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**Does an Early Foreign-Language Teaching Program Applied to
Kindergarten Children Lead to Successful Linguistic, Affective and
Cognitive Achievements?**

A Case Study

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Abstract

The relationships between languages coming into contact for geo-political reasons or as a result of migratory movements give rise to multilingualism which is a precious phenomenon that must be supported. In order to be effective, the approach to multilingualism must occur during early childhood. This is why the European Commission plans the Early Language Learning programs which introduce a second or foreign language in pre-primary schools. The most adopted programs are the Foreign-Language teaching and the Immersion programs. The formers concern the integration of a language different from the child's mother tongue in the pedagogical plan. The latter are typical in situations of bilingualism and aim at developing of an early, simultaneous and additive kind of bilingualism. The present study is based on an experimental research carried out in a kindergarten with Italian infants who approached to English as a foreign language for the first time. They were immersed into the new language during activities and various moments of the educational routine for 3 months. This study aim to demonstrate the effectiveness of Early Foreign Language Learning and from the analysis of the results a certain similarity between the achieved outcomes and some features of bilingualism can be observed. It follows that the support of second or foreign language acquisition at an early developmental stage is essential to enhance the growth of cognitive and linguistic benefits in young child.

Introduction

The present-day worldwide population is characterised by a complex linguistic and cultural heterogeneity. Growing up in this social community requires to have an appropriate competence in more than one language in addition to the mother tongue. This ability has been defined multilingualism. As far as the European Union is concerned, multilingualism is considered as an enriching phenomenon that must be preserved and supported. According to neuroscientific, linguistic and pedagogical research, the most favourable age during which the basis for multilingualism should be laid is the first stage of a child's development. These are the reasons why the European Commission drafted the Early Language Learning program, through which very young children attending pre-primary schools are exposed to a second or foreign language at an early age, depending on whether it concerns Immersion programs or Foreign-Language Teaching programs. The purpose of this thesis is to assess whether a research project of this kind could have a positive impact on very young children from a linguistic, cognitive and affective point of view.

In the first chapter, the socio-political setting that gave reasons for planning the Early Language Learning programmes is described. In addition, the main characteristics of the theoretical background and the educational framework and pedagogical explanations underlying these projects are outlined.

The second chapter gives an insight into the Foreign-Language Teaching programmes and the main features concerning what kind of language is proposed, the type of target and the related characteristics, the teacher's duties and the main problems to face while planning and consequently putting into practice these projects.

The third chapter analyses the other kind of Early Language Learning programmes. In order to understand the basics of Immersion programmes, the concepts of bilingualism and early bilingualism with their respective distinguishing features are introduced. Every aspect of these programs is explored from a linguistic, cognitive and affective point of view.

Finally, in the fourth chapter the research project on which this thesis is based is presented. Providing the outcomes achieved after that twenty-four very young Italian monolingual children have approached to the English language for an exposure of three months within

their formal educational context, it aimed at proving the effectiveness of a foreign-language exposure during the early stages of an infant's growth. It wanted also to discover what kind of linguistic, cognitive and affective achievement could be detected that could be able to enhance the child's development.

Chapter I

Early Language Learning

This chapter provides a general overview of the heterogeneous linguistic framework worldwide and, more specifically, it outlines the currently situation in Europe. As regards the European Union, in the last decades the European Commission has drawn up several documents and action plans which aim at fostering the acquisition of foreign languages. The Council insists on this particular topic in order to guarantee to European citizens all positive advantages coming from multilingualism, a phenomenon that is rapidly expanding nowadays. In addition, the European Commission places the emphasis on the age in which this language acquisition process should take place for the purpose of being efficient. It should occur at a very young age to ensure the favourable effects of multilingualism. This is due to young children's ability to acquire a new language naturally and with a minimum effort. Hence, the European Council is focusing on initiatives to promote Early Language Learning and to support research in this area. The problem to face here regards the heterogeneity of children that made up a class in present days. Everything depends on the teacher who has to choose the most appropriate language-teaching methods and pedagogical approaches to ensure a suitable acquisition of the new language which best fits pupils' particular needs.

1. A General Overview

In this day and age, several empirical studies that has tried to count and list every existing language have been carried out. This is what has been done, for instance, by *Ethnologue*, a comprehensive reference work that is found online. It presents a rigorous and up-to-date catalogue that testify to the existence of more than 7.000 living languages (7.111 to be precise) all around the world nowadays, including idioms and dialects, too. However, not all of them are spoken to the same extent. More precisely, 94% of the entire population speaks 347 languages, which means only 5% of the languages existing. In addition, *Ethnologue* statistics reveals that identifying exclusively monolingual Countries in which only one

language is spoken is not a simple matter. If they do exist, they will probably be isolated States, whether for geographic reasons - such as Greenland - or for political issues - such as North Korea. As a matter of fact, the majority of Countries is characterized by a great variety of languages existing within the corresponding administrative area. For instance, in China 302 living languages are listed, in India an amount of 406 languages are spoken, in Nigeria 525 languages are counted, in Brazil 237, in the U.S.A. 232, in Mexico 292, in the United Kingdom 13 and in Italy 35 languages.¹ From these empirical facts, it can be inferred that contacts between languages available whether within the same Country or in neighbouring Countries are largely frequent.

In addition to this geographical and political distribution of languages, another key factor to take into consideration talking about this topic is the creation of a complex network of social interactions. This includes not only relationships between native people, but also those established between native people and those groups of people immigrated in that Country. As a matter of fact, history bears witness to the powerful effect that migratory flows have had in making a Country population heterogeneous. Human migration is a complex and age-old phenomenon that stretches back to the earliest periods of human history. It has always happened for different reasons: political, social and economic matters, religious issues or business purposes. Nowadays, the estimated number of international migrants is growing rapidly. Statistical research carried out by the Migration Data Portal, the International Organization for Migration and the World Migration Portal demonstrates how it has increased over the past forty-five years. The total estimated number of people living in a Country different from their Country of birth amounted to 257.7 million in 2017², 244 million in 2015, which counted up to almost 100 million more than in 1990 (when it was 153 million), and over three times in 1970 (when it was 84 million)³. From these data it can be inferred that it is not a rare thing that a person comes into daily contact with another language different from the mother tongue.

A foreseeable consequence of these relationships between various languages and people belonging to different linguistic groups is the increasing number of individuals able to use and

1 www.ethnologue.com

2 <https://www.migrationdataportal.org>

3 <https://www.iom.int/wmr/world-migration-report-2010>

speak more than one language in their everyday life. This phenomenon has been defined as multilingualism. Even if empirical research proves its great expansion, it is a common belief that multilingualism is a rare incident. This idea comes from a distorted perspective of reality, which does not take into consideration an overview of all the contacts between different languages and different populations everyday and everywhere in the world. As a consequence, multilingual people are seen as a rare breed. But, actually, multilingualism is a global phenomenon that involves a large number of people of all ages, coming from all over the world, belonging to different social classes. As it has been claimed by the linguist François Grosjean, more than a half of the whole population is multilingual (Grosjean, 1982). From this point of view, it comes to light that monolingualism is considered as the exception, not the rule. The traditional concept of monolingualism is abstract and reflects a theoretical concept rather than a real concrete condition. This conclusion can be deduced from the fact that, in most cases, a person's first language is always juxtaposed in the everyday life with at least one dialect or another language, which can be a second language, a foreign language or the language of instruction. The term first language refers to the native language – also called as mother tongue - to which a person has been exposed from birth within the familiar environment. The first-language acquisition process is unconscious and spontaneous and it is part of the human genetic makeup. Hence, it does not depend upon language teaching and instruction. As regards the second concept, every non-native language acquired in parallel with the speaker's mother tongue is defined as second language. It is a language that co-exists with the first language in the same geographical and political area. As for the mother tongue, the second-language acquisition process occurs naturally thanks to the presence of the language in the environment in which the person lives. On the contrary, a foreign language can be acquired only thanks to specific language teaching as it is not one of the languages generally present in a specific territory. Finally, the language of instruction is considered as the dominant language formally used in education and within the school environment.

2. A Political Issue

As it can be inferred from the preceding paragraph, multilingual speakers outnumber

monolingual speakers within the world population. Moreover, it has been claimed that more than a half of the European population uses at least one language other than the native language in their daily life (European Commission, 2016). As a consequence of the fact that people's exposure to multiple language is continuously increasing everyday, one of the main key focuses of the European Council policies has been multilingualism and linguistic diversity throughout the last two decades. As a matter of fact, the European Commission has made available several action plans, declarations, surveys and reports encouraging multilingualism development and fostering language diversity. For instance, some of the most important cornerstones in this policy drawn up by the European Commission are the “European Council Resolution on Early Teaching and Learning of EU Languages” document (European Commission, 1997), the “2001 European Year of Languages” set of actions (European Council, 2001), the “Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity” action plan (European Commission, 2003), the “New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism” (European Commission, 2005), the “High Level Group on Multilingualism” report (European Commission, 2006), the “Multilingualism: an Asset for Europe and a Shared Commitment” comprehensive document (European Commission, 2008). Since 1997, the concept of multilingualism and its correlated policy actions has undergone considerable changes. As a matter of fact, at the beginning languages were seen as merely tools or sets of skills and the European Council's main focus was on the language learning and teaching processes. Successively, people started becoming more keenly aware of the importance of knowing languages other than the mother tongue as the whole population was changing in nature and becoming increasingly heterogeneous. As a consequence, several language-related policy fields started taking root, in which the economical, educational and professional advantages of knowing and using more than one language were taken into account. As the European Commission wanted everybody to share those benefits coming from foreign languages acquisition, it designed the Multilingualism Portfolio. From here on out, multilingualism was no more considered from an exclusively economical point of view, but also from both a social and individual perspective (Krzyzanowski, Wodak, 2011). As a matter of fact, according to the European Commission, foreign language acquisition would help people to acquire a sense of belonging, citizenship and community, and to increase their awareness of their opportunities, rights and responsibilities as mobile citizens of a

multilingual Europe. Furthermore, taking into account the Lisbon-based “Europe 2020” Programme and its strategies of economic, social and environmental policy, it can be inferred that the European Union is developing a society based upon knowledge as a key factor in moving towards its objective of becoming the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. Learning other languages – and, consequently, multilingualism - contributes to this goal by improving cognitive skills and strengthening learners’ mother tongue skills (European Commission, 2003).

What will make easier to achieve this goal is the effective promotion of foreign language learning within the European Union. This encouragement is reflected in those programs and action plans already put into practice within all levels of education. Not only do these initiatives promote the acquisition of a single foreign language – as it commonly happens throughout Europe – but their purpose is also to encourage the acquisition of two or more foreign languages. These educational programs have been generally introduced in several secondary schools across Europe. In addition, some of the most recent projects drafted by the European Commission are directed to the primary education and they are gradually becoming established in various primary schools. However, what the European Council is aiming at is to broaden these language education programs to an even younger target, such as to the pre-primary school and to early infancy. Thanks to the latest studies and fields testing, researchers have succeeded in demonstrating the effectiveness of foreign language education at an early age due to the innate ability of young children to acquire them naturally and without any particular effort. In doing so, languages acquired early in life will guarantee, in turn, an early development of multilingualism and all the advantages correlated to this phenomenon. This is the main motivation behind the various initiatives that aims to promote what the European Commission has defined as “Early Language Learning” programs (European Commission, 2011).

2.1. The Benefits of Early Language Learning

As evidenced by the paragraph above, the European Commission focuses on very young children as regards the Early Language Learning programs. Early Language Learning at

primary and, above all, pre-primary level means promoting systematic language awareness or exposure to one language – or more – within an early childhood education and care setting in a pre-primary school context. Proposing this kind of programs since infancy will ensure a long-lasting exposure to foreign languages and to multilingualism. As a consequence, those advantages correlated to multilingualism will appear earlier in life and, according to the European Council, this will definitely benefit the child.

Talking about this topic, it is worth recalling that the European Union's motto is “united in diversity”. It symbolizes the important contribution that linguistic diversity and multilingualism is making to the European project. As a matter of fact, the European Union is distinguished above all by its cultural diversity and it has always been based on the respect for this heterogeneity, which finds expression in its great linguistic wealth. The protection of this linguistic and cultural heritage is one of the cornerstones of European construction. As a consequence, one of the main favourable opportunity provided by an early exposure to multilingualism is the development of an open-minded attitude towards other languages and cultures. Early Language Learning can rise the child's awareness about the existence of linguistic diversity and cultural variety all around Europe and across the whole world. It will also foster the child's attitude towards understanding, respect, empathy and tolerance. These states of mind will be helpful in overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers found in the social environment, strengthening social cohesion and intercultural dialogue. Therefore, these education programs by the European Commission addressed to young children should focus on enhancing both language awareness and intercultural awareness, which should become a part of an individual's sensibility towards the nature of language and culture and awareness of their role in human life (European Commission, 2011). Furthermore, a child who is developing knowledge about one or more foreign languages different from his/her mother tongue early in life will have more chances to enhance an intercomprehension ability. As a matter of fact, another purpose of education and particularly of Early Language Learning programs is the willingness to support intercomprehension between European citizens.

Other factors that the European Commission takes into consideration are both the economic aspect of language and the language industry. Foreign language skills acquired early in life are a fundamental feature that shapes the professional development of European citizens and, in

addition, they play an important role in improving employability and mobility across Europe. As a matter of fact, the ability to communicate in several languages is one of the key abilities needed to meet current labour market demands. Multilingualism could be an effective tool also for strengthening European Union's external business relationships in the international and global trade (Krzyzanowski, Wodak, 2011).

Finally, through Early Language Learning, the European Commission aims at developing a multilingual and multicultural identity offering this kind of educational program within a period in which the child is building up his/her whole and complex identity. Hence, linguistic education ambition is to develop not only a mere pragmatic linguistic competence in more than one language, but also an aware understanding of language as part of the child's project of cognitive and cultural growth.

2.2. Why Early Childhood Target: the Critical Period

The fact that the European Commission insists on drawing up action plans targeted to very young children learning a foreign language is scientifically based on Linguistics and Neurobiology research data about infants' cognitive and linguistic development during the language acquisition process.

As a matter of fact, thanks to Linguists, Neurosciences, Cognitive Psychology and Developmental Psychology contribution, specific time windows have been identified within which children's linguistic acquisitional capabilities are at the highest levels and young learners seem to be able to acquire a new language without any significant cognitive effort. These precise time frames during child's development are called critical periods. The first study regarding this area of research was carried out by the linguist and neurologist Eric Lenneberg in 1967. He stated that there are several maturational constraints on the time a language can be acquired and that the most fertile and advantageous period that facilitate the acquisition of a new language is during early childhood and it drastically diminishes with the beginning of puberty (Lenneberg, 1967). Any language learning occurring after puberty will be slower, less successful and qualitatively different. This has been confirmed by in every research carried out in the last decades in which young children always result as superior

language learners when compared to adolescents or adults, in spite of the latter's cognitive superiority. In fact, rapidity in the ability of language acquisition, sophisticated computational skills, a great amount of unconscious mnemonic potential, the imitative processes typical of this period, an advanced sensitivity to phonological and prosodic features of language make infancy the most suitable period to acquire a new language naturally, optimally and effortlessly. Moreover, the language acquired during this particular moment of the lifespan will have characteristics resembling those of the same target language developed by a monolingual native-speaker (Johnson, Newport, 1989). In order to achieve this kind of linguistic competence, an early exposure to other languages different from the mother tongue and their consequent acquisition is therefore essential. Thanks to Johnson and Newport's research on Korean monolingual native speaker learning English, it was possible to draw a graph representing the general relationship between the age of exposure to a language other than the native one and the actual acquired competence.

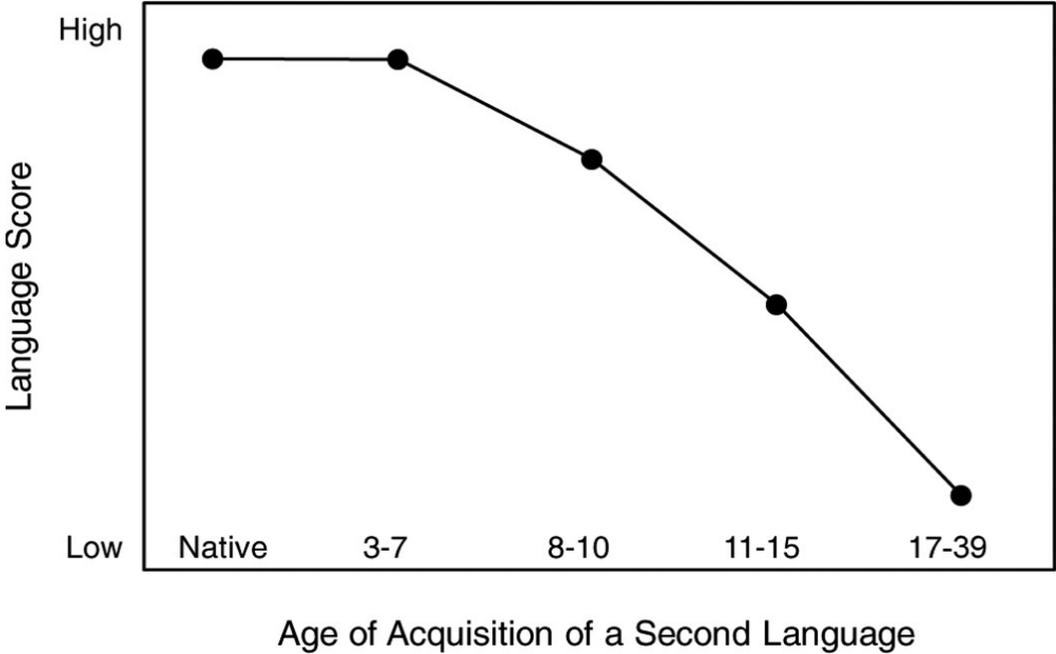


Fig. 1: Language Exhibits a Critical Period (adapted from Johnson and Newport, 1989)

It is worth noticing that this critical period that goes from very early childhood to the beginning of puberty is not an isolated and homogeneous timespan. As Jacqueline S. Johnson and Elissa L. Newport have stated, there is not a strict division between the period in which the language-acquisition process is more effective and the one in which the linguistic development is no longer valid (Johnson, Newport, 1989). In fact, what generally happens after puberty is a slow and gradual decrease of the ability of acquiring a linguistic competence in the new language similar to that of a monolingual native-speaker. In addition, the neurobiologist Eric Knudsen has pointed out that not all the components of language – such as phonology, lexicon, morphology, syntax and pragmatics - are acquired and developed equally and simultaneously during the critical period (Knudsen, 2004). He has postulated the existence of a continuum made up of several sensitive periods that satisfy the specific maturation time required by each linguistic component to develop and achieve a proper linguistic competence.

2.2.1. Phonology

One of the language components that deserves particular attention is phonology. Several field studies have analysed how age can have an effect on the growth of phonetic and phonological competences. After having analysed the existing literature, Jonathan A. Berker, Vincent L. Gracco and Denise Klein have concluded that an early exposure to a language other than the mother tongue positively affects the development of its phonological features (Berken, Gracco, Klein, 2016). This is attributable to the fact that phonology is the language feature most constrained by the age of language acquisition. As a matter of fact, the most favourable critical period to acquire a native-like phonology in a foreign language has been claimed to be within the first year of age. Specific studies on infants' phonetic and phonological perception during the first year of life show how computational, cognitive and linguistic skills combine together to form a powerful learning mechanism (Kuhl, 2010). James Emil Flege has explained this advantage of very young infants through his Speech Learning Model (Flege, 1995). He asserted that language production is influenced by the sounds perception owned by the language learner, which is in turn conditioned by the sound categories already existing in

the child cognitive and linguistic systems. These categories are based on the native language the child has experienced up to that moment. If the sounds of the new language are different from the already acquired ones, the infant is facilitated in the creation of new phonetic and phonological categories. Actually, only young children can benefit from this ability, as adolescents and adults cognitive system does not allow them to establish new sounds categories.

What can be easily deduced from Flege's theory cited above is that during the first year of age the child is able to discriminate and acquire numerous sounds belonging to any language (Flege, 1995). However, after this critical period of innate phonological acquisition, a slow decline of this ability starts. The consequence of this decay can be detected on the fact that it gets more and more difficult acquire a native-like pronunciation with growth and the first traces of a foreign accent insinuate in the individual's phonological system.

In essence, while the infant is an open system continuously evolving and modelling during the period of language-components development – such as phonology – the adolescent and the adult have already processed the cognitive and linguistic abilities acquired over the years into communicative strategies through their mother tongue. Hence, the following language learning processes are necessarily based on this intermediation.

2.2.2. Neuroscientific Explanations

In addition to the age of exposure to a new language, Neurophysiological and Psycholinguistic studies have assigned a prominent role to cerebral maturation as regards the language acquisition process. As a matter of fact, the configuration of the infant's brain has optimal features that can guarantee an excellent language acquisition, which are briefly discussed below.

During the first years of life, the main characteristic of the human brain is plasticity. It is defined as the brain flexibility and adaptability that allowed to modify its structure and its functions according to the neuronal activity in connection with the child's developmental process or as a consequence of external environmental stimuli. Due to this typical structural

alteration, during early infancy the brain is characterized by an intense growth, both at a quantitatively and a qualitatively level. What makes this cerebral re-organization possible is the processes called neurogenesis, synaptogenesis and myelination. Through these procedures neuronal cells are able to establish new synaptic connections, which make possible for neurons to communicate and exchange information coming from the external environment. Myelin - a lipid-rich substance formed in the central nervous system - increases the speed at which information encoded as an electrical signal travels from one nerve cell body to another. The neurogenesis, synaptogenesis and myelination phenomena start before birth during the embryonic stage and they are particularly active during early infancy. They provide an impressive cerebral plasticity to the brain and to the nervous system.

As regards the nervous system, another quality peculiar to young infants is their neurosensory receptivity. Very young children are able to use different sensory modalities to explore the surrounding environment and to interact with it. Hence, the neurosensory experience can be considered one of the child's first way of acquisition. While the infants is experiencing, several synaptic connections are being created at a neurophysiological level, whose settling depends on the environmental feedback. If the child makes an association between the received input and a positive feedback, stable synaptic connections will be guaranteed (Goswami, 2004). The same cognitive process can be applied to language acquisition. As a matter of fact, the language development is deeply linked to the attentional processing of multisensorial data. Hence, the first linguistic analysis occurs at a neurosensory-perception level during early childhood.

Another feature particularly refined in infants is their memory skills thanks to the implicit-memory development followed by the subsequent explicit-memory development. The former type of memory is unconscious and procedural and it is in charge of the acquisition of phonetic, phonological and morphosyntactic features of language. The latter is based on more intentional and aware procedures responsible for semantic acquisition. While during early infancy acquisition is ensured thanks to the implicit memory processes, starting from the eight years old explicit memory strategies play a more important role (Fabbro, 2004).

After having crossed this particular critical period, substantial changes starts taking place. After puberty, the brain gradually loses its cerebral plasticity and starts acquiring a more

rigid structure. As a consequence, it makes more demanding and less natural the foreign language-acquisition process.

These neuroscientific findings support the conviction that an early exposure to a language different from the mother tongue will be advantageous for an innate language acquisition that occurs naturally and effortless.

