sufficiente di conoscenza della cultura civica e della vita civile in Italia."

b) The Italian Government supports migrants' integration with every possible activity in cooperation with the local institutions (among which we can find Centres for Adult Education, best known as CPIAs in Italy):

"Con l'accordo, lo Stato si impegna a sostenere il processo di integrazione dello straniero attraverso l'assunzione di ogni idonea iniziativa in raccordo con le regioni e gli enti locali, che anche in collaborazione con i centri per l'istruzione degli adulti."

(DPR 14 september 2011 , n. 179, art. 2, subsect. 6)

c) If the migrant, at the end of the final test, has achieved or exceeded the agreed number of credits, the Deal is extinguished and the migrant has the right to benefit from educational facilitations provided by the local institutions, in cooperation with the City prefectures:

"Ai fini dell'efficacia, dell'economicità e della sostenibilità organizzativa dei procedimenti inerenti agli accordi di integrazione, il prefetto, anche in sede di conferenza provinciale permanente di cui all'articolo 11, comma 3, del decreto legislativo 30 luglio 1999, n. 300, conclude o promuove la conclusione di accordi ai sensi dell'articolo 15 della legge 7 agosto 1990, n. 241, e successive modificazioni, diretti a realizzare, nei limiti delle risorse umane, finanziarie e strumentali disponibili a legislazione vigente, forme di collaborazione tra lo sportello unico e la struttura territorialmente competente dell'ufficio scolastico regionale, i centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti di cui all'articolo 1, comma 632, della legge 27 dicembre 2006, n. 296, le altre istituzioni scolastiche statali operanti a livello provinciale e, se del caso, le altre amministrazioni ed istituzioni statali, comprese le università, relativamente all'organizzazione e allo svolgimento degli adempimenti di cui al presente regolamento, con particolare riferimento alle sessioni di formazione civica e informazione di cui all'articolo 3 e ai test linguistici e culturali di cui all'articolo 5, comma 1. Accordi analoghi possono essere conclusi o promossi con la regione e gli enti locali anche con

specifico riferimento al riconoscimento delle attività di formazione linguistica e orientamento civico."

<div align="center">(DPR 14 september 2011 , n. 179, art. 10)</div>

Given the legal background regarding residency permits and mutual commitments provided by the Integration Deal, the Italian legislation accounting for migrants' education and the measures to be taken when organizing an Italian course are going to be analysed in the next paragraph.

2.3.   Migrants and Italian language courses

As we have seen before, migrants legally residing in Italy have to observe the Integration Deal, which allows them to integrate within Italian society by different points of view. One of the most important aspects of such integration is language.

Law n. 40/1998, which is still in force regarding legislation on immigration in Italy, has a section accounting for migrants' education as part of their integration path. In particular, art. 36 focuses on:

a) The respect of each student's mother tongue as mirror of a mother culture:

"La comunità scolastica accoglie le differenze linguistiche e culturali come valore da porre a fondamento del rispetto reciproco, dello scambio tra le culture e della tolleranza; a tale fine promuove e favorisce iniziative volte alla accoglienza, alla tutela della cultura e della lingua d'origine e alla realizzazione di attività interculturali comuni."

b) The cooperation of several public institutions, such as the host country's Governments, the Consulate, the district offices, voluntary organizations and other associations to offer Italian language courses:

"Le istituzioni scolastiche, nel quadro di una programmazione territoriale degli interventi, anche sulla base di convenzioni con le Regioni e gli enti locali, promuovono:

a) l'accoglienza degli stranieri adulti regolarmente soggiornanti mediante l'attivazione di corsi di alfabetizzazione nelle scuole elementari e medie;

b) la realizzazione di un'offerta culturale valida per gli stranieri adulti regolarmente soggiornanti che intendano conseguire il titolo di studio della scuola dell'obbligo;

c) la predisposizione di percorsi integrativi degli studi sostenuti nel Paese di provenienza al fine del conseguimento del titolo dell'obbligo o del diploma di scuola secondaria superiore;

d) la realizzazione ed attuazione di corsi di lingua italiana;

e) la realizzazione di corsi di formazione, anche nel quadro di accordi di collaborazione internazionale in vigore per l'Italia."

The high number of migrants residing in Italy has recently highlighted the importance of L2 Italian learning. However, L2 Italian may play several roles depending on the different subjects of language learning; Favaro (2016) underlines the different contexts where L2 Italian is employed:

"- lingua della sopravvivenza per gli adulti neoarrivati in Italia;

- lingua del lavoro e degli scambi per chi risiede qui da più tempo;

- lingua da "certificare" e oggetto di test per coloro che chiedono il rilascio del permesso di soggiorno di lunga durata e per adempiere al "contratto di integrazione";

- lingua "filiale" per le famiglie straniere, i cui figli portano ogni giorno dentro la dimora nuovi termini e dunque nuovi significati e racconti;

- lingua di comunicazione quotidiana e di scolarità per i minori che crescono e apprendono insieme ai coetanei italiani attraverso le parole "basse "e le parole "alte", proprie dei contenuti curricolari;

- lingua adottiva, quasi una seconda lingua madre, che permea e struttura la storia e accompagna il percorso di cittadinanza e di appartenenza per i nuovi e futuri cittadini, immersi fin da subito nei suoi suoni e accenti;

- lingua di narrazione meticcia per coloro che scrivono in italiano e hanno vissuto una storia di esilio e di migrazione."

(Favaro, 2016, pp. 1-2)

Our focus here is L2 Italian teaching to adult immigrants, a social category that requires special attention and the adoption of specific didactic plans. As we will see in detail in the next chapter, each type of learner has some linguistic needs that have to be taken into account in the language-teaching classroom.

As we have seen before, the aim of migrants, residing in Italy or asking for residency permit, is the achievement of the A2 level of Italian as provided by the CEFR, and the full integration within the Italian community. However, given the heterogeneity of the subjects belonging to the label of "adult immigrants", each subject is equally important and deserves special attention.

Within this label, we also find "vulnerable" subjects, such as those people with little or no schooling in their L1 as well; the aim of language courses organized in Italy should be that of including all the addressees of

linguistic education. Favaro (2016) talks about "Italian proximity courses", which aim at:

"Vanno garantiti e diffusi dispositivi e metodi di insegnamento in grado di raggiungere gli utenti più fragili e che propongano l'italiano che possiamo definire di prossimità, legato ai ruoli sociali che ogni adulto si trova a vivere. Tra le attenzioni da promuovere: interventi mirati nei confronti delle situazioni di analfabetismo e di scarsa alfabetizzazione in L1; i dispositivi e strumenti, facilmente accessibili e semplici, di auto-apprendimento che possano coinvolgere anche gli apprendenti isolati sul territorio."

(Favaro, 2016, p. 4)

Regarding Italian proximity courses, from 2014 in Italy the CPIAs (Provincial Centers for Adult Education) are responsible for the organization of Italian courses on a large scale, in cooperation with local educational institutions. The addressees of such courses are various, as highlighted by MIUR (Italian Ministry of Education- http://www.istruzione.it/urp/cpia.shtml):

"Adulti, anche stranieri, che non hanno assolto l'obbligo di istruzione e che intendono conseguire il titolo di studio conclusivo del primo ciclo di istruzione;

Adulti, anche stranieri, che sono in possesso del titolo di studio conclusivo del primo ciclo di istruzione e che intendo conseguire titolo di studio conclusivo del secondo ciclo di istruzione;

Adulti stranieri che intendono iscriversi ai Percorsi di alfabetizzazione e apprendimento della lingua italiana;

I giovani che hanno compiuto i 16 anni di età e che, in possesso del titolo di studio conclusivo del primo ciclo di istruzione, dimostrano di non poter frequentare i corsi diurni."

(http://www.istruzione.it/urp/cpia.shtml)

In detail, as highlighted by a note drafted by MIUR on 3rd May, 2018, and by the three-year national research plan on adult education (2018-2021), literacy-teaching course are offered:

"Ai percorsi di alfabetizzazione e di apprendimento della lingua italiana possono iscriversi gli adulti con cittadinanza non italiana in età lavorativa, anche in possesso di titoli di studio conseguiti nei Paesi di origine, utilizzando il modulo C, allegato.

I percorsi di alfabetizzazione e apprendimento della lingua italiana, articolati in due livelli (A1 e A2) sono finalizzati al conseguimento di un titolo attestante il raggiungimento di un livello di conoscenza della lingua italiana non inferiore al livello A2 del Quadro comune europeo di riferimento per le lingue elaborato dal Consiglio d'Europa.

Si precisa che per l'adulto con cittadinanza non italiana iscritto al percorso di alfabetizzazione e apprendimento della lingua italiana, privo delle competenze necessarie per una fruizione efficace del percorso medesimo - ferma restando la possibilità di fruire di tale percorso anche in due anni scolastici - sono realizzate attività finalizzate al rinforzo e/o alla messa a livello nell'ambito delle attività di accoglienza e orientamento (20 ore); tali attività possono essere, altresì, realizzate nell'ambito dell'ampliamento dell'offerta formativa, nei limiti comunque dell'organico assegnato."

(MIUR note: Iscrizione ai percorsi di istruzione per gli adulti a.s. 2018/2019)

Such educational programmes, in synergy with the Lifelong Learning Programme[5] and EPALE[6] aim at enhancing adult education in Italy, achieving a full integration, social inclusion and linguistic awareness of adult learners in Italy.

To summarize, the organization of Italian language courses should take into account that:

a) Migrants come from different countries and speak languages, so language courses should adopt an intercultural approach;

b) Migrants may have different levels of language education, which can be null, basic or advanced; consequently, courses have to reflect these different linguistic backgrounds;

c) Given such different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, migrant students may have different resources and tools to rely on in linguistic learning, as well as different degrees of motivation; courses and didactic material should be adapted, if possible, to such environments.

The educational approaches available in language-teaching research rely on several factors, which can be both internal and external to the learner. We will analyse them in detail in the next chapter.

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[5] http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme_en (last accessed on July, 2018)

[6] http://www.indire.it/progetto/epale/ (last accessed on July, 2018)

Chapter 3. Syllabuses for linguistic assessment and didactic planning for illiterate and low-educated learners

As said in the previous chapter, language courses and didactic material have to be designed considering different factors, first, the learners' linguistic level as regards their L2. Several syllabuses have the aim of labelling learners in terms of their linguistic competence, but each syllabus follows its own structure and focuses on a particular aspect of language learning.

In the following paragraphs, we will analyse the CEFR European guidelines as regards L2 competence in contrast with the Borri-Minuz-Rocca-Sola syllabus designed for L2 teaching and learning in migratory contexts.

3.1. CEFR

The CEFR is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages designed by the Council of Europe in 2001. It is a framework providing language standard levels that can be consulted to verify language evaluation systems.

The Framework has to be interpreted on two axes: in the first (horizontal), competences like reception, production, interaction and mediation are reported, in the second (vertical) linguistic progression levels are indicated on the basis of the linguistic competences acquired by learners (CEFR, 2018).

