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**The use of the Direct Method and of the
Communicative Approach in teaching Italian
as an L2 in a private school in Venice**

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List of abbreviations

L2	Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
TL	Target Language
TPR	Total Physical Response
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
T	Teacher
S _n	Student

Abstract

The aim of the study is to examine in what way the teacher integrates two of the main methods applied in the history of language teaching – namely, the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach – to develop students' speaking skills.

In the first chapter, the two teaching methods are presented and analysed with an overview of some of the studies that investigated their use in the language classroom.

The second chapter presents a study carried out in an Italian as a second language classroom run by a language teacher with a 23 -year-experience in the field. Data were collected by interviewing the teacher on her beliefs about different aspects of language education: grammar, development of four basic skills, pronunciation, and use of non-verbal language, use of the tone of voice, use of visual aids. After the semi-structured interview with the teacher, a six-week -in class observation followed, and field notes were taken. The field notes were qualitatively analysed, and the results suggested that the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach were mainly employed in order to develop the speaking skills of the students.

Keywords: Direct Method, Communicative Approach, in class observation, foreign language teaching, speaking skills

Introduction

The present research investigates the teaching methods employed by a teacher of Italian as an L2 in a private school in Venice. The study was conducted within a six-week internship project by the current author, a student of The *Ca' Foscari* University of Venice. The main reason for conducting this research is exploring how the speaking skills are taught in this environment.

The objective of this paper is to discover which methods are primarily employed, and how they are employed to develop students' speaking skills. These two questions will be answered by analysing field notes collected by the researcher during the internship. In addition, an interview with the teacher investigating her teaching beliefs was held before the start of the observation. This thesis will compare the data collected through the observation with the answers provided by the teacher, to see whether teachers' practices are consistent with their beliefs. Studies on the tension between teachers' beliefs and practices (see Borg, 2003; Borg 2006; Borg, 2011) have highlighted a general discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and behaviours. The research available focused on different sub-categories of teachers' beliefs and this paper will focus only on some of them.

The first chapter of this research will provide an overview of the two teaching methods that were mainly employed by the teacher. Namely, the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach. Studies conducted on the implementation of the methods in the foreign language class showed that both the Direct Method (Sitrous & Silitonga, 2018; Mahmud & Ulya, 2021; Haliwanda, 2019) and the Communicative Approach (Lumy, 2008; Darmayanti & Arif, 2022; Maulana et. al, 2020; Aalaei, 2017; Al-Twarish, 2009; Saputra, 2015) had a positive impact on the development of students' speaking skills in different foreign language learning contexts. Students

generally performed better in post-tests after being taught using one of the two methods. This study, however, will not focus on the results achieved by the students in tests, but on the techniques employed by the teacher, leaving the analysis of students' performances to possible further research.

In the second chapter the research project will be presented, including a description of its aims, the context in which it was conducted, the participants, the instruments, and how the data were analysed. Next, in the third chapter the data collected using the two instruments will be presented. Finally, in chapter four, the findings will be discussed, and conclusions will be drawn.

The results of the study show that the teacher primarily employed the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach. Moreover, it emerged that the techniques that she implemented to develop speaking skills, belonged to the two approaches' tradition. Lastly, the comparison between the data collected using the two instruments highlighted that teacher's practices generally reflected teachers' beliefs.

CHAPTER 1: The Direct Method and the Communicative Approach

Teaching methods are teaching systems that are fixed and include techniques and practices. According to Balboni (2015: 9), a teaching method is the operational transposition of a teaching approach and can therefore be described as adequate or not adequate for realizing the approach and coherent or non-coherent in itself. Also, it is through the use of the teaching techniques, that the method becomes practice. In this chapter the main teaching methods that were developed and used in the XIX and XX centuries will be presented in chronological order. First, six teaching methods will be briefly presented. Second, the two teaching methods on which this research is focused will be analysed, namely the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach. Specifically, the history, the principles, the techniques and some studies on the methods will be considered.

