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Linguistic difficulties in Italian L2: a case study with adult immigrants

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ABSTRACT

Il lavoro proposto intende esplorare i percorsi di apprendimento degli immigrati adulti che "lottano" con l'italiano come seconda lingua (L2). Ci sono molte ragioni dietro il desiderio di imparare una nuova lingua, nel caso dell'italiano L2 si tratta spesso della necessità di conoscere la lingua del paese in cui ci si trova a vivere. L'italiano come L2 e le difficoltà ad esso legato che inducono l'apprendente in errore, oggetti dello studio che qui viene presentato, richiedono un'attenta analisi dalla quale partire per fornire modalità e strategie di superamento, un compito arduo di cui la didattica delle lingue deve farsi carico.

Il lavoro è suddiviso in due parti. La prima, più teorica, analizza gli aspetti fondamentali della lingua presa in esame, l'italiano, partendo da una prima panoramica storica della lingua per poi passare ad analizzare, in particolare, le sue caratteristiche come L2; dalle definizioni alla presentazione dei profili di apprendenti, ancora alla fase di progettazione di un corso. La sezione finale presenta una rassegna degli errori e difficoltà più comuni che uno straniero si trova a dover fronteggiare nel suo percorso di apprendimento dell'italiano L2.

La seconda parte, invece, è incentrata sullo studio del caso preso in esame. Cominciando dalla presentazione della struttura ospite e dei partecipanti coinvolti, per poi proseguire con la parte pratica della ricerca, dall'osservazione alla somministrazione di un questionario contenente domande dirette per cui gli studenti sono stati chiamati a "quantificare" il grado di difficoltà degli esempi linguistici proposti. Il lavoro si chiude con le conclusioni: i dati raccolti attraverso l'osservazione, l'ascolto, la tabulazione e l'analisi dei risultati, alla luce delle teorie di riferimento oggetto di studio nel percorso universitario affrontato, hanno fornito spunti di riflessione riguardo le tecniche didattiche che potrebbero risultare più idonee ed efficaci nella risoluzione di tali difficoltà.

INTRODUCTION

Most people in their lives have had to (or will have to) face a very significant challenge: to learn a new language. The learner has to face a difficult and often complicated path, whether we are talking about learning an LS or an L2. Moreover, numerous motivations, needs, and expectations lead the subject to undertake this path. One is approaching a new language for the pleasure of discovering new cultures, or because these languages are part of the school curriculum, or to achieve a career promotion at work or to start to live in a new country after a transfer. Different situations, then, that require specific and focused consideration.

Glottodidactics is the discipline that is concerned with and examines these and other factors that are part of a learning process. The main aim is to try to "know" and " work out" what the subject of language learning is: in short, it participates in both theoretical and practical dimensions. **Age** is one of the most investigated factors in Glottodidactics, referring to the principle that a child will follow a language learning path resembling but different at the same time from that of an adult.

The proposed work aims to examine the learning paths of adult immigrants who "struggle" with Italian as a second language (L2). The term " struggle " is to be considered appropriate for all those critical issues that have been examined and that identify the language of the "Bel Paese" as a language not easy to learn, even more, when the latter is very far from the mother tongue of the learner. In particular, the aim is to analyze and show the major difficulties that students encounter during a guided learning path of Italian L2.

As mentioned above, there are many reasons behind the desire to learn a new language. About the proposed situation, given that it refers to Italian L2 it is often the necessity to know the language of the country where one lives. In 2020, according to the statistics of the Ministry of the Interior, 6,576 immigrants landed in Italy and, in the same period of 2018, more than double that number had landed[1]. Sicily, in particular, is the first place in the Islands macro area for the foreign population legally residing (2018).

The foreigners that are resident on 1 January 2018 amount to 193,014 of the total population[2].

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[1] Ministero dell'interno, *Sbarchi e accoglienza dei migranti: tutti i dati,* 26-06-2020.
https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2020-06/cruscotto_giornaliero_26-06-2020.pdf
[2]www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it
http://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it/leregioni/sicilia/Pagine/default.aspx

The difficulties that mislead the learner, that are the subject of this study, require a careful analysis from which to start to provide ways and strategies to overcome them, a difficult task that language education must be responsible of. The first important element to analyze, from the didactics point of view, is precisely the kind of learners who decide to attend a course. In this case, it is a group of immigrant adults, a group of subjects who show specific needs and objectives. In particular, the decision to contact a CPIA in order to learn Italian is often due to the need to integrate into the community in which they live, to find a job, and to be able to move and manage independently.

The research sample examined is a group of adult immigrants aged between 16 and 35, living in Sicily, who attended literacy classes in Italian L2 at the CPIA (Centro Provinciale di Istruzione per Adulti) in Castelvetrano, a town in the province of Trapani that is particularly concerned by the phenomenon of immigration. This part of western Sicily is particularly populated by North African immigrants who, once they have arrived and settled, enter the world of work, which offers agriculture and fishing as the principal source of supply.

The observation of the class group and the level of interlanguage reached, the administration of a questionnaire about the difficulties encountered/perceived by the students and the tabulation and analysis of the same, have highlighted the most common problems. The work, divided into two parts, analyses the fundamental aspects of the language taken into consideration, Italian.

The first part opens with the historical framework of the Italian language, from its origins to the present day. In the evolutionary history of the Italian language lies the motivation why in Italy Glottodidactics has been delayed in the L2 issue. The road towards the unification and the Italianization of the peninsula itself has been long and varied.

The section continues with the analysis of the major interventions in this field, from the action of associations to the legal regulation of language integration in Italy, moving on to the theoretical definitions of L2 and its components, from the learner profile to the role of the teacher.

The following sections analyse the more specific aspects of Italian as L2, considering the users to whom the issue is addressed and presenting the language as an essential object of integration (**italiano di contatto e di prossimità**). Linguistic analysis is then carried out, which focuses on the stages of interlanguage and the difficulties associated with them, often manifesting themselves in linguistic errors. The section ends with an overview of these errors present at different levels of linguistic analysis, from phonology to vocabulary.

The second part focuses on the Case Study and illustrates the main criticalities found by the selected research sample. The presentation of the research method used and of the participants

involved is followed by the practical part of the research, from the observation to the administration of the questionnaire. The questionnaire divided into sections concerning the various aspects of Italian Linguistics (Phonology, Morphology, Syntax), presented direct questions to the students called upon to "quantify" the degree of difficulty of the proposed linguistic examples. A final part, moreover, included a series of open questions that tried to shift the attention to a more intimate aspect of the path they faced. They were asked not only to quantify in total the difficulty of the language, emphasizing the most critical aspects (listening, writing, speaking, etc.), but also to express an opinion about their new life in Italy and propose new activities and strategies to be included in the course to improve learning.

The work ends with the conclusions: the data collected through observation, listening, tabulation and analysis of the results, in the light of the reference theories studied during the University course, have provided insights about the teaching techniques that could be more appropriate and effective in solving these problems/difficulties. From theory to practice, always taking into account not only the linguistic aspect but also the cultural one. The proposed activities, in fact, often also take into account the issue of the cultural integration of the immigrant. It is not enough just to know the language of the place where one lives, but to pay attention to the customs and habits of the community and possibly also to bring one's history and culture in a perspective of continuous enrichment.

PART ONE: theory of second language acquisition

In Italy and around the world there are millions of people who decide to learn a new language and there are many reasons that lead them to undertake a learning path.

Learning a new language involves overcoming a series of challenges and obstacles that the learner will sooner or later have to face along this path. The term "obstacles" refers to all those grammatical structures of the language that are critical to the learner, especially when his/her mother tongue is very distant from Italian, e.g. Chinese, Arabic.

From such difficulties often emerge the errors of linguistic production, and conversely the errors can be the indicator of learning difficulties experienced by the learner.

It becomes even more complicated when dealing with an **L2**, i.e. a non-native language which is learned in the country of origin of native speakers, rather than with an **LS** (a foreign language learned in one's own country); consequently, in addition to the notions of _language_ and _grammar_, concepts such as _cultural identity_ and _integration_ also arise.

The notion of **Italian L2** can be considered as part of the condition of all those people who live in Italy, whether they are temporary immigrants or not (Erasmus students, Marco Polo, staff of foreign companies based in Italy, asylum seekers, immigrants etc.), who wish and/or need to learn Italian language, either through spontaneous acquisition or with the help of language courses.

The teaching of Italian L2 to immigrant adults, in particular, is one of the most complex topics in the panorama of language teaching studies.

It is a very complex matter because of the history of Italian L2 teaching itself, which started in a consistent way only after the 1980s, and thus it is a recent field of study. In the 1980s, in fact, two major problems of the old questione della lingua i.e. dialectal tradition and the lack of a common language, have been solved

The new **questione della lingua** has its roots in the history of Italian as a national language. The delay in facing "Italian as a second language" also derives from the delay resulting from the spread of Italian as the official language of the peninsula.

A general overview of the history of the Italian language, through a diachronic approach, provides a framework from which it is possible to define the concept of Italian L2 in all its aspects.

1. Short summary of the Italian linguistic evolution: from its origin to the present.

All the languages that are spoken in the world reflect years and years of transformation. Italian presents a history which is as complex as long. Hundreds of different dialects and idioms have led to the development of the national language. The well-known "*questione della lingua*" involved men of the Italian literary panorama who have been decisive in affirming the "standard" variety of the language.

All this mosaic of idioms and dialects that have contributed to the development of Italian continues to be evident today in the so-called varieties of language. As expressed by Berruto[3], the varieties of Italian differ on different axes (the social class, the historical evolution, the mean, the geographical area). When an immigrant living in Sicily learns, in a more or less spontaneous way, Italian, he will inevitably learn those structures of the Regional Italian. This may explain errors due to the infiltration of typical forms of regional or dialectal varieties:

"*Oggi è parlato di mangiare*" → Sicilian "*manciari*" → Italian "*cibo*"
"*Oggi ha parlato di cibo*"

Therefore, there is a precise evolutionary history behind this language.

Italian is one of the Romance languages, belonging to a larger group known as the Indo-European family that is a group of several hundred related languages. Latin, from which Italian derives, is a classical language belonging to this family.

With the expansion of the Roman Empire, started in the first century BC, Latin extended throughout the peninsula. It is important to underline the distinction between *Classical Latin* and *Vulgar Latin,* thus "good Latin" and "corrupted Latin"[4], because they were both crucial for the development of Italian. Classical Latin was the idiom of great poets such as Cicero, Livio, Ovid. It was therefore used for literary and formal purposes, codified by grammars and learned at school. Vulgar Latin, on the other hand, was the language of uneducated people, therefore it was a purely spoken language[5].

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[3] G. Berruto, *Sociolinguistica dell'italiano contemporaneo*, Roma, La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1987.
[4] L. Serianni, G. Antonelli, *Manuale di linguistica italiana. Storia, attualità, grammatica,* Bruno Mondadori, 2011, p.4
[5] R. Cella, *Storia dell'italiano,* Il Mulino, 2015, p. 13.

The study of Latin was essential, because it pervaded many aspects of life, from politics to literature. However, this situation changed because of the decline of the Empire, at first with the separation of the Western Empire from that of the East, and subsequently with the dissolution of the Western Empire, under the Emperor, Romulus Augustus[6].

Since that moment, most Italic populations, belonging to the conquered territories known as Romània, began to speak their own Vulgar[7].

Vulgar Latin then completely replaced the "correct" language, from being a solely spoken language to become the only idiom.

The first recorded form of written Italian is the *Placito Capuano*. It is a notarial report, an official paper belonging to the group of so-called *Placiti cassinesi*[8].

The certificate contains the testimonies of three men, and it was about a diatribe over a problem of land distribution, nearby a Benedictine monastery. Two of the three witnesses were reported in Vulgar. The testimony stated:

> ➢ *"Sao ko kelle terre, per kelle fini que ki contene,*
> *trenta anni le possette parte Sancti Benedecti"*

It was Literature that during the XIII century, began to lay the foundations for what would later become the national language. This is the century of the great Italian poets: Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio. The first real reflections on the language began with these authors, as witnessed, for example, by the work of Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia,* (1303-1305) These three authors undoubtedly showed different linguistic features, from Dante's multilingualism to Petrarca's monolingualism, passing through the Boccaccio's "impasto linguistico".[9]

The XIV century saw the rise of the first Italian grammar by Leon Battista Alberti, the *Grammatichetta,* and the spread of Tuscan by people such as Lorenzo De' Medici. This was in

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[6] Ivi, p. 13
[7] P. D'Achille, *L'italiano contemporaneo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2003, p. 23.
[8] R. Cella, 2015, *op. cit.*; pp. 21-22
C. Grassi, A. A. Sorbero, T. Telmon, *Introduzione alla dialettologia italiana,* Editori Laterza, 2003, pp.16-17.
[9] L. Serianni, G. Antonelli, *op. cit*. p. 43

fact, for Florence, a moment of exceptional vitality; it became the centre of Humanism and the Renaissance in the XV century[10].

In those years a strong diatribe arose about the need to identify a unitary language: the "*questione della lingua*". There were different opinions on the subject matter but the winning one turned out to be the one of Pietro Bembo.
He proposed the recovery of the language of the fourteenth century, the language of Petrarca and Boccaccio and Dante.
At the end of the XV century, the *Accademia della Crusca* started the project of drafting the first *Vocabolario*, published in 1612. The Vocabulary intended to indicate the language model to be followed, which constituted a union between the fourteenth-century Tuscan and the contemporary one[11].

The "questione della lingua" returns in the XIX century. Two main groups lined up, *Purists*, with **Antonio Cesari**, who exalted the language of the XIV century, the language of the Great poets, without external interference, and *Classicists*, with **Vincenzo Monti**, who supported the concept of innovation in the language. Classicists, as well as Purists, focused on the importance of the language of the XIV century but they also focused on the social and intellectual aspect of the language[12].

The Unity of Italy was coming closer, but the peninsula was still divided into hundreds of different spoken dialects. The need for linguistic unification was manifested by **Monti**, in *Proposta di alcune correzioni ed aggiunte al Vocabolario della Crusca* (1829):

> «*Una nazione di molti governi e molti dialetti, acciocchè i suoi individui s'intendano fra di loro, ha mestieri d'un linguaggio a tutti comune […]*»[13].

Since 1861, the Italian linguistic condition has been changing more and more rapidly. The situation seemed to be very critical from the first moment: illiterates were around 75% of the

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[10] C. Grassi, A.A. Sobrero, T. Telmon, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19
[11] R. Cella, *op. cit.* p. 85
[12] C. Marazzini, *Questione della lingua,* Enciclopedia dell'Italiano, 2011
< http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/questione-della-lingua_(Enciclopedia-dell'Italiano)/>
[13] V. Monti, *Prose elette ed eleganti cavate per la prima volta dalla proposta italiana del cavaliere Vincenzo Monti ad uso degli studiosi del sermone italico,* 1840, p.221.
<https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=HSdsPJ6H5_oC&rdid=book-HSdsPJ6H5_oC&rdot=1>
Tr. «A nation of many governments and dialects needs a common language so that citizens can understand each other».

population, and significant differences between north and south arose; the dialectophones were 90% of the population[14]. Nevertheless, the recovery was noticeable. In particular, the slow change in Italy's linguistic reality is also due to factors external to formal education such as school, press, television, and radio that became the main language distribution means[15]. These factors together with internal and external migration contributed to the abandonment of dialects. Millions of people now consider Italian to be the mother tongue they learn at home or, in any case, the language they use most even in the spoken language[16].

In 1911, the literacy rate was 40%. Since the mid-1990s digital networks and mobile telephony have shifted their focus to speech variety. The media have acted as linguistic catalysts throughout the century.

At the beginning of the third millennium, ISTAT[17] surveys reveal that the largest part of the Italians can use Italian at a very high standard. It must always be remembered, however, that language is not a monolithic entity, but it is in a state of continuous evolution. The new **questione della lingua** is therefore now a challenge that especially didactics has to face. Once the identity of Italians has been shaped, since the 1980s the country has been called upon to face these new critical issues.

2. Towards Italian L2: a new scenario

Once the process of "italianizzazione" of the peninsula has come to an end, Italy is called upon to face and become aware of a phenomenon that was growing exponentially in those years: immigration. More and more families decide to move to Italy, as well as many professionists and students decide to live (for a more or less long period of time) in the Bel Paese.
From a linguistic point of view, this means that the needs of these categories have to be considered, as they have to live, study and work in Italy, and above all they need something in order to succeed: to learn Italian.

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[14] M. D'Agostino, *Sociolinguistica dell'Italia contemporanea*; Il Mulino, Bologna, 2007, p.30.
[15] *Ivi, passim.*
[16] M. Vedovelli, *L'italiano lingua seconda, in Italia e all'estero*, "VALS-ASLA (Association suisse de linguistique appliquée)" 73, 11-48, 2001.
[17] ISTAT, *L'uso della lingua italiana, dei dialetti e di altre lingue in Italia*, 2017 <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/207961>

Language teaching has always been a matter of attention for the European Union, as witnessed by the European Cultural Convention.[18]

Italy, therefore, as a member state, is involved in the achievement of the common objectives for language teaching, outlined by UE.

Even though in the Italian peninsula there has not been until recently a national language used by the entire population, Italian L2 has a tradition that traces its roots back to the past, though, it referred to certain categories of learners, personalities who were listed in Italian handbooks published up to the 16th century: soldiers, university students, artists, merchants, etc[19].

However, it would be centuries before the problem of teaching Italian L2 becomes more relevant. The first courses of Italian language and culture for foreigners were founded in Siena only in 1917, followed in 1921 by the introduction of similar courses in Perugia.

The two cities would constitute, for the following years, a point of reference about the supply of Italian language courses.

In 1992, Universities for foreigners were officially established in the two respective cities: **l'Università per Stranieri di Siena** and **l'Università per Stranieri di Perugia[20]**.

The promotion of Italian as a foreign language is thus entrusted to these two prestigious institutions. The greatest attention had been given above all to the university education of foreign students visiting Italy. In fact, many mobility projects involved their presence in this country (Erasmus, Socrates, Marco Polo, etc.).

Since the 1970s, the considerable presence of foreign students in the classes and the exponential growth of young adult immigrants searching for better living conditions, have pushed for the teaching of Italian L2 issue to be promptly addressed by both the scientific community and the Italian State. According to Balboni P. E. (2010)[21], the Italian scientific community has strongly addressed the problem and reacted promptly and, in most cases, with good scientific standards. The Italian way to teaching L2 is therefore solidly based on science.

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[18] Article two of the Treaty of the European Cultural Convention (**European Treaty Series - No. 18**, 19 December 1954) states that: «Each Contracting Party shall, insofar as may be possible:
   a. encourage the study by its own nationals of the languages […] of the other Contracting Parties[…] and
   b. endeavour to promote the study of its language or languages […] in the territory of the other Contracting Parties […]».

[19] P. Diadori, M. Palermo and D. Troncarelli, *Manuale di didattica dell'italiano L2,* Guerra Edizioni, Perugia, 2009, pp. 37-38.
[20] *Ivi,* pp. 39-40.
[21] P.E. Balboni, "Storia dell'insegnamento dell'italiano L2", in MEZZADRI M. (ed.), *Le lingue dell'educazione in un mondo senza frontiere, Perugia*, Guerra, 2010, pp. 83-98.

On the other hand, the State has not been able to react promptly to the demands linked to this phenomenon. Balboni goes on to point out that the State was a "fugitive", incapable of managing reality clearly and precisely from the outset, and therefore a linguistic "policy" for immigrants wasn't possible:

«[…] lo Stato è stato latitante, giungendo a normare o gestire timidamente la realtà con annoso ritardo, con indirizzi confusi e spesso contrastanti»[22].

Although the first indications from the MIUR on the reception of foreign students were between the end of the eighties and the early nineties, it is from the first years of the twenty-first century that some guidelines were outlined in a more concrete reality.

In 2006, a new notice comes out, "Guidelines for the reception and integration of foreign students" (C.M. 24/2006), which establishes the way in which foreign students are received in Italian schools, «con l'obiettivo di […] dare suggerimenti di carattere organizzativo e didattico al fine di favorire l'integrazione e la riuscita scolastica e formative degli alunni stranieri»[23].

It states in the circular:

"*Uno degli obiettivi prioritari nell'integrazione degli alunni stranieri è quello di promuovere l'acquisizione di una buona competenza nell'italiano scritto e parlato, nelle forme ricettive e produttive, per assicurare uno dei principali fattori di successo scolastico e di inclusione sociale.*" (C.M. 24/2006:16)[24]

During those years the so-called "Maroni Law" (Law 38/2009) a law of the Ministry of the Interior, is realized. It establishes new rules on immigration, including the linguistic issue as well. The law was followed by a decree defining courses, tests of Italian language and civic culture (Ministerial Decree 04/06/2010; Law 94/2009).

This inter-ministerial decree, together with the Ministry of Labour, assigns to the regional school offices the management of European funding for integration, and to the CTP (Centri Territoriali Permanenti, now Centri Provinciali Istruzione Adulti CPIA) the language training. Subsequently, in 2014, the MIUR revised the 2006 document, providing new guidelines, (C.M.24/2014). In general, both children and foreign adults can benefit from the activation, by

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[22] *Ivi*, p.83.

[23] MIUR, *Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri*, 2006. <https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/2006/allegati/cm24_06all.pdf>

[24] Tr."*One of the primary goals in integrating foreign students is to promote the acquisition of good skills in written and spoken Italian, in receptive and productive forms, to ensure one of the main factors of educational achievement and social integration.*"

the State, the Regions and local authorities, of services and courses aimed at learning the Italian language. In addition, both documents mention the specific training of teachers as essential.

The laws on the right to study for foreigners also pay particular attention to *intercultural education*, which includes linguistic and cultural differences as a value at the basis of mutual respect and exchange between cultures, promoting initiatives aimed at the reception, protection of the culture and native language. (C.M.24/2014: 4).

Compared to the previous document, the new one presents important insights gained in this field and it offers details on the teaching and organization of courses.

There is increasing evidence of the need for a discipline that has its own identity and methods different from those of other subjects.

The same year, the ***"Osservatorio nazionale per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e l'educazione interculturale"*** was instituted by means of a special decree of the Ministry of Education, University and Research.

The main objective of the *Osservatorio* will be to identify strategies for the effective adaptation of school integration policies to the real needs of an increasingly multicultural and constantly changing society[25]:

«E' dunque il tempo di allargare lo sguardo: da un lato, diffondere e qualificare l'intervento didattico specifico rivolto agli apprendenti non italofoni e, dall'altro, accompagnare e sostenere lo sviluppo linguistico degli alunni stranieri per consentire loro di narrare, descrivere, definire, spiegare, riflettere sulla lingua […]»[26].

2.1 Definition of L2

The term **Second Language** (LS) refers to any language learned after the mother tongue. In particular it is a language acquired in the country where it is usually spoken, e.g. Italian learned by immigrants in Italy. (Pallotti, 1998; *La seconda lingua*, Strumenti Bompiani, Milano).

The expression **Second Language** is often compared to that of **Foreign Language** (LS). Although both are learned after the Native Language, the main difference, between the two,

[25] MIUR, 2014
<https://www.istruzione.it/archivio/web/ministero/cs090914.html>
[26]G. Favaro et al., L'ITALIANO CHE INCLUDE:LA LINGUA PER NON ESSERE STRANIERI; *Attenzioni e proposte per un progetto di formazione linguistica nel tempo della pluralità,*"Italiano LinguaDue"*, n. 1. 2016.*
<https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/promoitals/article/view/7560/7333>

lies, first, in the type of learning environment. The LS is generally studied at school, in a classroom with a teacher, in a country where it is not usually spoken; on the other hand, as already said, the L2 is a language that is learned almost spontaneously because it is spoken in the place where one lives. (Diadori, Palermo, Troncarelli, 2009; *Manuale di didattica dell'italiano L2,* Guerra Edizioni).

The L2, as well as the LS, is the focus of interest of the "*language education*" defined as the set of activities that take place during the period of schooling regarding the range of languages involved (L1, L2, LS, LC).[27] The science that studies language education has different denominations: *Didactics of modern languages, Glottodidactics, Evolutionary Linguistics.*

Glottodidactics in particular is "una scienza teorico-pratica che ha come scopo la risoluzione dei problemi di insegnamento/ apprendimento di una seconda lingua."[28].

According to a spatially differentiated order (relationship between student and language environment), some authors, such as Professor Balboni, usually identify four linguistic contexts[29]:

- **L1** is the language an individual first learned as a child;
- **LS**, a foreign language generally studied at school in a country where it is not usually spoken. For example, English is the LS that most Italian students study at school;
- **LC** languages, such as Latin and Greek, no longer used to produce communication but from which to receive communication. Classical languages are the languages used in the greatest literary, philosophical, etc. works on which Western culture is built.
- **L2** any language that the speaker learns after learning his or her native language.

Another important difference between LS and L2 is the type of *input*[30] provided. As for the foreign language, the input is selected and provided gradually by the teacher. The whole acquisition path takes place under the guidance of the teacher. In the case of L2, the input is available in the environment and is not ranked; in most cases it is the students themselves who propose and guide the activities' syllabus[31].

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[27] P. Balboni, *Fare educazione linguistica; insegnare italiano, lingue straniere e lingue classiche.* Utet, Torino, 2013, p.3.

[28]P. Diadori, *Insegnare Italiano a Stranieri*, Le Monnier, 2001, p. 46

[29] P. E. Balboni, *Didattica dell'italiano come lingua seconda e straniera*, Loescher Editore, Torino, 2014, pp. 17-20

[30] *Input* refers to the linguistic material to which the learner is exposed.