The Framework, as well as all linguistic frameworks, should:

a) Be general enough to be adapted to all linguistic and cultural contexts, but also detailed and specific, because each context has its own features;

b) Be based on theoretical ground;

c) Admit more levels of classification, which may vary depending on the contexts they are required by.

The levels provided by the CEFR for language learning, teaching and assessment are going to be showed and explained in the following section.

3.1.1. CEFR levels for language learning, teaching and assessment

The Framework (CEFR, 2001) features six levels of linguistic progression, which differ in terms of prerequisites, competences and abilities officially acknowledged in L2 learning in in UE countries; these levels are:

a) *A1 (Breakthrough)*: basic level, where the learner should be able to master some simple tasks, such as greeting, asking and telling the time, purchasing (with the help of gestures), reading very simple documents;

b) *A2 (Waystage)*: right before the Threshold level, in A2 we can find simple but fundamental communicative goals, such as interacting with others by greetings, asking for the time, purchasing by using a simple lexical and grammatical repertoire;

i) *A2 + (Waystage +)*: the learner is able to take active part in a conversation, to express an opinion, to complete a short monologue about general and personal information; in addition, at this stage the learner should be able to purchase something in person, to express a problem, with a limited but adequate vocabulary;

c) *B1 (Threshold)*: at this level, which is considered as a watershed between the elementary and upper-intermediate levels, the communicative goals regard the achievement of a goal through language (asking for and expressing opinions, understanding the key points of a conversation in standard language, asking for clarifications, concluding a conversation in spite of linguistic obstacles) and everyday problems management (complaining, participating to a conversation without any planning, being able to communicate in commercial and medical contexts);

i) *B1 + (Threshold +)*: same kind of competences as in the B1 level; what changes is the amount of information shared, which in the B1+ are more and more specific;

d) *B2 (Vantage)*: the B2 level is far above the Threshold level, just like the A2 level is far below it. Within this linguistic level there are different kinds of abilities, such as communicative efficiency (being able to analyse pros and cons of a situation, making an opinion respected, understanding different linguistic registers in several linguistic environments, being fluent) and linguistic awareness (correcting errors and understanding their meaning, linguistic planning);

i) *B2 + (Vantage +)*: same competences as the B2 level, but more emphasis on discourse linkers, which give more cohesion and coherence to both written and oral texts;

e) *C1 (Effectiveness)*: this level focuses on fluency and linguistic effectiveness; at this stage, the learner succeeds in completing communicative interactions without any problems and it is at his/her ease while communicating;

f) *C2 (Proficiency)*: this level is very close to the linguistic competence of a mother-tongue speaker and it highlights the learner's linguistic and communicative excellence. Indeed, at this stage, the learner is aware of his/her level, he/she boasts such a complete lexical and idiomatic repertoire that he/she is able to manoeuvre various kinds of linguistic register, prosody and complexity.

3.1.2. CEFR 2018 new descriptors: the pre-A1 level

The new compendium of CEFR 2018 underlines that the linguistic levels mentioned above do not have precise borders; this means that each level requires a number of competences and abilities, but the mastery of them may depend on several factors, which can be shared by two levels at the same time.

What is new about the CEFR compendium is the addition of new descriptors as regards language teaching, learning and assessment; indeed, the compendium inserts a pre-A1 level, which is placed right before A1 and is described as follows:

"Level A1 (Breakthrough) is probably the lowest 'level' of generative language proficiency which can be identified. Before this stage is reached, however, there may be a range of specific tasks, which learners can perform effectively using a very restricted range of language and which are relevant to the needs of the learners concerned. The 1994–5 Swiss National Science Research Council Survey, which developed and scaled the illustrative

descriptors, identified a band of language use, limited to the performance of isolated tasks, which can be presupposed in the definition of Level A1. In certain contexts, for example with young learners, it may be appropriate to elaborate such a 'milestone."

(Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume with new descriptors. Council of Europe, 2018, p. 35)

Pre-A1 level precedes A1, where the learner should be able to master a limited vocabulary and a series of pre-patterned formulas, which are useful for everyday linguistic survival.

In CEFR: learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume with new descriptors (2018), we find some of the abilities and competences (divided in pragmatic areas) requested for such linguistic level. As we can see in the list, the new pre-A1 descriptor admits the existence of one only level, where learners are not necessarily illiterate or unschooled; they have basic competence of the L2 they are going to study, so they do not fit in the A1 breakthrough level, because it requires the mastery of few grammatical rules. Such learners share the ability to succeed in a very simple conversation despite mastering a limited vocabulary.

Therefore, the aim of CEFR linguistic levels is: "Fundamentally, the CEFR is a tool to assist the planning of curricula, courses and examinations by working backwards from what the users/learners need to be able to do in the language." (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume with new descriptors. February 2018, p. 26)

3.2. The Borri-Minuz-Rocca-Sola syllabus: from literacy teaching to A1

Unlike the CEFR, the Borri-Minuz-Rocca-Sola syllabus focuses on the four levels preceding the A1 competence in Italian language, which regard the peculiar status of illiterate or low-educated learners.

The syllabus takes the cue from the CEFR but highlights those levels before A1, which guide the illiterate or low-educated learner in the path from illiteracy to the Breakthrough stage (A1).

As Minuz and Borri (2017) claim, the design of language courses and the creation of specific didactic material may depend on the learners' diversified needs and the various cultural environments language courses are taken in:

"Firstly, the growth of the migrant population – nowadays representing 8,2% of the Italian population – has diversified the educational needs, including language needs, according to the different biographies, projects, individual paths of access to the host society, actual living situations, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Secondly, the recent influx of asylum seekers and refugees requires a fast adaptation of the language provision to new teaching environments, such as short courses – due to the mobility of the asylum seekers/refugees population –, focused on the first linguistic support, and meanwhile preparing the refugees for further vocational training and job search.

Finally, the language courses are greatly heterogeneous, in terms of providers, teaching quality, and standardised procedures to assess the language needs of the learners.

Italiano lingua seconda in contesti migratori. Sillabo e descrittori dall'alfabetizzazione all'A1 (IL2S) (Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014) is a tool to plan courses, to create teaching materials and to prepare diagnostic and achievement tests at levels preceding the level A1 of the Common European Framework, to which is explicitly related."

(Minuz, Borri, 2017, p. 220)

Therefore, the syllabus arises from the need of preparing heterogeneous didactic material, suitable for various linguistic levels that precede the A1 level, and adapting such material to the L2 italian teaching in migratory contexts, as in the case of CEFR and the syllabuses drafted by other countries (Beacco, De Ferrari, Lhote, Tagliante, 2005; BMF, 2009; Fritz, Faistauer, Ritter, Hribesch, 2006; Beroepsoderwijs en volwasseneneducatie, 2008; Rocca, 2009; Finnish National Board, 2012; Markov, Scheithauer, Schramm, 2015).

The Borri syllabus drafting is inspired by that of CEFR: indeed, it contains:

a) Linguistic competence: being able to master linguistic structures;

b) Communicative competence: being able to use linguistic competence in real situations where the student has to reach a communicative goal;

Therefore, language teaching in migratory contexts is flexible because it mirrors each learner's attitudes:

> "L'insegnamento è orientato verso la realtà in cui l'apprendente usa la lingua che sta imparando e mira a metterlo in condizione di rispondere al meglio, per le proprie capacità, ai compiti che deve affrontare; i testi su cui lavorare, le situazioni proposte in aula, sono preferibilmente quelli che l'apprendente incontra nella propria quotidianità.
>
> L'insegnamento valorizza le competenze e le conoscenze dell'apprendente, quelle risorse individuali a cui ricorre per vivere nel Paese ospitante parlando un'altra lingua; la comunicazione nella classe, prioritariamente orale, è un'occasione per fare emergere l'esperienza dell'apprendente e per mettere a fuoco quegli aspetti culturali, impliciti ed espliciti, che intessono la comunicazione tra parlanti lingue diverse.

L'insegnamento è flessibile, capace di adattarsi ai bisogni di un pubblico differenziato e di apprendenti che presentano spesso profili linguistici eterogenei.

La valutazione della competenza linguistico-comunicativa, sia come valutazione diagnostica sia some valutazione finalizzata al conseguimento di titoli linguistici (in particolare certificazioni), tiene conto in primo luogo di che cosa l'apprendente sa fare; si chiede se lo stesso sia in grado di comprendere e portare a termine in LT un compito di routine (ad esempio, rintracciare l'orario di un servizio pubblico); nella misura in cui l'errore non pregiudica l'attuazione, un certo grado di tolleranza è accettato. "L'appropriatezza e l'efficacia comunicativa non già la correttezza morfosintattica, ortografica, lessicale e fonetica – risultano determinanti […]. L'enfasi va posta sulla realizzazione del compito, sul fare e non sul come."

<div align="center">(Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014, p. 31- 32)</div>

The syllabus is designed for L2 Italian language teaching to illiterate or low-educated migrant students. Four levels, from pre-alpha one to A1, differ from each other in terms of the linguistic level of learners at the beginning of language courses and the competences obtained at the end. The gradual development of such levels is based on the sequence of *recognize> be able to> start to do> can do* (Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014, p. 18), gradually acquired by learned during language courses.

However, it is important to underline that:

a) Only pre-illiterate or totally illiterate learners will go over all the steps from literacy teaching to A1, because they need to master the reading and writing and phonological awareness competences before reaching the A1 level; such approach is based on spatial and visuo-motor exercises, which strengthen left-to-right and up-to-down orientation and help learners understand the semiotic value of writing, together with the approach to writing paper:

"Con pre alfabetizzazione si intende infine l'acquisizione di capacità visuo-motorie nonché di abilità strumentali, quali ad esempio tracciare segni grafici; riconoscere l'orientamento da sinistra a destra, dall'alto in basso; riconoscere la scrittura come modo per comunicare, come produttrice di significato (e non solo come significante); ed ancora, sul piano fonetico, riconoscere l'intonazione ascendente e discendente."

(Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014, p. 19)

b) The *recognize> be able to> start to do> can do* progression is truly effective at the end of each level: "Gli obiettivi di apprendimento legati allo schema di progressione proposto (riconosce → riesce → inizia a saper fare → sa fare) si intendono in uscita, vale a dire al termine del percorso formativo." (Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014, p. 18)

Consequently, the literacy-teaching stages and the subjects of such didactic plans can be summarized as follows:

Stage	Pre-alpha1	Alpha 1	Pre-A1	A1
Users	Pre-literate or illiterate students with slow learning	Illiterate students	Low-educated students	Literate students
Courses	Orientation and pre-literacy	Orientation and literacy	Close to the CEFR	CEFR
Hours	100	250	150	100
READING-WRITING				
Progression	Recognizes	Is able to	Starts to do	Can do
ORAL INTERACTION				
	Recognizes	Starts to do	Can do (first and second	

			stage)

Table 2. Adapted from: Italiano L2 in contesti migratori. Sillabo e descrittori dall'alfabetizzazione all'A1. Borri, Minuz, Rocca, Sola, 2014.