1.1 Teaching methods: an overview

a. The Grammar-Translation method

This method, once known as “Classical Method” (Larsen-Freeman, 1986: 4), is focused on grammar, phonology and vocabulary. It developed in the late XIX Century, and it was mainly used to teach Latin and Greek, the classical languages. The Grammar-Translation method has however never been abandoned and it is still used by some foreign language teachers. Teachers use the native language of the students as language of instruction and the target language is scarcely employed. Being able to read literature in the foreign language is one of the main goals of learning and this is here achieved by learning the grammar and the vocabulary. Language rules are

considered as fixed and are normally learnt by heart by the students. The method is focused on written language, whereas oral language is hardly considered. Therefore, the main weakness of this method is the resulting inability by part of the students to speak the foreign language. Inside the classroom environment the teacher is regarded as an authority who knows the rules and therefore the truth, whereas the students are considered a *tabula rasa*, an empty vase that has to be filled with knowledge (Balboni, 2015: 23).

b. The Direct Method

For this method see paragraph 1.2

c. The Audio-Lingual Method

The Audio-Lingual method was developed in the USA during World War II when people needed to learn the language quickly, in order to use it for military purposes (Larsen-Freeman, 1986: 31). Consequently, it is quite different from the Grammar-Translation method and similar to the Direct Method, adding features from behavioural psychology and structural linguistics. As a matter of fact, the method is based on the Behaviourism theory of Skinner¹ (Almemi & Tavakoli, 2016: 2). Each lesson often starts with a dialogue that has to be memorized by the students through mimicry. Drills also are widely employed in the method, to create repetition and automatization. The goal of this method is that the students learn to use the foreign language automatically and overcome the old habits of their mother tongue. The teacher is seen as a model and students learn from them through a process of habit formation. It is of high importance

¹ Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1904-1990) was an American psychologist and author. He is regarded as the father of Operant Conditioning. He conducted experiments on animals in order to study their behaviour in response to neutral operants, reinforcers and punishers.

for students to receive feedback and to have their mistakes corrected, so that they do not become a habit. As to the vocabulary, it is limited to that included in the situations presented in the dialogues. Similarly, grammar is introduced via dialogues and is usually taught inductively.

d. The Silent Way

It was created in the 1960s, influenced by the ideas of cognitive psycholinguists and transformational-generative linguists that believed that “language must not be considered a product of habit formation [as in the audio-lingual method], but rather of rule formation” (Larsen-Freeman, 1986: 51). In the Silent Way, teachers normally start the lesson with something the students already know and then the learners are guided in developing their own knowledge. Silence is one of the tools that is used by the teacher in order to encourage the students’ autonomy development and students’ cooperation. Therefore, we can say that teachers work with the students and that they are not considered an authority, they listen to what students produce and ask directly to the students what they think they have learnt. On the basis of this and of the mistakes made by the students during the lesson, the teacher tries to understand what needs to be worked on next. Pronunciation is essential in this method, and also the melody of the language is supposed to be acquired by the students. Lessons are not based on a fixed syllabus. Despite being silent for most of the time, the teacher is still active and uses hand gestures and mouth words, accompanied by specialized teaching materials such as Cuisenaire rods², spelling charts and colour rectangle charts. Unlike other methods that have previously been analysed, the use of the mother tongue of the

² Cuisenaire rods are small wooden rods that are used in language teaching to represent different areas of language. They can be of different lengths and colours.

students is not forbidden. Indeed, its use is permitted to give instructions and to help the students with pronunciation and perception.

e. Suggestopedia

Suggestopedia was developed in the 1970s by Georgi Lozanov, who thought that language can be acquired by learners faster than we think. This, according to him, can only happen if students feel at ease and believe that they have the capacities they need for being successful. The name Suggestopedia originates in the belief that suggestion can be seen as an integral part of language learning. Everything starts from the environment, that has to be comfortable and pleasant. This can be realized, for instance, by using piped music. Teachers are regarded as an authority, but they do not correct mistakes directly, they generally use the correct form later on in the lesson. Vocabulary is emphasized, whereas grammar is considered only marginally, so that students have the chance to learn the language, without focusing on form. Suggestopedia uses also the aids of posters hang around the class so as to enable "Peripheral Learning" (Talley & Tu, 2016: 44). In order to make the students feel at ease inside the classroom environment, they are encouraged to create a new identity for themselves, changing their name, profession and origin. This child-like technique is thought to encourage them to take part to an imaginary and relaxing trip with the teacher (Larsen-Freeman: 1986: 85).