[31] P. E. Balboni, 2013, *op. cit.,* p.12.

A further important comparison is that between L1 and L2. In general, they differ because of three criteria[32]:

- **Acquisition period:** L2 is acquired after L1;
- **Proficiency:** L2 is not as well known as L1;
- **Competence:** L2 is not used as often as L1

A second language, however, is not necessarily a secondary language in order of acquisition. It may be another language used in the speaker's country of origin.

The second language can also be the dominant one for the speaker, which is the language he or she uses most or feels particularly comfortable with[33].

Consider for example:

- *the national language*, e.g. Italian for dialectophones or for citizens of other languages;
- *lingua di prestigio* like Mandarin for the Chinese or Classical Arabic for the Arabic speakers;
- *the language of education* like French for many North Africans or English for many Indians.[34]

Somehow, some of L2 users use the second language with the same skill as a monolingual native speaker. For instance, as regards Italian learned in Italy, the general diction of second language is now reductive since for a large part of children born in Italy it represents a second mother tongue[35]

2.2 The L2 student

The second language is acquired by the learner quite spontaneously, because he is living surrounded by the reality of the target language, e.g. an immigrant in Italy. But, when the learner decides to follow a guided learning path, e.g. a course, he becomes an L2 **student**.

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[32] C. Bettoni, *Imparare un'altra lingua; lezioni di linguistica applicata*, ed. 14, Editori Laterza, 2001, pp. 3-4.
[33] P. E. Balboni, 2014, *op. cit.,* p. 18.
[34]*ibidem*

[35] Graziella Favaro et al, 2016, *op. cit.*

The **student**, together with the **language** and the **teacher**, represent the protagonists of a process aimed at achieving a common objective, by cooperation: Italian language learning. In general, students should not just be listeners, but should become protagonists of the learning process.

Italian L2 learners in Italy belong to different profiles:

- foreign children and adolescents attending international and bilingual schools;
- foreign teenagers of the Intercultura project;
- university students in academic exchange projects, e.g. Erasmus, Socrates, Marco Polo;
- Seminarians and priests
- Foreign professionals placed (permanently or temporarily) in working contexts in Italy; etc.

Adult immigrants and children of immigrant workers recently settled in Italy, on the other hand, belong to group of learners of Italian as a *lingua di contatto*[36]. From a general point of view, the L2 student presents individual characteristics or factors that can be taken into account in the study of the language acquisition process. An important starting point in describing the L2 student's profile is undoubtedly his/her **motivation,** which is one of the so-called **Affective Factors**, which may influence learning (Motivation, Anxiety and Individuality)[37].

Motivation is defined by Gardner as the extent of the engagement or effort that an individual makes in learning a language because of his or her desire and satisfaction with it[38].

The motivations for which an individual decides to learn an L2 can be grouped into three categories:

- **Instrumental motivation:** Learning a language to achieve concrete goals such as succeeding at work or school;
- **Integrative motivation:** learning a language in order to be integrated in the community of its speakers and to learn about their culture; This is clearly an important notion in migratory contact situations. In the case of Italian L2, the project is to be integrated in Italy and its implementation is directly dependent on the acquisition of Italian.[39]

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[36] P. Diadori, M. Palermo, D. Troncarelli, *op. cit.,* pp. 45-46.

[37] G. Pallotti, *La seconda lingua*, Strumenti Bompiani, ed. 5, Milano, 1998, V ed., p. 211

[38] *ivi* P. 212.

[39] P.E. Balboni, 2014, *op. cit.*, p.61

- **Intrinsic motivation:** is related to behaviour, which is led by internal rewards. It is dependent on the kind of circumstances in which learning occurs (texts, teachers, etc.)[40].

There is a strong relationship between motivation and successful learning of L2. It is clear that a learner who has many good reasons to learn L2 will work harder than a person who has weaker reasons. According to L. Mariani, motivation should be considered as "l'integrazione di dimensioni psicologiche (relative ai singoli individui) e di dimensioni socioculturali (relative ai gruppi alle comunità e alle società di cui gli individui fanno parte)[41].

The other two affective factors, **Anxiety** and **Individuality** act as filters that allow the learner to receive more or less *input*, resulting in different levels of learning.

Anxiety can act in two different ways: as a stimulant or as an inhibitor.

In the first case, anxiety is a level of stimulation that improves linguistic performance, (*Facilitating anxiety*). In the second case, on the other hand, the level of anxiety is so high that the repercussions are completely negative (*Debilitating anxiety)[42]* The second result occurs in situations where the student is asked to communicate or interact directly with others.

According to Young's research (1990), among the spoken activities, the most anxious, in fact, are those that take place in the presence of the whole class as a *role-play* or answering questions from the teacher. Debilitating language anxiety can have deep consequences on the language learning process.[43]

Anxiety is generally prevalent in adults and in the early stages of L2 learning.

Finally, the student's **Individuality** traits help to define the profile of each single student. It is "the organized system of behaviours, attitudes, and values that characterizes a given individual and which accounts for his particular manner of functioning in the environment" (Strelau, 2000)[44].

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[40] F. Gattullo, S. Contento, *Basi psicologiche e cognitive del linguaggio,* Università di Bologna, 2015. <http://reteintegrazione.xoom.it/in_rete02/I%20materiali/mod_7_basi_psicologiche_cognitive_linguaggio.pdf >

[41] L. Mariani, *La motivazione negli apprendimenti linguistici. Approcci teorici e implicazioni pedagogiche,* Italiano LinguaDue, n. 1. 2012, p.2. <https://doi.org/10.13130/2037-3597/2267>

[42] P. Diadori, 2001, *op. cit*.

[43] D. Young, 1990, *An Investigation of Students' Perspectives on Anxiety and Speaking,* Foreign Language Annals quoted by G. Pallotti, 1998, op. cit., pp. 220-222.

[44] *Strelau, 2000* quoted by Ozanska-Ponikwia and Dewaele, 2012 https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/5100/1/OzanskaDewaele2012.pdf

Researchers believe that there is a close connection between Second Language acquisition and the personality of the student, as it determines what the student feels comfortable with. In particular it seems to affect both the process and the product of language learning, by influencing the students' choice of activities and exercises that are more suited to them, achieving linguistic success more easily[45]

Some of the most important and investigated features include:

- **Cooperation/competition**: students who aim to emerge among others and students who aim to integrate with others
- **Optimism/pessimism:** having a positive or negative attitude towards an activity changes significantly the outcome of it; and
- **Introversion and extroversion:** An extrovert L2 learner is considered a better learner in terms of **interpersonal communication skills**. Whereas an introverted learner seems to have greater success in **cognitive-academic language competence[46]**.

Alongside these affective features, we can identify other student's individual factors that may affect acquisition progress:

- **Intelligence:** Gardner identifies seven types of multiple intelligence. The MIT: *multiple intelligence theory)* is the theory which affirms that different types of intelligence combine to form the student's overall intelligence. Therefore, there are different ways to acquire a linguistic concept, which is not restricted to a genetically inherited fixed element, and it is up to the teacher to consider these varieties[47]

  The most relevant for the acquisition of L2 are:

  → *visual-spatial,*
  → *verbal-linguistic,*
  → *logical-mathematical,*

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[45] Bielska 2006:14 via Katarzyna Ożańska-Ponikwia, Jean-Marc Dewaele; *Personality and L2 use: Openminded and self-confident individuals are more likely to be active and proficient L2 users,* EUROSLA Yearbook 12, 2012.

[46] M. Pichiassi, *Modelli teorici sull'apprendimento di una L2*, ICoN- Italian Culture on the Net, Università degli Stranieri di Pisa, 2009, pp. 40-42.
<https://docplayer.it/47187-Modelli-teorici-sull-apprendimento-di-una-l2.html>

[47] P. Torresan, *Individualizzare l'insegnamento linguistico: la prospettiva delle intelligenze multiple*; *via* Annali di Ca' Foscari, XLVI,1, 2007.
<https://www.unive.it/media/allegato/facolta_lingue/annali/07-01_Annali_CF_Occ-2007_XLVI_1-2.pdf>

→ *musical-rhythmic*

→ *intra and interpersonal*

- **Aptitude:** it refers to the tendency to language learning and it includes *phonetic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, ability to learn in an inductive way, ability to memorize linguistic materials*.[48]
- **Cognitive/ learning styles:** the way in which the student processes information and faces learning tasks.

As regards types of cognitive styles, there are[49]:

- **Analytical/global: Analytical** individuals prefer to divide the task into discrete units; the global ones focus on the whole of the elements;
- **Analytical/mnemonic:** some learners have a good memory and tend to fully understand the specific rules of L2 for the composition of sentences; others, on the other hand, tend to discover the grammatical rules; and
- **Visual/auditory/ tactile/ kinaesthetic:** students with a visual style prefer to learn through reading; students with an auditory style appreciate oral lessons; those with a kinaesthetic style enjoy learning in an experiential way; tactile students are at ease in activities involving the use of hands.

2.2.1 Adult L2 student

Taking Italian as an example of L2, we can identify three different categories of learners: children, adolescents in high schools and universities and finally **adults** who decide to attend language courses. When talking about L2 adults, we must take into consideration those paths that must propose methodological approaches in line with the characteristics of the adult being

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- [48] The division of the global notion of **aptitude** is due to Carroll and Sapon (1959). They proposed a test for the detection of linguistic aptitude, consisting of a series of exercises aimed at verifying the four aspects of aptitude: the MLAT (Modern Language Aptitude Test).

[49] G. Pallotti, *op. cit.*, pp. 233

that learns. **Andragogy**[50] is the theory of reference according to which adult learning, presents very different characteristics from that of children and adolescents.

The teaching of L2 must therefore take into account some basic elements: the inclusion of the subject's experience in the teaching, consideration of the background of previous knowledge and skills, attention to the adult in his plurality of roles and social tasks[51].

The participation of an adult in a training process is therefore the result of a conscious choice. This choice derives in part from professional expectations or aspirations to improve one's skills; it is also motivated by the desire to satisfy one's own needs and to achieve one's ideals of life.

Whatever the reason, the approach is based on a **lifelong learning** perspective, pointing to continuous adult education. This perspective focuses on the adult and the choices he makes.

The adult learns or decides to undertake a new training path only if he perceives its meaning and usefulness (motivation), if he participates in the definition and negotiation of objectives (the concept of self), and whether he identifies links with his real life (learning orientation)[52].

The fact that the learner is an adult inevitably leads to balanced relationships between student and teacher. In addition, in most cases, the adult pays for the course, so he/she wants to obtain concrete results as soon as possible.

However, a socio-psychological problem related to language learning could arise from the stronger inhibition mechanisms in adults. These, together with anxiety, could damage the acquisition pathway[53]

As for the cognitive ability to acquire the L2, despite some similarities between adults and children (the progressive sequence of morphemes, syntax, etc.) some limited differences in time, method and outcome should be considered.

In Language Teaching field, there is a main hypothesis concerning research on the differences in learning a second language; it assumes that the ability to learn an L2 has time limits, the so-called *"critical period"* or *"sensitive period"* (Seliger, 1978), which, according to Lenneberg, ends with the transition from childhood to puberty (about 7-8 years old). Phonology, as an example, seems to be the most sensitive area in terms of age; so, from the age of six there is a decline in the learning potential of correct pronunciation. Gradually, the interference of L1 in

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[50] Theory of adult learning and education born in 1980. The most important exponent of the theory was Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997), professor of Adult Education at North Carolina State University.

[51] L. Maddi, *L'italiano seconda lingua per gli adulti immigrati*, in L. Maddii (ed.), *Insegnamento apprendimento dell'italiano L2 in età adulta,* Edilingua, Atene, 2004.

[52] P. Begotti, *La glottodidattica umanistico-affettiva nell'insegnamento dell'italiano LS ed L2 ad adulti stranieri*, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2007.
<https://doi.org/10.3299/sdg.v1i2.44-62>

[53] F. Gattullo, S. Contento, *op. cit., 7.6.2.1 Età.*

terms of pronunciation, but also morphosyntax, becomes more and more difficult to manage. Even though an adult is limited by the age factor in the acquisition of correct pronunciation and taking into account the greater length of the L2 acquisition path, they can, at last, achieve very good outcomes.

A further difference in acquisition due to age, for example, is the level of final linguistic competence achieved in L2 that is **ultimate attainment**: adults, in terms of speed, show a faster acquisition in initial stages. Conversely children would be at first slower but would reach a higher level of linguistic competence[54].

In the light of these assumptions, it could be said that children are better learners than adults are; however, this is not necessarily true. The greatest difficulties that an adult learner experiences are quite different from those of a child. An adult knows that he or she will have to get involved during the acquisition process and will have to face situations that could make him or her uncomfortable. It will be the motivation the motivation linked to the life project he/she wants to reach, or to the need that arises from social reasons, which more than all the other elements mentioned above, will make the difference in his/her learning path.

2.3 The L2 teacher

The second element of L2 training is the teacher. It is a character that operates in formal learning contexts, such as the Italian L2 courses provided by the CPIA. He is the one who has to help the student in his learning path, guiding and helping him to overcome the linguistic difficulties encountered.

The role of the teacher emerges immediately by following the following didactical space graph[55]:

LANGUAGE/CULTURE ⟶ STUDENT

TEACHER

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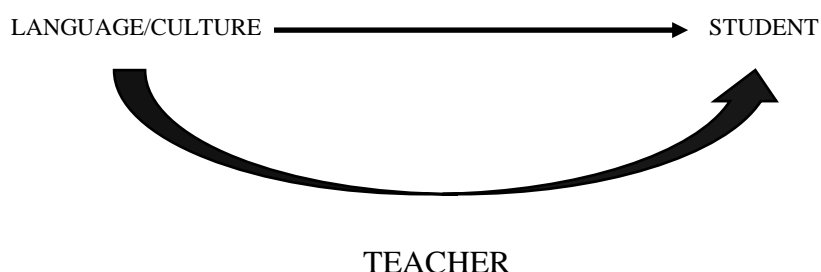
[54] P.E. Balboni, *Le sfide di Babele*, Utet Università, IV ed., 2015.

[55] P.E. Balboni, 2014, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

The principal interaction takes place between language and student, which are equally balanced, while the teacher lies in the background and supports them to connect with each other. A teacher is no longer considered an absolute and superior character anymore, is an expert who offers his knowledge and competence. Especially in an L2 course attended by adults, he will be perceived as a guide.

There are different roles played by the teacher. He/ she may be:
- DIRECTOR (regista): the one who stands behind the scenes and leads the students;
- TUTOR: he/she provides support and supervision in the process of language acquisition;
- FACILITATOR: the one who has to facilitate the conditions under which learning takes place; he is a facilitator of the work on the given input.[56]

Communication plays a central role in the learning experience. The teacher, by talking, not only provides the students with linguistic input to work with, but at the same time, thanks to **feedback**, is able to have control over the students' behaviour[57].

Feedback, in particular, does not consist only in error correction but includes all teacher's reactions to the non-native speakers' productions. The way a teacher manages feedback activities reflects the kind of interaction with students that prevails in the classroom.

Regular reliance on the feedback of the teacher makes students completely dependent on it. A more independent interaction management practice goes in a different direction.

It is the teacher's tendency to make students more independent, making them also capable of self-assessment beyond the teacher's judgement[58].

The percentage of time used by the teacher to communicate out of all lesson time should be considered: it is the so-called Teacher's Talking Time (TTT). It is usually a variable opposite to the result, i.e. the more the teacher speaks the less the students are going to do it, and this can have a negative impact on the outcome.

A central aspect of many contemporary methods is to minimize the amount of TTT as much as possible, to give students the opportunity to speak and learn to communicate.

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[56] P.E. Balboni, 2015, op. cit., ch. 4.

[57] D. Allwright and K.M. Bailey, *Focus on the Language Classroom. An introduction to classroom research for language teachers*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 139-140.

[58] G. Pallotti, 1998, *op. cit*., pp. 280-284.

A further critical point concerning the interaction in class among students and teachers is the so-called **Teacher's talk**. The teacher intentionally decides to use a simplified language, using elementary syntax, paratactic structure and frequent use of emphasized gestures. It is the teacher's attempt to help foreign students understand him/her at least in the early stages of the interaction. Since it lacks authenticity, it should only be used in the initial stages of the course. The input provided by the teacher has to be graduated but above all it has to be spontaneous. Although this is not easy because the class includes students who may not all be in the same stage of interlanguage. So, if the teacher should provide a step-by-step input (i+1) this is not valid for some students who would perhaps need an i+5. [59]

There are numerous variables involved in learning an L2 (student expectations, course duration, input variability) and the teacher must act as a competent guide, advisor, and facilitator. A professional who is able to make his or her expertise concerning the language available to the student.

3. Immigrants and Italy: Italian for communication

Since its unification, Italy has been affected by a strong internal migratory dynamic that transferred the excess labour from the more disadvantaged areas of the south to the industrial centres of the north. The country, however, has been expanding since the 1980s due to the arrival of different migration flows, which have turned Italy into a non-secondary landing point for foreigners. Today Italy can represent for many people protection and renewal. Among those who arrive in Italy, in fact, especially in recent years, we find men, women and children who run away from horrible realities, asking for asylum.

Four were the most important migratory movements that in those years changed the migratory balance of the country in a positive way: the one from Africa to Sicily (after the so-called Arabic Spring); that of the first women immigrants from the Philippines as houseworkers; that

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[59] D. Allwright and K.M. Bailey, 1991, *op. cit.*, p.140.

from Eastern Europe, e.g. Yugoslav workers, and a flow of political refugees and students from other European countries[60].

Today, the available data on immigrants living in Italy are partial and fragmented.

It can be said that there are just over 6 million foreigners in Italy. It is an imprecise number, because it is impossible to obtain a definite value, and this number varies according to what data is considered and how it is interpreted: resident immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, newly landed immigrants, and irregular migrants are reported separately.

Nowadays immigration assumes the features of stability as well as asserting itself as a phenomenon that is no longer an emergency, and that is pervasive in many fields of Italian society, from school to work.

Hence, different backgrounds, different reasons; but what languages do foreign immigrants living in Italy speak? Clearly the languages they bring with them from their country of origin, whether they are languages of great international communication, vehicular languages, local languages.

Whatever the mother tongue, once arrived in Italy, however, immigrants having a medium- or long-term project, will have to face a new and manageable phase of his life by learning the language of the host country: Italian. Where multiculturalism due to immigration is a growing phenomenon, language becomes an element of cultural and linguistic integration.

Italian, however, acquires a different relevance for the different subjects of migration, for example for adults or children, for those born in Italy and for those who arrive there later in life. It is also necessary to consider the varied nature of Italian, starting from standard Italian to regional varieties up to dialects[61].

The contact between the migrant languages and the linguistic space of Italian results in a new linguistic variety defined as **Italiano di contatto (Italian for communication)**. The term relates in particular to all those learners, unaccompanied immigrant children and adolescents or children of immigrants or adopted by Italian parents, who come into contact with Italian[62]. It can be placed along the line of the global Italian language space, according to Vedovelli's

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[60] M. Giovannetti, *L'orizzonte dell'asilo e della protezione dello straniero. Riconosciuti e "diniegati": dietro i numeri le persone,* "Questione Giustizia", ISSN 1972-5531, 2/2018, *passim*.
< http://questionegiustizia.it/rivista/2018/2/riconosciuti-e-diniegati-dietro-i-numeri-le-persone_533.php>

[61] Osservatorio sull'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e l'intercultura, *L'italiano di prossimità: attenzioni e proposte per la lingua dell'integrazione*, 2007.
<https://www.unipa.it/strutture/scuolaitalianastranieri/.content/documenti/Ongini_Osservatorio-Italiano-L2-e-plurilinguismo--NOTA-1.pdf>

[62] P. Diadori, M. Palermo, D. Troncarelli, 2015, *op. cit.,* pp. 75-83.

account in his work "*Storia linguistica dell'emigrazione italiana nel mondo*" (2011)[63]. In particular it belongs to the Italian pole, between the popular Italian and the Italian L2 of foreigners learning Italian in a formal context in their own country, together with the Italian L2 learnt in formal contexts by immigrants in Italy.

There is another expression concerning the Italian language, which tries to bring it even closer to the needs and necessities, also and especially, of the adult immigrant: **italiano di prossimità**. This term stands for «una lingua vicina e quotidiana, indispensabile per integrarsi, per vivere e agire ruoli diversi, per apprendere e riuscire»[64]. It is a language that aims to reach even those people who find themselves in the most vulnerable situations (e.g. lower levels of schooling).

The report of the "*Osservatorio nazionale per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l'intercultura*"[65] shows the different aspects of Italian in multicultural situations of contact:

- Survival language for adult immigrants newly arrived in Italy;
- The language of work and exchanges for those who have lived in Italy the longest;
- Certifiable language for those applying for a long-term residence permit;
- Lingua "filiale" for foreign families, whose children bring new terms therefore new meanings every day.

Each of these varieties requires an appropriate project with different courses, times and materials able to satisfy different acquisition situations and needs of use.

Regarding the domains of use of the Italian language by foreigners over six years of age, about 38% of them use Italian with their families and about 60% with Italian friends. The use of Italian is significantly predominant in the workplace, where 90% of foreigners use it.[66] Immigrant women and men thus find themselves having to manage their own linguistic repertoire, using the various codes according to context, situations and interlocutors. Learning Italian, however, should not be perceived as an abandonment of one's own culture, but rather as a linguistic and cultural enrichment.

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[63] Vedovelli offered a revision of the concept of Italiano di contatto starting from the notion of *Italian linguistic space* introduced in 1983 by Tullio De Mauro.

[64] Osservatorio sull'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e l'intercultura, *op. cit.,* p.1.

[65] Graziella Favaro et al, "*L'italiano che include: la lingua per non essere stranieri; attenzione e proposte per un progetto di formazione linguistica nel tempo della pluralità*", 2016, *passim*.

[66] F. Minuz, A. Borri, L. Rocca, *Progettare percorsi di L2 per adulti stranieri,* Loescher Editore, Torino 2016, p. 13.

3.1 The immigrants' profiles

One of the most important elements on which the teaching of languages, and in this case, of Italian L2, must focus is certainly the profile of the learner. As already mentioned, when talking about immigrants, a series of scenarios open up, ranging from refugees, to medium and long-term workers or residents, to migrants' relatives, etc. "Language for migrants" is an incorrect definition as it is too general.

The different subjects and their relative needs and requirements should be considered, alongside their age and status of origin.

In fact, they live and work in an Italophone context, but they come from a great variety of sociolinguistic conditions and it is therefore the task of the didactics to know how to face these differences giving appropriate solutions[67].

Consideration must be given to the principal variables that best help to define the profile of the immigrant learner.

These variables are[68]:

- **Age:** Young people, for example, need basic communication structures in order to get better into the working world, but they also want to continue or even start their schooling in Italy. Their common language is the language for social and affective relationships and leisure time. Adults, on the other hand, need to manage their lives, their families and integrate into the world of work as soon as possible

- **Schooling level:** Subjects can be divided into four groups: illiterate, poorly educated, with average schooling, secondary school graduates and university graduates.

- **The Family Situation:** There are some who come to Italy with their family, and then there are those who have left their families and children in the country of origin. Again, the needs and requirements are different.

- **Future work and life plans:** Life projects of people moving to another country, whether short, medium or long term, are useful to further define the necessities of the

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[67] F. Minuz, La didattica dell'italiano in contesti migratori, "Gentes" (2014), I n° 1, Johns Hopkins University – Sais Europe, p.107.

[68] L. Maddii, 2004, *op. cit.*

subject. It also determines the degree of interest in the language of the country to which one is moving and the effort and investment that will make in learning it.

The Italian Observatory for the integration of foreign students identifies, in addition, the subjects to whom the attention of the Group is addressed:

- Children born in Italy;
- NAi students (newcomers);
- unaccompanied foreign minors (MSNA); and
- foreign adults[69]

In relation to the last category (foreign adults) it is necessary to outline a distinctive learner profile compared to that of other learners.

Adult immigrants acquire Italian thanks to interactions with native speakers in everyday situations, even if these interactions are often asymmetrical and marked by formal traits.

Alongside the challenge of learning the language, considered as a long-term process of acculturation that often covers several generations, it is also necessary to consider the marked differences between immigrant adults and their distinct sociolinguistic situations that contribute to the diversification of individual paths of linguistic appropriation.

In this connection it comes the concept of **linguistic repertoire**, thereby linking up with the Council of Europe's *Guide on the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants*:

"*Effective integration requires the creation of conditions for a proper reconfiguration of the language repertoires of adult migrants.*"[70]

The linguistic repertoire of an individual is the set of linguistic knowledge and skills. Since a good number of adults know at least two languages, a multilingual competence is involved. The different languages are naturally used in different contexts and for different functions. One language may be used only at work rather than with family or friends.

Therefore, it becomes necessary that teaching takes into account and satisfies the plurality of educational needs which reflect the different paths of linguistic acquisition.

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[69] Osservatorio nazionale per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l'intercultura, *op. cit.*

[70] Jean-Claude Beacco, David Little, Chris Hedges, *L'Integrazione linguistica dei Migranti Adulti. Guida* (Council of Europe), Italiano LinguaDue, 2014.

The profile of adult immigrants in particular needs to be further integrated to take into account the traumatic experience and the specific living conditions of the most vulnerable subjects.[71] The most vulnerable, also considered as a priority by the Council of Europe, are, for example, illiterate or poorly educated adults, or adults who have not learned the language of the host country yet.