3. Some Challenges to Face

One of the major problems that education and, in this case, Early Language Learning have to deal with nowadays is the complex heterogeneity of pupils that compose a class. As it can be understood from the first section of this chapter, it is nearly impossible to find an exclusively monolingual class and this is primarily due to human migration occurring in the present days. As a consequence, pre-primary education has to do with children coming from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, speaking numerous languages, with different ethnicities and particular cultural and religious values. Accommodating an increasing diversity of first languages can enriches the variety of the communities involved but, at the same time, it presents a challenge to face as a result of migration flows. The miscellaneous nature of classes calls for a diversified answer to those issues related to language learning. Children with a migrant background who start attending a school in which the language of instruction does not coincide with their first language may be impeded to succeed in their scholastic career because of their low level of competency in the language of instruction. The most significant issue is that children's needs must be addressed first and foremost and that their linguistic and cultural background should always be taken into consideration in order to avoid any negative consequence of language learning. Hence, the most important thing is to ensure to all pupils equal opportunities to access all levels of education and language acquisition (European Commission, 2011).

Early Language Learning programs try to provide these same opportunities to all children they deal with by proposing a range from formal language instruction and language-awareness raising programs to bilingual approaches through full immersion programs. They vary according to the target language, which can be a second language or a foreign language.

The degree of focus and the amount of exposure to the target language are relevant, too. Another factor that influences these types of Early Language Learning approaches is the linguistic context in which the educational program takes place. In any case, these early teaching methods will be further analysed in the following chapters.

Whatever Early Language Learning approach is chosen, continuity in language programs should be ensured through all a person's scholastic career. As a consequence, this will ensure a life-long language learning, which undoubtedly benefits the individual. In fact, empirical evidence demonstrates that a link between pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education will enhance the effectiveness of the language acquisition process and it will give the opportunity of gaining a deep language proficiency.

Another challenge that Early Language Learning has to face is being able to adopt the most appropriate pedagogical process according to the age range of the children it deals with, especially if they are infants. As a matter of fact, pedagogical approaches are a key factor in guaranteeing quality, uniformity and effectiveness of Early Language Learning. As far as infants are concerned, the Early Language Learning programs designed for them are based on approaches such as the Playful Language Teaching, the Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach, which are going to be briefly explained below. In 1990, Giovanni Freddi provided the basis for the Playful Language Teaching, while the Total Physical Response was proposed by James J. Asher forty years ago in 1979 and the Natural Approach was theorized by Stephen Krashen and Tracy D. Terrel in 1983. The key concepts regarding the former of these approaches are expressiveness, multisensoriality, motility, relationality, pragmatism and authenticity (Freddi, 1990). The child needs to approach to the new language with his/her whole sensory faculty as it plays a central role in the child's growth. As explained in the section above, the multisensoriality approach activates the neurological and cognitive systems. Hence, it is important to stimulate the child's sensory perception while he/she is experiencing the new language in order to enhance the language acquisition process. In addition to the stimulation of all the five senses, the linguistic input should be comprehensible, meaningful and presented over and over again. It must refer to something familiar and that corresponds to the child's interest as, for instance, games, songs, nursery rhymes, fairy tales. As the game is one of the child's most natural means of interaction and acquisition, the new

language should be presented within a playful context. In addition, presenting the linguistic input associated with the child's routine will be helpful as it will result concretely linked to a realistic context. As a matter of fact, the routine is of crucial importance within the language acquisition process. The child lives particular scholastic situations everyday to which he/she associates specific linguistic expressions, such as the arrival, the break, lunch time, the nap, the hygiene time. In these cases, the associated linguistic input results as authentic, meaningful and concrete. If a linguistic expression is associated to every ordinary movement or action, the child will carry it out and, consequently, internalize the related enunciation. As regards the second approach presented, the Total Physical Response suggests learning activities in which the child relates to the linguistic input through movement and sensory-motors experiences (Asher,1979). In early infancy, the movement is determining the creation and the development of mental representations, including those concerning language. According to this approach, the child learns a new language doing by himself/herself, playing games and carrying out instructions. This is because language is extremely contextualized and regularly linked to specific actions. Finally, the Natural Approach stresses the emphasis on the child's cognitive and emotional needs and on the importance of communication to acquire a language (Krashen, Terrel, 1983). In order to benefit from Early Language Learning, children need to have a genuine, spontaneous and without-constraints contact with languages that matches their degree of psychological and cognitive development. The learning environment results to be as stress-free as possible. It should be designed in order to stimulate the child and his/her language-acquisition process. With this approach, the linguistic output is not forced, but it is allowed to emerge naturally after infants have been exposed to a large amount of proper linguistic input.

4. Conclusion

The world in which people live nowadays is characterized by a multitude of different languages. Within every Country, they have come into contact giving origin to a heterogeneous mixture of languages and cultures, particularly after all migratory flows that have followed one another. This cultural and linguistic diversity is a treasure for every

Country. However, it must be protected and valorised. As far as Europe is concerned, there is a need for safeguarding multilingualism and, at the same time, promoting it at all levels of education, especially starting from early infancy. This is the reason why the European Commission has drawn up the Early Language Learning program. It encourages foreign language teaching to very young children, as they are able to acquire a language naturally and effortlessly, thanks to their cognitive structure. Early language learning proposes an approach to foreign languages through several programs, that go from a more formal language teaching to immersion programs based on bilingualism.

Chapter II

Foreign Language Teaching

The chapter that follows is going to present some in-depth considerations about one of the approaches proposed by the European Commission's Early Language Learning programs. This approach regards the early foreign-language teaching and learning programmes. It plays a central role with respect to this topic as it is adopted as a means of first approach to a new language with very young children. Formal foreign-language teaching programs intend to expose young learners to a language not present within the environment in which they live. Not only they do it for linguistic purposes, but also to allow young children to develop favourable attitudes towards language awareness, language learning and multilingualism, which are the goals that European Commission aims to. In addition, these programmes help young learners becoming proficient users of foreign languages once they have become adults. This is because these projects usually introduce to the same foreign language that will subsequently be learned in primary and secondary levels of education as part of the formal curriculum (Nikolov, Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2006). The most salient features of early foreign-language teaching programs – such as the language, the main characteristics of the linguistic input, the contexts of use and child-related issues - will be further introduced under this heading. Furthermore, a section will be dedicated to those concerns and criticism that have been made during the last decades by those linguistic and psycholinguistic researchers doubtful about the effectiveness of this approach applied to very young children. Several problematic issues have been debated, even if there are some pieces of evidence that this kind of programs are being used throughout Europe to introduce a foreign language within pre-primary and nursery schools.

1. Foreign Language Teaching Programs

Foreign-language teaching programs designed for young children attending pre-primary and nursery schools have been subjected to several adjustments during the last seven decades.

This is due to the changes in the psycholinguistic and pedagogical perspective under which different foreign-language teaching approaches have been analysed. First of all, during the period between the Fifties and the Sixties, at international level a certain sensitivity to foreign-language teaching to children started to arise across all Europe. This particular attention towards young learners and their acquisition of new foreign languages is also due to research studies within the field of pedagogy, linguistic and psycholinguistic that have started to flourish during that period. Their main contribution was to demonstrate the cognitive, social and relational benefits that spring from the acquisition of one or more foreign languages early in life. A consequence to this interest towards this early approach to foreign languages was the birth of a series of occasional foreign-language teaching experiences within the context of formal educational institutions. The first experimental programmes concerning foreign-language teaching in primary schools date back to the first half of the 1970s and they take root almost everywhere throughout Europe. These programmes laid the groundwork for future experimentations in the primary school. Around the Nineties, the positive outcomes and the benefits resulted from these experienced have convinced researchers and pedagogists to adapt and apply these foreign-language teaching programmes also to even younger children attending lower level of education, that is pre-primary and childcare schools.

Nowadays, various educational projects concerning foreign-language teaching to pre-primary and infancy schools are being established across Europe and they are included in the Early Language Learning programmes. For instance, the main programmes adopted in Italy are “Progetto Lingue 2000”, “Progetto LiReMar”, “Progetto Infanzia”, “Let's Play in English” and the LESI project. Their educational and pedagogical basis are founded in a public document drafted by Ministry of Education in which a general course of action for planning pre-primary school is provided (Cerini, 2012). It concerns the child from a cognitive, affective and pedagogical perspective, the family function, the teachers' role and the educational environment. Other guidelines are supplied by a report edited by MIUR that aim at educating young children so that they will be able to face independently those challenges the contemporary world throw down (MIUR, 2018). Further foreign-language teaching programs within formal educational contexts occurring throughout other European Countries are “Learn the Neighbours' Language” in Germany, “Language Awareness in Kindergarten” in France, “Very Early Language Learning with Bear, Photo Books, Digital Technology and Parents” in

Poland, “Early English in Kindergarten” in Netherlands and “Early Language Learning in preschool” in Slovenia (European Commission, 2011).

As far as the languages proposed in these projects are concerned, European Commission's Early Language Learning programs tend to present a wide variety of foreign languages throughout all Europe. However, the proportion of projects aiming at promoting the English language to all levels of education have been dynamically increasing. As a matter of fact, English is widely taught in formal contexts in the majority of countries nowadays, including infancy, kindergarten and pre-primary schools. Foreign-language learning programs are focusing on an early approach to English due to its leading position of global language (Nikolov, Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2006).

2. Formal Language Teaching Adapted to Young Children

The general overview provided in the first chapter has highlighted the main principles underlying those teaching methods adopted while dealing with very young children. The same principles should be applied in those formal contexts of early education within which infants start approaching to a new foreign language. Even if they are traditional formal settings, pre-primary and nursery schools should guarantee to the child a natural approach to language acquisition. The focus must be on the infant who needs to be guided in his/her process of language acquisition. Infants' innate attitude of acquiring a new language must be enhanced by proposing activities that stimulate their multisensorial perception, their creativity and their call for movement. The comprehensible and meaningful linguistic input must be repeatedly presented during the child's scholastic routine and it should be concretely linked to those educational contexts and situations significant for him/her.

As far as pre-primary and nursery schools are concerned, the main educational purpose of foreign language teaching is to help the child's development process and to enhance his/her cognitive, emotional and linguistic growth. In other words, the foreign language is introduced in these educational contexts in order to contribute to the infant's achievement of those general goals peculiar to pre-primary and nursery schools. This does not assume that the foreign language is isolated from the rest of the educational program becoming a free-

standing subject to be studied and learnt. As a matter of fact, pre-primary and nursery schools do not operate in terms of single subjects. The infant's complete and balanced development is guaranteed thanks to cross-cutting issues which cover various areas. These are commonly known as areas of expertise and concern the growth of the infant from the standpoint of personal identity, knowledge about the world, interpersonal relationships, body awareness, identity and self-awareness, linguistic competence, creativity and ability to express himself/herself not only with words but also through multimediality and body language. As a consequence, foreign language teaching is effective if it operates in collaboration with the other contents of the programme. In doing so, the new language interprets its natural function, that is being the vehicle of contents in these formal educational contexts. This reflects one of the principles of the natural approach to language acquisition. Furthermore, from this perspective, the educational attentional focus must move from the object of learning – that is the new foreign language - to the person who is learning. What really matters is not how many things have been learnt by the child but how the child is experiencing the approach with a language different from the mother tongue during the everyday scholastic routine. Consequently, the emphasis should be on the process of language acquisition rather than the product of language learning (Balboni, Coonan, Ricci Garotti, 2002).

In order to assure a successful integration between the foreign language teaching and the general curriculum, a meticulous planned insertion must occur. Firstly, a general educational goal has to be chosen from among those available in the comprehensive curriculum, which can be cognitive, affective or related to the promotion of precise infants' attitude. Secondly, specific linguistic constructions linked with that particular purpose and relevant to the target of education – that is very young children – have to be identified. They must be promoted through suitable activities appropriate to the children's age range and characteristics. Hence, these activities should support the achievement of both the general educational purpose and the related linguistic objective at the same time. Finally, these activities do not have to be carried out independently from the didactic programming, but they should be chained one another to provide an accurate and reasonable continuity within the educational syllabus (Cameron, 2001). What should be borne in mind is that this integration between linguistic and pedagogical programmes do not have to be planned in advance with a static syllabus as a result. On the contrary, it has to continuously adapt to the infant's demands with the

consequence that its purposes will be always result realistic and linked to the context.

3. The Linguistic Input

The linguistic input typical of the Early Language Learning programmes dealt with in this chapter is provided by a foreign language. The main peculiarity of this type of language is that it is not present within the territory in which it is studied. As a consequence, the source of linguistic input the child's approaches to exclusively comes from the scholastic environment. Because of the fact that the input the child receives is restricted in terms of time, one of the main concerns of Early Language Learning programs related to the achievement of an efficient early language acquisition regards the nature of the input, which should be quantitatively and qualitatively relevant.

As far as quantity is concerned, the foreign-language input should be frequent, redundant and repetitive. In doing so, the infant will benefit from this restrictive but intensive exposure to the foreign language and he/she has the opportunity to fix and acquire the proposed linguistic structures more rapidly.

As regards quality of the input, various parameters must be taken into account. Firstly, the most important thing is that the child must be provided with a clear and formally correct input. During infancy, young children have the innate ability to absorb and capture any sort of information from the linguistic environment in which they are surrounded by. Hence, even a simple mistake in the linguistic input can destabilize their foreign-language acquisition process. Secondly, as the infant is approaching to a new foreign language for the first time, the input must be as accessible as possible. This is the reason why the foreign-language input should resemble the language adults generally use with young children outside the formal educational contexts of pre-primary and nursery schools. This way to talk with infants is defined baby talk. It is also called motherese, if it refers to the language used by the mother towards the baby, or caretaker speech, which relate to the person in charge of raising the child. The baby talk is a simplified way of talking to infants in order to make the foreign language more comprehensible to them. As a matter of fact, the it is characterized by several modifications which occurs at different language levels concerning lexical, morphosyntactic,

paralinguistic, extralinguistic, conversational features. For instance, the vocabulary chosen is concrete, simple and based on words the child commonly hears in the daily life. Onomatopoeias are also usually adopted, as it is the process of creating a word that phonetically imitates, resembles or suggest the sound it describes. As regards morphosyntax, it has to be easy to process by young children. Hence, sentences are short, not complex and coordination is preferred instead of subordination. They follow a fixed pattern which requires that the focus of the conversation is always placed at the beginning of the sentence, while new information is found at the end. Referents of personal, relative and possessive pronouns have to be made explicit so that their relationship within the sentence and the concrete reference to the context are made clear. As far as paralinguistics is concerned, adults talking to infants have to raise the timbre of the voice and their tone is exaggerated. They usually emphasize keywords, especially those relevant in that communicative situation. The speed at which they talk is slowed down using pauses, conversational breaks and a clearer sounds articulation. Extralinguistic strategies are also used to help young children better understand the new foreign language. For example, most of the times adults opt for the use of gesture in order to indicate the referent of the sentence or to mime the action the adult is talking to. Finally, typically employed discursive strategies are repetition, reformulation, explanation, and avoiding interruptions and false starts. Under this perspective, the adult plays the role of a tutor who assists the young child while approaching to a new language and, at the same time, he/she facilitates and simplifies the foreign language acquisition process (Daloiso, 2009).

Sometimes, adults and educators prefer to provide young children with an oversimplified linguistic input in order to facilitate their language-acquisition process. It must be pointed out that the fact that young children follow precise linguistic acquisitional pathways does not mean that the foreign-language input to which they are exposed should be simplistic and poor in terms of structure and contents. On the contrary, the input necessarily has to be significant both from a quantitative and a qualitative point of view. In doing so, infants are exposed to substantial input, which provide young learners with enough pieces of information that allow them to formulate and verify hypothesis about how the foreign language works (Daloiso, 2009).

4. The Teacher

As it can be understood from the sections above, the child can be exposed to the foreign-language input exclusively within the formal educational environment, which refers to pre-primary and nursery schools in the case of Early Language Learning programs. Hence, the main source of linguistic input is embodied by the foreign-language teacher. The teacher is in charge of presenting the foreign-language input, adjusting its quality and quantity, selecting the means and instruments of instruction, choosing the most suitable pedagogical approaches to adopt and he/she proposes the didactic activities and monitors the child's progresses in the foreign-language acquisition process. The teacher can be either a native speaker of the target language or using it as a second or foreign language. In any case, the he/she has a twofold importance. The teacher must own a proper level of foreign-language proficiency as well as an extensive competence concerning pedagogical, psychological and didactic matters. As a matter of fact, the linguistic input provided by the teacher should be suitable for the age range of the children is dealing with and it should be characterized by specific features similar to those explained in the section above. At the same time, while providing the linguistic input, the teacher should support the main pedagogical principles underlying the educational purposes characterizing the general didactic syllabus of the school in which he/she is working. In doing so, the general educational, cognitive and affective development of infants are assured.

In order to propose a comprehensible and meaningful linguistic input appropriate to the infants' age, the teacher carefully selects and graduate the language to propose during the activities planned in the educational program or during those daily activities which mark their routine.

Foreign-language teachers must be aware of the fact that they have the monopoly of the linguistic input, given that the target language cannot be found in the environment outside the educational context. Foreign-language teachers are the only means available to children to come in contact with a new language and its corresponding culture. Hence, they have to ensure an approach to the foreign language as authentic and realistic as possible, even if the language is limited in time and merely linked to the scholastic routine or to the planned activities. In addition, the teacher is dealing with very young children who do not have the

possibility to compare the teacher's linguistic and cultural linguistic model to others, opposed to what older children or adolescents are able to do thanks to technology or to the Internet.

5. The Child

The target of the foreign language teaching programs designed by the European Commission's Early Language Learning is very young children. Generally, they are attending pre-primary or nursery schools. The formers belong to the age group that goes from three to six years old. The latter are even younger, as their age goes from zero to three years old. In the sections that follow the main characteristics are being listed and explained.

5.1. Young Children's Motivation

One of the main arguments for an early approach to a formal foreign-language learning concerns the development of infants' positive attitudes towards the new language and the acquisitional process. This is the reason why motivation in young foreign-language learners has been explored. Several longitudinal linguistic and psycholinguistic studies, such as those of Elisabeth Jantscher and Isabel Landsiedler (Jantscher, Landsiedler, 2000) and Jelena Mihaljević Dijgunović (Mihaljević Dijgunović, 1993), have examined and analysed young learners' motivation and attitudes while acquiring a new language on a large sample and over an extended period of time. The results showed that initial motivation while approaching a new foreign language was closely dependent on the children's attachment to the teacher and it arose from a sense of pleasure and entertainment due to the activities proposed. Taking into consideration the fact foreign-language teaching programs are addressed to very young children, the main key factor able to enhance their motivation is pleasure. This positive emotion results from infants' evaluation of the linguistic input they have received during the scholastic routine and the activities, the tasks carried out and the outcomes achieved during the formal foreign-language teaching project. According to the Stimulus Appraisal theory developed by John Schumann, the linguistic input and the activities offered can be considered relevant by the child and, consequently, they can enhance motivation if they follow five

requirements (Shumann, 2004). Firstly, key features of the proposal should be novelty and originality. Children need to be stimulated everyday with various activities, games and laboratories and the related foreign-language input. If the daily activities fall into banality or monotony, there will be a high probability for infants to get bored and, as a consequence, lose their motivation. Secondly, for the same purpose, these activities should be attractive and engaging in order to maintain child's motivation. Thirdly, feasibility is another essential requirement. Children should perceive the task as possible and achievable. If they consider it as a stumbling block, they will not be motivated to carry it out. Furthermore, linguistic input and activities should be characterized by functionality in order to meet the infant's particular needs. Finally, they should guarantee infants' affective and psychological security. Children have to work in a comfortable and positive environment that do not have to threaten them but encourage their language-acquisition process and personal growth.

According to the “self-determination theory” elaborated by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, this kind of motivation detected in young children exposed to a new foreign language while attending pre-primary or childcare schools has been defined as intrinsic motivation (Deci, Ryan, 1985). It refers to the willingness of starting and carrying out an activity as it is interesting, engaging and satisfying in itself. Moreover, it is defined as the natural, innate and inherent drive to seek out challenges and new activities thanks to those positive emotions and feelings that trigger and maintain motivation – such as pleasure, engagement, curiosity, interest – which stem from the inside of the child.

5.2. Early Foreign Language Production

Testing these foreign-language teaching programmes in formal contexts such as those of pre-primary and childcare schools, experimental studies have found out almost always the same outcomes concerning early foreign-language production (Daloiso, 2009). As a matter of fact, examining these results has revealed that young children display the same linguistic behaviours shortly after few weeks of exposure to the new foreign language. In line with infants' linguistic developmental and acquisitional paths, the following typologies of language production can be observed.

Firstly, the most common type of production detected is reproduction. It is the children's attempt to imitate the teacher's talk. According to linguists and developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget, imitation has been identified as one of the main innate means of language acquisition adopted by infants from birth (Piaget, 1962). This process occurs with a foreign language, too. As a matter of fact, while young children are focused on repeating new sounds and words belonging to the new language they are exposed to, they are internalizing specific foreign-language features that will be helpful for subsequent complex linguistic productions.

Another type of language production identified during the first stages of foreign-language acquisition is the holophrasis, also called one-word utterances. It is defined as the pre-linguistic use of a single word which conveys the semantic content of a whole sentence. Hence, an holophrasis is not mere repetition of sounds or words as it happens with linguistic reproductions, considering that it bears a specific communicative purpose. Combined with infant's body language, gesture, facial expression and a concrete contextualization, holophrasis is usually adequate to express child's needs and requests. The fact that this kind of language production are frequently observed in those children acquiring a foreign language in formal contexts is because of the pragmatic nature of holophrasis. As a matter of fact, infants rely on this kind of production to communicate using the new foreign language as they can meet their own needs with minimum cognitive and linguistic effort, even if their communicative competence is not fully developed yet.

Further products associated to early foreign language acquisition are linked to the previous concept of holophrasis. They are defined as mixed sentences. In this kind of linguistic production, the main communicative focus is expressed with few words in the foreign language, around which the child builds the whole sentence using the first-language morphosyntax, considering that their foreign-language competence is not completely developed to allowed them to produce complex utterances. This is the reason why they are considered as an expansion of an holophrasis. Mixed sentences are correlated to the code-mixing phenomenon, which is typical of bilingual speakers. Hence, it will be deeply examined in the third chapter.

Finally, another example of children's foreign language production is represented by the category of lexical chunks. They are defined as a group of words that are commonly found

together in everyday speech. According to Michael Lewis, who theorized the lexical approach and first coined the concept of lexical chunks in the 1990s, children language-acquisition process is based on the internalization of these common fixed expressions. In addition, he explained that young children acquire lexical chunks as they were a single linguistic unit, without understanding the morphosyntactic, semantic and logical relationships between the elements making up the sentence (Lewis, 1997). This typical characteristic of infants' language-acquisition process puts the emphasis on the fact that the lexicon and its semantic content are central in creating meaning, while grammar plays only a subservient managerial role.

6. Problems Related to Early Foreign Language Teaching

One of the main problematic issues related to these early foreign-language teaching programmes proposed by the European Commission's Early Language Learning project is of a practical nature and originates from administrative and institutional factors. As a matter of fact, these programs are not homogeneously distributed in all pre-primary and nursery schools across all European Countries. This is because of the fact that several of these programs are often carried out in private kindergartens and they are not introduced in the public education yet. In addition, childcare schools are not part of the compulsory education. Hence, not all infants start attending schools before the age of three and, consequently, they do not have the possibility of being exposed to a foreign language through formal language teaching. As a result, these initiatives and action plans concerning foreign-language teaching to young children and infants in formal educational contexts are quite often occasional and of local character throughout all Europe and, above all, in Italy.