As we can see from the table, learners are divided in four categories, depending on the level of their education and literacy; consequently, each learner type has its own didactic plan that can be basic (with the necessity of mastering reading, writing and phonological awareness) or advanced (if such background knowledge has already been acquired).

Since learners' types and linguistic and cultural backgrounds in migratory contexts are so heterogeneous, didactic material and strategies will have to be adapted to each of the learners' various linguistic needs within the same classroom environment.

Such heterogeneity will be analysed in detail in the next paragraph.

3.3. Linguistic needs in migratory L2 contexts

Evidence from the CEFR levels analysed before and from the Borri-Minuz-Rocca-Sola syllabus highlight the difficulty of establishing linguistic levels in L2 teaching contexts; this challenge becomes even more difficult when adapted to migratory contexts, given the great heterogeneity of cultural and linguistic groups learners to which learners belong.

However, it is necessary to build L2 teaching around learners' linguistic needs, in order to create specific and differentiated didactic material. In the peculiar case of illiterate or low-educated adult migrants, Minuz (2011) claims that the design of the material should consider:

> "Radicare l'educazione linguistica nelle pratiche discorsive dell'apprendente, cioè tenere conto degli ambiti in cui usa l'italiano e le finalità per cui lo usa; dare priorità alla comunicazione e all'orale; collegare l'insegnamento in aula all'esterno, anche attraverso l'uso di testi tratti dalle situazioni di vita quotidiana."

> (Minuz, 2011, p. 139)

Although it may be difficult to develop efficient didactic material respecting each learner's linguistic needs, some useful tools may help teachers in the organization of Italian language courses (Minuz, 2011). These are:

a) An entrance exam, whose aim is to get information regarding four main areas (personal information, cultural background, L2 learning context, study motivation);

b) A language test, whose aim is to assess alphabetic competences, when referring to illiterate students, or linguistic competences, when having to do with learners who already have a basic education;

Learners' linguistic needs have become the core of teaching only after the introduction of the notion of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). With the adoption of such model, the centrality of linguistic competences appears to be overcome in favour of the socio-pragmatic applications of a language (Balboni, 2014):

> "La natura sociale della lingua si impone all'attenzione con la nascita della sociolinguistica, che studia il variare della lingua in "situazione". La natura pragmatica della lingua viene evidenziata dalla constatazione che si parla per raggiungere uno scopo."

By this point of view, the design of specific didactic material originates from the context where learners live and learn and from learners' strictly individual peculiarities. This way, each learner will make use of efficient material. Speaking of which, Minuz (2011) claims that the most influential factors in this context are:

a) *Age*: it would seem that age influences language learning by both a cognitive and an experiential point of view. As regards the cognitive aspect, psycholinguistics studies demonstrate that learning speed, learning modalities and learning effects vary together with age. According to these studies, adult learners are faster in learning morphology and syntax, while children are faster in phonology acquisition. Learning modalities are efficient both with children and adults, but the two learners' categories make use of different strategies, because children rely on analytic strategies, whereas adults make use of global abilities. Regarding learning effects, studies demonstrate that adults can learn a L2 as well as children can, but they will employ different strategies to reach the same goal. This is why in language teaching research there are several critical threshold levels in language learning (Balboni, 2014).

As for the experiential point of view, Minuz (search date) claims that the way young and adult learners approach to language learning may be influenced by the social role they occupy:

"Considerando invece la dimensione sociale ed esperienziale, oltre che per una diversa maturità cognitiva, adulti, adolescenti e bambini differiscono per lo spazio che occupano nella società, i compiti socialmente loro riconosciuti, le conoscenze ed esperienze accumulate e disponibili come risorsa a cui attingere."

This is why language-teaching research distinguishes various kinds of study motivation. Furthermore, in the specific case of illiterate adult learners, the process of language learning is effective only if long lasting and applicable both to formal and informal contexts of everyday life. Consequently, adult language learning is a *lifelong learning* deriving from the intersection of language features with contexts and learners' individual features:

"Porre al centro dell'insegnamento dell'italiano lingua seconda, soprattutto in contesti migratori, l'apprendente adulto e i suoi bisogni linguistico-comunicativi comporta una didattica flessibile, che, in estrema sintesi sappia: radicare l'educazione linguistica nelle pratiche discorsive dell'apprendente, cioè tenere conto degli ambiti in cui usa l'italiano e le finalità per cui lo usa."

b) *Learners' linguistic relationships:* as said in point a), language learning in adult age is influenced by peculiar factors that do not regard children. The adult individual may learn a L2 in formal contexts, such as Italian classroom, or informal situations, which are characterized by those social relationships learners build in their host countries. The inter-linguistic levels reached by the L2 Italian student are influenced by the quantity and the quality of his/her relationships with Italian mother tongue speakers or with foreign students with a good level of Italian:

"Dal lato dello straniero che apprende, la tendenza ad adattarsi in "interlingua" lontane dall'italiano standard può essere messa in relazione al suo incapsulamento all'interno del reticolo etnico. Ma ha a che fare, inoltre, con la quantità e la qualità dei contatti con parlanti italiani, parlanti italiano."

The "Linguistic integration of adult migrants. Guide to policy development and implementation", drafted by the Council of Europe (2014), adds:

a) *Type of education*: the use of specific types of didactic material can be also influenced by the level of education learners have both in their L1 and in L2;

b) *Similarities between mother tongue and L2 alphabets*: as underlined in the learners' profiles of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (2000), the graphic and conceptual distance between the mother tongue and L2 alphabets may simplify the process of L2 learning, or make it difficult:

"Occorre tenere conto delle somiglianze e delle differenze tra la lingua d'origine e la (o una) lingua del paese d'accoglienza (in particolare tra una lingua con alfabeto latino ed una lingua che usa un altro alfabeto o una lingua dal sistema grafico non alfabetico)."

(Beacco, Little, Hedges, 2014, pp. 13-14)

Ehrman, Leaver, Oxford's (2003) work on the three main individual differences that determine various kinds of language learning:

a) *Learning styles*: the term is used by literature to describe the way different "intelligences" adapt to the same learning context, brain flexibility and speed in language learning, cognitive styles varying depending on the learner (context dependent/independent, impulsive/ meditative, abstract/concrete):

"The actual term, *learning style*, did not appear until Thelen (1954) used it in discussing group dynamics. Although Allport (1937) proposed the term,

cognitive style, to mean ways of living and adapting modulated by personality, we more commonly reserve that term for preferred forms of brain activity associated with information acquisition and processing and consider personality variables to represent another kind of learning style."

<div align="center">(Ehrman, Leaver, Oxford, 2003, p. 314)</div>

Knowing such differences in L2 teaching contexts may be useful for designing effective didactic material and arrange a flexible learning environment;

b) *Learning strategies*: linked to learning styles, learning strategies can perfectly adapt to a type of task or intelligence, or be associated to other strategies in order to make learning long lasting. Oxford (1990) distinguishes six different learning strategies: cognitive, implying text reflection and text-manipulating abilities; metacognitive, which make use of reflection on language and errors; memory-related, which make use of exercises where memory is required, such as the use of key words, acronyms, pictures; compensatory, which take advantage of abilities learners already possess, so as to deduce the rest from the context; affective, exploiting strengths and weaknesses of the learner as a person; social, which consider the interaction as the best way for learning:

"1. Cognitive strategies enable the learner to manipulate the language material in direct ways, e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note taking, and synthesizing. 2. Metacognitive strategies (e.g., identifying one's own preferences and needs, planning, monitoring mistakes, and evaluating task success) are used to manage the learning process overall. 3. Memory-related strategies (e.g., acronyms, sound similarities, images, key words) help learners link one L2 item or concept with another but do not necessarily involve deep understanding. 4. Compensatory strategies (e.g., guessing from the context; circumlocution; and gestures and pause words) help make up for missing knowledge. 5. Affective strategies, such as identifying one's mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself, and using deep breathing or positive self-talk, help

learners manage their emotions and motivation level. 6. Social strategies (e.g., asking questions, asking for clarification, asking for help, talking with a native-speaking conversation partner, and exploring cultural and social norms) enable the learner to learn via interaction with others and understand the target culture."

<div align="center">(Ehrman, Leaver, Oxford, 2003, pp. 316-317)</div>

c) *Affective factors:* elements like motivation, tolerance towards ambiguity or the affective filter are factors that are innate in learners' nature and determine several approaches to language study and environment.

The main features of students as individuals are key in Balboni's work (2014) as well. In his analysis of learners' role in a language classroom, Balboni identifies the brain and the mind as the engine of language learning. In particular, brain works as a hardware, that is to say it is responsible for language automation processes (by means of cerebellum) and, consequently, for language acquisition or grammatical construction repetition (by means of the cerebral cortex) and, consequently, for language learning. Mind works as a software, meaning that students are naturally prone to acquire languages, because they are equipped with a LAD (Language Acquisition Device) that teachers have to support with appropriate didactic material.

In addition, Balboni (2014) analyses in detail the features of students as individuals, demonstrating that language acquisition can be achieved following different paths and adopting different strategies. Consequently, because students are not all alike, the factors that play a key role in the efficiency of language teaching are:

a) *Multiple intelligence Theory (Gardner, 1996)*: the way a student approaches language study may be influenced by his/her kind of

<div align="center">59</div>

intelligence, which can be linguistic, logical, spatial, musical, interpersonal or intra-personal;

b) *Cognitive styles*: the way a student deals with study can be global or analytical, ambiguity tolerant or intolerant, context-dependent or independent;

c) *Learning styles*: the way a student learns a language and approaches to its study can be creative or executive, prone to learn from his/her own mistakes, autonomous;

d) *Personality traits*: strictly linked to multiple intelligences, personality traits can contribute to determine a student's behaviour within the classroom environment.

To summarize, these would seem to be the main factors influencing learners' approach to study and determining the heterogeneity of study environment.

In the specific case of migrant learners, given the impossibility to define accurately this social category and the plurality of cultural and linguistic backgrounds of such learners, L2 teaching should be flexible. Indeed:

> " "Migrante" è una categoria sociologica o giuridica, non è una categoria linguistica omogenea. L'elaborazione di ogni politica d'integrazione relativa alle lingue ed ai migranti adulti, che si tratti di nuovi arrivi o di migranti già insediati, deve tenere conto della pluralità dei contesti d'accoglienza e delle esperienze e delle conoscenze linguistiche di queste persone."
>
> (Beacco, Little, Hedges, 2014, p. 13)

3.4. L2 Italian teaching to migrant women. Specific needs and didactic plans

As we have seen in the last paragraph, teaching Italian to adult migrants is a challenge in terms of classroom heterogeneity and didactic material planning. A migrant's primary need to learn L2 Italian is instrumental, that is to say linked to material aspects of everyday life, from searching for an accommodation, to finding a job or having social interactions with mother-tongue speakers of their host country.

