Teaching English in Italy:

A Tale of Two Systems

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Acknowledgements

Dopo aver conciliato istinto e ragione i personaggi principali trovano la piena felicità. Una felicità, è bene sottolinearlo, che non ha origine da sostanziali modifiche del loro essere precedente, bensì dall'addolcirsi dell'asprezza dei rispettivi caratteri. Ciò avviene quando essi comprendono che l'individuo armonioso non è una persona decisa a rifiutare l'esperienza della contraddizione. Al contrario, riesce ad entrare in sintonia con quanto lo circonda solo se, sosteneva Montaigne, "appartiene contemporaneamente a tutti gli estremi", ovvero se si dimostra capace di restare in bilico tra i diversi ambiti.

(Roberto Bertinetti, "Ritratti di signore")

Abstract

This works addresses the difficulties met by students who are native speakers of Italian in learning English and the possible solutions to increase the performances of weak and demotivated learners. It stems from more than fifteen years of teaching and observation and tries to blend official qualitative and quantitative data with personal research and ideas.

The starting point is that English, and languages in general, are not given proper attention either by institutions (ministry, schools, teachers) or by students themselves. Schools generally fail at motivating students to study languages, and while many of them succeed because of their own merits own, too many still drop or struggle at studying. We discuss issues of English teaching, but our concern is that on a wider scale they might also involve other subjects, thus hindering the learners' chances in our modern, interconnected world. The main question of this research is then how is this so, and how can it be improved?

Following von Bertalanffy's proposal, we assume that languages are open systems, organic contexts that have constant interchanges with their surrounding environments. Mastering a second language gives us the chance to face issues more efficiently, to appreciate differences and stigmatize extremisms. English Language Teaching (ELT) has mostly been described in terms either of process or purpose, with a preference towards the latter in the last years. These are the two systems we refer to in the title of the present thesis, and what underlies this work is the idea of redefining them as just one open system where process and purpose should be rebalanced.

Chapter 1 is a short overview of the history of ELT, aimed at highlighting how much of it has been marked by the work of foreigners rather than natives. After the development of the Grammar-Translation Method by German scholars in the first half of the 19th century, English-speaking scholars took over the field and started developing new theories and practices, from the Direct method to the Communicative approach of our days. The purpose of this excursus is to show that historically the teachers of English who knew deeply the culture they were coming in contact with have been the teachers with a higher chance of being better, motivating teachers.

This includes those who are not native speakers: against expectations, they might as well be the best teachers exactly because they know the receiving culture better.

Chapter 2 investigates in the first part recent theories and experiences, from Kachru's definition of Inner, Outer and Expanding Circles of English, to the idea of English as a lingua franca, considering it as one of the many varieties of world Englishes and not the touchstone par excellence. With the rise of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Corpus linguistics, the teaching has detached from a centralist model to a decentralised one. The Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) has gradually imposed as the standard for evaluating language proficiency since the 1970s, but it has ended up creating its candidates since students now mostly do only what is asked to pass certification tests.

The second part of this chapter examines the performance of Italians in English and foreign languages in general. Data from three different surveys are illustrated and analysed comparatively: Key figures on Europe 2020 by the Eurostat office includes the years 2007, 2011 and 2016, where respondents in 35 European countries self-assessed their knowledge of foreign languages. The OECD PISA 2018 measured the ability of 15-year-olds across 88 countries in reading, mathematics and science, where reading is broadly intended as the capacity to use texts (semiotically intended) to one's ends. The final survey was the INVALSI 2019 that tested Italian, English and mathematics. Here we considered mainly English for pupils in 8th Grade (14-year-olds) and 13th Grade (19-year-olds). The data from the three surveys largely agree towards a fairly low average level of English (and Italian) and confirm that Italians barely pass the threshold, while European and international competitors as per population and economy do much better.

Chapter 3 examines three textbooks adopted in Italian schools: *Life. Pre-intermediate, second edition* (National Geographic Learning, 2019); *Identity. A2 to B1* (Oxford University Press, 2019); and *Activating Grammar, digital edition* (Pearson Italia, 2011). These textbooks were chosen according to their levels and from three different international publishers of ELT books. Their structures, the theories they follow and their scientific references led us to conclude that, in varying degrees, these books all fail to reach their goals: motivation, engagement, success, and similar keywords are widely employed but most activities are explained in English and there is little connection to Italian culture and tradition. Most of these books are designed to get pre-set

results in line with the CEFR and the English language certifications tests, another proof that certifications have ended up creating their candidates rather than assessing a de facto situation.

Chapter 4 examines the histories of the two languages contrastively. English and Italian are frequently described as distant languages that have little in common, but the truth is that they have been mutually influencing each other for many centuries. Besides, Latin and Greek, which constitute the bulk of Italian as a Romance language, have heavily influenced English not only in the Latin period before Old English but also later when Latin was Europe's lingua franca for roughly a thousand years and at least until the end of the 16th century.

Italian, though a literary language, has never been a proper national language until 1861; English, on the other hand, has been heavily influenced by French since 1066. Middle and Modern English evolved from this double nature that is still with English today: an Anglo-Saxon syntax but a vocabulary essentially Romance (and mainly French), with more than two-thirds of today's words coming from French, Italian, Latin and Greek. The relationship between English and Italian, certainly at the vocabulary level but also in syntax, is tighter than we imagined and this comparative advantage must be exploited rather than downplayed. This chapter, summarizing the long relationship between the two languages, clarifies the rationale for the fifth and final chapter.

Chapter 5 details five topics that can become the focus of five lessons. The first area is word order and SVO languages. Italian is a synthetic language that likes to use literary devices such as dislocations thanks to its strong concord patterns, while English is an analytic language that builds meaning through order, and subverting that order means to disrupt the meaning relationship. Italians, used to a very different syntax, oversee this principle very frequently.

The second reflection focuses on nouns and how they work, with special attention to noun sequences where nouns are used as adjectives of other nouns only in reason of their position on the left of the determined noun, mirroring the usual collocation for adjectives in Italian (usually on the right, with frequent dislocations on the left). This comparison aims at reinforcing the comprehension of word order in the building of meaning.

The third topic is about the –ing forms, usually mistaken for the Italian *gerundio*. -ing forms are two functions – present participle and verbal noun – included in one ending and if once the

forms used to be distinct now we have one form with two functions. We propose a rephrasing of this definition as "verb used as an adjective" (present participle) which always accompanies a noun, and "verb used as a noun" (verbal noun) which can be used alone in all the functions that are typical of a noun (subject, object, complement, etc.).

The fourth idea focuses on the linguistic register and the passive voice. These two topics are linked in that they provide the lower intermediate student with a basic tool to select subsets of words within the wide English vocabulary. The register helps us to decide whether and when to use contractions, shortenings, formal or informal words, and choose the fittest solution when faced with a French/English couplet (e.g., kingly/royal, begin/commence, fight/combat, etc.). The passive voice, used more frequently in formal contexts, further reinforces the concept of register: a higher rate of passives indicates a higher formality, while a contrastive approach to passives may also help to reinforce the students' competence in Italian, where the verb to be can also be used to form actives as in *io sono andato*, an active form for an intransitive verb.

The fifth and final topic proposed is gender and false friends. Almost all Romance languages have lost their original Latin neuter in favour of a masculine/feminine dichotomy that has made them binary languages. In Italian, accordance is a complex operation involving nouns, pronouns, adjectives, articles and verbs (in the past participle), whereas English has only some personal pronouns (third-person singulars) and the possessives to take care of. The idea of gender at the grammatical level is very much simplified in English and is much easier than in Italian. False friends deal with the many words that sound similar to Italian but have actually developed a different meaning. Some examples with word etymologies show that those intuitive meanings were actually true in the past but have changed according to the needs of time and place. These two topics aim at reinforcing the concepts of synchronicity and diachronicity of languages.

In conclusion, this study hopes to show why English as it is used, taught and learnt in Italy, is "difficult", in the words of many learners, only because the approach used to teach and learn it has been that of the distance and not that of the proximity, favouring the purpose and leaving the process behind. English and Italian can be considered cognate languages and their long-term collaboration might be exploited to better understand both languages, rekindling motivation in weak learners through a stronger link with their native Italian.

Introduction

This work stems from what I have observed in fifteen years of teaching English in Italy. A teacher's task is – or should be – not only to "transmit", or "translate", or whatever "trans-" verb, what they already know to those who do not know it yet – the students. I have always been strongly convinced, on the contrary, that it is to tell a story, or better to sew smaller stories together in a way that could let students love an otherwise tough, hostile or at best dull environment as the average school is. And entice them into returning there, day after day, to hear another story.

I do not think I have been a particularly gifted student myself, nor studied enthusiastically any given topic in my past life because of the sacred fire of knowledge burning my ardent soul, as Romantic poets liked to depict the ideal of life, passion and work. And I believe I am in good company. I have always liked, though, to know things *despite* schools, not because of them. I liked languages and did my best to put in that effort that schools gave for granted – motivation. Luckily, this and many other things have changed from the time I went to the schools we are talking about, but some things remained the same. One of them is how English is taught and how students are expected to study it.

Unlike the modern marketing-oriented concept of storytelling, however, the story I have in mind does not want to sell a product but rather promote an idea. The school environment somehow carries with it the notion that new topics are "difficult" and only hard work can overcome this difficulty, this hard work being invariably defined as "study". I do not say this is not true, I say it is partly true: some topics are not that hard to learn, provided you look at them from the right angle or wearing the right hat. Work, and sometimes hard work, cannot be taken out of the equation, but since nature itself seems to be obeying a rule of economy, as we linguists know very well, why should we work more than what is necessary?

Schools take hard work as a prerequisite for everything, even what should not need not so much of it. The notion of study becomes intertwined with the idea of difficulty, and the proof of that is that when new methods for teaching and learning enter the market, the adjective "easy" –

or better, its comparatives and superlatives – are unfailingly featuring in the claim. Because everybody loves to know, actually. What they do not love, is to struggle to know.

I believe that the teaching of English in Italy suffers from this bias so that students mostly report that the topic is difficult while grammatical, syntactical and usage data tell us the opposite: English is a far simpler language than Italian, and it is surprising that the same people who have spent years learning by heart the 300-odd different forms in the three Italian conjugations do complain that the English 10-odd forms (and single conjugation) are "difficult". Whenever I tell students these figures, I get every time the same reaction: none of the teachers they had had ever put the conjugation question that way.

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English is today's global language, the mother tongue to almost 600 million people in the world and studied and used as a second language by roughly two billion. But numbers alone do not account for its importance and preference as the world's lingua franca. What makes its studying profitable is certainly its value for time/money spent: being a language structurally poor and highly scalable, it requires little effort on the part of an inexperienced learner to grasp its basic grammar and vocabulary, while compensating more motivated learners with increasing possibilities of expression in specialized areas.

Concerning grammar and syntax, English is among the simplest languages in the world, and though the idea of simplicity is subjective and debatable, when contrasted to Italian grammatical and syntactical variations one cannot but recognize its straightforwardness. Why is it, then, that the performances in English of Italian students are so unsatisfactory, whatever the survey? And how can they be improved? A key to that may be adopting a systemic view on language teaching, and rather than focussing on just one or two particular aspects, operating surgically on the many levers that make a system tick can get better results. The notion of Intercomprehension, a question that has been particularly debated in Europe because of its relevance, especially in the context of European institutions, may act as a beacon towards mutual understanding, even if "there is no single model of IC [Intercomprehension] that responds to every intercultural situation nor is there a stage where one becomes fully and definitely

interculturally proficient" (Byram & Hu 2013 : "Intercomprehension"). In a systematic view, the idea that everyone should be able to understand at least the gist of what the others say without recurring to a lingua franca is tempting, but we are conscious that this needs a linguistic competence that is much higher than the one we can witness today, even with all the technological help we have at hand. Given the limited scope of this study, the concept of intercomprehension will be recalled only for what concerns the improvement of (formal) knowledge about one's native language in the process of learning a foreign language, which however is no little improvement at all in itself.

A system, in Paul Watzlawick's words, is "a set of objects, attributes, together with relationships between the objects and their attributes" (Watzlawick et al. 1967 : 120). Languages are the perfect example of open systems, i.e., organic contexts where there are endless interchanges with their surrounding environments (von Bertalanffy 1968 : 40). This is why encapsulating the possibilities of language teaching into a rigid dichotomy can be counterproductive, but on the other hand it seems that this is exactly what has happened in language and most fields when strong, competing ideas tend to polarize the discourse.

The two "systems" we refer to in our Dickensian title are the polar views that seem to encompass all theories on teaching: language teaching as a process and language teaching as a purpose. As we illustrate in Chapter 2, modern language teaching seems to be more concerned with the purpose side, leaving the process to sciences such as sociology, psychology or pedagogy. What I contend is, that in such a complicated, interconnected society as ours we should refocus a bit on the process without losing sight of the purpose, and try to be interdisciplinary rather than (too much) specialized, taking into account the fact that languages, by their very nature, are systems in and between themselves, rather than closed circuits.

In the chapters that follow, we are going to investigate the causes – and the tentative learning solutions – to such poor understanding. I think that one of the main reasons for Italians not performing well in English – or, for that matter, in all languages – might be correlated both to the texts they use and to their not knowing formally the Italian language they otherwise use very proficiently, thus inhibiting chances of comparing their language to others on a formal plane.

A review of textbooks and grammars, and studies on syntax, language history and motivation will be taken into account to show that English, in the end, is never presented to students in contrast to the Italian syntax or marketed as a structurally simpler language than Italian. Rather, and especially because textbooks and grammars do not predominantly take into account the learners' first languages, it looks like just a subject that "must" be learnt because compulsory in the syllabus, thus depressing the motivation factor in students and reinforcing the hard work bias.

In the final chapter, we propose some contrastive grammar and syntax topics that might be introduced in English classes to Italian-speaking students, together with a motivation-building path in order to remarket English as a "simple", as well as a playful, language to learn, detaching somewhat from the idea of "duty" or "usefulness" which is today dominant.

Chapter 1

A short history of English teaching

That of the teacher is questionably the second-oldest profession of the world, so a "short" history of even a branch of it – the teaching of languages – might sound pretentious at first. However, and luckily, modern historiography is based on documents and if we are to follow Anthony Howatt's scholarly account, *A History of English Language Teaching* (Howatt & Widdowson 2004), we do not have written records going farther back than the Middle Ages.

Even more luckily for our proposition of brevity, not many books on grammar used to circulate in the old times, so Howatt's very comprehensive bibliography consists of just under 500 books for some eight centuries of documented history, most of which published from the late 19th century onwards. So we are in the peculiar position of stating that the teaching and learning some kind of languages were born with humans and civilizations – we are reasonably sure of that even without written data – while the available documents tell us that it is essentially a new science, developed in the latest days of history. It is only an apparent paradox, though, if we think that the same can be said of most fields of knowledge because they were passed down from generation to generation almost exclusively orally, and oral traditions tended to be a little conservative in essence, following the golden rule, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it".

One of the reasons why things worked, though, is that changes happened very slowly. In the Late Middle Ages, with the emergence of a dynamic bourgeoisie especially in the Italian city-states, a new banking system spreading across Europe, the "discovery" of new markets – the Americas – and the increased contacts with the Far and the Middle East, Europe underwent a phase of dramatic transformation, and a new, vibrant way of life based on exchanges – not incidentally, a keyword of finance – undermined the immutability of tradition. Eventually, some things, and languages among them, did not work any longer as they used to and needed a fix.

Latin, the world's lingua franca which outlived its homeland for almost a thousand years, travelled through periodical renovation and decline as a literary and political language, influencing the languages of the élites while the local populations manipulated it to create the

new national languages based on Latin, the Romance languages. English was no exception, and despite being a Germanic language it owed and still owes Latin a lot, so it was not normally used outside daily conversations. The first official instance is possibly the famous kingly swear by Henry IV in 1399 on his succeeding to the throne left vacant by the forced abdication of Richard II:

> *Henry of Lancaster then stood up and everybody in that vast hall craned their necks to see him as he challenged the throne, wisely speaking in English, the first medieval King to do so when claiming the throne.*
>
> *(Bevan 1994 : 65-6)*

From that moment on, it gradually earned itself not only practical but also formal importance as a business topic. The first grammars become available for the learned, but they are usually bilingual English-French texts dealing with both languages at the same level and focussing on business and trade situations.

Along with French, Latin and intermittently Italian were the most fashionable foreign languages taught in England in the Renaissance period until the end of Elizabeth I's reign (1601), for their obvious links with literature, art and politics (Lawrence 2005). We do not have books for teaching English itself as a foreign language until the end of the Elizabethan era since the island's political status was not particularly prominent, and languages mostly followed the political and economic fortunes of European states. In Europe, if one had to choose one of the new vulgar national languages, French was the most obvious first pick.

As mentioned, the events that had quaked European societies in the centuries between 1300 and 1600 with the many wars, the Reformation, the discovery of a New world and the collapse of the old political order in the East with the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the subsequent mass migration of Greek-speaking literates to continental Europe, brought with them new needs also in the linguistic field. A big impulse for writing English grammars and textbooks destined to foreigners came from the foreigners themselves.

The French Huguenots fleeing their native country after the harshest episode in the Wars of Religion that plagued France, St. Bartholomew's Massacre (1572), needed to know the language of their new country and some teachers, almost all of them French, designed the first books for foreign learners: Jacques Bellot and Claudius Holyband (né Claude de Sainliens) were

the most active. So was John Florio for the many Italians living in England, authoring some famous collections of Italian sentences and the first English-Italian dictionary (1611), an early masterpiece in lexicography.

Before these years, Britons seemed somewhat disinterested in putting their language's rules into writing for the benefit of the non-natives. Curiously, French teachers were having so much of a good time in dominating this publishing sector that an Englishman, John Eliot, published in 1593 a semi-serious grammar of French, both giving a native speaker's point of view and mocking the foreigners teaching a language other than theirs. He says:

> [A]rgue me a fond, foolish, frivolous and fantastical author, and persuade everyone that you meet, that my book is a false, feigned, slight, confused, absurd, barbarous, lame, unperfect, single, uncertain, childish piece of work, and not able to teach, and why so? Forsooth because it is not our own, but an Englishman's doing.
>
> *(Eliot, John (1593) cited in Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 34)*

This is just one in a series of curious events regarding the history of teaching English. It looks almost like writing a grammar was worth the effort only if for self-defence, as Howatt & Widdowson (2004) point out: "it is an amazing publication, made more deadly because it is a textbook that can be taken seriously as a teaching instrument" (33).

Other telling cases are those of Roger Ascham, author of *The Schoolmaster* (1570), and Joseph Webbe, author of *An Appeal to Truth* (1622). The former extensively employed a method that can be defined as inductive insofar as it used – though did not invent – "double-translations" to make learners aware both of their native and of their second language – an early endeavour towards intercomprehension, maybe. The latter, on the contrary, "dispensed with grammar altogether" (Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 39). As Howatt puts it:

> It is very interesting to observe how this contrast between Ascham (inductive grammar) and Webbe (no grammar) repeated itself in virtually the same form in the late nineteenth century with Henry Sweet playing, as it were, the role of Ascham and the Direct Method teachers that of Webbe.
>
> *(Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 39)*

Ascham himself knew Italian very well and admired the language – like many in England at the time, and not only among the élites, if we consider the number of translations and plays based on Italian stories, including many by Shakespeare – having probably travelled to Rome in his youth: "Ascham's name can be unexpectedly linked to some of the most notable early English

Italophiles" (Lawrence 2005 : 3). He was a translator himself, so it is safe to presume that the contact with one or more foreign languages somehow influenced the way he taught his native language.

The really important ground-breaker in the teaching of English as a second language came later from Switzerland and his name was Guy Miège, author of the *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre l'Anglois* (1685), a 270-page long book including a grammar, a small dictionary and a dialogue section, with an extensive theoretical part where principles of education were exposed. He drew on the work of native phoneticians and grammarians and produced a solid, comprehensive text that, since it worked, was not to be "fixed" for the following two hundred years. Another oddity in the matter at the time was that "[t]here were, moreover, few if any bilingual text books written by native speakers of English" (64). Howatt himself in the first edition of his work made an even more cutting statement:

> *It is one of the curious features of the subject that native-speaking authors of coursebooks for English as a foreign language were virtually unknown before the late nineteenth century and the work of Henry Sweet, whereas today native speakers tend to dominate the market.*
>
> *(Howatt 1984 : 60)*

Basing their study on Alston's *Bibliography of the English language* (1967), Howatt and Widdowson (2004 : 66) draw a map of the spreading of English textbooks produced in the places where the learning of English was needed. While the neighbouring countries of France, Flanders and the other Low countries look obvious as the first to provide by themselves already before 1600, the "ripple effect" slowly extends in the 17th century to the other European countries more in contact with the British Isles, i.e., Germany, Denmark, and Norway. The first half of the 18th century sees further development, thanks to the growing power of the new United Kingdom, all-winner of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) and now prime global player and colonizer: Sweden, Portugal and finally Italy see the publication of grammars and textbooks to learn English. The second half of the century fills out the map and reaches the remaining realms of Spain and Russia to have most of Europe covered.

The first Italian textbook was written by Ferdinando Altieri, *Gramatica [sic] Inglese per gl'Italiani* (1728), first published in London but counting as many as seven editions by 1800, most of which made in Italy (e.g., Livorno 1759, Venezia 1784); better than that fared the bestselling

title by Eduardo Barker, *Nuova e Facile Grammatica della Lingua Inglese* (1766), a Carmelite priest's dialogue book which enjoyed no less than ten editions in 34 years. Howatt tells us that "the real breakthrough for the English language came towards the end of the [18th] century in Germany where an interest, almost an obsession, grew up round the dramatic works of English literature, and particularly Shakespeare" (68). It was the beginning of the period later known as *anglomania* (Buruma 2015), and once again it looks like it was the world outside the UK that made the Kingdom aware of its potentialities.

The 19th century was exactly the century of potentialities, and several methods bloomed, usually as supporting theories for language schools, in order to cater for what universities could not – and would not – include in their curricula, i.e., the practical teaching of modern languages. The adjectives "modern" and "practical" must be intended here as opposed to "classic" (Latin and Greek) and "theoretical" languages, that is, solely based on grammar without practice in the everyday life. Of course, modern languages were practical also in the sense that they served the useful purposes of the modern middle class since European universities were still detached from practical life and stuck to syllabi intended to form accomplished gentlemen – women were not to enter academia until 1863 in France, 1869 in the UK and 1878 in Germany. The Italian states did have limitations for women, but in many cases these were overridden because of the exceptional qualities of the candidates. Of those we have reliable documentation we can mention the first graduate woman in history, the Venetian Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia, who fought for a chance of being tested at the University of Padua and obtained her degree in Philosophy in 1678 – though not in Theology as she hoped; and Laura Bassi, who graduated in 1732 and became the first woman lecturer in philosophy and experimental physics at the University of Bologna, her hometown.

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A wide swathe of methods flourished or got systematized in this century, mainly because there was "a new class of language learner, one that had not followed an academic 'grammar school' education and therefore could not be expected to learn foreign languages by traditional methods" (Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 159). The Grammar-Translation Method was probably the first

and the most popular: it had its heyday in Germany and the UK and was the method chosen and perfected for the new system of public examinations controlled by the universities and established in the 1850s. Since high schools taught languages using this method, universities set out their priorities so that pupils coming from a variety of schools could be assessed uniformly and consistently upon their accessing higher education. Franz Ahn (1796-1865) and H.G. Ollendorff (1803-1865) were the two German innovators who brought the Grammar-Translation Method to the fore, Ahn underlining its practicality and easiness, aimed at grasping the basics of any language in a short time; Ollendorff digging in the depths of students' proto-psychology in his lengthy treatise which had the merit of focussing on the unconscious mechanisms of pattern recognition that arise when learning a new language. Actually, the Grammar-Translation Method took a method originally intended for adults and tried to adapt it for schools, making it smoother and easier, and not more abstract and complicated as its detractors contend (cf. Siefert 2013).

After the mostly fruitless attempts of some individual reformers of language teaching — Jean Joseph Jacotot, Claude Marcel, Thomas Prendergast — the ending quarter of the 19th century saw the unique convergence of phoneticians, grammarians and teachers in what became known as the Reform movement (Siefert 2013 : iii). Henry Sweet (1845-1912) published his *Practical Study of Languages* in 1899, the International Phonetic Association was founded in Paris in 1886 and started publishing *Le Maître Phonétique*, its scholarly journal still running today. Reformers based themselves on three principles: "the primacy of speech, the centrality of the connected text as the kernel of the teaching-learning process, and the absolute priority of an oral classroom methodology" (Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 189).

Once again against our contemporary convictions, Sweet affirmed that "for teaching Germans English, a phonetically trained German is far superior to an untrained Englishman, the latter being quite unable to communicate his knowledge; and this principle applies, of course, with equal force to the teaching of foreign languages in England" (cited in Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 201). His contribution still stands today in that he "established an applied linguistic tradition in language teaching which has continued uninterruptedly to the present day" (207).

"Natural" methods, which have passed under a variety of names throughout the centuries – practically from the first mentions in Latin authors to today's schools of languages – are one of the most prolific strands in language teaching:

> ***Learning how to speak a language, it is held, is not a rational process*** *which can be organized in a step-by-step manner following graded syllabuses of new points to learn, exercises and explanations. It is an intuitive process for which human beings have a natural capacity that can be awakened provided only that the proper conditions exist.*
>
> <div align="right">(Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 210, our emphasis)</div>

These various denominations – Natural Method, Conversation Method, Direct Method, Communicative Approach, etc. – all rely on the above mentioned basic conviction, that we as humans learn our native language without any books or formalized teaching, and so should we do when we learn a second or foreign one. Harold Palmer (1877-1949) was the English teacher who condensed some of the Berlitz schools' tenets with the earlier methodologies, and in his opus maximum, *The Principles of Languages-Study* (1921), he drew a complete course line based on five principles: gradation, proportion, concreteness, multiple line of approach, and rational order of progression. This last one is perhaps the most appropriate summary of his idea of learning a language:

1. *Become proficient in recognizing and in producing foreign sounds and tones, both isolated and in combinations.*

2. *Memorize (without analysis or synthesis) a large number of complete sentences chosen specifically for this purpose by the teacher or by the composer of the course.*

3. *Learn to build up all types of sentences, both regular and irregular, from 'working sentence-units', i.e. ergons, chosen specifically for this purpose by the teacher or by the composer of the course.*

4. *Learn how to convert 'dictionary words', i.e. etymons, into 'working sentence-units', i.e. ergons.*

<div align="right">(Cited in Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 276)</div>

Drawing on the experience of Prendergast and Sweet, and somewhat anticipating Chomsky's work on generative grammar, Palmer identified a "kernel" of the language, irreducible units which could generate all sentences by combination: miologs (modern morphemes), monologs (word forms) and polylogs (collocations or phrases). He also revalued translation in spite of what the official Berlitz method said, i.e., that it was useless if not

dangerous in learning a language. With Palmer and the end of the Second World War, the teaching of English becomes officially a discipline in itself – English Language Teaching, or ELT, as it has been known from then onwards – rather than a filler employment for (now mainly British) young people willing to travel the world on a budget in their sabbatical.

Meanwhile, a lot of effort was being put into the building of word lists: from Palmer himself to the Carnegie convention of 1934, linguists were trying to identify specific sets of words in English to fence in which words did the hard work and which were merely tinsels, in a Pareto-style analysis of the world of words. BASIC (British American Scientific International Commercial) English was one such enterprise, proposed by C. K. Ogden, a Cambridge philosopher, in 1923 and defended by I. A. Richards in 1943, hinging on the fundamental 850 words that should have done everything. Michael West (1888-1973), from his experience in the India Education Service (IES), focussed his attention on the needs of little children with almost no background in English and developed a method for learning in stages but focussing on building a core vocabulary (1,500 words) and proceeding from that bedrock on to the complexities of English. The Carnegie conference, as said, set up on West's initiative, tried to do the same listing work but using analytical classes and statistics (word frequency, structural value, subject range, etc.) to give it a more solid scientific ground. The final list of 2,000 words, like its predecessors before it, did not impose as the single, ground-breaking method for learning English, but decidedly contributed to the spreading of the idea of a scientific method based on evidence and everyday language, rather than the previously en vogue, literary and mostly pedantic method, based on canonical literature masterpieces and the upper-class, erudite usage (Smith 2003 : xix).

The new ELT benefited from the works of many noted linguists such as A. S. Hornby (1898-1978), Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949), Charles C. Fries (1887-1967), J. R. Firth (1890-1960) and his disciple M. A. K. Halliday (1925-2018).

Hornby was the proposer of the Situational Approach, which wanted the topics ("patterns") of a foreign language to be selected and taught basing on their possibility to be linked to certain "situations" that the instructor was expected to devise. The way and the order of teaching were completely different from what was the norm before it, based on the classical distinction between, for example, simple forms and compound forms in verbs. Hornby thought it easier for

learners to link present continuous forms to everyday situations ("I am opening the window", "I am talking to you"), while the present simple form should come at a later stage. Firth himself, a linguist, supported this way also in his concept of "context of situation", saying "in very rough terms, that ultimately the meaning of an utterance cannot be divorced from the cultural and situational context in which it occurs" (308). In this, Halliday tried all his life to preserve his master's core idea of keeping the unity of language and language use, just like the "white" light contains all the distinct colours that can be seen through a spectrum, and analysed individually, but not detached one from the others.

The ELT studies came to distil seven principles in the years 1950-70, which constituted the basis from which future theories developed their approaches. These principles can be summarized as follows:

1. *All four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) should be taught but the spoken skill should be given priority.*

2. *Learning the spoken language meant acquiring a set of appropriate speech habits.*

3. *Courses of instruction should be built round a graded syllabus of structural patterns to ensure systematic step-by-step progress.*

4. *Vocabulary should be carefully selected and presented along with the new grammatical patterns in specially written connected texts.*

5. *Grammar should be taught inductively through the presentation and practice of new patterns in specially designed classroom situations with visual and/or textual support.*

6. *Wherever possible meaning should be taught through ostensive procedures and/or linguistic context.*

7. *Error should be avoided through adequate practice and rehearsal.*

(Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 299-300)

ELT, like the other practices before it, of course had shortcomings. In an effort to systematize a one-size-fits-all model, it took for granted that "the underlying theories of language and language learning were 'scientific' and hence largely unaffected by local variables" (301). A bias that proved to be very wrong in this aspect, though producing what can be considered the basis of modern ELT. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, linguists like Bloomfield and Fries became involved in the US Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), an unprecedented linguistic war effort that pushed for time- and cost-effective language learning for the military at a moment when time was of essence. Applied linguists, who had been working on the ways to

effectively save endangered languages of the Native Americans since the 1930s, developed a series of guides and word lists, based on the conviction that everything could be learnt by simply making it a behaviour (influenced in this by the American Behaviourism) through intensive repetition and imitation. In Howatt & Widdowson's words: "Things did not work out that way […] and to date nobody else has solved the time problem in second language learning" (307).