There can be negative consequences linked also to the fact that Early Language Learning programmes applied to pre-primary education levels are relatively recent. In fact, as a result of the absence of official guidelines to follow, there is a risk that these foreign-language teaching projects might be planned slavishly replicating those already-consolidated approaches and methods applied in higher levels of education such as primary or even secondary schools. As it has been explained in the paragraphs above, young children

acquiring a new foreign language have particular cognitive, affective and linguistic needs completely different from those of older language learners. As a consequence, even if Early Language Learning projects essentially aim to promote the acquisition of foreign languages, the specific linguistic goals have always to be interrelated to the general cognitive, psychological and affective purposes of early education didactic plans.

Further criticism about early foreign-language teaching programs carried out in formal educational contexts comes from research in the fields psycholinguistic, cognitive and neuropsychology (Daloiso, 2009). Researchers have claimed that foreign languages should not be formally taught in early educational levels such as pre-primary school or kindergartens. The language-acquisition process should be triggered in a natural way following the infant's evolutionary stages that should be supported and fostered. In addition, these researchers have described as inappropriate a formal language-teaching projects applied to young learners because this kind of curriculum is not enough flexible and adjustable to the continuously changing necessities of young children.

Formal foreign-language teaching programs have also been criticised for the amount of linguistic input they provide. Speaking of this topic, it should be borne in mind that the target language is not spoken in the environments outside the infant's educational context. According to the previous line of thought, the main disadvantage related to these projects is the fact that they are realized within a limited amount of curricular time. Moreover, young children are not exposed to the foreign language during all hours of instruction and the exact proportion of experience to foreign language varies according to the different educational systems. As a consequence, children's exposure to the target language is considered as inadequate and not substantial to early language learners. They are not provided with the massive amount of linguistic input that their innate implicit learning mechanisms require (Muñoz, 2008). In order to achieve a significant exposure, it has been claimed by linguists and psycholinguistics researchers that these formal foreign-language teaching programs should take inspiration from those immersion programs based on bilingualism and second-language acquisition, which will be further explained in the third chapter.

7. Conclusion

The foreign-language teaching programs planned by the European Commission's Early Language Learning project are being inserted in kindergartens and childcare schools more and more frequently across Europe nowadays. They are used as an efficient means to promote a language different from the young children's native mother tongue and which is not spoken anywhere else other than the environment outside their school. Because of the exclusive exposure to foreign-language input occurs only during school days, teachers are responsible of providing infants with an input that should be redundant, various, comprehensible, engaging. It does not have to be relegated to few hours a week and to single linguistic activities or laboratories carried out through the foreign language. On the contrary, the child must be exposed to the linguistic input across throughout the whole scholastic routine, resembling those immersion programs typical of bilingual education. In doing so, a natural approach to the target language can be guaranteed and the child's innate language-acquisition process is supported. Furthermore, these foreign-language teaching programmes do not have to be designed in advance. They have to be flexible and progressively planned according to the child's needs considering them not only from a linguistic point of view but also under a cognitive and affective perspective. Their main focus should be the complete growth of the child in all its aspects.

In this day and age, numerous programmes promoting the early acquisition of a foreign language are occurring across all Europe. The positive outcomes and the benefits the infant gains both at a linguistic and cognitive level should be an incentive for those schools in the European Countries that have not introduced these programs in their educational plans yet.

Chapter III

Immersion Programmes

In the first chapter, it has been claimed that the European Commission has designed the Early Language Learning project in such a way that an approach to languages other than the mother tongue can be made possible through the implementation of a continuum of various language-acquisition programs. In the previous chapter the former extremity of the continuum has been introduced, which is represented by the formal foreign-language teaching program. In the sections that follow, the other end of the continuum will be presented. It consists of early immersion programs, which are typically used in a bilingual environment. The main requirement of an immersion programme is that the young learner has to be fully immersed in the target language and this must occur both inside and outside the educational environment. As a matter of fact, the target language used in this project is a second language. The presence of a second language within a geographical and political territory determines the existence of the phenomenon called bilingualism. Researchers and experts in charge of planning these immersion programs have to face several challenges of various nature. Firstly, they should attempt to give an account of the complex and multidimensional nature of bilingualism, trying to formulate a proper and unique definition of this phenomenon. In addition, they have to take account of the heterogeneity of the bilingual population, which differs from Country to Country.

Hence, in order to describe what early immersion programs consist of, an insight into bilingualism – and more precisely early bilingualism - and early second-language acquisition will be further provided in this chapter.

1. What is Bilingualism?

For years on end, researchers and linguists have tried to give a proper definition to the complex phenomenon of bilingualism. Several proposals have been suggested. However, none of them seemed to match with what bilingualism actually is.

On one hand, some experts' attitude towards bilingualism was centred on the concepts of linguistic competence and language proficiency. One of the first definitions was provided by the American linguist Leonard Bloomfield in 1933. His interpretation of bilingualism is based on the perfect mastery of languages. As a matter of fact, in his opinion, a bilingual person should have a native-like control of the two languages (Bloomfield, 1933). Another definition, which excluded those people who do not have the same linguistic competence as monolingual native people, was stated by the diplomatic interpreter Cristophe Thiery (Thiery, 1978). He asserted that a real bilingual person should be mistaken for a native-like speaker by the second-language community. Taking account of these criteria, the majority of the bilingual population, who uses both languages regularly but with a naturally imperfect competence, would be excluded from this kind of definitions and would not receive a proper classification, neither as bilinguals nor as monolinguals. As a matter of fact, this idea of bilingualism was considered as a utopic situation by the researcher Einar Haugen, who highlighted the bilinguals' impossibility to split into two perfect monolinguals (Haugen, 1969). Moreover, these definitions do not specify what is meant by native-like competence, which varies considerably in a monolingual population, too. These are the reasons why bilinguals' linguistic competence and abilities should not be analysed using monolingual standards as assessment parameters. Opposite to this idea of bilingualism, according to John MacNamara everyone could be bilingual since everyone has a minimal competence in at least one of the four main linguistic abilities – listening, reading, speaking and writing - in a second language (Macnamara, 1967). However, this point of view has been criticised for being too imprecise and too generic.

On the other hand, as the native-like linguistic competence criterion does not succeed in providing an adequate classification of bilinguals, a second school of thinking focused on the way in which bilingual people use languages in their daily life. For instance, the researchers William Mackey (Mackey, 1962) and Uriel Weinreich (Weinreich, 1968) defined bilingualism as the alternate use of two languages. Even if there are some extremist members belonging to this second group – for example Nancy Huston, according to which being bilingual means learning two languages from birth and using them alternatively without making any effort (Huston, 2002) – this way of considering bilingualism concentrating upon the usage of language seems to be the most appropriate method to identify who is a real bilingual. As a

matter of fact, all bilingual people use the languages they know for various daily situations, with different people and for several purposes. This behaviour can be explained with what François Grosjean called the Complementarity Principle (Grosjean, 1997). The intersection between these factors creates specific linguistic needs and, as a consequence, corresponding linguistic competence is required, too. In other words, different settings or communicative situations make the bilingual person develop some particular skills in one language instead of the other one. For this reason, the most recent studies about bilingualism - such as Grosjean's research projects – focus on the relationship between the contexts of language uses and the bilingual's competence and proficiency to use that language in that precise context. Hence, the level of mastery of that language depends on the bilingual's need to use it and it is bound to the situation. It is precisely because linguistic needs and uses are different from one person to another that all bilinguals rarely develop equal and total fluency in both their languages. The Complementarity Principle cited above can be graphically represented as in Fig. 1 and it can be used to examine the linguistic situation of all bilinguals.

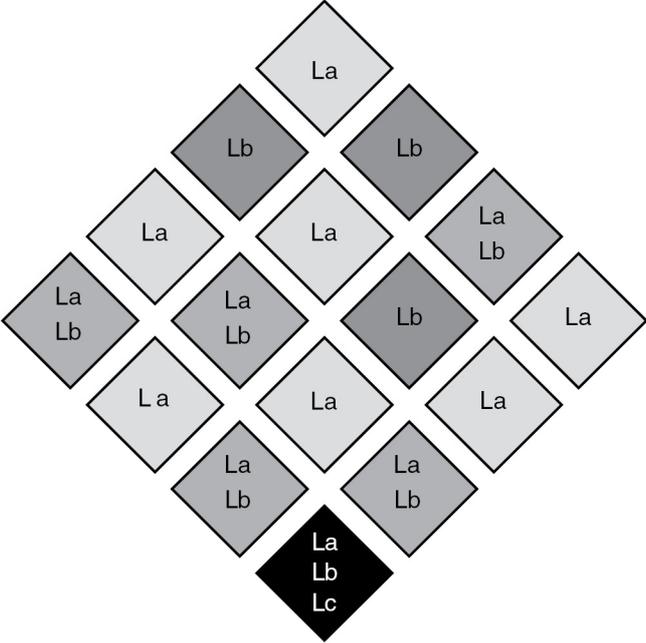


Fig. 1: An illustration of the Complementarity Principle.

In Fig 1, every box represents a different specific domain where the bilingual speaker taken into consideration can choose to use one language or the other one or even both of them. In the black box actually three languages are used. “La” stands for “Language a” which is the first language. Hence, “Lb” is the second language and “Lc” is a third language that can be a foreign language or the language of instruction. The result of this framework is the bilingual's language configuration in his/her daily-life domains. If in one box only one language appears, it means that no lexical, morphosyntactic, semantic or pragmatic competence referring to that context is owned in the other language. Some languages will fulfil more contexts than other. If a language is spoken in more situations and with a great number of people, there will be more probability to develop rather than a language that is scarcely used in few contexts. In addition, it is nearly impossible to find all languages in all life domains.

What must be borne in mind is that the development of a bilingual's language configuration is a dynamic process as new communicative situations, different participants at a social interaction and distinct purposes imply new linguistic needs. Consequently, bilinguals' linguistic framework can change repeatedly over time. Their life alternates between periods of steadiness and moments when languages frameworks are modified (Grosjean, 2010). During these time spans an already existing language can be strengthened, or a new one can be acquired, or processes such as language loss, language attrition or language forgetting can occur. This happens when domains where a language is used are drastically reduced. Pieces of evidence of language loss are hesitation in production, the use of code-switching and code-mixing, a marked pronunciation, morphosyntactic and lexical interferences between languages. However, no specific evidence exists that can prove if a language can be literally forgotten. Probably, a language has not been activated for a long time; hence, it is not possible for a bilingual to use it properly. It is important not to analyse a bilingual's linguistic framework during those transition points because they do not reflect properly his/her real linguistic competence and also because a particular ability could not have been fully developed yet.

As it has come to light, it is impossible to find bilinguals with a native-like competence and with a balanced mastery in both languages. They are part of an heterogeneous group where everyone is unique and characterised by various experiences that have modelled his/her

linguistic background. This is why it can be said that bilinguals place themselves along a continuum in which different contexts and communicative situations and the linguistic competence they require can be individuated. Bilingualism is a dynamic and continuously evolving phenomenon. This is the reason why it is not simple to find a definition able to embrace all its singular facets and its multidimensional nature.

1.1. Types of Bilingualism

Data from the existing literature about bilingualism distinguish several aspects and dimensions that constitute and characterize this phenomenon. Various kinds of bilingualism can be identified according to the level of linguistic competence, the cognitive organization, the age of acquisition and the social context (Bonifacci, 2018). The first criterion draws a distinction between balanced and dominant bilingualism. As regards balanced bilingualism, the person is supposed to own an equivalent level of linguistic competence in both languages. While the second one assumes that one of the two languages – the dominant one - is used more frequently and within a greater number of daily-life domains and its related competence is more developed. Furthermore, the second principle identifies compound, coordinated and subordinated bilingualism. (Weinreich, 1968). They are located along a continuum that goes from the intercorrelation between two language systems to their complete independence. In the former end of the continuum compound bilinguals are found, who associate two linguistic signs systems to a unique meaning system. In the opposite end of the continuum coordinated bilingualism is found, which requires two different and independent cognitive representation systems. Subordinated bilinguals are situated along the continuum and they gain access to the second-language system passing through the first-language framework. The other parameters mentioned above will be further examined in the sections that follows, as they are two relevant criteria in the description on Immersion programs, which is the main focus of this chapter.

1.1.1. Age of Acquisition

The term Age of Acquisition (AoA) denotes the moment in which a monolingual child starts approaching and acquiring a second language. It is the beginning of significant exposure to the second language and the immersion on its related context.

If the child has been exposed to both languages from birth, the resulting type of bilingualism that emerges is called simultaneous bilingualism. Simultaneous bilingual children grow up in a domestic environment where each parent speaks to the child with their own native language or when the parents use the same language different from the language used by everybody else that address the child. Therefore, two languages are acquired naturally and concurrently.

By contrast, sequential bilingualism occurs when the child first develops and strengthen first-language competence and the second language will be acquired later on during puberty, as a consequence of the delayed exposure to it. Sequential bilingual children outnumber simultaneous bilinguals. The child experiences the second-language input at school or outside both the scholastic and the domestic environments. Hence, the new language can be used as the education and schooling time or as the language for social interactions. A peculiar feature of sequential bilinguals is their ability to acquire a new language taking advantage of their first-language knowledge.

Furthermore, another distinction based on the AoA parameter differentiates early bilingualism from late bilingualism. The former, unlike simultaneous bilingualism, does not require the child to be exposed in a comparable way to both languages. What is necessary is that the Age of Acquisition occurs before the third year of age, when the four main linguistic abilities are being consolidated. The latter is similar to sequential bilingualism as it refers to the acquisition of the new language at a later time, for example during puberty.

Age of Acquisition combines with other data from the bilingual's language biography, such as the context of acquisition. Bilingualism can arise from family context or school context. Within the former, two languages are spoken in the same domestic environment. In the latter, the first language is used at home while the second language is learnt at school. Evidence that Age of Acquisition goes together with context of acquisition comes from the fact that simultaneous acquisition of two languages usually occurs in the same family context, while

later acquisition of the second language often take place in a school context (Hamers, J., Blanc M., H., A., 1989).

These concepts presented in this paragraph will be further analysed later on as they represent the core distinction in the target group of immersion programs designed by the European Commission's action plans regarding Early Language Learning.

1.1.2. The Social Context

Another factor that contributes to discriminate other types of bilingualism is the social context in which a bilingual person currently lives. What plays a leading role in this process are particular features such as social representation, ethnolinguistic vitality, cultural values and ideals shared by people belonging to those groups living nearby which are constantly in contact with each other and, consequently, create the right conditions for bilingualism (Hamers, J. F., Blanc, M., 2000). The resulting types of bilingualism are defined as additive or subtractive.

Speaker benefits from living in a social context characterized by additive bilingualism. Numerous advantages in social, relational, working or scholastic level comes from using both languages. This is possible if both languages and their corresponding cultures are seen as complementary and equally important for the bilingual speaker, who attaches importance and positive values to them. Hence, no language prevails over the other.

Subtractive bilingualism can be found when a bilingual's native language is considered a minority language. A language is in the minority condition when it is spoken by members belonging to an ethnolinguistic community which is a minority group compared to the whole community environment. It is defined in this way considering its lower political, economical and social power. As a consequence of this minority status, the speaker tends to use the other language, which is the language economically and socially accepted as more prestigious from people living in that society. This leads to linguistic attrition which is the progressive decline of the first language. Attrition can take the form of total loss of the language, a decrease in its fluency, or the transfer of grammatical structures or lexical items from the second language to

the first one. These languages are no more complementary as they are in competition. For these reasons, it can be asserted that subtractive bilingualism leads to no noticeable advantage. However, the additive-subtractive distinction has not an absolute denotation. On the contrary, it is a dynamic definition as the sociocultural value attributed to a language can change over time depending on social, political and economic variations.

2. Early Bilingualism

The European Commission's target group for the immersion programs delineated in the Early Language Learning project is represented by early bilingual infants.

There are basically two ways through which a young child can come into contact and, consequently, acquire a second language within a bilingual environment: simultaneously or sequentially. They correspond to the two type of bilingualism resulting from the distinction made by the concept of Age of Acquisition in the sections above, which are simultaneous bilingualism and sequential bilingualism.

2.1. Simultaneous Bilinguals

On one hand, from the point of view of researchers such as Janet F. Werker and Krista Byers-Heinlein, a child can be identified as an early bilingual if he/she has been balancedly exposed to two languages from birth and generally before the third year of age within the family environment (Werker, Byers-Heinlein, 2008). In the existing literature, this has been considered as the critical period within which the acquisition of a second language follows the same developmental pathways of the first-language acquisition. In the domestic background in which the infant has grown up both languages are spoken equally, hence with the same regularity and without distinctions regarding the domain in which they are used, the interlocutors, the purposes of the communicative interactions. Simultaneous bilinguals start distinguishing, understanding and acquiring two languages during the first year of age. This simultaneous acquisition of two languages has been defined in literature as Bilingual First

Language Acquisition (Genesee, Nicoladis, 2009).

2.1.1. A Unitary Language System or a Double Language System?

The fact that these children are exposed to two languages in parallel has made linguists and researchers thought that bilingual infants go through an initial stage in which their two languages are fused together. This belief is what the Unitary Language System Hypothesis is based on. The main supporters of this thesis are Werner Leopold and Volterra and Taeschner . The former has published one of the most comprehensive case study about simultaneous acquisition of two languages (Leopold, 1970). He analysed and documented his bilingual daughter Hildegard, her behaviour, her performance in both language and her most relevant linguistic achievements. He supported the idea that Hildegard combined her two languages - English and German - in a single and undiversified linguistic system and that she was not able to separate the linguistic codes until she turned two years old. As far as the latter are concerned, the model Volterra and Taeschner have postulated is composed by three developmental stages (Volterra, Taeschner, 1978). Firstly, in the early stage of the bilinguals' language-acquisition process, they assumed the presence of a single linguistic system able to combine every word and morphosyntactic principle coming from both linguistic input. Secondly, two distinct lexical systems are developed, but the morphosyntactic system does not evolve. Finally, the morphosyntactic system split into two different systems. This is the moment when the bilingual child gets to have two separate linguistic codes and, so, it is only by the third year of life that the differentiation process starts, by which bilingual children can separate lexicon and grammar belonging to the two languages. Hence, according to Volterra and Taeschner's point of view, it is only by three years of age that a child can be considered a truly bilingual and, before that moment, the initial state of the bilingual's linguistic development is essentially monolingual. These concerns resulting from the comparison of a bilingual's developmental path to that of a monolingual acquiring the same language can be misleading.

In doing so, there could be the possibility to fall into error as it happened in the past – as it has been explained in the first paragraphs of this chapter – that is comparing bilingual linguistic

competence to the corresponding native-like monolingual proficiency in both languages. As a matter of fact, a bilingual speaker should never be considered as the sum of two monolingual speaker (Grosjean, 2008). Furthermore, there are several pieces of evidence that reveal the extent to which bilingual first language acquisition actually differs from monolingual acquisition in certain aspects and in particular moments of the initial stages of language-development process. As a matter of fact, contrary to the claims made by supporters of the Unitary Language System Hypothesis, bilingual infants acquire language-specific properties of the target languages early in development. This provides the basis for the Double Linguistic System Hypothesis, which completely discredits the Unitary Language System Hypothesis. For instance, as far as morphosyntax is concerned, Joanne Paradis and Fred Genesee found out that young French-English bilinguals - two and three years old - were able to use correctly subjects pronouns in French exclusively with finite verbs and subject pronouns in English with both finite and non-finite verbs (Paradis, Genesee, 1996). Hence, these young French-English bilingual children behave in accordance with the status of subject pronouns in French as clitics or agreement markers. In addition, these children could properly place verbal negatives after lexical verbs in French but before them in English as according to the rule. Other pieces of evidence proving that bilinguals' early stage of language acquisition is not confused and merged as a monolingual-like system come from lexicon. It is commonly known that monolinguals' acquisition of new words is a process ruled by the principle of Mutual Exclusivity. It is defined as a word-learning constraint that involves the tendency to assign one and only one name to a single object and, consequently, it avoids assigning a second label to the same object. In other words, it is the assumption that new words always tend to refer to new referents. However, on the other hand, bilinguals' lexicon development is based on the acquisition of translation equivalents. These are words found in each language of a bilingual speaker that have the same referential meaning. They are also called cross-linguistic synonyms. Bilingual infants are able to produce these translation equivalents from the time they begin to speak and these cross-linguistic synonyms represent 43.8% of their lexicon, as it has been evidenced by a great number of empirical research studies by Barbara Zurer Pearson, Sylvia Fernández and Kim Oller (Pearson, Fernández, Oller, 1995), Elena Nicoladis (Nicoladis, 1998) and Dörte A. Junker and Ida J. Stockman (Junker, Stockman, 2002). This high rate of translation equivalents represents a clear example of violation of the

Mutual Exclusivity Principle, which suggests that even in the early stage of their language acquisition process young bilinguals have two distinct lexical systems. Finally, other studies about bilingual toddlers give evidence of the existence of two phonological systems in the early stages of language-acquisition process. Researchers have found out how bilingual children differ from monolinguals as regard prosodic and segmental phonology thanks to their ability to discriminate sounds belonging to different languages. For instance, Jacques Mehler, Emmanuel Dupoux, Thierry Nazzi and Ghislaine Dehaene-Lambertz (Mehler, Dupoux, Nazzi, Dehaene-Lambert, 1996) and Laura Bosch and Nuria Sebastián-Gallés (Bosch, Sebastián-Gallés, 1997), studying speech perception during the pre-verbal stage of bilingual linguistic development has demonstrated the young children's ability to distinguish their native language from a foreign language if these languages belong to different rhythmic group, as for example Russian and French. What is more, they are able to distinguish two languages associated with the same rhythmic group – as Spanish and Catalan – by the age of four months and a half.

These data resulted from language acquisition research prove that young bilingual infants do not have a single merged linguistic system, which would not allow them to distinguish two languages and, consequently it would make them behave like monolinguals. On the contrary, they have two distinct lexical, morphosyntactic and phonological systems, through which they are able to differentiate, handle and acquire two different languages. Young children will quickly demonstrate the ability to keep their languages separated. In addition, they display an early-developing understanding of when and with who one or the other of their language should be used (Fantini, 1985).

2.1.2. Similarity Between Monolinguals and Bilinguals

What monolingual and bilingual children have in common is the presence of some developmental milestones in their language acquisition process. First of all, monolinguals and bilinguals share the same canonical babbling period. It is a stage in child development during which an infant starts experimenting with the articulation of sounds, but does not yet produce any recognizable word. This period begins shortly after birth and evolves following several

stages, through which the child's repertoire of sounds expands and his/her vocalizations become more speech-like. Hence, the babbling period ends when infants begin to produce distinguishable words, that is around twelve months of age. During this stage, bilingual toddlers are able to generate sounds and phonemes of both their languages (Andruski, Casielles, Nathan, 2014). What deserves considerable attention is the fact that bilingual infants develop language-specific features within the same age range attested in monolingual children learning the same languages. Another fundamental milestone in language development is the holophrastic stage that goes from thirteen to twenty months of age. It is also called one-word stage as the child produces stretches of languages consisting of a single word conveying the whole semantic content of a complete sentence. During this phase, bilingual children use words from both languages, showing the presence of their double linguistic code. Cross-linguistic research found in literature reveals that the subsequent milestones in both monolingual and bilingual language acquisition develop in parallel and at the same rate. Results from analysis of a bilingual's languages through fixed development indexes show that they follow the same development pathways equal to those of monolinguals of the same age. As a matter of fact, the child – whether monolingual or bilingual - moves from one-word sentences to more elaborated utterances between eighteen and twenty-four months of age. Afterward, at around three years of age, the child's discourse is marked by telegraphic speech characterized by few simple words but no grammatical element is detected (Santrock, 2008). From here on out, sentences become more and more complex displaying the proper use of morphosyntactic rules.