3.2 Planning Italian classes and programs: a pathway to integration

Integration is one of the fundamental issues that the European Union pays attention to. Looking at the immigration phenomenon, the Council of Europe underlines the importance and the need to promote the proper integration of immigrant adults living in Member States[72]. Linguistic integration is a related aspect, essential for the creation of that feeling to belong to a new society. In Italy, furthermore, as established by the Ministerial Decree of June 4, 2010, the effective acquisition of Italian, by possessing at least an A2 level of competence, is essential for the issuance of the long-term residence permit, EC[73], for all those immigrants who have been in Italy for at least 5 years. Although it does not correspond to an actual A2 certification, passing the test allows the immigrant to acquire the residence permit. The exemption from the test is provided for under certain circumstances, one of which is the attendance of Italian courses instituted by the CPIAs[74], which coincide with the test location[75].

As already mentioned, since the 1980s, there have been numerous and heterogeneous initiatives aimed at strengthening the dimension of Italian as a second language in Italy. From the partnership between different associations and local authorities (COME, DARI, COSPE), to the actions of the MIUR since the first years of the millennium, to the birth of the National

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[71] F. Minuz, A. Borri, L. Rocca, 2016, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

[72] J.C. Beacco, D. Little, C. Hedges, op. cit., 2014.

[73] D.M. 4 giugno 2010, Modalità di svolgimento del test di conoscenza della lingua italiana, previsto dall'articolo 9 del decreto legislativo 25 luglio 1998, n. 286, introdotto dall'articolo 1, comma 22, lettera i) della legge n. 94/2009 (pubblicato sulla Gazzetta ufficiale, Serie generale, n.134 dell'11 giugno 2010).
< https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/2014_06_24_dm_24062014_test_italiano.pdf>

[74] Centri Provinciali di Istruzione per Adulti

[75] G. Sergio, *Un lasciapassare per l'Italia. La legge Maroni e l'obbligo del test di italiano per stranieri,* Italiano LinguaDue, n. 1. 2011.

Observatory, an attempt has been made to provide an answer to the need for immigrants language training[76].

The Italian National Observatory for the integration of immigrants, as an example, has carried out, in recent years, a project made of interventions and proposals for the teaching of Italian L2 to immigrant adults. The intention of the Group is to promote a national plan for integrated language training among adult immigrants that combines the most suitable methods and practices. Attention is paid to the work done over the years by the courses offered by the CPIA, courses offered as part of regional projects financed by EFI funds[77] and the initiatives promoted by associations and the socio-private sector.

Attention is paid not only to the linguistic dimension but also to the social one. in fact, one of the fundamental concepts of planning is **Integration**. This term includes large domains, such as social inclusion and health or indicators such as income, employment, housing, education, etc. The languages should not only be considered as just means of communication. It is a concept that goes beyond the boundaries of mere linguistics and reaches the social and cultural aspects.

Beyond that, however, the acquisition of the target language can still be seen by migrants both as a form of enrichment of their identity and as something that makes them vulnerable. Learning L2 can cause pain and frustration (e.g. related to the inability to express oneself), or it can eventually compromise the existing identity.[78] It is as if learning the new language should necessarily lead to the deletion of their mother tongue, removing the cultural identity connected to it.

The integration of previous knowledge with L2 acquisition shouldn't lead to alienation or loss of identity. There is no single strategy that can ensure perfect linguistic integration. The different possible approaches depend mainly on the life project and cultural background of the migrants[79]. According to the Council of Europe's *Guide*, there are different strategies implemented by migrants during the acquisition of their second language. Migrants can try to modify their repertoire as little as possible or can make efforts to improve the repertoire by accepting approximations in L2 and preserving their cultural habits by transferring them to the new language or even try to acquire the native speaker's skills as much as possible which may

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[76] P.E. Balboni, *Italiano L2: una via italiana*, Osservatorio nazionale per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri, Università di Venezia Laboratorio ITALS, (2008), 1, pp. 17 – 31.
[77] European Fund Investments
[78] *Linguistic integration of Adult Migrants,* Web.
 https://www.coe.int/it/web/lang-migrants/forms-of-linguistic-integration
[79] S. Pozzi, *Trasmissione della lingua, integrazione e identità nelle famiglie immigrate*, "Lingue migranti e nuovi paesaggi" ed. M.V. Calvi et al., 2014, 10.7359/700-2014-pozz.

lead either to the drop out of the native language or to the intention to transmit it to future generations[80].

Regarding the course designers and teachers, their task is to help the migrants along their path, by guiding them, and always considering their goals and expectations.

3.2.1 Design

Pluralism is the fundamental principle around which the world of L2 didactics is centred. Pluralism meant as diversity and variety of subjects with different needs and expectations.

It starts with the "first level" needs, which refers to all those adults who have never entered training and do not possess Italian connected to their social roles; then it moves on to the "second level" needs, where it does not stop at the content of the communication but focuses on the form as well, paying attention to the accuracy of the language[81].

Therefore, planning and projecting an Italian L2 course for immigrant adults is a real challenge. There can be no unified standard ways of planning language training, only the most individualised training possible.

The heterogeneous nature of these situations inevitably leads to an awareness of these diversities in order to establish the features of the course, from the syllabus to the goals.

In order to properly reflect the reality in which one operates, a first analysis and research of the group of learners may be useful to the teacher or to the course designers.

First, it is necessary to identify those key elements that help to define the learner's Profile: nature of the migration, level of schooling, family situation, type of work, etc.

Each of these indicators provides the teacher with guidelines for a more detailed and personalised course organisation according to the student's needs. For instance, the course attended by a group of illiterate or under schooled users will focus more on the acquisition of the written language and at the same time on the structures for everyday communication[82].

Special attention should also be paid to the relationship between migrants and Italian L2.

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[80]J.C. Beacco et al., *op. cit*., pp. 12-13.

[81] G. Favaro et al., *L'italiano che include: la lingua per non essere stranieri. Attenzioni e proposte per un progetto di formazione linguistica nel tempo della pluralità*, Osservatorio nazionale per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l'intercultura, Gruppo 1, 2016, pp.2-3.
<https://doi.org/10.13130/2037-3597/7560>

[82] Lucia Maddii, *2004, op. cit.,* p.4.

The differences and similarities between the languages that belong to the individual's linguistic repertoire and L2 must be considered. Furthermore, it is necessary to examine the different domains of the two, or more languages (at home, with friends, at work).

Finally, an investigation of the area where the user lives could be useful in order to outline its profile and recognize its significant characteristics.

According to Lucia Maddi's model[83], the following represent some of the most important elements of the territory in which the teacher works:

- Commercial and industrial activities (factories, tourism, farming, etc.)
- Leisure facilities (stadium, clubs, gyms, etc.)
- Cultural attractions (Theatres, cinemas, libraries, etc.)
- Social gathering points (Parishes, community centres, etc.)
- Italian spoken varieties (dialect, local variation, etc.)
- Immigrants' occupational and housing integration

The teacher will then communicate with the participants of the course. This preliminary meeting is fundamental for the structuring of the course and the design of the **syllabus**.

The syllabus is: «[…] la definizione del contenuto e degli obiettivi specifici del corso in termini di argomenti da trattare.»[84].

The purpose of the course will therefore be the basis from which to start planning the full course. A possible strategy to precisely define the objectives is, for example, the face to face interview with the student. The teacher or the designer will be able, through some questions to better define the content to be dealt with. For this kind of negotiation to take place on an equal level, a necessary condition is the comprehensibility of the content. This means providing the learner with the necessary tools to understand the language presented (simplified Italian or translation)[85].

Once the research process is completed and the content of the course has been negotiated, the teacher can specify the goals for each type of activity and domain, setting them according to the indications of the CEFR[86].

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[83]L. Maddii, *op. cit.,* pp. 3-5.

[84] S. Peyronel, *La preparazione del sillabo: selezione di materiali, forme linguistiche e testi,* in L. Revelli, *Italiano L2. Problemi scientifici, metodologici, didattici,* Franco Angeli, Milano, 2009, p.151.

[85] L. Maddii, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

[86] *European Framework of Reference for Languages*. Different levels correspond to different types of skills and goals.

The interview may be completed with a test on Italian language proficiency.

The learner is thus fully aware of the communication topics that will be covered during the course and he/she will always negotiate them. Several methodologists even claim that the idea of a pre-programmed syllable is detrimental to the learning process. The programme must be constantly negotiated and renegotiated between teacher and learner over time.[87]

At this point it is possible to access the technical phase of the course planning that the teacher will focus on. Here comes the matter of models and teaching techniques to be adopted.

3.3 Operative models and teaching practises

Over the last few years, the teaching of Italian L2 has taken a lot of steps forward in the attempt to define and elaborate targeted syllables and programming, testing different **methods**, **approaches,** and **techniques**.

The **approach** represents the underlying philosophy of what is considered language and culture (in this case, Italian)[88]. Based on the considered approaches, we can talk about the **methods** chosen and used by the teacher. The **method** indicates how to divide the contents of the syllable and present them to the students.

Finally, the **techniques** are the operating procedures (exercises and activities) that turn the method into practice.

The choice of the most appropriate method or approach is up to the teacher and the course providers. There is neither one winning method nor one method that can apply to all situations. Reference is made, for example, to the *structuralist approach* which can lead to an **audio-oral or audio-visual method**. This kind of method involves the language in its minimal structures, and it presents the language through pattern drills which are repeated many times or through the oral presentation of sentences or words which are manipulated through substitution or expansion[89]. Alternatively, one can turn to a type of approach related to *humanistic- affective glottodidactics* that leads to a **ludic methodology**. This approach is marked by the centrality

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[87] G. Pallotti, *op. cit.*, pp.293-294.
[88] Paolo E. Balboni, 2014, *op. cit.* p.27.
[89] Ivi, pp. 30-31.

that the affective and relational aspects assume for the student[90]. From role-playing games to puzzles to word games, the playful dimension of learning is one of the most popular approaches.

One of the most successful operating models is the **module**. A **module** is a "*sezione*, una *porzione*, un *sottoinsieme* del corpus dei contenuti di un curricolo."[91]

Furthermore it is "un blocco tematico concluso in sé, autosufficiente, significativo, si articola in una serie di unità didattiche, ciascuna basata su una rete di unità d'acquisizione".[92]

It allows the teacher to break the program into different sections for the different types of learners, where, considering the diversity of students, it is not possible to identify a unique itinerary. It is an excellent solution for adult learners, as they might leave for long periods and decide whether to attend parts of the course.

A further significant aspect of the module is the opportunity for the learner to self-evaluate the learning process. At the end of the module the learner can determine whether he is capable of finding his way in the context covered by the module.

As far as the internal structure of the module is concerned, the so-called **acquisition units** (Unità di acquisizione) are used. An acquisition unit is the measure by which the student perceives his or her learning. It lasts a few minutes to an hour or more.

The learning unit (UDA)[93] is preferred to the teaching unit, which is not very suitable for users who cannot attend class regularly.

Each learning unit is used to build flexible learning paths. It is no longer about **sequence** but rather about **network of learning units**. In this way the teacher can choose the most suitable ones for each student without compromising the final result.

The words that always appear in L2 didactics are modules, learning units, flexibility and individualisation.[94]

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[90] P. Begotti, *La glottodidattica umanistico-affettiva nell'insegnamento dell'italiano LS ed L2 ad adulti stranieri*, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2007.
<https://doi.org/10.3299/sdg.v1i2.44-62>

[91] Balboni E. P., "Modulo, Unità Didattica, Unità d'apprendimento: dalla conoscenza alla progettazione in glottodidattica", in BENUCCI A., CARUSO G. (a cura di) *Competenze d'uso e integrazione*, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Napoli, 2012.

[92] Ibidem.

[93] UDA: Unità Di Apprendimento

[94] Lucia Maddii, 2004, *Insegnamento apprendimento dell'italiano L2 in età adulta*, Atene, Edilingua

Equal attention in the selection and organization of content must also be paid to the choice of **teaching practices** to be used. The teacher has to evaluate the specific properties of each teaching practice in order to determine which ones to use within given contexts and users. Carrol (1980) suggested four of these parameters[95]: Relevance, Acceptability, Comparability and Economy.

In addition to the latter there are further ones such as **flexibility, relationality, psychological adaptability, autonomy**.

The choice of successful methods teaching techniques must consider an essential aspect of the learners: age. Unlike children, adults, in fact, have to constantly face the challenge of putting themselves at risk during the learning process alongside the need to maintain a certain self-image. Learning a new language represents a challenge that involves effort and struggle. Adults experience various anxious situations that they have to withstand, so it would be appropriate to propose such activities in small doses.

Therefore, some teaching practices should not be proposed insistently. One of these is certainly **role-play**, simulations that can be considered as activities in which losing face. The role-play may also be perceived as a childish game and therefore a time-wasting activity. The adult needs to learn slowly that the ludic dimension of learning is not time wasting, rather it can be a very effective technique. Further techniques are for example the **impossible interviews** or a **talk show simulation**.

The teacher's direct intervention can be an additional source of anxiety. Therefore, at least in the early stages of the course, it is better to avoid blackboard training or corrections in front of the entire class.

A teaching practice which gives a sense of confidence to the learners is that of structural exercises. They are useful, for example, for the fixation of a grammatical rule and they are particularly appreciated by adults because easy to perform. A structural exercise consists of sets of triggers to which the student has to provide a response according to the original pattern. The structural exercises result more effective if set in a ludic dimension (structural exercises turned into a batch of dice or tic-tac-toe).[96]

Concerning the humanistic perspective of teaching practices that considers the psychological and cognitive features of the adult, the attention given to the kinds of relationships during class

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[95]Carrol (1980) quoted by P. E. Balboni, 2013, *Fare educazione linguistica: insegnare italiano, lingue straniere e lingue classiche,* Utet università, Torino.

[96] Ivi, pp 30.

is essential. The relationship needs to be set up between peers and the teacher, acting as a mediator, has to maintain it. Furthermore, in classes where learners have various scholastic backgrounds, a mediation and debate processes are needed.

A further aspect of the humanistic perspective is that of the personal history of the learner and therefore also of his cultural background. A possible mistake the teacher may encounter, with reference to the learner's cultural background, involves causing "communication failures". Both the teacher and the learners bring preconceptions and expectations towards each other. A good attitude is for the teacher to become aware of that, analysing the materials presented to the class in a better way.

Because of the definition of *politically correct*, showing films, images or videos depicting stereotypes about cultures or which might make the students feel uncomfortable should be avoided.[97]

Finally, **glottotechnologies** deserve a specific attention. In a world where technologies and the web dominate our lives, the teaching of Italian L2 cannot ignore the potential that this world offers. The use of the new information and communication technologies is useful to consolidate and integrate the acquired skills.

Platforms such as Youtube, Skype, chats, blogs can help learners acquire the language and also offer them longer exposure to Italian. From online newspapers to Italian literature, the web is full of texts that students can search for themselves to practice their comprehension skills. The texts could also be accompanied by videos of songs, operas scenes, movies concerning the activities presented in the module currently in progress.

Today's technologies also offer all those adults who are unable to attend regularly (due to work or family duties) the possibility of integrating in-presence and distance learning.

This is called **blended learning** approach, currently applied to many L2 Italian courses. The teacher also provides online in-depth study materials and exercises available after class so that the learners can become fully involved.

However, it is necessary to ensure that the students possess the tools required in order to rely on technology outside of class. That is, if they can use an internet network to search for material. If this is not possible, the teacher can integrate the use of technology directly in class.

In conclusion, planning an Italian L2 course requires various factors from the definition of the learner's profile to the research on the area to the selection of the most suitable tools to meet the learner's needs and expectations. The pivotal element is certainly the language, which is not

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[97] Lucia Maddii, 2004*, Insegnamento apprendimento dell'italiano L2 in età adulta*, Atene, Edilingua

considered as a simple means of communication but as a vehicle of identity and culture. The challenge that an adult immigrant has to overcome is to learn the language of the host country. The teacher's task is to make this path as easy as possible, considering the learner's cognitive and affective resources.

One of the greatest challenges for the teacher is to identify the most difficult steps, to analyze the mistakes in a positive light and to look for solutions that can ease such obstacles.

4. Second language acquisition

"**Learning**" an L2 is not always a synonym for "**acquiring**" an L2, and vice versa.

This kind of opposition resulted in one of the most widely accepted theories concerning the subject: Krashen's **SLAT (Second Language Acquisition Theory)**.

According to the theory of the Californian scholar of the 1980s, acquisition would take place in natural communicative exchanges, in which the focus is on meaning. Since acquisition is a spontaneous process that leads to the permanent consolidation of the linguistic structure, the teacher's task is to provide acquisition in Italian.

Learning, on the other hand, is the result of the formal study of the language, when the attention is focused on both formal and grammatical properties. A rational process does not produce long-term acquisition[98].

Additional assumptions related to Krashen's theory is the presence of a comprehensible **input** as well as its gradual administration according to the natural order **i+1**.

The last of the hypotheses proposed by Krashen refers to the emotional component of the acquisition path, defined as **Affective filter**. The filter is a sort of self-defence mechanism that activates due to anxiety states, causing the inhibition of the acquisition process.[99]

There are, however, diverging views, especially about the concept of providing comprehensible input. According to some authors, this condition would not be sufficient. Exposure to a "voluntarily modified" input would be necessary, i.e. in the case of interactions with foreigners

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[98] F. Gattullo et al., *op. cit.*, *7.1.1 Esplorazione di alcuni termini*.
[99] Paolo E. Balboni, 2014, *op. cit.,* p. 38.

the native speaker of Italian should simplify the language as much as possible, spelling out the words and slowing down the rhythm.

In this way the language would be easier for the learner to understand.

Beyond the variations of the different theories there is a certain common identification of those factors that affect L2 learning. In fact, an attempt has been made to take account of: situational factors, individual differences and cognitive processes of the learner.[100]

The set of the above and other factors results in their subdivision into two main groups: **Standard Factors** and **Variable Factors[101]**. The former are all those factors that generally follow universal paths, such as learning sequences, which are the same for all learners. The latter are those factors related to the specificity of the learning situation such as individual differences or learning strategies.

The discipline that investigates the process of proficiency development in L2, especially within a natural context, is **SLA Linguistics**. It attempts to describe how different individuals learn second languages in different situations and to describe the biological, cognitive and social dynamics behind these processes, supporting the idea of a natural order of acquisition[102]. The factors generally investigated include the role of education, age, aptitude, native language, universal grammar, communication skills and the sociolinguistic background.

With regard to the linguistic acquisition sequences, the SLA Linguistics shows some parallelisms between the acquisition of an L1 and an L2. For example, learners move forward through grammatical simplification processes; the language undergoes similar developmental stages; meanings are acquired through socialisation, communication and interaction.[103]

Broadly speaking, it can be said that the acquisition of Italian as a second language (L2) is a gradual, unconscious and spontaneous process that leads to the ability to communicate, both with native speakers of Italian, who speak it as L1, and with other non-native speakers, who speak it as L2[104].

The cooperative interactions with L1 Italian speakers are essential for the acquisition process, providing the input for the acquisition of new rules and words. In this case, there is spontaneous,

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[100] F. Gattullo et al.*, op. cit.*, 7.1.0 *Rapporto fra insegnamento e apprendimento.*

[101] *ibidem*

[102] R. Solarino, *Linguistica acquisizionale: tappe di apprendimento dell'italiano L2 in contesto naturale,* quoted by L.Revelli, *Italiano L2. Problemi scientifici, metodologici, didattici*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2009, pp.78-79.

[103] Francesca Gattullo*, Basi psicologiche e cognitive del linguaggio: Rapporto fra l'apprendimento di una L1 e di una L2,* via Web.

[104] G. Pallotti, 1998, op. cit., p.13

unpredictable input that follow the natural process in a spontaneous environment. On the other hand, Italian spoken during an L2 Italian class (a more guided environment) is monitored and planned. In this case, however, the teacher must be aware that teaching does not always generate learning.

One of the fundamental concepts of SLA Linguistics, which helps better understand the concept of acquired structures and skills, is that of **interlanguage**.

4.1 Italian L2: interlanguage

The concept of **Interlanguage** was first introduced by Corder (1967) and then used by Larry Selinker and Schumann in the 1970s, and it may be considered as:

> «*il sistema linguistico provvisorio che l'apprendente a mano a mano ricostruisce relativamente alla lingua che sta apprendendo. L'Interlingua è un sistema linguistico in continua evoluzione […] nuove regole e strutture si aggiungono progressivamente[…]*»[105].

The definition aims to illustrate the fact that L2 learner's productions do not constitute a set of sentences joined together with no sense at all. At first interlanguage can be considered a language without grammar[106], as the lexical elements are used invariably, e.g. verbs are not conjugated but appear in basic form, different tenses are represented by lexical elements (una volta, ieri, dopo + infinite).[107]

Instead, it is a complete system, governed by precise rules. Throughout the learning process, the learner's language changes by passing through very precise and identifiable evolutionary sequences. It is therefore a dynamic and systematic language at the same time.[108]

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[105] Andorno C., Cattana A., *Linguistica acquisizionale; analisi delle interlingue; errore linguistico ed errore comunicativo*, 2008, quoted by Francesca Pulvirenti, *Applicazioni didattiche degli studi sulle sequenze di acquisizione della L2.*
http://www00.unibg.it/dati/bacheca/582/38769.pdf

[106] G. Pallotti, 1998, *op. cit.*, *p. 22.*

[107] I*vi,* pp. 22-25.

[108] F. Gallina, *L'italiano degli immigrati*, "VIVIT: il portale dell'italiano nel mondo".
http://www.viv-it.org/schede/l-italiano-degli-immigrati

These fragments of language, called acquisitional sequences, are the subject-matter of a field of linguistics known as **Acquisitional Linguistics**:

> "*La linguistica acquisizionale (LA), è specializzata nello studio di una L2 e il suo scopo è quello di descrivere e spiegare i processi di apprendimento della lingua sia in contesto sociale che in contesto guidato*"[109].

Considering the three different stages of the language learning process, (pre-basic, basic and post basic), research on the acquisitional sequences of L2 Italian language learners has led to the identification of acquisition paths associated with their interlanguage.

As regards the **pre-basic** stage the statements' structure presents words which are not organized by grammatical classes (lack of even fundamental distinctions, such as name-verb opposition). Moving on to the **basic** variety we see an initial development of morphosyntax, and the statements are organized around the verb + complements opposition. There is also an increase in using lexical elements to signal grammatical relations (adverbs, prepositions, personal pronouns).

Finally comes the **post-basic** stage in which the order of words is more organized according to the syntax of the natives. There is a significant use of morphological elements: articles, copula, auxiliaries[110].

The general trend in the acquisition of an L2 moves from a first stage in which the lexical element is predominant. This is due to the urgent need to communicate. Grammatical accuracy is instead an aspect that will be left for the following stages. It can be resumed with the general concept that what is easy and useful is learned earlier and faster than what is unnecessary[111].

The initial interlanguages, in particular, contain words that are defined as highly common, which are learned at the very earliest stages:

In all initial interlanguages there are negation forms, greetings and farewells, thank-you forms, and other frequent and communicatively relevant expressions, usually as routine formulas, and of course names of people and places[112].

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[109] L. Revelli, 2009, op. cit., p.78.

[110] I. Pistorio, *L'interlingua scritta degli adulti. Uno studio presso il CTP di Ragusa,* Bollettino Itals, Anno 14, numero 63. ISSN: 2280-6792, 2016, pp. 15-16.

[111] G. Pallotti & MIUR, p.4.
< http://www.salainsegnanti.it/documenti/materiale-insegnati/Interlingua%20e%20analisi%20degli%20errori%20-%20Gabriele%20Pallotti%20%20MIUR.pdf>

[112] G. Ramat, 1993, pp. 395 quoteb by G. Pallotti, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

The following are some of the common Italian L2 acquisitional sequences:

- ○ **The noun**

Regarding the **noun morphology** the learner has to face **gender, number** and **morphological agreement** as the main acquisition processes.

Concerning the category of the **number**, the Italian language behaves with a vocal change at the end of the word, always coordinating with the gender of the noun to which it refers. Many studies point out that the number is the category that tends to appear earlier. As pointed out by Anna Giacalone Ramat, since the first recordings of L2 Italian speakers' productions, names with plural morphemes appear, even if many of them seem to be already represented by the plural form in the input.[113]

In addition to the many strategies of language simplification adopted by the Italian L2 learners, (codification of the number by means of quantifiers and numerals, *due mano* Vs *mani,* lexicalization and omission of numerical morpheme), there is at first the emergence of the desinence **-i** followed by the use of the desinence **–e**; later appears a more uncertain use of the desinence **-e** [114].

As regards **gender**, Italian identifies two categories: male and female. The ability to recognize which gender a name belongs to is certainly a difficult task for the learner and sometimes it doesn't even take place after a year and a half of exposure to Italian[115]

During the early stages of interlanguage in particular, the morphological component is avoided in favour of lexicalization (es. Figlio *femmina*)[116]

The acquisition of gender generally goes through five different stages:[117]

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[113]G. Ramat, 2003, op. cit., p.44-45.

[114] L. Revelli, op. cit., pp- 80-84.

[115] G. Ramat, 2003, op. cit., pp.43-44.

[116] L. Revelli, 2009, op. cit., p.82.

[117] Gabriele Pallotti, 1998, op. cit., pp. 56-59.