The Makerere Conference, which was held in 1961 at the namesake College in Uganda, marked a milestone in English language teaching, but probably not for the reasons its organizers had hoped. Called to discuss some theoretical and practical aspects of language teaching in the soon-to-be-decolonized (plus some already decolonized) countries of the British Empire, the Conference took cognizance of, and opened the way to, a season of radical change in language teaching and learning. Howatt and Widdowson, reporting on the so-called "tenets" that the Conference produced (312), actually show how these tenets later opened up debate rather than fixed a point. The first of them ("English is best taught monolingually"), for example, wraps up a linguistic (should we use translations?) and a political point (should we use English as a means of communication?), ending up clearing none. The other points, concerning native speakers as ideal teachers, the timing of teaching English (the earlier, the better), the quantity of English to be taught (the more, the better), and the ratio of the languages used by EFL learners (more local language equals to less English, and this equals to worse English). "However, perhaps the most important fact about Makerere is that it happened at all" (315).

These five principles, which later came to be adopted in toto by the British Council, have also been addressed extensively by Phillipson in his *Linguistic imperialism* (Phillipson 1992 : 173-222) and *Linguistic imperialism continued* (Phillipson 2009), to the conclusion that these tenets have all led to fallacies rather than certainties about ELT, and that they are instrumental to other policies rather than positive values in themselves:

> *Adherence to the five tenets is fundamental to the British English teaching business. […]* ***One of the British Council's primary functions is to ensure that the English language 'industry' will continue to thrive, despite geopolitical changes affecting the many functions and forms of English worldwide*** *through setting agendas that will strengthen British economic and cultural interests. [Gordon] Brown's strategy is to influence globalization through English, and to cash in on it. The term globalization is deceptive, since it reveals nothing of who the winners and losers are in this phase of global economic relations.*
>
> *(Phillipson 2009 : 12-13, our emphasis)*

In sum, the years 1946-1960 distinguished themselves for a range of conflicting perspectives which all contributed to shaping one or the other aspects that still today we can find in ELT. Not to forget the impressive technological advances that started to make the experience of learning a language no more just a human-human, but a more coordinated human-machine business. Language laboratories, television, and all kinds of recordings (tapes, videos) allowed learners to replicate the real experience of using a foreign language, so reducing the gap between the formalized context of the classroom and the living situation of language.

The Communicative Approach, an innovation that came steadily forward in the 1970s first in academia and later in everyday use, revolutionised syllabi:

> One practical consequence of this new perspective was **a different kind of teaching syllabus built round a graded selection of rhetorical or communicative acts** which learners needed to perform appropriately if they wanted to be accepted as speakers of English in their chosen roles. [...] scientist for instance, needed to know how to carry out professionally relevant acts such as definition, classification, deduction and so on [...]
>
> *(Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 327-8, our emphasis)*

Drawing on various sources – Jacobson's functionalism, Halliday's "Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching", and the American sociolinguistics, particularly Dell Hymes's "communicative competence" concept – the Communicative Approach benefited from a raft of inspirational sources and aimed at responding to the needs the public of the 1970s had: adult learning and English for Special Purposes (later English for Specific Purposes, or ESP). Also, the new waves made for a definitive break from language theory as the background for methods, as it had been the case in the past. Chomsky's assertion: "it is the language teacher himself (sic) who must validate or refute any specific proposal. There is very little in psychology or linguistics that he can accept on faith" (cited in Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 333). Psychology, however, peeped in the crack and informed the research mainly in two strands, "problem-solving" (derived from Behaviourism but not too compromised with the Old school) and "second language acquisition", inspired by Chomsky's "language acquisition device" postulated in his 1965 *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*:

> UG [Universal Grammar], then, can be taken to be the genetically determined initial state of the language faculty, shared among humans to a very close approximation. Viewed from another perspective, UG so understood is a **language acquisition device**.
>
> *(Chomsky 2015 : xiii, original emphasis)*

Of particular importance is Pit Corder's 1967 paper in response to Chomsky's hypothesis, where he focuses on the speakers' errors. He says that

> **given motivation**, *it is inevitable that a human being will learn a second language if he [sic] is exposed to the language data.*
>
> <div align="right">(cited in Howatt & Widdowson 2004 : 336, original emphasis)</div>

So it seems that learners (actually, all humans), when exposed to data, postulate hypotheses on how these data interrelate and work, and errors are only the markers of their failed hypotheses, which will be abandoned in their progress thus fine-tuning their acquisition, just like infants do when they learn their mother tongues. Corder's inevitability, though, proved a little too optimistic because it excluded factors other than motivation alone, such as success in communication. At this point, "communication" already means at least two things: 1) effective communication is what language teaching is for, preparing learners to use language in the real world (the mainstream notion); 2) communication is a necessary condition for language acquisition (Prabhu's, and partly Krashen's, notion).

The end of the 1960s also marked the end of the Situational Approach, and a new model for linking language and the expression of meaning was needed. The Council of Europe's 1971 Threshold Level (T-Level) for languages proved to be one such enterprise, nominally addressing the needs of adult Europeans learning English, but actually framing our future society where international travel and open-border relationships are the norms, and where one national language is simply not enough to communicate effectively. Defining a "threshold level" meant, then, to start setting up an international credit recognition system that could assess foreign language skills in a uniform framework. The reference to a "threshold", in fact, did not refer to a survival level, but rather to a set of basic competencies people needed to communicate decently in a foreign language. The influence of the "Threshold Level" on the ESP and, more in general, ELT projects all over the world has been great and anticipated the gradual but momentous shift from one-directional teaching to active teaching, asking students, at last, to "do something", and not just listen.

Along the same lines moved the "Bangalore Project", the unofficial label of the Communicational Teaching Project (CTP) directed by N. S. Prabhu of the local South India British Council branch (Prabhu 1990). Dissatisfied with the apparent failure of the S-O-S

(Structural-Oral-Situational) Approach in having Indian pupils learn "habits" of conversational English, this project aimed at giving children tasks (called "reasoning-gap activities") within their age capacities where they had to come to clear, unambiguous answers and results using English. It started in 1979 and ended in 1984 without proper theoretical conclusions and with insufficient funding, but produced some very interesting points on which to ponder, as Howatt & Widdowson (2004) note:

> The essential feature of Prabhu's approach is **the theory that the "meaning-focused activity" engendered by the tasks activates the cognitive process responsible for language acquisition**. As we said, Krashen said essentially the same thing only in a stronger form [...]. It needs to be said, however, that in most classrooms around the world, and India is no exception, there are too many children for any one of them to produce very much language, so comprehension (in a broad sense to include "following the lesson", "paying close attention", etc.) must be the keystone of any theory of classroom-based language acquisition. But comprehension sharpened by the possibility of having to respond later is a rather more focused activity than comprehension for its own sake.

> *(347-349, our emphasis)*

The 1980s marked the powerful assertion of the Communicative approach and a focus on the ESP as the teaching address more suitable to the people who wanted to learn a language. English imposed itself as the world's lingua franca and also scholarly studies began to admit that more than one point of view on what was the "norm" in English started to emerge and deconstruct the monolithic, though almost always implicit, notion that English is the language of native speakers, and all the other learners should conform to the way they use it. As we will see in the next chapter, several pillars started to crack and crumble in these decisive years.

Chapter 2

English teaching and learning in Italy

2.1 Contemporary approaches and best practices. Theories in use

The last chapter of Howatt & Widdowson (2004), entitled "A perspective on recent trends" (353), though dealing with what was "recent" in 2004, still gives profound insight on the basic issues of language teaching, showing how many of the age-old problems that troubled the likes of Miège in the 16th century are still there unresolved. In particular, the authors focus on the two basic pedagogical considerations that stand at the root of all teaching: what is the purpose of a language course? And what process should we enact in order to attain that purpose? Historically, theories of languages supported the purpose question, while theories of learning fed the hunger of process definition. All in all, this is what language teaching is all about, a philosophical, psychological and sociological question, rather than a linguistic one.

Regarding the purpose, this question was traditionally given one of three broad answers: a language gives access to its literature; a language is an object of study in itself, rather than a key to something else; language is useful because it has a utilitarian use and practical proficiency is the goal. The last one, given the predominance of the communicative approach today, is of course the more fashionable reason for learning English (or any language) in our days. Whatever the purpose, the question remains as to what is essential and what can be left out in designing a course. In this case, theories of learning historically preferred the indirect approach, providing students with the underlying structure of a language so that from formal knowledge they could infer its practical functioning. As we can imagine, however, ESP takes the opposite direct approach, favouring practical and limited real language examples, explaining grammar and syntax only when needed. But how to identify the most appropriate examples, and exclude the useless?

"Genre analysis as defined by Swales is a set of conventions for use which typifies the communicative activity of a particular discourse community" (355). Crucially, this kind of

analysis goes beyond the boundaries of linguistics to delve into the social constructs and norms accepted in a certain community, thus putting forth an idea of "social indoctrination" (356), raising concerns on whether this is education at all. One notable objection, by Edward Said (Said 1994 : 305), was that the more specific is the purpose of linguistic education, the drier is the kind of education attained because deprived of all the cultural and conceptual significance attached to a language. He spoke of English, but this can be easily generalized to include all languages, as Howatt & Widdowson (2004 : 356) suggest.

Increasingly "restricted" language syllabi, though, are exactly what has been being proposed in recent years around the world, to address the students' needs and so have, from the business point of view, more marketable courses to sell to satisfied customers. We are not forgetting that at the origin of English teaching were exactly business reasons (see Chapter 1), and this has not particularly affected the excellence of the English language and culture – rather the opposite – but in today's global world it is easy to foresee a quick impoverishment if this is the line to prevail. But an opposing force to this has affirmed, supported by computerized technologies and a new branch of studies called Corpus linguistics. The upside for ESP is that using large corpora or databases it is now pretty easy to identify and study particular domains of language, the only thing that needs be done is to set the right parameters in the linguistic search engine. With huge amounts of data available for analysis, the risk of excessive reduction is counterbalanced by the risk of too many samples where to fish materials for courses. A notable contribution of Corpus linguistics has been to underline the primacy of lexis over grammar, i.e., that the observation of actual language use shows that it is the lexis which governs grammar and not the other way round, so it sounds reasonable to build syllabi around the use of lexical items and show how grammar is subservient to them, contrary to what structuralist believed.

What is the real downside with corpus linguistics, though, is that the very samples that constitute the database are selected with a "native-speaker" bias in mind, i.e., they are taken from larger excerpts of institutionalized language from the countries of the Inner Circle, in Braj B. Kachru's terms (Kachru 1992) – the UK, the USA, Australia and all the other countries where English is one of the official languages. In this way, all of the Outer Circle (where English plays a significant role along with local languages) and Expanding Circle countries are excluded. These

last ones, in particular, are perhaps today even more important than the supposedly "normative" Inner Circle countries, in that people who want to learn ESP are normally from these countries and would use the language to talk with other non-natives, so the ideal "norm" is in most of the cases absent in the interactions taking place in these contexts. Holding as the touchstone the Inner Circle English of 600 million people inevitably frustrates and somewhat excludes the roughly two billion of the Outer and Expanding Circle English. Which English is more real, then?

Many have observed that this is just the imperialism of yore disguised as education (e.g., Phillipson 1992, 2009), but others proposed reconsidering Hymes's communicative competence as seen in the light of the norms, conventions, cultures and societies where the language is taught. This fine-tuning of objectives would "define them in terms of language which is adequate for international contexts of use" (360). Also, it would be useful to grant English as a lingua franca an independent status, thus removing the inferiority stigma associated with it. Untying the knots with the original, Inner Circle culture would allow ELF finally to be able to freely associate with the local cultures it comes in contact with. What is certain, is that "English is implicated in globalization as both cause and effect, for good or ill, and this clearly raises issues of an ethical and political kind about pedagogic responsibility that cannot, or should not, simply be ignored" (362).

This debate has taken us to an important point, especially in the view of what we are going to address in the chapters that follow. Howatt & Widdowson push so far as to affirm:

> *The questioning of the validity of basing ELT objectives on the norms of native-speaker usage leads naturally to a questioning of another well-established assumption: namely that native-speaker teachers are necessarily the most competent to teach the subject. Even if one accepts the dubious proposition that native-speaker competence constitutes an over-riding qualification for teaching a language, if what ELT teachers teach is no longer exclusively their language, then the basis of their authority would seem to disappear. […]* **It is not only a matter of calling into question how reliable native speakers can be as informants about a language no longer their own, but of how far their linguistic experience qualifies them in their pedagogic role as instructors**.
>
> <div align="right">(362, our emphasis)</div>

If the aim is no longer "learning to speak a language like natives do" but relating that language to one's culture and using it for exchange or business purposes, then native teachers do not qualify

automatically as the best facilitators worldwide. They should adapt themselves to the cultures they are talking to to promote effective learning.

This issue has sparked discussion in recent years and the question was addressed by using new acronyms such as ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), preferred in the USA over the acronym ELT (English Language Teaching, not distinguishing between Foreign and Second language), preferred in the UK. While being more precise than ELT, ESOL might also imply that

> *there is an English to be taught which can be independently defined without reference to these other speakers. This would seem to lend support to the assumption [...] that there is a unitary norm, established on native-speaker authority.*
>
> *(363)*

The so-called reality of language, then, should refer to the reality of language taught in class, rather than the reality of language used by native speakers who might be so distant in place and time to constitute something very unreal for (especially young) learners who have never experienced first-hand contact with "real" English. The "real" examples of Corpus linguistics referred to before, as a consequence, completely lack context, which is what makes language real according to all linguists. Language examples should be chosen taking into account their pedagogical factor, the chance teachers have to transform a linguistic descriptive fact into an act of promotion of learning — because this is the specific purpose of language teaching.

This leads to the key notion of inference, a faculty maybe better trained through the structuralist approach rather than the Direct one:

> *One might say that the history of ELT methodology is an account of the different ways that have been proposed for inducing learners to generalize by inferring what it is that it is exemplified in the language they are presented with, or they manipulate, or put to use in classroom activities. [...]*
>
> *The structuralist approach does this indirectly by investment, by getting students to internalize encoded regularities as a resource. That is to say, they focus on examples. [...]*
>
> *They would surely be better prepared to cope with unpredictable eventualities if they were equipped with the more general capability that the indirect approach takes as its purpose to reach. Looked at in this light, **a direct approach which deals with 'real' language is actually less realistic than the indirect approach of the kind proposed by Hornby both in respect to process and purpose**.*
>
> *(365, our emphasis)*

One recent direction that has been taken by ELT methodologies is Task-Based Instruction (TBI), not an entirely new concept but rather a reformulation of an old technique, more recently resumed by Prabhu in South India, as we have seen in Chapter 1. In this view, tasks differentiate themselves from exercises in that they focus on pragmatic meaning rather than on form. However, praxis can only be investigated if one overlooks semantics, so the problem remains: "how to get learners engaged in natural communication while getting them at the same time to attend, unnaturally, to the linguistic resources that enable them to do so" (367).

One final word goes to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF or CEFR), a development of the earlier Council of Europe's endeavour, the Threshold Level, about which we have said above in Chapter 1. This is another attempt, though commendable at a practical level, of finding "common" specifications designed on abilities, not taking into account what is not common, i.e., the local and particular teaching and learning situations. Again, only one of the two key factors, purpose and process, is satisfactorily defined. While purposes, as in ESP, can be defined at very detailed levels, processes, when they are defined, unfailingly stumble in the many difficult adaptations to local circumstances.

As Howatt & Widdowson conclude:

> *The actuality of practice is for the most part unrecorded, and indeed to a large extent unaffected by the shifts of thinking that have been charted here. The usual way of looking at this disparity in the past has been to see actual practice as a constraint on the effective implementation of the proposals of expert opinion which needs to be overcome. Teachers, in this view, need to be coaxed, or even coerced, into changing their ways. More recently, however, a change in attitude has become evident. **Increasingly, it would seem, it is being recognized that the local contexts of actual practice are to be seen not as constraints to be overcome but conditions to be satisfied**. […]*
>
> *This also means, of course, that those who experience such conditions, who share the linguistic and cultural reality of the community the learners belong to, namely the non-native teachers of ELT, are particularly well placed to develop such an appropriate pedagogy. And these teachers have their own wisdom, their own cognitions which have to be understood and respected, rather than over-ridden by some supposedly superior expertise.*
>
> <div align="right">*(369, our emphasis)*</div>

The next paragraph is dedicated to exploring how all this expertise has been translated into practice by looking at some data from international surveys on the Italian population's – students and adults – competence in key subjects.

2.3   English language performance data of Italians. What works and what does not

Popular notions about the learning of English, obliterated even by a scholar like Graddol, have it that

> *as English becomes more generally available, little or no competitive advantage is gained by adopting it. Rather, it has become a new baseline: without English you are not even in the race.*
>
> *(Graddol 2006 : 122)*

While Graddol underlines that this does not translate into an automatic advantage for native speakers – quite the opposite, actually (Graddol 2006 : 122) – he also says, like Robinson (2010, 2011), that education at large is undergoing a process of inflation. To paraphrase the quotation above, we may say that the more is education available, the less is it worth because more people have it, and this obeys the well-known principle of scarcity for commodities. In the next paragraphs, we will try to understand if the Italian situation is as bad as they depict it.

2.2.1   Key figures on Europe 2020 (Eurostat)

The last 75 years have seen much expertise and the refinement of many theories. In absolute terms, we have witnessed a worldwide growth in the rates of knowledge and exposure to foreign languages, especially English. Institutional frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 or Europe 2020 are built around expectations that sometimes may sound too optimistic compared to the real state of the art but, at least for languages, they turned out valid paths to beat[1].

If we look to Europe alone, many commendable efforts have been made so far: reciprocal diffidence has softened, frontiers crumbled – some are being rebuilt, though – new generations of Europeans have got used to working, living and travelling unlimitedly in the Union, knowledge and understanding are now considered as values, we have one currency and, the most important aim in the first place, we have avoided wars in the continent for an unprecedentedly long period.

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[1] Europe 2020's targets for Education (one of its five main strands) were: 1) Share of early school leavers to be reduced under 10%; and 2) At least 40% of 30 to 34 years old to have completed tertiary or equivalent education (for a quick overview, see also https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/europe-2020-indicators, last accessed 11 April 2021). In 2019, most of these goals were already met.

The 24 official languages of the EU play a leading role in this and remind us that, even if through difficult and bumpy roads, knowing at least a bit of each other's idiom and culture can contribute to peace and prosperity. "Unity in diversity", the EU's motto, aptly summarizes this attitude, while programmes like Erasmus in its many variants have made more than a thousand policies in making people aware of the importance of languages.

Despite being a founding member state of the EU, Italy has not traditionally been very prone to the learning of foreign languages, if we consider proficiency in speaking as a parameter. Using data from the European office of statistics (Eurostat) from surveys made in 2007, 2011 and 2016, Italy fares constantly below the average when compared with other 34 European countries (EUROSTAT 2019 : 58ff.)[2]. Even if these surveys are based on self-assessment on the part of the respondents, we will see that data from tests only but confirm these rough results.

In 2016, the EU average of people knowing no foreign language was 35.4% with Italy just below it at 34.0%. While this may seem not so bad, one should consider that average values are calculated as weighted on population, so the reason why the average is so high is that some of the most populous countries in Europe are above that: France (65 million people) is at 39.9%, Spain (47 million) 45,8% and the United Kingdom (64 million) at 65.4%. Aggregated, these three countries plus Italy count alone for around 240 million inhabitants out of the 511 million of the EU (EUROSTAT 2020 : 10)[3].

Crude data suggest that these countries may be less motivated to learn a foreign language because their official languages are widely spoken and used as a lingua franca by millions. French is an official language in 32 countries for around 300 million native speakers and a foreign language to another 50 million[4]. Spanish is the official language in 23 countries[5], third in the world for use, fourth for distribution with 483 million native speakers and a foreign language for 100 million, 7.6% of the world's population. The numbers of English need not be detailed again.

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[2] The countries considered in the surveys are the 28 of the EU plus Norway, Switzerland, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Albania and Turkey.

[3] *Key Figures on Europe 2020* already excludes the United Kingdom because of the Brexit, so the present population of the EU is 447 million people, while in 2016 it was 447+64=511 million.

[4] Organisation internationale de la francophonie, 2018. http://observatoire.francophonie.org/ (last accessed 11 April 2021)

[5] El español en el mundo 2019, Instituto Cervantes.
https://www.cervantes.es/sobre_instituto_cervantes/prensa/2019/noticias/presentacion_anuario_madrid.htm (last accessed 11 April 2021)

Germany, Europe's biggest country for population with 83 million inhabitants, despite its size, is far below the EU average: only 21.3% does not know any foreign language. German is practically not spoken outside Europe and this may be the reason for Germans being motivated in learning foreign languages. Seemingly not-so-bad statistical data reveal then that Italy is indeed just below the EU average in foreign languages, but the countries that contribute most to it are also the countries that are least motivated in learning them. Why do we fare so poorly?

The same survey records the rates for one, two and three or more foreign languages known. In 2016, the EU average of one foreign language was 35.2% (Italy 41.6%); for two foreign languages was 21.0% (Italy 20.1%); and for three foreign languages was 8.4% (Italy 4.4%). The same factors discussed for the no foreign language percentages can be drawn in also here as regards the two and three foreign languages rates. The above-the-average performance in the one foreign language sector looks like a bit of compensation for the other bad results.

Foreign language skills statistics (self-reported)

	No foreign language			One foreign language			Two foreign languages			Three or more foreign		
	2007	2011	2016	2007	2011	2016	2007	2011	2016	2007	2011	2016
EU	37,0	34,3	35,4	38,4	35,4	35,2	17,7	21,3	21,0	7,0	9,1	8,4
Belgium (¹)	32,1	42,1	21,5	16,3	13,8	18,2	26,1	23,5	33,5	25,4	20,6	26,9
Bulgaria (¹)	44,1	61,1	50,5	30,0	24,4	32,5	21,2	11,7	13,7	4,7	2,8	3,3
Czechia	31,9	30,9	21,0	34,6	39,6	44,7	24,7	22,4	26,9	8,8	7,1	7,4
Denmark	12,0	5,9	4,2	35,8	26,3	29,9	38,5	43,1	41,2	13,6	24,7	24,6
Germany	28,6	21,5	21,3	41,3	41,9	41,7	21,5	26,3	26,6	8,7	10,3	10,4
Estonia	13,6	14,5	8,8	30,4	24,1	26,4	35,3	35,1	39,1	20,6	26,3	25,7
Ireland (³)	:	72,7	49,2	:	20,8	29,9	:	5,2	15,4	:	1,3	5,6
Greece	43,4	41,9	33,5	44,8	43,0	48,5	9,9	12,2	15,3	2,0	3,0	2,7
Spain	46,6	48,9	45,8	35,4	34,0	34,8	13,6	12,6	14,3	4,3	4,5	5,2
France (¹)	41,2	41,2	39,9	35,9	34,9	35,4	18,4	19,2	20,1	4,5	4,6	4,6
Croatia	31,4	:	26,8	39,7	:	45,2	21,3	:	21,8	7,6	:	6,2
Italy	38,6	40,1	34,0	33,8	39,6	41,6	20,9	16,6	20,1	6,7	3,7	4,4
Cyprus	14,6	16,1	10,5	59,3	56,7	62,2	17,9	19,2	20,3	8,1	8,0	7,0
Latvia	5,1	5,1	4,2	40,0	35,7	33,7	42,9	46,1	49,3	12,0	13,1	12,7
Lithuania	2,5	2,7	4,5	31,5	40,7	42,9	45,8	44,7	39,0	20,3	11,9	13,7
Luxembourg (²)(³)	:	1,1	5,5	:	5,0	16,2	:	22,0	27,1	:	72,0	51,2
Hungary (¹)	74,8	63,2	57,6	17,6	25,9	28,6	6,3	9,2	11,1	1,3	1,7	2,7
Malta	8,3	10,9	8,2	26,0	24,7	32,4	42,8	45,7	43,2	22,8	18,6	16,2
Netherlands	:	13,9	13,7	:	25,2	28,7	:	37,1	37,1	:	23,7	20,6
Austria	20,3	21,9	13,8	50,4	50,5	49,6	20,2	18,9	23,3	9,1	8,8	13,4
Poland	37,3	38,1	32,9	39,0	38,7	45,0	19,6	19,2	19,2	4,1	4,0	2,8
Portugal	51,3	41,5	31,0	22,3	26,6	28,9	17,5	20,5	24,8	8,9	11,5	15,3
Romania	69,6	:	64,2	19,2	:	24,7	9,9	:	10,2	1,3	:	0,9
Slovenia	7,7	7,6	15,9	20,5	15,0	20,7	37,2	32,6	25,7	34,6	44,9	37,7
Slovakia	7,6	14,7	11,8	24,4	30,2	24,5	35,4	33,5	35,7	32,6	21,6	28,0
Finland	16,1	8,2	8,0	16,0	13,1	15,6	29,9	29,5	31,6	38,0	49,2	44,9
Sweden (³)	5,0	8,2	3,4	44,6	31,6	45,9	31,0	29,7	31,7	19,4	30,5	19,0
United Kingdom (³)	35,1	:	65,4	64,9	:	20,0	:	:	9,6	:	:	5,0
Norway	2,9	4,4	7,9	22,4	24,7	26,9	28,6	23,9	21,5	46,1	46,9	43,7
Switzerland	:	12,1	8,3	:	20,9	19,7	:	34,2	35,5	:	32,9	36,5
North Macedonia	:	:	31,7	:	:	38,6	:	:	20,0	:	:	9,7
Albania	:	:	59,9	:	:	25,9	:	:	10,9	:	:	3,2
Serbia	:	37,4	20,7	:	47,4	37,2	:	12,3	21,6	:	2,9	20,5
Turkey	75,5	81,8	:	21,6	15,9	:	2,6	2,3	:	0,3	:	:
Bosnia and Herzegovina	:	:	61,0	:	:	30,8	:	:	7,5	:	:	0,7

(¹) 2011: breaks in series.
(²) No foreign language, 2011: low reliability.
(³) 2016: breaks in series.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_aes_l21)

Table 1. Distribution of people aged 25-64 by knowledge of foreign languages, 2007, 2011 and 2016 (%)

The Eurostat survey includes as well the data on the distribution of the level of command of the best-known foreign language (reported in Table 2 below). Asked to use one of three indicators (Proficient, Good or Basic) to rate their knowledge, Europeans totalised an average of 24.8% Proficient, 30.3% Good and 44.6% Basic. Italians evaluated the knowledge of their best-known foreign language as Proficient in 10.8% of cases (15 points below the average, lowest in the EU), as Good 25.5% (five points below the average) and as Basic 63.7% (almost 20 points above the average, highest in the EU). Combined with the results on the number of foreign languages known, these data suggest that Italians know – and are aware of knowing – foreign languages less than the average of Europeans do, as for both quantity and quality.

Foreign language skills statistics (self-reported)

	Proficient			Good			Basic		
	2007 (¹)	2011	2016 (¹)	2007 (¹)	2011	2016 (¹)	2007 (¹)	2011	2016 (¹)
EU	20,3	23,7	24,8	24,3	32,4	30,3	51,3	43,4	44,6
Belgium	27,1	27,7	28,7	30,6	37,2	38,7	40,5	33,1	31,9
Bulgaria	11,7	22,6	25,0	15,5	30,4	35,8	72,8	46,2	39,0
Czechia	11,0	16,8	11,8	22,4	35,8	25,4	66,6	47,4	62,8
Denmark	:	38,2	41,1	:	33,7	34,5	:	28,0	24,1
Germany	29,8	24,5	27,5	23,6	31,8	32,7	46,6	43,5	39,4
Estonia	32,4	26,1	34,4	38,6	41,7	25,1	29,0	32,1	40,4
Ireland (³)	:	17,3	31,9	:	22,6	22,2	:	60,1	45,6
Greece	18,6	13,4	30,5	33,0	39,1	35,6	45,4	47,3	33,6
Spain	29,2	27,7	29,8	26,5	37,0	30,8	43,5	32,6	38,4
France (²)	8,7	18,7	19,9	23,4	35,0	29,0	45,4	46,2	51,1
Croatia	21,3	:	26,9	26,6	:	35,3	49,9	:	37,8
Italy	9,7	14,1	10,8	24,5	25,5	25,5	56,4	60,3	63,7
Cyprus	30,7	41,5	34,5	37,5	33,0	38,1	31,8	25,5	27,4
Latvia	57,6	54,4	41,0	26,0	30,2	32,2	16,1	15,4	24,6
Lithuania	42,7	47,8	45,2	28,8	28,4	29,2	28,3	23,8	25,6
Luxembourg (³)	:	72,1	65,5	:	17,8	21,7	:	9,4	11,9
Hungary (²)	23,1	23,0	25,4	28,5	29,8	26,4	48,3	47,2	46,2
Malta	:	52,6	50,9	:	26,9	27,8	:	20,6	21,3
Netherlands	:	38,5	36,7	:	42,0	42,1	:	19,5	20,9
Austria	30,6	29,8	35,8	32,3	37,5	31,4	37,0	32,4	32,8
Poland	9,9	12,7	14,8	21,8	27,3	26,1	68,3	59,7	59,0
Portugal	20,8	24,1	21,3	33,3	32,8	29,2	45,9	43,0	49,5
Romania	21,0	:	14,7	19,7	:	31,1	57,4	:	54,2
Slovenia	49,2	32,2	48,5	35,4	41,7	38,1	15,4	26,1	13,4
Slovakia	48,0	33,2	33,1	25,8	32,9	37,2	26,0	33,9	29,7
Finland	21,7	29,9	34,2	38,6	40,0	40,4	39,2	30,0	25,2
Sweden (³)	41,4	43,4	59,7	41,9	35,3	26,4	16,6	21,3	13,6
United Kingdom (³)	11,5	:	22,0	16,1	:	24,9	72,3	:	52,8
Norway	43,1	46,1	46,2	40,4	39,0	35,1	16,5	14,8	16,2
Switzerland	:	28,7	28,8	:	59,2	37,8	:	11,9	33,4
North Macedonia	:	:	41,9	:	:	31,7	:	:	26,3
Albania	:	:	30,3	:	:	28,0	:	:	41,3
Serbia	:	21,4	40,1	:	29,9	28,4	:	48,7	31,6
Turkey	7,7	18,5	17,3	12,4	17,4	18,5	79,8	64,1	64,2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	:	:	12,6	:	:	23,0	:	:	64,4

(¹) In the 2007 and 2016 surveys there was also a category titled 'very basic'; this is included in 'basic'.
(²) 2011: breaks in series.
(³) 2016: breaks in series.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_aes_l31)

Table 2. Distribution of the level of command of the best-known foreign language, 2007, 2011 and 2016 (% of people aged 25–64 years who knew at least one foreign language)

While raw data analyses of this kind seem quite straightforward and it is tempting to draw immediate, certain conclusions, we should be careful in doing so. Sometimes the reasons behind the numbers are not what they seem.