2.2. Sequential Bilinguals

Sequential second-language acquisition occurs when a young child begins to approach and learn the second language after the basis for the first language has been at least partially established. Sequential bilinguals do not have the possibility to grow up in a perfectly balanced bilingual context in which the two languages are spoken to a similar extent. For instance, they could have been exposed to the second language at a later time as a consequence of migration conditions and thanks to educational contexts, such within the

childcare centre or the pre-primary school. Even if the second-language exposure occurs after the first-language knowledge has been developed, there is the possibility for these young children to achieve a native-like linguistic competence even in the second language. As a matter of fact, researchers such as Patricia K. Kuhl, Feng-Ming Tsao and Hwei-Mei Liu proved the infants' ability to learn from a short foreign-language exposure outside the domestic environment (Kuhl, Tsao, Liu, 2003). This kind of exposure can guarantee a linguistic competence similar to a native-like speaker (Verhoeven, 2007).

As far as sequential bilingual infants are concerned, second language development and acquisition follow four main steps, as it has been claimed by Patton O. Tabors (Tabors, 1997).

The first stage is determined by constant presence of the home-language use. As a matter of fact, when a child is introduced for the first time into a setting where everyone is speaking a different language, he/she keeps using his/her mother tongue, even if nobody else practices it and, consequently, do not understand it. During this period infants become aware of the fact that not everyone speaks and understands their language, that people who do not use their language use another different language, and that if they want to communicate they need to learn this new language.

After the child realizes that speaking their home language does not lead to any successful communication, he/she abandons any attempt to communicate in the home language, entering a period where he/she rarely speaks. This period has been analysed by a number of researchers who termed it as the silent or mute or non-verbal period. The fact that during this phase young children stop producing utterances does not necessarily mean that they stop communicating. In fact, they rely on a combination of nonverbal techniques - such as facial expressions, gesture and body language - as a means to communicate, getting attention, requesting, protesting. In doing so, they can participate successfully in interactions in a way that it would not be possible if these techniques were not used. In the past, the phenomenon of the salient period has been commonly examined under a wrong perspective that considered this stage as a negative consequence of the child's exposition to two languages. In actual fact, during this period the child is collecting information and trying to acquire salient features, words and sounds of the new language and, so, it is a period of active language learning. This data-gathering operation is based on two strategies: spectating and rehearsing. With the

former strategies the child is an active observer and is focusing on the language that is being used. The latter refers to the verbalization process of the second-language learner which has not a communicative purpose, but it indicates that the child is working on producing the new language. Children usually rely on repetition of sounds and words as part of the rehearsing process and they do it in a quiet way as it is a sort of private speech. In doing so, infants are taking phonological and lexical control over their second language.

The child is now ready to start using the new language. He/she does so adopting telegraphic speech that involves the use of formulas. They refer to unanalysed lexical chunks, which are a group of few content words used as a complete sentence. They are simple repetitions of what the child has heard by the native speakers. Second-language learners are usually quite quick in acquiring those telegraphic and formulaic phrases that help them to interact with their peers.

Finally, the child goes beyond telegraphic or formulaic sentences and starts processing his/her own utterances. This is the period of productive language. In the first stage of this period the child may use simple grammatical patterns, but over time he/she will gain control over the structure of the new language. Errors are common during this period as children are experimenting with their new language and learning its rules and structure. These four stages are not fixed, do not have a predetermined length and do not mutually exclude one another. On the contrary they are quite flexible, follow a different progression and are sensitive to characteristics of the child as well as the language learning environment (Espinosa, 2010).

3. The Bilingual Advantage

As it has been claimed by Jim Cummins, those situations of early bilingualism, whether simultaneous or sequential, foster the development of infants' cognitive abilities (Cummins, 1978). During the last decades, researchers have demonstrated the fact that very young bilinguals can rely on a greater metalinguistic competence, cognitive flexibility, inhibition ability, divergent thinking. These have been defined as horizontal or general cognitive functions. Their main characteristic is the integration of various pieces of information coming from the external environment and they work controlling and having recourse to those vertical or specific cognitive functions, such as reading, writing, calculation, language computation,

which operate in an almost entirely independent way one from the other.

Hence, cognitive flexibility, the ability of inhibition, divergent thinking, problem solving skills and metalinguistic awareness are benefits that characterize young bilinguals and they constitute what has been called the bilingual advantage. An early exposure to two language during the early stages of a child's development will lead to the innate acquisition of all these advantageous cognitive resources which will be a great help to the individual for the whole life. Not only will these benefits be useful in carrying out verbal task, but they will be helpful in all daily-life domains, too.

3.1. Cognitive Flexibility

Research about the bilingual advantage started in 1962 with Elizabeth Peal and Wallace Lambert's pioneering study (Peal, Lambert, 1962). Prior to this research, several empirical studies found that bilinguals were linguistically deficient compared to their monolingual counterparts. In fact, bilinguals were shown to suffer from several linguistic disadvantages compared to their monolingual counterparts, such as an inadequate linguistic articulation, the habit of making more grammatical errors and a considerably reduced vocabulary. This led to the conclusion that bilinguals suffered from a language handicap, which had a negative impact in the individual's intellectual abilities and cognitive potential, too (Hakuta, Diaz, 2014). However, the majority of early studies suffered from a wide range of methodological problems concerning the setting, the sample, the procedures. As a result, outcomes achieved with these studies were almost always unreliable. As a consequence, Peal and Lambert tried to assure the selection of balanced bilinguals coming from the same cultural and socioeconomic background. In their experimental study, they assumed that both monolinguals and bilinguals might display the same patterns and equal results in non-verbal tasks, while monolinguals might overcome bilinguals in verbal tasks. However, the obtained results disprove the researchers' assumption. As a matter of fact, bilinguals obtained higher scores than monolinguals both on verbal and non-verbal tasks. In addition, their greater advantage was observed in those tasks that required a cognitive reorganization. It was thanks to these revealing outcomes that the concept of cognitive flexibility was introduced. The early

bilinguals' advantage analysed in terms of cognitive flexibility identified by Peal and Lambert has been taken up by other experimental studies carried out by Ellen Bialystok (Bialystok, 1999) and Philip David Zelazo, Douglas Frye and Tanja Rapus (Zelazo, Frye, Rapus, 1996). They have proposed to young children a selection task in which they had to order some cards according to a specific criterion, which was changed by the researchers at a certain point of the activity. When this task was handed out to monolingual infants, variations in the selection criterion has usually caused an increase on the rate of mistakes as young children continued applying the previous criterion. On the contrary, early bilinguals achieved a better performance as their reaction time to the change in the criterion was shorter compared to that of young monolingual speakers. These results support the idea of bilinguals' cognitive flexibility and their ability to switch from one task to another and to adapt to changes regarding rules.

3.2. Inhibition

The concept of cognitive flexibility has also been analysed considering the specific cognitive processes underlying it. As a matter of fact this bilingual innate ability can be decomposed to various subcomponents. One of these components is represented by the bilinguals' inhibition ability. According to David Green's inhibitory hypothesis (Green, 1998), bilinguals are able to inhibit irrelevant stimuli on one language while using the other in a communicative interaction, so that linguistic input of lesser importance do not influence the successful outcomes of the activity. Hence, bilingual speakers are able to control and focusing on the target language they are using in a particular situation while excluding the other inadequate one at the same time. Not only is this ability applied in verbal tasks, but it is also generalized to non-verbal activities.

One of the main tests commonly used by researchers who want to measure and evaluate a person's inhibitory abilities is called Simon task and it was designed by the researchers Simon and Ruddell (Simon, Ruddell, 1967). In their experimental studies, they asked to participants to respond to certain stimuli presented in the left or right side of the computer monitor by pressing the corresponding buttons in the keyboard. For instance, they were asked to press the

left button when they saw the red colour or the button on the right when they saw the green colour. Simon and Ruddell noticed that when the stimulus appeared in the same side of the right answer – for example a red stimulus on the left – the response time were faster and this was defined as congruent condition. On the contrary, when the stimulus appeared in the opposite side – for example the red stimulus on the right - the response time was slower and this was called incongruent condition. The difference in response time between congruent and incongruent conditions has been defined as Simon effect, which usually ranges between twenty and thirty ms. Ellen Bialystok has applied the Simon task in her experimental study which compared young bilinguals and monolinguals' response time (Bialystok, 2006). She has found out that very young bilinguals have faster response time in incongruent conditions compared to their monolingual peers.

3.3. Divergent Thinking

Early bilingualism has also been claimed to foster and enhance a divergent thinking behaviour (Grosjean, 2008).

From a linguistic perspective, bilinguals are able to separate the form and the sound of a word from its meaning or reference since early childhood. In other words, they quickly understand that something can be called in different ways according to the language used. Going through the outcomes achieved by Jim Cummins and Merrill Swain, it can be concluded that young bilingual child are more sensitive to semantic relationships between words and aware that these relationships are based on arbitrary associations between words and referents (Cummins, Swain, 1986). Hence, young bilingual children early acquire the basis of semiosis and the meaning making process, which are the conventionality and arbitrariness that characterize the matching signifier and meaning. This results from the fact that acquiring two languages at an early stage of development influences the child's way of thinking. Bilingual infants experience linguistic inputs from two codes and they learn two words to name one object or event. This innate ability cannot be encountered in monolingual infants. They cannot gain advantage from divergent thinking, as they can only rely on a convergent way of thinking.

In addition, from a more general perspective, the concept of divergent thinking can also be linked to bilingual's creativity and ability of problem solving. As a matter of fact, divergent thinking is defined as the ability to find alternative, unusual and creative solutions while facing a problem. According to Joy Paul Guilford, divergent thinking is characterized by four main features (Guilford, 1967). Firstly, fluency is a quantitative parameter which indicates the ability to generate several potential creative ideas connected with the situation. Secondly, flexibility concerns mental fitness and an open-minded attitude that allow the individual to pass from one task to a completely different one. Moreover, originality refers to an individual's attitude of formulating authentic, unique and personal ideas. Finally, processing these ideas into concrete actions. If bilinguals can rely on the innate ability of divergent thinking, as a consequence they are able to manage with problem solving activities. Ronald Kessler's research proves that while young children were undergoing a task that evaluated their creativity, bilinguals proposed more complex and sophisticated solutions than monolingual peers (Kessler, Quinn, 1980).

3.4. Metalinguistic Competence

Another area of interest examined by several researchers concerns metalinguistic abilities typical of young bilinguals. Metalinguistic awareness involves the ability to objectify language, to explicit knowledge of its functions and structures and to focus on its form rather than its meaning. Children exposed to two languages from an early age are able to analyse their languages in every aspect, that is from a phonetic, phonology, morphosyntax, semantic point of view. In addition, not only are they aware of linguistic components, but they are also able to speak about them. Young bilinguals consider language not merely as a means of communication but also as a complex system to reflect on. Generally, young monolingual speakers use their language automatically and mechanically. In other words, they know how to say something but they do not know why they use those specific words. There is no reason why they should make a demanding cognitive effort to understand how the structures and properties of their language work.

4. Immersion Programs

Immersion programs correspond to another approach proposed by the European Commission's Early Language Learning. The main characteristic of these programmes is that they are based on bilingualism. They are typically adopted in those early educational contexts surrounded by a political and geographical area in which two languages are normally spoken, or they are proposed in those pre-primary and nursery schools that deal with immigrant children. Hence, immersion programs have to take into account the heterogeneity of the target they are addressed to in order to be successful and efficient. They have to apply proper strategies to accommodate both simultaneous and sequential bilinguals' needs and necessities.

Furthermore, one of the main purposes underneath the support of immersion programs by the European commission is related to those cognitive advantages discussed above that a child can benefit of while being exposed to two language from early stages of development.

As far as Europe is concerned, experimentations of immersion programs are occurring in those Countries in which there is a presence – whether more or less strong - of a second language, which can be in a situation of equality or minority from a social and political point of view. For example, one of the immersion programs supplied by the European Commission's Early Language Learning project is called “Swedish Immersion for Finnish-Speaking Children” and it has been adopted in Finland pre-primary schools.

In the following sections the main features and characteristics will be examined.

4.1. Linguistic Input

Thanks to European Commission's immersion programmes, young children are constantly exposed to a linguistic input which is provided in second language. The main feature that characterizes a second language is the fact that it is a language that the child normally finds also in those natural settings outside the educational context. Hence, the child is significantly exposed to the second language in every authentic domain of the daily life. As a consequence of these several linguistic sources, the linguistic input is substantial, various and not confined to a mere scholastic context. Therefore, the second-language acquisition process is influenced

by all the environment that a child experiences. The fact that the second language can be found in the geographical and political area in which the child lives, it should be acquired in a spontaneous way. The promotion of a natural approach to a second language and its implicit acquisition are some of the central issues of Early Language Learning and immersion programs.

4.2. The Child

The immersion programs designed by the Early Language Learning project outlined by the European Commission are adopted by schools in which a great variety of students can be encountered. For example, in those contexts in which a language is normally spoken within a specific geographical and political area as it is accepted as an official second language, the group of children constituting a classroom will be quite homogeneous. As a matter of fact, all children will find themselves in the same linguistic level both in their first and second language. In addition, they share the same socio-cultural background. There are other several circumstances in which immersion programmes are introduced in the educational plans of a school. This is the case concerning those infants who come from migration situations. They are immersed in a new language and they must be helped in their second-language acquisition process and, above all, in the social integration process. As far as this particular case is concerned, classrooms will be made of young children characterised by distinct first languages, different levels of second language ad various cultural background.

The European Commission's Early Language Learning and immersion programmes have the responsibility to enhance the value of every child they deal with, whatever the linguistic situation or cultural background are.

4.2.1. Motivation

Generally speaking, either in those contexts in which a second language is naturally presents in the geographical and political area in which the child lives or in those situations of migrations, several types of motivation are involved.

Firstly, one kind of motivation related to young children is based on the Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination theory. They defined it as intrinsic motivation and, as it has been explained in the second chapter, it stems from pleasure and positive emotions the young child experiences during both those activities proposed in an immersion program and those daily moments in which he/she is exposed to the second language (Deci, Ryan, 1985).

The second type of motivation involved in immersion programs is based both on the Self-Determination theory and also on the model proposed by Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert. As a matter of fact, these researchers have identified another kind of motivation that takes part on the second-language acquisition process (Gardner, Lambert, 1972). Deci and Ryan have defined it as extrinsic motivation, while Gardner and Lambert have called it instrumental motivation. In second-language acquisition contexts, this type of motivation focuses in particular on the objective to be pursued. This type of motivation is practical and utilitarian. In the case of immersion programs and second-language acquisition, a child's extrinsic or instrumental motivation is practically linked to the infant's essential need to communicate.

A further kind of motivation identified by Gardner and Lambert corresponds to the integrative motivation. It is typical of those learners which aim at acquiring the second language in order to become integrated within the society of the Country they are living in and within the community in which the second language is spoken. Hence, integrative motivation is connected with the development of additive bilingualism and the corresponding positive attitude towards the advantageous interrelation between languages and cultures.

4.2.2. Early Linguistic Output

Until the 1970s, it was a common belief considering early bilingualism as a negative condition. This inference was based on tangible features of young bilinguals' behaviours and on characteristics emerged while they were speaking. For example, people thought that bilinguals' typical trait of passing from one language to the other one in the same communicative interaction or even within the same sentence was a damaging consequence of being bilingual. It was considered a random mixture of two languages adopted by lazy

children who do not care about how they are speaking. This kind of behaviour was thought to be the consequence of an unbalanced and incomplete linguistic competence in both languages that could lead to a wrong cognitive development. It was also compared to semilingualism, a condition in which a child speaks several languages but with a scarce level of development and low degree of competence, with evident deficiencies in all languages (Haugen, 1969). Furthermore, the most radical opinions sustain the idea that early bilingualism could lead to Specific Language Impairments such as Aphasia and Anomia. Specific Language Impairment is diagnosed when a child's language does not follow typical developmental path. Hence, it cannot be accounted for generally slow development, physical abnormality of the speech apparatus, hearing loss, autism spectrum disorder, apraxia or acquired brain damage. Specific Language Impairment usually results from the influence of various genetic variants combined with environmental features. Aphasia is the inability to understand or formulate language because of damages to specific brain regions, which are caused by strokes or head traumas. Anomia is a form of Aphasia that causes the patient's inability to recall the name of everyday objects or give them a proper definition, even if he/she is able to recognize them. These are the reasons why parents, educators and teachers have always discouraged people and, above all, children to use more than one language in their daily-life.

Contrary to those unfounded misbeliefs, psycholinguistic research and empirical studies have confirmed that the usage of both languages in the same communicative situation is peculiar of the bilingual population. It is an oral ability governed by precise rules that requires a high degree of language competence. Rather than representing an inaccurate behaviour, this process states a person's level of bilingual competence (Poplack, 1980). The main types of bilinguals' linguistic output which can also be detected in those children attending immersion programs will be discussed in the sections that follow.

4.2.2.1. Linguistic Modality

If the term communicative competence for a monolingual speaker includes knowledge about language – in conjunction with phonetic, phonology, morphology and syntax –, about how to use it in order to communicate efficiently considering the interlocutors, the topic and the

purpose of the interaction and about nonverbal communication – that is gesture, posture, facial expression -, a bilingual should be able to apply this kind of knowledge to both languages. In addition, bilinguals should know how, when and with who use a particular language instead of the other one. This process has been defined as language choice and it can be outlined in the following steps. Firstly, before the interaction starts, both languages are deactivated. Secondly, when the communicative exchange takes place, the bilingual speaker promptly decides which is the most suitable language for that specific kind of communicative situation. Thereafter, the speaker makes a brief assessment whether the second language can be used in the same interaction. If this is not possible, the speaker is said to be in the monolingual modality as only one language is activated. This happens, for example, when the interlocutor does not know or does not want to use that language, or because it is not a socially accepted language. On the contrary, if the interlocutor and the communicative situation allow the use of the second language too, the speaker finds himself/herself in the bilingual modality. The monolingual modality and the bilingual modality represent the ends of a continuum. In their daily-life, bilinguals can be located in different points along this continuum and, consequently, in various linguistic modalities. The definition of linguistic modality has been given by François Grosjean who described this phenomenon as the language-activation condition and the bilingual's procedures of language processing at a certain time and place (Grosjean, 2008). Bilingual speakers differ one another in the way they move along the linguistic-modality continuum and, depending on the situation, they can choose to adopt various procedures to carry on their interaction.

4.2.2.2. Code-Switching

As it has been explained before, if the young bilingual speaker is situated towards the bilingual-modality end of the continuum, both languages can be used in the same conversation. This functional interchange of languages within the same social interaction is called code-switching. It occurs in conjunction with changes in the main contextual variables belonging to the communicative situation, such as the interlocutor, the topic, the communicative function, the location. As matter of fact, bilingual children demonstrate to

have a major sensitivity to characteristic of sociolinguistic interactions. They can switch to the other language to point out variations in the interlocutors, for example either when the latter speak different languages and the infant wants to be understood in the best way possible by everyone or if the bilingual child addresses to a particular monolingual person. Early bilinguals usually start the interaction with one language and when variations in the interlocutor occur they switch the level of language activation - this process cannot occur in the monolingual modality (Grosjean, 1982). In addition, code-switching is employed to emphasize a change in the communicative function or in the topic of the conversation. In these cases, the language more functional to carry on the interaction in the best way possible is selected by the child. The language choice depends also on the type of location in which the communicative interaction takes place. Moreover, young bilinguals prefer to use one language instead of the other one to compensate for a low degree of their linguistic competence in that particular language or just because they want to be clearer and more accurate as some particular concepts are better explained in a language rather than the other one.

Empirical studies have called attention to the interrelation between phonetics and code-switching (Grosjean, 2008). As a matter of fact, researcher have found out a sudden changeover of sounds, prosody and intonation from one language to the other one just as code-switching occurs.

Mastering linguistic preferences according to changes on contextual variables indicates that, even if very young, bilingual children are able to use their developing languages appropriately and this reflects their bilingual communicative competence.

4.2.2.3. Code-Mixing

The frequent and intensive exposure to a second language during the age range around the third year of age has a strong impact on the young child's communicative competence. As a matter of fact, the linguistic output, which can also be found in the immersion programs, shows signs of this positive juxtaposition of two languages through the production of mixed sentences. The code-mixing phenomenon is typical of early bilinguals, who usually combine together their two languages as they do not possess a complete competence and awareness of

the two codes in the first stages of language acquisition. This depends on the fact that young children's communicative intention and need to communicate overwhelm the choice of the means of communication. Hence, in order to achieve their communicative purpose, infants adopt every language and linguistic resources at their disposal.

Therefore, like code-switching, code-mixing concerns the interchange of language, too. But, on the contrary of code-switching that is an inter-utterance mixing, this phenomenon is defined as an intra-utterance mixing and gives rise to multilingual mixed sentences (Genesee, Nicoladis, 2006). Phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical features of one language are mixed together in the same clause with features belonging to the base language chosen for that interaction (Genesee, 1989). Moreover, code-mixing does not depend on variations in the communicative situation as it was said before. It is neither intentional nor used to perform a specific communicative function. Young bilingual speakers usually opt for code-mixing to compensate for a defective linguistic competence or to communicate in a more efficient and precise way. As a matter of fact, when infants are not able to access the right words in the base language, they pass to the other language to search for the more appropriate term to express what they want to say. In doing so, young bilinguals follow precise implicit rules. Their code-mixing is grammatically constrained as they usually mix the two languages at points in a sentence where the two grammars are concordant, that is when the structure is the same in both languages. They never mix languages where they are not concordant. These findings reinforce the Double Language System Hypothesis previously presented in this chapter, indicating that young bilingual children acquire language-specific morphosyntactic properties of each languages during the early stages of development (Genesee, Nicoladis, 2009).

Another difference between code-switching and code-mixing concerning phonetic, phonology, prosody and intonation was pointed out by those phonological studies cited in the section above. As code-mixing regards small units such as single words or lexical chunks, it could happen that only phonetics and phonology change from one language to the other one, but prosody and intonation remain the same of the base language adopted for the interaction.

4.2.2.4. Loan Words

Another type of linguistic output typical of bilinguals is represented by loan words. They usually borrow a word from one language – usually the non-activated one in that particular communicative interaction – and they insert it in the sentence in the target language. They adapt that word to the target language features both in a phonological and morphological way. In contrast to code-mixing, which is the alternate use of both languages, a loan word is the integration of a small unit of one language into the other one.

4.3. Teacher

As far as immersion programs teachers are concerned, the main challenge they have to face is related to the heterogeneous configuration of the group of infants they have to deal with, their various levels of linguistic competence both in the first and in the second language, and their different cultural background. Early childhood educators may encounter a variety of second language learning situations in their classrooms, from one child speaking a different language as a result of migration, or an entire group of children speaking the same first language which are exposed to a second language either within the educational context or outside school.