- **stage one**: initially, the gender is a feature hardly analysed by the learner. Frequent are the constructions that report the use of a basic form for male and female; an over-extension of the single basic form in -*a* is very frequent, es. *uoma, filma* (Revelli, 2009);
- **stage two**: when the first stage of gender assignment has been overcome, the learner proceeds with the words assembling to form the first utterances. The problem of the agreement between name and article or between names and adjectives begins to arise. After a first over-extension of the -a termination, there is a shift to a basic distinction between -*a* feminine and -*o* masculine;
- **stage three**: the agreement between the name and the adjective attribute is internalised by the learner. However, the agreement between the name and the predicate adjective is still missing, es l*a* mamm*a* è bell*o*;
- **stage four**: the agreement includes also the adjective predicative: l*a* mamm*a* è bell*a*;
- **stage five**: Finally, the agreement is also extended to the past participle of verbs, es. sei arrivat*a* / sei arrivat*o*.

The first stages of interlanguage are generally defined by the agreement concerning first all those elements that are part of the nominal syntagma, followed by those that are part of the verbal syntagma:

*L*e* mi*e* car*e* bambin*e**
*Sono tornat*e**

Adults proceed slowly in acquiring both flexible and nominal morphology rules and they often employ, as mentioned before, lexical strategies to express meanings that would otherwise require the use of morphology e.g. *figlio femmina* VS *figlia.*

o **The article**

It is appropriate to make a distinction between the acquisition of the determinative **article** and the acquisition of the indeterminate article. The latter seems to appear earlier than the determinative article. This seems to be due to the coincidence with the numeral *uno (one).* Although there is an early use of the indeterminative, there is a minor inflection of the same article, showing only one extended form: *un* → *un porta, un sedia*[118].

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[118] G. Ramat, 2003, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

The determinative article, initially, is avoided or replaced with **demonstrative adjectives,** *questo* o *quello*. The following stages show the extension of the most frequent allomorphs although without gender mistakes: *la* instead of *l'; il* instead of *lo; i* instead of *gli* → *il albero; la Università; il zero*[119]

o **The verb**

The **verb** acquisitional sequences consider three fundamental aspects: tempo, modo e aspetto (TMA).[120]

The **temporality** refers to a deictic expression of the action, i.e. relative to the position of the event with respect to a reference point e.g. the time of utterance.

The **aspect** expresses how the action proceeds in time, i.e. the perspective from which the action expressed by the verb is described i.e. whether it is external or internal to its progress.[121]

The **modality** indicates the way in which the speaker relates to the action expressed by the verb. Therefore, there can be modality of doubt, hypothesis, willingness or probability.

As reported by C. Andorno "Le forme verbali non entrano nella competenza dell'apprendente in modo casuale ma seguono un ordine di comparsa"[122]. It means that the learner of Italian L2 shows a certain regularity in the acquisition of verbal structures and some of them appear before others.

In particular, some studies related to the varieties of spontaneous learning of Italian L2 conducted by the Pavia Project reported by Andorno in his article, have led to describe the path of reconstruction of the system of TAM functions linked to the synthetic forms of the verb[123]:

FASE I	FASE II	FASE III
presente, infinito, participio *nessun valore TAM*	**presente, infinito** *non perfettivo*	**infinito** *futuro, intenzioni, ordini, intemporale, abituale* **presente** *presente, intemporale*
	participio *perfettivo*	**imperfetto** *pass. imperfettivo*

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[119] *Ivi*, pp.55-56.
[120] TMA: tense, modality and aspect.
[121] C. Andorno, *Grammatica e acquisizione dell'italiano L2,* Italiano LinguaDue, 2009-1, p.6.
[122] C. Andorno, 2009, op. cit., p. 9.
[123] *Ivi*, p.12

participio
perfettivo

In the early stages of interlanguage the learner begins to use the *infinitive form* of verbs as well as other verbal forms corresponding to the root of the verb, e.g. io *corre* – re,

io *mangia* – re.

A first opposition between past and completed actions and present actions starts in the following stages. The first are marked with the past participle that rapidly extends, e.g. *–to (io andato, io mangiato).*

The present actions, on the other hand, continue to be realized using the present tense or using the stem of the verb.

Concerning the **aspect** of the verb, in these early stages there is not a distinction between *durative* class' actions and *punctual* class' actions, yet.[124] This distinction will be achieved in the later stages with the acquisition of the *imperfetto* (imperfect; *io andavo, io mangiavo*) and with the first forms of the *passato prossimo* (present perfect; *io sono andato, io ho mangiato*).

More advanced stages of Italian L2 show the appearance of verbal constructions that express doubt and desire, therefore the first forms of the subjunctive and the conditional emerge. There is also the presence of the periphrasis STARE + gerund. Finally, the learner implements a new temporal distinction using the forms of the future.

As for the **modality**, it can be expressed in Italian in different ways. In the acquisition of the second language these are acquired through regular sequences.

As Pallotti reported, it is possible to recognize three stages[125]:

- **Implicit modality**: initially modal expressions are communicated through non-verbal signals, such as gestures or facial expression or intonation.
- **Lexical modality:** at this stage expressions of uncertainty or doubt are realized through the use of lexical elements such as adverbs (*forse, magari*) and fixed verbal forms (*non so, penso, credo*).

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[124] **Durative verbs** are those that refer to events that have duration, e.g. *lavorare, leggere, scrivere*.
Punctual verbs are those that refer to events that do not have duration, e.g. *cadere, accendere, rompere*.
[125] G. Pallotti, 1998, op. cit., pp. 52-56.

- **Grammatical modality:** the acquisition of the conjunctive and conditional modes appears late during the acquisition of Italian L2. In particular, the subjunctive is the most complicated to learn, given the difficulty of the verbal paradigm. The appearance of sentences containing conjunctive and conditional is only found in the most advanced interlingue.

Finally, as described by Monica Berretta (via G. Pallotti, 1998, pp. 56), the imperative provides for five different stages of acquisition. These phases consider the complexity of the verbal paradigm. In Italian the imperative forms are rather irregular, e.g. the final vowel that changes according to the conjugation or the difficulty in choosing such vowel:

*tu entr**i** → entr**a**!*   *tu smett**i** → smett**i**!*   *tu apr**i** → apr**i**!*

Acquisitional linguistics, therefore, which in recent years has reached an important position in terms of glottodidactics, provides teachers with the tools to understand the acquisition of the verbal system by the learner of Italian L2. It is neither a chaotic nor random system. Like Andorno claims in his work[126]:

"System is reconstructed by:

- **classi di forme**
- **classi di funzioni**

As he or she identifies pairs of forms and functions, the learner organizes them into his or her own paradigms and uses them according to the most frequent combinations in input or semantically simpler.

5. Common errors and difficulties in Italian L2

The adult immigrant who has to face a new life in the country he often knows nothing about, except the name, has to deal with a reality that appears far from being simple. Among the social

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[126] C. Andorno, *op. cit.*, p 14

and cultural difficulties, among the necessity to find a job and take care of the family, there is one obstacle that connects all these complexities: learning Italian.

The need to learn Italian, which will then become the L2 of the learner, is an urgent necessity. The communicative pressure is therefore extremely significant[127].

Second language learning may occur in a more or less guided way. There is mainly a strong spontaneous component, as the learner has to use the language in everyday interactions; however, it can be combined with some form of education, e.g. Italian language courses. The learner has to face a slow and hard path, in any way, which may last even several years.

Over the years, Acquisitional Linguistics, as mentioned above, has dealt with the language acquired by foreigners living in Italy. Thanks to the numerous studies conducted, for example by the Pavia Project[128], it is now possible to analyze the stages of acquisition of the main linguistic phenomena of Italian L2, also and especially from the didactic point of view. In particular, in the initial phases of Interlanguage, what is noticeable is that the learner experiences a series of difficulties and differences from the standard. This means that he or she realizes linguistic outputs that are different from what a native speaker would produce.

Therefore, learners' productions inevitably show, in relation to the various stages of Interlanguage, what is generally referred to as **error**.

An error is «lo scarto rispetto alla norma riconosciuta e codificata dalla comunità linguistica».[129] This definition, however, highlights only the negative connotation that accompanies the term. It is instead the discrepancy between the transitional competence of the learner and the target language[130]

What is considered negatively as error or failure are actually manifestations of the rules of this transitory linguistic system, which has its own logic and functionality. An incorrect construction is a production of a certain stage of Interlanguage whose correction will be made in a subsequent step. As already mentioned, initially the first stages are characterized by an essentially lexical learning and then, afterwards, by the acquisition of the real grammatical rules.

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[127] G. Pallotti & MIUR, p.3.
http://www.salainsegnanti.it/documenti/materiale-insegnanti/Interlingua%20e%20analisi%20degli%20errori%20-%20Gabriele%20Pallotti%20%20MIUR.pdf
[128] The Pavia Project started in the mid-1980s; A. G. Ramat originally coordinated it and it represents the biggest research project on Italian L2.
[129] Beccaria (1995:279) via L. Revelli, *Italiano L2. Problemi scientifici, metodologici, didattici,* p.95.
[130] M. Miozzo, B. Garofolin; *Analisi dell'errore nell'acquisizione dell'italiano in un contesto LS e in contesti L2;* EL.LE*; Vol. 5 – Num. 3,* 2016, p. 434.

A difference, even if minimal, is made between **mistakes** or **performance errors** and **errors** or **competence errors**[131]**.** The former reflect a general absence of awareness of a specific rule or its misinterpretation. The second, on the other hand, indicate a temporary production failure that the learner normally corrects. The two options, however, become blurred together because some structures can coexist even for long periods of time in the learner's mind.[132]

A further distinction considers not only the concept of correctness, which can result in an error, but also the concept of *intelligibility* and *appropriateness*[133]. They are also defined as "errori di lingua" VS "errori di linguaggio"[134], as they represent a distinction between formal correctness and communicative effectiveness. A statement that does not respect the grammatical rules of the target language can still be correct from a communicative point of view, i.e. the message is still clear for communication purposes.

Beyond the communicative intention, at the linguistic level what has been especially analysed in this work is called **errore di apprendimento**, as opposed to **errore di interferenza**[135].

The "errore di apprendimento" is essentially linked to the path that the learner takes when learning an L2. It reflects, as mentioned above, the interlanguage level actually achieved and acts as an indicator for competences not yet reached.

From simplification, to over-extension of a grammatical rule, still to regularisation, e.g. verbal flexion, learning errors affect all language levels. It is not easy, however, to quantify these kinds of errors.

They certainly represent the majority of linguistic errors, even greater than interference ones[136].

These errors fit into different descriptions, according to the language category they belong to[137]:

- **phonology:** includes pronunciation errors;
- **morphology:** includes errors that concern the inflection of the noun or verb;
- **syntax:** contains errors such as the sequence of components in a sentence, missing articles, etc;

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[131] G. Pallotti, 1998, op. cit., pp. 312-313.
L. Revelli, 2009, op. cit., p.96.
[132] G. Pallotti V 2012, pp 313.
[133] C. M. Coonan, *La lingua straniera veicolare*, De Agostini Scuola, Novara, 2012, pp. 62-63.
[134] Simone, 1976 *in* R. Solarino, *Gli errori di italiano L1 e L2: interferenza e apprendimento* Italiano LinguaDue, n. 2. 2010, p. 15.
[135] R. Solarino, op. cit., p.18.
[136] *Ivi*, p.20.
[137] Miozzo, Garofolin, op. cit., p. 434-435.

- **lexicon:** errors regarding the use of words, invention of new ones, etc.

As already said, in any L2 learning path, error is inevitable and its detection (whether in a guided context or not) can certainly be useful to the learner. The person who makes an error knows that he is making attempts and is waiting for expert speakers to validate or falsify them[138].

In a guided context, i.e. an Italian course, error detection is useful not only for the student but also for the teacher. In this way the teacher can direct his attention to appropriate corrective measures and can also give suggestions on successful learning strategies.

Even if explicit teaching does not alter, in an L2 path, the learning order of morphemes or the progressive hierarchy of sentences, it can positively influence the accuracy of future productions and accelerate the learning of the hierarchical structures of subsequent levels of interlanguage. Explicit teaching, taking into account the learner's difficulties, can also help the learner to overcome the fossilization of certain structures and bring him/her to higher levels of competence[139].

The following are the most common errors that learners of Italian L2 make with respect to the language category they belong to.

5.1 Phonology and Phonetics

All spoken languages are based on the generation of sounds or **phones**. In order to learn a new language, therefore, it is necessary to know how these sounds are produced.

The branches of linguistics dealing with the study of the sounds of a language and how they combine together are **Phonetics and Phonology**.[140]

Considering Italian, its phonological system is made up of about thirty sounds:

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[138] R. Solarino, 2010, op. cit., p.20.

[139] C. Bettoni, 2001, op. cit., 138-139.

[140] **Phonetics** is the branch of linguistics that studies the language sounds (**phones**), produced by the phonatory apparatus. (P. D'Achille, 2003, op. cit. cap.4).
Phonology is the branch of linguistics that deals with the linguistic function of the sounds of a given language. The object of study are the **phonemes**, the sound units that are distinctive for that language thus the sounds that determine meaning differences. The phonemic inventory includes the distinctive phonemes for a given language. (P. D'Achille, 2003, op. cit., cap. 4).

- 7 **vowels:** /a, ɛ, e, i, ɔ, o, u/ in stressed position but 5 vowels in unstressed syllable /a, e, i, o, u/;
- 2 **glides or semivowels**: /j/ and /w/, sounds that behave like vowels; and
- 21 **consonants**.

The idea that Italian is a language that " you can read it the way you write it" is still alive. Although the spelling system of Italian is less distant from pronunciation than other languages are, there is no perfect correspondence between graphemes and phones[141].

Italian has some peculiar characteristics absent in other languages, for example the *roticity* of the **/r/** which is absent in English where it does not vibrate as in Italian, since the tip of the tongue does not touch the alveoli at all. This can therefore lead an English-speaking learner to a weak realization of Italian words containing the phoneme /r/.

Or even **gemination,** or consonant lengthening, is a typical Italian phonological trait which is largely absent in languages such as Spanish and Chinese.

These examples show that most of the errors made by Italian L2 learners, at phonological level, fall into the category of *interference errors*.

Therefore, evaluating and identifying the possible difficulties of an Italian learner should also consider his/her mother tongue.

As Trubetzkoy argued (tr.) «the sounds of the foreign language are phonologically misinterpreted because they are interpreted with the phonological assessment of one's mother tongue»[142]. Therefore, when a second language is acquired, the phonetic habits learnt with the mother tongue are transferred.R. Solarino (2010) reports some evidences, e.g. North Africans find it very difficult to pronounce **/p/**, *baezi* (paesi), as well as the voiceless **/s/**, *coza* (cosa).

In addition to interference errors, there are difficulties due to evolutionary factors related to the universal properties of languages. The phonological features of certain traits of the target language are linked to the difficulty of acquiring it.

Implications due to the distinctiveness of these traits are related to the theories of Eckmann (1987) and Best (1988).[143]

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[141] P. D'Achille, 2003, op. cit., p.87.

[142] Trubetzkoy (1971: 126) in E. Mastrantuono; 2010; *Considerazioni teoriche e proposte applicative sull'acquisizione della fonologia nell'insegnamento/apprendimento dell'italiano L2;* Italiano LinguaDue, n.1, p.55.

[143] *In* E. Mastrantuono, 2010, op. cit., p.55

More specifically, the former states that a learner will have less difficulty in acquiring a phonetic trait than in L2 is less pronounced than in L1 compared to the difficulties he will encounter when faced with a marked trait of L2. The second one on the other hand states that a sound of L2 when similar to that of the L1 phonemic category will be completely assimilated to this one[144].

The greatest errors and difficulties in Italian pronunciation by L2 learners concern:

- gemination or consonant lengthening;
- plosive; and
- affricates.

Gemination or consonant lengthening

A fundamental feature of Italian pronunciation is **gemination or consonant lengthening**. It is present only in 0.6% of the languages known as a distinctive feature, i.e. it determines a difference of meaning, e.g. *casa/cassa; fato/fatto; cane/canne [145]*.

Since it is a trait shared by very few languages (e.g. Italian, Arabic, Japanese) it is consequently one of the elements of the Italian language that causes more difficulty to a foreign student (e.g. Spanish, Chinese or English), both in pronunciation and orthography.

It results in a production, oral or written, lacking the gemination feature:

-questo pesse se chiama <u>tono</u>-[146] → *Questo pesce si chiama tonno*

In this case there is the lack of **n** gemination, which in Italian creates the minimal pair

tono → tonno.

*-Tro**p**e cose sta**n**o su**c**edendo in questa pictura*

Tro**pp**e cose sta**nn**o su**cc**edendo in questa immagine[147].

One of the activities that could help the learner in the recognition of the use of gemination is the division into syllables. The awareness of the syllabic division of Italian, can help the learner in the quantitative perception between non geminate and geminate consonants[148]. Possible

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[144] *ibidem*

[145] P. D'Achille, *op cit*. pp. 102.

[146] this was pronounced by a Senegalese boy, recorded during one of the Italian L2 lessons held at the CPIA in Castelvetrano.

[147] VALICO: http://www.valico.org/valico_b_CORPUS.html

[148] E. Mastrantuono, *op cit*., pp. 57.

activities in this sense could be the reordering of syllables to form words, or the completion of missing parts of a word with the correct syllable among other items. Another didactic proposal is that of providing similar pairs of words that differ only in the double consonant, e.g. *casa/cassa, polo/pollo*. The activity proposed could be the association of the lexeme with an image that represents it: referring to concrete objects, the memorization process becomes faster[149].

Plosive

According to E. Mastrantuono[150], another difficulty encountered by foreigners in Italian L2 is the opposition between voiceless plosive and voiced plosive. Since the presence of such phonemes in world languages is different (e.g. Chinese does not present voiced occlusive, Arabic does not present voiceless occlusive) their realization and opposition in Italian L2 can create difficulties. In particular, the learner, whose L1 lacks voiced plosives, will tend to produce voiceless phonemes in Italian L2.

A language such as Chinese, for example, makes no distinction between voiced plosives and voiceless plosives, as the distinctive feature is the aspiration: /p/, /t/, /k/ Vs /pʰ/, /tʰ/, /kʰ/. A language, however, such as Arabic, does not have voiceless plosives. Therefore, an Arabic-speaking learner of Italian L2 will generate for example, an overlap of /p/ and /b/: *re**b**obblica* Vs re**p**ubblica; ***b**roblema* Vs **p**roblema[151].

One of the activities aimed at improving knowledge of the distinction between voiceless and voiced plosives, could be the presentation by the teacher of a list of minimal pairs containing the two types of plosives. Immediately after the presentation of the words, the learner should recognize the words and repeat them correctly.

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[149]V. Maggioni, *L'influenza della L1 nell'apprendimento di lingue affini: analisi delle interferenze linguistiche di ispanofoni apprendenti l'italiano come lingua straniera*, Italiano Lingua Due, n. 1. 2010, pp.20.

[150] E. Mastrantuono, *op. cit.*, pp. 58.

[151] G. Bernini, *acquisizione dell'italiano come L2*, Treccani.it, 2010. <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/acquisizione-dell-italiano-come-l2_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27Italiano%29/>

Affricates

Another of the most widespread phonological errors among learners of Italian L2 concerns the category of **affricates**. In particular, the most common errors concern the the strengthening of non-geminate affricates (e.g. *piacce* → *piace*) and the replacement of the affricate with a fricative (e.g. /ˈʒente/ → *gente*).

From the study carried out by Chiara Celata[152], it is possible to identify and reconstruct the potential path followed by Italian L2 learners in the acquisition of the affricates.

In the early stages, the learner would tend to reinforce the pronunciation of the affricate by making it geminate. This is due to the fact that the learners would perceive the Italian affricate as a phone characterized by a length/strengthening trait[153]: *Poi c'è la coppia che si baccia*[154].

Once this "strengthening" stage is over, the learner is able to make the correct distinction between non geminate and geminate affricates.

The second most frequent mistake is given by the tendency to replace the **affricate** with a **fricative**, e.g. /ˈpjaʃe/ Vs /ˈpjatʃe/; /ˈmarso/ Vs /ˈmartso/. This type of error occurs in more advanced stages of interlanguage where the learner is exposed to spirantization errors[155].

In particular, the substitution and confusion with fricative is a symptom of the existing categorisation between two close categories of the Italian phonological system[156].

Opposition activities between geminate and non-geminate affricates, and between affricate and fricative, following the natural stages of phoneme acquisition, will help the learner to overcome these difficulties in Italian L2.

5.2 Morphology

Morphology analyses the forms of words and the changes they assume to designate different functions. The morphology of Italian is rather complex, especially with regard to verbal forms, having a considerable inflectional component[157].

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[152] C. Celata, *Sviluppo storico e acquisizione di categorie fonologiche: le affricate in italiano*, 2004. <http://linguistica.sns.it/QLL/QLL01/CC.SviluppoStoricoAcquisizioneCategorie.pdf>

[153] *Ivi*, pp. 114.

[154] VALICO: http://www.valico.org/valico_b_CORPUS.html

[155] E. Mastrantuono, *op. cit.*, pp. 62.

[156] C. Celata, *op. cit.*, pp. 116.

[157] P. D'Achille, *op. cit.*, pp. 117.

The difficulty increases in the situation where the learner's mother tongue belongs to the group of so-called **Analytic Languages** (isolating) for which each meaning is represented by a single element or word order, e.g. Afrikaans or varieties of Chinese. Even English is mostly analytic; a word like "*the* student_" in Italian is translated differently depending on the gender, which in this case is a central morphological element in the inflection of the name: "**lo** student**e**" Vs "**la** studente**ssa**". Morphological errors therefore include errors concerning the inflection of nouns, verbs, articles and prepositions and their agreement.

In particular, morphological errors related to the **noun** and **verbal forms** are examined.

5.2.1   The noun

The morphology of the noun marks the **number** and the **gender** in Italian, as already reported in the section on the stages of interlanguage acquisition.

Gender is a particularly difficult category to learn, especially for those who have a mother tongue very distant from Italian, e.g. Persian, Chinese. The main consequence of this distance lies right in the difficulty of achieving an important preliminary requirement: the attention to the name endings and their conformity to Italian[158].

In the analysis of the most frequent errors related to the gender of nouns in Italian, Ramat identifies four categories[159]:

- words without a vowel ending, due to the interference with languages already known that do not present vowels in the final position of the word; e. g. *problem-*, *animal-*;

- over-extension of the termination in **-a** not related to gender but probably due to the relevance of the vowel; e.g. *uoma, filma, giovana[160];*

- over-extension of the termination in **-o**; e.g. *nom**o**, color**o***;
  *dove si incontrava in un **barco** con una ragazza molto bella[161]*

- overextension of **-e**; *salade*, *telefone*.
  *voglio passare tutta la setiman**e** qui*

In general, the tendency of learners, at least in the early stages, is to assign names to their gender following the dominant paradigms (m. in *-o*; f. in *-a*), and this is a cause of error.

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[158]L. Revelli, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

[159] A. G. Ramat, op. cit., pp. 43-45.

[160] R. solarino, *op. cit*., pp.18

[161] VALICO: http://www.valico.org/valico_b_CORPUS.html

In Italian, the **number** is expressed by replacing the inflectional suffixes, as opposed to the simple addition of a formative like *-s*, in languages such as English or Spanish.

Learners find it less difficult to express the number of names than the gender. There may be omissions of number morpheme, e.g. *la signora ha fatto cadere tute l**e** cos**a** dalla tavola* or lexical strategies such as the addition of quantifiers and numerals e.g. ***due*** *settimana,* ***due*** *calendario*; *in questo imagine vedo un stazione ferroviaria dove come sempre per **ogni giorno** (giorni) ce tanta gente*[162] at least in the early stages of interlanguage[163].

In general, the most used suffix for the plural is **-i**. Learners with different mother tongues show some differences that refer to their L1. Anglophones for example show some uncertainties and absence of plural brands with names in **-e**, e.g. *le animal**e***. Francophones tend to over-extend the plural in **-e**, e.g. *tre ome, queste lepre*[164].

A further source of errors are **derivative morphemes**. Learners generally show a preference for certain modalities of construnction in the early stages and the persistence of difficulties related to the most complex and difficult categories in Italian, e.g. *custod**iatore*** → *custode*[165]. The derivation concerns not only nouns but also adverbs such as *subita**mente*** → *subito*.

The didactic activities able to reinforce the structures and the knowledge still fragile, regarding the nominal morphology, that can be proposed are various.

One of these is, for example, **the choice of the correct alternative** between the two options proposed, based on the number or gender of the noun itself, or the corresponding article or adjective.

The **filling of blanks** can be an alternative. Listening to a text being read, the learner will have to fill in the blank space with the correct names, articles, adjectives or the last letter of each noun. Again, the ludic dimension of glottodidactics can be an important resource. So, activities like **crossword puzzles, lexical puzzles, guess who or riddles** are fun exercises for the learner and highly productive.

Based on the learner's needs and his or her level of interlanguage, the teacher will choose the means and didactic activities that are suitable for the criticalities identified.

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[162] *Ibidem*

[163] S. Ambroso, E. Luzi, *L'italiano L2 dalla pragmatica alla sintassi. Fenomeni di un corpus di produzioni di apprendenti sinofoni e non a confronto*.
<http://ojs.uniba.it/index.php/glottodidattica/article/viewFile/241/112>

[164] A. G. Ramat, *op. cit.*, pp. 52.