2.2.2   OECD PISA 2018

OECD PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment, is a survey that does not measure any mastery in foreign languages, but the ability of 15-year-olds across 88 countries in three key competencies such as reading, mathematics and science every three years. In particular, the Reading definition in the following OECD PISA report 2018 focuses on how it has evolved since the first test in 2000:

> *The PISA 2000 definition of reading literacy was as follows:*
>
> *Reading literacy is understanding, using and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society.*
>
> *The PISA 2009 definition of reading literacy, also used in 2012 and 2015, added engagement in reading as part of reading literacy:*
>
> *Reading literacy is understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society.*
>
> *For 2018 the definition of reading literacy includes the evaluation of texts as an integral part of reading literacy and removes the word "written".*
>
> **Reading literacy is understanding, using, evaluating, reflecting on and engaging with texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society.**
>
> <div align="right">(OECD 2019 : 27, our emphasis)</div>

The "Reading" label is used here as a portmanteau for many cognitive operations in addition to the mere reading as it is normally intended. And if reading is of course tested in one's native language, this also measures one's capacity in practically "using" that language for their purposes. The lower the performance, the worse the ability to express oneself and to understand others, that is, to communicate.

As per Reading, Italy's overall points are less than in the recent past and the gulf with the OECD average is widening if we consider the last four surveys: Italy totalised 476 points in 2018 (OECD average 487), 485 in 2015 (490), 490 in 2012 (493) and 486 in 2009 (491). Before 2009

the results are not comparable because the number of participating countries has grown a lot since then, but in any case, Italy never surpassed or even matched the OECD average in any survey in the Reading domain (INVALSI 2019a).

However, the situation is not so bad, and we have not had results as poor as the Philippines or the Dominican Republic, which, with 340 and 342 points respectively, end the list; but neither have we managed to reach the results of countries that are comparably as rich and as modern as we are, such as Canada (520), Ireland (518), or even France (493), not to speak of the wealthiest cities of China (555), which apparently play another championship. The complete list, including the results from previous PISA tests (2012 and 2015), is reported in Table 11 in Appendix 1.

Apart from (too) easy comparisons, maybe it is more telling to explore the neighbours of Italy in this special ranking. Between 470 and 480 points, we find Luxembourg and Israel (470); Belarus and Iceland (474); Lithuania and Hungary (476); and Russia, Latvia and Croatia (479). Of the 76 countries participating in the survey, Italy ranked 45th and thus made it into the second quartile of the interval, more or less in the middle of it.

Finally, and interestingly, while being below the average in the three main performance indicators, Italy fares far above the average of OECD countries in the Equity indicators (Boys v Girls, Social background, Immigrant students) (INVALSI 2019a). Italian schools, then, seem to be successfully focussed on being inclusive and socially just, but fails when it comes to the practical results many expect from schools, i.e., educating people to master subjects and acquire competencies.

This is probably and partly due to poor funding, a deficit structurally present in the Italian school system, linked with an age-old bias against hard, practical disciplines and in favour of philosophical, literary ones (cf. 4.1 below). This might help explain why the gap with the OECD average is smaller in reading but considerably wider in mathematics and science: 468 points is Italy's average in these two topics (a 21-point loss since 2009), while OECD's is 489 (-9 since 2009).

2.2.3 INVALSI 2019

One last survey we may look at to try to understand what is the level of Italian students is the test organized by the Italian INVALSI body (Istituto nazionale per la valutazione del sistema educativo di istruzione e di formazione – National institute for the evaluation of the education and training system) which since 2005 has been administered annually to students of the Grades 2, 5, 8, and 10 – corresponding to the 2nd, 5th (final) class in primary schools; 3rd (final) class in middle schools; and 2nd class in secondary schools in the Italian school system – to test their competence in Italian and mathematics. Following a 2017 reform, Invalsi has also included Grade 13 students, corresponding to the 5th (final) class in secondary schools, and an additional subject – English, differentiated into Listening and Reading marks – for students in Grade 5, Grade 8 and Grade 13. The results discussed in this section are reported in full in Appendix 1[6].

This survey, which is compulsory for students to sit in their end-of-cycle year – 5th primary, 3rd middle, and 5th high school – is in a written form for students in primary schools, while it is computer-based for all other grades. It tests the knowledge and the competencies of students and ranks them on a standardised scale in order to uniformly compare the different parts of the country. According to the report:

> *Students in [Italian and mathematics] were evaluated in two ways: by attributing them a score on a quantitative scale (Rasch) and by attributing them a level (1-5), according to the higher or lower level of competence shown in the test.*

> *(INVALSI 2018 : 32, our translation)*

In order to compare these metrics against the OCSE PISA international survey's ones above, we will take into account the Invalsi results for Grade 8 students (14-year-olds), while a comparison with the Eurostat survey will be made considering the results of the quasi-adult students in Grade 13 (19-year-olds). The 2019 results – the latest we have since the 2020 survey was not held because of the coronavirus pandemic – showed that, along with other national indicators, the students' competence in these key areas covers a homogeneous range, that is to say, English follows the same distribution as Italian and mathematics.

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[6] Tables 3 and 4 summarize the results for English Listening and Reading, Table 5 for Italian and Table 6 for Mathematics using a points scale. Tables 7-10 report the results for the same subjects in the same order but using a level scale. All data refer to Grade 8 students.

In 2019, English Listening for Grade 8 gets a national average of 202, with the best region (Autonomous Province of Bolzano) at 219 and the worst one (Sicily) at 183. Nine regions out of 21 had a score less than, or equal to, the national average. English Reading got better success, with the national average at 203, high at 215 (Friuli Venezia Giulia) and low at 185 (Sicily). The CEFR level taken as a reference (as shown in Tables 3-4 and 7-8 in Appendix 1) was A2, so not a particularly high one.

In sum, what the Invalsi 2019 report tells us is that 60% of Italian mid-teenagers have an A2 level in English Listening, while 78% can comply with the A2 in Reading. These percentages are in line with the 2018 results, highlighting an improvement only in the South, which gained around ten points on average.

2.2.4   INVALSI 2019 for Grade 8 and OECD PISA 2018. A comparison

If we compare the INVALSI results in English with the ones in Italian (Tables 5 and 9 in Appendix 1), what strikes us is that in the national language and literature the score is some points lower (199) than in English (202-203). We get the same regional differences, though, with the North doing better and the South doing worse than the average. We added Tables 6 and 10 in Appendix 1 with the Mathematics data to show the homogeneity of results also in this subject for Grade 8 students.

We must consider, on the one hand, that in the three years of middle school in Italy, Italian, together with history and geography, is assigned 9 hours a week, while English 3 hours and an additional 2 hours are reserved to a second European Union language, usually French, Spanish or German. On the other side, the required level of Italian is 3 out of 5. INVALSI Level 3 descriptor states as follows:

> *Students single out one or more pieces of information explicitly given in a wide portion of the text, distinguishing it from non-pertinent others. They reconstruct the meaning of a part, or the whole, text by extracting implicit information from textual elements — e.g., punctuation or conjunctions — also through personal knowledge and experience. They understand the text's structure — e.g., titles, paragraphs, internal sections — and the functions of its constituting elements. They know and use common words and phrases, also not linked to usual situations. They know and use the basic forms and structures of grammar and their relative terminology.*

> *(INVALSI 2019 : 100, our translation)*

This, of course, is a bit more complicated than just grasping some words in a foreign language; the A2 level descriptor in overall Reading comprehension, in effect, only requires that a speaker "[c]an understand short, simple texts containing the highest frequency vocabulary, including a proportion of shared international vocabulary items." (Council of Europe 2020a : 54). The apparent proficiency in English is then far from being such.

The provisions of OECD's PISA level 2 descriptor sound somewhat similar to those of the INVALSI level 3 in Italian above:

> *Readers at Level 2 can identify the main idea in a piece of text of moderate length. They can understand relationships or construe meaning within a limited part of the text when the information is not prominent by producing basic inferences, and/or when the text(s) include some distracting information.*
>
> *They can select and access a page in a set based on explicit though sometimes complex prompts, and locate one or more pieces of information based on multiple, partly implicit criteria.*
>
> *Readers at Level 2 can, when explicitly cued, reflect on the overall purpose, or on the purpose of specific details, in texts of moderate length. They can reflect on simple visual or typographical features. They can compare claims and evaluate the reasons supporting them based on short, explicit statements.*
>
> *Tasks at Level 2 may involve comparisons or contrasts based on a single feature in the text. Typical reflective tasks at this level require readers to make a comparison or several connections between the text and outside knowledge by drawing on personal experience and attitudes.*
>
> *(OECD 2018, Chapter 15 : 14)*

Italy, as we have reported above in 2.2.2, stops at 476 when, according to the OECD cutpoints for the Reading scale, the threshold to stepping up to level 3 is 480.18 (OECD 2018, Ch. 15 : 14). At that level, competence and understanding are naturally higher and involve reasoning starting from often incomplete information, in texts where items are not so clearly identifiable and in the presence of some distracting factors. But 4 points are almost negligible if we consider that the level 2 band spans an amplitude of 72.71 points (from 407.47 to 480.18), thus we can state that Italy practically locates on the threshold between level 2 and level 3.

Putting all these pieces of information together, and considering the different measurement scales, we can safely say that the INVALSI and OECD PISA 2018 tests largely confirm each other's results, with the Italian students performing reasonably well in their (mostly) native language, a bare pass if we might put it in school terms. The situation is not fine, but neither is it such a disaster as it often gets reported about in the media.

Our "reasonably" adverb is grounded on the fact that we could, and should, do better because our direct competitors, as per size, population, economy and culture actually do better than us, so we should not be content with a bare pass. Another important reason for this partial dissatisfaction is that performing badly in one's national language may be linked with performing badly in foreign languages, as we will see below.

2.2.5   INVALSI 2019 Grade 13 and Europe 2020. A comparison

According to the Indicazioni nazionali per il curricolo (National guidelines for the school curriculum, MIUR 2010, Annex A, note 8), Italian students ending their Grade 13 should reach a B2 competence in English according to the CEFR of languages (Council of Europe 2020c), both in Reading and in Listening. But things have not gone as expected:

> *In the Listening test, the B2 level is attained by around 50% of students in the North-West and the North-East, and 36% in the Centre, while in the South and the South and the Islands only 21% and 16% of pupils, respectively, reach the set target.* **The average percentage of students at B2 level is 35% nationwide**: *in the Listening, then, the majority of Italian students is below the level where students should be by the end of the secondary schools.*

> *In the Reading test, things are better but the gap between macro-areas remains wide: in the North-West and the North-East the percentage of students reaching the B2 level is 65%, in the Centre 52%, in the South and the South and the Islands percentages fall to 41% and 34%.* **If we consider Italy in its entirety, only 52% of students align to the prescribed level**.

> *(INVALSI 2019 : 91, our translation, our emphasis)*

Apart from the usual label Italians like to stick to themselves – that "they have not got a gift for the foreign languages", which is undoubtedly true if one looks only at the outcomes without addressing the possible causes – the Invalsi surveys might lead to another consideration, too, if we compare the results in English to those in Italian: the differences in percentages between the macro-areas of the country (North-West, North-East, Centre, South, South and Islands) are strikingly similar for the two subjects.

Due to different statistical methods, the results in Italian (and mathematics) are not directly comparable to those in English, which was introduced only in 2018 and follows the now widely accepted CEFR A1-C2 scale. As we have seen in 2.2.3 above, examiners devised instead a scale of five levels (1-5) to measure the competence of students in Italian and mathematics. Do these data simply show that there is an age-old difference between the North and the South of the

country – and, in general, between the richer areas where education is considered an asset, and the poorer areas where necessity forces many people to choose between education and work – or do they suggest also that there is a possible correlation between the performances they have in Italian and the way they learn English? We think that the latter is the case.

If we compare the results for Grade 13 2019 to those of Europe 2020 reported in Table 2 above in 2.2.1 and measuring adult self-assessment in foreign languages, we find that in Italy only 25.5% of adults (25-64 y.o.) judge their level of competence in their best foreign language as Good. Given the three bands provided (Proficient, Good, Basic) we might assume that the Good level should be equivalent to an Intermediate (B) level in the CEFR, Proficient being C, and Basic being A. The INVALSI Grade 13 we have just examined see, on the other hand, a national average of 35% in Listening, and 52% in Reading, reaching B2 level.

In the Eurostat survey for the Good level (Table 2), Italy is 29th out of 35 participant countries. The European Union average is 30.3%, and the best performers are the Netherlands (42.1%), Finland (40.4%), and Belgium (38.7%). Italy (25.5%) ends up in the fourth quartile with Poland just above it (26.1%), and Czechia (25.4%), Estonia (25.1%), the UK (24.9%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (23.0%), Ireland (22.2%) and Luxembourg (21.7%) below. In all the countries either there is more than one language widely spoken (Estonia, Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Luxembourg), or the official language is an international language (the UK), or the number of languages spoken is above the EU average (Czechia, see Table 1 for One foreign language and Two foreign languages, with Three foreign languages just below the EU average; Poland, see Table 1 for One foreign language, well above the EU average). All these countries have then other areas where they can compensate for their relatively bad performance, while Italy has only a One foreign language percentage some points above the EU average.

Taking into account that INVALSI Grade 13 is administered to 19-year-old students and the evaluation is external, while Europe 2020 asked 25-64-year-old people to assess themselves, this comparison is not scientifically valid if not for giving us only a broad range where to locate Italian speakers of foreign languages. Of course, young people in their late teens are today facilitated by the abundance of material in English available on the internet and in more traditional formats, while people in their sixties (who ended their second school cycles in the

1970s) did not benefit from such repositories and therefore may have had fewer chances of practising and improving their knowledge of foreign languages during their lives.

This notwithstanding, a fact can be inferred from these data: Italians as a whole usually locate in the lower-second or third quartile in any ranking concerning the knowledge or performance in foreign languages. Only the richer and better-organized areas in the North manage to reach the upper-second, or even the first quartile in some rare cases. As we have seen, our competitor countries regularly do better than us, because either their school systems are better organized or they benefit from the comparative advantage of natively speaking international languages: this is maybe one of the reasons why the publication of these surveys almost always causes distress and self-harming headlines. All in all, things are not so bad even though there is ample room for improvement.

In the next chapter, we will examine some international textbooks for English which have been adopted in many Italian high schools to see if some of the shortcomings of the Italian performance in English can be traced to the manuals in use to teach English.

Chapter 3

The (un)intended consequences of standardized textbooks

In this chapter, we are going to examine three different textbooks, together with their companion teacher's books, widely adopted in Italian secondary schools and published by renowned international publishing houses: National Geographic Learning, Oxford University Press, the Pearson Longman group. The textbooks are presented with examples from their learning units, reported in Appendix 2, 3 and 4, respectively, and analysed from the practical and theoretical point of view, referring to the structuralist framework provided by Genette's studies *Palimpsests* and *Paratexts* (Genette 1997a; 1997b), paying particular attention to the paratexts, since we believe Genette's idea that much information about a book comes from what surrounds its text, rather than from the text itself:

> *For us, accordingly,* ***the paratext is what enables a text to become a book*** *and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold, or - a word Borges used apropos of a preface - a 'vestibule' that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back.*
>
> *(Genette 1997b : 1-2, our emphasis)*

The level we have focussed on in the choice for the textbooks is A2/B1, so as to have a consistent term of comparison with the surveys we have reported in Chapter 2 (OECD PISA, INVALSI) focussing on the competence of young learners (indicatively Grade 8, 13-15 years old). The aim of this chapter is to try to establish if there is a link between the textbooks used in schools and the rankings in those surveys for English.

3.1 *Life*. Pre-intermediate, second edition (National Geographic Learning, 2019)

National Geographic Learning is an imprint part of the Cengage group, an editorial conglomerate created in 2007 after buying out the Thomson Learning branch, then part of the Thomson Corporation, in turn now known as the Thomson Reuters Corporation after a merger with the famous press agency. This editorial brand, then, has long lost any real connection with the namesake National Geographic Society, whose name, logo, and contents it uses under license.

As they state on their corporate website:

> *Cengage is the global education and technology company built for learners. Cengage's products and services create learning experiences that build confidence and momentum toward the future students want. Cengage is united by a single belief that every student has the potential to be unstoppable. Confident students are successful learners, so Cengage designs tools that keep them moving toward their goals.*
>
> *We enrich the relationship between educators and students by:*
> • *Putting students at the centre of all product development*
> • *Partnering with educators to create solutions, share student insight*
> • *Providing curated content in new delivery models to empower libraries as they transform into centres of learning*
>
> *(About Cengage, https://www.cengage.co.uk/education/cengage/, last accessed 11 April 2021)*

Apart from the obvious positive view on learning, the language used evokes the user-centricity loved by companies wanting to entice potential customers, in this case, prospective and present students. This is clear from the emphasis put on "products" (first line), placed at the closest distance possible from "learners", and the insistence on learning being an "experience" (second line) just like the buying of any other product that satisfies a consumerist drive. "The future students want" may be read as another wording for "the customer is always right", since here teachers, institutions, or states are factors with reduced power in the education formula, a fact not only profoundly unfair but also factually wrong. They are taken into account (second and third points in the list), but only to make "what students want" concrete, then subordinating some actors that should be on an equal par with the others.

The book appears as a very refined typographic product, made to impress with its high-quality pagination on glazed paper and curated typesetting. The student's book (Hugues et al. 2019) does not contain any reference as per the theoretical framework employed in designing it. We may find something interesting in the Teachers' book (Sayer 2019), where the Introduction explains in detail how the book is structured. It starts with the assumption that:

> *The topics are paramount and are the starting point for lessons. These topics have been selected for their intrinsic interest and ability to fascinate. The richness of the texts means that students are so engaged in learning about the content, and expressing their own opinions, that language learning has to take place in order for students to satisfy their curiosity and then react personally to what they have learned. **This element of transfer from the topics to students' own realities and experiences converts the input into a vehicle for language practice and production** which fits the recognized frameworks for language learning and can be mapped to the CEFR scales.*
>
> *(8, our emphasis)*

The words in bold in the above excerpt only confirm a fact that we will see more clearly below: it is the learner who has to adapt to the book, rather than the book that adapts to different types of learners. The commitment of *Life* to other state-of-the-art issues in modern ELT is evident also in the reference to critical thinking and its implementation in every book unit, defined as "the ability to develop and use an analytical and evaluative approach to learning" (9), and in the methodology concerning memorization, grammar and vocabulary. The references it makes, however, are outdated or marginal to ELT: the only book cited, and only for reporting a datum on human brain memorization, is *Working with words*, by Ruth Gairns and Stuart Redman (Gairns & Redman 1986), a handbook for language teachers published by Cambridge University Press long ago; plus, there is a reference to the "SUCCESS factors" in memorization, an acronym standing for "Simplicity, Unexpectedness, Concreteness, Credibility, Emotion and Stories" (10), without properly citing its source. Maybe because this is taken from a motivational book aimed at improving management leadership, *Made to Stick: Why some ideas survive and others die*, by Chip Heath and Dan Heath (2007), not exactly a study on language teaching.

Even if the methodological framework is not presented with due scientific rigour, the book practically does what it promises using colourful, compelling images to elicit the students' interest and make the "study experience" a momentous, memorable and motivating one. If we take as an example Unit 1C of the book (some pages of which are included in Appendix 2), we can see that it actually focuses on critical thinking among other things and tries to have students reflect on one of the most important issues we are facing today, nature and our relationship with it. Another fact is that the book adheres to the Direct method, given that it is entirely in English, including its grammar section.

The way this book presents topics is certainly up-to-date and engaging, and no observations can be advanced towards the choice of examples, the exercises accurately geared to the expected level (A2/B1), the word lists proposed, the essential but complete grammar summaries, or even its typography, which is very well curated and in itself up to the National Geographic Society's famous strict standards. If we take a look at the Teacher's book (Sayer 2019), the prompts to lesson 1C are very detailed and instructors just need to follow the directions provided to flow smoothly from beginning to end. In sum, the overall impression of such a book is reassuring, it

does not frighten readers – A2-level students might feel overwhelmed if faced with too much information – and provides a sleek, simple and straightforward path to get to B1 while promising to lead, if followed scrupulously, to the coveted proficiency in English.

All is well? It depends, as usual. From the point of view of Cengage, its American mother company, a book which is typeset in Britain, printed in Spain and distributed in 52 countries all over the world of course cannot risk failing its purpose because it represents a substantial investment. This big corporation already filed for bankruptcy in 2013, so one might presume they would rather tend to play safe with such ventures. As they candidly admit in their clichéd proposition, language learning is an experience, so books are designed to make that experience pleasant, intentionally building a world where everything works perfectly if you just follow their pre-set steps. While delivering what promises, so being perfectly honest about that, this book paints a pink-hued picture of language learning thus inducing learners to believe that this is a smooth, easy process. It wilfully dodges some fundamental issues in language learning, though, such as common mistakes, difficulties, incomprehension, and does not take into any consideration the learners' native languages, then failing to connect to existing cultural backgrounds.

3.2   *Identity.* A2 to B1 (Oxford University Press, 2019)

The authoritativeness of the Oxford University Press in scientific publications is beyond any reasonable doubt, and this aura naturally extends to its products dedicated to the languages, from the monumental Oxford English Dictionary, today the ultimate authority on English language, down to textbooks. There are many products dedicated to ELT in the OUP catalogue, and one of the upsides of this publishing house is that it is, or at least strives to appear, more sensitive than others to the different needs of learners in different parts of the world. In Italy, they distribute many titles for the secondary schools: *English File*, a course with a focus on speaking; *Insight*, more leaning to writing; the best-sellers *Headway* and *Network*, sorts of all-rounders in language teaching; and *Language for life* and *Venture*, other good products addressing language, in

the publisher's words, under a "holistic approach"[7]. *Identity* is perhaps their most basic series, centred on the needs of very weak learners who are at a loss with English-related things. Having decided to focus on this kind of learners, this title looked like the most suitable Oxford publication to analyse.

Identity (Leonard 2019a), in line with its purpose, is designed as a tool for everyday, intensive use. Larger characters make its pages look bigger than other textbooks (even if they are not), enriched with lots of graphic and visual elements to help students relate words to images, but not as intrusive as to raise a sense of awe towards it. The book consists of 12 units (like many of its competitors, including *Life*), and has a very rich "workbook" section in the second part of the volume, providing no fewer than 8 pages of Grammar – as many as the units' – and additional practice for every unit that includes also translation and dictation exercises. The final part of the book is dedicated to life skills, school- and work-related topics and a useful English-Italian glossary, for a total of 310 pages, while its companion Teacher's pack (Leonard 2019b) consists of 192 pages. Samples of some pages from Unit 1 and its related grammar section, together with the Teacher's pack pages, can be found in Appendix 3.

The book's mini-website advertises that "[t]his course was written specifically to respond to the needs of English teachers in Italy's upper secondary schools: it is TEEN-CENTRED and TEACHER-FRIENDLY" (original capitals)[8], even though from its very structure it is clear that this is not a standardized product but a thoroughly localized one. As many as 56 Italian teachers of English are acknowledged on the colophon page for their collaboration and suggestions on how to adapt this English course to an Italian audience, while in the units' Grammar sections all critical explanations and exercise directions are given in Italian, unlike *Life*.

However, this book too is very sparing in referencing, even more than *Life*, since it does not mention any scientific source that guided or at least inspired its design. It only states that "the course has been informed by best practice principles developed by the Oxford University Press expert panel." (Leonard 2019b : 3). We all trust the Oxford University Press experts, but a more detailed reference would have been welcome in order to see if the principles they set out

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[7] https://elt.oup.com/catalogue/items/local/it/l4l/?cc=it&selLanguage=it&mode=hub (last accessed 11 April 2021)
[8] https://elt.oup.com/feature/it/identity/?cc=it&selLanguage=it (last accessed 11 April 2021)

were actually met in practice. The only guidelines that might help us are on the same page, in the "Aims and methodology" paragraph:

> *Above all, Identity is designed to motivate teenagers and to get all students to actively participate in class while equipping them with the language and the life skills that they need to succeed.*
> • *Live it: Identity prepares students for real life.*
> • *Tell it: Identity gives students all the tools to communicate effectively.*
> • *Share it: Identity suits all learning styles.*
>
> *The course has been informed by extensive research with teachers in Italy, whose feedback has been invaluable in shaping this course. Identity supports teachers to:*
> • *Engage and motivate students [...]*
> • *Get students to speak in class [...]*
> • *Get students to where they need to be [...]*
> • *Include all students in the class [...]*
> • *Use classroom time effectively [...]*
>
> <div align="right">(Leonard 2019b : 3)</div>

As further evidence that words matter, the "experience" tag so cardinal in *Life* here is used only once and to refer to students' "personal experience" (3), that is, in its proper meaning. Apart from that, the student-centric approach is evident in this work's structure, giving learners quasi-total prominence and reclassifying teachers as facilitators, as per the latest developments in teaching methodology. Nonetheless, under the heading "Get students to where they need to be", the author details what follows:

> *The content has been designed with key educational targets in mind. Topics and activity types have been chosen to help students build the competences and the 21st century **skills that they will need as they move into the world of employment**. At the same time, the language content and activity types prepare students for the B1 Preliminary for Schools exam and INVALSI.*
>
> <div align="right">(3, our emphasis)</div>

This course, then, underlines importantly that English is what students "need", either for work or to take a certification (or both). The motivation factors recalled above are of course taken into account, but need is not the most important of them, as already demonstrated by Dörnyei (2001), in that it is a negative emotion triggered by extrinsic factors that can actually press or force someone to learn, but certainly is not as powerful a driver as intrinsic emotions such as love or curiosity. It is a factor that one should leverage on only secondarily and to complement more motivating emotions, otherwise the risk is to draw one's efforts on a powerful but also stressful emotion.

3.3 *Activating Grammar,* digital edition (Pearson Italia, 2011)

This book (Gallagher & Galuzzi 2011), like the previous one, decided to take a local approach and benefited from the contributions of 24 Italian teachers to its development. Although published in 2011, this Grammar is still being reprinted and frequently accompanies more recent textbooks in school book lists as a companion reference for English grammar, including many exercises and revision tests, as well, that make it a complete course in itself for those who wish to have only one "no-frills" text that covers a comprehensive range of topics in its 540 pages.

The very concise Presentazione section (pages 2-4), written in Italian, explains from the outset that

> *[t]his is a reference and practical grammar of English language, aimed specifically at Italian students. Articulated on two levels (**Basic** and **Learn more**), it can be used flexibly from Beginner to Post-intermediate levels.*
>
> <div align="right">(Gallagher & Galuzzi 2011 : 2; original emphasis, our translation)</div>

The theoretical framework it uses, from what we can infer, is that of the Communicative approach:

> ***Activating Grammar Digital Edition*** *stresses not only **formal correctness** but also **real communicative practice**. The exercises move gradually from a mechanical practice to a less controlled one, reinforcing the **communicative use** and creating a **real context** through a wide variety of texts (dialogues, newspaper articles, instructions, advertisements, notices, questionnaires, letters, e-mails, narrative excerpts).*
>
> <div align="right">(Gallagher & Galuzzi 2011 : 2; original emphasis, our translation)</div>

Like others, it includes a section dedicated to linguistic certificates (PET and FCE, according to its A1-B2+ level) but one notable difference between this book and its competitors is the prominence it gives to translation, an exercise maybe too much neglected today and considered old-fashioned in modern language learning theories. Translation exercises are dedicated 34 pages in a special Translation dossier at the end of the book. Here, as throughout the whole book, instructions are given in Italian and of course particular attention is paid to the rendering of some tricky constructions when translated from Italian into English. Appendix 4 includes samples from this book's sections, including the Translation dossier.

However, the Teacher's Test and Resource Book (Gallagher et al. 2011), does not provide further insight on the methods than the ones we find in the book destined to students. The only

additional hint as per its aims is the paragraph explaining (this time in English) that cognitive skills are one of their dedicated areas in designing the book:

> **Activating Grammar Digital Edition** *is a **grammar trainer**. It offers a "percorso di apprendimento" which not only teaches students grammar but also progressively develops cognitive skills and competence.*
>
> 1. *Every exercise takes into account what point the students are in the learning process. […]*
>
> 2. *Procedural or conceptual difficulties that the students may have are often pre-empted and the explanations and exercises are designed to help the student overcome these difficulties. The practice exercises in **Activating Grammar Digital Edition** don't test knowledge but develop ability by showing students the questions they need to ask themselves to produce the correct form.*
>
> *(Gallagher et al. 2011 : 5; original emphasis)*

Once again, it is difficult not to agree with such sensible propositions. Besides, the fact that its exercises are aimed at comprehension and not evaluation may help students use this book more comfortably than other books designed only to complete pre-set tasks. Its length, however, may deter if one wished to use it as the main textbook for learning English and not simply as a reference book to be consulted only when needed. Maybe aware of this, the book designers decided to include a number of black-and-white illustrations by one of the most famous Italian comic artists, Giacomo Pueroni, who frequently collaborated with Sergio Bonelli Editore, in order to give pages breaks and rhythm and make the book's look-and-feel lighter. In the next paragraph, we are going to analyse and compare the ideas behind the books we have examined.

3.4   The ideas behind the books. A comparison

As we have seen, many clues about the process and purpose of a book can be easily inferred from a book's paratext, i.e., its cover, colophon, forewords and graphic layout, among other elements (Genette 1997b). Even the use of colours can be indicative of what a book is after: *Life* (Hugues et al. 2019), for example, is masterly paged and one cannot but be impressed by its good looks, starting from its colourful cover. The production details, though, as well as a more rigorous glance at its contents, quickly expose its nature of a standardised product aimed at a blurred "world audience", trying to fly high on transnational topics but in the end never landing on something linked to any particular, local situation. Although an aesthetically appreciable editorial object, this book hardly catches the heart of learners because by not wanting to tackle any

national particularities it always remains far away from what a learner normally does, i.e., to link their native culture to the one they are learning. The absence of culture-specific references, and most of all of the reference to culture-specific common mistakes, makes it a somewhat alien book, a book to which students have to adapt, and not the other way round. A nice thing full of stunning photos but of limited practical use. If success in learning EFL is what it wants, probably only already motivated students can find anything useful in it.

Identity (Leonard 2019a), on the other hand, is a book that clearly states that it is "for Italian teachers" and "teen-centred", and makes it a point of being localized rather than globalized. Given the competence level it aims at (B1), this seems the more natural strategy to adopt, because learners at a low level may feel discouraged if confronted with something too detached from their experience, or at least not properly linked with their actual knowledge. It makes things simple and straight, with a basic layout that does not distract but efficiently complements its contents. In sum, it is a book that presents itself as an honest guide to EFL.