In order to plan appropriate activities for heterogeneous groups, and above all within migration contexts, the teacher's primary interest should be gathering information about the children's developmental niche. It is a theoretical framework that is useful to understand how culture shapes the child's development. Hence, teachers should collect these pieces of information about infants' linguistic and cultural situations from their families. Firstly, teachers should gather details about infants' basic demographic information, such as where they are born, when they arrived in the second-language community, what their family configuration is, what the main features of their cultural and religious background are. Secondly, teachers should focus on the children's linguistic situation. This kind of information concerns their language - or languages - normally spoken at home, the family members who use those languages, the languages to which they have been exposed to, including when and where. Finally, teachers should gain relevant cultural practices information which includes several areas such as the concept of early childhood education, the idea of discipline, toileting

behaviours, feeding practices, food preferences.

As it has been explained in the previous chapters, Early Language Learning teachers should be able to plan activities engaging and motivating for young children attending pre-primary or childcare schools which not only do they aim to enhance their linguistic and communicative competence but also they focus on a more general growth of the infant both from a cognitive and affective perspective. Together with this educational purpose, the immersion programs teachers have also a social mission. As a matter of fact, they should guarantee the inclusion of those infants coming from a migration situation inside the educational context. Above all, teacher should be able to make children become part of the second-language speakers' community. They should set up a classroom environment that helps young second-language learners to feel safe, comfortable and included. Hence, they should encourage the development of additive bilingualism, so that both languages and their corresponding cultures can be seen as complementary and equally important for the growing bilingual speaker. In doing so, negative emotional factors arising from the new second-language social situation will not overwhelm infants and their language-acquisition process (Tabors, 1997).

5. Conclusion

In this day and age, there is an increasing demand of planning educational programs capable of providing young children with a total immersion in that language different from their mother tongue and with which they are in contact in every domains of their daily life, hence it is not merely linked to the scholastic context. In order to meet this educational demand, the European Commission with the Early Language Learning project proposes the realization of immersion programs. These have specific educational purposes. First of all, they aim at the development of early bilingualism in those children attending pre-primary or childcare schools. In doing so, two languages will be acquired simultaneously and following an innate and natural acquisitional process. Secondly, immersion programs encourage the immigrated infants' integration within the new community supporting the second-language development and promoting additive bilingualism. Last but not least, immersion programs focus on fostering early bilingualism in order to provide young children and infants with all those

cognitive advantages related to it, such as cognitive flexibility, metalinguistic awareness, inhibition skills, divergent thinking, ability in problem solving. The enhancement of these benefits is of fundamental importance as they will be at the disposal of the bilingual individual for the whole life.

Chapter IV

A Case Study

This chapter is going to describe and analyse the main features of a research study aiming at examining young children's attitudes and behaviours while approaching a foreign language for the first time inside their childcare centre. It deals with twenty-four Italian monolingual infants who have been exposed to English for a three-months period that started at the beginning of March 2019 and finished at the end of May 2019. Children have approached new language during their daily-life educational routine, hence during free play, lunch time, toilet time, while listening to storytelling or songs or nursery rhymes, and during the various recreational activities such as drawings or handcraft. The theoretical framework this project is based on concerns the pedagogical, psycholinguistics and neurological principles presented in the first chapter. In addition, as far as more practical guidelines are concerned, this research study takes inspiration from the European Commission's Early Language Learning programmes. As a matter of fact, it takes inspiration both from Early Foreign-Language Teaching and Immersion Programs. It consists of the introduction of English in the educational plan of the kindergarten, which is a language different from children's mother tongue. As a consequence, they have the possibility to experience the English-language input exclusively within the formal educational context. For this reason, this study has provided an approach to the new foreign language as natural as possible in order to support children's innate language-acquisition process, focusing on their strong points such as multisensoriality, expressiveness, motility. Hence, a formal language teaching method have been avoided, considering literature demonstration of its ineffectiveness when applied to very young children. On the contrary, the linguistic input has always been as authentic and contextualized as possible. It has been presented not only during activities but across all infants' childcare centre routine.

The main purpose of this research project is to gather information about very young Italian children exposed to English for the first time with a duration of three months within their educational environment, their attitudes towards the new language, their reactions and potential changes in their behaviours while approaching to the target language. It wants also

to determine the extent to which the introduction of English as a foreign language through a natural approach in order to support infants' innate language-acquisition process proves to be successful. In addition, this study aims at analysing data collected through observational checklists in order to determine the presence of positive outcomes as the result of this early foreign-language exposure. Consequently, it wants to assess whether the achieved results share more features either with the Early Foreign-Language Teaching programmes or with the Immersion programs. If this research project actually has some characteristics in common with Immersion programs, data analysis also focuses on determine the appearance of linguistic properties and cognitive benefits typical of early bilingualism, even if this study is based on a relatively short foreign-language exposure to young Italian monolingual children. Therefore, the research questions that served as a guide for the entire duration of the study and during the analysis of the outcomes are the following:

- Does this research study based on an approach to a foreign language that occurred within a formal context of education involving children from zero to three years old and that lasted three months lead to successful achievements?
- What kind of linguistic outcomes has been detected? Do the three groups of children differ one another taking into consideration these results?
- What kind of evidence that proved the activation of cognitive processes has been monitored? Do the three groups of children differ one another taking into consideration these results?
- What kind of affective and emotional changes in children's attitudes towards the new language, the person who spoke it and the activities carried out has been observed? Do the three groups of children differ one another taking into consideration these results?
- Does this research project share more features with Foreign-Language Teaching Programmes or with Immersion Programmes?

This experimental project can be considered a novelty within this field of research. As a

matter of fact, there is not consistent evidence about foreign language teaching programs applied to kindergarten children, even if psycholinguistic research studies have demonstrated how this age is suitable for a natural acquisition of a new language which occurs without any cognitive effect. The majority of research has been carried out with older children aged between five and eleven years old as in this period the language is almost fully developed, first-language competence is established and the effects of foreign-language acquisition are more evident. In addition, the scarcity of studies in this area of research is also due to a more practical reason. In fact, several studies concerning very young children exposed to a foreign language during the early stages of their development have been conducted in designated laboratories using sophisticated technological equipment. Very few of them have been carried out in formal educational contexts. This is due to the fact that childcare centres are private schools and are not part of compulsory education. In conclusion, it is not simple to find a proper sample of children in order to analyse their attitudes and behaviour while exposed to a new foreign language within their formal educational context.

1. Methods

The sections that follow will outline the main components of this research project, the physical setting in which it has occurred, the participants involved, the activities carried out during the educational routine that has made possible the observation of the subjects in every aspect of their daily life, the data-gathering procedures and the analysis of the achieved results.

1.1. Physical Setting

This research study has been carried out in a nursery school located in the province of Padova. This childcare centre is managed at a municipal level and it is administered by a social cooperative. This educational structure hosts infants aged between three months and three years old. It has been authorised by the local USSL and accredited by the Socio-Medical Regional Agency of the Veneto Region. The internal organization follows the guidelines

provided by the Ministry of Health and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Prevention (ISPESL, 2005).

As far as the physical setting is concerned, this childcare centre is composed of three main areas located in the ground floor: the area for the younger children, the area for the older ones and the garden. The former consists of a room dedicated both for free play, activities and lunch time. Adjacent to it, there are two other rooms used for bath time and nap time. The latter is made up of four rooms. The bigger one is used for free play, recreational games and physical activities. Next to it the lunchroom, the bathroom and the bedroom can be found. The physical distinction between younger and older children inside the structure has educational and pedagogical foundations. As a matter of fact, every area has distinct and peculiar characteristics in order to be suitable for the children's age range it is designed for. All pieces of furniture is suitable for infants and it is made of natural materials. Every room dedicated to free play is divided into several areas that served for different educational and pedagogical purposes. As a matter of fact, according to various recreational areas, infants are provided with books, different toys, child-size kitchen equipment, dolls and dresses to enhance symbolic and imaginative play, puzzles Lego building blocks that foster imagination, creativity and fine motility, sensory panels to sustain multisensoriality, heuristic play area to stimulate curiosity and desire for knowledge. The garden is also used to free play activities. Outdoor activities are chances for developing gross motor skills and cooperative game playing

As far as the child's routine, the typical day starts at half past seven in the morning and ends at five o'clock in the evening. The first one hour and a half in the morning is a free play period, during which children are typically offered a group of activity options from which to choose. A brief clean-up period follows free play activities. Afterwards, around nine o'clock, children sit on the carpet and sing song together with their teachers. Before snack-time, they are accompanied to the bathroom for toilet time. After break-time, the younger children have a nap, while the older one take part at the activity of the day. At eleven o'clock, they usually have lunch. In the afternoon, at around two o'clock, all infants have a nap, after which they have the mid-afternoon snack and, then, they carry out another recreational activity or they are free to play until they are picked up to go home.

1.2. Subjects

The participants at this research project are twenty-four Italian monolingual children, seventeen boys and seven girls. They have been divided into three groups according to the age factor, as it normally happens in all Italian kindergartens. The first group generally goes from three to twelve months of age, the second ranges between thirteen to twenty-four months and the third between twenty-five to thirty-six months of age. The groups and their related subjects this study deals with will be presented in the following sections. In order to maintain privacy and protect children's personal data, fictitious names will be used in this study.

1.2.1. First Group

The first group is called “Lattanti” group and it includes the youngest infants. They are eight children, six boys and two girls. Their age range goes from five months to sixteen months and a half at the first observation and from seven months to eighteen months and a half at the last observation. It can be inferred that not all of them can produce language. As a matter of fact, at the first observation, four of them do not speak as they are in the babbling period. While on the last observation, three of them do not speak yet. In the Table 1 that follows the fictitious names attributed to the children and the related age at the first, second and last observations will be summarized.

Fictitious Names	Months at First Observation	Months at Second Observation	Months at Third Observation
Simone	16 and a half	17 and a half	18 and a half
Stefano	9	10	11
Lorenzo	16	17	18
Sara	12 and a half	13 and a half	14 and a half
Vittorio	16 and a half	17 and a half	18 and a half
Davide	5	6	7
Giulio	16 and a half	17 and a half	18 and a half
Alice	13	14	15

Table 1: First Group Members.

1.2.2. Second Group

The second group is called “Semi-Divezzi” group and also this one is composed by eight children, four boys and four girls. Their age ranges between nineteen to twenty-six months at the first observation and between twenty-one to twenty-eight months. Four of them could not express themselves perfectly in Italian, the usually produce formulaic speech or very simplified sentences. Second group members' information is provided in the Table 2 below.

Fictitious Names	Months at First Observation	Months at Second Observation	Months at Third Observation
Elisa	25 and a half	26 and a half	27 and a half
Pietro	19	20	21
Elena	26 and a half	27 and a half	28 and a half
Anna	19 and a half	20 and a half	21 and a half
Andrea	23	24	25
Lucia	19	20	21
Daniele	21	22	23
Paolo	26	27	28

Table 2: Second Group Members.

1.2.3. Third Group

Again, the third group called “Divezzi” group is made up of eight children, too. They are seven boys and one girl. Their age goes from twenty-six to thirty-eight months at the first observation, while it goes from twenty-eight to forty months. Names and age information are presented in the following Table 3.

Fictitious Names	Months at First Observation	Months at Second Observation	Months at Third Observation
Nicola	36	37	38
Mattia	8	29	30
Nicolò	32	33	34
Matteo	35	36	37
Giorgio	34	35	36
Fabio	29	30	31
Giorgia	26	27	28
Filippo	38	39	40

Table 3: Third Group Members.

1.3. Educational Activities

During this research project, apart from those usual situations such as greetings – such as “Hello!”, “Bye bye!”, “Good morning!” - or general requests – such as “Sit down!”, “Stand up!”, “Come Here!”, “Take off your jacket”, “Put the toy away” -, young children had the possibility to come into contact with frequent and intensive English-language input during two types of activities: routine activities, classified as informal circumstances, and educational activities, considered as formal situations. More precisely, free play, snack and lunch time and bathroom time are part of the first group, while the numerous activities are part of the second one.

During free play, children chose the toys to use or the game to play among those proposed by the teachers. In addition to decide what recreational activity to carry out, children were free to choose whether to interact or not with the person who gave them the foreign language input. They usually asked to read them a book in English or they wanted to hear the English name of animals, colours or toys around them. However, it was the infant who searched for interactions in English. This is also due to the fact that teachers and educators played the role of external observer while children were carrying out free time activities. They could intervene if and only if it was the child to ask for help or to play together.

Snack time and lunch time were important as far as exposure to English is concerned. As a matter of fact, young children were provided daily with fixed formulaic speech and contextualized sentences - such as “Do you want some more food?”, “Put your bib on”, “Take your bib off”, “Have you finished?”, “Do you want some water?” - together with the name of food they were eating. These linguistic routines, along with greetings and general requests mentioned above, are able to turn an ordinary event into an opportunity to learn and acquire the new language naturally.

Children received daily concrete and contextualized linguistic input during bathroom time, too. This linguistic routine was characterized by expressions like “Wash your hands”, “Dry your hands”, “Use soap”, “Take the toilet paper”. In addition, during this moment of the day children could also listen to nursery rhymes, songs or stories in the English language. As a matter of fact, infants generally went to the toilet in groups according to the division explained in the sections above. While one child was washing his/her hands or relieving

themselves or while the educator was changing the nappy, the rest of the group could listen to English songs and experience storytelling in a new language.

A further opportunity in which children could be exposed to the new foreign language was during activities planned by educators. This moment of the day was central to the enhancement of foreign-language acquisition process as children could experience English while they were concentrated on the activity. The English language was the means to carry out the activity, not the main focus. As a consequence, it took second place as compared with the achievement of the final result of the activity. The fact that infants' focal point was on the operational side of the activity, it diverted young children's attention from the linguistic contents and made them forget they were acquiring the new foreign language. As it was explained by Krashen's Rule of Forgetting, people can acquire a language more easily when they forget that they are learning. And this is even more clear with young children. During this research project, four main types of activities were proposed, which were always interrelated with the general educational and pedagogical plan of the kindergarten. Firstly, every morning children could hear English songs such as "Incy Wincy Spider", "Tommy Thumb", "One Little Finger", "If You're Happy", "The Wheels on the Bus", "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star". Songs play an important role in the language-acquisition process as they take advantage of infants' innate attitude towards phonology, musicality, rhythm and prosody. In order to make the comprehension of the songs words easier, they were always accompanied by movement, gestures or images. The main cognitive and linguistic purposes of using songs were to support language acquisition through movement. That is, associating one word – such as "up", "down", "sun", "nose", "hand", "mouth", "clap" - to the related movement or its concrete referent, their semantic relationship was made clearer and infants could fix internalized it more easily. Secondly, another type of activity proposed during this research project was storytelling. The illustrated books read to children were "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle, "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?" by Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle, "The Good Morning Game", "Press Here" and "Let's Play" by Hervé Tullet. As far as the former book is concerned, it provided a linguistic input related to food names and to the contrast between big and small. The second book aimed at proposing the names of animals and colours. Through the third one children experienced various routine actions. The linguistic purpose of the latter regarded numbers, names of colours, the difference between

up and down, in and out, big and small. They also provided linguistic input related to some actions such as clapping hands, blowing, shaking, pressing, scratching. Storytelling was not a simple activity to carry out, as infants' attention span is quite short. As a consequence, the story had to be presented in a reasonable amount of time and it had to be engaging enough to catch the children's attention. In addition, the same book was read more than once. Multiple readings helped children to get more pieces of information and to assimilate them more easily. Moreover, pictures and images played a central role in the comprehension process, as they offered further support to gather additional information about the story. Finally, the last types of activities proposed during this research project were motor activities and expressive and manipulative activities. Both of them were linked to the content of the previously presented songs and books, in a sense that they presented the same linguistic input under different perspectives - such as pictures, words of a story or of a song, movements, actions, creative and artistic activities. In doing so, coherence, cohesion and continuity of this project were assured. As regards motor activities, they consisted of obstacle courses in which children had to jump in and out of some hoops or to go up and down using some steps. In this way, words such as "in", "out", "up", "down" children had heard with songs and storytelling were concretely linked to the movement they were doing. This practical correlation between words and actions made the infants language-acquisition process easier. Expressive and manipulative activities worked on children's multisensoriality, innate creativity and natural propensity for exploration, matching their actions with English-language input, which mainly concerned colours, food and animals. With some of these activities, children experimented the use of food to draw and paint. For example, they used apples or beetroots as stencils and tea and teabags as watercolours. During other activities, they made a collage using several types of paper and various materials of different colours. They also made collages to create some animals through the use of wool or feathers.

Taking into consideration both formal and informal activities, children were exposed to English five out of nine hours a day and three out of five days a week for a period of three months. Hence children's total amount of time of exposure to the new foreign language corresponded to one hundred and fifty-five hours in three months.

1.4. Data Gathering Process

The activities presented above were useful to collect information about children's approach to a foreign language, their attitudes towards English and their behaviour while experiencing the new language during their routine. In order to gather data, observational checklists were adopted.

1.4.1. Instruments Used

As far as this research study is concerned, checklists have been chosen as the most suitable tool for data gathering. They are quick easy to fill out, characteristics that are fundamental considering the fact that the observer had the role of an active participant observer and, at the same time, it was the person in charge of carrying out English activities. Hence, there was a complete and active involvement during activities and various routine moments in which children were observed and their behaviour and attitudes were examined, apart from those few brief moments during which taking notes and filling out checklists.

These checklists were made up of pre-determined and closed-ended specific items which individuated and described those children's behaviour and attitudes relevant for the purposes of this research study. These items were grouped together according to five main categories:

- The former was related to children's foreign-language sounds and words production or imitation.
- The second group concerned infants' behaviour adopted in response to certain linguistic situations, such as for example understanding the meaning of English expression related to an activity or simple English requests and their subsequent accomplishment.
- The third one was about the eventual development of linguistic competence in the new foreign language.
- The fourth category referred to children's attitude during activities.

- The latter concerned infants' emotions and attitudes towards English.

Even if similar in terms of structural layout, three checklists with slightly different items were drafted, one for each group of infants, taking into consideration their cognitive, linguistic and affective characteristics.

Together with checklist, a diary was kept in which both general notes concerning children's attitudes during the activity of the day or the other moments of their routine and annotations about individual particular behaviour related to a specific circumstance were recorded. These pieces of information were used as a support for filling out checklists.

1.4.1.1. First Group Checklist

The items that compose the checklist used to gather information about the first group of young children were planned thinking about the main cognitive and linguistic characteristics of their age range. As a matter of fact, the general focus is on the infants' affective and emotional sphere and on their attitudes towards the new foreign language rather than insisting on language production, considering that only four of them were able to produce formulaic speech at the beginning of research.

The first category of items investigated whether children were interested in repeating English sounds and words. In addition, bearing in mind the particular sensitivity to phonology and prosody typical of this developmental stage, this group of items aimed at collecting pieces of information about how infants reacted to English phonology, which is different from their mother tongue phonology. These entries were drafted as follows.

1. The child starts imitating some sounds typical of the English language.
2. If the child imitates English-language sounds, there is no linguistic interference with mother tongue and pronunciation is native-like.
3. The child is interested in listening to English-language sounds.

4. The child enjoys repeating English-language sounds and simple words.

The second group was useful to analyse the extent to which young children could understand and consequently carry out simple tasks and instructions stated in English both during the activity of the day and during the whole routine. Moreover, it examined the children's ability identify emotions and feeling even if they were expressed in English. This category was composed by the items that follow.

5. The child accomplishes simple tasks assigned in English (for example “come here”, “sit down”, “stand up”, “give me...”, etc).
6. The child understands simple daily English expressions (for example “hello”, “bye bye”, “good morning”, etc.).
7. The child understands simple English words (for example “toy”, “book”, “animal”, “car”, etc.).
8. The child understands and carries out instructions given during English activities (for example “clap your hands”, “press”, “scratch”, “shake”, “jump”, etc.).
9. The child is able to distinguish emotions and feelings expressed in English.

Thanks to the third category proposed in the checklist, it was possible to gather information about children's general behaviour and attitudes during those activities during which they were exposed to the English language.

10. The child looks at the pictures of a book narrated in English with interest.
11. The child's attitude is active and engaged during activities carried out in English.
12. The child is motivated to carry out activities performed in English.
13. The child gets distracted easily during activities carried out in English.

Children's attitudes, emotions and feelings towards the person who spoke English that was a language different from their mother tongue were examined through the fourth group of items. These are listed below.

14. The child appears to be shy with the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
15. The child is scared by the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
16. The child trusts the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
17. The child is willing to relate to linguistic diversity.
18. The child shows curiosity and interest towards English and the person who speaks it.
19. The child shows difficulty in interacting the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.

In this checklist planned to observe and collect data about young children belonging to the first group the section related to linguistic competence was not included. This is a consequence of the children's age range and the corresponding linguistic and cognitive characteristics that would have not led to any relevant and significant result.

1.4.1.2. Second Group Checklist

As far as the checklist designed for the second group of infants, a few items had been added together with those of the previous checklist. These additional entries reflected the characteristics of these children, who started using formulaic speech and holophrasis frequently. In addition, in contrast with the first group, children's behaviour was also monitored in order to find out evidence of their linguistic competence on the new foreign language the children were exposed to. Moreover, this checklist was useful to detect the

presence of eventual signs of sensitivity towards language diversity during those social interactions with the person who spoke a language different from children's first language.

The first group of items listed below is similar to that of the checklist presented in the previous section, with the addition of some entries related to the production of simple words in English.

1. The child starts imitating some sounds typical of the English language.
2. If the child imitates English-language sounds, there is no linguistic interference with mother tongue and pronunciation is native-like.
3. The child is interested in listening to English-language sounds.
4. The child enjoys repeating English-language sounds and simple words.
5. The child tries to repeat English words.

The second category, in addition to demonstrate whether children understood daily English expressions, answered to questions and accomplished simple tasks assigned in English, aimed at examining how infants approached to the foreign language and use it to carry out communicative purposes related to these interactions. Its corresponding items is presented as follows.

6. The child accomplishes simple tasks assigned in English (for example “come here”, “sit down”, “stand up”, “give me...”, etc).
7. The child understands simple daily English expressions (for example “hello”, “bye bye”, “good morning”, etc.).
8. The child understands simple English words (for example “toy”, “book”, “animal”, “car”, etc.).
9. The child understands and carries out instructions given during English activities (for example “clap your hands”, “press”, “scratch”, “shake”, “jump”, etc.).

10. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers in Italian.
11. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers in English.
12. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers both in English and in Italian.
13. The child is able to distinguish emotions and feelings expressed in English.

The following group of items was not present in the first checklist. It deals with linguistic competence and the children's ability of adapt their behaviour and attitudes to the interaction with a person who did not share their first language.

14. The child uses code-mixing.
15. The child uses code-switching.
16. The child is able to choose the appropriate language to use with his/her interlocutor.
17. The child elaborates compensatory techniques to overcome difficulties during language-comprehension process (for example relying on contextual information, pragmatic features, extralinguistic elements, etc.).
18. The child reflects about the language.
19. The child is aware of the plurality of languages.

The fourth section was identical to the third one of the first checklist. It dealt with children's attitude while carrying out activities in English and its items is listed below.

20. The child looks at the pictures of a book narrated in English with interest.
21. The child's attitude is active and engaged during activities carried out in English.
22. The child is motivated to carry out activities performed in English.