[165] R. B. Costa, *Rassegna degli errori lessicali in testi scritti da apprendenti elementari, intermedi ed avanzati di italiano L2 (ed implicazioni didattiche)*, 2002, pp. 51.
<https://aisberg.unibg.it/handle/10446/264#.XsfpolUzbIU>

5.2.2 The verb

The verb is the part of the sentence that provides information on precise notional categories (temporality, modality, aspect, diathesis) from the morphological point of view[166]. The verb in Italian presents almost a regular structure, but there are cases of allomorphy or verbs that have more than one root, e.g. *andare* → *vad-*; *essere* → *sono*, *fui.* These anomalies create difficulties for the learner who produces errors such as *rispondato* (risposto) and *distruggiato* (distrutto) for irregular verbs[167]:

il cane ha rovesciato il tavolo in che mode lo stoviglie ha __romputo__[168].

As analyzed in the section on interlanguage, learners follow specific stages in the acquisition of competences on the verb in Italian, stages that concern temporality, modalities, and aspect. Therefore, the error must always be considered on the basis of the level of interlanguage and the competences achieved by the learner.

The errors related to the use of verbs in Italian belong to different categories, like autonomous elaboration of forms or analytical forms, such as the case of *prenduto* (preso)[169] or *non sono molto dare importanza[170]*, or even errors due to over-extension or hypergeneralization of certain rules, e.g. *io rimano* (io riman**go**) following the form of a verb like *io cred**o***.

On the other hand, the forms produced by the deletion of final morpheme are less frequent, or completely absent, as the words used by the learner are always complete from the point of view of morphological constitution[171].

In general, the most common errors found, concerning the category of the verb, in Italian L2 are: the **over-extension** of regular forms even for verbs with irregular paradigms along with **autonomous elaboration of forms**, the difficulty, at least initially, in the choice between the present and the past, and the choice of the auxiliary in the compound tenses.

Other errors are mostly due to the interference of the learner's L1.

The latter category includes structures like:

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[166] P. D'Achille, *op. cit.,* pp. 134.
[167] R. Solarino, op. cit., pp.19.
[168] VALICO: http://www.valico.org/valico_b_CORPUS.html
[169] A. G. Ramat, op. cit. pp.102-103.
[170] S. Ambrosio, E. Luzi, op. cit., pp. 15.
[171] A. G. Ramat, op. cit., pp. 100.

- *sono 20 anni* → engl. *I'm 20 years old*

  (**ho 20 anni**; the correct auxiliary is to have*)*;

- *io piace la pizza* → engl. *I like pizza*

   (**a me piace la pizza/ mi piace la pizza;** the verb *piacere*, as well as the verb *mancare,* is preceded by an indirect stressed or not stressed pronoun);

- *vado a iscrivermi ad un corso di inglese* → *(sp.) voy a apuntarme a un curso de inglés;* (Here the error is related to the meaning that the periphrasis "andare a" conveys: in Italian it indicates a movement activity, while in Spanish it indicates mostly the intention to do something, i.e. *ho intenzione di iscrivermi[172])*; etc.

The error of **over-extension** of verbal paradigms consists in using a form even in contexts that do not require it, e.g. *io parl**a** dell'Itiopia* rather than *io parl**o** dell'Etiopia[173]*.

In this case there is an overextension of the third singular person as opposed to the first person. There are also cases of over-extension in the use of the infinite instead of the present, e.g. *io studiare italiano*[174]. This type of error occurs mainly in early basic varieties of interlanguage, thus marking the lack of structures that will emerge later.

The phenomenon of the **autonomous elaboration of forms** instead concerns regularization processes. The learner uses the morphemes of the paradigms he already knows to express forms that he still does not know[175].Wrong productions, in this category, are for example the case of *presato* or *prenduto* or *diciato* , in which the learner tends to regularize the termination in -to for the past participle with irregular verbs.:

e.g. *Esta personna ha **vedato** la scena[176]*

The most numerous processes are those in which the learner tends to eliminate lexical base allomorphy and the consequent elimination of verbal paradigm irregularities, as in the case of *diciono* instead of *dicono*, *devrò* instead of *dovrò[177]*.

Another case is the lexical derivation of verbs from the noun. Following the Italian derivation principle, the learner produces forms such as *bugi**ano*** from the noun *bugia*, based for example on *lavoro* → *lavor**ano***.

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[172] V. Maggioni, op. cit. pp. 25.

[173] A. G. Ramat, op. cit., pp. 92.

[174] *Ivi*, pp.101.

[175] Ivi, pp. 102.

[176] VALICO: http://www.valico.org/valico_b_CORPUS.html

[177]A. G. Ramat, op. cit., pp. 105.

Another source of errors linked to the use of the verb is the prepositional regency, to whose difficulty the learners respond either by omitting the prepositions or by relying on L1:

*Ho detto che italiano **pensano solo mangiare*** → *pensano a;*

*ho conosciuto **a** un ragazzo* → *ho conosciuto un ragazzo (ingl. I met **a** boy)[178].*

As already reported in the section on interlanguage, the learner, especially in the early stages, tends to use more verbal forms in the **present** tense rather than using forms in the **past**: "*Ieri al parco, sto leggendo il giornale* […]*"[179].*

Finally, a last great difficulty for L2 Italian language learners is the use of the correct auxiliary, *essere* or *avere*:

"*Ieri sera **ho uscito** con i miei amici"[180]* (**sono uscito**).

These errors may be partly due to interference with the learner's L1. In cases such as "***Sei ragione**!*" since "***you are right**!*" instead of "***Hai ragione***", for an anglophone learner.

The principal reason, however, is to be found in the lack of a defined and exhaustive rule that can explain the choice of one or the other auxiliary. According to Davide Bozzo, a syntactic model, in the teaching of Italian for foreigners, is not adequate for the explanation of the theme, i.e. the choice of the auxiliary[181]. He underlines the need to find a model, first of all, simple and exhaustive. In his article, he speaks rather of a semantic model that is able to identify and somehow represent the reasons for the alternation of auxiliaries, focusing on the meaning of the verbs and auxiliaries involved: the verb **avere** is used when the verb expresses an action directed by the subject towards the object or the external world in general, while the verb **essere** is used when the verb expresses an action directed towards the subject[182].

The process of acquiring the verbal morphology of Italian goes through the phase of **fixing structures**, rules[183]. The activities and exercises related to this stage, for the reinforcement of verbal structures are different.

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[178] R. B. Costa, op. cit., pp. 55.

[179] VALICO: http://www.valico.org/valico_b_CORPUS.html

[180] M. Miozzo, B. Garofolin, op. cit., pp. 439.

[181] Bozzo, D. (2018). *Essere* o *avere*? La selezione dell'ausiliare tra teoria e didattica nell'insegnamento dell'italiano a stranieri. *Italica Wratislaviensia*, 9(2), 55–80. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15804/IW.2018.09.16

[182] Ivi, pp. 70.

[183] P. E. Balboni, 2014, op. cit., pp. 105-110.

Pattern drills are typical exercises for the stabilization of structures. Presenting a typical structure like the *passato prossimo*, through the repetition of verbs, the fixation will be more successful.

Manipulation exercises, on the other hand, as a "*tell a story*" allows the learner to focus on structures such as the past of verbs.

The exercise may also differ according to the content described. For example, for an Italian course for adult foreigners, depending on the context or work environment, the story presented will deal with familiar topics for the learner[184].

Finally, the creation of a **reference grammar** is instead a winning strategy for reflection on morphology. The learner reports the grammatical knowledge acquired in consultable reference schemes, supporting the student in his or her linguistic acquisition path[185].

5.3 Syntax

Syntax studies the placement of words in sentences and of sentences within periods; it defines functions such as that of **subject**, **verb** and **complement** and how these relate to each other[186].The errors related to the syntactic domain, therefore, concern the order of the elements in a sentence, e.g. "*mi piace Venezia **molto***"[187], the lack of articles, prepositions, coordination and subordination relations, etc.

Syntax is the most complex level of linguistic analysis and this is also confirmed by studies on the L2 acquisition which present a general sequence of learning ranging from pragmatics, semantics, morphology and finally syntax[188].

Concerning the **order of the elements** within a syntagm, the Italian L2 learners do not show any particular difficulties. The most significant errors concern, above all, the omission of copulae or articles, due to the simplification strategies of the initial varieties, or rather the excessive use of these elements:

-*io_ fatto speciale media di medico* → *io **ho** fatto una scuola media speciale di medicina*

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[184] Ivi, pp. 108.
[185] P. E. Balboni, 2016, op. cit., pp. 82.
[186] P. D'Achille, op. cit., pp. 169.
[187] Miozzo, Garofolin, op. cit., pp. 440.
[188] G. Pallotti, op. cit., pp. 81-84.

*-a scuola qui **lo** cancela lavagna sempre → A scuola cancellano sempre la lavagna[189].*

The **organization of the sentence**, in the initial stages of learning, is organized in accordance with the functions of topic and comment, rather than with the verb, and in particular following the sequence TOPIC → COMMENT:

io di Italia/ studie → TOPIC / COMMENT
Io in Italia (sono venuto per) studiare

The salient information covers the initial positions of a statement at least as long as they are based on semantic-syntactic rather than pragmatic categories (pragmatic mode)[190].

Frequent in these early stages are the omissions of topics already mentioned previously in the speech. In the following stages the learner tends to vary the organizational principles focusing on the verb. In this phase the element that controls the action the most is expressed first, followed by the verb and the other arguments[191]:

*i bambini / **gli piacciono**/ tante questa festa*
ARG.+ CONTROLLO /**VERBO** /ARGOMENTI

A further common trend among foreigners, with regard to the syntax of the sentence, concerns the expansion of arguments by means of a pronominal dative: ***mi** scrivo le parole, io **mi** prendo il blu, **si** ruba una macchina[192].*

As regards the relationship between the different clauses within a period, in the initial stages of Italian L2, learners are not able to establish any kind of relationship between them, whether it be one of coordination or subordination. In these initial stages the learner usually does not have the appropriate tools to express the hierarchical relationships between the clauses, in Italian partly dependent on verbal morphology. This is mostly a simple juxtaposition of propositions: *io ancora bambino mio nonno aveva morto → ero ancora bambino **quando** mio nonno è morto[193].*

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[189] A. G. Ramat, op cit., pp. 125.
[190] Ivi, pp. 131.
[191] S. Ambroso, L. Luzi, op. cit., pp. 17.
[192] L. Revelli, op. cit., pp. 89.
[193] A. G. Ramat, op. cit., pp. 160.

After this first phase the **coordination** with the conjunction *e* and *perchè* will soon appear, followed by other connectors such as *ma, però, così, quindi*[194].

As far as **subordination** is concerned, the Italian L2 learner shows a precise hierarchy of acquisition. Specifically, the sequence is: **adverbial, completive and relative**.

Among the **adverbials**, the most frequent are **finals, causals and temporals**, which witness the semantic and communicative importance of the sentences. the concessive and conditionals do not appear in the early stages of interlanguage, probably due to the complexity of construction[195].

The **completives** are present mainly as implicit with modal (*potere, volere, dovere*) or with the verb *pensare* followed by the infinite form: *se fai così, puoi crescere più velocemente*[196] The explicit completives, instead, present another subject, and usually introduced by *dire* and *penso*: *la ragassa vuole che (**lui**) prende il gatto*[197].

The **relative** structures are not present in the early stages of the acquisition of Italian L2. There are instead structures, defined as pre-relative, which omit the relative pronoun, a phenomenon massively presents in Anglophone learners due to interference with the mother tongue [198]: *la prima paesi__ noi visitato è Luxembourg*[199].

Other pre-relatives are to be considered those paratactic structures with full SN repetition:

quelo persona siedi quela una machina quelo machina passa quela dentro
una persona è seduta in una macchina che passa dentro un tunnel.

The teaching techniques and activities that can be adopted to fix and reflect on syntactical structures in Italian L2 can be based, for example, on the repetition and manipulation of texts or clauses. An example is the grammatical multiple choice, in which is presented a battery of multiple choices with two or three options concerning the use of conjunctions, pronouns, connectives related to the different relationships that exist between the clauses[200].

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[194] Ivi, pp. 161.
[195] Ivi, pp. 166.
[196] S. Ambroso, op. cit., pp.18.
[197] A. G. Ramat, op. cit., pp. 169.
[198] L. Revelli, op. cit., pp. 93.
[199] A. G. Ramat, op. cit., pp. 173.
[200] P. E. Balboni, 2016, op. cit., pp. 69.

Or a sentence splitting exercise, i.e. jigsaw, where the learner is asked to link the topics with their comments could be useful[201].

One of the activities related to the game is to play the team game. Each team must be able to produce three sentences within a set time limit (e.g. 5 minutes) following some rules given by the teacher (e.g. use a minimum of three words, do not use the same words for each sentence, the longer the sentence the higher the score)[202].

The exercises will stimulate students' reflection on the syntactic structures of Italian. They will be stimulated to use not only co-ordinated but also subordinate constructions, reflect on the correct use of prepositions and connectors and the functions connected to them. Taking the interlanguage stages for the acquisition of syntactic structures, the learner, through reinforcement exercises, will overcome obstacles and difficulties more quickly.

5.4 Lexicon

The lexicon is the complex of language's lexemes. Italian has a rather wide vocabulary due mainly to its long and rich cultural history that has grown over the centuries[203]. The errors that fall into this category concern the use of a word instead of another, the creation of new forms and the interference of L1. In particular, they fall into three macro-categories: **genericisms, semantic extension/approximation and analytical periphrases**[204].

Genericisms are mainly present in the initial and intermediate varieties of Italian L2. Learners tend to use and exchange among themselves verbs such as *essere, avere* and *fare*, verbs that are frequent in input and show little semantic specificity:

*-**Hai piacere** per fare vacanze la per una settimana?* → ti **farebbe piacere**;

*-**fanno** bicicletta* → **vanno** in bicicletta[205].

Even some adjectives tend to become genericisms, like *brutto, cattivo, forte*:

*-penso che il mare è molto **forte*** → ***mosso**[206].

[201] Ibidem
[202] https://italianoperstranieri.loescher.it/italiano-per-immagini/esercizi
https://italianoperstranieri.loescher.it/al-posto-giusto21.n4139
[203] P. D'Achille, op. cit., pp. 67.
[204] R. B. Costa, *op. cit.,* pp. 41.
[205] Ivi, pp. 42.
[206] S. Ambroso, E. Luzi, op. cit., pp. 8.

Semantic extensions and approximations occur when the learner tends to choose a word that belongs to the same semantic area as the correct word. These are in many cases almost synonymous words:

-*sono capitata che ho mantenuto una vigilanza in qualsiasi momento*

sono stata attenta in qualsiasi momento;

-*come lo sai che l'udito di italiano per me è un po' difficile, quindi devo esercitarlo molto*

come sai l'ascolto di italiano per me è un po' difficile quindi devo esercitarlo molto[207].

More common and generic words are preferred over more specific terms by creating relationships of hypernymy, metonymy:

-*Gelosa → invidiosa; scomodità → disagio; scala → gradini[208].*

Another type of lexical error is represented by **analytical periphrastics**, constructions that the learner uses to form, for example, verbs from more frequent predicates or to replace derivates and words codified with morphology[209]:

-**Parlo con te** *a presto* **→ ci sentiamo**

-**Il signore della stazione di gasolina → il benzinaio**

-**Quello che resta della banana → buccia[210]**

The influence of L1 is another factor that often leads the learner into error and is sometimes used by him/her as a simplification strategy. The learner relies on his mother tongue in the form of **loans** to express words he does not yet know:

Prendevamo un bagno nel **swimming pool →** **piscina**[211] *(engl.);*

Così passegiando e **disfrutando** *nella una bella giornata* **→ godendo** *(sp.).*

The homophony of the words of L1 with some words of L2 encourage the use of **calques** that can provoke difficulties in communication: e.g. (sp.)

Andar → *camminare / andare;* **mirar →** *guardare / mirare;* **salir →** *uscire / salire;* **espalda →** *schiena / spalla[212].*

A final aspect related to lexical errors depends on the **collocations**. Influenced by the frequency and availability of certain verbs, learners tend to formulate incorrect collocations such as:

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[207] S. Ambroso, op. cit., pp.8

[208] R. B. Costa, op. cit., pp. 45.

[209] Ivi, pp. 47.

[210] V. Maggioni, op. cit., pp.31.

[211] R. B. Costa, op. cit., pp. 48.

[212] V. Maggioni, op. cit., pp. 32.

*potrebbe dirmi come farlo e cosa dovrei **fare l'attenzione** → **prestare attenzione**[213];*

*senza **riempire** un desiderio → **realizzare** un desiderio[214].*

Especially in the written variety the inaccuracies concern the use of colloquial expressions typical of speech and genericisms.

The teacher's work on the lexicon must aim at overcoming the fossilisation of the amount of vocabulary learned. The activities to be proposed have to focus on the quantitative and qualitative improvement of the Italian vocabulary, with particular attention to the verb and its collocations. The more complex structures and technicalities will then be reinforced and systematically exercised especially in production. Activities that support the acquisition and memorization of vocabulary are for example lexical maps, where a word is written in the middle of a sheet and other words related to it are connected with a line. The same exercise can also include the process of lexical formation. By working with suffixes, the learner acquires skills for the lexical formation of nouns, adjectives or verbs[215].

Ludic didactics provides functional tools for the acquisition of vocabulary, through activities such as lexical puzzles, the game of differences, the treasure hunt. Finally, creating one's own vocabulary that can be expanded each time the learner comes into contact with a new word or collocation can be useful in the fixation and memorization process.

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[213] S. Ambroso, op. cit., pp. 9.
[214] R. B. Costa, op. cit., pp. 58.
[215] P. E. Balboni, 2016, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

PART TWO: case study

Research is one of the most important tools available to find answers in Glottodidactics. According to the words of Zoltán Dörnyei, research «simply means trying to find answers to questions […] in order to learn more about the world around us»[216]. A teacher can always base and focus his/her teaching activity on the results and evidence of studies or research on the acquisition of an L2, an L1, a classical language, etc. **Classroom research** is one of the first and peculiar linguistic research as the specific characteristics of this context make the study closer to methodological practices, even if many scholars (Mackey and Gass, 2005) claim that although it is a distinctive environment many teaching practices can be applied outside the classroom context (seminars, workshops, online courses)[217].

For a research to be defined properly, it must have three essential elements:

- a question, problem or hypothesis;
- data; and
- analysis and interpretation of data[218].

Methods of analysis used during class research range from simple **observation** to so-called **mixed methods**, combining quantitative data collection (e.g. through questionnaires or surveys) to qualitative data (e.g. through interviews).

In particular, the latter method of investigation provides a broader knowledge of a specific phenomenon within, for example, the language class, and also makes it possible to compare the data collected by the two different methods[219].

The research method reported in this paper is a **case study**. David Nunan (1992) gives different definitions of a case study, as its identification is not so simple[220]. It is, in general, the study of the particularities of a given phenomenon related to a single case, meaning by case, in the majority of cases, people, but also organizations, institutions, etc[221].

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[216]Z. Dörnyei, *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 15.
[217]I*vi*, pp. 176.
[218] D. Nunan, *Research Methods in Language Learning*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 3.
[219] Z. Dörnyei, op. cit., pp. 164.
[220] D. Nunan, op. cit., pp. 76.
[221] Z. Dörnyei, op. cit., pp. 151.

1. **Case study slideshow**

Research, as already mentioned above, requires three fundamental elements. First of all, it requires a hypothesis, a question or a problem to analyse and to which start from. The study presented here, which falls into the category of a case study, presents, as a basic point of study, the analysis of the most common errors and the greatest difficulties encountered by a foreign student of Italian L2.

Attention is focused above all on that category of what are known as fragile learners, immigrants, who once they arrive in Italy must necessarily face and deal with the culture and language of the country. An arduous challenge that does not always see these subjects as successful.

The question at the basis of the study refers to the possibility of tracing and analysing the errors of L2 Italian learners, especially in the early stages of learning, corresponding to levels A1 and A2 of the CEFR. From these errors and from these difficulties expressed, therefore, it is useful to start again, at didactic level, to help the learner to overcome these difficulties and to suggest more effective didactic techniques.

The children of immigrants or unaccompanied foreign minors arriving in Italy learn the language mainly at school. The situation is different in the case of adults. Most of them learn the language spontaneously without following a guided path. However, many people, especially in recent years in which Italian L2 courses are being expanded, decide to turn to institutions and structures that offer Italian language courses. One of this structure is the **CPIA**, i.e. *Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti*. The CPIAs are state schools instituted by the Minister of Education, University and Research that offers Italian and foreign citizens services and activities for adult education. Foreigners attending language and social integration courses (Italian L2) must be over 16 years of age and be in possession of a valid residence permit.

Once the courses are over and after having passed a final test, the CPIA releases an Italian Language Certificate of Proficiency (L2). The linguistic aspect, however, is not the only one that needs to be addressed.

Speaking of adult learners, moreover, the social and cultural factor is of fundamental importance for the acquisition of an L2. As already reported in the adult learners' section, the immigrant often feels the communicative and cultural pressure as a threat to his identity. Therefore, cultural integration is another central aspect that an L2 Italian teacher must consider and handle.

The work presented here is fundamentally based on the research and analysis of linguistic errors in Italian L2 but also considers a cultural part that must absolutely encounter the didactic of the target language.

The research is divided into two different parts. It starts with a first phase of observation of the classroom environment, during which the dynamics between teacher and students, the activities carried out and the types of topics addressed were observed. In addition, there is also a section of transcription of the most common errors found mostly during oral interactions, although some exercises were also performed during class. The second part of the analysis regards the administration of a questionnaire to the students containing direct questions for which the students were asked to "quantify" the degree of difficulty of the proposed linguistic examples, relative to the various levels of the target language, from nominal morphology, verb, phonology to syntax.

In addition, there is also a final section presenting a series of open questions concerning the student's perceptions of the Italian language and their life in Sicily. In the end, the data of the questionnaire were recorded and analysed in the light of the reference theories studied in the university course and provided insights on the teaching techniques that could be more suitable and effective in solving these difficulties.

The presence of different methods of investigation arises from the need to adapt the research to a rather critical and uncertain scholastic situation.

The research conducted entirely within the Italian L2 class of the CPIA in Trapani, Sicily, had to consider the difficulties in analysing a problematic school situation, as the students, in most cases, workers, not always during the school year were able to attend lessons assiduously. In addition to this, there was also a high percentage of course dropouts linked to the most varied reasons, from lack of time to lack of interest or, again, to moving to other cities.

This obviously affects both teachers and teaching, which often becomes fragmentary and uncertain. In the light of the results obtained by the different methods of analysis, some didactic proposals have been presented in order to be able to suggest useful methods to overcome the difficulties encountered by adult students during the course and to be able to make them aware of the mistakes most made in order to pay attention to them.

1.2 The CPIA and its members

The research was carried out at the Castelvetrano headquarters of the CPIA (Provincial Centre for Adult Education) based in Trapani, in the context of Italian L2 literacy courses for adult foreigners. The institute presents five further offices distributed throughout the territory of the province:

- I.C. "G.G. Ciaccio Montalto "di Trapani e sede carceraria "G.Barraco" Favignana
- I.C. "G. Pagoto" di Erice e sede carceraria "Pietro Cerulli"
- I.C. "G. Garibaldi- V. Pipitone" di Marsala
- I.C. "S. Bagolino "di Alcamo
- I.C. "Borsellino- Aiello" di Mazara del Vallo

The Institute receives a large number of students from different parts of the world, foreigners from both EU and non-EU countries with limited knowledge of Italian, Italian and/or foreign minors and adults attending Italian literacy classes alongside minors and Italian and/or foreign adults who do not have a final qualification of 1st degree in education or who have not fulfilled their compulsory schooling[222].

The institute provides, for foreigners attending Italian language courses, an entry test aimed at verifying the degree of knowledge of the Italian language in order to identify the level A1, A2 or A1-A2 for which they are most suitable.

The didactic programme presented to the student is the result of the personalisation of the same on the basis of the individual formative program defined after recognition of formal, informal and non-formal knowledge and skills. The attention in the educational field focuses not only on the linguistic and scholastic contents, but also on the enhancement of the cultural and professional heritage of the person, starting from the reconstruction of his/her personal history[223]. Once they have completed and reached the acquisition of Italian at A2 level, students can, if they wish, continue their studies at the institute and acquire a middle school diploma. Or they can attend B1/B2 Italian courses only if these are provided for by the PON projects.

As already described above, one of the headquarters of the CPIA of Trapani is located in Castelvetrano, a small town in western Sicily. The city has a high percentage of foreign

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[222]PTOF PIANO TRIENNALE DELL'OFFERTA FORMATIVA 2018-2021, pp. 13.
https://cpiatrapani.edu.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/PTOF-2018-2021.pdf
[223] ivi, pp. 24.

immigrants, especially coming from the most different regions of Africa. Many other nearby cities present a large portion of African immigrants. The city of Mazara, for example, a few kilometres from Castelvetrano, boasts one of the largest Tunisian communities in western Sicily. The particularly complicated situation of immigrant landings in Sicily is, of course, well known. Many of those who arrive in this land are just passing through and, after spending a few months in host structures, they leave in search of a better life and reach different parts of Europe. Many are those who stay deciding to find a job in the neighbourhood and settle down with their families definitively.

Among those who decide to stay, the percentage of those who choose to attend the courses of the adult education centre is not very high and, as already mentioned above, the learning path undertaken is not always completed. There are in fact many drop-outs due to several different reasons. Among those who decide to contact the institute there are those who need to learn the language to find a job, those who already have a job but are driven by the desire to know how to speak Italian correctly to feel part of the society in which they live and, still, many are those who come from communities or host centres.