The last book we have examined, *Activating Grammar Digital Edition* (Gallagher & Galuzzi 2011), is a comprehensive grammar structured on parallel tiers to cover both beginner and intermediate students including different levels of language insight. Of the three books, it is the one with the simplest layout, printed in two colours with no photos but only illustrations, and the only one including an Italian-English Translation section.

From this very short comparison, and having already underlined some of the more evident differences between them, one feature can be certainly ascribed to all of these books: although in varying degrees, they all assume that learners all know their native languages – Italian, in our case – at a proficient level, presumably equivalent to a C1-C2, because they never make any reference to Italian syntax, grammar or vocabulary except in translations. Differences in the use of verb tenses, for example, are never treated exhaustively and contrastively, and neither are articles, one of the most difficult parts of speech to use in English for Italians. Only *Activating Grammar* (Gallagher & Galuzzi 2011), due to its nature, tries to refresh the basics of the parts of speech while illustrating the English. As we will see in the next paragraph, this is a gross mistake and failing to acknowledge that learners are a motley crew and not a monolithic entity inevitably leads to a course's failure. This looks like a problem in setting the reader model. As Eco

postulated in his *The Role of the Reader* (Eco 1979), the reader model is certainly useful from a writer's point of view to have a fictional "someone" who to address our writings to. But if this true for novel writing or even for academic writing, it can be a deceptive device to use in the case of textbooks for learning a foreign language.

Why should it be? To understand the reasons maybe it is better to look at the ambits where it is already employed profitably. Novels are the usually considered example of a use for reader models because they draw on common knowledge from a cultural background, and they usually want to be successful. Some parameters to consider a novel successful may be sales, influence on culture or other works, citations, adaptations. In a word, if the message of the novel survives and consolidates, it may be considered a successful story. To achieve this goal, cooperation on the part of readers is not only appreciated but essential, although if some people do not cooperate because they do not get involved by the reading, this does not seem to mar it. In Italy today the potential audience for a novel is millions of people, but selling some 10,000 copies is already considered a success[9] – not counting that of those who have bought some might have not liked it. The reader model of novels, then, is a useful trick for writers but it is not the writing device that many deem essential, if only for its low efficacy ratio.

If we take academic writing, today we have many marketing-inspired KPIs – Key Performance Indicators – among which citations, impact factor, medians, organization of talks and conferences, etc. The higher the numbers, the better the success, in the belief that higher numbers represent wider public recognizance and more widespread research – but do they represent that? There are increasingly authoritative studies which show that the "publish or perish" formula has created more background noise in research than veritable insight on valuable topics (Neill 2008; Rawat & Meena 2014). A simple search in Google Scholar for "publish or perish academia" returns more than 40,000 results, not including the books and articles related to the ones listed on the search engine results page. Most of them present this practice as evidently damaging the quality of research, but it is kept alive in many education systems along with other crude financially-inspired indicators like the GDP simply because it is a simple,

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[9] This article in Italian details some figures on the sales of books in Italy for some successful novelists, some of whom must stick to their previous jobs, though, because of poor revenues: https://ilmiolibro.kataweb.it/articolo/scrivere/851/la-scrittura-non-paga-insegnanti-editor-o-impiegati-il-vero-lavoro-dei-romanzieri/ (last accessed 11 April 2021)

straightforward way to judge a performance. A number representing the complex value of a person's output. Does it ring a bell? Yes, the same way a student's output is judged in a single, all-encompassing and easy-to-understand number, so are professors and so is something even more complex as a country's economy. Simplicity is key, but can it all be reduced to simple terms?

If we get back to the original question – is it worthwhile to adopt a reader model in writing a language textbook? – I hope it is clear now the reason why not: because it reduces the complexity of a population – a class, a school, an entire age group – in three lines of a descriptor, as we will see below. This is why these books we have analysed all fail, in a sense, against the goal they want to get to. They assume A2, B1, C1, etc. as homogeneous classes of people all equal, all with the same knowledge and the same cultural references. Of course, there is a degree in failure: *Life* (Hugues et al. 2019), is perhaps the least fit for a truly intercultural education because it does not make any references to local culture and considers an indistinct world scenario as a taken-for-granted reality[10] which it is not, whatever the point of view. *Identity* (Leonard 2019a) at least tries to approach the English language from an Italian point of view, explaining everything in English, though, and so implying that the best way to learn a language is learning it in its own terms, which is the same assumption at the base of the CLIL methodology. *Activating Grammar* (Gallagher & Galuzzi 2011) builds a sturdier bridge between the two languages, as we have seen, including many passages and directions in Italian, dedicating a section to Italian-English translation, and recapitulating the basics of syntax when tackling the parts of speech. It fails better, in Beckett's words, inasmuch as it takes for granted the basic knowledge of grammatical structures in one's mother tongue. That is, to return to our statement, it fails like the others in the reader model it postulates, but getting closer to the expected goal.

Why is this reader model always taken up, then?

The reader model is more often than not based on the Council of Europe's CEFR descriptors, and it is unfit for these purposes because this framework

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[10] "Taken-for-granted" is a definition for the world or reality we assume as true in our social group. It was coined by the Austrian philosopher and sociologist Alfred Schütz (1899-1959).

> *[…] describes **in a comprehensive way** what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively.*

<div align="right">(Council of Europe, Use of the CEFR[11], our emphasis)</div>

It is the "comprehensive way" part that is key for us to understand here because we do not want to demonstrate that the CEFR is responsible for all evils, but only that it has been used as a go-to solution to be applied to all syllabi and books, a ready-made pattern to stick to and get an expected outcome. The Council of Europe itself has long stated that they did not want to create a standard but only to provide a tool:

> *One thing should be made clear right away. We have NOT set out to tell practitioners what to do, or how to do it. We are raising questions, not answering them. It is not the function of the Common European Framework to lay down the objectives that users should pursue or the methods they should employ.*

<div align="right">(CEFR 2001, Notes to the User, cited in Council of Europe 2020a : 29, original capitals)</div>

Standardisation is good, as we have been experimenting in the last 70 years in the systems of measurement, safety standards, medical protocols and many more fields. But standardisation is fine with what can be standardised. Language, alas, is one of those fields where it is extremely difficult to assess one's competence using a universal measure and trying to encompass in a standardised way what a person knows, in a single number or acronym, is always a risky business. More than risky, it is unfair as a philosophical and political principle, because complex matters cannot – cannot – have simple reductionist solutions. The CEFR should have been used to assess candidates, which is acceptable as a practical reference because languages are taught and need some sort of evaluation for linguistic certificates or at school, but it ended up creating the candidates themselves. The proof is, that all the books considered here – and the many more on the market – include a section dedicated to PET, FCE, TOEFL, and all the certificates of English that are so sought after today. With so much demand created, it is logical that supply should follow suit, therefore books not only try to include as much reference as possible to what we can find in these certificates, they are asked to do it, otherwise they risk not being purchased by prospective candidates, that is, students and schools adopting them as textbooks. It is a market logic that they created in the first place.

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[11] https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/uses-and-objectives (last accessed 11 April 2021)

That the situation is not what these books envisage is proved by the statistics cited above in Chapter 2 apropos of the Italian students' knowledge of their native language, certainly not a proficient one, according to the CEFR own descriptors. If we examine the results of the INVALSI tests of Italian for Grade 8 students, we will see that levels 1-3 are attained by the majority of candidates, leaving less than 40% to levels 4-5, which can be considered levels of proficiency since level 3 is considered the level of reference to be obtained by the Indicazioni nazionali (INVALSI 2019 : 9). Grade 13 students, the same who should possess a B2 level of English at the end of upper secondary schools, according to the Indicazioni nazionali, do more or less the same, with fewer than 40% reaching the corresponding proficient levels 4 and 5 for their grade (INVALSI 2019 : 9).

3.5   The missing link. The limits of learning English as L2 as we know it

Language, like many other things, does not work the way *Life* and the other books expect. Of course, it is important to proceed in stages and one cannot crash-learn everything at once, but since English has a particular status as a de facto lingua franca today, and almost everyone (and especially young learners) is exposed to English-produced contents every day and on every media, we cannot simply ignore that real English is actually an imperfect language, full of variations and actual mistakes, even if somehow licensed ones, especially in songs and movies where slangs are spoken. We also cannot ignore that English, though a simple language syntactically speaking, is a very tricky one with regard to vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation. A very detailed introduction on the relationship between English and Italian should be carried out at the beginning of every course, and recalled from time to time, because even if English today influences the Italian of 2020s, it is also true that for centuries literary Italian has influenced English, too, along with French, Latin and Greek. And not a little, as the language historian John Algeo underlines:

> [A]n overwhelming majority of the words in any large dictionary, as well as many we use everyday, either came from other languages or were coined from elements of foreign words. So the foreign component in our word stock is of great importance.

> (Algeo 2009 : 247-8)

The Encyclopedia Britannica, in an entry[12] compiled for it by Simeon Potter and David Crystal, among others, corroborates this fact with impressive figures:

> *The vocabulary of Modern English is approximately a quarter Germanic (Old English, Scandinavian, Dutch, German) and **two-thirds Italic or Romance** (especially Latin, French, Spanish, Italian), with copious and increasing importations from Greek in science and technology and with considerable borrowings from more than 300 other languages.*
>
> *("English Language. Vocabulary" entry, our emphasis)*

With these data in mind, we can see that in the books we have examined there is a wilful dismissal of an(other) inconvenient truth: English not only is not pure — just like any other language on earth — but also is even more "impure", so to say, than other languages we are familiar with and especially Italian. This seems to be a problem for language teaching book authors because if you acknowledge that a language originates from many sources, it is difficult then to build a strong, centralized idea of culture acting as a beacon — another failure of the simplistic *reductio ad unum* principle. The old myth of an *âge d'or* when everything was at its height in a compact, perfect unity of minds, bodies and lands, has always existed and still retains its fascination and power. But language studies have evolved and it is time that this variety of influences, far from complicating things, be instead brought to the fore and exploited in all its potential, because in all those influences, in the wealth of cognates from Romance that populate English, we might find many a hook to anchor English to the Romance world, and hence to Italian, with the goal not only to learn a new language but to shed light on one's own native language, too. A small step towards intercomprehension, and a big step to reverse the mainstream narrative according to which world languages and especially European languages are being irreversibly colonized by English: data understandable by students of all ages show that this is not the case simply because it is the European languages, and French and Italian first among them, that colonized English in the first place, then we might rephrase the question as a (partial) reappropriation of what was once ours — to some people, this may sound extremely reassuring in cultural terms and set up a positive attitude towards the learning of foreign languages.

Publishers and authors advertise positive experiences, where students should never hurt or feel lost. As Don Draper, the leading character in the *Mad Men* series played by Jon Hamm, used

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[12] Also available at https://www.britannica.com/topic/English-language/Vocabulary (last accessed 11 April 2021)

to say: "Advertising is based on one thing: happiness" (*Mad Men*, season 1, episode 1). If you want to sell your book or your idea, quite logically you do not start advertising it by recalling bad feelings such as hardship or difficulties. We are used to a circular image of a smooth flow and a gamification effect rather than to a broken line, a zigzag path, or a convoluted journey with no certain destination. If we pictured language as the result of the erratic deeds of many actors in disagreement, rather than the perfect design of one all-knowing mastermind, it would be easy to discourage learners. But this is what it is, as any English language history reports (van Gelderen 2014; Crystal 2003), and telling otherwise would be telling a lie. Maybe the many disappointments we record in teaching and learning languages have a connection with the fact that learners expect to get a clear-cut, measurable and finished product – perhaps because of the books, as we have seen – when they actually get an imperfect, faulty and mutable tool, which becomes soon obsolete if not used regularly. Teachers and educational systems alike can be held accountable for this, too, given the need to produce measurable results of their job.

This does not mean that language learning, or learning at all, has to come back to the old days when studying hard was the only method. Thanks to modern studies, as we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2.1 above, now we know we have at least more than one option as for how to learn. Old schools did not want to motivate – quite the opposite, in effect – and now we know that motivation is key to learning. Today's schools and textbooks compete in trying to pave the way for students of all ages, gamifying the learning experience, making education "funny", rendering subjects once tough "easy". But while methods have changed, the substance stays the same, so that it is virtually impossible to get any good results if you do not study more than what is given you. Textbooks and programmes, however, are now designed around expected outcomes and they somehow make students believe that all they need to know lies in those colourful leaflets and they do not need to know anything else. Not unlike bad recipe books where amateur cooks are tempted with "easy" ways to devise complicate dishes.

In the years, books have become more friendly to the needs of students, and this is a good point. The amount of things to know has not changed, though, and to be proficient in languages students have to know the same things as our ancestors of 50, 500 or 5000 years ago had. On the contrary, global knowledge has greatly grown so there are more, and not fewer, things to

know and then to study. This is one of the reasons, in my opinion, why students apparently perform well when at school and crash so sadly against the wall of real life. Schools and universities demand less so that it is easier to meet expectations, simply because expectations have lowered.

Thinking of one of the books we talked about above, *Activating Grammar*, so-called back translation, in effect, is today frowned upon in the common practice of language teaching while it is one point that should not be avoided since it is a normal operation performed by weak FL and L2 speakers – and also strong ones, at times. While books based on the Communicative approach profess to be all content and little grammar, they frequently overlook the fact that learners need to practice translation in their minds for many years before being able to "think in English" and interiorize grammatical structures alien to them. Admitting to this simple fact and guiding them in translating from Italian into English would do some good to the acquisition of their second language.

As we have anticipated in the previous paragraph, one common mistake on the part of language learning and teaching textbooks is assuming that learners master their first language. If we look at the descriptors of the C1 and C2 levels of the Council of Europe's CEFR, we might find that the requirements are pretty high, and we are not sure that even the majority of adult, educated people may match these features:

> *C2. Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.*
>
> *C1. Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.*
>
> *(Council of Europe 2020b)*

As Maryanne Wolf, director of the Center for Dyslexia, Diverse Learners and Social Justice at UCLA, wrote in an article[13], the attention needed to "understand a wide range of demanding,

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[13] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/25/skim-reading-new-normal-maryanne-wolf (last accessed 11 April 2021)

longer texts" as specified already in the C1 profile is constantly decreasing in our society and we rather skim than actually read texts. And this is a phenomenon that is touching also those who are not "digital natives", a label that has had much luck lately but misrepresents the phenomenon of the pervasiveness of digital devices. The link between the spread of digital devices in society and the age of users is only one of the predictors of a decreased attention threshold, as the educators Helsper and Eynon already demonstrated in their paper "Digital natives: where is the evidence?" (Helsper & Eynon 2010), so maybe presuming that young learners aged 14 or 15 – not to speak of adults – can overcome the effects of digital distraction only in reason of their age is optimistic, to say the least.

Statistics and tests return data that are not transparent per se and must be interpreted. When the summaries of standardised tests like the ones we have seen in Chapter 2 are made public, Italian newspapers like to make headlines with the supposed bad results of young Italian students at school[14]. But the same newspapers also like to make headlines with the outstanding results of Italian researchers, at home and abroad, for example when they sweep ERC grants[15], to testify the goodness of our school system. These points seem in contradiction since most of those researchers were once students in the same public schools that fared so badly, and in the public universities that never made it in the first 100 of international higher education rankings[16][17]. A question spontaneously arises: what if these contrasting performances depended on the parameters used to assess them, and not on the subjects? After all, we have now learned that results depend on the intelligence model we adopt to teach and assess students, as Gardner (Gardner 1983) and Robinson (Robinson 2010; 2011) demonstrated, among others. Once again, in other words, the reader model we postulate for our lessons is responsible for their success.

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[14]   https://www.corriere.it/scuola/secondaria/cards/ocse-pisa-2018-studenti-italiani-non-sanno-piu-leggere-voi-superereste-test/italiani-piu-deboli-lettura-che-matematica_principale.shtml (last accessed 11 April 2021)

[15]   https://www.corriere.it/scuola/universita/cards/borse-ricerca-all-italia-ne-vanno-17-ma-italiani-sono-piu-premiati/i-progetti-premiati_principale.shtml (last accessed 11 April 2021)

[16]   https://www.corriere.it/scuola/universita/cards/universita-sapienza-prima-italia-classifica-cwur/roma_principale.shtml   (last accessed 11 April 2021)

[17]   https://www.corriere.it/scuola/universita/cards/universita-ranking-times-higher-education-bologna-sant-anna-normale-pisa-top/bologna-top_principale.shtml (last accessed 11 April 2021). I chose examples only from one widespread Italian newspaper, *Corriere della sera*, to underline the differences in tone of headlines, but the same schizophrenia takes place more or less unaltered in all other newspapers, national and local.

As regards universities, the answer is easy: rankings are built taking into account only results and excluding the financial dowries they have to get those results. A more correct approach would correlate the value for money spent, a basic financial principle that has been mostly overlooked in these popular rankings. A think tank of Italian academics tried to adjust these data and what they obtained was that, as they suspected, Italian universities and the research system are better than what rankings tell, and particularly international rankings[18]. So, maybe in adopting the same prospect we have overlooked something in the evaluation of schools, too.

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[18] https://www.roars.it/online/classifica-arwu-14-universita-italiane-meglio-di-harvard-e-stanford-come-value-for-money/ (last accessed 11 April 2021), and in general the Classifiche internazionali section of the Roars (Return on Academic Research and School) website: https://www.roars.it/online/category/classifiche-internazionali/ (last accessed 11 April 2021).

Chapter 4

No strangers, only far-removed relatives

One of the issues that have emerged from the statistics and tests we have examined so far is that learners might not know formally enough about their own native language, and maybe one of the possible strategies in the research to link the two languages and not depress motivation could be both to highlight their similarities and to tackle some false assumptions about English and Italian. As Byram and Hu point out, "It is a fortunate circumstance that many people in Europe can profit from the fact that the great majority of its languages belong to one of three 'language families': The Romance […], the Germanic […], the Slavonic" (Byram & Hu 2013, "Intercomprehension. Developments in Europe"). Having only three families, that for more than a millennium have been in contact in the same densely populated and relatively small continent, means that those families have never been estranged and many are the points of contact and the (especially linguistic) exchanges that took place – and that still do.

In the following paragraphs, we are going to examine some possible strands of intervention that in our experience have brought some fruit in raising the learners' awareness of this tight relationship between our two languages. In the following Chapter 5, these lines will be translated into a proposal to introduce five topics of English grammar and syntax in lessons that can be instrumental in reinforcing contextually an Italian formal competence.

4.1   "Literary" Italian v "natural" English. Language awareness enhanced

Aiello (2018), in her field research on English teaching in two Italian cities, underlines how regional differences are still strong, recalling that

> [i]n the mid-nineteenth century, Prince Klemens Metternich remarked that Italy was simply a geographic expression, a peninsula rather than a nation. The North of Italy had close cultural ties to France, Germany and Austria; Central Italy was closely connected to the Vatican; while the Bourbons ruled the South for nearly 400 years. **To this day, Italians often identify themselves as inhabitants of individual cities of Italy rather than citizens of the Italian nation**.
>
> (Aiello 2018 : 32, our emphasis)

Metternich's famous quote has had a long and somehow undeserved life in political literature: in his times, south of the Alps there was only a collection of many small states with next to nothing in common, so he simply described a matter of fact. The *Risorgimento* patriots who wanted a united Italy following the model of France, Spain and Britain – and the other continental movements that predicated larger and centralized state entities for Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, even Switzerland – took it in its radical, judgmental value, implying that they might also be united politically, but still, the Italian states did not have anything in common, not even the language.

The language question, even more than the cultural one, has always been a key issue in the Italian political debate. Another famous quip that encompassed Italy's troubled cultural situation is the one pronounced by one of the protagonists of 19th-century Italian affairs, marquis Massimo D'Azeglio, Prime Minister of Sardinia from 1849 to 1852, who in his memoir famously said that "alas, Italy has been made, but Italians have not" (Azeglio 1867 : 7, our translation). In saying so he wanted to underline his consciousness that the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia might have successfully fought to annex the rest of Italy, but the 1848-1866 Independence wars that in 1870 led to the final conquest of Rome and the creation of a new state won a political but not a cultural battle: the creation of a common ground for the population was yet to begin. That the goal was not unifying but annexing in the first place is clear from the fact that King Victor Emmanuel II kept his numeral to underline the continuity with the Kingdom of Sardinia, and that most of the top-tier officials of the new entity came from the Piedmontese élite, mostly in the French sphere of influence when not directly French-speaking.

The Italian Constitution in force, approved in 1948, nowhere states that Italian is the official language of Italy while it explicitly protects its linguistic minorities that were oppressed under the Fascist regime (Repubblica italiana 1947 : art. 6). Italian has been recognized as the official language only in an ordinary act of parliament on the protection of linguistic minorities[19] and in the statutes of the Trentino-Alto Adige autonomous region, approved with a Presidential decree and then having the force of a constitutional act[20]. On the contrary, the Statuto Albertino,

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[19] Act no. 482 of 15 December 1999.
[20] DPR (Presidential Decree) no. 670 of 31 August 1972.

the 1848 quite progressive constitution of the Kingdom of Sardinia that like the numeral of the King came to be extended to the rest of Italy in 1860, set instead a provision for the official language:

> The Italian language is the official language of the Houses.
>
> It is optional, though, to make use of the French for the members who belong to the lands where this is in use, or to respond to them.

<div align="right">(Regno di Sardegna 1848 : Art. 62, our translation)</div>

The Italian intended in the king's Statute was the language of the élites that had been agreed upon since the fundamental treatise *Prose della volgar lingua* (Bembo 1525 : Book I) proposed to adopt the literate Tuscan of the 14th century, notably the one used by authors such as Francesco Petrarca (or Petrarch, 1304-1374) for poetry and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) for prose. But it was just an arbitrary – even if literarily grounded – choice of one language among the many Romance languages in Italy that had evolved from Latin. The language question, from Bembo onwards, had been a problem of literature and not of politics until the beginning of the 19th century when, after the Napoleonic turmoil throughout Europe and the spread of the Romantic ideals, many states started to wonder whether they could build a new sort of political entity, the nation-state, where the unity of culture and language was central to their project. Manzoni famously summarized the feelings of his time in his ode, "Marzo 1821" (March 1821), composed immediately after the concession of a constitution by the regent of the Kingdom of Piedmont, Carlo Alberto, which seemed to herald a move by the king to unify the rest of the North and especially the Lombardy and Veneto regions:

> Una gente che libera tutta,
> O fia serva tra l'Alpe ed il mare;
> Una d'arme, di lingua, d'altare,
> Di memorie, di sangue e di cor.
>
> A nation that free be all,
> Or serf 'tween Alps and sea;
> One of arms, of tongue, of altar,
> Of memory, of blood, of heart.

<div align="right">(Manzoni 1881, ll.29-32, our translation)</div>

Manzoni, among other critics and linguists such as Tommaseo, Cattaneo, De Sanctis and all those who gravitated around the Gabinetto Vieusseux circle in Florence, gave the decisive

thrust to elevate the Florentine vernacular as the model of the new, united national language exemplified in the 1842 edition of his masterpiece, *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*). Of course, before such sponsors, one could hardly turn down the proposal, and indeed the new state simply adopted the "literary" Tuscan model with an adaptation to modern Florentine as these intellectuals pushed for, along with all the other principles of the nation-state. They had few alternatives, anyway, since the 1861 census revealed that 75% of the population was illiterate, while "Italian" was spoken by 2.5% or 9.5% of the population, according to the source one draws on (Morgana & Ricci 2011 : 3.1). With such figures and still little physical and social mobility, one's real native language was the local dialect of the place where they had been born, which could be very different and hardly intelligible only a handful of kilometres away.

Literary Italian was then the language taught in schools since two fundamental laws, the Casati (Regno di Sardegna 1859, art. 168) and Coppino (Regno d'Italia 1877, art. 2) acts, were passed and included it in the new syllabi which for the first time established universal, free elementary state schools across the kingdom and introduced a basic compulsory attendance for the first two years. Derived from the Prussian and Austrian experiences, the latter especially in its Italian regions of Lombardy and Veneto, these innovative laws were not so effective at the beginning, for many reasons ranging from teachers' insufficient preparation to students' high dropout rate, especially in the South. Many adjustments followed, and with the new elementary syllabi of 1888 and the successive Orlando (in 1904) and Daneo-Credaro (in 1911) acts, the Fascist Gentile reform (Regno d'Italia 1923a) found an Italy radically different from that of sixty years before. Now, most people could read and write – even if with large portions of illiteracy, around 30% (Sabatini 2011 : 2) – and the terrible yet unifying experience of the Great War infused a heartfelt sense of unity in a country otherwise famous for hair-splitting. This last reform roughly crystallized the Italian school system for at least forty years but also introduced many modern principles such as compulsory education until 14 years of age, and a lower secondary school with common syllabi and different upper secondary specialisation paths now divided into technical, vocational, and *Licei* (lyceums), specializing either in classics or science, which were the only schools that admitted to universities (Regno d'Italia 1923b, art. 24). From the 1960s onwards, many reforms have brought about a series of minor adjustments to school curriculums,

but maybe the most important change as pertains to language has been the emergence of a neo-standard Italian (Sabatini 2011 : 4; Berruto 1987), a language that is now native and not just a foreign lingua franca to be used in addition to one's native dialect but is different from the formal language still taught in schools because adapted, interpolated and manipulated originally by Italian speakers.

To paraphrase what Lev Tolstoy said of families in the famous beginning of *Anna Karenina*, the history of languages is all alike, but every language is peculiar in its own way. Italian underwent the peculiar fate of having being born, like any other language, "naturally" from everyday speakers who manipulated, misused and misunderstood it, then it was elevated to a literary standard — also thanks to the influence of Provençal troubadours — by the first great poets and writers in the Sicily of Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor, who in turn brought innovations to Tuscany and fostered the great season of Tuscan language. From the 14th century onwards, it remained in the heavens of literature for more or less 500 years, while popular languages, in Tuscany and elsewhere in the peninsula, followed their natural evolution and detached from it. Then again, after unprecedented political upheavals, it proved useful to be again the language of the land — a land which had been politically united for the last time in 554CE, when the Gothic War sanctioned the end of the Ostrogothic Kingdom of Italy. Since 1861, it took a full century of diffident familiarization to change this lingua franca into a native language, and only now we may say that Italian is a native language for Italians, with the usual thousand provisos due to regional particularities (Serianni 2015 : 155). All is not normal, however, because even if it is a native language this does not mean that it has lost trace of its literary origins. For once, schools still today teach that the subject pronouns for the third person singular are *egli* (m) and *ella* (f), while their oblique forms *lui* (m) and *lei* (f) can be sometimes used also as subjects in their place. This used to be true until 60-70 years ago, but today practically nobody uses the "regular" subject pronouns, neither in writing nor in speaking, and they should be considered as dead forms rather than as preferable forms that are frequently eluded (Da Milano 2011 : 4; Sabatini 2011). The idea of what should be good Italian is lagging behind the increased speed with which it is developing today. Everyone is aware of this distance, this diglossia of literary language and everyday language, although schools insist that the model be that of many years ago, with —

luckily frequent – concessions to modern usage; but this dodging the inevitable change rather than preceding and governing it only inflates this sense of detachment between schools and reality, with predictable consequences on students' motivation.

Aiello (2018 : 27-28), subscribing to the views of Ballarino & Checchi (2006) and Olagnero & Cavaletto (2011), argues that the way the language question is considered may be a consequence of people's social status and the schools they have attended. Historically – and partly still today – Italian *Licei* have been regarded as élite schools, where the humanities have had prominence even since before the Gentile reform. Good knowledge of languages, including literary Italian, was viewed as a prerogative of educated people, so those who chose to attend technical or vocational schools – or worse, quit studying earlier – simply accepted the fact that they did not know, and did not need to know languages. This might have been true in the past, but at least since 1990, when foreign languages were introduced in primary schools (Repubblica italiana 1990 : art. 10), this has been a perception that gradually disappeared from the public discourse. According to our experience, though, many people who were educated before that date, and many teachers working in secondary schools other than *Licei* are still deeply convinced that languages are not as necessary as the core subjects, and behave accordingly. This just adds up to the already established idea that languages are only subjects that belong to the school, and not issues that concern everybody in that they are meta-competences enabling us to learn and discuss all the other topics.

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If we follow the path of the English language, on the other hand, we will see that it has had an even more zigzag-like course. Celtic languages had existed well before the Romans set foot permanently in the British Isles, in 43CE under Emperor Claudius, and had been coexisting as long as the Romans remained there, until 410CE. In those four centuries, Latin was the official language while Celtic was widely spoken by the population, and this bilingualism later influenced the development of English as we know it today (Baugh & Cable 2002 : 39). After the Romans left the island, the Old English phase began:

Old English is the term denoting the form of the English language used in England for approximately seven centuries (c450–1150 ad). It is a synthetic language (like Latin) rather than an analytic one (like modern English): it relies on inflections (or endings) on words to denote their function in the sentence. In nouns, pronouns, and adjectives it distinguishes between different cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, and instrumental), genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter), and numbers (singular, plural, and—in some pronouns—dual).