23. The child gets distracted easily during activities carried out in English.

Information collected through this last group of items concerned both infants' emotions resulted from the relationship with the person who spoke English and their attitudes towards linguistic diversity.

24. The child is scared by the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.

25. The child appears to be shy with the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.

26. The child shows difficulty in interacting the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.

27. The child trusts the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.

28. The child is willing to relate to linguistic diversity.

29. The child shows curiosity and interest towards English and the person who speaks it.

30. The child shows more sensitivity during social interactions with the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.

1.4.1.3. Third Group Checklist

The checklist adopted to gather data concerning the third group of children is more complete and comprehensive compared to the other two presented in the previous paragraphs. This is due to the fact that it referred to an age range in which the faculty of language was almost fully developed and cognitive skills and abilities were being improved and strengthened.

The first category is similar to the formers. Further items were added in order to understand if children's foreign-language production of words and simple sentences was more accurate

considering their age.

1. The child starts imitating some sounds typical of the English language.
2. If the child imitates English-language sounds, there is no linguistic interference with mother tongue and pronunciation is native-like.
3. The child is interested in listening to English-language sounds.
4. The child enjoys repeating English-language sounds and simple words.
5. The child tries to repeat English words.
6. The child clearly utters English words.
7. The child utters simple sentences in English.

Apart from collecting information about infants' ability of understanding and carrying out tasks and simple requests, the second group of items was useful to determine if children could discriminate and use common English words experienced during activities and other moments of the day. Moreover, this category was designated to analyse how and in which language children belonging to the third group interact with the person who spoke English.

8. The child can distinguish and name colours in English.
9. The child can distinguish and name animals in English.
10. The child can distinguish and name food in English.
11. The child accomplishes simple tasks assigned in English (for example “come here”, “sit down”, “stand up”, “give me...”, etc).
12. The child understands simple daily English expressions (for example “hello”, “bye bye”, “good morning”, etc.).
13. The child understands simple English words (for example “toy”, “book”, “animal”, “car”, etc.).

14. The child understands and carries out instructions given during English activities (for example “clap your hands”, “press”, “scratch”, “shake”, “jump”, etc.).
15. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers in Italian.
16. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers in English.
17. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers both in English and in Italian.
18. The child is able to distinguish emotions and feelings expressed in English.

Children's linguistic competence about English, their awareness of plurality of language, and their sensitivity to linguistic diversity were examined through the use of the items listed below.

19. The child uses code-mixing.
20. The child uses code-switching.
21. The child plays with the English language.
22. The child is able to choose the appropriate language to use with his/her interlocutor.
23. The child elaborates compensatory techniques to overcome difficulties during language-comprehension process (for example relying on contextual information, pragmatic features, extralinguistic elements, etc.).
24. The child reflects about the language.
25. The child is aware of the plurality of languages.
26. The child is aware of differences between English and his/her mother tongue.

The following category related to children's attitudes during English activities is the same as those of the checklists of the first and second group of children.

27. The child looks at the pictures of a book narrated in English with interest.
28. The child's attitude is active and engaged during activities carried out in English.
29. The child is motivated to carry out activities performed in English.
30. The child gets distracted easily during activities carried out in English.

The last group of items is similar to that of the second checklist. Hence, children's emotional relationships with who spoke English, their approach to language diversity, their sensitivity to social interaction with someone who used a language different from their mother tongue are analysed.

31. The child appears to be shy with the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
32. The child is scared by the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
33. The child shows difficulty in interacting the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
34. The child trusts the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
35. The child is willing to relate to linguistic diversity.
36. The child shows curiosity and interest towards English and the person who speaks it.
37. The child shows more sensitivity during social interactions with the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.

1.4.2. Procedures

With the purpose of collecting accurate and specific information useful to answer to the research questions, one of the checklists presented in the previous section was filled out for

every child during three different moments throughout the duration of study: at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. They were completed on the basis of naturalistic observation which means that children and their spontaneous behaviour arisen from the foreign-language exposure were monitored within an ordinary daily-life context, namely their childcare centre. The checklists were filled out by the active participant observer, who planned and at the same time took part in the activities and those routine moments carried out in English during which children's behaviour, reactions and attitudes could be analysed more closely and more in detail. For every items of the checklists, three answers were possible, namely “Yes”, “No” or “Partly”, depending on whether that particular behaviour or attitude occurred in the child being observed or it did not take place or it happened only on rare occasions. In addition, those field notes taken in the diary were used as a support in order to answer properly to every item. After having completed a checklist, the answers – whether “Yes”, “No” or “Partly” - obtained for the same item of the checklists of the same group of children were coded and summed up. The resulting number were consequently transformed in percentage. In doing so, it was easier to determine the amount of children who displayed that particular feature. This procedure was carried out for initial, middle and final checklists and for every group of infants. The sequence of outcomes achieved made even more evident the changes occurred in children's emotions and feelings towards English, towards the person who spoke a language different from their mother tongue, in their attitudes during activities and routine moments in which they were exposed to the new language, in their linguistic behaviour after English-language exposure. Furthermore, a comparison between results obtained in those items categories shared by checklists of all groups of children was also possible. In this way, difference and similarities between young children of different ages approaching to a foreign language could be examined.

2. Results Analysis

The outcomes achieved through checklists will be presented in the sections that follows. Firstly, findings related to each group will be exposed separately according to the different moment in which the checklists were filled out. Subsequently, the results obtained with the

three checklists will be compared and analysed together.

2.1. First Group Outcomes

In the sections that follows the results obtained with the checklists used to monitor the first group of children will be introduced. It is worth recalling that this group was composed by eight infants, more precisely six boys and two girls. The average age was thirteen months at first checklists compilation, fourteen during the second observation, fifteen during the last data collection.

The number of the items correspond to those items presented in the paragraph 2.4.1.1. and they will be recalled below.

1. The child starts imitating some sounds typical of the English language.
2. If the child imitates English-language sounds, there is no linguistic interference with mother tongue and pronunciation is native-like.
3. The child is interested in listening to English-language sounds.
4. The child enjoys repeating English-language sounds and simple words.
5. The child accomplishes simple tasks assigned in English (for example “come here”, “sit down”, “stand up”, “give me...”, etc).
6. The child understands simple daily English expressions (for example “hello”, “bye bye”, “good morning”, etc.).
7. The child understands simple English words (for example “toy”, “book”, “animal”, “car”, etc.).
8. The child understands and carries out instructions given during English activities (for example “clap your hands”, “press”, “scratch”, “shake”, “jump”, etc.).
9. The child is able to distinguish emotions and feelings expressed in English.

10. The child looks at the pictures of a book narrated in English with interest.
11. The child's attitude is active and engaged during activities carried out in English.
12. The child is motivated to carry out activities performed in English.
13. The child gets distracted easily during activities carried out in English.

14. The child appears to be shy with the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
15. The child is scared by the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
16. The child trusts the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
17. The child is willing to relate to linguistic diversity.
18. The child shows curiosity and interest towards English and the person who speaks it.
19. The child shows difficulty in interacting the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.

2.1.1. First Observation

In Table 4 below, the outcomes achieved through the first checklist are presented. This checklist was filled out two weeks after the beginning of the research project. Hence, infants had just been exposed to the new foreign language. However, even if only few days had passed, first consequences of English exposure started to appear.

Items	N° of Children			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Partly	Yes	No	Partly
1	2	6	0	25%	75%	0%
2	1	6	1	12.5%	75%	12.5%
3	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
4	2	6	0	25%	75%	0%
5	4	3	1	50%	37.5%	12.5%
6	4	1	3	50%	12.5%	37.5%
7	0	4	4	0%	50%	50%
8	0	4	4	0%	50%	50%
9	0	6	2	0%	75%	25%
10	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
11	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
12	3	0	5	37.5%	0%	62.5%
13	1	4	3	12.5%	50%	37.5%
14	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
15	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
16	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
17	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%
18	5	1	2	62.5%	12.5%	25%

Table 4: First Group Outcomes Achieved with the First Checklist.

As far as the first group of items are concerned, the related findings are not successful. Even if the majority of children was interested in listening to the English language, it can be seen that only two of them started imitating simple English sounds and words. This was due to the fact that foreign-language exposure had just begun and, above all, because only four of them could produce holophrasis and formulaic speech.

From the outcomes achieved with the second category of items, it can be inferred that since the beginning of the research study half of the children were able to understand simple English expressions related to their daily routine and they were also able to carry out simple requirements expressed through the English language during the whole day. This is because this kind of statements was specific and highly contextualized. On the contrary, children found some difficulties in understanding words with a more general meaning or those expression generally adapted during activities carried out in English. Furthermore, nearly all infants were not able to identify emotions and feelings expressed by the person who spoke

English for example when they were reprimanded if they did something wrong.

Findings related to the third category of items demonstrate children's high level of interest, motivation and engagement during those activities in which they approached the English language.

Thanks to the last group of items, it can be concluded that very young children did not have difficulties in relating with the new foreign language they were exposed to and with the person who spoke English. They were neither troubled nor scared by language diversity.

2.1.2. Second Observation

The following Table 5 outlines the results of the second checklists filled out halfway of the research project.

Items	N° of Children			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Partly	Yes	No	Partly
1	4	4	0	50%	50%	0%
2	2	5	1	25%	62.5%	12.5%
3	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
4	3	4	1	37.5%	50%	12.5%
5	4	2	2	50%	25%	25%
6	5	1	2	62.5%	12.5%	25%
7	0	4	4	0%	50%	50%
8	4	2	2	50%	25%	25%
9	1	1	6	12.5%	12.5%	75%
10	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%
11	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
12	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%
13	0	4	4	0.0%	50%	50%
14	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
15	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
16	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
17	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%
18	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
19	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%

Table 5: First Group Outcomes Achieved with the Second Checklist.

From the outcomes achieved with the first group of items concerning imitation and repetition of sounds belonging to the English language, improvements can be observed. In addition, it can be noticed that the sounds that two of them produced while repeating English language were similar of those of the target language. For instance, when they said “Hello!” they correctly pronounced it /hɛˈləʊ/ and not with the letter “o” typical of Italian phonology.

Improvement can be detected in connection with the second category, too. As a matter of fact, enhancement occurred in relation to comprehension of both those English expressions related to daily routine and those words with a specific meaning exclusively linked to the activity of the day. Moreover, children started to become familiar with emotions and feelings expressed by the person who spoke the English language.

From the third group of items, a further growth of infants' interest and participation in activities carried out in English was monitored

As far as the last category, it does not display any fundamental difference with the results achieved with the items of the last group of the previous checklist.

2.1.3. Third Observation

Findings related to the last observation of the first group of children are depicted in Table 6 below.

Items	N° of Children			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Partly	Yes	No	Partly
1	4	3	1	50%	37.5%	12.5%
2	2	5	1	25%	62.5%	12.5%
3	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
4	5	3	0	62.5%	37.5%	0%
5	5	1	2	62.5%	12.5%	25%
6	7	1	0	87.5%	12.5%	0%
7	0	4	4	0%	50%	50%
8	4	2	2	50%	25%	25%
9	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
10	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
11	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
12	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
13	0	5	3	0%	62.5%	37.5%
14	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
15	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
16	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
17	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%
18	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
19	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%

Table 6: First Group Outcomes Achieved with the Third Checklist.

With respect to the results of the first category, they show no difference with the findings of the second checklist, apart from a further improvements concerning both the level of interest in the new foreign language and its prosodic and phonological features, and the number of children who repeated and imitated typically English sounds.

Also the outcomes achieved thanks to the second group of items do not differ from those obtained with the previous checklist. The only variation concerns the entry related to the comprehension of emotion expressed in English. As a matter of fact, at the end of the study, infants were able to discriminate feelings easier. This was due to familiarization with both the foreign language they were exposed to and with the person who spoken language. As a consequence, children became accustomed to English expression of emotions and feelings.

From the third category it can be observed that a further engagement of young children during English activities occurred.

Finally, the results obtained with the fourth group of items are the same as those achieved

with the second checklist.

2.1.4. Comparison of Results

Outcomes achieved in all the previous checklists are presented in the Table 7 that follows. In doing so, they can be easily compared.

Items	Total Yes			Total No			Total Partly		
	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.
1	2	4	4	6	4	3	0	0	1
2	1	2	2	6	5	5	1	1	1
3	4	6	7	0	0	0	4	2	1
4	2	3	5	6	4	3	0	1	0
5	4	4	5	3	2	1	1	2	2
6	4	5	7	1	1	1	3	2	0
7	0	0	0	4	4	4	4	4	4
8	0	4	4	4	2	2	4	2	2
9	0	1	7	6	1	0	2	6	1
10	4	5	6	0	0	0	4	3	2
11	4	6	8	0	0	0	4	2	0
12	3	5	6	0	0	0	5	3	2
13	1	0	0	4	4	5	3	4	3
14	0	0	0	8	8	8	0	0	0
15	0	0	0	8	8	8	0	0	0
16	8	8	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
17	5	5	5	0	0	0	3	3	3
18	5	6	7	1	0	0	2	2	1
19	0	0	0	8	8	8	0	0	0
Items	Percentage Yes			Percentage No			Percentage Partly		
	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.
1	25%	50%	50%	75%	50%	37.5%	0%	0%	12.5%
2	12.5%	25%	25%	75%	62.5%	62.5%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%
3	50%	75%	87.5%	0%	0%	0%	50%	25%	12.5%
4	25%	37.5%	62.5%	75%	50%	37.5%	0%	12.5%	0%
5	50%	50%	62.5%	37.5%	25%	12.5%	12.5%	25%	25%
6	50%	62.5%	87.5%	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	25%	0%
7	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
8	0%	50%	50%	50%	25%	25%	50%	25%	25%
9	0%	12.5%	87.5%	75%	12.5%	0%	25%	75%	12.5%
10	50%	62.5%	75%	0%	0%	0%	50%	37.5%	25%
11	50%	75%	100%	0%	0%	0%	50%	25%	0%
12	37.5%	62.5%	75%	0%	0%	0%	62.5%	37.5%	25%
13	12.5%	0.0%	0%	50%	50%	62.5%	37.5%	50%	37.5%
14	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%
15	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%
16	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
17	62.5%	62.5%	62.5%	0%	0%	0%	37.5%	37.5%	37.5%

Table 7: Total Results of the First Group.

With regard to the first group of items, consistent results related to the imitation and repetition of English sounds and words are monitored within the first month and a half, bearing in mind that only four children produced holophrasis and formulaic speech at the beginning of the study. Infants imitated the new sounds they heard not only because they found it funny and engaging. As a matter of fact, while they were repeating sounds or simple words in English, they pointed the object to which they were referring or they mimed the action. Hence, this was not a mere mechanical imitation as a certain degree of awareness in comprehension of what they heard in English could be detected. Apart from repetition, a steady increase can be noted in connection with interest towards English and its phonetic, phonological, prosodic and rhythmic characteristics. This attraction for these linguistic features reflects the infant's innate sensitivity for phonology and prosody of a language typical of this age range

As far as the second category is concerned, a slight but constant increase related to English-language comprehension can be observed. These results also reveal the difference between English expressions connected with children's routine and those statements bound only to the activity of the day. The former was easier to understand and internalize as they were more frequent, concrete and contextualized, while the latter were restricted to few contexts of use. Presenting linguistic routines repeatedly and with a precise referent in the context facilitates and supports their comprehension by the young child. A significant increase can also be observed in those findings concerning the identification of feelings expressed in English. Only at the end of the research project children were able to discriminate emotions. This is due to the fact that with the passing of time they became accustomed to the person who spoke English and the way emotions were usually expressed.

From the third group of results it can be inferred that children were attracted by activities carried out in the new foreign language right from the beginning of the study. Moreover, a gradual increase of their engagement can be observed for the entire duration of the research project. Children were motivated to perform their activities and this attitude deserves particular consideration as children belonging to this age range generally have a limited attention span. Catching the children's attention and maintaining it was possible by presenting activities that stimulated infants' innate multisensoriality and creativity.

Finally, the last category makes clear children's curiosity and interests towards the person who

spoken a new foreign language and their willingness to relate to language diversity from the beginning of the research project.

2.2. Second Group Outcomes

Findings about the second group of children examined while being exposed to the new foreign language are exhibited and explained in the paragraphs that follow. It should be considered that this group was made up of eight children, four boys and four girls. At the beginning of the research project, when the first checklist was filled out, their average age was twenty-two months and a half, at the second observation it was twenty-three months and a half and at the end of the research project it was twenty-four months and a half. It is worth recalling that only four of them were able to produce complete and well-formed sentences in Italian, while the other half of the group generally used formulaic speech or very simple sentences.

The numbers of items used in the table correspond to the following items, which have already been presented in the section 2.4.1.2.

1. The child starts imitating some sounds typical of the English language.
2. If the child imitates English-language sounds, there is no linguistic interference with mother tongue and pronunciation is native-like.
3. The child is interested in listening to English-language sounds.
4. The child enjoys repeating English-language sounds and simple words.
5. The child tries to repeat English words.
6. The child accomplishes simple tasks assigned in English (for example “come here”, “sit down”, “stand up”, “give me...”, etc).
7. The child understands simple daily English expressions (for example “hello”, “bye

- bye”, “good morning”, etc.).
8. The child understands simple English words (for example “toy”, “book”, “animal”, “car”, etc.).
 9. The child understands and carries out instructions given during English activities (for example “clap your hands”, “press”, “scratch”, “shake”, “jump”, etc.).
 10. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers in Italian.
 11. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers in English.
 12. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers both in English and in Italian.
 13. The child is able to distinguish emotions and feelings expressed in English.

 14. The child uses code-mixing.
 15. The child uses code-switching.
 16. The child is able to choose the appropriate language to use with his/her interlocutor.
 17. The child elaborates compensatory techniques to overcome difficulties during language-comprehension process (for example relying on contextual information, pragmatic features, extralinguistic elements, etc.).
 18. The child reflects about the language.
 19. The child is aware of the plurality of languages.

 20. The child looks at the pictures of a book narrated in English with interest.
 21. The child's attitude is active and engaged during activities carried out in English.
 22. The child is motivated to carry out activities performed in English.
 23. The child gets distracted easily during activities carried out in English.

24. The child is scared by the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
25. The child appears to be shy with the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
26. The child shows difficulty in interacting the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
27. The child trusts the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
28. The child is willing to relate to linguistic diversity.
29. The child shows curiosity and interest towards English and the person who speaks it.
30. The child shows more sensitivity during social interactions with the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.

2.2.1. First Observation

Results achieved during the first observation of the second group of children and its corresponding checklists are represented in Table 8 below.

Items	N° of Children			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Partly	Yes	No	Partly
1	2	4	2	25%	50%	25%
2	1	4	3	12.5%	50%	37.5%
3	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
4	4	4	0	50%	50%	0%
5	2	4	2	25%	50%	25%
6	3	2	3	37.5%	25%	37.5%
7	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
8	0	2	6	0%	25%	75%
9	2	1	5	25%	12.5%	62.5%
10	3	0	5	37.5%	0%	62.5%
11	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
12	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
13	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
14	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
15	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
16	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
17	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
18	1	4	3	12.5%	50%	37.5%
19	1	4	3	12.5%	50%	37.5%
20	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
21	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
22	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%
23	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
24	0	6	2	0%	75%	25%
25	0	5	3	0%	62.5%	37.5%
26	0	6	2	0%	75%	25%
27	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%
28	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
29	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
30	0	5	3	0%	62.5%	37.5%

Table 8: Second Group Outcomes Achieved with the First Checklist.

The first group of results makes it clear that even if all children are interested in listening to the sound of English as it was a new foreign language never heard before, only few of them tried to imitate its sound and simple words. This is imputable to the fact that they had been exposed to English for a limited time – only few weeks.

The outcomes achieved with the second category show how children had difficulties in

understand simple English expressions and requests presented during the day or during activities. However, there is a slight difference in the comprehension of general statements linked to the routine and the precise expressions used exclusively during the activity of the day. The formers were easily understood as they were highly contextualized and presented repeatedly, while the latter were considered more complex as they were associated with restricted contexts of use, namely during the activities. In addition, from the results exhibited in this group, it can be deduced that children never adopted the English language to answer a question asked in English. When they were able to understand it, they usually answered in Italian. Furthermore, this category was also useful to examine children's ability to discriminate emotions expressed in English. Findings show that almost all the children were able to distinguish and interpret feelings of the person who spoke English, even if they had been exposed to the new language for only two weeks.

The third group of items refers to the children's development of linguistic competence in the new foreign language, such as the ability of code-switching and code mixing or the ability of relying on extralinguistic elements to understand what was said in English. At the beginning of the research project, positive outcomes can be detected only related to the children's skill of examining and collecting information from the context, the communicative situation and extralinguistic elements such as gestures, actions, facial expressions. Code-mixing did not occur, while occasional pieces of evidence of code-switching started to appear. Hence, children were becoming aware of the importance of selecting the right language according to their interlocutor. In addition, these results show how children's awareness of linguistic diversity and plurality of language started to emerge.

Thanks to the results obtained with the fourth category, it can be asserted that the majority of children were engaged and interested in performing those activities carried out in English. However, a relatively high number of children found difficult to maintain the attentional focus on what they are doing. This was due to the fact that they were active and dynamic children who could not concentrate on the same task for a long time.

As far as the last group of results is concerned, findings reveal the positive attitude towards the new foreign language and who spoke it assumed by the majority of children. If some of them hesitated to relate to English and to the person who spoke it, it was due to the fact that at

the beginning of the research project they appeared a little bit shy. However, none of them were diffident and unwilling to relate to linguistic diversity. On the contrary, they showed immediate curiosity and interest in the English language.

2.2.2. Second Observation

Table 9 that follows exhibit the results achieved with the second checklist after the second observation, which occurred in the middle of the research project.

Items	N° of Children			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Partly	Yes	No	Partly
1	2	3	3	25%	37.5%	37.5%
2	2	4	2	25%	50%	25%
3	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
4	4	3	1	50%	37.5%	12.5%
5	2	3	3	25%	37.5%	37.5%
6	5	1	2	62.5%	12.5%	25%
7	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
8	2	1	5	25%	12.5%	62.5%
9	4	0	4	50%	0%	50.0%
10	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%
11	0	5	3	0%	62.5%	37.5%
12	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
13	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
14	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
15	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
16	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
17	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
18	3	4	1	37.5%	50%	12.5%
19	3	4	1	37.5%	50%	12.5%
20	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
21	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
22	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
23	0	5	3	0%	62.5%	37.5%
24	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
25	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
26	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
27	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
28	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
29	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
30	0	5	3	0%	62.5%	37.5%

Table 9: Second Group Outcomes Achieved with the Second Checklist.

Examining the results achieved in the first category, it can be stated that no significant changes occur in comparison with the first category of the first checklist. Hence, all of the children were attracted by the prosody and the phonology of the new language, but only few of them try to imitate and repeat its sound and simple words.

The outcomes outlined in the second group show an increase of the number of children who

were able to understand expressions and statements in English related to both their general routine and the activities proposed. Distinction between these two kinds of context of use is still evident. On the contrary, no noticeable changes occur in their behaviour related to the way in which they answer to questions answered in English. They usually preferred to answer in Italian. Furthermore, these results demonstrate that all children were able to discriminate feelings and emotions expressed in English around the middle of the research project.

The results achieved with the third category demonstrate that no change occurred in children's behaviour and linguistic competence.