f. Community language learning

This method traces its root back to the Counseling-Learning approach developed by Curran³ (Netta and Safura, 2019: 3). The aim of this method is for the students to be able to communicate in the foreign language. Students should feel part of a community of individuals that treat each other as whole person, taking into account both the physical and the emotional part of the other learners. The teacher plays the role of a counsellor, but students develop an increasing degree of independence in building their own learning. Here the use of the mother tongue of the students is permitted. However, the teacher acts as an interpreter who translates the utterances produced by the students in their first language. Furthermore, syllabi are usually designed by the students who are encouraged to talk freely about the topics they are interested in. However, printed books are not prohibited and can be used by the teachers. As to grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, they are discussed based on the topics and problems that emerge while the students produce language.

g. The Total Physical Response Method (TPR)

As stated by Larsen-Freeman (1986: 109), this method is part of the “comprehension approaches”, since students are introduced to the foreign language starting from the development of the listening skills. Teaching techniques are used to enable students to learn the foreign language in the same way they have learnt their first language. The method was developed by the psychology professor Dr. James Asher in the late 1960s, in order to aid language teaching classes at the University of San Jose in California (Talley & Tu, 2016: 42). In TPR students are allowed to use their mother tongue and they are invited to start producing language using the target

³ Curran was a specialist in counselling and a psychologist. He worked with adult learners and noticed the emotional and affective barriers that learners created during the learning process. He therefore tried to create a method to counter anxiety and negative feelings so as to create a supportive environment where learning is possible. (Cakir, 2014)

language whenever they are ready, so as to reduce anxiety. Teachers usually use commands and expect the learners to respond to the command by performing a physical action. In the same way, students could then be encouraged to command the other learners and the teacher to perform actions. Asher (1982: 43) compares the teacher to the director of a play and the students to the actors that perform on stage. This method can be considered as “multi-modal” (Curran, 1976: 79) since students do not just sit on the chair and listen to the lecture, on the contrary they are involved from a somatic, a pedagogical and an intellectual point of view. This method is believed to reduce stress in the students, since they are expected to enjoy their experience in language learning. However, as observed by Brown (2007), it is usually only suitable for beginners.

h. The Communicative Approach

For this method see paragraph 1.3.

1.2 The Direct Method

1.2.1 The History

The Direct Method was developed in the end of the XIX century in response to the inefficacy of the Grammar-Translation method which did not enable students to speak the language. As a matter of fact, the Grammar-Translation method was focused only on grammar and on the written comprehension and the translation of written texts and little attention was paid to production in the foreign language. In the late '800 however, people needed foreign languages to communicate inside the multicultural

and ever-growing global community. This led to the production of new teaching methods in which speech was enhanced.

The Direct Method is also known as Berlitz method, since it was used in the commercial schools directed by Maximilian Berlitz⁴ in the late '800 in the US. These schools were later developed by his grandson into an international institution with branches all over the world (Balboni, 2015: 22). Its origins, however, can be traced back to work of proponents as George Ticknor, François Gouin and Claude Marcel and Wilhelm Viëtor (Danesi, Diadori & Semplici, 2018: 55).

Gouin began to publish his works on the Direct Method in 1880 (Celce-Murcia, 2011: 2). His methodology was based on the observation of his 3-year-old nephew who was learning his mother tongue (Wafi, n.d. :2). This aspect is crucial for the development of the principles on which the Direct Method was built. Hence, it is based on the concept that foreign language students can learn a foreign language in the same way they have learnt their first language: without the use of translation, only relying on action and demonstration. Moreover, an important product of Gouin's works is the "Gouin series". These consist in a series of actions and activities related to a topic connected to real-life experiences. Here follows an example of a Gouin series as cited in Titone (1968: 35):

I walk toward the door	I walk
I draw near to the door	I draw near
I draw nearer to the door	I draw nearer
I get to the door	I get to
I stop at the door	I stop
I stretch out my arm	I stretch out
I take hold of the handle	I take hold
I turn the handle	I turn
I open the door	I open

⁴ Maximilian Berlitz (1852-1921) was a German linguist, founder of the Berlitz Language Schools.

I pull the door	I pull
The door moves	Moves
The door turns on its hinges	Turns
The door turns and turns	Turns
I open the door wide	I open
I let go of the handle	Let go

Gouin's ideas were quite innovative for the time and were not sufficiently disseminated and implemented until the late XIX century, when both linguists and teachers felt the necessity to change the way foreign languages were taught and stated the so-called Reform Movement (p.7).