The research was carried out during the month of May 2019, during the last part of the school year, from 13th to 31st May to be exact. The L2 literacy class collected about 40 registrations throughout the year, but no more than 20 students ever attended classes. As already mentioned, one of the major problems is the drop-out of the course. In addition to dropping out, there is also another critical issue, that is, delayed registrations, as many students decide to enrol when the school year has already started or is even advanced in time. During the observation period, for example, at least there were no dropouts but new registrations, even though the school year was coming to an end: the number of students increased from 18 to 20 during the last week of May. Classes took place on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 5pm to 7.30pm. The students (males and females), who were 13 independents, living in Castelvetrano, and 7 coming from a host centre nearby, were between 16 and 44 years old. All of them came from different regions of Africa (Senegal, Nigeria, Gambia).

At the time of the project, all the learners were included in a guided Italian L2 language course level, for an A1/A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Many of the students possessed written and oral proficiency not only in their mother tongue (African languages) but also in the second language they acquired, e.g. French or English. Others, though extremely limited, at the time of registration did not have any type of written skills even in their mother tongue.

The course, therefore, also included an initial part of L2 literacy and, at the same time, carried on the Italian L2 program for A1/A2 levels.

Although the number of students varied, the number of cases actually analysed by the research was 15. This is because the students with the highest attendance of the course and who completed the course were selected.

It was only they who were able to complete the questionnaire and the final open questions.

The general data of these 15 students were collected through a presentation paper that was provided during the initial days of observation (see Appendix 1).

The data collected anonymously have been recorded in a table:

o **Age**	- 16 y. o. (four students) - 17 y. o. (two students) - 20 y. o. (one student) - 21 y. o. (one student) - 23 y. o. (two students) - 26 y. o. (one student) - 28 y. o. (two students) - 35 y. o. (one student) - 44 y. o. (one student)
o **Country of origin**	- Nigeria (seven students) - Guinea-Bissau (two students) - Senegal (three students) - Gambia (three students)
o **Gender**	- **F = 6** - **M = 9**
o **Mother tongue**	- Mandinka (seven students) - Wolof (one student) - English (three students) - Yoruba (one student) - Edo (three students)
	- English (thirteen students) - French (two students) - Benin (two students)[224] - Portuguese (one student)

[224] Three of the fifteen students included, in addition to English, other languages known, as Benin and Portuguese.

o **Other languages**	
o **Work**	- No (seven students) - Farmer (four students) - Hairdresser (four students)
o **Arrival date in Italy**	- 2009 (one student) - 2011 (two students) - 2014 (two students) - 2016 (one student) - September 16th 2016 (one student) - June 17th 2017 (two students) - March 2019 (four students) - March 19th 2019 (two students)[225]
o **Town of residence**	- Castelvetrano (fifteen students)
o **Course attendance period**	- April (ten students) - May (five students)
o **Level of education in the country of origin**	- No one (seven students) - Primary (three students) - Secondary (five students)
o **Italian language level to reach**	**A1** = 7 students **A2** = 8 students

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[225] Some of the students inserted the day, month and year of their arrival, others inserted the month and year, others only inserted the year of their arrival.

On the last part of the presentation sheet the students were asked about the reason why they decided to come to Italy.

These were the answers recorded:

- *For work* (five students);
- *Because of marriage I left my country to Italy;*
- *Protection* (two students);
- *Trabalhar* (for work) *Pt.;*
- *Pour travailler* (for work) *Fr.;*
- *Protection and school* (two students);
- *I came to Italy for a better future and to be a footballer;*
- *I was having depression problems, so I came to Italy to have good health and working;*
- *J'ai décidé de venir en Italie parce que j'ai subi des cas insupportables, par exemple: des problèmes de conflit, de rébellion et de famille. Fr.*
  Transl. - I decided to come to Italy because I have suffered intolerable cases, for example: problems of war, rebellion and family.

Having recorded the students' general information, the first part of the analysis, i.e. observation, was carried out.

1.3 Observation period

After an initial meeting with the course teacher, during which the objectives of the research and how to achieve them were analysed, the class observation step began.

Overall, the observation period covered about 30 hours, from 13th to 31st May. Classes were held from 5pm to 8pm, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. During the last week of May, two additional recovery lessons were held.

The number of students in class varied from lesson to lesson. Almost always present were the seven boys coming from a reception centre, all of them minors at the time, who attended the course as an activity foreseen by the Centre's organization. Eight other independent students also attended these last May classes regularly. Despite the fact that their period of attendance did not last more than two months in total, these fifteen were presented with the questionnaire.

Their regularity in the attendance of the lessons has allowed them to reach the number of hours required to be admitted to the final test on the basis of the indicators form for the qualification for the examination colloquium and for the conclusive assessment of exams[226]. At the end of the course these students were provided with the certificate of attendance, because they attended at least 10% of the total number of hours of the Italian L2 module and those who passed the final test were also awarded the certificate of knowledge of Italian language at levels A1 and A2, according to CEFR.

Other students, on the other hand, (no more than five or six) were unable to reach the total amount of hours required to complete the course. Their attendance was very weak and three of them even enrolled during the last weeks of May.

Finally, two other students, (a Venezuelan woman and a Senegalese boy) who already had an A2 Italian language certificate, attended some of the lessons but faced a different program and carried out more complex activities than the rest of the class.

Given the instability of the number of students who actually attended the course, it was not possible for the teacher to organise and present a regular and uniform teaching programme. Some of the students, enrolled at the beginning of April, for example, had to deal with a first period to become literate in Italian and only afterwards were able to join the rest of the class attending the didactic activities presented by the teacher. Some of them, though very few, still presented some problems and difficulties in writing at the beginning of May. As far as orality is concerned, almost all of them had elementary oral skills in Italian L2, probably acquired spontaneously in everyday life situations outside the school system and then further explored during the course.

The general organization of the lessons was as follows.
Once in class, the teacher presented the contents of each lesson immediately after the initial roll call. When dealing with a new topic the teacher gave a general and theoretical introduction of it and then continued with practical examples and exercises. The teaching tools used in class consisted only of a blackboard and an interactive whiteboard. Students were not expected to buy or use a textbook that they could keep. During recovery lessons on specific topics or previous subject lessons the teacher started with a small summary of what had been done previously and then move on to the practical part with exercises, worksheets and discussion.

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[226] PTOF PIANO TRIENNALE DELL'OFFERTA FORMATIVA 2018-2021, pp. 32.
 https://cpiatrapani.edu.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/PTOF-2018-2021.pdf

The oral component was essential during the lessons. The teacher's talk time was certainly predominant given the language level of the students who were not yet able to master certain aspects of communication in Italian. Not everyone, then, was inclined to expose themselves in front of the class. Specifically, the students coming from the reception centre, considering the fact that they perceived the course as an imposed obligation, tended to remain often silent and avoid exposing themselves or actively participating in the proposed activities. On the other hand, autonomous students, even the older ones, showed great interest in the topics dealt with and the activities proposed, so they actively took part during the lessons. Frequently, in fact, aspects of these students' everyday lives, almost all of them workers or job seekers entered the stage during the lessons. Their questions concerned, of course linguistic aspects, but also, and above all, cultural aspects. Many doubts and curiosities were expressed about, for example, idioms, colloquial expressions and habits of living. The conversation, on these occasions, became very informal, and it almost completely reset the teacher-student relationship. Sharing life in the same city made it perfectly easy for the teacher to discuss with the students about problems, events, places and people they knew so well and so directly. Communication was completely in Italian, also due to the fact that the teacher did not have any competence in English but only in French. This was certainly one of the disadvantages of teaching and was a critical point widely expressed by the students during the administration phase of the questionnaire and the open questions. Sometimes many expressions and notions could not be fully acquired because they were not fully understood.

The students, on the other hand, tried to speak almost entirely in Italian, but many were the interferences of English or French, languages they relied on to make up for the lack of competence in Italian. Often the students with the most advanced skills in Italian helped their classmates by translating in English for them.

Interference from Sicilian, though minimal, has been recorded, e.g. *amunì* (let's go), *manciari* (food), *favi* (fava beans), *accattari* (to buy), *papara* (duck). The social context in which students have to live obviously influences their lives. Just as Italian begins to enter their linguistic register, Sicilian, spoken predominantly in the territory, also has its effects in communication. Probably the recourse to the Sicilian language during lessons is a minimal part of their actual competence in the local dialect, and it is intentionally avoided given the formal context in which they find themselves during lessons.

A good part of the lesson was dedicated to exercises and didactic papers. The most common types of exercises featured were completion exercises (fill in the blanks), pattern drills, matching images to words, translations from English to Italian.

Then all the students at the blackboard executed many exercises, one at a time. Faced with this activity many showed great intolerance, as it was perceived as a very anxious activity.

No ludic didactic techniques, such as role-plays or word games, have ever been used and little space has been dedicated to the use of images or videos during the lessons.

The topics addressed during the observation period were different. Several verbs were addressed including the verb **to be**, **to have**, expressions such as **I like**/ **I do not like**, **animals**, **hobbies and free time**, **numbers**, some complex **phonetic elements**.

The final lessons focused on a general review of topics covered previously and throughout the course. The observation period proceeded well, comfortably accepted by the students who were available to the research objectives.

Throughout the observation period, some parts of the lessons and the most common errors found were recorded and transcribed. The focus of attention was mainly on the oral component of the lesson, which, as mentioned above, was predominant. Below are some of the highlights of the lessons and the errors encountered.

1.3.1   Lessons and errors analysis

The first lessons during the observation period covered the UDA (Unità Didattica di Apprendimento) on Food. The teacher introduced the topic by showing students pictures of food on the interactive whiteboard and asking them what the lesson might be about that day. The most popular answer was "*il manciari*" which in Sicilian means in fact *food*. This is one of the examples of the Sicilian's interference.

After focusing on the main topic of the lesson, the teacher asked the students what their favourite foods were. Once again, the answers included the use of the word ***manciari*** instead of ***cibo***:

"*mio manciari favorito è pasta/riso*".

Most of the students replied in Italian except the two francophone students who instead answered *macaronis*.

The teacher introduced the conjugation of the verb *mangiare*, writing it on the blackboard and asking each of the students to read it. Some students still showed difficulties in reading the small block letters and most of them showed difficulties in reading the **GI** sound in *mangio, mangia*, producing forms such as *io mango, lui manga*.

While reading some examples of sentences containing the verb **mangiare**, e.g. *tu mangi molto pane, io mangio tanta pasta, loro mangiano solo pesce*, one of the students asked the teacher the following question:

*"Ma, **io mangio tanta pasta**, tant**a** è se parla una donna?"*

He clearly referred to the **-a** final vowel of the adjective, which agrees, in most cases in Italian, with female names, e.g. *tanta past**a***. In this case, however, the student was referring to the sex of the speaker and not to the name to which the adjective related. The teacher resumed quickly the concept of **gender agreement** between noun and adjective, and subsequently also resumed the verb **avere**. She proposed some sentences containing the verb **to have** referred to sensation like *io ho sonno/fame/sete* by trying, with the help of the students, to point out the difference of construction between Italian, which uses the verb **avere**, and English, which instead requires the verb **essere** (I'm thirsty/ I'm hungry). A further major difficulty was to correctly insert the letter **h** during the written conjugation of the verb.

The teacher then wrote six sentences containing the verb **avere** alongside six sentences containing the verb **mangiare**, on the blackboard and asked the students to read them each in turn:

1) *Io ho fame*	1) *io mangio spaghetti*
2) *Tu hai sete*	2) *tu mangi maccheroni*
3) *Lui ha sonno*	3) *lui mangia carne*
4) *Noi abbiamo fretta*	4) *noi mangiamo pesce*
5) *Voi avete fretta*	5) *voi mangiate tanta pasta*
6) *Loro hanno caldo*	6) *loro mangiano verdure*

These were the most common errors recorded during the reading activity:

1) *Io **sono** fame/ io **hai** fame/ io ho **famè**/ io **emangio espaghetti**/ io mangio **spagheti.***
2) *Tu **ha** fame/ tu **ha** sete/ tu hai **setè**.*
3) *Lui ha **sono**/ lui **hai sono**/ **lüi** ha **sono**/ lui mangia **cane**.*
4) *Noi –**bbiamo** fretta/ noi abbiamo **fletta**/ noi abbiamo **frezza** (ts instead of t).*
5) *Voi **aveti** fretta/ voi avete **fetta**/ voi mangiate **tanti** pasta.*

> *6) Loro **mangiàno** verdure.*

Some difficulties encountered, especially in pronunciation, are for example the sounds **pr** and **fr**, (premura; fretta) often realized with *fetta* or *fletta*. The sound *gi*, e.g. *mangiamo*, also causes difficulties in pronunciation, especially in French-speaking students.

Another exercise involved the completion of some sentences by filling in the blanks with the correct form of the verb **avere**, e.g. *Io___ una sorella; tu ___ un computer*; etc.

The most common errors found were the missing verbal forms of the letter **h** (*io **o** una sorella*), the lack of double consonants in the first and third person plural of the verb (*noi **abiamo** fame*; *loro **hano** una grande casa*), and the error in the transcription of the second person of the verb, made both as third person singular (*tu **ha** un computer*; *tu e Miriam **ha** un caderno*).

A further topic discussed during the lessons of the teaching unit on food was the verb **piacere**. The teacher, after writing the verb declension on the blackboard, asked all students to take turns reading. One of the most common errors found was the pronunciation of *ʧ* in */pjaˈʧere/* which was orally pronounced as */ʃ/: mi piasce – ti piasce*. One second activity involves pairing the students. Everyone had to ask their partner what their favourite food was by using the formula *ti piace?* and, on the other hand, the partner had to answer *sì, mi piace/ no, non mi piace*.

Although the teacher had suggested the eventual change between the personal stressed pronouns (a me/ a te / etc.) and the not stressed pronouns (mi/ ti/ ci) none of the students used the first ones.

A final difficulty found in this activity concerns the **verb number agreement**:

"mi piasci fave" → *mi piacciono le fave;*

"mi piasciono pane" → *mi piace il pane;*

"mi piasciono lasagna" → *mi piace la lasagna/ mi piacciono le lasagne.*

The final activities on food concerned vocabulary. With the help of the interactive whiteboard, the teacher showed the students different images of food, different types of meat, of fruit, of fish. Some students suggested the names of some animals like *pulscino* (/pulˈʃino/) or *papara* instead of *oca*, another expression of the Sicilian dialect. Before the image of a pheasant a student asked the teacher: "*questo dove trovare?*" (where does this one live?), using the infinite. Looking at pictures of fish, the teacher asked which kind of fish the students knew.

Someone answered *"mellusa"* (merluzzo), showing difficulties in the pronunciation of the sound -**rl**- e and in the pronunciation of the geminate affricate **-zz-** pronounced as the fricative **s**. Some students asked the teacher the following questions:

- *"Come ti chiami in italiano octopus?"*, (come si dice/traduce in italiano octopus?), by using the second person of the verb, surely a more familiar and immediate expression to use;

- *"questo pesse c'è si chiama tono?"* (questo pesce che c'è lì si chiama tonno?), in which the difficulty is found in the pronunciation of the postalveolar soundless fricative (/ʃ/) made as a soundless alveolar fricative (/s/); moreover, there is one of the major difficulties in Italian pronunciation, which is gemination (to*no* →to*nno*);

- *"dove tunnu?"* (dove si può trovare il tonno?), in this case the question lacks the verb and the word for tuna, *tunnu*, is clearly taken from the Sicilian dialect;

- *"questo pesce pessico?"* (questo è il pesce persico?), another troubling consonant in pronunciation found to be the vibrating **r,** here pronounced as a geminate alveolar fricative -**ss-**.

- *"ah, questo di acqua dosce?"* (questo è un pesce di acqua dolce?), in which the **l** is not pronounced at all and the postalveolar affricate is turned into an alveolar fricative again.

The last topic addressed was the types of fruit. Once again, the teacher proposed a series of pictures of fruits on the interactive whiteboard and invited the students to read or propose some names of familiar fruits. Many students used the words in English because they did not know the Italian translations. In general, the same errors can be found in the pronunciation of the postalveolar affricate, for example *aranscia/ aransce* (ʧ → ʃ), and in the pronunciation of the **r** within word, as in *mitilli,* (mi**r**tilli).

Further errors can be found in:

- *ciliscia* (ciliegia), in which even the postalveolar voiced affricate (ʤ) is rendered as a postalveolar fricative (ʃ);

- *abicocca* (albicocca), in which returns the difficulty in the pronunciation of the lateral before a consonant, here completely omitted;

- *aguria* (anguria), with the omission of the nasal (n);

- *aransci* (arance), which reproduces the Sicilian word *aranci,* but replacing in pronunciation the postalveolar voiceless affricate (ʧ) with the fricative (ʃ).

Many of the activities proposed by the teacher were based on reading exercises. In fact, she usually wrote sentences or paragraphs on the blackboard and encouraged the students, one by one, to read them. One of these exercises required the following sentences to be read:

Oggi vorrei uscire per fare una passeggiata con i miei amici. Fuori c'è una bella giornata e sicuramente potremo giocare anche con il pallone. Dopo andremo a mangiare la pizza tutti insieme.

The following are some key points that have been transcribed and the most common errors recorded:

- *"ogi vorei uscile par fare unna passeggia con i mie amisci. Fare sce una bella giornata e securamente possiamo giocare anche con i palone. Dopo andare/andremo a mangiale le piza tutti insieme";*
- *"ogi vere uscire per fare una passegiata con i miei ami. Fure sce una bella giornata e sicuramente posiamo giocare anche con il palone. [...]";*
- *"Oghi vuoe ussire [..] passegiama [...]. Fuori che una bela giornata e sicuramente posiamo ghiocare anche con il palone. [...]";*
- *"oggi vuoi ucciro per fare una paseggiata con i mio amici. [...] giocare anche con i pallone. Dopo andramo a mangiare la piza [...]";*
- *"oggi vorre uscire per fare uno pasegiata con i mie amisci. Fiori sce una bela giornata [...]".*

Another topic covered during the observation period was **numbers**. Almost all of the students already knew the numbers in Italian and orally they showed no particular difficulties other than common pronunciation errors, one of which was the performance of the postalveolar affricate as a fricative, e.g. /ˈʃento/ → /ˈʧento/; /seiˈʃento/ → /seiʧento/. There was another registered speech error with the pronunciation of the word *quaranta,* in which the soundless dental occlusive was rendered as a dental affricate, i.e. *quaranza:* /t/ → /ts/. When the teacher wrote down the numbers up to 100 in figures on the blackboard, she asked the students to write them down in their notebooks in letters. In this activity the most common errors resulted as follows:

- substitution of the vowel **u** with the consonant **v** right after the letter **q**, e.g. *cinqve, qvaranta*;
- the omission of geminate, e.g. *sete, oto, setanta, otanta;*

- difficulty in writing diphthongs, e.g. *deci*, *dicisette, decinove;*
- struggle with the consonant **n** followed by **q** or **t**, e.g. c*iquanta, viticique, novata.*

During the lessons many doubts were also raised directly by the students about the language. Many referred to a particular difficulty in the use and pronunciation of the sounds ghi/ chi/ ci/ gi, especially in the difference between hard sounds and soft sounds. Many difficulties were also found in learning the vocabulary. One of the strategies frequently adopted by the students themselves was the transcription of the Italian word along with its translation into English or French. The most common expressions used by students referring to the difficulty in understanding vocabulary were: *"non capito cosa dire"/ "io no capito parola"/ "no capire proprio".*

Returning to the grammar lessons, other topics dealt with were the **gender** and **number** of names in Italian. The teacher introduces the topic by adding a section of vocabulary, the names of jobs. On the blackboard the teacher wrote a series of names of professions in a table, classifying them according to number and gender. Once the teacher has presented the topic she proposed to the students a series of job names and asked them to indicate the gender of each one and to put the correct article before it. In general, students did not find it very difficult to recognise the gender of names terminating in **o** or **a**. Likewise, the use of the correct article for the same names. The most obvious difficulties were found with names ending in **e**. In fact, the majority found it difficult to recognize the gender of words like ***badante***.

Once again, the teacher proposed a reading activity based on the names displayed on the blackboard:

- **la maestra**: *la [ma'eʂ:a]* in which there is one of the typical sounds of the Sicilian dialect that is the voiceless retroflex sibilant fricative /ʂ/;
- **il calzolaio**: *i [kas:o'lajo]*in which the voiced alveolar fricative /z/ becomes a geminate soundless alveolar fricative /s:/ like in *grassie*, *magassinieri*;
- **gli elettricisti**: *li [eletri'kisti]* in which there is the difficulty in recognizing the pronunciation of the consonant links between **ci** and **chi** and the lack of pronunciation of the geminates /t:/;
- **I muratori**: *i [mura'toɻi]* which is the pronunciation of the **voiced postalveolar approximant** /ɻ/

A different argument dealt with during the lessons was the **question form** in Italian, i.e. how to make the questions in Italian. No particular problems were reported by the majority of the students, both in the written and oral form of the questions. The biggest errors occur in the syntactic construction of the sentence, in which the verb is often omitted or used in the infinite mode.

Some examples are:

- *"che giorno ogi?"* → che giorno è oggi?
- *"come chiamare tu?"* → come ti chiami?
- *"tu quante ane ha?"* → quanti anni hai?
- *"dove tua casa?"* → dov'è casa tua? / dove abiti?

The teacher then presented to the blackboard the conjugation of the verb **rispondere** and then asked the students to read it:

- io rispondo: *io rispondo*
- tu rispondi: *tu rispondo*
- lui risponde: *lui risponda*
- noi rispondiamo: *noi rispondemo/ rispundemu*
- voi rispondete: *voi risponde*
- loro rispondono: *loro rispondeno*

Some of the lessons covered phonology and pronunciation. In particular, the most problematic sounds for the students, also reported in the previous examples, are the consonant cluster containing the consonant **c** and the consonant **g**. The greatest difficulty lies in recognising the difference in pronunciation (and also in writing) between /ʧ/ and /k/ and between /ʤ/ and /g/. One of the exercises proposed by the teacher was to identify the correct position within a table listing the different sound categories. The list contained the following words:

Giostra – Giacomo – Gianluca – giugno – Genova – gelato – raggi – regola – gola – virgola – tegola – cielo – vicino – cervello – giusto – gusto – ciccio – ciuccio – tacco – Francesco - chele.

In the identification of the right category the students did not demonstrate any serious difficulties. As expected, the greatest difficulties were found in pronunciation:

raggi: [ɹˈadʒi] / **ciuccio**: [ˈkiutʧo] / **giostra**: [ˈʤostrwa] / **Gianluca**: [ʤjanˈlutʃa] / **tacco**: [ˈtako] - **gusto**: [ˈʤusto] / **virgola**: [verˈgula] / **giusto**: [ˈgjusto] / **cielo**: [ˈkilo] / **cervello**: [ʃerˈvel:u], [seˈvel:u] / **vicino**: [viˈʃino], [viˈsinu] / **Francesco**: [franˈʃescu]; **tegola** [teˈgula] / chele: [ˈʧele].

According to the phonetic transcriptions, the most common error produced is an exchange in the pronunciation of the soundless and voiced velar occlusives rendered as postalveolar affricates respectively soundless and voiced.

The last lessons of the course were held during the last week of May and the number of students present decreased. The activities carried out mainly concerned the review of previous lessons and simulations of exam tests. The last two days were dedicated to the completion of the questionnaire.

2. The questionnaire: structure and administration

Once the observation period was over, the questionnaire concerning the difficulties actually perceived by the students regarding the structures and functions of the Italian language was administered. The questionnaire was realized by reporting, among the sections presented, aspects of the language already faced during the course by the students. All linguistic levels have been processed separately. In order to match the students' actual knowledge of the Italian language, the length of the sections varies according to the amount of questions presented. The longest section is the one related to phonology, as the errors analysed during the course belonged for the most part to this category. The shortest section is syntax because the actual competence of the speakers (stable on A1/A2 levels) did not allow the analysis of further syntactic aspects. In total there were four sections investigated: **morphology, verb, phonology** and **syntax**. Each section contained a various number of questions or categories, which in turn could contain a different number of subcategories.

The final part, instead, was reserved for a series of open-ended questions. The language used for the questionnaire was Italian apart from the introductory section and the final open-ended questions which were translated and presented both in English and French.

The questionnaire opens with an informative element for the students, concerning its compilation, which reports as follows:

> *Il seguente questionario offre la possibilità di riflettere sulle proprie competenze in italiano e sulle difficoltà effettivamente riscontrate durante questi mesi.*
> *Uno spunto per ripartire proprio da queste difficoltà al fine di migliorare il proprio livello linguistico[227].*

And then continues with:

> ⊕ *Leggi le domande, segna con una x il valore corrispondente alla tua risposta.*
>
> ☐ Tanto difficile = so much difficulty
> ☐ Abbastanza difficile = fairly difficult
> ☐ Poco difficile = not very difficult
> ☐ Per niente difficile = simple/ very simple
>
> *I valori sono presentati in ordine decrescente per quanto riguarda il grado di difficoltà del compito richiesto*

The nominal morphology section is immediately displayed. The questions listed in this part are three, and each one deals with the main aspects of morphology in Italian: **gender**, **number** and **agreement**.

The **gender** category contains three subcategories as three different types of behaviour related to the gender change of names in Italian have been presented. The first are names that have completely different forms for male and female, the second are names that change morphological desinence and the third are invariable names for which the gender can be indicated by the article or by the presence of an adjective.