As far as the fourth category is concerned, findings exhibit an increase in the number of children who were interested and motivated in carrying out their activities. They started being accustomed to the routine and the related activities proposed in English and, consequently, it was easier for them to maintain the attentional focus on what they were doing.

Outcomes obtained in the last category are evidence of how rapidly children's attitude towards English and the person who spoke it changed. Everyone felt comfortable while exposed to the new foreign language and they were willing to relate to a language different from their mother tongue. None of them felt uneasy or frightened.

2.2.3. Third Observation

Findings achieved with the third checklist filled out after the last observation are depicted in Table 10 represented below.

Items	N° of Children			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Partly	Yes	No	Partly
1	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%
2	2	3	3	25%	37.5%	37.5%
3	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
4	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
5	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
6	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
7	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
8	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
9	6	0	2	75%	0%	25.0%
10	3	0	5	37.5%	0%	62.5%
11	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
12	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
13	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
14	0	6	2	0%	75%	25%
15	0	1	7	0%	12.5%	87.5%
16	0	1	7	0%	12.5%	87.5%
17	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
18	4	1	3	50%	12.5%	37.5%
19	4	1	3	50%	12.5%	37.5%
20	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
21	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
22	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
23	0	6	2	0%	75%	25%
24	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
25	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
26	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
27	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
28	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
29	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
30	0	4	4	0%	50%	50%

Table 10: Second Group Outcomes Achieved with the Third Checklist.

At the end of the project, a sudden increase of the number of children who repeated and produced simple English words was recorded, as a result of a three-months exposure to the target language. However, only two of them displayed clear phonological and prosodic features similar to those of the English language. In the other children's English linguistic output signs of interference with the Italian language could be perceived. The same rate of interest and curiosity in listening to the English-language sounds and words remained the

same for all the duration of the research project.

As far as the second category is concerned, it does not show considerable contrast with the second group of results of the previous checklist. The majority of children could clearly understand English expressions they heard throughout their daily routine and during the activities proposed. On the contrary, the number of children who sometimes answered in English to simple questions asked in English slightly increased. Finally, the results of the last item of this group is the same of the previous checklist.

Within the third group of results, no changes or improvements can be detected. They are almost the same as in the first and in the second checklists presented in the sections above.

An additional small enhancement can be pointed out concerning the outcomes achieved in the fourth category. This means that the children's active attitude and engagement during the activities proposed in English was further increased.

As regards to the last category, it can be asserted that no changes occurred compared to the last group of results achieved with the second checklist.

2.2.4. Comparison of Results

All the results achieved with the checklists presented in the sections above are summarized here in Table 11. In this way, they can be compared more easily.

Items	Total Yes			Total No			Total Partly		
	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.
1	2	2	5	4	3	0	2	3	3
2	1	2	2	4	4	3	3	2	3
3	8	8	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	4	4	6	4	3	0	0	1	2
5	2	2	4	4	3	0	2	3	4
6	3	5	6	2	1	0	3	2	2
7	4	8	8	0	0	0	4	0	0
8	0	2	4	2	1	0	6	5	4
9	2	4	6	1	0	0	5	4	2
10	3	5	3	0	0	0	5	3	5
11	0	0	0	8	5	3	0	3	5
12	0	0	0	8	8	8	0	0	0
13	6	8	8	0	0	0	2	0	0
14	0	0	0	8	8	6	0	0	2
15	0	0	0	3	3	1	5	5	7
16	0	0	0	3	3	1	5	5	7
17	8	8	6	0	0	0	0	0	2
18	1	3	4	4	4	1	3	1	3
19	1	3	4	4	4	1	3	1	3
20	4	6	7	0	0	0	4	2	1
21	6	7	7	0	0	0	2	1	1
22	5	7	7	0	0	0	3	1	1
23	0	0	0	3	5	6	5	3	2
24	0	0	0	6	8	8	2	0	0
25	0	0	0	5	8	8	3	0	0
26	0	0	0	6	8	8	2	0	0
27	5	8	8	0	0	0	3	0	0
28	4	8	8	0	0	0	4	0	0
29	6	8	8	0	0	0	2	0	0
30	0	0	0	5	5	4	3	3	4

Table 11: Total Results of the Second Group.

Items	Percentage Yes			Percentage No			Percentage Partly		
	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.
1	25%	25%	62.5%	50%	37.5%	0%	25%	37.5%	37.5%
2	12.5%	25%	25%	50%	50%	37.5%	37.5%	25%	37.5%
3	100%	100%	100.0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	50%	50%	75%	50%	37.5%	0%	0%	12.5%	25%
5	25%	25%	50%	50%	37.5%	0%	25%	37.5%	50%
6	37.5%	62.5%	75%	25%	12.5%	0%	37.5%	25%	25%
7	50%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%
8	0%	25%	50%	25%	12.5%	0%	75%	62.5%	50%
9	25%	50%	75%	12.5%	0%	0%	62.5%	50%	25%
10	37.5%	62.5%	37.5%	0%	0%	0%	62.5%	37.5%	62.5%
11	0%	0%	0%	100%	62.5%	37.5%	0%	37.5%	62.5%
12	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%
13	75%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	0%
14	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	75%	0%	0%	25%
15	0%	0%	0%	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	62.5%	62.5%	87.5%
16	0%	0%	0%	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	62.5%	62.5%	87.5%
17	100%	100%	75%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%
18	12.5%	37.5%	50%	50%	50%	12.5%	37.5%	12.5%	37.5%
19	12.5%	37.5%	50%	50%	50%	12.5%	37.5%	12.5%	37.5%
20	50%	75%	87.5%	0%	0%	0%	50%	25%	12.5%
21	75%	87.5%	87.5%	0%	0%	0%	25%	12.5%	12.5%
22	62.5%	87.5%	87.5%	0%	0%	0%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%
23	0%	0%	0%	37.5%	62.5%	75%	62.5%	37.5%	25%
24	0%	0%	0%	75%	100%	100%	25%	0%	0%
25	0%	0%	0%	62.5%	100%	100%	37.5%	0%	0%
26	0%	0%	0%	75%	100%	100%	25%	0%	0%
27	62.5%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	37.5%	0%	0%
28	50%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%
29	75%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	0%
30	0%	0%	0%	62.5%	62.5%	50%	37.5%	37.5%	50%

Table 11: Total Results of the Second Group.

Comparing findings of the first category makes clear that neither successful achievements nor meaningful changes can be detected. This is due to two main reasons. Firstly, not all the children were able to produce complete sentences in Italian as they still found themselves in the formulaic-speech period. Hence, their linguistic production in English was restricted to sounds or simple words. Secondly, children belonging to this age range usually start to become aware of their mother tongue. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of the study they usually emphasized the differences between English and Italian. For example, one of them said in Italian “No ball. È palla!” pointing a ball. In addition, no considerable changes

occurred concerning children's prosodic and phonological features while they uttered English linguistic output. This is due to the fact that at this age phonology generally starts to become stable.

From the results of the second category, one of the first thing that catches the eye is the constant difference between the comprehension of English expression related to the children's routine and those used exclusively during activities. The formers could be understood more easily as they were highly contextualized and repeatedly presented to the child. The latters were more difficult to understand as their use was not sufficient in order to be internalized. Going on with the outcomes of the second category, it can be noticed that none of the children used both English and Italian to answer to the same question. They adopted either their first language or the new foreign language. It can be inferred that they were aware of linguistic diversity and language awareness as they knew that using both languages to say the same thing it would be a pointless repetition. Finally, this group of results show how children are able to distinguish and identify feelings and emotions expressed in English from the beginning of the study.

As far as the third category is concerned, results achieved with the first checklist were kept constant throughout the whole research project. Hence, code-mixing did not occur, while some examples of code-switching could be found, as some of them were able to select the language appropriate to the interlocutor in a few cases. In addition, children belonging to the second group always relied on extralinguistic elements and contextual features to understand what was said in English.

Even if at the end of the study positive outcomes had been achieved, at the beginning of the study it was not easy to catch children's attention and maintain their motivation high during activities, as it can be seen from the fourth group of results. This was due to individual personality traits as some children were active and dynamic and found difficult to keep focusing what they were doing.

From the last results of the checklist, favourable changes in children's attitudes towards the language can be monitored. At the beginning of the study some children were introverted and shy. But, consequently, they modified their approach as they had the possibility to familiarize with a foreign language different from their mother tongue and with who spoke it.

2.3. Third Group Outcomes

In the paragraphs that follow, outcomes concerning the third group of children obtained as a result of this research project are examined. This group was made of eight children, seven boys and one girl. Their mean age at the first observation was thirty-two months, while it was thirty-three months at the moment of the compilation of the second checklist around the halfway point of the study, and it was thirty-four months at the end of the project when the third checklist was filled out.

It is worth noticing that the numbers of items match with those presented in paragraph 2.4.1.3. and they will be reported below.

1. The child starts imitating some sounds typical of the English language.
2. If the child imitates English-language sounds, there is no linguistic interference with mother tongue and pronunciation is native-like.
3. The child is interested in listening to English-language sounds.
4. The child enjoys repeating English-language sounds and simple words.
5. The child tries to repeat English words.
6. The child clearly utters English words.
7. The child utters simple sentences in English.

8. The child can distinguish and name colours in English.
9. The child can distinguish and name animals in English.
10. The child can distinguish and name food in English.
11. The child accomplishes simple tasks assigned in English (for example “come here”, “sit down”, “stand up”, “give me...”, etc).
12. The child understands simple daily English expressions (for example “hello”, “bye bye”, “good morning”, etc.).

13. The child understands simple English words (for example “toy”, “book”, “animal”, “car”, etc.).
14. The child understands and carries out instructions given during English activities (for example “clap your hands”, “press”, “scratch”, “shake”, “jump”, etc.).
15. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers in Italian.
16. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers in English.
17. The child understands what is said in English and he/she answers both in English and in Italian.
18. The child is able to distinguish emotions and feelings expressed in English.

19. The child uses code-mixing.
20. The child uses code-switching.
21. The child plays with the English language.
22. The child is able to choose the appropriate language to use with his/her interlocutor.
23. The child elaborates compensatory techniques to overcome difficulties during language-comprehension process (for example relying on contextual information, pragmatic features, extralinguistic elements, etc.).
24. The child reflects about the language.
25. The child is aware of the plurality of languages.
26. The child is aware of differences between English and his/her mother tongue.

27. The child looks at the pictures of a book narrated in English with interest.
28. The child's attitude is active and engaged during activities carried out in English.
29. The child is motivated to carry out activities performed in English.
30. The child gets distracted easily during activities carried out in English.

31. The child appears to be shy with the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
32. The child is scared by the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
33. The child shows difficulty in interacting the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
34. The child trusts the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.
35. The child is willing to relate to linguistic diversity.
36. The child shows curiosity and interest towards English and the person who speaks it.
37. The child shows more sensitivity during social interactions with the person who speaks a language different than his/her mother tongue.

2.3.1. First Observation

Data collected through the first checklist are summarised in Table 12.

Items	N° of Children			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Partly	Yes	No	Partly
1	3	3	2	37.5%	37.5%	25%
2	0	4	4	0%	50%	50%
3	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
4	4	3	1	50%	37.5%	12.5%
5	3	3	2	37.5%	37.5%	25%
6	0	3	4	0%	37.5%	62.5%
7	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
8	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
9	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
10	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
11	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
12	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
13	3	0	5	37.5%	0%	62.5%
14	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
15	6	2	0	75%	25%	0%
16	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
17	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
18	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
19	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
20	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
21	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
22	1	3	4	12.5%	37.5%	50%
23	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
24	4	2	2	50%	25%	25%
25	3	4	1	37.5%	50%	12.5%
26	0	2	6	0%	25%	75%
27	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
28	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
29	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
30	1	3	4	12.5%	37.5%	50%
31	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
32	0	5	3	0%	62.5%	37.5%
33	2	3	3	25%	37.5%	37.5%
34	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
35	2	1	5	25%	12.5%	62.5%
36	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%

Table 12: Third Group Outcomes Achieved with the First Checklist.

From the first group of results, it can be inferred that at the beginning of the research project almost all children were interested in listening to sounds and words typical of the English

language, but only the half of them attempt to imitate and reproduce them. It can also be observed that phonological and prosodic traits characteristic of the English language could not be found in none of the children who attempt to produce sounds or simple words in the new foreign language. Moreover, none of them was able to utter clearly neither words or simple sentences.

As far as the second category is concerned, four main outcomes have been achieved. Firstly, children were not able to discriminate and use the name of animals and colours. Some slight concrete results started to appear related to the ability to distinguish and name food. Secondly, almost half of the children could understand simple English expressions related both to their routine and the activities proposed. They were also able to understand the meaning of simple requests and carry it out during the whole day. Thirdly, from these results it can be inferred that the majority of the children answered in Italian when they were asked something in English. They never used the new foreign language. Finally, all children could discriminate and identify emotions expressed by the person who spoke English.

Findings achieved through the third category show that after two weeks from the beginning of the study children were not able to make use of code-mixing yet. On the contrary, some of them showed the first signs of code-switching. As a matter of fact, they could select the right language according to their interlocutor. Moreover, these outcomes demonstrate that nobody played with words belonging to the new foreign language. Furthermore, from this group of results it can be inferred that every child relied on compensatory skills in order to understand what was said in English. For instance, they examined contextual factors, extralinguistic elements, gestures, actions and visual expressions. Finally, this category collects information about the fact that some of the children adopted an attitude of reflection while being exposed to the English language and they often compared words of the new foreign language with the corresponding translation in their mother tongue. In conclusion, they started to become aware of the differences between English and Italian, of linguistic diversity and plurality of languages.

According to the fourth group of results, it was not simple to get children's attention and foster their engagement during the first activities carried out using the English language. In fact, some of them got distracted easily.

From the last category, it appears that at the beginning of the study children are not scared or frightened by the new foreign language they were exposed to. However, they showed some difficulties to interact with the person who spoke English as they were cautious and timorous. In addition, as it was demonstrated by the third group of results, the majority of children immediately started to show a certain sensitivity to linguistic diversity and plurality of languages.

2.3.2. Second Observation

Table 13 that follows exposes those outcomes achieved with the second checklist used to examine children's behaviour and attitudes around the middle of the study.

Items	N° of Children			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Partly	Yes	No	Partly
1	6	2	0	75%	25%	0%
2	0	2	6	0%	25%	75%
3	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
4	6	2	0	75%	25%	0%
5	6	2	0	75%	25%	0%
6	0	2	6	0%	25%	75%
7	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
8	4	2	2	50%	25%	25%
9	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
10	4	2	2	50%	25.0%	25.0%
11	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
12	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
13	4	0	4	50%	0%	50%
14	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
15	1	2	5	12.5%	25%	62.5%
16	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
17	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
18	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
19	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
20	4	2	2	50%	25%	25%
21	1	7	0	12.5%	87.5%	0%
22	4	2	2	50%	25%	25%
23	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
24	5	2	1	62.5%	25%	12.5%
25	4	2	2	50%	25%	25%
26	3	2	3	37.5%	25%	37.5%
27	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
28	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
29	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
30	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
31	0	7	1	0%	87.5%	12.5%
32	0	7	1	0%	87.5%	12.5%
33	1	5	2	12.5%	62.5%	25%
34	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
35	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%
36	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
37	0	2	6	0%	25%	75%

Table 13: Third Group Outcomes Achieved with the Second Checklist.

As far as the first category is concerned, a significant increase can be detected in the number

of children who attempted to produce English-language output. As a matter of fact, almost all of them tried to imitate and reproduce sounds and words belonging to the English language. However, phonology and prosody were still typical of Italian. Furthermore, children were not able to utter complete sentences in English yet.

Some improvements can be monitored within the second group of results. As a matter of fact, an increasing number of children were able to discriminate and name colours and food. No change occurred concerning the distinction of animals. Furthermore, almost all of them could understand statements and requests made during the activity of the day, while everybody could comprehend those linguistic expressions related to their routine. In addition, these outcomes show that around the halfway of the research project, some of the children started using the English language to answer to questions expressed in English. Finally, as far as identification of feelings, no changes occurred in comparison to the former checklist, as all children were able to distinguish emotions from the beginning of the study.

Evidence of code-mixing was not detected by the second checklist, while the number of children able to code-switch increased. As a consequence, their ability to choose the right language according to their interlocutor improved, too. In addition, this category shows that a child played with English words. As a matter of fact, this child pretended to speak English during free play, putting together creatively words heard during the day – such as “yes”, “no”, “yellow”, “water” - and made-up words. Furthermore, findings achieved with the third category reveal that children still relied on contextual and extralinguistic elements to facilitate their comprehension of English. Finally, considering the fact that the majority of children could choose the most appropriate communicative strategies according to their interlocutor, it could be inferred that their awareness of language diversity was enhanced.

Thanks to the fourth group of items, an increase on the number of children actively engaged during those activities carried out in English can be monitored.

Additional successful achievements are also detected within the last category. Generally speaking, children were more willing to relate with the foreign language and the person who spoke it. They were no more shy or cautious. In addition, other positive changes occurred in relation to children's sensitivity to linguistic diversity.

2.3.3. Third Observation

Findings obtained with the third checklist at the end of the research project are presented in Table 14 below.

Items	N° of Children			Percentage		
	Yes	No	Partly	Yes	No	Partly
1	6	1	1	75%	12.5%	12.5%
2	0	2	6	0%	25%	75%
3	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
4	6	2	0	75%	25%	0%
5	6	1	1	75%	12.5%	12.5%
6	1	2	5	12.5%	25%	62.5%
7	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
8	4	2	2	50%	25%	25%
9	0	2	6	0%	25%	75%
10	5	1	2	62.5%	12.5%	25%
11	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
12	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
13	5	0	3	62.5%	0%	37.5%
14	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
15	1	1	6	12.5%	12.5%	75%
16	0	2	6	0%	25%	75%
17	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
18	8	0	0	100%	0%	0%
19	4	3	1	50%	37.5%	12.5%
20	5	1	2	62.5%	12.5%	25%
21	1	7	0	12.5%	87.5%	0%
22	5	1	2	62.5%	12.5%	25%
23	2	0	6	25%	0%	75%
24	6	1	1	75%	12.5%	12.5%
25	5	2	1	62.5%	25%	12.5%
26	4	1	3	50%	12.5%	37.5%
27	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
28	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
29	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
30	0	3	5	0%	37.5%	62.5%
31	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
32	0	8	0	0%	100%	0%
33	0	7	1	0%	87.5%	12.5%
34	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
35	6	0	2	75%	0%	25%
36	7	0	1	87.5%	0%	12.5%
37	0	2	6	0%	25%	75%

Table 14: Third Group Outcomes Achieved with the Third Checklist.

Changes in findings related to the first category cannot be monitored in comparison to the first

category of the previous checklist. Hence, even by the end of the study children generally produced English sounds and words but their phonological and prosodic traits were typical of the Italian language. Moreover, children could not produce simple sentences in English for the whole duration of the research project.

As far as the second category is concerned, no substantial changes occurred compared to the results of the previous checklist, apart from some slight improvements related to the ability of children to distinguish and name animals.

The third group of results shows that, by the end of the research study, children not only displayed their ability to code-switch, but some of them also started to make use of code-mixing. For example, during lunch time they often use expressions like “Non voglio water. Voglio juice.” or “Vorrei ancora fish”. Moreover, as a consequence of their better comprehension of English, children relied less on contextual factors and extralinguistic elements. Furthermore, an additional enhancement occurred both in their linguistic competence in the new foreign language related to the choice of appropriate communicative strategies and in their sensitivity to language diversity.

Examining the fourth group of results, it can be inferred that there is no significant change comparing them with those of the fourth category of the previous checklist. As a consequence, the majority of children showed an active and engaged attitude in carrying out their activities during which they approached the English language.

Finally, the last category shows that additional improvements on children's behaviour and positive attitudes towards English and the person who spoke it could be monitored.

2.3.4. Comparison of Results

All results concerning the older group of children this study dealt with are outlined in the following Table 15.

Items	Total Yes			Total No			Total Partly		
	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.
1	3	6	6	3	2	1	2	0	1
2	0	0	0	4	2	2	4	6	6
3	7	8	8	0	0	0	1	0	0
4	4	6	6	3	2	2	1	0	0
5	3	6	6	3	2	1	2	0	1
6	0	0	1	3	2	2	4	6	5
7	0	0	0	8	8	8	0	0	0
8	0	4	4	8	2	2	0	2	2
9	0	0	0	8	8	2	0	0	6
10	0	4	5	3	2	1	5	2	2
11	4	8	8	0	0	0	4	0	0
12	6	8	8	0	0	0	2	0	0
13	3	4	5	0	0	0	5	4	3
14	4	7	7	0	0	0	4	1	1
15	6	1	1	2	2	1	0	5	6
16	0	0	0	8	3	2	0	5	6
17	0	0	0	8	8	8	0	0	0
18	8	8	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
19	0	0	4	8	8	3	0	0	1
20	0	4	5	3	2	1	5	2	2
21	0	1	1	8	7	7	0	0	0
22	1	4	5	3	2	1	4	2	2
23	8	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	6
24	4	5	6	2	2	1	2	1	1
25	3	4	5	4	2	2	1	2	1
26	0	3	4	2	2	1	6	3	3
27	4	6	6	0	0	0	4	2	2
28	4	6	6	0	0	0	4	2	2
29	4	6	6	0	0	0	4	2	2
30	1	0	0	3	3	3	4	5	5
31	0	0	0	3	7	8	5	1	0
32	0	0	0	5	7	8	3	1	0
33	2	1	0	3	5	7	3	2	1
34	4	7	7	0	0	0	4	1	1
35	2	5	6	1	0	0	5	3	2
36	5	7	7	0	0	0	3	1	1
37	0	0	0	4	2	2	4	6	6

Table 15: Total Results of the Third Group.

Items	Percentage Yes			Percentage No			Percentage Partly		
	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.	1 st Obs.	2 nd Obs.	3 rd Obs.
1	37.5%	75%	75%	37.5%	25%	12.5%	25%	0%	12.5%
2	0%	0%	0%	50%	25%	25%	50%	75%	75%
3	87.5%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	12.5%	0%	0%
4	50%	75%	75%	37.5%	25%	25%	12.5%	0%	0%
5	37.5%	75%	75%	37.5%	25%	12.5%	25%	0%	12.5%
6	0%	0%	12.5%	37.5%	25%	25%	62.5%	75%	62.5%
7	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%
8	0%	50%	50%	100%	25%	25%	0%	25%	25%
9	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	25%	0%	0%	75%
10	0%	50%	62.5%	37.5%	25%	12.5%	62.5%	25%	25%
11	50%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%
12	75%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	0%
13	37.5%	50%	62.5%	0%	0%	0%	62.5%	50%	37.5%
14	50%	87.5%	87.5%	0%	0%	0%	50%	12.5%	12.5%
15	75%	12.5%	12.5%	25%	25%	12.5%	0%	62.5%	75%
16	0%	0%	0%	100%	37.5%	25%	0%	62.5%	75%
17	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%
18	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
19	0%	0%	50%	100%	100%	37.5%	0%	0%	12.5%
20	0%	50%	62.5%	37.5%	25%	12.5%	62.5%	25%	25%
21	0%	12.5%	12.5%	100%	87.5%	87.5%	0%	0%	0%
22	12.5%	50%	62.5%	37.5%	25%	12.5%	50%	25%	25%
23	100%	100%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	75%
24	50%	62.5%	75%	25%	25%	12.5%	25%	12.5%	12.5%
25	37.5%	50%	62.5%	50%	25%	25%	12.5%	25%	12.5%
26	0%	37.5%	50%	25%	25%	12.5%	75%	37.5%	37.5%
27	50%	75%	75%	0%	0%	0%	50%	25%	25%
28	50%	75%	75%	0%	0%	0%	50%	25%	25%
29	50%	75%	75%	0%	0%	0%	50%	25%	25%
30	12.5%	0%	0%	37.5%	37.5%	37.5%	50%	62.5%	62.5%
31	0%	0%	0%	37.5%	87.5%	100%	62.5%	12.5%	0%
32	0%	0%	0%	62.5%	87.5%	100%	37.5%	12.5%	0%
33	25%	12.5%	0%	37.5%	62.5%	87.5%	37.5%	25%	12.5%
34	50%	87.5%	87.5%	0%	0%	0%	50%	12.5%	12.5%
35	25%	62.5%	75%	12.5%	0%	0%	62.5%	37.5%	25%
36	62.5%	87.5%	87.5%	0%	0%	0%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%
37	0%	0%	0%	50%	25%	25%	50%	75%	75%

Table 15: Total Results of the Third Group.