Viëtor is one of the main representatives of the natural approaches, of which the Direct Method is part. He was a German linguist who applied linguistic theories on language teaching in order to justify how he saw language education. His views were summarized in the pamphlet *Language Teaching Must Start Afresh* (1882), in which he enhanced the critical points of the Grammar-Translation Method and advocated for the training of teachers in phonetics.

On the whole, the members of the Reform Movement shared some principles that Richards and Rodgers (1986: 8) summarized in six points. First, spoken language was considered fundamental and should be enhanced using an oral-based methodology. Second, teaching and teacher training should take the principles of phonetics into account. Third, the exposition to oral language should precede written language. Fourth, words and sentences should be considered inside a context and not as separated elements. Fifth, the inductive method should be used to teach grammar. Sixth, teachers could turn to the first language of the students when they had to expose the meaning of new concepts or in order to check their understanding on some topics. However, they were advised against the use of translation. These principles are the scientific base on which linguists as Viëtor produced their works including more

practical instructions and suggestions. Furthermore, they are of essential importance for Natural Methods and for the most widely known Direct Method.

As it has already been mentioned, the Direct Method was mainly known because it was used in the Berlitz Schools. However, Berlitz never referred at it with the name “Direct Method”, instead he called it the Berlitz Method. Its principles were also applied by Saveur, who founded a French School in Boston at the end of the 1860s. The two linguists shared the belief that language should be taught recurring to realia and demonstration, whereas translation in the mother tongue of the students should be avoided. Moreover, language should be used spontaneously in the classroom and should be connected with everyday life contexts.

Both Berlitz and Saveur schools were private. Consequently, students were typically motivated since they were willing to pay to attend a foreign language course. In addition to this, teachers were native speakers of the language, condition that enabled them to feel confident and competent in using the language during the whole duration of the course. For these reasons, the Direct Method was unpracticable in public schools where teachers were not usually native speakers of the language and students were rarely motivated. Therefore, the Direct Method was not widespread and did not encounter success outside of private schools. Mart (2013: 182) highlights a further important drawback of the method: teachers did not only have to be native speakers of the language, they also needed “competence in [their] language, stamina, energy, imagination, ability and time to create own materials and courses, immense vitality, robust health, real fluency in the modern language [they teach].” Such resourceful figures were difficult to find and can be considered an additional cause of the unsuccessful spread of the method outside of some specific niche contexts. Furthermore, Brown (1973: 5) argues that sometimes the complete rejection of the use

of translation could lead to unpleasant situations in which the teacher had to perform “verbal gymnastics” in order to explain the meaning of a difficult word or concept. However, the Direct Method was used outside the commercial schools in combinations with other methods, including the Grammar-Translation Method to compensate to such drawbacks.

1.2.2 The Principles

Each language teaching method is based on a series of principles that constitute the guideline on which later the teaching techniques are developed. Titone (1968: 100-

1) indicates the principles of the Direct Method as:

- Never translate: demonstrate
- Never explain: act
- Never make a speech: ask questions
- Never imitate mistakes: correct
- Never speak with single words: use sentences
- Never speak too much: make students speak much
- Never use the book: use your lesson plan
- Never jump around: follow your plan
- Never go too fast: keep the pace of the student
- Never speak too slowly: speak normally
- Never speak too quickly: speak naturally
- Never be impatient: take it easy

Larsen-Freeman (1986) also tries to provide a personal review of the principles. According to the scholar, the main goal of the teacher is that students learn how to use the foreign language for communication. This can be achieved only if students start to think in the TL and stop translating from their mother tongue into the foreign language. Moreover, the students should be able to directly associate the meaning of the words or sentences to a concept. Realia, pictures and pantomime are the instruments that teachers are supposed to use in order to demonstrate this immediate association. As

it has been already mentioned in the previous section of the paper, translation should never be used. As to the role of the teacher and the students, they have to be regarded as partners who cooperate in both the teaching and the learning processes. In addition, students are invited to interact with each other, not only with the teacher. Grammar is taught using the inductive method and vocabulary is practiced by using it in sentences in context and is emphasized over grammar rules. Lectures are based on a syllabus structured according to situations and topics that are thought to be relevant for the students' needs. Culture is also part of the lessons, and it is seen as the culture of the native speakers of the language. It includes the study of its history, geography, and everyday life. Oral communication is the starting point of each lesson, and the development of written skills is subordinated to that. Particular attention is paid to pronunciation from the beginning of the language learning process. Finally, the errors of the students are usually taken into account by the teacher who tries to help them to self-correct.