The **number** category contains three other subcategories. The first includes names that change the ending in the transition from singular to plural, the second includes collective names and the third includes names with irregular plurals.

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[227] *The following questionnaire offers the opportunity to reflect on your skills in Italian and the difficulties actually encountered during these months. A suggestion to start again from these difficulties in order to improve your language level.*

The last one, the category of the **agreement**, includes three other subcategories. The first presents the agreement between the name and the determinative article, the second of the name with the indefinite article and the third the agreement between the qualifier and the name.

The second section analyses the difficulties encountered regarding the **verb** in Italian.

It contains seven different questions concerning different aspects of the verbal forms that the students dealt with during the course. The first question concerns the difficulty perceived by the students with respect to the four verbal forms faced during the lessons: **the present, the passato prossimo, the imperfetto and the simple future**. The second question asks instead to quantify the difficulty in recognizing and using the correct auxiliary between **essere** and **avere** in the compound times. The third one then moves on to a more morphological aspect, i.e. the **agreement between the verb and the noun**, presenting two different examples. The first concerns the agreement in gender and number of the past participle of verbs; the second, instead, presents the behaviour of the verb **piacere**, which adapts morphologically to the following object complement. The fourth category presents the **negative form** of the verb, which in Italian is rendered with the particle *non*. The fifth analyses the difficulty in recognizing and distinguishing **servile verbs** (*potere, volere, dovere*). The sixth presents the **irregular verbs** and the seventh and final category asks students to quantify the difficulty in recognizing the correct desinences for the three different **conjugations**.

The **Phonology** section is the most extensive, as the majority of the course included many oral interactions rather than written exercises or activities. It contains nine questions. The first question asks students to identify the degree of difficulty in pronouncing **double consonants**, a typical and distinctive feature of Italian that is particularly hostile for those who learn Italian L2. This is not a difficulty really perceived by the student but rather the inability to consider this as a distinctive trait, since it is not present in most of their mother tongues such as English. Another of the pronunciations farthest from the standard concerns the consonant **r** which in Italian is rendered with the phoneme /r i.e. a vibrating one. The difficulty in pronunciation has been analysed for three different cases according to the position of the **r**: at the beginning of the word, in final syllable followed by vowel, in syllable within the word followed by consonants such as *l* or *n* or preceded by the consonant *t*.

The third category includes the pronunciation of the consonant **q** followed by a semi-consonant or approximant. The fourth is one of the most complex categories for foreigners. This is the pronunciation of the soft sounds **ci/gi/ce/ge** and the hard sounds **chi/ghi/che/ghe**. It is one of

the most complex distinctions that an Italian student has to face both orally and in writing. Indeed, there are two distinct phonemes linked to these different consonant clusters. These four examples, however, only included the pronunciation of consonants followed by the vowel *i*.

The fifth and sixth categories concern the pronunciation of the **consonant z** often confused with the consonants *s* and *t*, especially in words containing the consonant as double.

The seventh and the eighth category require to quantify the difficulty in pronouncing two other typical consonant clusters typical of Italian: **-gn-** and **-gli-** respectively /ɲ/ and /ʎ/.

The difficulty lies in the unusual sound of these consonants so placed within words, especially for English-speakers. The ninth and last question, finally, requires students to evaluate the overall difficulty of Italian pronunciation according to their own experience and knowledge.

The last section of the questionnaire concerns the **Syntax** of Italian. This is the smallest section of the questionnaire because, as already mentioned, the students' competence did not allow to analyze other syntactical aspects. It is composed of three questions plus a final open question. The first question concerns one of the typical characteristics of Italian, i.e. the possibility whether or not to express **the subject** within the sentences. Italian, being a pro-drop language, does not always require the explicit use of the subject or the personal pronoun subject. This can generate different difficulties in Anglophone speakers, as English always requires the explicit use of the subject. The examples presented show the difference between two sentences reported in English and French in which the subject is highlighted and the respective translation into Italian missing subject in both sentences. The student, in order to recognize the subject, i.e. the person performing the action must refer to verbal desinences. The second question is based on one of the most frequent syntactic aspects faced during the lessons, that is, the timeline within the sequence of **temporal subordinates**. The greatest difficulty is to recognize which of the two actions reported in the two sentences occurs before and which occurs after. A further criticality is provided by the use of the correct verbal modes and tenses in the main and subordinate sentences. The question presents three different examples in which the student is asked to quantify the difficulty in recognizing the temporal chronology of the two actions.

The last question concerns the use and functions of **prepositions** in Italian within the syntagmas. The student was asked to quantify the difficulty in recognizing and using the different functions that the prepositions perform within the sentences. Finally, this section also contains an open question about the effective comprehension of prepositions in Italian.

The last part of the questionnaire presents eight final questions concerning the Italian language and the approaches adopted to learn it. The student is invited in a more subjective way to express also his personal opinions about language learning and the most perceived difficulties encountered during, not only the period of the course, but also in his/her Italian everyday life. Once the questionnaire sheets had been distributed, the students were informed what they were supposed to do and, after the instruction part had been completed, the questions were filled in. Given the level of competence of the students, each question was translated orally from time to time. The administration of the questionnaire took place on two different days. Once all 15 students had finished, the analysis part was carried out.

2.1 Outcomes

Once the students had finished answering the questionnaires, their answers were collected and processed. Each section has been analysed separately and the respective answers have been processed and displayed in bar charts and histograms. All answers related to each category contained in the questionnaire were graphically treated and represented with the exception of the phonology section, given the heterogeneity of the questions and data.

- The first section, as reported above, deals with the category of **morphology** in Italian, in the forms of gender, number and agreement of the noun. In order to simplify the graphical representation of the answers for each subcategory (a, b, c) they have been summed. The data were represented in the following form on the basis of the results collected:

LA MORFOLOGIA
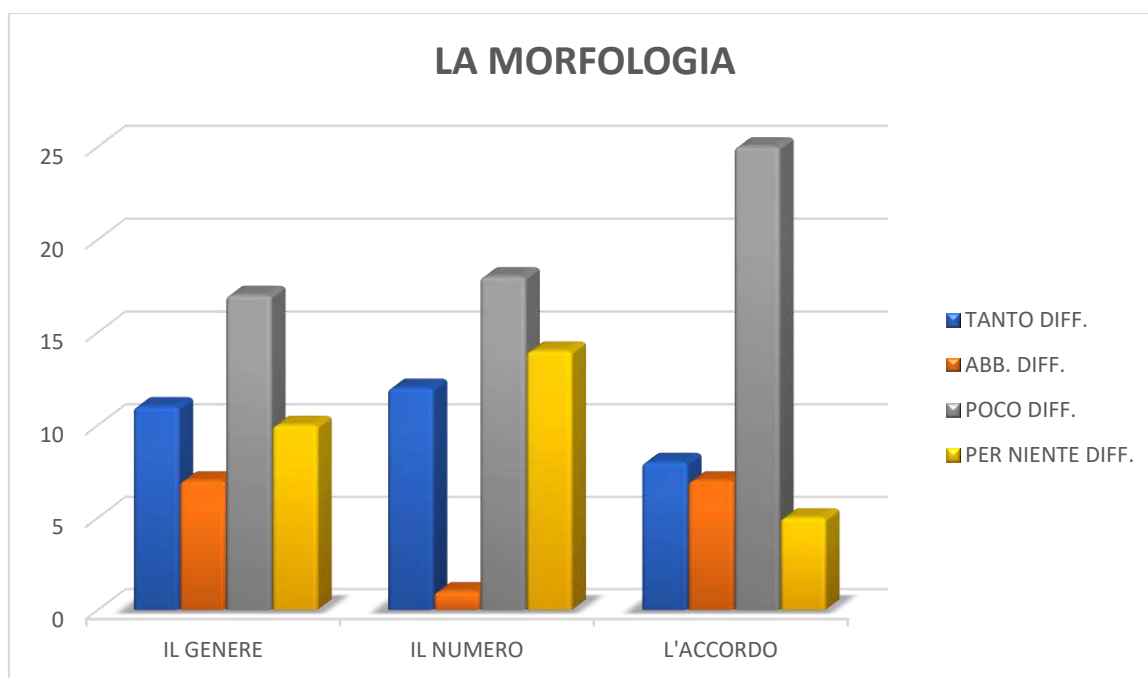
From the graphic evidence, the students have shown that they have little difficulty in confronting the category of nominal morphology. In the first subcategory, although the majority expressed that they had no particular difficulty in recognizing the **gender** of names in Italian, a relative heterogeneity of answers is noticeable among the students. The greatest difficulty among students is found in the third subcategory of answers, i.e. invariable names expressing gender through the use of the article.

The second category, the **number**, shows in the first two subcategories (a, b) that students had little difficulty in recognizing the number of names presented. With regard to the third subcategory (c), the difficulty is greater, as these are names with irregular plurality that show an unusual ending.

Finally, the third and final category shows that students have little difficulty in following the rule of gender and number **agreements**. A greater, though minimal, difficulty is found in the second subcategory (b), i.e. the use of the correct indeterminate article before the name.

- The second section deals with the **verb** in Italian, one of the most problematic categories for students of Italian L2. The section has been divided into two macro-categories: tenses and verbal constructions. The first macrocategory, verbal tenses, has been treated separately due to the presence of microcategories concerning four of the verbal tenses of Italian dealt with by the students during the course.

The data were represented accordingly:
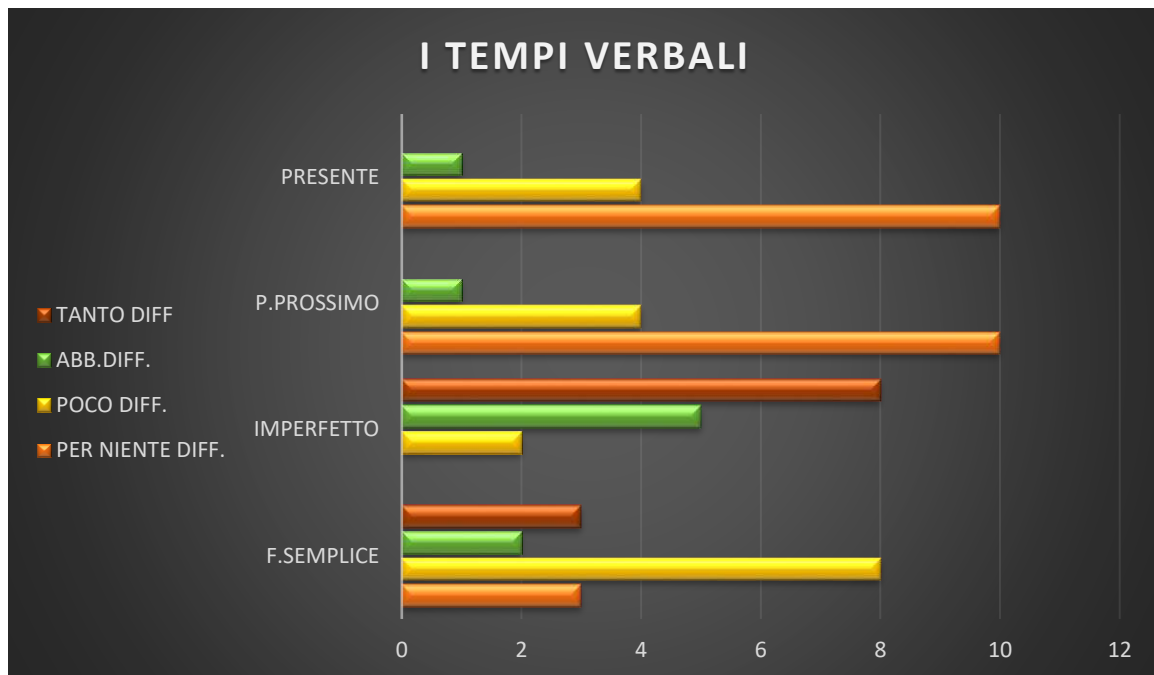
Source: own elaboration

The bar chart, represented here, shows a double trend between the answers given. The first two verbal times treated during the course, presente and passato prossimo, do not represent a particular criticality for the students, in fact more than 50% of them do not perceive any difficulty in recognizing the mentioned above verbal times. This, however, does not always correspond to the actual lack of errors in using them. The greatest difficulty lies in imperfect tense, where 50% of the students chose the first option as their answer, i.e. "tanto difficile".

The second macro-category, which concerns **verbal constructions**, is composed of 5 micro-categories: essere o avere, accordo nome-verbo, forma negativa, verbi servili e verbi irregolari. Data were graphically represented using a histogram, where the greatest difficulties encountered by the students in using different verbal structures, mentioned above, are evident, thanks to the different colour shades:

IL VERBO
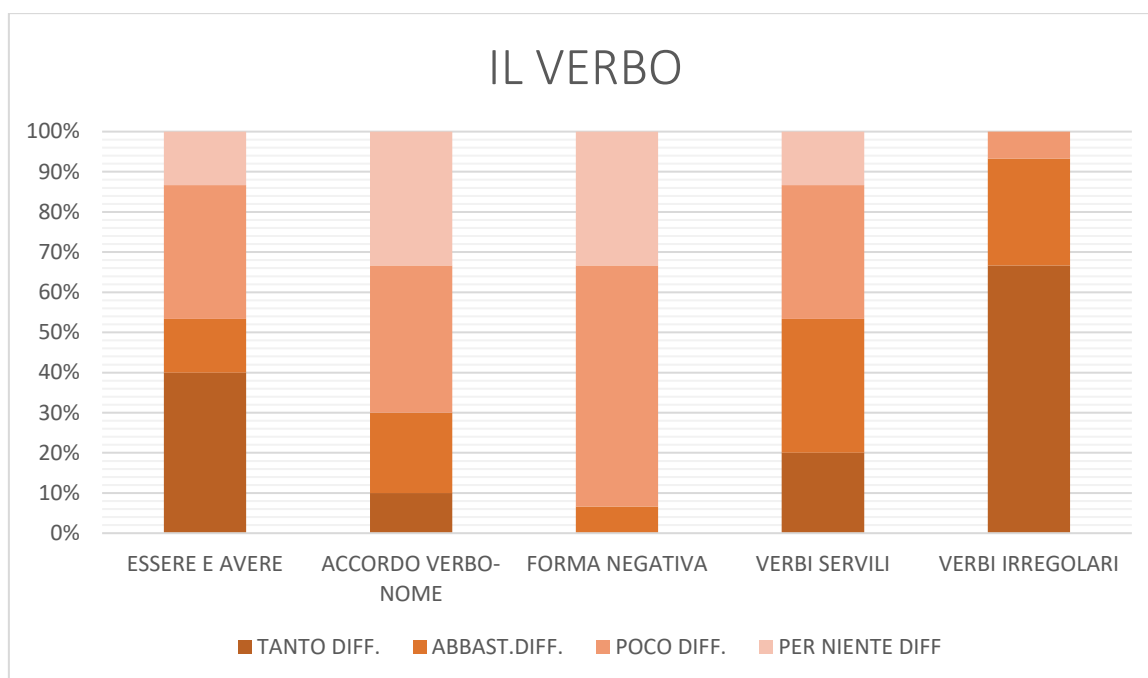
Source: own elaboration

As shown by the representation of the data, students perceive greater difficulty in using and choosing two of the five verbal constructs presented to them, i.e. the auxiliaries essere and avere and the irregular verbs. In particular, 75% of the students have more difficulties in using irregular verbs.

The **verb-name agreement** micro-category shows a general trend towards the choice of the third option, "poco difficile". Specifically, this trend was predominant for the correct use of the gender of the past participle in compound verbs. The microcategory of **servile verbs**, on the other hand, shows a rather balanced trend between the four options given.

Finally, one of the features perceived with less difficulty by the students turns out to be the category of negation. Even if the negative form of verbs is not always well constructed, negation seems to be a more intuitive aspect for learners. The element that gives most ease in the recognition and use of verbal construction is certainly the presence of the negative element "non", which is similar and reminds of the English "not".

- The third section of the questionnaire dealt with the **phonology** part of the Italian language. The answers analyzed, being very mixed and containing different types of information, were not represented graphically, but analysed individually.

- The first category examined by the students was the **geminate** or double consonants group. Most of the students, more than 50%, expressed no difficulty in pronouncing doubles from the examples given. The answers in this case did not find much confirmation in the actual phonetic realization of the doubles by the students. As reported in the section on the class observation period, one of the biggest difficulties encountered was the use of geminate, both orally and in written form.

- The second category concerning the pronunciation of the **vibrating alveolar dental consonant** /r/ has been further divided into three subcategories related to the position of the consonant in words. The greatest difficulties perceived by the students were found in the pronunciation of the consonant within words and with complex consonant clusters.

- The third category includes the pronunciation of the graphemes **qua/qua/qui** i.e. phonemes containing the soundless occlusive velar /k/ and the approximant velar /w/.With regard to the writing of these consonant associations, during the period of observation, it was observed the tendency to replace the vowel u by the consonant v. On the other hand, as regards the difficulty in pronunciation, the majority of students reported as particularly difficult the pronunciation of **qua**. Although the other two cases showed a tendency towards "not very difficult" and "quite difficult" options, none of the students expressed a total ease in pronunciation.

- The fourth category reports another of the particularly complex and misleading pronunciations of Italian, which is the distinction between the soft sounds **ci** and **gi** and the hard sounds **chi** and **ghi**. As already reported in the previous section, students, both in written and oral form, often tended to confuse and exchange the two sounds.With regard to the pronunciation of postalveolar affricates /ʧ/ and /ʤ/, the answers tend to focus particularly on the options indicating the minor degree of difficulty. As far as the sound **chi**, [*ki*] is concerned, the answers focused, equally, on the second and third degree of difficulty. The sound **ghi**, [*gi*], on the other hand, is perceived by just over 50% of the students (53.3%) as quite difficult.

- The fifth and sixth phonological categories contain some of the particularly marked pronunciation errors highlighted during the observation period: the pronunciation of the soundless alveolar affricate /ts/. The first distinction

between the consonant **z** and the consonant **t** represents a little difficulty for the students in pronunciation, with a majority of answers belonging to the low difficulty option. The second distinction, i.e. the one between the consonant **z** and the consonant **s** outlines a high concentration of answers towards the central options, thus expressing a greater perception of difficulty.

- The seventh and eighth category include the pronunciation of other two sounds which are particularly difficult in Italian: **gn** and **gli** respectively /ɲ/ and /ʎ/. The most difficult sound for students to pronounce is the nasal palatal /ɲ/, in fact about 50% selected the first option, which is very difficult. The 60% of the students instead chose the third option with regard to the palatal lateral /ʎ/ pronunciation.

- Finally, the last category, presenting a general evaluation of the degree of difficulty perceived by the students with regard to pronunciation in Italian, found a medium-low degree of difficulty as the majority of responses (60%).

- The fourth and last section of the questionnaire deals with some aspects of the Italian **syntax**. It has been divided into three categories: the subject, the chronology of the sentences, the use and the features of the prepositions. The data collected were represented as follows:

LA SINTASSI
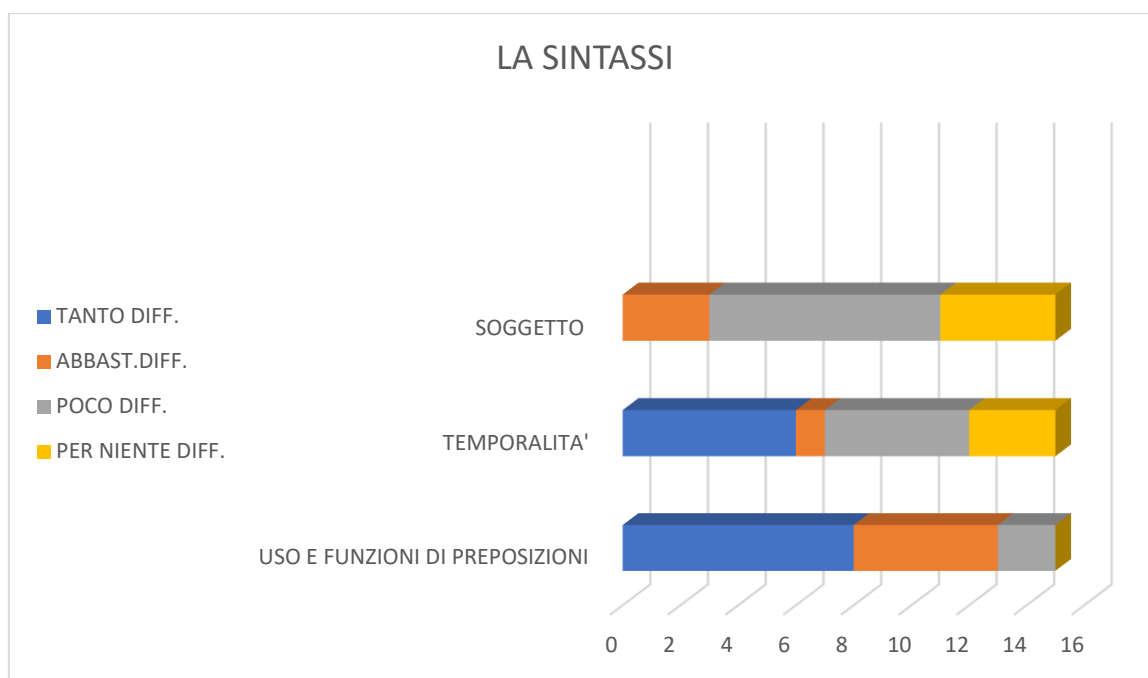
Source: own elaboration

In this section, greater difficulties were found in the temporality and use and function of prepositions. In the first category it is possible to observe that almost 50% expressed the highest degree of difficulty; the percentage increases by a further 3% in the second category.

Among all the sections present in the questionnaire to which the students were presented, this latter certainly highlighted the most relevant critical issues. The last part where students were asked what prepositions they know how to use, showed the following answers:

- **con**: 15/15 students;
- **a**: 6/15 students;
- **di**: 4/15 students;
- **per:** 2/15 students.

2.2 Open-ended question's results

The last section of the questionnaire focused on a series of open questions aimed at analysing a more subjective part of the study. The questions (7 open-ended questions and one multiple-choice question) were presented on the second day dedicated to the questionnaire, but not all students were ready to complete this part. The answers of ten students were then registered.

The questions are listed in Appendix 3.

The first question asked students why they had decided to study Italian and attend the course. Most of the students claimed to have decided to study Italian in order to be able to communicate and speak correctly with friends or for work.

The answers were the following:

- *J'étudie pour comprendre et pour parler;*
- *per parlare;*
- *speaking;*
- *for speaking the language;*
- *to speak Italian;*
- *because is very important to know how to write and how to read and pronunciation;*
- *for the language;*
- *because of my life/ communication/ work;*
- *I decided to study Italian because for communication, working, or doing ordinary things with my family and being part of their life;*
- *I love Italy so I have to learn the language in order to have a good conversation with Italian citizen and have a good work.*

The second question raised what the most difficult part of the Italian language for them was. Seven out of ten students pointed out **pronunciation and speaking** in Italian as one of several possibilities. Other answers included **writing and meaning**. A student then later added that "*some sentences are very difficult for me to understand".*

The next question asked the students who they spoke to in Italian out of school. With the exception of one student whose response was negative, the other nine stated that they spoke mostly in Italian with their Italian friends and with their bosses. One of them said that he also speaks Italian with his family and another one with his boyfriend. One last answer was: *Yes, I love speaking Italian language with Italian people because it makes me to learn more*.

The preferred options chosen to answer the fourth question (what kind of strategies do you use to learn Italian? Watching TV; listening to music; talking with Italian friends) were **watching TV** (six out of ten students), four others added **talking to their Italian friends**, one chose no options and another one added **listening to music**.

The fifth question (Do you like to live in Italy? If yes, why? If not, then why?), has reported the following answers:

- *I love to live in Italy because is more better than been in my country. There is no work in my country;*
- *Yes (four students);*
- *Yes because I want to learn the language;*
- *I love Italy because Italy is good;*
- *Yes because I like Italy so much;*
- *Yes because I love Italy and I like their way of life;*
- *Yes I love living in Italy because I like to study here and work.*

The sixth question provided a multiple choice with the possibility of choosing more than one option. students were asked directly which strategies could improve and facilitate their course of study. Five options were presented plus a final one that included the possibility of adding further strategies. Only one student added an extra strategy, which is **listening to music**.
Eight preferences were left for the simultaneous translation option, five for watching movies with subtitles option, seven for using images and videos during lessons. No one chose option c) i.e. to organize trips in the area and only one student did not answer.

3. Teaching proposals

Over the last few years there has been greater interest in the question of the immigrants' language in Italy, in the educational and scientific fields where studies on the language of immigrants have increased, in the field of language policies with an evolution of institutional interventions and in the field of education with the increasing number of Italian language courses for foreigners[228]. Particular attention must be paid to this target group of learners considered vulnerable and in need. Language, as mentioned above, is one of the most important

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[228] Barni M., Villarini A., *La questione della lingua per gli immigrati stranieri. Insegnare, valutare e certificare l'italiano L2*, Franco Angeli editore, XIV, 2001, pp. 10.

social factors for inclusion and integration. Communication skills are more than an imperative for these people. As can be seen from the answers in the final section of the questionnaire, most students indicated the communication factor as the answer to the question "why did you decide to study Italian?". The desire to approach an Italian language course, closely linked to the need to know how to speak this language, can be considered the result of an even greater necessity: work. This, in fact, was another of the most recorded responses. Especially in large cities those who arrive and do not find any point of reference (family, friends) have to fight harder to get what they came to Italy for, that is, a job and better living conditions. The language is certainly a trigger in the job search, which is why learning the basic knowledge of Italian is fundamental. However, not everyone is open to attending the courses as they are considered a waste of time or unnecessary. In fact, many people learn the language spontaneously, often speaking a mixture of Italian and dialect strongly influenced by the mother tongue. An Italian course, however, in addition to focusing the student's attention on the grammatical aspects of the language, also invites them to dwell on the communicative aspects, on the cultural aspects of the country in which they have chosen to live. Moreover, a course held in Sicily will certainly have partially different contents from a course held in Rome. The territory and its customs and habits, therefore, becomes an integral part of the educational program. Learning Italian means, therefore, to penetrate the cultural and social universe of Italy, considering the language-culture connection as indispensable[229]. The aim of the institutions, therefore, is to bring as many adults as possible closer to attending these courses, held by associations, CPIA, etc.