Comparing the results obtained in the first group, a substantial increase in the imitation and reproduction of English sounds and words can be detected around the middle of the research study. However, children's English-language output was influenced by Italian phonetics and

phonology. Hence, their pronunciation was not characterised by typically English traits. This was due to the fact that at this age children become aware of their mother tongue and, as it happens with all the other language components, phonology is becoming more and more stable. Furthermore, from this category of outcomes, it can be observed that none of the children belonging to the older group was able to utter simple sentences in English. This is attributable to the insufficient exposure to the new foreign language that did not allow children to understand how sentence and English-language production in general works.

Results outlined in the second category emphasize the difference between the comprehension of those expressions presented repeatedly everyday during the whole routine – such as greetings or food - and those expressions confined to restricted contexts of use such as those of activities carried out in English – such as particular requirements or the names of colours and animals. The first ones were easier to understand than the second ones, even if successful achievements are obtained in both categories. Moreover, this group of results shows how children answer to questions asked in English. At the beginning of the study, they preferred to use their mother tongue, while after one month and a half some of them began to use also the English language. The fact that they answered in Italian makes clear that children could understand what it was said in English, but their knowledge about the new foreign language was not developed enough to allow them to reply. In addition, children never used both languages to answer the same question. This reflected their awareness of linguistic diversity and plurality of languages as they could understand that replying both in English and in Italian would be a mere repetition. Finally, children showed their ability to distinguish and identify emotions and feelings manifested by the person who spoke English right from the beginning of the research project.

As far as the third category is concerned, positive outcomes related to children's ability to code-switch could be monitored since the beginning of the study. This reflects the fact that children developed a certain sensitivity on selecting the most appropriate language according to their interlocutor. This, in turn, means that children were able to perceive some differences between their mother tongue and the foreign language. In addition, they were becoming aware of linguistic diversity and plurality of languages. This group of results shows that by the end of the research project, children could also make use of code-mixing. This ability took time to

develop as it required a certain familiarity with the new foreign language.

The results achieved with the fourth category prove that it was not easy to catch children's attention and maintain their engagement during activities in which they approached to the new foreign language at the beginning of the study. This is due to the fact that every activity proposed in English and inserted in the children's routine was a novelty. However, as the day passed, children started familiarizing with the new foreign language, the person who spoke it and the activities proposed and, at the same time, positive changes in their attitudes occurred. They became more interested and engaged in performing their English activities.

A similar evolution in children's behaviour and attitudes towards the English language and the person who spoke it could be monitored taking into consideration the last group of results. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of the study not all the children were at ease. Some of them were not willing to relate with the new language. On the contrary, at the end of the research project, children showed interest and curiosity towards English. Above all, they exhibit an increasingly growing of their sensitivity towards linguistic diversity and plurality of languages.

3. Discussion

In this section, all the results achieved in this research study will be analysed taking into consideration the research questions raised at the beginning of this research study.

- Does this research study based on an approach to a foreign language that occurred within a formal context of education involving children from zero to three years old and that lasted three months lead to successful achievements?

The current chapter provides an example of early language teaching program that aimed at introducing English as a foreign language within a formal educational context, such as that of an Italian kindergarten. It dealt with twenty-four young Italian monolingual children which had been exposed to the new foreign language for three months. Taking into consideration the fact that it was a foreign language, which means

that children could be exposed to English exclusively within their childcare centre, this research project provided an immersion into the new language which covered both informal routines moments and formal educational activities. As far as the outcomes achieved with this study concerning all three groups, it can be stated that they have satisfied this research question. As a matter of fact, this project was able to prove that an early approach to a foreign language that occurred before the third year of age and lasted three months can lead to successful results. These outcomes can be classified in terms of cognitive, linguistic and affective achievements. These three kinds of results have been examined separately, but actually the linguistic, cognitive and affective components are highly interrelated in an individual. For instance, linguistic production could not occur if the comprehension process is not activated, which in turn is allowed if and only if the child is not interested, engaged, motivated and willing to approach to a new foreign language.

- What kind of linguistic outcomes has been detected? Do the three groups of children differ one another taking into consideration these results?

Examining the results from a linguistic point of view, it emerges that the majority of children could imitate, reproduce or produce English-language output. Some differences related to the linguistic output characterise and distinguish the three groups of children. As a matter of fact, imitation and reproduction of sounds and simple ordinary words were detected in every group. These two processes have been defined as the main innate means of language acquisition adopted by infants from birth. Production of simple words occurred within the second and, above all, the third group of children. Most of the times these words bore the meaning of a whole sentence and, as a consequence, they could be considered as holophrasis. Some pieces of evidence of both code-switching and code-mixing were provided by older children, especially at the end of the research project when they had already been exposed to the English language for long enough.

Furthermore, phonology, which is the most straightforward language component, is another factor that contributed to make a distinction between younger and older

children. As a matter of fact, the former group displayed some phonological characteristics typical of the English language while imitating and reproducing sounds and simple words. On the other hand, peculiar phonological features could hardly be found within the older group as its members have already started to consolidate first-language phonological and prosodic traits.

- What kind of evidence that proved the activation of cognitive processes has been monitored? Do the three groups of children differ one another taking into consideration these results?

First of all, considering that various pieces of evidence of English language production have been detected, it means that the comprehension process has been activated by the child. This can be regarded as a clear sign of activation of cognitive processes and is considered as the first step towards a successful foreign-language acquisition process. On the subject of foreign-language comprehension, there is a constant feature encountered in all three groups. While almost all children could understand linguistic expressions linked to those informal routine situations, on the contrary they showed some difficulties in understanding those less frequent words adopted only during those formal educational activities.

Moreover, another achievement obtained in this study that is able to prove the activation of cognitive processes is the ability of code-switching. It could be monitored especially in older children. They showed their ability to flexibly switch from one language to the other one and to select the most appropriate language according to their interlocutor, which in turn demonstrated their early development of the ability to inhibit irrelevant linguistic stimuli in the language which were not useful in that particular communicative situation.

- What kind of affective and emotional changes in children's attitudes towards the new language, the person who spoke it and the activities carried out has been observed? Do the three groups of children differ one another taking into consideration these results?

As far as the children's attitude towards the new foreign language and the person who spoke it, some differences between younger and older children could be detected at the beginning of the research project. As a matter of fact, younger infants were immediately attracted by the novelty, by the sounds they heard and by the person who spoke a new language different from the language they were used to hear. Older children realised that they were dealing with another language different from their mother tongue and, as a consequence, they showed a disengaged and distant attitude at the beginning of the study. With the passing of time, they started to acquaint themselves with the new language, with the person using it and with the introduction of a new foreign language within their educational routine. As a result, they became more willing to relate with the English language.

As far as formal and informal activities are concerned, apart from those few cases represented by those children who got easily distracted because of particular individual personality traits, all children generally showed to be interested in carrying them out keeping a high level of engagement throughout the duration of the research project. This active involvement was also fostered by some qualitative features of the activities propose, which take advantage of children's innate creativity, expressivity, imagination, multisensoriality and inclination for motility.

- Does this research project share more features with Foreign-Language Teaching Programmes or with Immersion Programmes proposed in the Early Language Learning project planned by the European Commission, taking into consideration that this study took inspiration from both of them?

Evaluating the achieved results, it can be concluded that this research project shared characteristics with Foreign-Language Teaching programmes as it dealt with a foreign language taught in a formal educational context. In addition, they showed similar linguistic output, which were imitation of sounds, reproduction of words and production of holophrasis. However, the most consistent findings are comparable to those distinguishing features of Immersion programs, which in turn have characteristics in common with bilingualism. As a matter of fact, both code-mixing

and code-switching could be detected in some of the children, especially the older ones. Above all, some of the features attributable to the bilingual cognitive advantage can be monitored, such as the skill of inhibiting the irrelevant linguistic input, the ability of flexibly change the language used according to their interlocutor, the awareness of the arbitrariness of semantic relationship existing between a word and its meaning.

3.1. Educational Implications

This section deals with those points of strength emerged after data analysis and after having answered to research questions. These key features that characterised this study can be translated in educational implications, which can be useful either for future research in this field of study or for planning similar projects, bearing in mind that early foreign-language teaching programs applied to kindergartens and childcare centres are in the testing phase in Italy.

- Considering those positive linguistic, cognitive and affective achievement obtained with this research study, it can be recommended to propose this kind of programmes through which an infant has the possibility to be exposed to a language different from the mother tongue during the early developmental stages. It should not be focused on a formal language-teaching method. On the contrary, it should foster the child's innate and natural language-acquisition process. Hence, children need to have a genuine, spontaneous and without-constraints contact with the new foreign language and this approach should match their degree of linguistic, psychological and cognitive development. In addition, the learning environment, informal routine situations and formal educational activities should be designed in order to be attractive for the child. In doing so, when positive attitudes are stimulated, children are more willing to approach to the new foreign language. As a consequence, unconscious cognitive processes are activated, which allow a successful and effective foreign-language acquisition.

- This research project lasted three months, during which children were exposed English three days a week and for a duration of five hours a day. The fact that it could not provide children with a complete, intensive and long-lasting immersion in the English language represents the most critical feature of this research study. Even if it can be considered as a short-term study, it has obtained successful linguistic outcomes, such as imitation and reproduction of sounds and simple words, production of words and holophrasis and code-mixing. Planning similar projects which can guarantee a long-term exposure to a foreign language, the quantity and the quality of linguistic output can be improved.

In addition, on the subject of phonology, bearing in mind that the most successful results could be detected in younger infants, it can be asserted that the sooner very young children have the possibility to approach to the new foreign language, the better is for the acquisition of those language features that allow them to develop linguistic traits similar to those of a native speaker.

- Taking into account the difference in the results achieved in the comprehension of those expression linked to informal daily situations on one hand and the understanding of those words merely linked to formal educational activities, it is recommended to provide children with abundant, frequent and redundant linguistic input while adopting this kind of foreign-language teaching program. Moreover, in order to guarantee an effective understanding of the new foreign language, the linguistic input should be comprehensible, various, attractive and associated with formal educational activities that take advantage of children's innate inclination to multisensoriality, creativity, motility, expressivity.

Furthermore, those foreign-language teaching projects similar to the one proposed in this research study should ensure the activation and development of infant's cognitive processes such as those related to the inhibition of irrelevant linguistic input while the child is making use of code-switching. Hence, code-switching conditions should be stimulated and children should be encouraged to switch from one language to the other one in order to develop and improve their ability of inhibition, which is a way to train

the brain and to enhance its flexibility.

- Proposing foreign-language teaching programs means planning project able to pay attention to infants' emotions and feelings. Under this perspective and considering the differences between younger and older children mentioned in the paragraph above, children should be immersed in an educational environment which should be not-oppressive, relaxed, motivating, engaging and in which they could approach to the new foreign language through comprehensible, contextualized and concrete linguistic input.

4. Conclusion

As it was claimed in the first chapter of this thesis, an early exposure of very young children to a language different from their mother tongue it is recommended by the European Council, according to which this experience will provide infants with cognitive skills and linguistic tools necessary to grow up in the heterogeneous linguistic framework that characterizes the present-day worldwide population. This exposure to a second or foreign language during the early developmental stages is able to support the child's orientation towards multilingualism. In addition to increase knowledge and competence in more than one language, this will also enhance the development of open-minded, respectful and tolerant attitudes towards the existing plurality of languages and cultural diversity that characterised the social community within which the child grows up. This favourable disposition towards other languages could also be detected in this research project. As a matter of fact, right from the beginning of the study, the majority of children showed not to be frightened or intimidated by the presence of a person who spoke a foreign language different from their mother tongue. In fact, they were curious and interested in approaching to the English language. The higher level of engagement could be monitored in the younger infants belonging to the first group rather than the older ones. In conclusion, an exposure to a language different from the mother tongue during the early stages of a child's growth can lay the foundation for multilingualism and, at the same time, it can enhance the development of positive attitudes towards other languages

and the corresponding cultures. It should take advantage of this age as it is a sensitive phase of child's development.

In the first chapter, it was also introduced and explained the concept of critical period and the related consequences it has to the language-acquisition process. Neuroscientific and psycholinguistic achievements have been able to identify specific time windows within which linguistic acquisitional capabilities are at the highest levels and, as a consequence, children are able to acquire a new language without any significant cognitive effort. The results obtained during this research study were able to show the innate infants' abilities to acquire a language naturally typical of this developmental stage. As a matter of fact, a three-months immersion in the new foreign language within their formal educational context was enough to exhibit the first pieces of evidence of language acquisition. This was also supported by the approach to early language exposure adopted during the research project, which encouraged the children's natural acquisition of the new foreign language. Therefore, English was not taught through a formal teaching program – even if the childcare centre can be considered as a formal educational context. On the contrary, the child was immersed in the English language throughout all the moments of scholastic routine, such as free play, snack and lunch time, bathroom time, during the activity of the day. Hence, this research project offered an English language that was comprehensible, authentic, highly contextualized, always related to what infants were doing. In doing so, English passes from being an abstract object of instruction to become the concrete vehicle of educational contents aiming at stimulating the child from a cognitive, linguistic and affective point of view. In connection with this topic, from the results achieved in this study it can be inferred that children successful foreign-language acquisition differed depending on whether the linguistic input was associated only to restricted contexts, such as those concerning the activity of the day, or it was offered frequently everyday as it was related to various moments of the child's educational routine. Infants experienced greater difficulties in understanding and acquiring the former type of linguistic input, as it was less common and recurrent. As it was explained in the first chapters of this thesis, frequency, concreteness and authenticity are fundamental features that should characterise the linguistic input in order to be acquired naturally and effortlessly by a young child.

Still on the subject of critical period, this research project could provide evidence concerning

the acquisition process of a foreign-language phonology, which has been claimed to be the language feature most constrained by the age of language acquisition. Scientific research has found out that the most favourable critical period to acquire foreign-language phonology should occur within the first year of age. As far as this study is concerned, differences between younger and older children could be detected. As a matter of fact, those infants belonging to the first group who imitated and reproduced sounds and simple words displayed phonological features typical of the English language. On the contrary, older children's English-language output was influenced by Italian phonetics and phonology.

With regard to infants' behaviour and attitudes during activities in which they were exposed to the new foreign language, children showed to be interested in carrying out these activities and they could maintain their level of engagement high throughout all the research project – apart from those few cases in which some children got easily distracted because of particular individual personality traits or due to an upheaval to their routine as a result of the insertion of the English language. This active involvement was also fostered by some qualitative features of the activities proposed. They stimulated children's expressivity, creativity, imagination, multisensoriality and motility. In addition, these activities were planned according to the general educational plan of the kindergarten. In doing so, they could support a linguistic as well as cognitive and emotional development of the child.

Finally, various kinds of linguistic output could be recorded during this research study depending on infants' age and the corresponding cognitive and linguistic characteristics. Firstly, imitation and reproduction of sounds and simple words were detected in every group. Secondly, production of words and holophrasis occurred within the second and, above all, the third group of children. Finally, the ability of code-switching and code-mixing were detected within the older children's group. The former occurred in conjunction with changes in the main contextual variables belonging to the communicative situation, which concerned the interlocutor in the case of this study. As a matter of fact, the majority of children could choose the most appropriate language most of the times depending on whether they were speaking to their Italian teacher or to the person who spoke English. The latter gave form to mixed sentences as a consequence of the juxtaposition of Italian and English. Children's ability to flexibly switch from the useless language to the other relevant one showed their ability to

inhibit linguistic stimuli not pertinent in that particular communicative situation. In addition, the fact that children often reflected on the relationship between English and Italian comparing the translations of the same word, indicated that they began to understand that something could be named in different ways according to the language used. Hence, a sensitivity to semantic relationships between words and meanings and a certain awareness that these relationships are based on arbitrary associations between words and referents started to develop.

In conclusion, having examined all the achieved results, the points of strength and the educational implications of this research project, it can be asserted that foreign-language teaching projects planned for very young children attending childcare centres have to be promoted as they will have a positive impact on the infant from a linguistic, affective and cognitive perspective. Hence, these achievements emphasize the importance of the support and the adoption of this kind of programmes. This promotion of should occur also in Italy where proper guidelines and action plans have not been officially planned yet. This deficiency is mainly due to the novelty and the complexity of the issues related to early foreign-language teaching applied to childcare centres and also because this kind of educational contexts fall within the framework of private instruction.

Conclusion

As it has been stated by several statistical studies, more than seven thousand languages exist nowadays, 347 of which are spoken by 94% of the whole population. Hence, contacts between different linguistic communities are increasingly frequent due to either their geopolitical distribution or reasons related to migration. A foreseeable consequence of these relationships between various languages and individuals belonging to different linguistic groups is an increase in the number of people able to use more than one language in their everyday life. This phenomenon has been defined multilingualism. As far as the European Union is concerned, plurality of languages and cultural diversity are considered enriching factors to be preserved and supported. Neuroscientific and psycholinguistic research studies have found out that the most favourable age able to guarantee an effective second or foreign language-acquisition process is represented by the early stages of a child's development, which constitute the critical period, a specific time window during which children's linguistic acquisitional abilities are at the highest levels and they can acquire a new language without any significant cognitive effort. This is possible primarily because of the configuration of the infant's brain which has optimal features that can guarantee an excellent language acquisition. These are the main motivations behind those initiatives planned by the European Commission that aims to promote Early Language Learning programs. They promote an exposure to a second or foreign language within an early childhood education and care setting in a pre-primary school context. The main purposes are a long-lasting exposure to multilingualism, the development of children's awareness and open-minded attitude towards linguistic diversity and cultural variety, an possibility to enhance intercomprehension abilities. Early Language Learning programs provide these same educational opportunities to all children they deal with by proposing a range from formal foreign-language instruction programs to full immersion programs with inspiration from bilingualism. The Early Language Learning programs taken into consideration in this thesis are Foreign-Language Teaching programs and Immersion programs. Foreign-Language Teaching programs intend to expose young learners attending pre-primary schools to a new foreign language not present within the environment in which they live. As a consequence, as the source of linguistic input exclusively comes from the scholastic environment, it should be quantitatively and qualitatively relevant. Hence, foreign-

language exposure must be frequent, redundant, repetitive, comprehensible, authentic, concrete, contextualized. The teacher has the monopoly of foreign-language input and is in charge of presenting it adjusting its quality and quantity, selecting the means and instruments of instruction, choosing the most suitable pedagogical approaches to adopt, proposing didactic activities and monitoring children's progresses in the foreign-language acquisition process. Foreign-Language Teaching programs are addressed to very young children with a common first-language background. After being exposed to a new foreign language, the most common types of language output detected are imitation and reproduction, production of lexical chunks, one-word sentences called holophrasis that become more and more complex with the passing of time, and mixed sentences. On the other hand, with Immersion programs children are fully immersed in the target language and this occurs both inside and outside the educational environment. As a matter of fact, the target language proposed in this project is a second language. Hence, Immersion programs are typically used in bilingual environments. Bilingualism is a complex phenomenon described as dynamic as its configuration could change over time, relative as it reflects the existence of various degrees of bilingual linguistic competence depending on the features of the communicative situation, multidimensional as it is determined by several aspects and characteristics. The result of this interrelation of factors is a heterogeneous bilingual population in which each bilingual speaker is different from anyone else. As a matter of fact, Immersion programs are addressed to various types of early bilinguals, from those living in a geo-political area in which an official second language is spoken to those coming from migration conditions. This kind of projects aims at fostering bilingualism not only concerning the concept of linguistic competence but also from an affective and cognitive point of view. Immersion programs support also the child's integration within the second-language community and the development of several cognitive advantages such as metalinguistic competence, ability of inhibition, divergent thinking, cognitive flexibility. Typical linguistic output of very young children attending Immersion programs and acquiring a second language is represented by imitation, reproduction, production of holophrasis and lexical chunks and, above all, loan words, code-switching and code-mixing. The simultaneous use of two languages in the same social interactions or in the same sentence highlights young bilinguals' linguistic competence both in the first and in the second language. Whether Foreign-language Teaching or Immersion programs, they all take into

consideration the fact that they deal with very young children. Hence, they must adopt the most appropriate pedagogical, psychological and educational principles such as the Playful Language Teaching, the Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach to language acquisition, which focus on children's expressiveness, creativity, multisensoriality, motility, relationality, pragmatism and authenticity.

The research project presented in this thesis takes inspiration from both Foreign-Language Teaching and Immersion programs. As a matter of fact, it aimed at proposing a foreign language – English – inside a kindergarten located in the province of Padova. It dealt with twenty-four Italian monolingual children from zero to three years old exposed to the new foreign language for a three-months period that started at the beginning of March 2019 and finished at the end of May 2019. The approach to English was not based on formal teaching methods as it usually happens with foreign languages. In fact, this research project introduced the English language within every moment of the children' routine, from informal daily situations, such as lunchtime, bathroom time, free play, to formal educational activities. As a result, children were immersed in the new foreign language three days a week and for five hours a day. In doing so, this study provided an approach to English as natural as possible in order to support children's innate language-acquisition process, focusing on their inclination to creativity, multisensoriality, expressiveness and motility. The main purpose of this research study was to gather information about the effectiveness of the achievements of a project based on an approach to a foreign language that occurred within a formal context of education involving children from zero to three years old and that lasted three months. In addition, it wants to assess whether the achieved results share more features either with the Early Foreign-Language Teaching programmes or with the Immersion programs. In order to examine and monitor children's attitude and behaviours three different observational checklists were planned, which corresponded to the three groups of children. The items were grouped in five main categories concerning linguistic output, children's attitude during activities, children's attitude towards the new language and the person who spoke it, and the presence of pieces of evidence of children's activation of cognitive processes. Three checklists were filled out for every child, one at the beginning of the study, one in the middle and one at the end. Examining the achieved results, it can be stated that this project had a successful impact on children from a linguistic, cognitive and affective perspective. The majority of

children could imitate and reproduce sounds and simple words, and produce words, holophrasis and code-mixed sentences. In addition, the fact that they were able to comprehend the English language and their ability of code-switching demonstrated their activation of cognitive processes. Finally, they showed interest and curiosity towards the new language, the person using it and the activities carried out. These positive and successful outcomes led to some educational implications which could be helpful to plan similar foreign-language teaching projects. Above all, they emphasized the importance of the promotion of this kind of early language education programmes.

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