(Irvine 2006 : 33)

Noun cases and endings, along with several other features, were lost but made Old English look so different from today's English that some authors went as far as doubting whether to consider Old English as English at all. Soon after the Romans left, other populations from continental Europe came in to bother the Celts, who were still there:

*As the Anglo-Saxons settled in eastern England, and took control, there was some movement of population. It is known, for example, that in the fifth century a large number of Britons moved to Armorica, and this movement is reflected in the name Brittany. The size of the native population has been estimated at about a million (Hodges, 1984: 42), and the emigrants can have formed only a small proportion of the total. The bulk of the population must have remained where they were. **People in positions of power would speak English, and there would be strong incentives for Celtic speakers to learn the new language**. Centres of population would go over to English, and from there it would spread to more outlying districts. In the course of time the whole local population would have adopted English, and would have absorbed the newcomers.*

(Knowles 1997 : 29, our emphasis)

So the watershed year 1066 witnessed the invasion of Normans from continental France in an already mixed landscape. The Celtic people who had endured Romans, Angles, Jutes, Saxons, Frisians and Scandinavians was already used to living with, and being subjected to, peoples from abroad. The language spoken on the island was in effect not only one but many and very mutually influenced. William the Conqueror was just the last in a long line of invaders but managed to do on a smaller scale what we have seen Victor Emmanuel II do centuries later: he was at the head of a handful of men with whom he won himself a kingdom, establishing a new élite, a new bureaucracy, a new language. The Anglo-Saxon/Old English from now on would act as a substrate where plenty of new words would graft and grow. The establishing of this connection on the two sides of the Channel started a continuous pouring of words from France to England: the English Plantagenets had possessions in continental France, were connected with the French royal family, and French was the language spoken at court and among the nobles until at least the 14th century. Again, a situation of diglossia where the high language is radically different from the language of the common people. If we exclude the arrival of William of Orange in 1688,

who was accepted if not explicitly invited by the English aristocracy, foreign powers have never again set foot on the British Isles since. Political change, then, started to follow a different route and lost influence on the linguistic arena while a long process of change to the language of the masses took place, which is conventionally called the Middle English period and lasted until 1400. The historian Michael Prestwich summarizes the identity question in the Plantagenet period (1125-1360) as follows:

> *More problematic was the fact that* **society was multilingual, with a French-speaking aristocracy. French was the language of gentility.** *Its use was socially exclusive, its speakers marked out as members of the elite. To talk or write in French was to make a statement about status, not about nationality. Even for Robert Grosseteste, whose origins were almost certainly humble, French appears to have been the normal vernacular. The French spoken in England was distinct from that of France, though this may have been something that the French noticed more clearly than the English. In the thirteenth-century romance 'Jehan et Blonde', the count of Oxford's beautiful daughter had an accent, which made it plain that she was not from Pontoise, where the best French was spoken. French writers made fun of the way Englishmen spoke.*
>
> <div align="right">(Prestwich 2005 : 556-7, our emphasis)</div>

The game-changer in this phase of linguistic evolution, in Britain as elsewhere, was the introduction of printing, developed by Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz, Germany, in 1455 and soon exported all over Europe. As Bolton (1972) explains:

> *After the Middle English period, however, and especially after the introduction of printing, the main sorts of innovation in English vocabulary change.* **The innovations become less a matter of natural linguistic borrowing, and more a matter of deliberate addition to the vocabulary***; and they are less to do with every-day life, and more to do with literature, philosophy and other subjects where the printed book is an object of interest in its own right. As a result, words enter the vocabulary of common speech through the familiarity that literature has given them, where before literature tended rather to base its vocabulary on the resources of common speech. In so far as the spoken language is 'natural' and the written one 'artificial', the new situation is one in which nature imitates art. In bringing this relationship about, the printed book, and the wide increase in literacy which it made possible, played a major role.*
>
> <div align="right">(Bolton 1972 : 19, our emphasis)</div>

Assuming that English is a completely 'natural' language, then, is completely ungrounded in that no language is such and all benefit from continuous interactions with literature, the arts, foreign borrowings and top-down or bottom-up transfers. The circulation of books nothing but increased an already present phenomenon of enrichment, and in the centuries that followed the technology of printing English has massively borrowed words from Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and German, with huge imports from Latin and Greek, in a planned — and not spontaneous —

effort to ennoble the language and make it more precise and fit for the new purposes of science and literature. From the end of the 15th century, vocabulary enrichment becomes less a matter of need than a matter of preference, and by the times of Shakespeare English had already become a language able to express fine feelings and high poetry on a par with the more titled Italian, French and Latin, Europe's de facto lingua franca. Today, 400 years on, we are still able to read the Bard and his contemporaries, and in effect, the history of English from then on is just a history of small adjustments, mostly simplification in spelling and change in pronunciation, rather than one of big syntactic revolutions.

Eric Gill, one of the most prominent sculptors and type designers in 20th-century England, creator of the still famous and used Gill Sans, the classic typeface used on Penguin covers, commented on the sad situation of English spelling in his 1931 book *An Essay on Typography*:

> *Spelling is putting letters together to make words; but these letters have by now ceased to be purely sound symbols. It is no longer possible, even if it ever was, to say that such and such letter always and everywhere signifies such and such sound; and, for example, a combination of the four letters OUGH is used to signify at least seven distinctly and even widely different sounds –* **'Though the tough cough and hiccough plough me through, my thought remains clear'** *and it is this: that it is simply stupid to make pretence any longer that our letters are a reasonable means for rendering our speech in writing or printing.*
>
> *[…] There is no correspondence between talking & writing it down. Writing is not written talk; it is a translation of talk into a clumsy & difficult medium which has no relation whatever to the time factor of speech and very little relation to the sound. It is in fact an entirely outworn, decayed and corrupt convention whose chief & most conspicuous character is its monumental witness to the conservatism, laziness and irrationality of men and women.*

(Gill 2019 : 197-8, our emphasis)

Ninety years later, things have not changed and this is further testimony to how slow change has been in the last 400 years compared to the speed it had at the time of Middle English. Writing, and most of all printing, as Gill underlined when speaking of the first English printers, were at first factors of innovation but quickly became vehicles of stability because printing required standards to optimize production, and from printing stabilization soon imposed on the everyday language. William Caxton himself, already in 1490 when he translated Virgil's *Aeneid* from the French and printed it, complained that English was not the one he was used to in his youth and posed many problems in deciding which spelling – and which vocabulary – to use in order to reach a certain uniformity:

our langage now used varyeth ferre from that, whiche was used and spoken whan I was borne. For we englysshe men ben borne under the domynacyon of the mone, whiche is never stedfaste, but ever waverynge, wexynge one season and waneth and dyscreaseth another season. And that comyn englisshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth from a nother […] **Loo what sholde a man in thyse dayes now wryte, 'egges' or 'eyren'?** *Certayinly it is harde to playse every man, by cause of dyversité and change of langage.*

<div align="right">

(Caxton 1490 : Preface, our emphasis)

</div>

Caxton opted for the London vernacular because he felt that his Kentish parlance was too rude to be taken as a model, and this contributed a lot in establishing the prominence of the Southern variety, contrary to what was the situation before the year 1000, when Northumbria, thanks to its important monasteries and centres of power, was regarded as the noblest variant of the language spoken in the Isles (Hogg 1992 : 5). Different centuries but similar problems that never actually got solved by a third party, since neither England nor any English-speaking country ever saw the establishment of a linguistic academy such as the Italian *Accademia della Crusca* (founded in 1583), the *Académie Française* (1635) or the *Real Academia Española* (1713)[21]. This allowed a flow of words to come into the language without a scholarly sieve to select them, and contributed to further settle the two spheres of language the philosopher George Santayana talked about in 1916:

As the Latin languages are not composed of two diverse elements, as English is of Latin and German, so the Latin mind does not have two spheres of sentiment, one vulgar and the other sublime.

<div align="right">

(Interpretations of Poetry and Religion, 131–32, cited in Hughes 2006 : xviii).

</div>

Even though we do not agree that Latin languages do not possess these two spheres Santayana posits, it is very true that in English the origins of the two "souls" of its vocabulary are more evident and recognizable, and therefore more clearly manageable by speakers.

More respectable forms of English writing and pronunciation have imposed in the centuries (printed English, legislative English, the Received Pronunciation, etc.), but they could also be somehow ignored because their authority used to come from class or power and not from science, i.e., they were highly subjective and did not possess the objectivity modern linguistics has as a science. The lack of a central, formal linguistic authority has given popular English its

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[21]   A comprehensive list of language regulators worldwide can be found at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_language_regulators (last accessed 11 April 2021). Interestingly, some defunct languages do have their academies (Latin, for example), but English does not, not even in one of many Englishes spoken today in the world. On the other hand, many regional languages in the UK, such as Scottish or Cornish, have such a body.

distinctive drive for innovation, and this is maybe one of the reasons for the many "exceptions" in English spelling and pronunciation that lead English learners astray, but we think this is also one of the main strengths for Italians learning English, as we will argue in the next paragraph.

4.2   "Simple" v "complicated". A change in the point of view

Aiello (2018) confirms in her interviews with Italian students what all teachers of English in Italy know from their professional experience, that is, that English is perceived as a "difficult" language (Aiello 2018 : 36 and passim), especially when studied for the first time at the primary or middle schools. We all know that students, including ourselves when we don the student's hat like to complain about what they are asked to do, and this is part of the role-play of the school; but in this case it is extraordinarily surprising as an excuse, given the dramatic difference in the structures of the two languages involved, English and Italian.

Where does this supposed "difficulty" lie? We suspect it is just a difficulty of adaptation to a different way of seeing things, as Seamus Heaney would have said. When students report generic difficulties in learning English, my usual strategy is to reply with some incontrovertible data. If we take verbs, the most important part of speech, the Italian conjugation can be described, not exactly in technical terms, as a nightmare: three regular conjugations with roughly 300 voices in total, plenty of different endings to be learned by heart, not to talk about usage and meaning of tenses like, say, the *futuro anteriore* in the indicative mood or the *trapassato* in the subjunctive. When asked: "How many conjugations does English have?", learners usually stare at the void before them as if they never heard such a question – and it usually is so, actually, because we are not used to thinking of English as having conjugations at all, since that particular subsection of the verbal voice, so familiar to Italians, is never even mentioned in English grammars, and with a reason: there is only one conjugation, so there is no point in introducing the concept. But not mentioning it means failing to connect with one's internal grammar, in Chomsky's words, that for Italian learners is a very complicated tripartite pattern of verb endings.

Once they realize that English has only one conjugation, another awareness-raising question is asked: "And how many endings does English have?" Some attempt an impromptu count, but

usually the answer goes way above reality. Strictly speaking, the endings are only three: -s (third person singular, present simple); –ed (all persons, past simple); and –ing (present participle) (Biber et al. 1999 : 392). Mathematically speaking, the Italian/English ending ratio is very close to 100 to 1, a figure which is quite impressive and unfailingly leads students to wonder why do they perceive English as so difficult, if verbs are so dramatically simple. When confronted with this insight, all excuses to go on complaining about English verbs being difficult fall, most of all if one is reminded of the years passed at school – and outside school – learning to use the Italian conjugation properly.

Another part of speech fraught with hurdles for foreign learners is that of nouns: of course, languages and cultures name things differently according to their history, and nouns are the first concepts one learns in a language because to name means to master and take over external reality, even more than using verbs. But here as well facts contradict common wisdom because English nouns do not have gender, while Italian ones do, and plurals have all undergone a simplification path that from the times of Caxton reduced almost all to a final –s, with very few exceptions that can be learnt by heart in less than half an hour. The gender question, too, is frequently not very clear for Italian students, because due to our binary language we find assigning gender to things a natural procedure, while in fact it is completely arbitrary. As Biber et al. point out very clearly:

> *Although there is nothing in the grammatical form of a noun which reveals its gender, there are lexical means of making gender explicit [...], and reference with a third person singular pronoun may make it apparent [...]. However, **gender is not a simple reflection of reality; rather it is to some extent a matter of convention and speaker choice** and special strategies may be used to avoid gender-specific reference at all.*

> *(Biber et al. 1999 : 312, our emphasis)*

Rarely it occurs to think that English actually does not need gender assignment because there is no agreement with articles, adjectives or past participles – but Italian does, and because of the still predominant overextended masculine in most cases students think in the masculine by default. This misunderstanding probably comes from the fact that gendered pronouns do exist in English, but they are reserved to people (and today also to animals), while "it" covers the overwhelming majority of cases. Again, it is difficult not to recognize how simpler English grammar is when confronted with Italian noun formation and concord patterns.

Talking of adjectives, they are even more perplexing than nouns because they do not take either gender or number, then while Italian ones are a variable part of speech in English they are invariable like adverbs. So, in this sense, they are simpler but compared to the Italian ones they are used as if in a mirror with their standard, unmarked position before nouns (on their left) and the marked, very unusual position after nouns, on their right. Italian, on the contrary, has the adjectives' unmarked position after nouns and the marked position before nouns, but with more frequent usage of the marked position in everyday language, a clear reminiscence of its literary origins. Adjectives, in effect, can be a tricky field for Italians and they are maybe one of the areas where productive comparison can be made to generate the consciousness of language differences and peculiarities. The remaining parts of speech (articles, conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns) are all simpler as well, from the grammatical point of view, than their Italian counterparts, because less populated of variations.

Again, we are wondering, if the grammar is so simple, why do we perceive it as difficult? Maybe the reason is in the syntax, and not the grammar in itself. In effect, it does not take years of teaching and translating to be aware of the "Italianness" of an English sentence, if we happen to stumble on one. It is exactly the syntax that betrays L2 speakers of English because the syntax is a deep structure, always in Chomsky's words, that is settled in us and determines the way we formulate our thoughts and describe the world. For lack of a better definition, it can be described as a grid providing a predefined pattern of cells (the parts of speech in their right order as defined by grammar) that we fill with the words we know. And it is exactly how speakers manage word order that reveals how much of a foreign language is interiorized.

Italian and English are both considered as SVO languages (Tomlin 1986 : 22; Crystal 2019 : 44; Antonucci & Cinque 1977 : 123) – i.e., languages where the standard syntactical order is Subject-Verb-Object – but there are substantial differences in the actual application of this rule between the two. English adheres to it almost slavishly, considering subject or object dislocation only in a very limited range of cases; Italian, although preferring the SVO order, likes to dislocate a lot even in the spoken form instead, both to obtain stressing effects that are very much appreciated by native speakers and to emphasize subtle changes in meaning (Antonucci & Cinque 1977 : 122). If we add that Italian is also a null-subject language (or pro-drop, like Spanish, for

example), i.e., a language where the explicit mention of the pronominal subject is not compulsory, this creates a pragmatics of not expressing personal pronouns as a rule. And when they are used their presence signals an additional layer of meaning by speakers, a markedness that is difficult to spot when learners face the compulsoriness of explicit subjects in languages such as French or English, just to name the most frequently studied foreign languages in Italy.

Word order might seem a detail in the complex process of learning a language, but we think that it greatly impacts fluency, a goal that is usually one of the most sought after in L2 learning. Fluency is what students normally aim at, also because it is very much promoted and held in consideration by teachers and evaluators alike, but this concept has not been satisfactorily defined yet. Chambers (1997), for example, defines it as follows:

> *[A]s a criterion often used in the assessment of oral performance, the concept of fluency is confused, multi-layered and therefore needs to be defined specifically. It cannot be assumed that we all share the same definition of fluency. Otherwise the validity of the judgements made by assessors is seriously in question.*
>
> *(Chambers 1997 : 543)*

Lintunen et al. underline that "[w]hile studies often acknowledge the variation in L2 fluency and operationalisations […], few studies have focused on the concept itself" (Lintunen et al. 2020 : ch. 2)

Generally, scholars of FLT underline that it usually encompasses an idea of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also a mastery of word order and other suprasegmental features to give the spoken (and sometimes written) foreign language a natural, native rhythm. Understanding the differences, but most of all the similarities in the syntax of the two languages, might greatly improve language awareness in learners, and this is why we will dedicate a subsection in Chapter 5 to this.

As we have seen, Italian has a strange history where it lived in the literary dimension for hundreds of years and would have surely died, however slowly, if the political change had not brought it to life again by reinventing it as a native language. But in the centuries where it was solely a literary language, Italian influenced English just as English started to influence modern Italian already in the second half of the 19th century during the so-called *anglomania* (Buruma 2010). Yet another proof that, even if they do not belong to the same linguistic family, English

and Italian have had a long relationship that brought about many similarities, both directly and indirectly via Latin and Greek importations. The points we have illustrated used to be seen as complications in the process of learning both Italian and foreign languages, but if we looked at them from another point of view they could prove unprecedented advantages that have never been exploited by Italians. The five topics for lessons that we will propose in Chapter 5 are aimed at addressing these points with the goal of a reciprocal reinforcement in mind.

Chapter 5

Some grammar grams and a pinch of motivation.

Five proposals to fix it

Following the premises we have outlined in Chapter 4, in this chapter we will detail the proposals for five aspects of English to be the focus of lessons where some troublesome grammar and syntax topics for Italian learners are tackled and explained using a historical approach contrasted with the corresponding Italian structures. Following the ELT progressive steps recalled in Chapter 1, and according to the test results we have examined in Chapter 2, we think that this pedagogical strategy is necessary since these are the structures that are less clearly understood in the Italian language as well, due to the literariness of our language. The expected result in implementing these classes in a course of English, especially at an A2/B1 level, a stage when learners have already familiarized with the basics of the language but have not reached full intermediate competence yet, is that learners may gain an additional boost in their learning, understanding the mechanisms of the underlying syntax, correlating the many cognates in English and Italian vocabularies, and increasing their motivation to continue studying English.

These five proposals will be dedicated, respectively, to word order, noun sequences, the use of –ing forms, the register and the passive form, and gender and false friends. Of course, there are other topics worthy of our attention, but in my experience in teaching, I have found that these are the ones that create the highest amount of perplexities in students at the level we have considered. Since the aim of this study is not to find how to perfect the knowledge of English of already exceptional students but to raise the average level of the mass of students in order to have a higher general competence, I deem that clarity must be made on those topics that are not dealt with explicitly enough in the school texts that are presently used, or not dedicated enough time by teachers.

5.1   In the beginning was the subject. On word order and SVO languages

One of the first rules we meet when learning English is the one stating that when the subject is a pronoun, it must be always explicit and precede the verb (Biber et al. 1999 : 123). Less often is it explained that the latter is a general rule also for subjects that are not pronouns. Grammars in English are today ever more aware of the complexities of world languages, but as in the case of *Life* (Ch. 3.1) they are mass-produced for a world market so they cannot go into the details of every single native language they happen to come in contact with. Thus, they cannot do more than recommend that the compulsory pronominal subjects should be put in the first place: a norm that is soon forgotten when it comes for learners to produce their own written or spoken English. As with laws, if we do not fully comprehend the rationale of a prescription and what happens if we decide not to respect it, it is very likely that we do not interiorize it as a rule, simply because we do not understand it.

First, then, comes the subject, be it a pronoun, a noun, a phrase or even an entire sentence. But why is that? A first, though simplistic, explanation would be to introduce the concept of SVO languages (see 4.2 above), to make learners aware that the word order in their native language is not the only one possible and that different languages possess different syntaxes. If we had language books designed specifically to contrast foreign and native languages, it would be certainly easier to compare linguistic structures rather than to build new ones from scratch. For French learners, for example, this rule need not be explained much, since French has the same prescription (Grévisse & Goosse 2008 : 245) so English links seamlessly to an already established internal grammar of French; but for Italian learners, this is mostly incomprehensible for the reasons we have explained in Chapters 1 and 4. As we have underlined, Italian still today pays for the fact of having been a literary language for centuries: native speakers spend a lot of time in learning the many subtleties of a language that was perfected for literary uses, that is, for written and not spoken purposes. Among these subtleties, Italian includes relative freedom of subject position within the sentence, a feature English does not possess – nor does French.

A good point to make would be to underline that this effort repays Italian learners in some way, however, because the huge goodwill cost, if we may use a financial term, pays off in the long term with savings thanks to strong syntactic connections and added layers of meaning

acquired by simple operations such as dislocations, ellipsis or interpolations. This agility in making use of the subtleties of syntax comes in handy, for example, when one wants to use the language humorously: the Italian syntactical freedom allows such wordplays as *Questa non è una casa bella ma una bella casa*, implying with a simple adjective dislocation to the left a change of meaning (not just "aesthetically beautiful", but also "desirable") without actually modifying anything in the sentence. English does not allow for such tricks, but has other arrows in its quiver, preferring double meanings and homophonies, as we can easily see in media headlines or advertising (Monsefi et al. 2016), taking advantage of its more relaxed sound-spelling relationship.

Since Italian allows to obtain sometimes complex nuances only using displacements, that is, modifying the standard word order, native speakers often find it difficult to accept that a language does not permit such mechanisms and frequently complain that they cannot render the small differences they sense when they speak Italian. For example, a very common sentence that Italians say daily is *Ci penso io* ("I'll do it"), where the usual SVO order is completely subverted by moving the subject on the right and the indirect object on the left. A correctly ordered sentence would be: *Io penso a questo*, or to use the same elements, *Io pensoci*, but this latter form, even if correct, is so outdated that nobody uses it any longer. The dislocated form is used because putting the subject at the end of the sentence leaves it in a position of evidence, and allows for stressing the final subject, *Io*, when spoken. However, if native speakers have to translate that into English, they very frequently put the subject at the end as they would in Italian, and obtain something like "think I", or, if they order it correctly as in "I('ll) think about that", they do not appreciate the same meaning they understand in Italian because the sentence in English is unmarked while the Italian one is. There is a constant feeling of something lost in translation.

Since markedness is the most important thing in this sort of sentences where the subject is dislocated on the right – as in *Ci andiamo noi*, *Lo farai tu*, etc. – foreign language teaching should explicitly underline that by making students aware that they are using marked and not standard language, and this "effect" they are after can be obtained in different ways in the two languages. This basic linguistic notion is never taught at school but native speakers of course know it by their daily practice even if they do not happen to know how to name it. While learning the tricks

of markedness in their own language, learners can then apprehend how to render this feature in English and lose some of their sense of being at a loss with the language. Comparing the two languages in their standard (SVO) and marked versions can make them aware that languages have different layers of usage, that can be mastered by introducing some very straightforward concepts without necessarily going into too much detail.

A plain explanation can be that English, a language that has never lost touch with the actual spoken form, prefers to mark sentences not by using inversions (except isolated cases) but with additional stressing phrases such as, in the case proposed, a –self pronoun as in "I think about that myself", and underlining that inversion is seldom used. A list of commonly used, everyday Italian expressions where inversion is used to mark the sentence can be made with the help of the class, so having them participate actively in a flipped classroom with presentations prepared by different groups with the corresponding translations in English of marked sentences in Italian. It goes without saying that the satisfaction of finding a way to express a finesse (with the help of the teacher as a facilitator correcting any presentation mistakes) when still at a lower intermediate level can greatly improve motivation in learners.

5.2   Nouns, nouns, nouns. On noun sequences

Besides the SVO order, another good example to make learners understand the importance of word order is the case of noun sequences. Also called noun+noun sequence, or else noun phrases where the modifier happens to be a noun, these structures are very handy and have enjoyed popularity all over the world in the last years exactly because of their extreme flexibility. Theorists like Bauer (1998) wondered whether and when to consider such sequences as actual sequences or simply fixed compounds to be treated as one lexeme, but this problem need not concern us here since the point we wish to make is about sequences that are longer than two elements and thus they can rarely be considered as one consolidated phrase.

Two-word compounds are today very much used in English: they give speakers the opportunity of taking advantage of a very economic syntax, doing without articles, conjunctions and propositions altogether and obtaining in some cases very catchy definitions for things (usually products), events, ideas, etc. This kind of economy of efforts was first defined by Zipf in his

seminal study on human behaviour: "[a] person will strive to minimize the *probable average rate of his* [sic] *work-expenditure* (over time). And in so doing he will be minimizing his *effort*" (Zipf 1949 : 1, original emphasis). Applying this definition to languages, he then stated that "*words are tools that are used to convey meanings in order to achieve objectives*" (20, original emphasis), and therefore

> we may say that there is a **potential general economy in the sheer existence of speech**, in the sense that some human objectives are more easily obtained with speech than without. [...] Hence in addition to the general economy of speech **there exists also the possibility of an internal economy of speech**.
>
> *(20, original emphasis)*

While this principle is true of any language, English today seems to represent the best case in this economy competition, but this economy comes at a price because a substantially stable and mature language cannot be further compressed without losing some data in the process. As we have noted above, these sequences eliminate no fewer than three parts of speech, so a certain amount of detail in information is certainly lost, but the development of these structures made it evident that this loss is negligible since it is at least partly replaced by the syntactic bonds expressed by word order.

The central concept to such structures is that syntactic positions define grammatical functions, i.e., the order of words is what makes a word a verb, an adjective, etc. Were it not so, a word that is exclusively a noun, for example, would be such also in another place in a sentence, and if we wanted to make it a verb we should use dedicated affixes. The same word, to be employed as an adjective, would also have to take up an ending while today some nouns do so but some others do not and assume the function of adjective only because of their place before another noun. Let us think about couples such as "economy" (noun) / "economic" (adj.), or "sleaze" (noun) / "sleazy" (adj.), compared to nouns that can be used as adjectives such as "house", "media" or "car". This process is so pervasive that also nouns that already have their specialized adjective tend to be used as adjectives with a slightly different meaning, like "economy" mentioned above. The ongoing simplification process reached such a point that English verbs, for example, could comfortably do without some or all endings today – as happens in some creole and pidgin world Englishes (Mühlhäusler 1974; Kachru 1992) – because the ones it still has are a remnant of the past and are difficult to let go on the part of native speakers. There

is no compelling reason why there should be an –s ending for the third person singular in the present simple, and if we exclude the auxiliaries (to be and to have) it is the only variation in the whole conjugation which for the rest has no problems in using the same voice for all persons, for example in the simple past or present conditional. Given the syntactic structure English has, though, the tightening of its syntax is directly linked to the ongoing simplification process in its grammar, especially in the verbal field.

This is a very important correlation to explain, together with the one we have talked about in 5.1 above because for Italian speakers it is a concept that is very distant from their daily language practice. Used as they are to playing with word order, both in sentences as a whole and at a lesser scale in noun sequences, it can be quite problematic to understand without feeling a sense of loss in translation, of frustration and in the end of decrease in one's learning motivation.

Simpler examples such as the sequence "word order" itself can be easily understood in their structure because the pattern is similar to many other patterns we read and listen to today, but what about simply inverting the terms to get a sequence slightly different from what is familiar: "order word"? Or inverting known clichés such as "self service" to obtain "service self"? In both cases, we get grammatically admissible noun sequences that, because of their rarity, unsettle foreign language speakers. In both cases, Italians normally fail at recognising a noun sequence in them and tend to apply the Italian unmarked word order (determined-determinant), trying to make sense of a "service" rather than of a "self", and an "order" rather than of a "word", as an English speaker would do. Complications arise already at this stage, but it is when sequences get longer that the sand in the mechanism becomes a stone.

Longer examples such as "house office furniture", which may be understandable at first, if shuffled to obtain "house furniture office", or "office furniture house", which may be plausible wordings in a furniture manufacturing establishment, become obscure if one is not aware of the underlying, rigid structure. When moving forward to 4-element structures, chances increase of meeting noun-adjective or noun-adverb mixes such as the "grammatically admissible noun sequences" used in the previous paragraph, where the determined (noun) is preceded by another noun used as an adjective, an adjective proper and an adverb, all of them its determinants. Sequences can be even longer of course, as it is often the case in the IT, medical, and scientific

fields, or for organizations where long definitions are shortened to more memory-friendly acronyms. Long-established specimens are the likes of AIDS (Acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome) in medicine, SDRAM (Synchronous dynamic random-access memory) in ICT (Information and Communication Technologies, itself an acronym), LHC (Large Hadron Collider) in physics, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in the political sector, just to name some of the most widely known. Not to mention the ultra-long MMORPGS (Massive Multimedia Online Role-Play Game Server) in online gaming, perhaps proof that sometimes fun gets too far and becomes difficult to handle.

What lies in adjectival position becomes an adjective and so gets all of its prerogatives, most importantly that of not taking the plural ending. However, as the Encyclopedia Britannica notes, speakers now tend to include plural nouns in determinant position if they believe this helps to clarify the reference to a plural entity: so "sports editor" and "parks and gardens committee" are today admissible[22]. This difficulty – which is not a difficulty at all, again, but the result of a simplification as we have seen – couples with a general difficulty in interiorizing the rigid word order underlying both sentences and noun sequences, which is exactly what helps us in deciphering what these words without any conjunctions, prepositions or articles between them mean. Focussing on word order, for Italians, is essential to understand how the English sentence is composed and meant, and this second topic for a lesson aims at reinforcing at the phrase level what the first introduced at the sentence level. A good group exercise might be to ask students to propose noun sequences they know to the class, and to decode them collectively, thus uniting personal involvement to a topic of general interest.

5.3   It ain't no thing like gerund. On –ing forms

This point is about the –ing forms in English. Basically, there are two ways of using the –ing ending, and our experience testifies that both are regularly misunderstood by Italian learners. The source of this misunderstanding is not clear, but clues point to the fact that it may lie in the first contact Italians have with the English grammar: the present continuous tense. Given that it

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[22] https://www.britannica.com/topic/English-language ("Origins and basic characteristics" section, last accessed 11 April 2021).

is one of the easiest things to teach and learn, this tense is always presented at the beginning of any English course, and with a sort of imprinting effect it helps consolidate the idea that the –ing form used in it corresponds to an Italian *gerundio*, which is a verbal tense that does not exist in English as such. It requires a *–ndo* ending for verbs of all conjugations and it is used today only either with a predicative value or as an adverb. In the late Middle Ages, it was also used to make a verbal noun, though there are limited instances of that process in words such as *agenda* (the things to be acted) and *legenda* (the things to be read)[23]. Some traces of it can also be found in the standard musical terminology with *crescendo*, *calando*, *bisbigliando*, *allargando,* and so on, all nouns indicating the action of the corresponding verbs *crescere* (increase), *calare* (decrease), *bisbigliare* (whisper), *allargare* (widen)[24]. To further complicate things, perhaps because of Latin influence, the –ing form that makes the verb a noun is termed by many English grammars as "gerund"[25], while other, usually corpus-based grammars prefer not to make distinctions and call all these simply "-ing forms" (e.g., Biber & al. 1999).

The function of the Italian *gerundio* has changed, however, and today it is very much, even if not exclusively, used in combination with the verb *stare* (lit., to stay) as a substitute for the verb *essere* (to be) to form expressions meaning more or less the same as the progressive forms in English: *io sto andando a casa* (I am going home), implying that this is a present action that has a progressive feature. It is used mainly in the present and *imperfetto* (past) tenses of the indicative, while other uses are less frequent (Bertinetto 1995). This seamless correspondence established between the present continuous and the progressive *gerundio* form in Italian hinders further steps in learning how to use –ing forms properly in English because all –ing forms are then thought to correspond to the Italian gerundio (*-ndo* ending) form, which is simply incorrect in modern Italian. This is a passage that must be very clear when teaching English, especially at early stages

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[23] See par. 1 (*Definizione*) and par. 4 (*Residui del gerundivo latino*) in https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gerundio_(Enciclopedia-dell'Italiano)/ (last accessed 11 April 2021).

[24] A comprehensive list of music words (mostly Italian and including many gerundio forms) can be found at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_music_terminology (last accessed 11 April 2021).

[25] Oxford Dictionaries record the term but redirect to "verbal noun", stating that it is a present participle used as a noun (https://www.lexico.com/grammar/grammar-a-z#grammar/grammar-a-z#gerund, last accessed 11 April 2021); Cambridge Dictionaries prefer "gerund" and define it as a verb made a noun, without references to the present participle (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gerund, last accessed 11 April 2021). Foley & Hall (2003 : 140) opt for a Solomonian solution calling them "–ing forms" but informing readers that they are often referred to as "gerunds" when used like nouns.

because these forms are very much used in English, also thanks to their economy, and getting them right is essential.