1.2.3 The Techniques

Teaching techniques are the instruments teachers have at their disposal when they have to act practically inside the classroom. They are procedures that teachers use to accomplish a specific activity or task. Techniques can be drawn from different teaching methods and then be combined by the teacher in order to achieve the learning objectives. In other words, teachers do not necessarily have to select techniques that belong to the repertoire of one method only. They are usually free to blend methods, according to the needs of their students. Some techniques can be considered typical of one specific method, however, according to Danesi et al. (2018: 49), they cannot be

regarded as representative of one specific method only. From a practical point of view, techniques do not only guide the learning process, but they also support it.

As to the Direct Method, different techniques can be considered typical. Larsen-Freeman (1986: 26-28) proposes a summary of the main techniques that are usually adapted in the Direct Method: reading aloud, question and answer exercise, getting students to self-correct, conversation practice, fill-in-the blank Exercise, Dictation, Map drawing, and Paragraph Writing.

The reading aloud technique consists of reading different pieces of dialogues or passages out loud. Each student takes their turn and in the end the teacher should clarify the meaning of the source text using realia, gestures, examples and pictures. In the question and answer exercise, students are asked questions and then they are supposed to answer them with full sentences. They are also encouraged to reciprocally ask new questions and answer them. Furthermore, students are spurred to self-correct in different ways: the teacher might ask them to choose between two alternatives, the wrong sentence they have produced, and a correct sentence supplied by the teacher, or the teacher might repeat the sentence to the student and signal the mistake with a questioning voice or by stopping just before the mistake. In addition, conversation practice is also a core feature of the Direct Method. It works as follows: the teacher asks students questions whose corresponding answers contain a specific grammatical structure, then the students should be able to ask the questions and answer them to each other using the grammatical structure properly. As to the fill-in-the-blank exercise, students are expected to fill in with the missing words that are all in the TL and are not directly presented as connected to a specific grammar rule. The focus on grammar should precede the exercise, which should be presented as pure language, and not as a grammar exercise. In dictation, a passage is read by the teacher three times at

different paces. The first time, students are supposed to just listen, whereas the second time, they are expected to write down the sentences they hear as the teacher pauses after each one. The final time is designed for the students to check their work. Map drawing consists in getting students to convert an oral message into a map drawing. Then, the roles are swapped, and the teacher is the one to receive oral instructions from the students. Finally, students might be asked to summarize a concept presented orally in a coherent and cohesive text.

1.2.4 Empirical Research

Being the Direct Method one of the most important and most used methods in the teaching of foreign language worldwide, it has been the subject of numerous studies in the last decades, each one focusing on different aspects of the method. As this dissertation will consider the use of the Direct Method to develop the oral production in students of Italian as a foreign language, previous research on the use of the Direct Method in the teaching of the oral language will now be presented.

Sitrous and Silitonga (2018) carried out a study on how the speaking competence of 40 students of English as a foreign language in Indonesia changed before and after the implementation of the Direct Method. Findings suggest that the use of the Direct Method should be implemented “by providing activities that can increase students’ interest in reading poetry such as poetry contest, making the poetry surgical group and so on” (p.84).

Similarly, Mahmud and Ulya (2021) conducted a study that analysed how the speaking abilities of 28 eleventh grade students of English as a foreign language changed after being taught using the Direct Method. Students were administrated a pre- and post-test to test the students’ speaking abilities before and after the

implementation of the Direct Method in the teaching classroom. The two tests consisted of an oral test made of ten questions, to which students were supposed to answer orally. The overall scores in the pre-test were categorized into “poor level”, whereas the overall scores in the post-test were categorized into “good level”. Therefore, it can be said that the difference registered was significant and that the use of the Direct Method proved to be effective.