It is important to underline that L2 learning is useful to the migrant learner to support his/her auto-promotion and socialization, but unfortunately, migrants often have to face integration on their own. In addition, this process of cultural and linguistic integration is inserted in the context of L2 learning that, as we have already seen, takes advantage of two learning channels: formal (in the classroom, where learning is supported by the teacher and by didactic material) and informal (in everyday life situations, where learning is spontaneous). These are the main reasons why each kind of didactic material should be adapted to each learner's individual needs, which can arise from peculiar cultural backgrounds or current working or personal necessities.

In this context, an area of interest that is worth studying is the peculiar case of migrant women in L2 teaching environments. As Quercioli (2004) underlines, that of women is a "subgroup" sharing the need of migrants learning a L2 and specific needs related to women.

The care of children and their role of wives excludes women from a full integration in a host country; some specific cultural models also boost

such isolation, where women have fewer chances to find jobs and to participate to their host countries' social life. Indeed:

"In taluni gruppi etnici questo particolare aspetto è ulteriormente amplificato da modelli culturali specifici per cui non solo la donna dovrà occuparsi di tutte le attività domestiche, ma ha anche una minore libertà personale rispetto all'uomo, che al di fuori dell'attività lavorativa può frequentare luoghi di svago e aggregazione e potenzialmente avere ulteriori occasioni di interazione linguistica. Non è raro il caso di donne che pur vivendo in Italia da un tempo relativamente lungo, presentano una competenza d'uso della lingua estremamente limitata che non permette loro di esprimersi se non a un livello molto basilare."

(Quercioli, 2004)

Moreover, L2 Italian curricula designed for women are characterized by specific lexical areas, such as the lexicon of school, of everyday life and health. The lacking mastery of such groups of words automatically leads migrant women to social exclusion, because they cannot follow their children's progression at school or discuss it with teachers, as well as they are not adequately informed regarding health topics, such as gynaecological diseases or maternity. For this reason, the study of L2 Italian may be useful for migrant women to take their parenthood back and to start having an active role in their host countries and in their children's lives.

Starting from this, the key point of the next chapter will be the management of individual differences, added to external factors that make the L2 class a heterogeneous environment. We will introduce the concept of *mixed abilities class*, which is the environment where L2 Italian teaching often originates; we will then explain some specific didactic strategies whose aim is to enhance variety in each student; we will eventually

analyse some didactic proposals regarding the design of syllabuses that fit such teaching and learning conditions.

Chapter 4. Enhancing differences. L2 Italian teaching to adult immigrants in a CAD environment: didactic strategies and learning unit proposals

4.1. Mixed abilities classes: enhancing individual differences

In the previous chapters, we have seen how demanding L2 Italian learning can be for foreigners residing in Italy; if L2 Italian learning is inserted in migratory contexts, where learners could be illiterate or low-educated or share different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, it becomes a real challenge.

In line with what we have said before, L2 Italian learning in migratory contexts is influenced by the following factors:

a) Learners' level of education, both in their L1 and L2, and the (sometimes lacking) mastery of alphanumeric codes;

b) Individual factors related to the single individual, such as gender or age, requiring a deeper study of specific semantic areas in L2; cognitive or learning styles, requiring a specific and differentiated approach to the study of second languages;

c) Nature, quantity and quality of linguistic relationships learners have with their L2 mother-tongue speakers;

d) Structural similarities between L1 and L2 writing systems;

e) Affective factors, such as motivation or affective filters, according to which a good learning environment and the absence of all kinds of anxiety make second language learning easier.

Such factors, different for all learners, determine the various learner profiles and require the design of didactic plans that can fit such specific linguistic needs.

Clearly, a classroom that is made up of learners with divergent gender, age, place of origin, education and cultural background is also characterized by different abilities, cognitive and learning styles and approaches to the study of a second language. These environments are best known as CADs (mixed abilities classes).

Caon (2008) defines CAD as:

"Un sistema dinamico che dipende dalla natura e dall'apprendimento di ogni persona che lo compone e che agisce in esso; in questo senso essa viene presentata come un sistema aperto in cui la valorizzazione della differenza di ogni alunno, su più livelli ed aspetti, diventa fondamentale per poter gestire efficacemente le eccellenze e le diversità all'interno della classe."

(Caon, 2008, p. XII)

Starting from the observation of the differences, which are one of the advantages of CADs, the optimal management of such learning environments should be based on specific strategies, as Caon e Tonioli (2016) claim:

"a. «una varietà della didattica all'interno dell'aula» variando i contenuti, i materiali e la metodologia di lavoro sugli stessi; b. «un'organizzazione flessibile della classe» che rispetti la divisione in gruppi di alunni con lo stesso livello di apprendimento linguistico e quindi eterogenei e che presti

attenzione tanto al recupero degli studenti con difficoltà quanto degli studenti eccellenti; c. «una concezione cooperativa e basata sull'aiuto reciproco tra gli studenti» che collaborando e cooperando nella realizzazione di un compito diventano co-responsabili del lavoro da portare a termine agendo, in questo caso, sulle dinamiche relazionali che si sviluppano all'interno della classe; d. l'utilizzo di schede di lavoro differenziate per stili di apprendimento e stratificate per complessità del compito (cfr. D'Annunzio, Della Puppa 2006) che permettano di agire contemporaneamente su diverse «zone di sviluppo prossimale», secondo la celebre espressione di Vygotskij."

(Caon, Tonioli, 2016, p. 141)

Therefore, the creation of differentiated didactic material becomes of utmost importance in the CAD management. In particular, flexibility is essential in such environments, because materials and teaching have to support excellence and weakness at the same time. Consequently, CAD makes use of material that enhances all students' profiles and emphasizes all kinds of "intelligences".

The didactic strategies that are preferred in CADs are:

a) *Cooperative learning:* work carried out in a mixed group, where activities are differentiated and stratified; adopting such strategies, each student can work individually, following his/her own cognitive styles, but answer to the group at the same time, updating it:

"Così operando si crea nel gruppo cooperativo la necessità di aggiungere alla responsabilità personale anche una responsabilità verso gli altri. Il successo o il fallimento del singolo, di conseguenza, è strettamente legato al successo del gruppo e viceversa."

(Caon, 2008, p. 62)

b) *Peer tutoring*: work carried out in pairs, usually made up of a teacher or an excellent student and a weak student; both parts benefit from this kind of activity, because:

> "Il *peer tutoring* o *peer teaching* comprende ogni forma di ausilio che gli studenti offrono gli uni agli altri prima, prima, durante o dopo lo svolgimento di un compito. In un'ottica Vygostskyana, l'altro, il più esperto, sia egli insegnante o studente più competente, ricopre un ruolo decisivo per la crescita cognitiva del singolo. *[…]*
> Si badi: a trarne beneficio non è solo l'allievo meno competente, che ha modo di apprendere dal compagno, ma anche quello più competente, che è tenuto a rielaborare e ripetere (quindi fissare) quanto appreso."
>
> (Torresan, 2015, pp. 11-12)

Such strategies, as Caon e Tonioli (2016) state:

> "Da un lato mirano – grazie alla mediazione sociale – ad attivare le risorse del gruppo come fonte primigenia di mutuo insegnamento/apprendimento, dall'altro identificano la loro specificità nella differenziazione e nella stratificazione del compito, nonché nella proposta di attività gestibili contemporaneamente da studenti con livelli di competenza diversa."
>
> (Caon, Tonioli, 2016, p. 145)

Task differentiation and stratification succeed in combining the cooperation of two or more students of different levels and enhancing their differences at the same time because, as Caon e Meneghetti (2017) claim:

> "Il riconoscimento delle differenze, dunque, è il punto di partenza dell'agire didattico mentre il punto di arrivo è la valorizzazione di tali differenze, attraverso una metodologia varia ed integrata che permetta l'accesso alle informazioni in modalità differenti e per mezzo di strategie di insegnamento plurali che sappiano tenere in considerazione le diverse intelligenze, i vari

stili cognitivi e di apprendimento, i differenti tratti della personalità e le modalità sensoriali attraverso le quali si apprende."

(Caon, Meneghetti, 2017, p. 218)

We will see what these strategies consist in in the next paragraph.

4.2. Didactic strategies in mixed abilities classes

After learning that the main purposes of mixed abilities classes are identifying students' individual differences and enhancing them in the best way, the didactic strategies that are most suitable to this purposes are:

a) *Diversified task*: different activities based on diversified inputs, so that each student can choose which cognitive or learning style to use in order to complete the entire activity:

"La differenziazione del compito prevede la creazione di input diversificati, sia linguisticamente sia per quanto concerne la modalità di rappresentazione cognitiva. In questo modo ogni studente può interiorizzare lessico, strutture, concetti e procedure diverse partendo dalla sua reale competenza comunicativa e attraverso la strategia che è più consona al suo stile."

(Caon, Meneghetti, 2017, p. 219)

As an alternative to diversified inputs, diversified tasks can have the same input, but different focuses:

"Balboni (2006), riferendosi agli studenti di L2 in una classe tradizionale di L1 (o di LS in cui comunque vi sia disomogeneità di livello tra italofoni e non), propone

di differenziare il focus, per cui, pur mantenendo un input comune, si può agire comunque sull'individualizzazione."

<div align="center">(Caon, 2008, p. 67)</div>

b) *Stratified task*: same activity stratified with increasing difficlulty, so that each student can complete the task making use of their cognitive styles:

"La stratificazione del compito prevede la proposta di tecniche e schede di valutazione formativa organizzate a 'strati' secondo un ordine che va dal più semplice al più complesso, in modo che ogni studente raggiunga il livello massimo cui può giungere nella sfida rappresentata dalla scheda."

<div align="center">(Caon, Meneghetti, 2017, p. 220)</div>

c) *Electable tasks*: activities based on problem-solving, solvable by students with different language proficiencies, adopting very personal perspectives on the activity and strategies:

"Relativamente ai contenuti di un compito, una strategia che si può rivelare utile per gestire contemporaneamente diversi livelli di competenza è quella di proporre attività di problem-solving o attività che sviluppino il pensiero 'divergente', cioè che non prevedano un'unica risposta corretta e che permettano a studenti con livelli differenti di competenze di riuscire a svolgere comunque il compito in quanto si può risolvere il problema attraverso un'ampia gamma di strategie linguistiche che non necessariamente sono collegate alla conoscenza approfondita della lingua, e che prevede la risoluzione anche con un bagaglio minimo di conoscenze linguistiche."

<div align="center">(Caon, Meneghetti, 2017, p. 220)</div>

For the purposes established for the present study, it will be necessary to analyze in more detail the processing of stratified tasks in CAD environments.

4.2.1. Stratified tasks and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

As explained in the previous paragraphs, considering the diverse cultural and personal backgrounds in migratory and CAD contexts acquires utmost importance in didactic planning.