Going back to the didactic dimension, great attention must be paid to the real and immediate needs of the student. Learning a new language is always a challenge that not everyone is willing to accept; on the contrary it is often a source of discomfort and frustration. When the student encounters the first difficulties in learning, the desire to leave this project takes over. The teacher has to take these difficulties into account and, where possible, offer the student valuable support so that he or she can more easily overcome the obstacle. Overcome it, do not avoid it or go around it. As seen in the section on interlanguage there are some steps that the student of Italian must necessarily face with the consequent mistakes. Errors, however, today considered as a positive element, represent indicators of the language level actually reached. The attention paid to these steps and the errors made by the student leads the teacher to present teaching activities suitable for the acquisition success. Starting from the idea that "*mia lingua no come*

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[229] Gilardoni S., *La didattica dell'italiano L2. Approcci teorici e orientamenti applicativi*, EDUcatt, Milano, 2005, pp. 9-10.

tua lingua", focusing also on the differences between the first language and the target language can be a valuable tool for students so that they can face the learning path in a more relaxed way. Going back to the results obtained from the analysis of the case and examining the errors and difficulties most expressed by the students as well, some didactic proposals have been considered.

Vocabulary

One of the biggest problems for the students was the lack of feedback of words and structures from Italian to their mother tongue, i.e. the impossibility of getting an immediate translation during the lessons. The possibility of being able to learn new words in Italian by comparing them with their translation, for example into English, would help students in memorizing and associating lexicon. One of the strategies that can be adopted is to create a sort of personal vocabulary in which each student can add, gradually at a time, the Italian words that he or she encounters and the meaning of which he or she does not know, so that even the translation into his or her mother tongue can be used to define the word. The vocabulary, moreover, could be divided into sections; a possible division could result between words, verbs and idioms. In addition, a small section could be dedicated to Sicilian, a dialect with which students come into contact every day. Glottodidactics provides many useful and effective examples in language learning. One of the activities related to vocabulary acquisition could be memory cards. Students realize an even number of cards on which one half of them is written a word in Italian and on top of the other half of the cards the corresponding picture is placed side by side with the translation in English or French. The cards can also be classified according to the topic dealt with into a certain teaching unit, e.g. one day at the post office, shopping at the supermarket, ways of travelling. Another activity related to vocabulary could be a team game within the glottodidactic dimension. The class is divided into two or more teams; the teacher makes a list of words in Italian that he or she has to read to the students, one at a time. Once the word has been heard, the students will have to draw the corresponding picture, all of it timed. The team that manages to correctly identify most words is the winner. In combination with the classic memorization exercises, ludic glottodidactics allows the acquisition of new words in a more elastic and entertaining way.

Phonology

As far as the pronunciation practice is concerned, there are several activities that can be integrated in addition to reading and listening. One of them is definitely listening to Italian songs. One of the strategies proposed by the teacher during the course was just this one, that is to look for songs in Italian and try to sing them following the lyrics. Each person in turn could also choose a different musical genre, obviously including opera, and practice the notes of Italian melodies. This is an activity closely linked to the acquisition of both pronunciation and vocabulary. In the lyrics students could underline and search for words that are difficult to understand and then include them in their personal vocabulary. Another activity that can be proposed is the recitation of tongue-twisters or nursery rhymes in Italian. With regard to the activities aimed at the difficulties of pronunciation encountered in the study, one could propose out loud reading exercises of pairs of sounds such as "chi" and "ci" or "gi" and "ghi". Reading and repeating these critical sounds out loud can also include the melody. A list of words containing the problematic consonant links (rn, tr, gli, gn, rm) can be sung rather than read. By following, for example, the melody of a known song, the list of words provided can be replaced by the original lyrics. A final strategy is to provide students with recordings of words containing the most complex sounds of Italian that they can check whenever necessary.

Morphology

The nominal morphology is one of the sections of the questionnaire that showed less difficulty perceived by the students. Nevertheless, it is not a category without errors or difficulties. Italian has many irregularities, especially with regard to this language category, which may cause the student some confusion. Useful activities are usually the manipulation or repetition exercises, helpful in fixing some regular patterns. A good and fun exercise is the crossword puzzle in which students may have to turn all the names given by the definitions to the plural or vice versa. The creation of their own grammar containing, for example, a reference table for male, female, singular and irregular plural names to be updated from time to time. Concerning the ludic glottodidactic one activity to be proposed is the taboo game in which two teams fight to guess as many words as possible. In turn each player will have to let his team guess the word taken from the deck, giving a possible definition without mentioning the five words written on the card. It is a game that involves different language levels such as syntax and vocabulary. As for the agreement, an extra point will be given to the team that can guess the word and say what the corresponding article is. With regard to qualifying adjectives an activity could be the

physical and character description of the partner. In turn, each student chooses a partner to describe both physically and characerically, so that they can practice the agreement between the name and the adjective (capell**i** ner**i**, vis**o** oval**e**, permalos**a/o**, etc.).

The verb

The section on the verb has shown more difficulty in the use of irregular verbs and the correct use of the auxiliaries *essere* and *avere* in compound times. From the period of observation, moreover, it could be seen that the students used only two tenses, the present indicative and the present infinite, and quite often they had the tendency to completely omit the verb, e.g. "*prof. domani scuola?*"; "*scusa maestra questo no è italiano*"; "*io andare là*".

Manipulation and repetition exercises can also be useful in this language category when fixing certain verbal structures. Within the reference grammar, then, the student could add the conjugations of irregular verbs that he or she encounters along the way. A fun activity that can be carried out in class is the dice game. Each student takes turns to roll a dice with six irregular verbs and a dice with six different verb tenses; once rolled, the student must conjugate the verb of the first dice in the time resulting in the second dice. A similar activity can be applied to the exercise on the correct use of the auxiliary in the compound times. A single dice, showing six different verbs, three of which requires the auxiliary **avere** and the other three the auxiliary **essere** in compound tenses. Once the dice is cast, the student must report which of the two auxiliary belongs to the verb. Another exercise is the transformation of a text. A more personal variant of this exercise could be the transformation to the past of a chat on whatsapp for example or a letter received from relatives. Or the "tell a story from the past" in which the students could talk about a particular day at work, tell about pleasant episodes related to their life in the country of origin so as to keep the cultural relationship between the original and the culture of arrival constant. Some activities can then be based on listening, perhaps of legends related to the country in which they now live.

Syntax

This section highlighted the greatest difficulties in identifying the unexpressed subject within sentences and in the use and functions of prepositions. For Anglophone students, the lack of the subject in the sentence causes a certain difficulty in understanding who is doing the action. The only point of reference are the desinences of the verb. One activity that can be proposed is the construction of sentences. Ten sentences are chosen which will be divided into syntagmas and each syntagma will then be reported on a card. The cards can be placed upside down on a table

and scattered. The student must take turns drawing a card and gradually try to construct the whole sentence. A variant could include fewer sentences and on the other side a list with a series of subjects (from names to personal pronouns) that the student will have to correctly associate. A similar activity can present the lines of a conversation taken from a chat. A conversation between friends, or between the student and the employer, may be the right cue for the exercise. Once the lines are written down on different sheets of paper, the student's task is to tidy up them. As far as **prepositions** are concerned, a possible strategy could be to list the Italian prepositions and associate them, by function and meaning, with English or French prepositions. Next to the prepositions the student can also give a small description of the function related to each one. Finally, a table could contain examples of sentences containing them. A simple completion exercise could then be associated with a team game, such as the goose game or the monopoly that presents every cell reached with unexpected exercises in Italian. Still a very entertaining game that can be played in teams is the "winning chemistry" (*l'intesa vincente*). Adapted from a TV quiz very famous in Italy, it is based on the ability to formulate definitions with the aim of making a team member guess the mysterious word. Timed, in turn, two components of a team must be able to build a grammatically acceptable definition, syntagma by syntagma and make a third component guess the mysterious word.

Other activities and strategies

In addition to the classic exercises offered in the books, there may be different versions that can be made according to the type of difficulty perceived by the students. By creating a path as personalized as possible, the teacher's attention can actually make the difference during the student's acquisition process.

In addition to the role-plays or interviews that can be performed and conducted in class, there are a number of activities that can be carried out outdoors of the school walls. In the case analysed adults have decided to come to Italy for a specific purpose. The course must above all, in addition to focusing attention on the grammatical part of the language, base every single activity on a possible feedback in the student's life. Proposing a teaching unit on mountain holidays, is indeed a valid proposal for linguistic aims, but rather useless because it provides skills that cannot be exploited, at least in the short-term, by the student who lives in Mazara del Vallo. Considering the possibilities that the territory offers in terms of work or free time and, adding to these, the daily needs of the student, the teaching units to be presented should be based on them. All these activities, from looking for a job to shopping, require specific acts of

communication. The teacher must adapt the most effective teaching techniques accordingly. So, let's start with **role-plays** but not in school but directly on the scene. A teaching proposal could be to organize weekly outings, with a different goal each time. Starting then to the pharmacy, the hardware store, the supermarket by organizing a lesson directly on site. This allows students to interact directly with reality and, once the experience is over, even buying what they needed, they will no longer feel the tension of the first time out of school.

Other places where a role-play can be played are for example the bar or the restaurant. And talking about food, a fun activity could be a cooking challenge. As a sort of TV format, students in teams could challenge each other to prepare typical Italian dishes, explaining step by step, in Italian, the procedures carried out and the food used, all recorded on video. They could then combine these Italian recipes with typical recipes from their home country.

Moving on to work, once analysed in general all the Italian professions at the beginning of the teaching unit, the teacher could focus on the type of work that students already do or on the possibilities offered by the territory. It is possible to simulate a telephone conversation to ask for information about a job offer, send an email or simulate a direct meeting with the employer. With reference to the case analysed, this is a territory that mainly offers work in agriculture and fishing. Other jobs are for example hairdresser, beautician, bricklayer. The focus will therefore be on the technical terms used to indicate the various methods in the different work areas, working tools, and processed products. A small section in this field, could also be dedicated to the Sicilian dialect which often replaces Italian and for which, certain expressions, do not have a direct translation. A **treasure hunt** in the city could be another fun activity to go on. Directions could contain spatial directions, riddles, duties to perform such as "vain el bar al centro e ordina un caffè". At each stop there will be a clue to move on and eventually find the treasure.

Some of the students already had children at the time of the research. Some very young others already enrolled in school. In class, a sort of medical vadevecum could be created together with the teacher, containing all the indications to be used at a meeting with the paediatrician, for example. Another one could be realized for the meeting between parents and teachers.

As far as the cultural aspect is concerned, it becomes important for students to feel a full part of the community in which they now live. Knowing the local traditions could be another inspiration for further lessons. The town festival, the patron saint, and the folklore; everything presented in class through videos, pictures, or even films, make the student feel even more deeply involved in the local community. As a final task, students could expose some of their traditions and festivals, using video and audio tools if possible.

Watching films, TV series, documentaries, TV quizzes certainly helps the acquisition of Italian. As well as the possible realization of the same. Students could become actors, journalists, videomakers and present small film works. The common goal of each activity presented is to make students perceive the language not only from the grammar point of view or as the object studied and analyzed in class; but to observe it as a living entity, in everyday life. Then see how in concrete terms it is rich in facets, pronunciations, mixtures with the dialect. The main purpose is to analyze the difficulties encountered, perceive them not in a frustrating way but as a stimulus to move forward and be able to overcome all obstacles.

CONCLUSION

The work proposed here has focused on the analysis, first theoretically and then through the case study, of the most common difficulties and errors of learners of Italian L2. The students, aged 16 years and over, through the compilation of the questionnaire, were able to reflect and analyze the actual difficulties encountered and/or not yet overcome. They all enthusiastically accepted to undergo the research and the completion of the questionnaire, showing from the first days of observation a great awareness of their language level reached, i.e. A1/A2. The difficulties encountered were recorded both through the observation period, where some errors turned out to be consequences of them and through the questionnaire and open questions. The analysis of the errors during the observation period mirrored, mostly, the answers obtained from the questionnaire, graphically represented. Examples are errors with double consonants, the pronunciation of the r, the order of the components of a sentence, verbal desinences. From these, it is necessary to start by proposing activities of reinforcement and fixation, always keeping the grammar-language combination in context. Starting from the assumption that the error does not always reflect a difficulty, it should not be a negative element for learning purposes, but above all, it becomes an essential clue for the teacher throughout the educational process.

One of the examples concerning the lack of correspondence between perceived difficulty and error can be deduced from the answers concerning the morphological section of the questionnaire. The graphs show that it is not at all complicated for the students to recognize the gender and the number of nouns in Italian. Nevertheless, if one goes to analyze the errors made during the observation period, it is possible to notice how in reality such deviations are found. The over-extension of the **-a** and **-o** desinences, respectively used for singular female and male names, is an indication that the student has reached the second stage of interlanguage in the acquisition of gender in Italian, and acts, consequently, following a sort of rule for the gender in Italian, but perceiving no difficulty in doing so. Once the errors made by the students have been evaluated, it will be easier for the teacher to trace back the level of Interlingua achieved to focus attention on those elements and structures left behind or not yet actually acquired. Difficulties arise not only from all those elements that have not yet been acquired, and from whose derives the lack to express themselves in a certain way, but also from feelings of frustration, anxiety, failure to take an interest. There is no fully effective method or approach to avoid the obstacle or the difficulty encountered by the student. Rather, there are combinations of different methods that may act as a facilitator in getting the student to overcome this difficulty. Overcome it, not avoid or bypass it.

The teaching activities that have been proposed in the final section of the work take into account different approaches. There is a good part of ludic didactics, although with adults it is necessary to first present the exercise and explain its value for learning purposes. There is a part that involves and encourages the use of educational technologies, such as smartphones, PCs, audio, and video tools. There is a part of the structuralist approach with the related structural exercises or pattern drills. There is also a more formalistic or grammatical part that focuses on the form of the language. However, the most prominent approach is still the communicative one with situational methods that take into account the social aspect of the language.

The study focused on a particular type of Italian L2 learners: immigrant adults. The starting necessities of these subjects are inevitably different from those of an Erasmus student, just as the needs of the latter are completely different from those of an employee of a company who has been moved to Italy. Their motivations behind such a drastic choice, like abandoning their country and their family, are so strong that they are able to face, very often, a journey whose end is unknown. Once they arrive in Italy the uncertainty of a better future is still present, but hope begins to strengthen. The imperative then becomes to survive by trying in every way to find a job and begin to put together the first bricks of new life in Italy.

In general, the process of acquisition of a second language begins when a person decides to live, for a relatively long time, in the country whose target language is spoken. Once he or she arrives in Italy, the individual will constantly have to deal with Italian. Learning a new language is generally a fairly complex path with many obstacles or difficulties. When the language becomes a necessary tool to carry out normal daily activities and not only that, the difficulties may increase. Therefore, it becomes necessary to focus attention on the language within the context of everyday life. A medical consultation, a post office appointment, a reservation by phone become not only the subject of the teaching unit presented in class but the real scenes of life that the student will have to deal with outside the school. As already pointed out, culture is one of the aspects to be considered, a concept that goes alongside language. Linguistic integration also goes through culture. Hence the need to present students with an insight into the life and culture of the country in which they live, in order to make them more closely involved in the life of their fellow citizens. This does not mean abandoning one's own culture of origin and risking a sort of estrangement of the individual; rather, it means enriching one's multicultural heritage by becoming and feeling part of the community where they have decided to live.

Didactic planning is one of the most important aspects in the development of an Italian course. However, following this initial project can be complicated, as students will still bring their

experiences and doubts about their life outside of the classroom. Besides, analysing the difficulties expressed, a deviation from the original itinerary may be inevitable. Taking these obstacles into account, however, the teacher can provide a flexible route to be updated from time to time. Moreover, for the teacher, knowing the territory, the possibilities that this offers, both in terms of work and free time, making an initial interview with the student are other fundamental knowledge for the didactic planning.

Difficulties are part of every life course, including the acquisition of a new language. It is all about accepting them, being aware of them and making sure they do not remain that way. Because even if "*chello scervello chiuso*", everyone is able, thanks to valuable help and expert guidance, to overcome them.

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Appendix 1

<div style="border:1px solid black">

SCHEDA ALUNNO

</div>

- *Età: _____*

- *Paese di provenienza: _____*

- *Sesso:*   F   M

- *Lingua Madre: _____*

- *Altre lingue: _____*

- *Professione: _____*

- *Anno di arrivo in Italia: _____*

- *Città di residenza: _____*

- *Inizio frequenza scolastica: _____*

- *Prima Alfabetizzazione nel paese di origine:* SI   NO

- *Titolo di studio: _____*

- *Livello di Italiano L2*:   A1   A2

Appendix 2

<div style="border:1px solid black;">

QUESTIONARIO

</div>

✚ *Il seguente questionario offre la possibilità di riflettere sulle proprie competenze in italiano e sulle difficoltà effettivamente riscontrate durante questi mesi. Uno spunto per ripartire proprio da queste difficoltà al fine di migliorare il proprio livello linguistico.*

✚ **Leggi le domande, segna con una x il valore corrispondente alla tua risposta.**

☐ Tanto difficile = so much difficulty
☐ Abbastanza difficile = fairly difficult
☐ Poco difficile = not very difficult
☐ Per niente difficile = simple/ very simple

I valori sono presentati in ordine decrescente per quanto riguarda il grado di difficoltà del compito richiesto

Alle domande guidate del questionario, seguirà una parte finale in cui gli studenti sono chiamati ad esprimere direttamente il loro pensiero riguardo la lingua italiana e non solo.

✤ IL NOME

"Parola che designa esseri viventi, oggetti, fatti, concetti, sentimenti; Parte del discorso variabile, cioè declinabile in italiano secondo genere e numero".[230]

---

1. *Quanto è difficile per te riconoscere il GENERE del nome, dei seguenti esempi:*

---

    a) *Padre Vs madre;   sorella Vs fratello;   marito Vs moglie;   frate Vs suora*

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

    b) *Bambino Vs bambina;   attore Vs attrice;   poeta Vs poetessa;   signore Vs signora*

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

    c) *Il cantante Vs la cantante;   il dirigente Vs la dirigente;   il nipote Vs la nipote*

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

---

[230] https://dizionari.corriere.it/dizionario_italiano/N/nome.shtml

2. *Quanto è difficile per te riconoscere il NUMERO (Singolare, Plurale) dei seguenti nomi:*

a) *Libro Vs libri;   cane Vs cani;   penna Vs penne;   occhio Vs occhi*

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

b) *Folla;   mandria;   sciame;   coro;   squadra*

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

c) *Uomo Vs uomini;   bue Vs buoi;   dio Vs dei;   braccio Vs braccia*

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

3. *Quanto è difficile per te seguire la regola dell'ACCORDO, in genere e numero:*

a) del nome con l'articolo determinativo:

IL tavolO **ma** *LA tavolA;   IL bancO* **ma** *La bancA;   L'aquilA* **ma** *L'ombrellO*

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

b) del nome con l'articolo indeterminativo:

UNA barcA;   UN canE;   UN'isolA

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

c) del nome con l'aggettivo qualificativo:

*BellA bambinA;   uomO altO; **ma** borsA grandE   eserciziO difficilE*

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

✚ IL VERBO

1. Indica per ogni tempo verbale (Indicativo), il relativo grado di difficoltà:

a) **Presente***: Io mangio, tu mangi…*

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

b) ***Passato Prossimo****: Io ho mangiato, tu hai mangiato…*

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

c) ***Imperfetto:*** *Io mangiavo, tu mangiavi…*

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

d) ***Futuro semplice****: Io mangerò, tu mangerai…*

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

---

2. Quanto è difficile per te saper scegliere tra l'ausiliare ESSERE e AVERE nei tempi composti:

 Io HO mangiato **ma** *Io SONO andato;*   *Tu HAI dormito* **ma** *Tu SEI venuto*

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

---

3. Quanto è difficile per te riconoscere e rispettare l'accordo Verbo – Nome:

---

1) Maria è uscitA **ma** *Mario è uscitO;   Le ragazze sono partitE* **ma** *i ragazzi sono partitI*

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

2)Mi PIACE il pane   ***ma***   *Mi PIACCIONO le fave*

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

---

4. Quanto è difficile per te riconoscere ed utilizzare la forma NEGATIVA del verbo?

Io NON mangio;   Tu NON guidi;   Lui NON cucina

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

---

5. Quanto è difficile per te riconoscere la differenza tra il verbo POTERE, DOVERE, VOLERE:

POSSO aprire la finestra?;   DEVO fare i compiti!;   VOGLIO mangiare la torta

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

6. *Quanto è difficile per te riconoscere ed utilizzare le forme corrette dei verbi irregolari:*

 POTERE ma Io POSSO; SEDERE ma Io mi SIEDO; SALIRE ma Io SALGO; TENERE ma Io TENGO; DARE ma Io DO, Tu DAI; ecc.

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

7. *Quanto è difficile per te utilizzare le desinenze appropriate per le 3 coniugazioni:*

1) Lavor –are	2) Ved-ere	3) Dorm-ire
Lavor-o	Ved-o	Dorm-o
Lavor-i	Ved-i	Dorm-i
Lavor-a	Ved-e	Dorm-e
Lavor-iamo	Ved-iamo	Dorm-iamo
Lavor-ate	Ved-ete	Dorm-ite
Lavor-ano	Ved-ono	Dorm-ono

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

✚ FONOLOGIA

1. *Quanto è difficile per te la pronuncia delle consonanti geminate (DOPPIE)*

 laTTe;   muCCa;   leTTo;   taPPo;   coCCo;   roSSo;   baFFi;

- ☐ Tanto difficile

- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

---

2. Quanto è difficile per te la pronuncia della R in italiano:

---

1) Rosa;   Rana;   Ramo;   Riso;   Ruota;   Rete;   Rita

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

2)   toRo;   pauRa;   baRa;   aRma;   poRta;   LaRa;

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

3) meRLuzzo;   baRLume;   maesTRa;   quadeRNo;   caRNe

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

---

3. Quanto è difficile per te la pronuncia di parole con QU-

QUAderno;   QUAle;   QUAdro;   QUAnto;

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

QUEsto;   QUEllo;   QUEsti;

- ☐ Tanto difficile

- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

QUI

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

---

4. Quanto è difficile per te riconoscere e riprodurre i suoni:

CI =   CIao;   CInema;

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

GI = Gioco; Girasole

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

CHI = CHIave; CHIesa

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile

☐ Per niente difficile

GHI = GHIro; GHIsa

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

---

5.   Quanto è difficile per te distinguere, nella pronuncia, tra Z e T:

---

laTTe; taZZa; roTTo; paZZo

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

---

6.   Quanto è difficile per te distinguere, nella pronuncia, tra Z e S:

---

merluZZo; saSSo; piZZa; caSSa

☐ Tanto difficile
☐ Abbastanza difficile
☐ Poco difficile
☐ Per niente difficile

7. Quanto è difficile per te la pronuncia di -GN-:

Gnomo; castaGNa; raGNi

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

8. Quanto è difficile per te la pronuncia di -GL-

aGLio; coniGLio; famiGLia

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

9. Quanto è difficile per te la pronuncia italiana:

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

SINTASSI

***I** go to school / **Je** vais à l'école*   *__ VADO A SCUOLA*
***We** eat pasta / **nous** mangeons des pâtes*   *__ MANGIAMO LA PASTA*

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

Comprerò la macchina dopo aver guadagnato tanti soldi
Dopo aver comprato gli ingredienti, farò una torta
Stavo annaffiando le piante, quando squillò il telefono

I'll buy the car after making lots of money
After buying the ingredients, I'll make a cake
I was watering the plants when the phone rang

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile
- ☐ Poco difficile
- ☐ Per niente difficile

Di / a / da / in / con / su / per / tra / fra

- ☐ Tanto difficile
- ☐ Abbastanza difficile

◻ Poco difficile
◻ Per niente difficile

Di quali conosci il significato? *What prepositions do you know the meaning of?* _____

Appendix 3

1. Why did you decide to study Italian?

_____
_____

2. What are the biggest difficulties that you have encountered in this language?

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3. Do you speak Italian in your everyday life, apart from school? If yes, with whom?

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_____

4. What kind of strategies do you use to learn Italian? (watching TV; listening to music; talking with italian friends; etc.)

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5. Do you like to live in Italy? If yes, why? If not, why not?

_____
_____

6. According to you, what could the school do to facilitate the learning process of Italian?

    a) using simultaneous translations

    b) watching movies with subtitles

c) organizing trips

d) using images and videos during the lesson

e) role-playing technique (at the market; at the cinema; at the theatre; etc.)

f) other strategies

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