One possible explanation can start from the reason why these two –ing forms in English came to adopt two such different meanings. A very simple bit of philology which would take no more than ten minutes in a lesson could account for the reasons of this seeming paradox and clarify that the opposite is true instead, that is, that two quite differentiated functions and forms came to be simplified into one form with two functions. As Van Gelderen (2014 : 219) points out, the be+–ing present continuous is a relatively recent form that has been gaining momentum only in the last two centuries and thanks to the consolidation of the London primacy among the British dialects. As the same author noted earlier, Middle English had different forms for making verbal nouns and present participles. The latter, in particular, were made using the –ande suffix in the North, -ende in the Midlands, and –ing or –inde in the South (141). The final evolution towards the –ing form testifies to the final word the London usage had on the standard English that first imposed at home and then institutionalised in EFL. Bernabò Silorata (2014 : 658) gives on the other hand an account of the evolution of the verbal noun from an original –ung(e) or –ing form to the present-day –ing, making it clear that the two functions – verbal noun or gerund, and present participle – were originally distinguished because they turned a verb into either of two different parts of speech – noun and adjective – and therefore should not be confused even if today they happen to assume the same form.

This short philological digression could do much to stimulate students who are used to an incredibly specialized conjugation and fail to appreciate simplification if not told why it came to be so. Once we make it clear that what is important in the English conjugation is not the ending employed but the function taken up in the sentence, which is in turn strictly connected to a word's position in the same sentence, as we have seen above in 5.2, a stronger awareness of how English works may be born. Motivation, as a consequence, could be boosted if things start to make sense in a logical pattern: one of the most common critiques to the structure of English is that it is difficult to understand when a word is a noun, or a verb, or an adjective, i.e., to understand its function. This, in my opinion, is never dutifully stressed either in books or in

courses and contributes to this distorted idea of English as a "difficult" language to learn for Italians.

Following this stream, it is perhaps simpler to rephrase the two –ing forms as "verb used as a noun" and "verb used as an adjective" functions. The –ing form used in isolation is a noun and so behaves like one, taking plurals and forming any complement including object and subject. It can also keep part of its original verbal function as in Italian, and be followed by an object as in: "meeting expectations is hard", where "meeting expectations" is a verbal noun plus its object, which together work as the subject of the sentence hinging on the "is" verb. The –ing form used in combination with another noun simply is its adjective, just like the Italian present participle is: "an interesting person", where "interesting" is an adjective of "person". Leading back these two forms to the ones we have just analysed when talking about noun sequences fill in another gap in the English puzzle. The next stage in the process is using these new findings to talk about linguistic registers and the passive form, which is the topic of the next point.

5.4   As in the textbook. On linguistic registers and the passive voice

We can find many examples of the usage of –ing present participles in English since this is a form much used today, but an interesting parallel can be drawn with the Italian use of present participles. As we have just seen, most present participle forms can be said to include relative clauses in them since they can be substituted by explicit defining relative clauses: "a running woman" can be paraphrased as "a woman who runs"[26]. However, translating this literally into Italian risks creating yet another misunderstanding because the two forms are not as interchangeable as they look at first and the reason why they still coexist, under the terms of the economy principle, is that they do not "say the same thing", but rather propose the same concept using two different linguistic registers. Generally speaking, if in English we use a present participle the register we are in can be very broad, from low to standard to high, while if we use the relative pronoun we are more formal since the relative pronouns "who", "which" and their

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[26] Cf. for Italian https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/participio_%28La-grammatica-italiana%29/ (last accessed 11 April 2021). For English, see Biber et al. 1999 : 631ff.

compounds are generally avoided if not misused (as in the case of who/whom), while "that" is preferred as a substitute to all of them. Pavesi (1986) confirms that:

> *Whereas in formal registers relative clauses are often used to identify referents, in informal registers other linguistic means are preferred (e.g., determiner + noun constructions such as 'this man', instead of 'the man who…', or noun + preposition constructions such as 'the woman with a red hat', instead of 'the woman who is wearing a red hat'). As Hatch (1983) expresses it,* **"much of the work of relative clauses can be presented more easily in other less complex ways"** *(p.10).*
>
> *(Pavesi 1986 : 40-41, our emphasis)*

In Italian, the opposite is true: the preferred structure in all registers is the one including a relative pronoun (even if mostly the overriding *che*, which covers many of the uses corresponding to "that" in English), while the adjectival present participle is felt as too formal a choice. Let us compare "running" with *corrente*, for example. In Italian, *corrente* is never used as an adjective except in consolidated expressions such as *acqua corrente* and few others. If we had to speak about a "running woman", one would never translate that as *donna corrente*, but as *donna che corre*, even if the two versions are both ok grammatically. This chiasmic relationship between the two languages is another seeming correspondence that should be reassessed correctly, and introducing the concept of the linguistic register, another topic often overlooked in schools even if key to language use, would do much in clarifying these differences.

According to the ISO/PRF 12620 standard, there can be as many as 11 linguistic registers[27], but for our purposes, the usual three levels of the register can be enough: high or formal, standard, and low or informal. The OED defines the register as follows:

> *II.8.d Linguistics. A variety of a language or a level of usage, spec. one regarded in terms of degree of formality and choice of vocabulary, pronunciation, and (when written) punctuation, and related to or determined by the social role of the user and appropriate to a particular need or context.*
>
> *(OED, "register, n., 1")*

The concept of register is then tightly linked to the social context in which languages are used; it is not strictly speaking a linguistic competence but rather a social competence in linguistics. This may seem obvious to those who know a language at an upper-intermediate or proficient level, but for those learning a new language this concept is mysteriously obscure. Even people with rather good vocabularies in their native languages often fail to apply the notion of register

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[27] https://www.iso.org/standard/69550.html (last accessed 11 April 2021)

to the new words they learn. In my opinion, this has a link with the omnipresent direction in book exercises to "use contracted forms when possible". While this is certainly useful for immediate, practical use of the language since contracted forms have gained currency in spoken English everywhere, it is detrimental to the development of written competence in English because contracted forms belong to informal English while written documents normally require formality, that is, require that we recognize the social levels of language. Learners are somehow led to believe, not only by books but also by movies and the internet usage of English, that contracted forms are good for everything and there is no such thing as a register in English.

Understanding registers, on the contrary and especially in English, might greatly help to make sense of the large subset of words apparently similar which belong to different registers, such as, for example: royal/kingly, begin/commence, fight/combat, and so on. In the case of English, many words originally from French that sort of duplicate other words of Anglo-Saxon origin are actually not synonyms but words used for different purposes, related to a different register and then to different social situations. A very simple explanation, that should be recalled every time the occasion arises, that gives words their place and purpose in the language and helps learners' orientation in the English vocabulary, which is very large and sometimes discouraging exactly because of this.

The passive voice can be introduced as a spin-off of the register issue, given that it is used in English not only to change the complement which is given emphasis in a sentence but very frequently just to lift the tone of voice, metaphorically speaking. English does not have a specialized impersonal pronoun like the Italian *si* or the French *on*, which are used pronominally to act as subjects but actually refer to no real person in particular. Italian and French speakers tend to employ it very often because it saves the effort of detailing a specific person but also because it is useful for not pinpointing who exactly is to do something. By the way, we love to think this is a "very Italian" attitude, but the reality is that all languages have their strategies to dodge painful decisions or inconvenient bluntness. English has the passive voice, and with a reason: in the passive, subjects undergo the action which is carried out by agents – as in the present sentence – but agents themselves can be very blurred (such as a generic "they") or even omitted since this complement is not obligatory as is the subject in the active voice. If in the

active I have to say "I stroke my cat", in the corresponding passive I can choose between "my cat is stroked by me" and "my cat is stroked", and while these two differ in meaning this also allows us to not mention the agent to focus on the action itself.

What is the relationship between the passive voice and the linguistic register, then? If I have at my disposal a form that avoids mentioning people who must do things, I can focalize my speech on the things that must be done, on the directions to follow and the results to achieve, excluding personal addresses and giving it a more formal look and feel, therefore a high rate of passive voices in a text signals a higher level of formality in the discourse (Biber et al. 1999 : 937-8). This is not the only use we can make of the passive voice in English, because it is used also in certain types of (usually formal) documents where the passive is required or much recommended, such as textbooks, instruction manuals, contracts and legal documents, etc., whereas in the standard register passives appear less frequently, and even less in the low or informal register.

The English passive might also be helpful in a contrastive key, because it clarifies an important Italian feature about the relationship between the two most important auxiliaries, to be and to have, that is clearer in English than it is in Italian: while *avere* (to have) can be used as an auxiliary only for the active voice, *essere* is not limited to the passive as it is in English but acts also as an active auxiliary for verbs which do not have a passive form such as, for example, *andare* (to go) or *venire* (to come), which quite logically cannot be turned into the passive[28]. So, if I say *io sono andato* (I have gone) I use *essere* in the active sense, but if I say *io sono mangiato* (I am eaten), I am using it in the passive. This can be quite confusing and requires a lot of practice, first of all on the part of the natives who on average know how to conjugate even though occasional uncertainties can still show up even after years of practice. But this can be a very difficult point to handle for those who learn Italian as a foreign language and have to grapple with the already difficult ending patterns and have also to keep in mind every single verb using *essere* as an active auxiliary – potentially, all intransitive verbs can raise this doubt in those who do not master the language at a high level. The simplicity of the English conjugation here again demonstrates as such, since the verb to be + past participle is reserved to the passive voice, with no exemptions,

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[28] Cf. https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/avere-o-essere_%28La-grammatica-italiana%29/ (last accessed 11 April 2021).

while to have does its bit in the active. When you meet both in the same verb – as in "I have been warned", for example – that means that it is a passive, where the "be" auxiliary is in turn helped by the "have" auxiliary for making a composed tense. And that is it[29].

Today, registers and formality are not given the due prominence in ELT textbooks but only occasionally reminded in notes to the main text, and the likely reason is the stress placed on the spoken language. However, as we have seen, understanding how languages work not only helps to improve one's English but also one's Italian by forcing to reflect on language choice, and it is central not to lose one's bearings in the mare magnum of English vocabulary. If we have a corpus of one million words, it is difficult not to feel disheartened when confronted with them as a mass – breaking the mass down into subsets would greatly improve one's positive approach towards English. This, incidentally, would prevent or at least limit the usual question on the part of learners: "what's the English word for this?". The answer, as usual, is that "it depends on the context", that is, on the register you want to use.

5.5   The secret life of Grammar. On gender and false friends

This last proposal for a series of lessons aims at further smoothing the edges of English for Italian native speakers, clarifying the relationship between gender and genre – introducing the idea of arbitrary gender assignment in language, a notion Italians are not very used to consider – and the relationship between the so-called false friends, words or phrases that sound similar in the two languages but are not. This latter point, in particular, is functional to illustrating what we have very fictionally called "the secret life of Grammar", or the way words travel worlds and migrate from one language to another, often wiping away their footsteps in the process so that we do not recognize their origins any longer.

Bassetti (2014), in her paper on the semantic motivations of grammatical gender, concludes that

> *knowing two languages with different grammatical gender assignments may increase awareness of the arbitrariness of language, thus reducing language-induced biases in mental representations of the world. Although other explanations are possible, these results*

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[29] The case of patterns such as "you should be thinking", which contain a "be" form but are active, is included in the general discussion about the present continuous (see 5.3 above), here used with a modal.

may support the views of Benjamin Lee Whorf, arguably the father of linguistic relativity, who believed that the solution to biases in our worldview created by our language was to learn more than one language (Whorf, 1956[1941]).

These results can be relevant to language teachers and learners, showing that language learning can act as a mind-opener even when an additional language is learnt later in life and in an instructed environment.

(Bassetti 2014 : 291, our emphasis)

Since we first meet English as a foreign language, usually in primary schools, we learn that it is a language that has a special gender for things that are neither masculine nor feminine, or do not need to be identified as such. It has a dedicated singular personal pronoun ("it"), and singular possessive adjective and pronoun ("its" in both cases – very often confused with the similarly sounding "it's", even by native speakers). Italian does not have such pronoun; Latin used to have one ("id") but in its transition into modern Romance languages it was lost almost everywhere except in Romanian and a handful of dialects. Therefore, Italian speakers always have to decide whether something is either masculine or feminine – tertium non datur, and this is why languages like Italian are called binary languages. If we talk about humans, normally their sexual gender is what determines their grammatical gender, but already in the case of animals, usually having clear sexual attributes, the assigning of gender is not entirely logical: we have a masculine name for some animals as a species (*il gatto, il cane, il coniglio*), but some other animals have their species called in the feminine (*la giraffa, la rana, la pecora*). If we move on to things, here the situation is entirely arbitrary, with some even allowing a change of gender correlated to a change of meaning (e.g., *il tavolo* and *la tavola*) and one can only imagine the difficulty of learning genders on the part of a foreigner, especially one who natively speaks a language where there is a neuter gender, like English or German, or any Slavic language.

When one starts from a tripartite gender scheme including the neuter, the difficulty in assigning a gender to things that normally fall in the third slot is palpable and can create a huge confusion. For Italians, though, this should be easier since if we talk about things or concepts that do not need a specific gender, it should be clear that the pronoun to use should be "it": here an amplification in the range of choice occurs, not a restriction. What is less clear, especially for weaker learners, is that also the possessives should follow suit, and lots of mistakes in this area regard a misunderstanding of agreement, mixing up usually the masculine "his" with the neuter

"its" – and the apparent reason for this is that masculine is the default agreement Italians have in mind because of the overextended masculine principle. While in recent years we are witnessing a fight against this grammatical and, in a sense, masculinist rule (Bazzanella 2010)[30], no agreed-upon solutions have imposed so far, and the majority still employ the masculine when referring to people – or things – of both genders.

If, again, our grammars are the way we describe what we see, but are also the way we think the things we see, then binary languages like Italian can only show us a world in black and white where everything must be either male or female, forcing us to choose a gender even for cases in which no gender is necessary, and requiring a complex concord operation for all pronouns and adjectives defining them as a consequence. Italian native speakers can only have in mind a gender-biased world where the gender issue cannot be escaped because it is the grammar itself that requires such an effort for each and every thing we talk about. English, on the contrary, does not need such preoccupations since it has gendered pronouns, true, but those pronouns are almost exclusively dedicated to people – and a big debate on their uses in English has been running, too[31]. What is more, English article and adjectives do not need to be agreed to nouns, so that nouns simply do not have genders in most cases; while Italian dictionaries have to specify each noun's gender, English dictionaries do not bother about that. English speakers, when they think in English, do not have the problem of agreement and see the world as an ungendered place, where gender is simply not so important: "there is nothing in the grammatical form of a noun which reveals its gender" (Biber et al. 1999 : 312). It is almost ironic that in a language where gender is not given prominence, there are two words to talk about it: "gender" and "genre" – the latter referring to literary kinds, a meaning that was once of "gender"[32] – while Italian, so keen on assigning gender to everything it talks about, has only one: *genere*.

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[30] Cf., in particular, paragraph 3 also at https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/genere-e-lingua_(Enciclopedia-dell'Italiano)/ (last accessed 11 April 2021)

[31] Most international organizations and companies have their policies against gender-biased languages, see for example UN's at https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml, a good article on *Time* magazine about the ongoing debate https://time.com/4327915/gender-neutral-pronouns/, and Merriam-Webster's announcement for their word of the year 2019, the "singular they" https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/word-of-the-year-2019-they/they (all last accessed 11 April 2021).

[32] "Gender" and "genre" entries in the OED.

The simplification of the issue, with the abolition during the Middle English period first of gender distinction and then of syntactical agreement (Baugh & Cable 2002 : 12), is just another proof of how much English is simpler than Italian, and yet another puzzling point that keeps the question boiling: how is it, then, that Italians perform so badly in English? As we suggested above, maybe the grammatical and syntactical simplicity of English is not enough to help Italians learn it, because other points are more difficult to handle. We suggested that spelling and vocabulary may be counted in as culprits, too, and a focus on false friends might help reinforce the knowledge about the history of English and the reasons why some words mean what they mean, and not what they seem to mean.

The OED online has "false friend" defined as:

> *n. A word or expression that has a similar form to one in a person's native language, but a different meaning (for example English magazine and French magasin 'shop').*
>
> *'Our friend has fallen foul of the phenomenon known as faux amis, or false friends, foreign words that seem to mean one thing but actually mean another.'*
>
> *Origin: Translating French faux ami.*
>
> <div align="right">(<u>https://www.lexico.com/definition/false_friend</u>, <i>last accessed 11 April 2021</i>)</div>

The 1928 book by Maxime Koessler and Jules Derocquigny, *Les faux amis ou les trahisons du vocabulaire anglais (conseils aux traducteurs)* (Koessler and Derocquigny 1928) was a 400-page tome listing in a vocabulary fashion an incredible amount of likely translation traps linked to words that apparently have the same meaning in the two languages. Curiously, English imported the phrase from French: yet another sign that, as we have seen in Chapter 1, the need for defining such phenomena in the past was felt not as much by Britons as by other peoples and scholars who learnt and studies foreign languages, and especially English.

While this might seem no more than a linguist's whim, if we take into account what we have observed so far, Italian does not have fewer reasons than French to care about false friends, given that both are Romance languages and, also because of their proximity, have shared large chunks of their respective histories – some writers and historians even came as far as saying that Italy and France cannot be friends only because they are lovers[33]. Apart from exaggerations,

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[33]   https://www.corriere.it/cultura/12_luglio_16/cazzullo-italia-francia-storia-amore-inimicizia_c0d7dc2c-cf33-11e1-8c66-2d335d06386b.shtml (last accessed 11 April 2021).

there are a lot of historical and linguistic reasons to focus our attention on the many seemingly easy words that appear in English and that are not as transparent as they look. Usually, it is a story of appropriation, misunderstanding, rewriting or specialization, while very rarely did a word remain pure and precise in its meaning after crossing the Channel. Not pretending to cover such a wide scope as Koessler and Derocquigny's, I wish nonetheless to give some instances of the way these lexemes can be treated in class.

Actually. This, in my experience, is the most misunderstood word of all. It is positively recognized as an adverb, thanks to its –ly ending, but due to its similarity with the Italian adverb *attualmente*, which has prominently a temporal sense ("at present"), it is almost always translated as such and given a wrong meaning. The Treccani online dictionary of Italian reports as the first meaning of the adjective *attuale* its philosophical – and original – sense: "1.a. In philosophy (usually as opposed to 'potential', sometimes to 'virtual', 'possible', etc.), of what is in act"[34], though the formation of its adverb followed the 1.c meaning, related to the present time. A more reliable translation into Italian of this English adverb would be *davvero* or *in realtà*, instead.

Eventually. Another adverb, another misunderstanding. Given its large use in contemporary Italian, it shares with "actually" the primacy in incomprehension. While both languages relate it to a chain of events, the English adverb means "at the end of a chain of events", while Italian means "if a chain of events happens". The difference may look slight, but when translated almost certain facts become a mere possibility, a very distant idea if not its opposite. This word entered English and Italian in the 17th century from French, which launched *eventuel* into the word arena. A proper translation of the Italian adverb would be "in case" or simply "if".

Sympathy. This is very often confused with the very Italian concept of *simpatia*, an umbrella term that is very useful to talk about an ample range of feelings. However, coming from Greek, English took this and other terms from that language and Latin in the course of the last five centuries to ennoble its scientific vocabulary, so this word is still close to its original reference to a "common suffering" and denotes a feeling of deep comprehension, usually in bad situations. Italian, as often happens with the classical languages that shaped its heritage, has had the time to get used to them to the point of losing track of the origins. If in English it is used for

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[34] https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/attuale (last accessed 11 April 2021, our translation).

grief and pain, Italian uses *simpatia* to denote only positive feelings and in general a sentiment of consonance of souls, of general happiness. So, in this case, we risk a real *brutta figura* if we apply that in the wrong context.

Ingenuity. This interesting word betrays its Latin origins without looking immediately Latin. It comes from *ingenuus*, "who is not a slave", therefore noble by race, or *genia*. Free people were also those who could afford to study and refine their intellect, so from a condition of freedom descended an augmented intelligence, hence its English meaning that can be translated as *ingegnosità*. Italian, however, has *ingenuo* and *ingenuità* meaning the exact opposite, that is, (the condition of) someone who is of poor *ingegno*, so not very smart. The English for that is, ironically, a word taken from French: "naïve".

To pretend. Directly from the Latin *praetendere*, meaning "to stretch forth, put forward, […] offer for action" (OED, "pretend, v."), its first sense was to "tend before", a physical action of showing or illustrating something to someone. Then it gradually came to signify "to put forth an assertion or statement". The original verb, though, if it was once used to illustrate something believed to be true, now means mainly to conceal the truth. The Latin prefix *prae*, meaning both "before" and "much", was interpreted in the first sense in English, while Italian took its second meaning to get to present-day *pretendere* = *tendere troppo*, i.e., to strain something to its limits (and possibly beyond), usually referred to expectations, belief or patience. It is then best translated with "to claim", although one of the possible meanings of "pretend" includes this sense as well, but context must be given not to misunderstand.

I believe these examples, though few, can be enough to understand what such a procedure could be like and the results it aims at. Relating Italian and English so that their histories can be read as twisting lines regularly intersecting rather than two never-touching parallels can prove interesting to learners because it connects new knowledge to existing backgrounds, treating words as something familiar rather than foes pretending to be allies. The Oxford English Dictionary online blog gives us the ultimate word on the topic in one of its post's titles, a nice pun but also sound advice on this: "Keep your friends close, and your false friends even closer"[35].

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35   https://web.archive.org/web/20110911033831/http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2011/07/keep-your-friends-close-and-your-false-friends-even-closer/ (last accessed 11 April 2021).

Conclusion

A slight change of perspective. Towards a holistic view

As we noted in our Introduction, the concept of simplicity in languages can vary according to who studies them. But one cannot deny that compared to Italian English syntax is extremely simplified and straightforward to understand. To the point that, we came to think, Italian native speakers are so used to a complicated syntax, especially with verbs, that when they see such simplicity they are suspicious of it. Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 2002), Sapir (Sapir 1921) and Whorf (Carroll 1956) contended that it is the language that shapes the way in which we see and tell the world we live in, and not the other way round. Italian syntax is difficult, convoluted, rich in variation, but once you have your hands on it, it allows you to play with language wonderfully and get such subtle nuances in meaning that yes, maybe not all of them can be actually translated into English. But English, on the other hand, is so smooth and syntactically simple that one cannot but appreciate the speed and ease with which one can master its prose, complicating things only at the vocabulary and spelling level – where Italian allows for more leeway.

Many self-appointed language gurus, especially those who advertise on the social networks, tend to present their courses and methods to learn English as easy and quick, usually highlighting the differences rather than the similarities with Italian. Coping with linguistic differences, however, covers just one of the many facets of this issue, so we do not think it can be a real master key to comprehension; for that matter, we do not think there exists a single master key that can open all doors in language learning. Like all complex matters, there cannot be any simple solution but a range of approaches that can put in the correct perspective the different histories, the different syntaxes, the different vocabularies of the languages studied in a systemic view: languages do not exist in themselves and isolated from their contexts, so a systemic view may be probably the only framework that can give the proper understanding of how languages work at a larger scale. Just as with people – and languages are spoken by people, normally – "understanding" and "learning" are complex operations that subsume many discrete phases that

should be decoded one by one. This is why we have insisted on just some parts in the ideas for lessons we have proposed in Chapter 5: the English we learn at school is not wrong, but simply misses some of the points of view that could help us understand how English sees the world, and link the English syntax and vocabulary to the Italian ones.

The aim we had in mind when setting up these points was to enhance the students' motivation through the discovery of unexpected connections between the two languages – a discovery that in principle should be guided by the teacher-instructor but practically carried out by the students themselves. Intercomprehension was our beacon – however difficult it might be to actually attain it, the prospect for students to understand what the others say while being capable to master their own languages should act as a potent motivation factor. The work of Dörnyei in this field (e.g., Dörnyei 2001, 2007) has been all dedicated to underline that motivation is the key to finding one's way among a plethora of information that in our modern world can be misleading and confusing rather than reassuring: if we feel motivated in doing something, we recognize the purpose of doing it, our goal is clearer and the actions towards it stronger. In my experience in teaching, I have found that rarely this is true at an institutional level, while a percentage of students manage to find their own motivation to study despite, and not because of, the way their schools are organized. This is a terrible waste of time and resources, because with simple integrations to current syllabi students – and not only them – could better appreciate the reasons for their paths in learnings and interpret this extremely confounding world with sharper intellectual tools.

As the title of this conclusion suggests, individual disciplines are fine because we cannot teach and learn everything at the same time, but nothing is disconnected under the sun, as the ancients believed and the ideal of the Renaissance wise not only postulated but required for a complete understanding of our world. Today, the same concept goes under the name of Holism, but it practically means more or less the same as in the past: to consider disciplines just as ways to break the whole down into more manageable bits and not watertight compartments unrelated to one another. I believe this is true for any discipline, but in particular for languages: a mature, contemporary approach to languages teaching and learning should recognize this and connect languages not just to "jobs" or "travels" or whatever languages are advertised to be useful for.

Through language we experience and shape the world and our lives, it extends well beyond the limits of working hours or our days off on a city break, it defines who we are and the sense of our existence. And, if one does not have a penchant for philosophy, it is language that we use to talk about everything, from quantum physics to the last trends in hairstyling, so the examples of the interdisciplinarity of language, its being a meta-competence at the foundation of any other discipline, are so many that one does not need a PhD to understand it.

My contribution for a more integrated teaching of languages, and particularly of English as a foreign language in Italy, wishes to be exactly that: some little insights on how languages work, on how they do not exist in isolation but rather feed each other in a space-time continuum, and of how we have come to speak the way we do in our synchronic today by illuminating some shades of the diachronic past with linguistic spotlights. Not much, I reckon, but enough I think to spur the curiosity of students, and in general of weak learners, about why English is what it is now, and tickle their motivation in learning a language that from a little island in the outskirts of the Empire cunningly came to give the world a tool for mutual comprehension.

Appendix 1

INVALSI and OECD Tables

I RISULTATI IN INGLESE **PER PUNTEGGIO** AL **GRADO 8** - ASCOLTO (*LISTENING*)

Il grafico mostra il punteggio medio, la deviazione standard e la distribuzione dei punteggi per regione. La mappa mostra i risultati medi delle macro-aree e indica se tali risultati e i punteggi medi regionali differiscono significativamente dalla media italiana (202). Quest'ultima è riportata alla media del 2018 (200), dalla quale può differire segnalando un progresso o un regresso.

Punteggio significativamente superiore alla media dell'Italia

Punteggio in linea con la media dell'Italia

Punteggio significativamente inferiore alla media dell'Italia

Intervallo di confidenza della media

Punteggi dal 25° al 75° percentile

Punteggi dal 5° al 25° percentile

Punteggi dal 75° al 95° percentile

Nord Ovest
Nord Est
Centro
Sud
Sud e Isole
Italia

	Media	E.S. della media		Deviazione standard	E.S. della D.S.
Valle d'Aosta	217	2,5		29	0,9
Piemonte	206	2,1		33	0,8
Liguria	205	1,5		32	0,6
Lombardia	211	1,4		32	0,6
Prov. Aut. Bolzano (I. it.)	219	2,7		33	1,0
Prov. Aut. Trento	216	1,9		32	0,8
Veneto	212	1,3		30	0,5
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	217	1,7		32	0,7
Emilia-Romagna	213	1,6		32	0,6
Toscana	210	1,9		32	0,7
Umbria	203	1,9		32	0,8
Marche	211	1,6		31	0,6
Lazio	202	1,6		34	0,7
Abruzzo	199	1,7		32	0,7
Molise	193	3,1		33	1,3
Campania	186	1,9		36	0,8
Puglia	194	1,8		33	0,8
Basilicata	190	2,0		32	0,8
Calabria	184	2,8		35	1,2
Sicilia	183	2,2		35	1,0
Sardegna	189	2,1		33	0,9
ITALIA	202	0,7		35	0,3

Table 3. INVALSI 2019 Grade 8 results in English (Listening, by points).

I RISULTATI IN INGLESE **PER PUNTEGGIO** AL **GRADO 8** - LETTURA (*READING*)

Il grafico mostra il punteggio medio, la deviazione standard e la distribuzione dei punteggi per regione. La mappa mostra i risultati medi delle macro-aree e indica se tali risultati e i punteggi medi regionali differiscono significativamente dalla media italiana (203). Quest'ultima è riportata alla media del 2018 (200), dalla quale può differire segnalando un progresso o un regresso.

Punteggio significativamente superiore alla media dell'Italia

Punteggio in linea con la media dell'Italia

Punteggio significativamente inferiore alla media dell'Italia

Intervallo di confidenza della media

Punteggi dal 25° al 75° percentile

Punteggi dal 5° al 25° percentile

Punteggi dal 75° al 95° percentile

Nord Ovest
Nord Est
Centro
Sud
Sud e Isole
Italia

	Media	E.S. della media		Deviazione standard	E.S. della D.S.
Valle d'Aosta	214	2,4		33	0,9
Piemonte	208	1,6		34	0,7
Liguria	205	1,7		36	0,7
Lombardia	211	1,3		34	0,5
Prov. Aut. Bolzano (I. it.)	213	3,4		35	1,4
Prov. Aut. Trento	214	1,8		33	0,7
Veneto	213	1,1		33	0,4
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	215	1,8		33	0,7
Emilia-Romagna	212	1,5		34	0,6
Toscana	210	1,7		35	0,7
Umbria	204	2,1		35	0,9
Marche	214	2,0		35	0,8
Lazio	204	1,7		36	0,7
Abruzzo	202	1,6		36	0,7
Molise	198	2,8		36	1,2
Campania	191	2,2		39	1,0
Puglia	199	2,1		37	0,9
Basilicata	199	2,3		38	1,0
Calabria	188	3,0		39	1,3
Sicilia	185	2,7		40	1,2
Sardegna	191	2,3		37	1,0
ITALIA	203	0,7		37	0,3

100   150   200   250   300

Table 4. INVALSI 2019 Grade 8 results in English (Reading, by points).