In the teaching context (Balboni, 2014), the interaction between language and culture, which are the main object of study, and the student, who is the subject, is moderated by the teacher, placed in the backdrop of didactic action. This relationship can be summarized by the following model:

Language/culture   ⟷   Students

Teacher
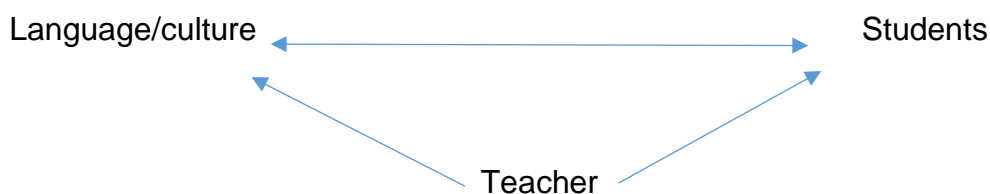
(Balboni, 2014, p. 28, adapted)

In this context, the studies carried out by Vygotskij on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) are key. According to Vygotskij's theory, in learning environments, language has both the role of tool for understanding the surrounding environments and sign for modifying internal models (thinking, attitude, first language etc.):

> "La funzione dello strumento è di servire da conduttore dell'influsso dell'uomo sull'oggetto di attività; è orientato esternamente; deve portare a trasformazione negli oggetti. E' un mezzo attraverso il quale l'attività umana esterna mira a padroneggiare e sottomettere la natura. Il segno, d'altra parte, non cambia niente nell'oggetto di un'operazione mentale. E' un mezzo di attività interna che mira a padroneggiare sé stesso; il segno è orientato internamente."

(Brazzolotto, 2013, https://www.itals.it/articolo/vygotskij-apprendimento-di-una-lingua-seconda-e-stratificazione-del-compito-linguistico)

Therefore language, with its double function of tool and sign, has diversified effects on each learner, because in each students what changes is:

a) External factors: language-learning contexts;

b) Internal factors: culture, first language, cognitive styles, multiple intelligences.

If we extend such theory to a multilingual language-learning context:

> "Se allarghiamo la nostra visione alla classe multilingue (con questo termine intendiamo una classe eterogenea con un minimo di 30% di alunni di diversa origine, che provengono da vari paesi del mondo, neoarrivati e/o che hanno frequentato la scuola italiana da un anno), possiamo affermare che il linguaggio, nel nostro caso l'italiano, è lo stesso *strumento* per tutti gli alunni, mentre non rappresenta lo stesso *segno*, in quanto ogni alunno non italofono, in modo particolare nei primi stadi di apprendimento della nuova lingua, possiede un proprio *segno* di comunicazione interna, che coincide con la lingua madre."

(Brazzolotto, 2013, https://www.itals.it/articolo/vygotskij-apprendimento-di-una-lingua-seconda-e-stratificazione-del-compito-linguistico)

One last factor to contemplate is the intelligibility of the task proposed to the CAD class. Because students tend to do what they are not able to do by imitating teachers, it is fundamental that the input is the most intelligible and clear. Moreover, a well-structured didactic plan should focus on the next steps of language learning, not on the current ones.

As a matter of fact, as far illiterate and low-educated learners are concerned, the starting level of language learning is almost null or low and diversified for each individual. It would be more appropriate to focus on the nearest objectives of an imaginary learning line for each student, as the ZPD suggests. In the next section, we will see how a learning unit in L2 Italian teaching contexts should be structured, before inserting it in migratory contexts with illiterate or low-educated learners.

4.3. The creation of a learning unit in L2 Italian teaching contexts: an example

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the introduction in language teaching research of the notion of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) sheds new light on didactic planning and the creation of specific materials. In particular, Semplici (2015) underlines the importance of dividing a learning unit in little but meaningful steps, characterized by little goals students have to reach during their learning path:

> "In particolare, in questo paragrafo ci concentreremo sui diversi scopi che le tecniche consentono di conseguire -al docente, se in un percorso guidato, o direttamente all'apprendente nel caso di percorsi di studio autonomi- nei diversi momenti del micro-percorso didattico, ovvero di ogni singola sezione all'interno dell'intero percorso, qualunque sia il modello operative utilizzato. Indipendentemente infatti dalla scelta del modello di unità – didattica, centrata sul testo, di apprendimento, di lavoro- il processo di apprendimento deve seguire un percorso coerente e funzionale, tale da consentire un'acquisizione quanto più possibile efficace, rapida e duratura. Proprio per questo ogni fase è finalizzata a conseguire specifici obiettivi adottando a tale scopo opportune modalità e, di conseguenza, avvalendosi di adeguate tecniche didattiche."
>
> (Semplici, 2015, pp. 236- 237)

The necessity to clarify the objectives for each step of a learning unit makes the lesson management easier to the teacher and the achievement of specific linguistic and communicative goals less laborious to the student.

These are some of the main reasons why Semplici (2015), in her work, tries to give a brief but thorough outline of the steps a learning unit should be divided in, which is a topic already investigated by many researchers, especially Freddi (1994), Porcelli (1994), Vedovelli (2002) and Balboni (2014). However, the steps identified by Semplici (2015), which are a summary of previous research in the field, can be described as follows:

a) *Introductory section*: best known as "motivation phase", it consists in a short presentation of the main topics of the unit, in order to give to all students the opportunity to start from a common ground and to raise their motivation to the study:

"Come abbiamo visto, è questa la fase che precede l'incontro con il testo/con i testi, nel corso della quale il docente, con l'aiuto dei materiali dei quali ha scelto di avvalersi – ma anche l'autore di materiali didattici finalizzati all'apprendimento guidato o autonomo – deve preparare gli studenti alla comprensione fornendo indicazioni sul contesto nel quale si inserisce il testo input, deve attivare motivazione e interesse, deve creare una base commune dalla quale tutti gli allievi, se più di uno, possano partire per affrontare il percorso didattico previsto."

(Semplici, 2015, pp. 237-238)

As Semplici continues, the main objectives in introductory phases are the *elicitation* of lexicon and the main cultural elements contained in the unit and the *presentation* of the context the text is inserted in.

b) *Developmental section*: the most complex section of a didactic unit, it contains several steps, corresponding to different phases of linguistic acquisition:

"[…] è indubbiamente questa la fase più complessa e più articolata dell'unità di lavoro, in quanto riunisce momenti che negli altri modelli sono divisi in più fasi. Si svolge infatti al suo interno il percorso che nell'unità didattica classica parte dall'"analisi" per condurre alla "sintesi" e alla "riflessione […]."

(Semplici, 2015, p. 238)

The various steps, as Semplici underlines, are not always present in all didactic units, but generally cover comprehension guide, rule analysis, rule presentation, fixation, reflection, reuse, strengthening.

c) *Conclusive section*: as Semplici (2015) highlights, a conclusive phase (where the teacher makes certain of the acquisition of the linguistic and cultural objectives set by the unit) should be present in every step of all didactic units:

"In questa fase, definita qui "conclusione" come indicato nell'UdL, si procede quindi alla verifica delle competenze e conoscnze acquisite, ovvero a quello che l'UD definisce "controllo". Oltre che sotto forma di vero e proprio controllo, tramite ad esempio un test formale, la verifica può essere realizzata anche chiedendo agli apprendenti di svolgere compiti e attività nelle quali riutilizzare in maniera significativamente rilevante le competenze acquisite […]."

(Semplici, 2015, p. 239)

The activities included in the conclusive phases concern final checks, self-assessment, strengthening and reuse of grammatical structures or lexicon.

In the next chapter, which will be entirely devoted to the analysis of an experimental learning unit designed on the basis of previous research in

this field, each of these steps will be analysed in detail, with the addition of strategies suitable for migratory contexts and illiteracy.

Chapter 5 – An experimental learning unit for illiterate and low-educated migrant learners: the study

The example of how a learning unit should be structured, provided by Semplici (2015), underlines the fact that didactic materials and teaching techniques can be easily adapted to learners' learning context, their linguistic needs and background. The testing of didactic material in CAD contexts with illiterate or low-educated migrant adult learners is a clear example of such flexibility.

As confirmation of the adaptability of teaching methods and materials to several learning contexts, the last aim of the present paper was that of creating, testing and eventually determining the validity of a completely new learning unit, which has been inserted into the syllabus of the "Educittà" project.

The unit has been proposed and subsequently tested in two classes of the project, all made up of migrant women. In the following tables, average data related to learners' age, country of origin, level of education and motivation to the study of L2 Italian are reported in order to introduce the linguistic and cultural ground where the unit has been tested:

Age	32 years (average)
Country of origin	Bangladesh (19 people); Kosovo (3 people); Macedonia (2 people); China (1 person); Indonesia (1 person).
Level of education	11 years (average)
Motivation to the study of L2 Italian	Becoming fluent in Italian; various reasons (talking with teachers, help children); integrating in the city life;

	talking with doctors; the study of Italian is important; they like it; they want to understand it better.

Table 3. Average data related to the learners attending the first class of the project

Age	37 years (average)
Country of origin	Bangladesh (26 people); Afghanistan (1 person).
Level of education	11 years (average)
Motivation to the study of L2 Italian	Learning Italian language is important; motivation to learn the language well; learn to speak Italian; various reasons (help children, talk with doctors and teachers);

Table 4. Average data related to the learners attending the second class of the project

5.1. Theoretical framework

As Balboni (2014) underlines, two phases of use and management of materials are key in language teaching: course design and course planning. On course design, the author claims: "Nei corsi organizzati da scuole, università, sistemi scolastici e così via la progettazione è svolta da comitati, specialisti, esperti che stilano il curricolo generale e il sillabo, cioè i contenuti dei singoli livelli;" (Balboni, 2014, p. 71)

Instead, the second:

"[…] riguarda la suddivisione dei contenuti del sillabo in lezioni, cioè in "unità di acquisizione", blocchi minimali che lo studente percepisce come minimali e che durano una, due ore, con eventuale intermezzo di lavoro a casa, e in cicli di lezioni, cioè in "unità didattiche" costituite da una serie di unità di acquisizione che l'insegnante vede come blocco unitario."

(Balboni, 2014, p. 71)

In the specific case of our study, the focus is on course planning, in other words the choice and partition of topics on the basis of learners' types and cognitive workload.

Speaking of which, Balboni (2014) continues underlying the centrality of didactic unit and acquisition unit in the learning process. To be more specific, a didactic unit is:

"[…] una *tranche* linguistico-comunicativa più complessa, che nei manuali prevede 8-10 ore di lavoro e talvolta anche di più; di solito è basata su un tema situazionale/culturale – i trasporti, il cibo, il tempo libero, ecc. – che funge da collante tra varie unità di acquisizione;"

(Balboni, 2014, p. 74)

An acquisition unit is, instead:

"[…] un'unità di lavoro costruita secondo la psicodidattica della Gestalt che descrive la percezione come una sequenza di tre fasi – una globale, una analitica e una conclusiva – in cui si attua la sintesi che trasforma i dati *percepiti* in elementi *recepiti* dalla nostra mente;"

(Balboni, 2014, p. 72)

Therefore, each acquisition unit is structured following the sequence of globality → analysis → synthesis as it happens in Gestalt psychology. Such units are interpreted in the same way both by teacher and student and, as for the latter, the use of such sequence makes sure that *learning* becomes permanent *acquisition* (Balboni, 2014, p. 73).

5.2.   Case study introduction

As already specified in the theoretical framework, acquisition units are inserted in a broader didactic unit, which can be considered as a series of acquisition units, all belonging to the same macro-topic.

The case study we are going to discuss focuses on a new acquisition unit specifically designed for two classes within the Educittà project I participated in. Although the two courses were supervised by different teachers, syllabus partition and management were the same in both classes.

Generally, the main topics of the syllabus regarded aspects of everyday life and were presented to the class in order of linguistic and conceptual complexity. Each of those didactic units used to last two or

more lessons (each of them was at least an hour long), also depending on the positive or negative reaction of the class to the topics proposed.

The main topics usually included, with possible changes of schedule:

- Greetings and self-introduction (the teacher writes on the blackboard basic questions and answers about self-introduction, regarding name, age, place of origin and residency);

- Family (on the basis of a fictitious picture of a family, the teacher introduces all family members; after the teacher and the intern make a short demonstration, students are encouraged to talk about their family);

- A typical day (the teacher used to mime the main daily activities and then give a sheet to students with actions corresponding to pictures);

- Food (this was the longest and most difficult didactic unit, because it was made up of more than two acquisition units. Generally, the food unit involved a presentation of the main food categories, types of shops and salespeople, recipes, verbs related to cooking);

- Health (together with food, one of the most complex units in the syllabus. Exercises involved a presentation of all parts of the body, types of doctors and simple diseases, medicines and remedies, places related to health).

The choice of the topic for a new acquisition unit was due to the need of finding a halfway through usefulness and innovation. After attending a

lesson by a doctor on the importance of food and balanced diet in Italian culture, the topic came out by itself.

Health food perfectly combines two of the topics already inserted in the syllabus and it is an important part of the Italian culture, which migrants residing in Italy have to be aware of. Moreover, all students being women, the topic acquired more importance also because it could be part of the educational path of their children as well.

The choice of lexicon and grammatical structures was adapted on the basis of what students already knew from previous lessons (in order to respect their zone of proximal development) and of the linguistic level reached so far. The entire unit follows the partition in motivation, globality, analysis and synthesis provided by Balboni (2014); each exercise is stratified, that is to say provided both in pre-A1 and A1 version, except for some exercises designed in one only version; objectives, targets, linguistic content and unit duration are all summarized in an introductory table (see Appendix).

We are going to analyze the unit exercise by exercise always following the same pattern:

- Kind of didactic strategies used in the exercise, with reference to literature in the field, when necessary;

- Objectives before presenting the exercise and results obtained after;

- Pros and cons in exercise execution;

- Overall motivation of the students.

5.3.   Unit analysis

5.3.1. Before reading: activity 1 (pre-A1/ A1)

Didactic strategies

Activity 1 corresponds to the introductory phase of the acquisition unit on health food. As already claimed by Semplici (2015, p. 237), this is the motivation phase, where the teacher introduces a new topic to the class by making use of precise strategies, whose aim is that of preparing the ground for a new acquisition block.

Activity 1 was designed for both pre-A1 and A1 levels, because the aim of this introductory section was that of eliciting lexicon and grammar that had already been dealt with (Semplici, 2015, p. 242). The didactic strategies we resorted to were:

a) Elicitation;

b) Context presentation.

In order to reintroduce the already discussed topics of food and health and to present the new one, Activity 1 was designed as a series of questions, whose aim was that of investigating students' relationship with food. Therefore, questions asked what, where, with whom and when they like/do not like to eat. The exercise presented a written example of how questions should have been answered and a graphic presentation of grammar, with emoticons corresponding to the verbs *piacere/ non piacere* (like/ dislike), which had already been introduced in the previous lessons. The exercise was carried out in pairs or little groups, where each student could express her opinion on the subject, with the supervision of the teacher; that way,

lexicon of food and health was elicited and students were prepared to the second part of the activity: the introduction of new context.

Being "health food" ("*salute alimentare*" in Italian) the main topic of the acquisition unit, I thought it could be appropriate to write the title of the unit on the blackboard before starting the activities, in order to elicit a brainstorming; indeed, I then asked students to tell me what they thought "health food" would mean; their reactions to the question confirmed that elicitation of previously studied material is really useful to present new and related topics, because it helps students imagine and think on word meaning.

Objectives before and after the exercise. Potential pros and cons. Students' motivation to the study.

As regards Activity 1, the main objective was introducing the main topic of the unit with a brainstorming (divided in elicitation and context introduction), carried out with an open-question activity. After the exercise, students seemed more aware of what they had studied before (in particular, food and health) and ready to start a new topic.

Overall, the exercise presented no difficulties in its execution because it was carried out orally, in pairs or groups. That way, each student could express her opinion on the subject and participate to the conversation, but feeling no pressure about it. Students seemed interested in the new topic, and the appropriateness of their answers confirmed their motivation.

5.3.2. Reading: activity 1 (pre-A1 and A1, stratified)

Didactic strategies

Activity 1 is the starting point of the Reading phase, otherwise known as globality/analysis. This is the most complex part of the acquisition unit, because it contains four exercises that resort to several didactic strategies and have different goals (Semplici, 2015, p. 244).

In particular, Activity 1 aims to introduce the lexical part of the new topic: foodstuffs. Because this was a completely new topic to the class, I thought it would be appropriate to stratify the most important activities, presenting the same exercise, at two different degrees of complexity, for pre-A1 and A1 students. Overall, Activity 1 is divided in:

a) Presentation of a cake graph with pictures related to the four food categories (carbohydrates, proteins, fats and fiber);

b) The real exercise in the pre-A1 and A1 variants.

For this kind of activity, the main didactic strategy used was the *word-picture pairing* (Semplici, 2015, p. 245), which consisted in matching the picture of food categories with their written description. On the one hand, in the pre-A1 version, students could look at the pictures, read which kinds of food belonged to each category and then write in the box the right word; the word related to foodstuffs was in bold type, because it was the new lexical content to work with. On the other hand, in the A1 version, students could look at the pictures as well, but food lists were incomplete, because I thought they would manage to resort to their lexical background to fill in the lines; after writing two or more elements for each line, they could write foodstuffs names in the correct box, as in the pre-A1 version of the activity.

Objectives before and after the exercise. Potential pros and cons. Students' motivation to the study.

The main goal I set for this activity was lexicon comprehension. The reason behind this choice was combining two codes, a written and a graphic one, could help students at different linguistic levels master new lexical load in the same way by compensating their knowledge. In exercise execution, for both degrees of complexity, I found in students no particular problems in understanding the instructions and doing the exercise. Students' motivation seemed to be the same observed in the previous activity.

5.3.3. Reading: activity 1a (pre-A1 and A1, stratified)

Didactic strategies

Activity 1a is the second step of the Reading phase of the unit. The activity, stratified as well as the previous one, has the goal of lexicon reviewing and strengthening, for two main reasons:

a) Because Reading Activity 1 introduced a new topic, where food lexicon was included;
b) Because the following activity, which is a roleplay, summarizes all that was done so far.

To do so, Activity 1a was designed to review food lexicon and to prepare students to the next activity. The exercise is stratified and consists in:

a) For the pre-A1 level, a word identification;

b) For the A1 level, a fill-in the form.

As we have said for the other activities, the choice to stratify some of the exercises is due to the different linguistic resources and abilities of the students, who can master the notions of writing and word identification according to their linguistic level. Indeed:

a) The pre-A1 version resorted to word identification, where students had to match pictures of food to the correct words, which were already written;

b) The A1 version resorted to completion, where students had to look at food pictures and write the correct words in blank spaces.

Objectives before and after the exercise. Potential pros and cons. Students' motivation to the study.

As it has already been underlined, Activity 1a aimed at combining notions that students already mastered and that had been just presented as new topics. With word identification and fill-in the form structure, the two versions of Activity 1a's target was that of reviewing, so as to be ready to do a roleplay (Activity 1b) and to conclude the first part of the Reading phase.

However, a remark came out by the observation of exercise execution. Although activity stratification was purposely designed to adapt exercise structure to students' stratified abilities, the analysis of Activity 1a gave me an unexpectedly positive feedback. Despite stratification, some of the students belonging to the pre-A1 group, after doing their exercise, eventually managed to do the A1 version as well, as if they could learn by

steps. I think this could be a sort of practical reflection of the ZPD (this work, paragraph 4.2.1), according to which students can learn only if they start by topics they already manage and that are linked to already acquired material.

Apart from this observation, which will not be a single case in unit analysis, the overall participation of students to the activity was good. The time of exercise execution and the absence of questions to the teacher confirmed the initial hypothesis.

5.3.4. Reading: activity 1b (pre-A1/A1)

Didactic strategies

Activity 1b represents the final part of the Reading phase of the unit. To conclude the most significant acquisition block, I inserted a roleplay. As Semplici (2015, p. 248) claims, the insertion of roleplays at the end of acquisition blocks helps the student reflect on the lexical and grammatical rules proposed in the unit and to fix them.

Objectives before and after the exercise. Potential pros and cons. Students' motivation to the study.

The activity consisted in dividing the class in two balanced groups, that is to say made up of both pre-A1 and A1 students. The table reported in the unit in Appendix had been drawn on the blackboard, in order to facilitate exercise execution.

The aim of the exercise was that of showing the class pictures of food or famous dishes and asking students, in turn, to put the picture in the correct section of the chart (carbohydrates, proteins, fiber, fats). I opted for structuring question answering in pairs rather than in groups so as to avoid confusion or misunderstandings of any sort; that way, every student could participate to the game and pay attention to exercise execution.

Global motivation of the class was notably high in the development of Activity 1b; this was also confirmed by the fact that students tried to answer to questions even when it was not their turn; furthermore, most answers to questions were correct, appropriate and prompt, meaning that:

a) The level of attention was still high;
b) The topics proposed interested the class;
c) Class had properly acquired what proposed so far.

5.3.5. Reading: activity 2a (pre-A1/A1)

Didactic strategies

Activity 2a is the last section of the Reading phase and consists in the presentation of both a lexical and grammatical rule: healthy/unhealthy food, corresponding to *fa bene/fa male* in Italian. This is a lexical and grammatical rule because it includes two adverbs (*bene/male*), whose meaning may not be known by students, and the conjugation to the third singular person of *fare.*

The exercise had an immediate realization because, after explaining the difference between *fa bene/fa male* with the support of

emoticons and examples to the blackboard or mimed with the teacher's assistance, students were able to read the sentences and decide whether the kind of food mentioned was healthy or unhealthy.