I RISULTATI IN ITALIANO **PER PUNTEGGIO** AL **GRADO 8**

Il grafico mostra il punteggio medio, la deviazione standard e la distribuzione dei punteggi per regione. La mappa mostra i risultati medi delle macro-aree e indica se tali risultati e i punteggi medi regionali differiscono significativamente dalla media italiana (199). Quest'ultima è riportata alla media del 2018 (200), dalla quale può differire segnalando un progresso o un regresso.
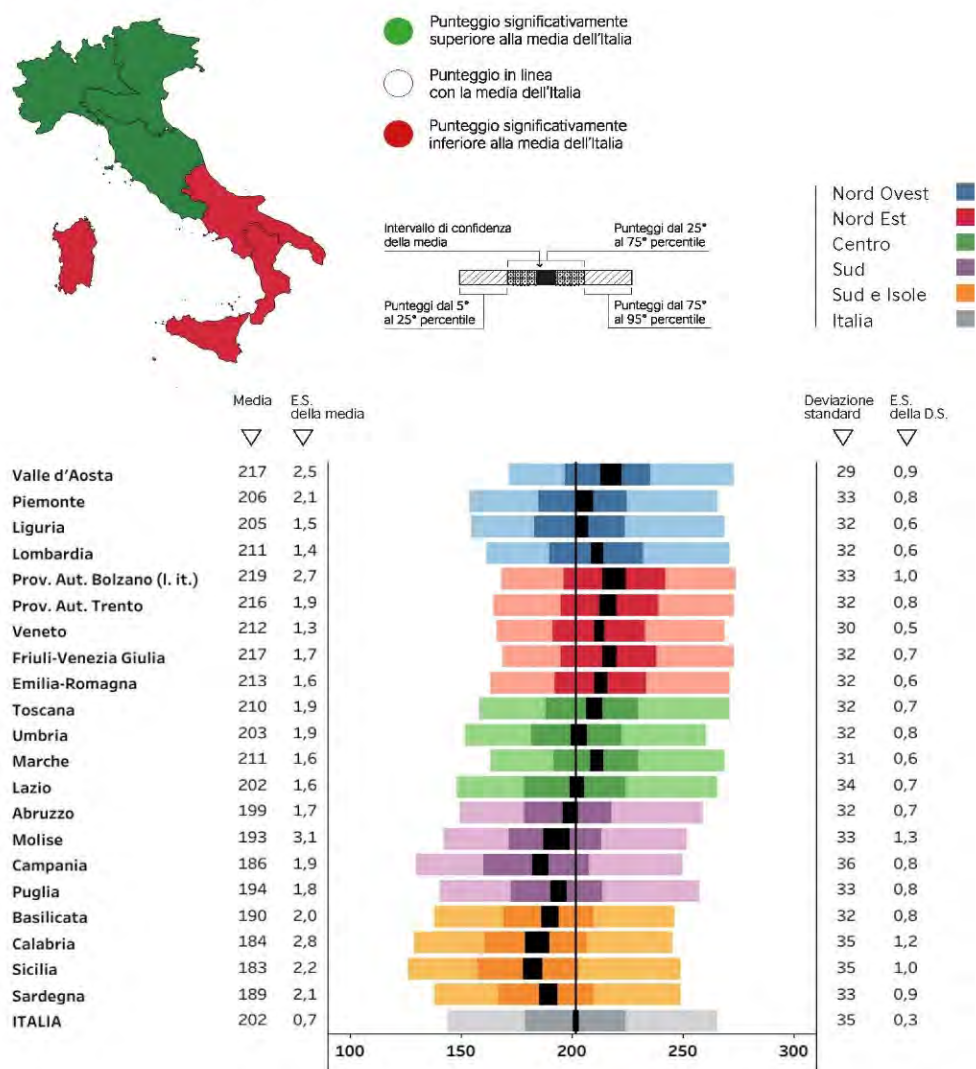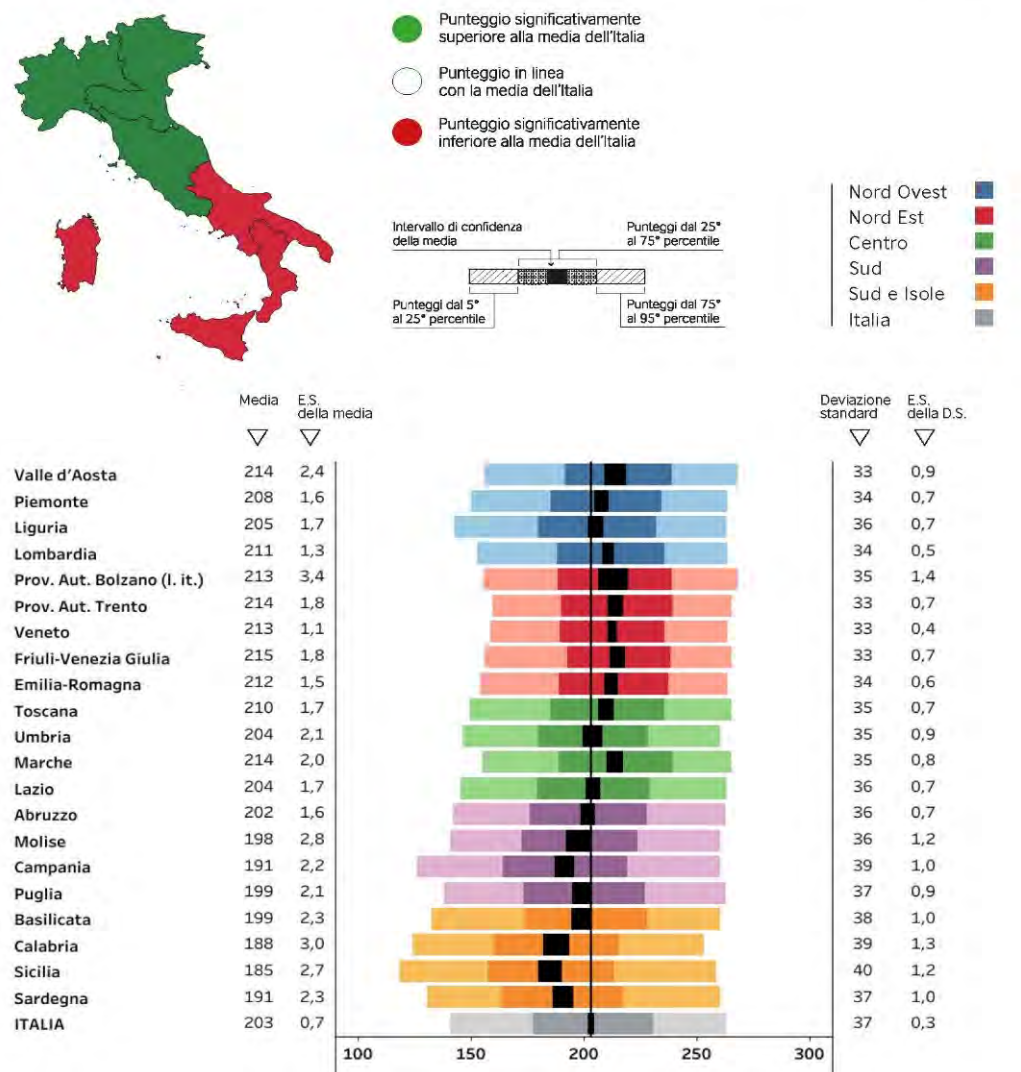
	Media	E.S. della media		Deviazione standard	E.S. della D.S.
Valle d'Aosta	206	1,3		33	0,5
Piemonte	203	1,5		35	0,6
Liguria	199	1,3		36	0,6
Lombardia	204	1,4		36	0,6
Prov. Aut. Bolzano (l. it.)	193	2,8		35	1,2
Prov. Aut. Trento	204	1,4		34	0,6
Veneto	205	1,1		34	0,4
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	207	1,6		35	0,7
Emilia-Romagna	205	1,6		37	0,7
Toscana	203	1,4		35	0,6
Umbria	200	2,0		36	0,8
Marche	208	1,8		37	0,7
Lazio	199	1,6		36	0,7
Abruzzo	201	1,8		36	0,7
Molise	198	2,5		34	1,1
Campania	190	1,8		38	0,8
Puglia	199	1,8		36	0,8
Basilicata	198	2,1		37	0,9
Calabria	186	2,5		37	1,1
Sicilia	186	2,3		37	1,0
Sardegna	194	2,0		35	0,9
ITALIA	199	0,5		37	0,2

Table 5. INVALSI 2019 Grade 8 results in Italian (by points).

I RISULTATI IN MATEMATICA **PER PUNTEGGIO** AL **GRADO 8**

Il grafico mostra il punteggio medio, la deviazione standard e la distribuzione dei punteggi per regione. La mappa mostra i risultati medi delle macro-aree e indica se tali risultati e i punteggi medi regionali differiscono significativamente dalla media italiana (200). Quest'ultima è riportata alla media del 2018 (200), dalla quale può differire segnalando un progresso o un regresso.
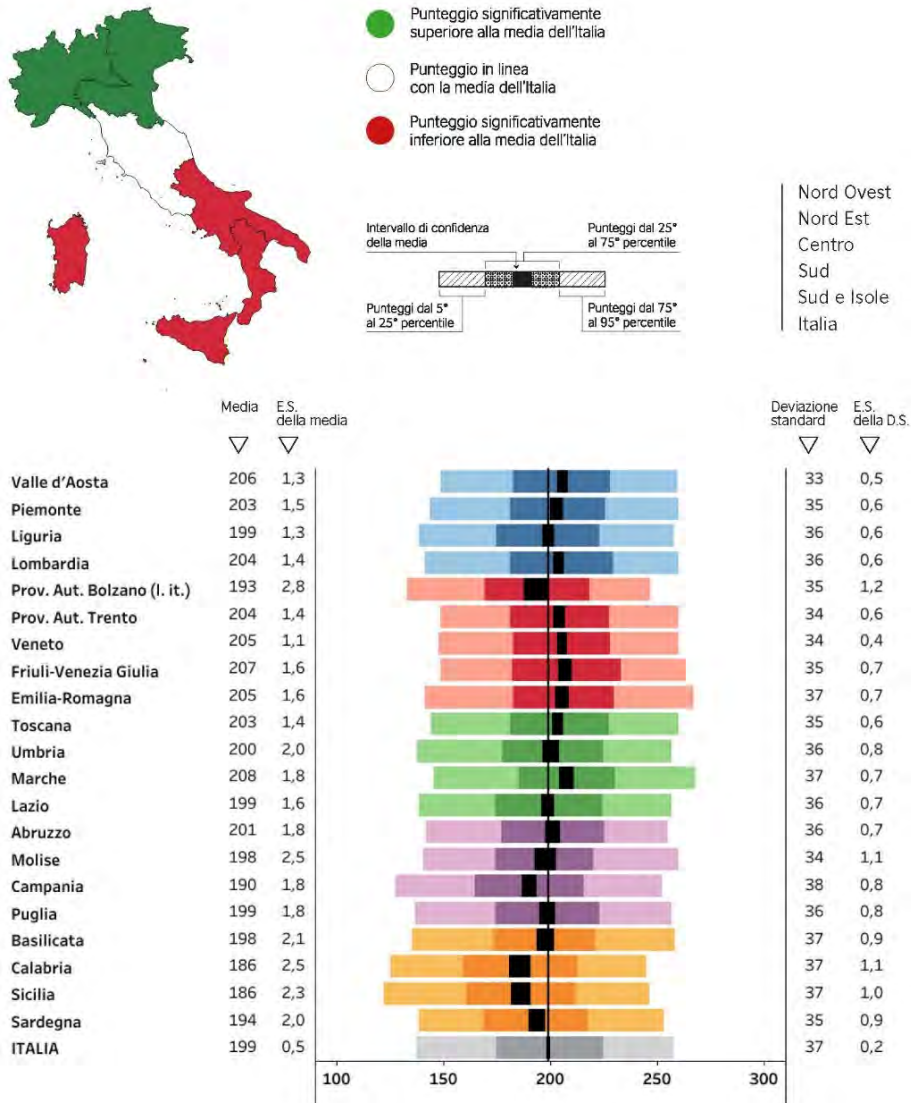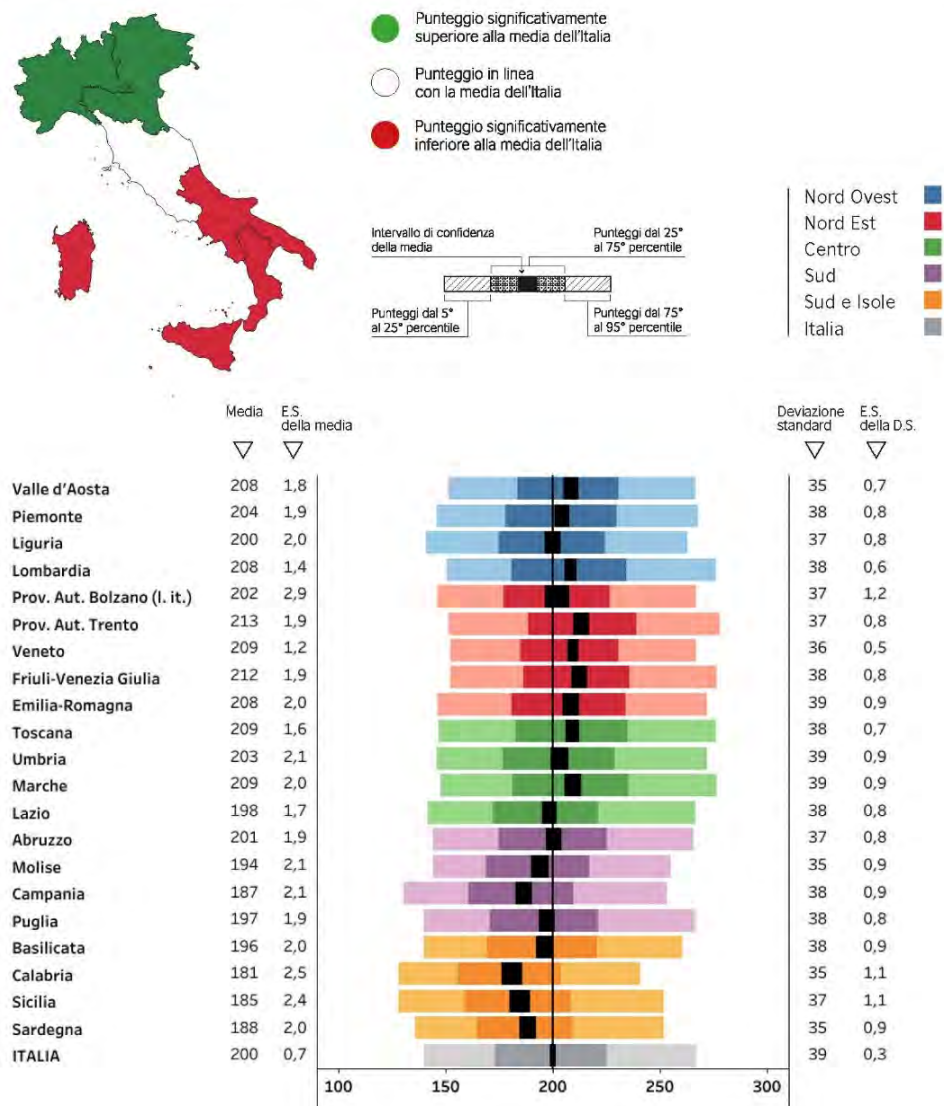

	Media	E.S. della media		Deviazione standard	E.S. della D.S.
Valle d'Aosta	208	1,8		35	0,7
Piemonte	204	1,9		38	0,8
Liguria	200	2,0		37	0,8
Lombardia	208	1,4		38	0,6
Prov. Aut. Bolzano (I. it.)	202	2,9		37	1,2
Prov. Aut. Trento	213	1,9		37	0,8
Veneto	209	1,2		36	0,5
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	212	1,9		38	0,8
Emilia-Romagna	208	2,0		39	0,9
Toscana	209	1,6		38	0,7
Umbria	203	2,1		39	0,9
Marche	209	2,0		39	0,9
Lazio	198	1,7		38	0,8
Abruzzo	201	1,9		37	0,8
Molise	194	2,1		35	0,9
Campania	187	2,1		38	0,9
Puglia	197	1,9		38	0,8
Basilicata	196	2,0		38	0,9
Calabria	181	2,5		35	1,1
Sicilia	185	2,4		37	1,1
Sardegna	188	2,0		35	0,9
ITALIA	200	0,7		39	0,3

Table 6. INVALSI 2019 Grade 8 results in Mathematics (by points).

I RISULTATI IN INGLESE **PER LIVELLO**
AL GRADO 8 (*LISTENING* E *READING*)

Il grafico mostra la distribuzione percentuale degli studenti nei livelli.
La scala sotto il grafico indica, a destra dello zero gli alunni che raggiungono il livello A2
previsto dalle Indicazioni Nazionali, a sinistra quelli che non lo raggiungono.
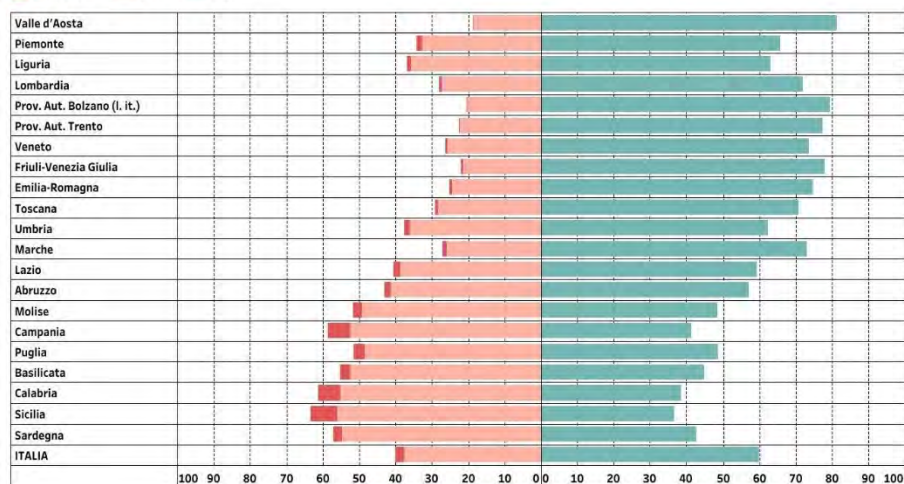
LISTENING

■ Pre A1   ■ A1   ■ A2

Valle d'Aosta
Piemonte
Liguria
Lombardia
Prov. Aut. Bolzano (I. it.)
Prov. Aut. Trento
Veneto
Friuli-Venezia Giulia
Emilia-Romagna
Toscana
Umbria
Marche
Lazio
Abruzzo
Molise
Campania
Puglia
Basilicata
Calabria
Sicilia
Sardegna
ITALIA

100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 0 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Table 7. INVALSI 2019 Grade 8 results in English (Listening, by level).

READING

Valori percentuali (%)

■ Pre A1   ■ A1   ■ A2

Valle d'Aosta
Piemonte
Liguria
Lombardia
Prov. Aut. Bolzano (I. it.)
Prov. Aut. Trento
Veneto
Friuli-Venezia Giulia
Emilia-Romagna
Toscana
Umbria
Marche
Lazio
Abruzzo
Molise
Campania
Puglia
Basilicata
Calabria
Sicilia
Sardegna
ITALIA

100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 0 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
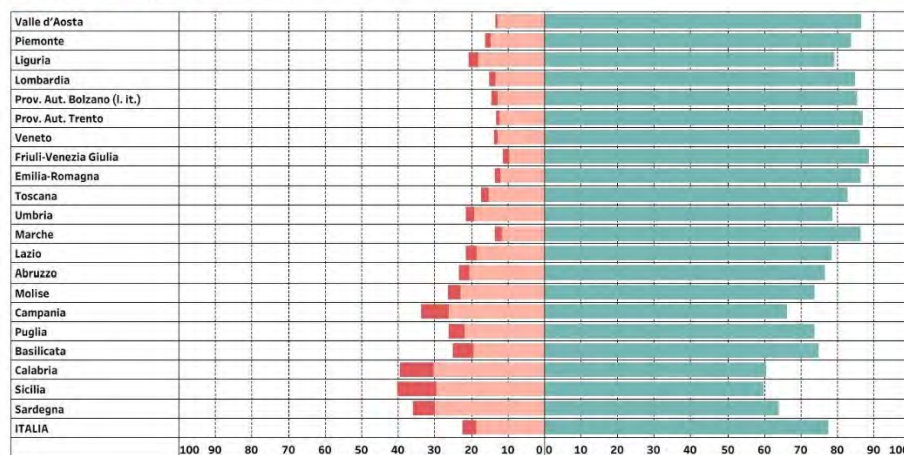
Table 8. INVALSI 2019 Grade 8 results in English (Reading, by level).

I RISULTATI IN ITALIANO **PER LIVELLO** AL **GRADO 8**

Il grafico mostra la distribuzione percentuale degli studenti nei livelli.
La scala sotto il grafico indica, a destra dello zero gli alunni che raggiungono
o superano il livello 3, a sinistra quelli che non lo raggiungono.

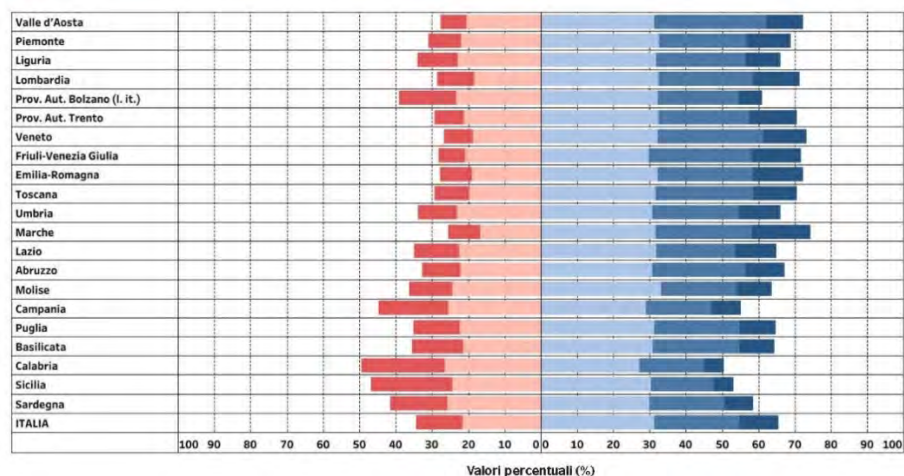■ livello 1   ■ livello 2   ■ livello 3   ■ livello 4   ■ livello 5

Table 9. INVALSI 2019 Grade 8 results in Italian (by level).

I RISULTATI IN MATEMATICA **PER LIVELLO** AL **GRADO 8**

Il grafico mostra la distribuzione percentuale degli studenti nei livelli.
La scala sotto il grafico indica, a destra dello zero gli alunni che raggiungono
o superano il livello 3, a sinistra quelli che non lo raggiungono.

■ livello 1   ■ livello 2   ■ livello 3   ■ livello 4   ■ livello 5
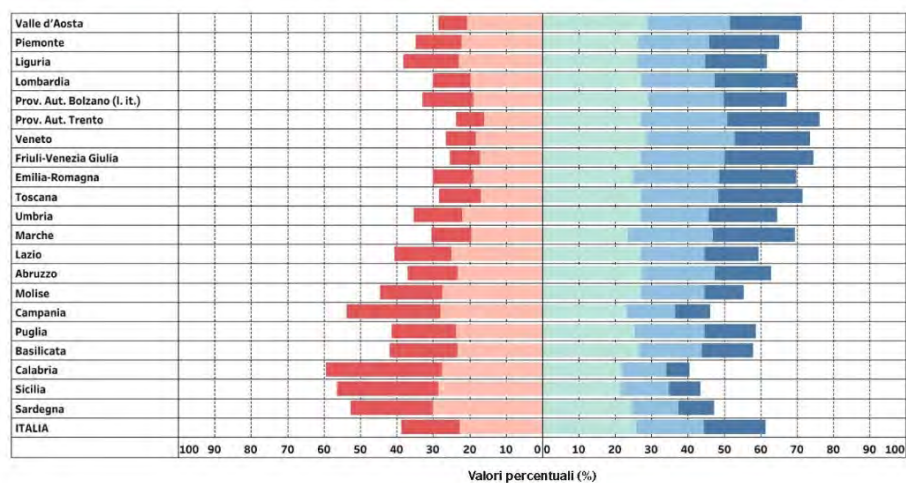
Table 10. INVALSI 2019 Grade 8 results in Mathematics (by level).

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	PISA 2012	PISA 2015	PISA 2018		PISA 2012	PISA 2015	PISA 2018
The Philippines	m	m	340	Iceland	483	482	474
Dominican Republic	m	358	342	Lithuania	477	472	476
Kosovo	m	347	353	Hungary	488	470	476
Lebanon	m	347	353	Italy	490	485	476
Morocco	m	m	359	Russia	475	495	479
Indonesia	396	397	371	Latvia	489	488	479
Panama	m	m	377	Croatia	485	487	479
Georgia	m	401	380	Switzerland	509	492	484
Kazakhstan	393	m	387	Austria	490	485	484
Baku (Azerbaijan)	m	m	389	The Netherlands	511	503	485
North Macedonia	m	352	393	OECD - 35b	493	490	487
Thailand	441	409	393	OECD - 36	493	490	487
Saudi Arabia	m	m	399	OECD - 35	493	490	487
Peru	384	398	401	OECD - 29b	498	493	490
Argentina	396	m	402	Czech Republic	493	487	490
Bosnia and Herzegovina	m	m	403	OECD – 27	498	495	491
Albania	394	405	405	Portugal	488	498	492
Qatar	388	402	407	France	505	499	493
Brunei	m	m	408	OECD – 23	501	497	493
Colombia	403	425	412	Belgium	509	499	493
Brazil	407	407	413	Slovenia	481	505	495
Malaysia	398	m	415	Germany	508	509	498
Jordan	399	408	419	Norway	504	513	499
Bulgaria	436	432	420	Denmark	496	500	501
Mexico	424	423	420	Taiwan	523	497	503
Montenegro	422	427	421	Australia	512	503	503
Moldavia	m	416	424	Japan	538	516	504
Cyprus	449	443	424	UK	499	498	504
Costa Rica	441	427	426	USA	498	497	505
Uruguay	411	437	427	New Zealand	512	509	506
Romania	438	434	428	Sweden	483	500	506
UAE	442	434	432	Poland	518	506	512
Serbia	446	m	439	Korea	536	517	514
Malta	m	447	448	Ireland	523	521	518
Chile	441	459	452	Finland	524	526	520
Greece	477	467	457	Canada	523	527	520
Slovakia	463	453	458	Estonia	516	519	523
Turkey	475	428	466	Hong Kong (China)	545	527	524
Ukraine	m	m	466	Macao (China)	509	509	525
Luxembourg	488	481	470	Singapore	542	535	549
Israel	486	479	470	B-S-J-Z (China)	m	m	555
Belarus	m	m	474	Vietnam	508	487	m
				Spain	488	496	m

Table 11. OECD PISA 2012-2018 Reading points. The Table is ordered by the 2018 ranking. (m=missing; B-S-J-Z=Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang)

Appendix 2

Life Pre-intermediate (National Geographic Learning)

1c Nature is good for you

Reading

1 Look at the photo. Where is the woman? What can she see?

2 Read the article. Match the topics (a–c) with the paragraphs in the article (1–3).

  a how much time we spend outdoors
  b making nature part of city life
  c studies by doctors

3 Read the article again. Answer the questions.

  1 What do most people think about nature?
  2 What is the main change in how people spend their time?
  3 What is happening at national parks in Canada?
  4 After the maths test, where did some people look at nature?
  5 In Toronto, where did healthier people live?
  6 What are they going to build in Dubai?
  7 Where can children study in Switzerland?
  8 In South Korea, how many people visit the new forests every year?

Word focus *feel*

4 Underline three phrases with *feel* in the first paragraph of the article. Match the phrases to the uses (1–3).

  1 to talk about your emotions or health
  2 to talk about wanting to do something
  3 to talk about an opinion

5 Complete the questions with these words.

better	like	that

  1 What do you usually feel _____ doing after a day at work?
  2 Do you feel _____ nature is good for us? Why? / Why not?
  3 After a difficult day, what makes you feel _____ in the evening?

6 Work in pairs. Take turns to ask and answer the questions from Exercise 5.

  A: *What do you usually feel like doing after a day at work?*
  B: *Going for a run in my local park and then eating dinner. Sometimes I go out and meet friends.*

Critical thinking giving examples

7 When writers give an opinion in an article, they often support the idea with examples. Look at these sentences from paragraph 1. Which sentence has the main idea? Which sentences give examples?

  a For example, the number of visitors to Canada's national parks is getting lower every year.
  b Humans are spending more time inside and less time outside.
  c And in countries such as the USA, only 10% of teenagers spend time outside every day.

8 Read paragraphs 2 and 3 of the article. Find the sentence with the main idea and sentences with examples. Underline the words and phrases for giving examples.

  For example, the number of visitors to Canada's national parks is getting lower every year.

9 Complete these sentences in your own words. Use examples from your own life. Then tell your partner.

  1 I relax in my free time in different ways. For example, …
  2 My home town has some places with trees and nature, such as …
  3 There are some beautiful national parks in my country. A good example is …

Speaking my life

10 Work in groups of four. Imagine your town has some money to make people's lives healthier. Look at the ideas below and think of one more.

  • one hundred new trees in the town
  • a 400-metre running track in the park
  • a new park with a children's play area
  • two cycle paths across the town
  • a bridge across the river with a garden

11 Discuss the ideas in your group and choose the best idea. Give reasons and examples.

  I think cycle paths are a good idea because cycling is good for your health and good for the environment.

12 Present your idea to the class. Then compare your ideas. Try to agree on the best idea.

14

Figure 1. Life Pre-intermediate (NatGeo Learning). Unit 1C including critical thinking.

NATURE
is good for you

▶ 6

How do you feel about nature? After spending hours indoors, do you often feel like going outside for a walk? Or if you work for hours at your office desk, do you feel better when you take a break and visit your
5 local park? Most people think that nature is good for us; it's good for our bodies and good for our brains. However, humans are spending more time inside and less time outside. For example, the number of visitors to Canada's national parks is getting lower every
10 year. And in countries such as the USA, only 10% of teenagers spend time outside every day. Many doctors feel that this is a problem in the twenty-first century, and that it is making our physical health worse.

As a result, some doctors are studying the connection
15 between nature and health: one example of this is the work of Dr Matilda van den Bosch in Sweden. The doctor gave people a maths test. During the test, their heart rate was faster. After the test, one group of people sat in a 3D-virtual-reality room for fifteen
20 minutes with pictures and sounds of nature. Their heart rates were slower than people's in the other group.

The virtual contact with nature helped them feel more relaxed. Another good example of how nature is good for health comes from Canada. In Toronto, researchers studied 31,000 people living in cities. Overall, they 25
found that healthier people lived near parks.

Because of studies like these, some countries and cities want nature to be part of people's everyday life. In Dubai, for example, there are plans for a new shopping mall with a large garden so shoppers can relax outside 30
with trees, plants and water. In some countries such as Switzerland, 'forest schools' are popular; schoolchildren study their subjects in the forests and do lots of exercise outside. And South Korea is another good example: it has new forests near its cities and around 35
13 million people visit these forests every year. So after building cities for so long, perhaps it's now time to start rebuilding nature.

heart rate: the speed of the human heart (number of heart beats per minute)

my life   ▶ YOUR HABITS ▶ YOUR CURRENT LIFE ▶ **MAKING LIVES HEALTHIER** ▶ ILLNESS
         ▶ FILLING IN A FORM   15

Figure 2 Life Pre-intermediate (NatGeo Learning). Unit 1C text.

GRAMMAR SUMMARY UNIT 1

Present simple and adverbs of frequency

Use

We use the present simple:

- to talk about habits and routines.
  I play tennis every week.

- to talk about things that are always true.
  Sleep is really important for health.