The didactic strategy we resorted to for this activity was that of highlighting (Semplici, 2015, p. 248), which consists in underlining the correct answer by recognizing it in the text. In this specific case, the text was made up of six sentences about healthy or unhealthy habits and students had to tick the correct answer.

Objectives before and after the exercise. Potential pros and cons. Students' motivation to the study.

The realization of Activity 2a was fast because, as we already said, only one explanation of the rule was necessary for students to understand and to carry on by themselves. The overall participation and motivation to the exercise was more than good. As we will explain in the next paragraph, Activity 2a (rule presentation) and 2b (reflection on the rule) were meant to be carried out separately, as two distinct sections. Instead, students intended the two activities as one. I found a possible answer to this question, which will be illustrated in the next paragraph.

5.3.6. Synthesising: activity 3a (pre-A1 and A1, stratified)

Activity 3a, in both pre-A1 and A1 versions, is the last part of the acquisition unit, dedicated to reflection on language. After presenting the general context of the unit and the main lexical and grammatical rules, this last section had the function of summarizing the knowledge acquired so

far by transferring theoretical knowledge to everyday life and personal experiences.

The aim of Activity 3a was that of building a weekly menu on the basis of what had been analyzed in the previous exercises and of a pyramidal diagram displaying everyday consumption of the various food categories.

The activity was stratified because I thought pre-A1 students might not be able to decode a complex picture like a diagram; in order all students to complete the exercise, the pre-A1 version displays a simpler diagram, with foods that should be daily consumed at the bottom and those that should rarely be consumed on the top of the diagram. In parallel, the A1 version of the activity displayed a similar picture, with foods organized in the same way as the pre-A1 version, but daily consumptions were reported below the diagram, because A1 students were believed to possess the skills to decode a picture and then read short sentences related to it.

To increase students' participation and motivation to this last exercise, I wrote a weekly table on the blackboard, divided in days and parts of the day, in particular breakfast, lunch and dinner. I let students analyze and decode the diagrams and then asked them, in turns, to fill in the blank spaces with examples of their daily menus.

Motivation in this last exercise was very high, probably because the activity involved students' lives directly. However, due to insufficient time, I told most students to complete their exercise at home, because that one was the very last part of the lesson.

Final remarks

The aim of this paper was that of investigating the main theoretical and pragmatic features of illiteracy and low-education, related to L2 Italian learning in migratory contexts.

The main research questions came out after attending an educational apprenticeship in cooperation with Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the municipality of Venice, which consisted in supporting teachers in L2 Italian proximity courses within "Educittà" project.

The observation of teachers' didactic methods and strategies in class environments and the awareness that there is little or no didactic material available for illiterate or low-educated learners allowed me to design and test an experimental unit, created following language-teaching research in the field.

On the basis of research on illiteracy's main features, the attitude of Italian law towards adult migrants, the division of migrant L2 Italian learners in categories according to their linguistic level and their insertion in mixed abilities class contexts, the experimental unit purposely designed for this paper aimed at:

a) Stratifying activities in two main layers, respectively pre-A1 and A1, to verify if didactic materials can be adapted to different kinds of learners with different linguistic needs;

b) Analyzing the learning strategies used by students to do the activities proposed in the learning unit;

c) Determining if the choice of stratifying activities according to different linguistic levels could be a useful tool to implement learners' attention and development of learning strategies.

The overall judgement of unit execution was positive, because:

a) Learners' degree of attention and participation was high in almost all activities;

b) Learners' were able to complete the exercises purposely designed and selected for their linguistic level; moreover, learners with lower linguistic levels were able to develop learning strategies that allowed them to complete the most difficult version of the exercises;

c) The unit added useful cultural knowledge to the topics already studied during the Italian language course. Learners' attention and participation confirmed this initial hope.

We hope that interest and research in this specific field of language teaching will be kept open in the future, because L2 learning is today a key point of cultural and linguistic integration of the individual, in all countries. Moreover, we hope that more differentiated didactic material will be designed, due to L2 Italian's heterogeneous beneficiaries.

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Aknowledgements

La valigia pesa quasi quanto ciò che lasci alle tue spalle prima di partire.

Non ricordo esattamente i pensieri che hanno attraversato la mia testa in quel giorno di settembre che, nel profondo sud da cui vengo, è ancora nel pieno dell'estate. Non ricordo se avessi più paura del salto nel vuoto, della malinconia di chiudere in uno scatolone ciò che ero stata fino ad allora o della voglia di ricominciare da zero. Forse, in quel giorno di settembre, provavo un po' tutto insieme.

Una traversata interminabile, la prima di tante. Tredici ore invece che nove, iniziamo bene. Un caldo opprimente, sia alla partenza che all'arrivo, mi ha fatto pensare che tutto il mondo è paese, come se, in quel giorno così triste, volesse farmi sentire meno la nostalgia di tutto ciò che avevo da poco lasciato.

Una stanza vuota ad accogliermi, una stanza che avrei potuto riempire di una nuova me, giorno dopo giorno. Quella stanza, però, iniziò a stringersi sempre di più, fin quasi a darmi l'impressione di non essere la benvenuta, lì.

Anche se ero appena arrivata, scappai.

Una partita iniziata con un punto della squadra avversaria non è detto che si concluda con una sconfitta. E la rimonta, infatti, non si è fatta attendere.

Ho scoperto quante cose possono accadere in un mese e travolgerti, quante strade si possono fare per raggiungere lo stesso posto, quanto può essere grande una città, quanto peso possono sopportare le tue braccia, quante cose si possono fare in un giorno. Ho ricominciato da zero, ci ho voluto riprovare. Questa volta la stanza è rimasta lì dov'era. Anzi, ha cominciato ad allargarsi, come i miei orizzonti.

Mi sono buttata, spavalda, nella gabbia dei leoni, come una straniera in una terra ostile, con i piedi ben ancorati a terra, gli occhi sempre per aria e il cuore diviso a metà.

Ho corso, ho sudato, ho parlato con sconosciuti, sono arrivata in ritardo e anche troppo in anticipo, ho sentito parlare nuove lingue, ho imparato nuove strade ogni qualvolta mi perdevo sui miei passi, ho avuto paura, ho pianto, ho letto fino a farmi chiudere gli occhi, ho visto il mondo da nuove prospettive, ho viaggiato da sola, ho creduto di amare, ho voluto bene, ho fatto amicizia, ho assaggiato nuovi cibi, ho sperimentato intemperie che non pensavo esistessero, ho imparato ad amare l'acqua e a farmela amica, ho apprezzato l'arte, ho iniziato ad amare la cucina, ho abbracciato l'ordine sia mentale che fisico, mi sono morsa la lingua più volte, ho imparato a contare fino a dieci prima di scoppiare, ho detto addio a chi mi voleva portare a fondo, ho imparato a vivere con leggerezza ma a dare peso alle parole, a guardare una persona negli occhi, a non fermarmi alle prime impressioni, a ridere più di me stessa e meno degli altri, ho appreso il valore dell'ospitalità, dell'amicizia e del lavoro di squadra.

Ho capito che il cuore si può dividere in tanti pezzi senza tuttavia spezzarsi, che la nostalgia non sempre mette tristezza, che si può star bene anche da soli e che essere da soli non significa sentirsi soli. Ho capito come trarre il meglio da ogni esperienza, come rivalutare le situazioni e le persone, come pensare due volte prima di parlare. Ho imparato ad amare quello che faccio, a non sentire la fatica, a incanalare l'energia in qualcosa di bello, a farmi brillare gli occhi quando qualcosa mi piace. Ho trovato il coraggio di aprire il mio cuore a qualcuno, ho appreso come incassare una delusione, rialzarmi come se nulla fosse, non mostrare la sofferenza, anche quando era tanta. Ho imparato ad abbracciare, a dire "ti voglio bene", a valutare le persone e a lasciarne dietro alcune. Mi sono meravigliata di quanta bellezza ci possa essere in giro, e specie di come essa si annidi nelle piccole cose. Ho soprattutto apprezzato il valore del silenzio, di come a volte non servano parole, di quanto sia bello essere diversi, perché diversi non vuol dire strani, se i nostri cuori battono all'unisono.

Non pensavo che un solo cuore e una sola testa potessero contenere tutto questo senza esplodere.

Oggi quello scatolone non c'è, ma quello che conteneva è tutto in ordine sulle mensole di una nuova casa i cui muri non si restringono. Non più.

Appendix

PRIMA DELLA LETTURA

(PRE-A1/ A1) Attività 1. Parla delle tue abitudini con una compagna seguendo l'esempio.

RICORDA: mi piace= ☺   non mi piace: ☹

Perché mangi? Mangio perché è importante e perché serve per stare bene.

Cosa ti piace mangiare?

Cosa NON ti piace mangiare?

Dove ti piace mangiare?

Dove NON ti piace mangiare?

Con chi ti piace mangiare?

Con chi NON ti piace mangiare?

Quando ti piace mangiare?

(PRE-A1) Attività 1. Guarda l'immagine, leggi le frasi e inserisci le parole scritte in nero nei riquadri.

1. **Carboidrati:** pane, pasta, riso, cereali, biscotti.
2. **Fibre:** mela, banana, zucchine, carote, insalata, ananas.
3. **Proteine:** carne, pesce, legumi, uova, latte e formaggio.
4. **Grassi:** dolci, olio di oliva, burro.

(A1) Attività 1. Guarda l'immagine, inserisci le parole scritte in nero nei riquadri e aggiungi due alimenti su ogni riga.

1. **Carboidrati:** pane, pasta, riso, _____, _____.
2. **Fibre:** mela, banana, zucchine, _____, _____.
3. **Proteine:** carne, pesce, legumi, _____, _____.
4. **Grassi:** dolci, olio di oliva, _____, _____.

(PRE-A1) Attività 1 a. Scegli la risposta esatta.

pasta	Riso	cous cous

ananas	banana	pera
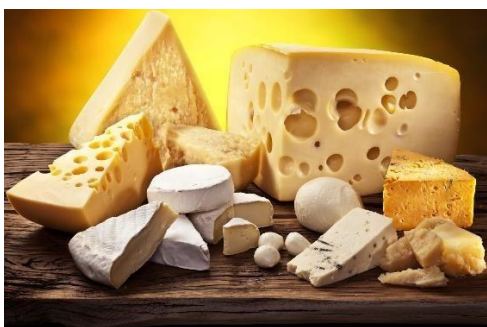
cioccolato	Latte	formaggio

acqua	Latte	Coca cola
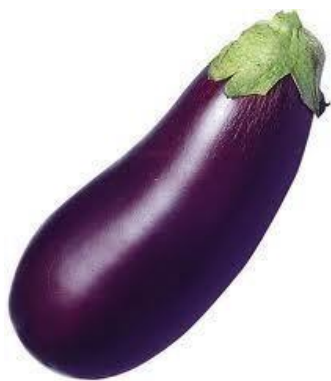
melanzana	peperone	zucchina

torta	pizza	pasta

mela	formaggio	salame
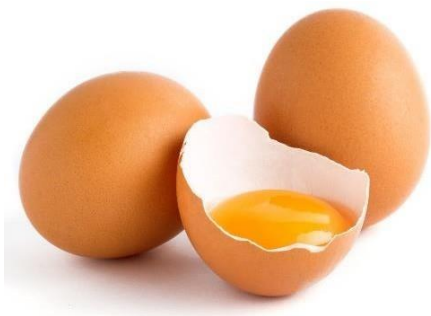
riso	Carne	uova

cioccolato	formaggio	torta

zucca	pesce	Olio di oliva

(A1) **Attività 1 a.** Guarda le immagini e scrivi il nome del cibo.

_____

_____

_____
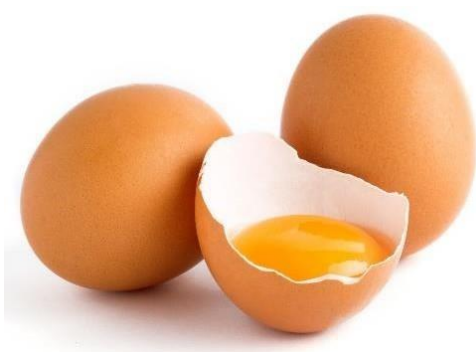

_____

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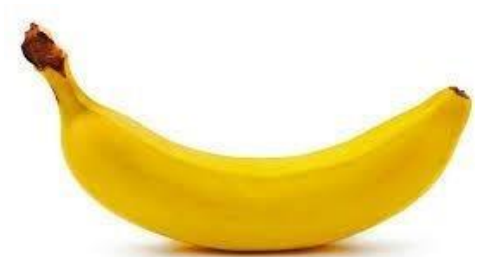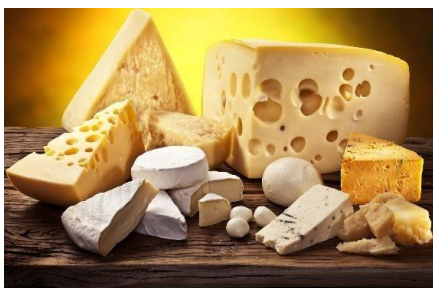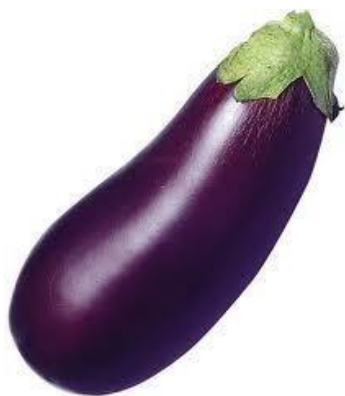
(PRE-A1/ A1) **Attività 1 b.** Gioco a squadre. Guarda le immagini e inseriscile nella tabella.

CARBOIDRATI	PROTEINE	FIBRE	GRASSI

(PRE-A1/ A1) Attività 2 a. Cerchia FA BENE o FA MALE.

RICORDA: fa bene: ☺   fa male: ☹

1. Mio figlio mangia sempre la torta.

Fa bene	Fa male

2. Io mangio la frutta tre volte al giorno.

Fa bene	Fa male

3. Mio marito beve tanta acqua.

Fa bene	Fa male

4. Mio figlio mangia 10 uova a settimana.

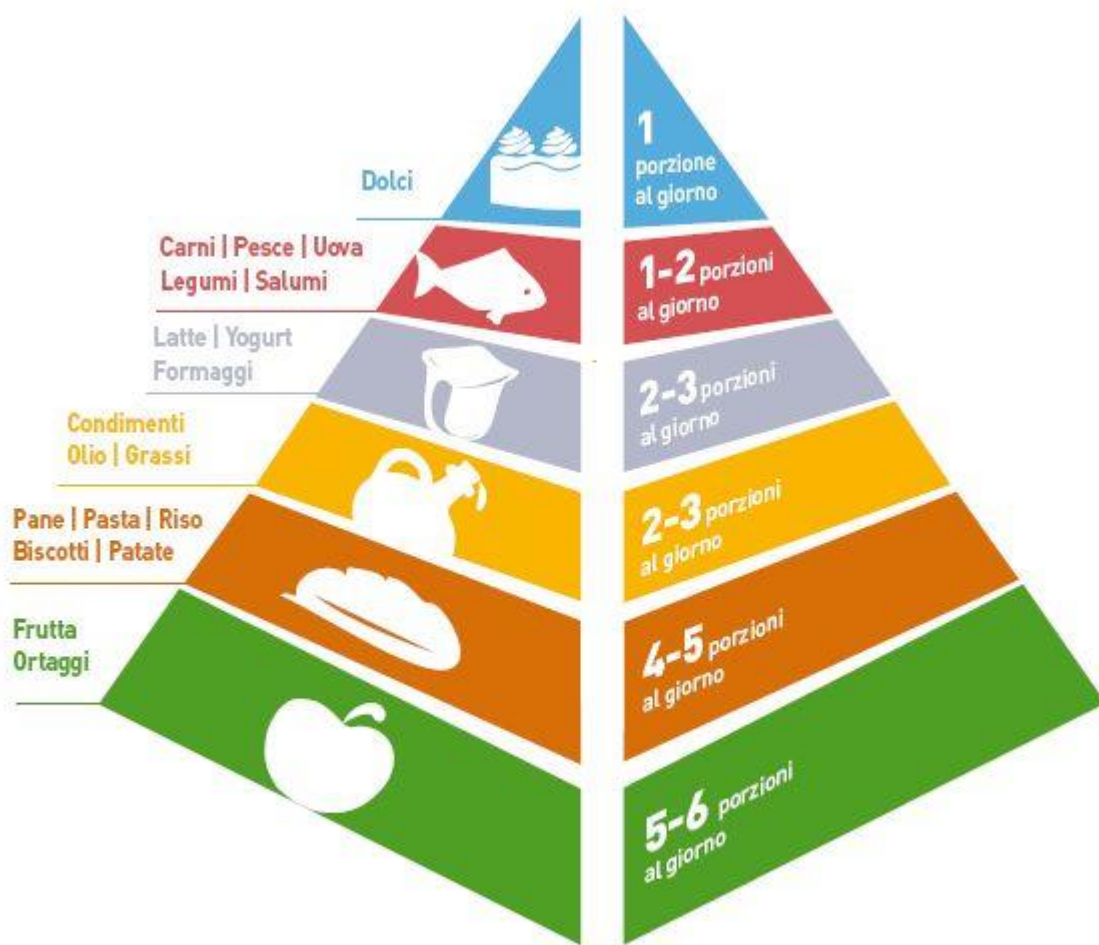| Fa bene	Fa male

5. Io a pranzo preparo il riso con le verdure.

Fa bene	Fa male

6. La mia famiglia mangia spesso il pesce.
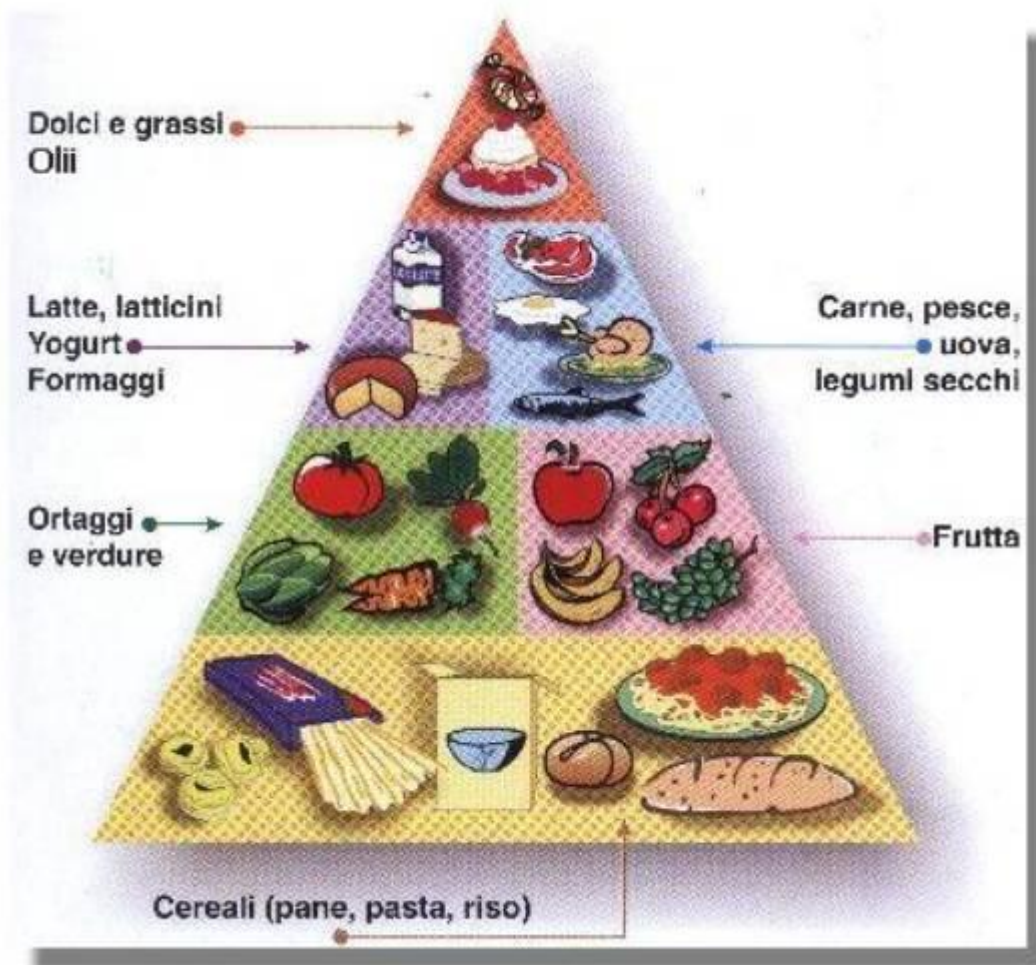
Fa bene	Fa male

(PRE-A1/ A1) Attività 2 b. Parla con la compagna. Perché gli alimenti dell'attività 2 a fanno bene/ male?

Attività 3 a. Guarda l'immagine e leggi.

Attività 3 b. Inventa il menu di una settimana guardando l'immagine.

(A1) Attività 3 a. Guarda l'immagine e leggi.

DOLCI E GRASSI: una volta al giorno

PROTEINE (CARNE E PESCE): una volta al giorno

FRUTTA E VERDURA: 5 volte al giorno

CARBOIDRATI (CEREALI, PANE, PASTA): 4 volte al giorno

LATTE E LATTICINI: 2 volte al giorno

Attività 3 b. Inventa il menu di una settimana guardando l'immagine.