Form

We form the present simple with the infinitive form of the verb. To make negative sentences, we add *don't* before the verb. To make questions, we add *do* before the subject.

After *he, she, it,* etc. we add *-s* to the verb. We use *doesn't* in negative sentences, and *does* in questions.

	+	–	?
I/you/we/they	I eat.	You don't eat.	Do you eat?
he/she/it	She eats.	He doesn't eat.	Does he/she/it eat?

The verb *be* is different from other verbs.

	+	–	?
I	I'm fit.	I'm not fit.	Am I fit?
you/we/they	We're fit.	They aren't fit.	Are you fit?
he/she/it	She's fit.	She isn't fit.	Is he fit?

▶ **Exercise 1**

Adverbs and expressions of frequency

We use adverbs and other expressions in present simple sentences to talk about how often we do things.

> Mike **usually** goes for a run in the evening.
> I'm **often** late for work.
> I have a hot drink **five or six times a day.**
> We go on holiday **two or three times a year.**

Some common frequency adverbs are:

100% *always*
usually
often
sometimes
not often
rarely
0%
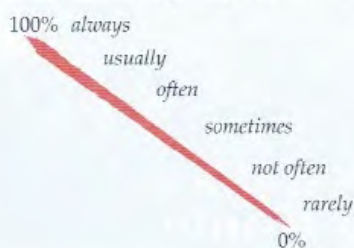
Position

Frequency adverbs and expressions of frequency go in different places in a sentence.

- Adverbs of frequency go before the main verb, but after the verb *to be*.
  *They **never** eat out.*
  *She's **always** out at the weekend.*
  *I don't **often** do sport.*

- Expressions of frequency normally go at the beginning or end of a sentence.
  *I go out with friends **three or four times a week.**
  Once a week, I go for a run.*

▶ **Exercises 2 and 3**

Present continuous

Use

We use the present simple to talk about things we do or that happen regularly. We use the present continuous to talk about something in progress in the present. This can be:

- something actually in progress at this moment.
  *I can't answer the phone because **I'm driving.***

- something happening around now, but not necessarily at this moment.
  I'm looking for a new job.

- a changing situation.
  *More and more people **are changing** their diet.*

Form

We form the present continuous with *be* + verb + *-ing*.

	+	–	?
I	I'm writing.	I'm not writing.	Am I writing?
you/we/they	We're writing.	They aren't writing.	Are you writing?
he/she/it	He's writing.	She isn't writing.	Is she writing?

Some verbs describe states (for example, *agree, believe, hate, know, like, love, prefer, want*). We don't use these verbs with the continuous.

> ~~He's owning a really nice car.~~
> He **owns** a really nice car.

▶ **Exercises 4, 5 and 6**

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Figure 3. Life Pre-intermediate (NatGeo Learning). Unit 1 Grammar summary.

Extra activity

With a young class, you could turn this into a roleplay. Ask half the class, working in pairs, to prepare questions to ask somebody famous or in the news. Ask the other half to decide which person to be and to think about what they often do and what they are doing these days. Organize students into new pairs (one from each half) to carry out their interviews.

1c Nature is good for you

Lesson at a glance

- reading: nature and health
- word focus: *feel*
- critical thinking: giving examples
- speaking: making lives healthier

Reading

1

- Ask students to work in pairs to discuss the photo and the questions.
- In feedback, elicit ideas from the class, and use this opportunity to pre-teach the meaning of some key words from this section: *brain, heart rate, outdoors, nature, 3D virtual reality* (see Vocabulary note below).

ANSWERS

Students' own answers.

The woman is enjoying a virtual reality nature experience. She's standing in a studio with pictures of nature around her.

Vocabulary note

brain = the grey organ in your head that thinks

heart rate = how fast your heart beats

outdoors = not inside

nature = the world not made by man, i.e. trees, lakes, mountains, seas

3D virtual reality = 3D means three-dimensional – *virtual* and *reality* refers to the pictures and sounds made by a computer to make the user feel they are in a real place

2 🌀 [6]

- Ask students to read the article and match the topics with the paragraphs. Let students compare answers briefly in pairs before checking with the class.
- **Optional step** The reading text is recorded. You could play the recording and ask students to read and listen.

ANSWERS

a 1 b 3 c 2

3 ● **CPT extra!** Grammar activity [after Ex. 3]

- Read the questions with the class.
- Ask students to read the article again and find the answers. Let students compare their answers in pairs before checking with the class.

Figure 4. Life Pre-intermediate (NatGeo Learning). Unit 1 Teacher's book with prompts for lessons and keys to exercises.

ANSWERS

1 It's good for us.
2 Humans are spending more time inside and less time outside.
3 The number of visitors is getting lower every year.
4 in a 3D virtual reality room
5 near parks
6 a new shopping mall with a large garden
7 in forest schools
8 13 million

Word focus *feel*

4
- Ask students to find and underline the three phrases with *feel* in the first paragraph of the article.
- Read the uses (1-3) with the class and elicit the first answer as an example.
- Ask students to work in pairs to match the remaining two phrases with the uses. Check answers as a class and try to elicit other examples for the uses (see Vocabulary note below).

ANSWERS

1 feel better 2 feel like going 3 feel that

Vocabulary note

1 To talk about your emotions or health: *feel better/ worse, feel tired, feel ill, feel sick, feel bored, feel under the weather*
2 To talk about wanting to do something: *I feel like going out later; I feel like singing.*
3 To talk about an opinion: *I feel (that) ...*

5
- Ask students to work individually to complete the questions. Let them compare answers in pairs before checking with the class.

ANSWERS

1 like 2 that 3 better

6
- Give students a minute or two to think about the questions in Exercise 5.
- Ask students to work in pairs to discuss the questions. Monitor and help with vocabulary as necessary.

Extra activity

Write the following sentence starters on the board. Ask students to complete them, then discuss them in pairs or small groups:

1 *I feel that the government ...*
2 *I often feel tired when ...*
3 *At the weekend, I usually feel.... because ...*
4 *... always makes me feel ...*
5 *Right now, I feel like ...*

Critical thinking *giving examples*

7
- Read the information with the class and elicit the answers to the questions.

ANSWERS

Sentence b has the main idea.
Sentences a and c give examples.

8 ■ **CPT extra!** Critical thinking activity [after Ex. 8]
- Ask students to work individually to find the sentence with the main idea and the sentences with examples in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the article. Ask them to underline the words and phrases for giving examples.
- Let students compare answers in pairs before checking with the class.
- In feedback, build up a list of words and phrases on the board for giving examples and point out how they are used (see Vocabulary note below).

ANSWERS

Paragraph 2
Main sentence:
As a result, some doctors are studying the connection between nature and health ...
Example sentences:
One example of this is the work of Dr Matilda van den Bosch in Sweden.
Another good example of how nature is good for health comes from Canada.
Paragraph 3
Main sentence:
Because of studies like these, some countries and cities want nature to be part of people's everyday life.
Example sentences:
In Dubai, for example, there are plans for a new shopping mall with a large garden ...
In some countries such as Switzerland, 'forest schools' are popular ...
And South Korea is another good example; it has new forests near its cities ...

Vocabulary note

We can use *For example,* to introduce an example, or one of a number of other set phrases:
> *An/One example (of this) is ...*
> *Another / A further / A good example (of this) is ...*
Alternatively, we can use a phrase at the end of sentences:
> *The number of visitors is going down, for example.*
> *The reduction in the number of visitors is an example of this.*
We use *such as* + noun / noun phrase to give an example.
> *In cities such as London, ...*

Figure 5. Life Pre-intermediate (NatGeo Learning). Unit 1 Teacher's book with prompts for lessons and keys to exercises.

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Appendix 3

Identity A2 to B1 (Oxford University Press)

1 It's all about me!

VOCABULARY Common nouns • Bedroom furniture • Physical appearance
GRAMMAR *there is/there are* • *some* and *any* • Prepositions of place • *have got* • Adjective order
FUNCTIONS Describing physical appearance • Making friends

1.1 Talk about favourites

CLOTHES & ACCESSORIES

ENTERTAINMENT

MY FAVOURITE THINGS

FAMILY & FRIENDS

TECHNOLOGY

FUN FACT
Percentage of British teens with a mobile = 90%!

VOCABULARY Common nouns

1 ◉028 **Match the words to the pictures. Then listen, check and repeat.**

___ video games	___ best friend	___ bag	___ celebrity	___ jacket	___ magazine
___ TV	___ headphones	___ sunglasses	___ trainers	___ laptop computer	___ football
___ mobile phone	___ parents	___ pets	___ brother and sister		

2 **SPEAKING** Cover the words in Ex.1 and test your partner's memory.

❝ **A** What are these?
B Those are sunglasses.

22

Figure 6. Identity A2-B1. Unit 1.

3 Read the Vocabulary strategy. Complete the mind map with words from Ex.1.
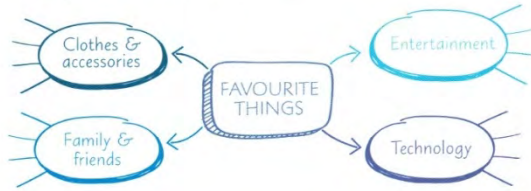
VOCABULARY STRATEGY

Mind maps

There are different strategies to learn new words. One is to create mind maps and group words by topic (e.g. music, sport) or by word type (e.g. verbs, nouns, adjectives).
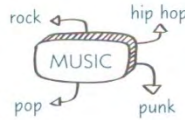
4 Add these words to the mind map in Ex.3. Can you add any other words?

T-shirt • film • rock band • app
email • tablet • jeans • baby

5 Complete the profile about you.

ALL ABOUT ME

My favourite person is

My favourite accessory is:
○ bag   ○ trainers
○ sunglasses   ○ jacket   ○ other
My favourite film is

My favourite TV programme is

My favourite band is

My favourite style of music is:
○ rock ○ pop ○ hip hop ○ punk ○ other
My favourite app/video game is

My favourite thing about me is

6 COMPETENCES In pairs. Ask and answer five questions about your profiles.

❝ **A** Who's your favourite person?
   B My favourite person is my brother Paolo.
   A What's your favourite film?
   B My favourite film is *Star Wars*.

Challenge ⟫⟫ Write your profile, for a social media site. Give information about your favourite things.

LIAM'S VLOG
My 'Top 5'

Before you watch

1 This is Liam's first vlog. How old do you think he is? Where do you think he's from?

While you watch

2 ▶◉029 Watch or listen. Tick (✓) the words you hear. Which two are NOT in the vlog?

Comprehension check

3 ▶◉029 Watch or listen again. Answer the questions.
1 Where is Liam?
2 What colour are his favourite trainers?
3 What colour are his headphones?
4 What are his posters of?
5 What's Liam's favourite thing?

Your turn

4 In pairs. Present your 'Top 5' favourite things in the style of Liam's vlog. Use *this is/these are*.

❝ Hey guys! I'm Chiara. I'm 14 years old and these are my Top 5 favourite things. Number 5: This is my…

EVERYDAY ENGLISH	🗩
Hey guys!	Ciao ragazzi!
tons of	un sacco di
cool	fantastico, alla moda
I love	adoro
See you next time!	Ci vediamo la prossima volta!

Figure 7. Identity A2-B1. Unit 1.

It's all about me!

GRAMMAR REFERENCE

A there is/there are

Forma affermativa	Forma negativa	
There is (There's)	There is not (There isn't)	
There are	There are not (There aren't)	
Forma interrogativa	**Risposte brevi**	
	Affermative	**Negative**
Is there...?	Yes, there is.	No, there isn't.
Are there...?	Yes, there are.	No, there aren't.

There's a magazine in the bag.
C'è una rivista nella borsa.
There are two beds in the room.
Ci sono due letti nella stanza.

There isn't an alarm clock.
Non c'è una sveglia.
There aren't 30 students.
Non ci sono 30 studenti.

Is there a TV? *C'è una TV?*
Are there two pillows? *Ci sono due cuscini?*

1 **There is/There's** introduce un primo elemento singolare in una lista.

There's a lamp and two pictures in my room.
Ci sono una lampada e due quadri nella mia stanza.

2 **There is** corrisponde a 'c'è' in italiano. Si usa davanti a un sostantivo singolare o a un elenco di sostantivi di cui il primo è singolare.

There's a calculator and two pencils.
Ci sono una calcolatrice e due matite.

3 **There are** corrisponde a 'ci sono' in italiano. Si usa davanti a un sostantivo plurale o a un elenco di sostantivi di cui il primo è plurale.

There are six new chairs and an old desk.
Ci sono sei sedie nuove e una scrivania vecchia.

B some and any

1 **Some** e **any** corrispondono ai partitivi italiani 'del', 'dello', 'della', 'dei', 'degli', 'delle' e si usano con i sostantivi plurali per indicare una quantità non specificata. Normalmente si usa **some** in frasi affermative e **any** in frasi negative e interrogative.

There are some books on the table.
Ci sono dei libri sul tavolo.
Are there any apps on your phone?
Ci sono delle app sul tuo cellulare?
There aren't any bus passes.
Non ci sono abbonamenti per l'autobus.

⚠ In inglese si usa **any** anche quando in italiano non è necessario.

There aren't any magazines.
Non ci sono riviste.
Are there any pens?
Ci sono penne?

2 **Some** si usa anche in frasi interrogative per fare offerte e richieste quando ci si aspetta una risposta affermativa.

Would you like some coffee?
Vuoi del caffè?
Can we have some wine?
Possiamo avere del vino?

⚠ Dopo **some** si usa il plurale dei sostantivi diversamente dall'italiano in cui dopo 'qualche' si usa il singolare.

some chairs   *qualche sedia*

C Prepositions of place

in   on   under   next to

in front of   behind   between   above
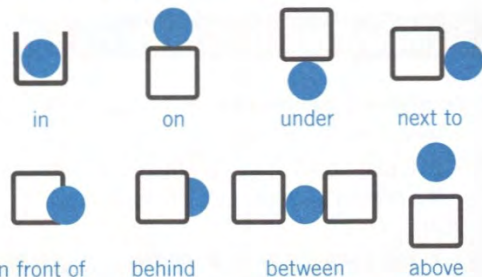
1 Si usano le preposizioni di luogo per indicare la posizione di cose o persone.

in	in, dentro
on	sopra, su (con contatto)
under	sotto
next to	accanto a
in front of	davanti a
behind	dietro a
between	fra, tra
above	sopra, al di sopra di (senza contatto)

2 Si usa **in** con riferimento a spazi chiusi, circoscritti.

in the bathroom   *in bagno*

3 Si usa **at** con riferimento a un punto o a un posto specifico.

at home   *a casa*
at the bus stop   *alla fermata dell'autobus*

Figure 8. Identity A2-B1. Unit 1 Grammar section.

D *have got*

Forma affermativa	Forma negativa
I have (I've) got	I have not (haven't) got
You have (You've) got	You have not (haven't) got
He has (He's) got	He has not (hasn't) got
She has (She's) got	She has not (hasn't) got
It has (It's) got	It has not (hasn't) got
We have (We've) got	We have not (haven't) got
You have (You've) got	You have not (haven't) got
They have (They've) got	They have not (haven't) got

1 *Have got* corrisponde al verbo 'avere' in italiano.

2 Nella lingua informale si usa la forma contratta.

3 Si usa *have got* per parlare di possesso, rapporti familiari e interpersonali, e caratteristiche fisiche.

We've got a dog. *Abbiamo un cane.*
She's got a sister. *(Lei) Ha una sorella.*

4 La forma negativa si ottiene aggiungendo *n't* dopo *have/has* oppure mettendo *not* tra *have/has* e *got*.

Forma interrogativa	Risposte brevi	
	Affermative	**Negative**
Have I got...?	Yes, I have.	No, I haven't.
Have you got...?	Yes, you have.	No, you haven't.
Has he got...?	Yes, he has.	No, he hasn't.
Has she got...?	Yes, she has.	No, she hasn't.
Has it got...?	Yes, it has.	No, it hasn't.
Have we got...?	Yes, we have.	No, we haven't.
Have you got...?	Yes, you have.	No, you haven't.
Have they got...?	Yes, they have.	No, they haven't.

5 La forma interrogativa si ottiene invertendo soggetto e verbo *have*.

6 Nelle risposte brevi non si usa *got*. Nelle risposte brevi affermative non si usa la forma contratta.

E Adjective order

1 Gli aggettivi di opinione precedono gli altri aggettivi.

2 Per descrivere denti, capelli e occhi gli aggettivi seguono un ordine preciso:

Per descrivere i denti:

• opinione ► grandezza ► colore ► *teeth*
The dog's got horrible big, yellow teeth!
Il cane ha i denti grandi e gialli orribili!

Per descrivere i capelli:

• lunghezza ► stile ► colore ► *hair*
I've got short, wavy, black hair.
Ho i capelli corti, neri e mossi.

Per descrivere gli occhi:

• grandezza ► colore ► *eyes*
Bob's got big, blue eyes.
Bob ha dei grandi occhi celesti.

GRAMMAR CHECK

1 Completa le frasi con *is*, *are*, *isn't* o *aren't*.

1 There _____ a man but no woman.
2 No, there _____ any twins here.
3 There _____ six video games.
4 There _____ a lamp and a pillow.
5 No, there _____ a laptop in the bed!

2 Scegli la risposta corretta.

Con i sostantivi plurali si usa [1]some/any (= dei, delle) in frasi interrogative e negative, e [2]some/any (= dei, delle) in frasi affermative.

3 Completa le regole.

Si usa il verbo *have got* per parlare di [1]_____, descrivere caratteristiche [2]_____ di una persona e parlare di rapporti [3]_____.

4 Scegli la risposta corretta: A, B o C.

1 La terza persona singolare di *have got*
   A è uguale alle altre persone.
   B diventa *has got*.
   C diventa *has gots*.
2 La forma negativa del verbo *have got* si ottiene aggiungendo *not*.
   A dopo *got*.
   B prima del verbo *have*.
   C tra *have* e *got*.

5 Scegli l'alternativa corretta.

1 Alla forma interrogativa il verbo *have got* precede il soggetto/si mette il soggetto tra *have* e *got*.
2 Nelle risposte brevi si usa/non si usa *got* dopo il verbo *have*.

6 Scrivi le preposizioni di luogo accanto alle loro traduzioni:

behind • on • above • under • next to
in • in front of • between

1 _____ davanti a   5 _____ dentro
2 _____ _____ sopra   6 _____ dietro a
3 _____ fra, tra   7 _____ sotto
4 _____ accanto a

Qual è la differenza tra le due traduzioni di *sopra*? _____

7 Completa il diagramma con le parole nel riquadro.

shape • opinion • colour • size

Adjective order

1_____ ►2_____ ►3_____ ►4_____

Figure 9. Identity A2-B1. Unit 1 Grammar section and exercises.

1 It's all about me!

Pages 22–31

Unit aims

Vocabulary
Common nouns
Bedroom furniture
Physical appearance

Grammar
there is/there are
some and *any*
Prepositions of place
have got
Adjective order

Functions
Describing physical appearance
Making friends

Pronunciation
h

The audio and video for this unit can be accessed via the QR code on Student's Book page 22.

> **Fast track**
>
> The language syllabus is covered in lessons 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3, and in the Communication lesson. The vlog, the Culture lesson, and Trending Topics offer additional skills practice, so if you have limited class time you could set some of these for homework.

1.1 Talk about favourites pages 22–23

Aims

- Learn common nouns.
- Talk about favourites.
- **Language competences:** Talking about favourites, Watching and understanding a short film.
- **Key competences:** Learning to learn.

Vocabulary • Common nouns

- P B1 Preliminary Vocabulary list

Ex.1

- Students could work individually or in pairs to do the matching task.
- As you check answers, get students to repeat chorally and individually.

Transcript and key ◀)) 028

video games 16, TV 7, mobile phone 14, best friend 10, headphones 13, parents 9, bag 3, sunglasses 1, pets 11, celebrity 8, trainers 2, brother and sister 12, jacket 4, laptop computer 15, magazine 6, football 5

Ex.2

- If necessary, briefly revise the use of *this, that, these, those*.
- Allow students time to memorise the words before they work in pairs to do the memory test.

KEY
Students' own answers.

Ex.3

- Read the Vocabulary strategy aloud to the class.
- Students then complete the mind map.
- Allow students to compare their answers in pairs before you check with the class.

KEY
Clothes & accessories: bag, jacket, sunglasses, trainers
Entertainment: celebrity, football, magazine, TV
Family & friends: best friend, brother and sister, parents, pets
Technology: headphones, laptop computer, mobile phone, video games

Ex.4

- Students could work individually or in pairs to add the words to the mind map.
- Check answers and model pronunciation of the words, then elicit any other words students have added. Write these on the board and teach the meanings to the class.

KEY
Clothes & accessories: T-shirt, jeans
Entertainment: film, rock band
Family & friends: baby
Technology: app, email, tablet

Ex.5

- Read the profile aloud, giving answers about yourself, then ask students to complete it about them.

KEY
Students' own answers.

Ex.6

- P B1 Preliminary Speaking Part 1
- Students work in pairs to ask and answer their questions. Ask them to note down their partner's answers.
- Ask some students to tell the class something about their partner.

KEY
Students' own answers.

Figure 10. Identity A2-B1 Teacher's pack. Directions for Unit 1.

THE PAST (2)

70 Contrast: past simple/present perfect simple

A L'uso del *past simple* o del *present perfect simple* è condizionato dalla presenza o meno di un esplicito riferimento temporale.

B *Past simple* e *present perfect simple* <u>in presenza</u> di un riferimento di tempo.

Present perfect simple		Past simple	
Si usa quando l'azione si svolge in un periodo di tempo **non del tutto trascorso**	Riferimento temporale: *today* *this week* *this month* *this year* *this morning/afternoon* (se ancora in corso)	Si usa quando l'azione si è svolta in un periodo di tempo **ben definito** e **del tutto trascorso**	Riferimento temporale: *yesterday* *yesterday evening* *last night/year* *in 2001* *three years ago* *this morning/afternoon* (se già concluso) *at that time* *when*
Janet has bought a lot of new clothes this month. Janet ha comperato molti vestiti nuovi questo mese.		*Janet bought three pairs of jeans yesterday.* Janet ha comperato tre paia di jeans ieri.	

Con le espressioni *this morning* e *this afternoon* si usa il *present perfect simple* quando, nel momento in cui si parla, il periodo **non è del tutto trascorso** e il *past simple* quando il periodo è già **completamente trascorso**. Osserva:

(h. 10.00) *I've had three coffees this morning.* Ho bevuto tre caffè stamattina.

(h.15.00) *I had three coffees this morning.* Ho bevuto tre caffè stamattina.

C Il *present perfect simple* si usa anche:

1) con le espressioni di tempo che indicano una relazione tra il **passato** e il **presente**:

so far/up to now (= 'fino a ora')
in the last few days (= 'negli ultimi giorni')

He's served one customer so far.   Ha servito un cliente finora.

2) con i seguenti avverbi ed espressioni di tempo che indicano un periodo di tempo non ben definito/precisato:

already   before   ever   just   lately   many times
never   not... yet   often   once   rarely   recently
seldom   several times   twice   three/four times   yet

They haven't found the treasure yet.   Non hanno ancora trovato il tesoro.

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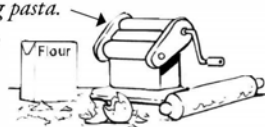
Figure 11. Activating Grammar, unit 70, basic grammar.

74 Contrast: present perfect continuous/present perfect simple

A Nota la differenza d'uso tra *present perfect continuous* e *present perfect simple*.

AZIONE INIZIATA NEL PASSATO E TUTTORA IN CORSO	
<u>SENZA</u> *how long, for* o *since*	<u>CON</u> *how long, for* o *since* (FORMA DI DURATA)
… si deve usare il *present perfect continuous*:	… se i verbi sono di **azione** si possono usare sia il *present perfect continuous* sia il *present perfect simple*:
I've been working on this report but I still haven't finished it.	*I've been working/I've worked on this report for two hours and I still haven't finished it.*
Lavoro da tempo a questa relazione ma non l'ho ancora finita.	Sono due ore che lavoro a questa relazione ma non l'ho ancora finita.
Per mettere in risalto il prolungarsi dell'azione si usano **all day, all week** ecc.:	Ma con i verbi di **stato**, di **sentimento**, di **possesso**, di **percezione involontaria** e di **attività** mentale si usa il *present perfect simple* (v. Unit 73).
I've been working on this report all day but *I still haven't finished it.*	
È tutto il giorno che lavoro a questa relazione ma non l'ho ancora finita.	

AZIONE CONCLUSA NEL PASSATO SENZA SPECIFICARE <u>QUANDO</u>	
Il *present perfect continuous* descrive <u>solo</u> un'azione **appena** conclusa:	Il *present perfect simple* può descrivere sia un'azione **appena** conclusa sia un'azione **avvenuta molto prima**:
He's been visiting his relatives in Mexico.	*He's visited his relatives in Mexico. He stayed with them two years ago.*
È stato in Messico a visitare i parenti.	È stato in Messico a visitare i parenti. È andato da loro due anni fa.
AZIONE SVOLTA	RISULTATO OTTENUTO
Si usa il *present perfect continuous* per attirare l'attenzione su un'**attività appena svolta**:	Si usa il *present perfect simple* per attirare l'attenzione sul **risultato** di un'azione passata:
Mum's been making pasta. La mamma ha fatto la pasta.	*Mum's made some pasta. She's made ravioli.* La mamma ha fatto della pasta. Ha fatto i ravioli.
Il *present perfect continuous* puntualizza che esistono segni evidenti dell'attività svolta.	Il *present perfect simple* sottolinea il **risultato** dell'azione svolta piuttosto che l'azione in sé.

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Figure 12. Activating Grammar unit 74, advanced grammar with illustrations.

TRANSLATION DOSSIER

1 Tradurre il presente

In italiano si usa il **presente indicativo** per esprimere:

A Situazioni stabili, fatti sempre veri e azioni abituali.

Gianni *abita* a Bologna.   Il Po *sfocia* nel mare Adriatico.   Ci *alleniamo* ogni mercoledì.

> In inglese si usa il *present simple* (→ Unit 23):
> Gianni **lives** in Bologna.   The Po **flows** into the Adriatic Sea. We **train** every Wednesday.

B Azioni in corso nel momento in cui si parla, situazioni temporanee o in evoluzione.

A: A chi *telefoni*?   B: *Chiamo* Sara per invitarla a pranzo. Oggi *non lavora*.

Il prezzo del petrolio *cresce* rapidamente.

In questi casi possiamo usare anche la forma *stare + gerundio*: A chi *stai telefonando*?

> In inglese si usa sempre il *present continuous* (→ Units 27, 30):
> A: Who **are** you **phoning**?   B: I'm **calling** Sara to invite her to lunch. She **isn't working** today.
> The price of oil **is rising** fast.

C Azioni iniziate nel passato e tuttora in corso.

Lavorano qui dal 2008.   *Ho* questa macchina da cinque anni.

> In inglese si usa il *present perfect simple* (→ Unit 68) o il *present perfect continuous* (→ Unit 72):
> They **have worked / have been working** here since 2008.
>
> ⚑ Attenzione! Il *present perfect continuous* non si usa con i verbi di stato (→ Unit 28):
> I've **had** this car for five years.

D Azioni future.

Stasera *mangiamo* fuori. Ho riservato un tavolo.   Domani *lavoro* in giardino, se il tempo è bello.

Guarda! C'è un circo in città. Ci *porto* i bambini sabato sera.

> In questi casi, l'inglese ha tre forme diverse. Se l'azione futura è stata programmata definitivamente ed esiste un **impegno definitivo**, si usa il *present continuous* (→ Unit 112):
> Tonight we **are eating** out. I've booked a table.
> Se l'azione futura è **solo un'intenzione**, si usa *be going to* (→ Unit 113):
> Tomorrow I'm **going to work** in the garden, if the weather is fine.
> Se è una **decisione immediata**, presa nel momento in cui si parla, si usa *will* (→ Unit 114):
> Look! There's a circus in town. I'll **take** the children on Saturday night.
> Si usa *will* anche per **offrire** (→ Unit 126) o **promettere** di fare qualcosa, e **per chiedere** a qualcuno **di fare qualcosa** (→ Unit 125):
> I'll **cook** if you like.   I'll **call** you when I arrive.   **Will** you **get** some bread for me?
> Cucino io se vuoi.   Ti *chiamo* quando arrivo.   Mi *prendi* del pane?

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Figure 13. Activating Grammar, Translation dossier, theory.

Exercises

1 Come hai visto, al presente indicativo italiano possono corrispondere forme verbali inglesi diverse. Per tradurre correttamente bisogna individuare il significato del verbo italiano tra i vari possibili. Immagina di dover tradurre la frase seguente e di avere dei dubbi sul verbo evidenziato:

0 Siamo a Londra in vacanza. **Stiamo** in un albergo vicino a Hyde Park.

Puoi procedere così:

1 identifica che significato ha qui il presente indicativo:
   A situazione stabile, fatto sempre vero o azione abituale;
   ☒ azione in corso nel momento in cui si parla, situazione temporanea o in evoluzione;
   C azione iniziata nel passato e tuttora in corso;
   D azione futura, offerta, promessa, richiesta.
2 trova la forma inglese corrispondente: *present continuous*
3 traduci: *We are in London on holiday. We are staying at a hotel near Hyde Park.*
4 controlla la tua traduzione, eventualmente consultando la grammatica (in questo caso → Unit 30).

Ora segui lo stesso procedimento per le altre frasi.

1 Gary fa il cuoco. **Lavora** in (= *at*) un albergo vicino a Hyde Park.
   Significato del verbo italiano: **A**   **B**   **C**   **D**
   Forma inglese corrispondente: ....
   Traduzione: *Gary is a cook.* ....

2 Che cosa **fai** il prossimo weekend?
   Significato del verbo italiano: **A**   **B**   **C**   **D**
   La domanda riguarda un'intenzione, quindi la forma inglese corrispondente è: ....
   Traduzione: ....

3 Janet **vive** in Italia dal 2006.
   Significato del verbo italiano: **A**   **B**   **C**   **D**
   Le due forme possibili in inglese sono: ....
   Traduzione: ....

4 **Amo** la musica da quando ero bambino.
   Significato del verbo italiano: **A**   **B**   **C**   **D**
   Love è un verbo di stato, quindi l'unica forma possibile è: ....
   Traduzione: .... *since I was a child.*

2 Scegli tra i due significati indicati, poi traduci.

0 Ecco il tuo biglietto: parti domani con il treno delle 14.15.
▶ azione per cui esiste un impegno definitivo   intenzione
   Here's your ticket: you are leaving tomorrow on the 14.15 train.

1 Secondo il bollettino meteorologico, l'uragano si muove verso la Florida.
▶ situazione in evoluzione   azione abituale
   According to the weather report, ...

Figure 14. Activating Grammar, Translation dossier, exercises.

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