Haliwanda (2019) obtained analogous results when investigating the use of the Direct Method to teach English as a foreign language to 135 second year students in a High School in Indonesia. Students were submitted a pre-test and a post-test, and the scores were later compared. The oral production of the students was examined using categories developed by Higes which included: accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The results of the study highlighted a significant difference in the performance of the subjects of the study before and after being taught using the Direct Method. Namely, the speaking ability was overall categorized into “poor level” in the pre-test, and into “good level” in the post-test (p.161)⁵.

The studies so far presented suggest that the Direct Method can be an effective tool that teacher can use in order to help students develop their foreign language speaking skills. Students performed better after being taught using this method and showed an increase in the fluency as well as in the correctness.

⁵ Scores were categorized as follows: 1 = incompetent, 2 = competent enough, 3 = competent, 4 = very competent.

1.3 The Communicative Approach

According to Richards and Rodgers (2007: 66) the Communicative Approach “aims to (a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication”. The Communicative Approach is also sometimes referred to as Communicative language teaching (CLT), notional-functional approach and functional approach.

1.3.1 The History

The Communicative Approach traces back its roots to the first Communicative Approaches that developed in the 1970s. These approaches include the Notional-Functional Syllabus⁶ and the threshold level (Danesi, Diadori & Semplici, 2008: 32). Similarly, Karapetyan (2005: 96) claims that the Communicative Approach was significantly influenced by the sociolinguistic and socio-semantic theories of the 1960s and 1970s, namely the cognitive theories of language teaching and learning. Balboni (2015: 31) presents the followings as main events that lead to the change the idea of what a language is and what being able to speak a language means: Austins’ works on the pragmatical function of the language; the *Modern Language Project* developed by the Council of Europe in 1967; the publication of *Speech Acts* by Searle (1969); the notion of communicative competence formulated by Dell Hymes.

In the 1960s and 1970s European countries started to feel the urge for creating and spreading international methods of language teaching. This was determined by

⁶ “A notional-functional syllabus is a set of materials to be learned by students of a second language. While learning to perform communicative activities, students practice language structures that refer to certain situations and ideas (notions). The language structures are organized to express different interactions (functions) that are possible for different effects.” (Knop, 1981)

the need to teach the major languages of the Common Market to European adults. The market to which foreign language teaching was aimed at was broader and it included different types of students. Now, not only elite students were able to learn foreign languages, but also common students were offered foreign language education in secondary schools. A new approach to language teaching was deeply needed. Moreover, changes were experienced in school curricula as a whole. Learning outcomes in all subjects had to be clarified and presented in form of objectives beforehand and new learning techniques were employed, such as group works. Two key influences in the development of the Communicative Approach were: the redefinition of what it means to be competent in a language and the new way of planning foreign language syllabi. In the following paragraphs these two aspects will be presented and analysed.

Richards and Rodgers (1986: 65) explain how the studies of Wilkins contributed to the development of the Communicative Approach. Wilkins's theories were part of the materials used by a group of experts within the Council of Europe that in the 1970s was working on the creation of a unit-based system to manage language courses. The scholars considered the functional or communicative definition of language proposed by Wilkins as a starting point for the production of communicative syllabi for language teaching. He analysed the communicative meanings with which language learners should be familiar with in order to communicate. Wilkins proposed to analyse language uses starting from the communicative uses of language, and not from grammar and vocabulary. His theories were later collected in his book *Notional Syllabi* (1976).

According to Larsen-Freeman (1986: 131) the communicative competence "involves being able to use the language appropriate to a given social context". This definition corresponds to the idea of communicative competence developed by Hymes,

who considered it a definition of what speakers need to know in order to actively participate in a speech community. According to Hymes (1972: 281), speakers have to acquire knowledge and ability in order to understand:

- (1) whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;
- (2) whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;
- (3) whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
- (4) whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

A significant contribution to the development of the Communicative Approach is the functional account of language elaborated by Halliday (1975). The linguist described the seven basic functions of language:

- (1) instrumental function: use of language to get things;
- (2) regulatory function: use of language to control the behaviour, attitudes or feelings of others;
- (3) interactional function: use of language to interact with others;
- (4) personal function: use of language to express individuality;
- (5) heuristic function: use of language to seek and test knowledge;
- (6) imaginative function: use of language to create unreal scenarios or words;
- (7) representational function: use of language to communicate information.

Taking all the above-mentioned theoretical framework into consideration, Canale and Swain (1980: 30) proposed four components of the communicative competence:

- (a) Grammatical competence: it includes the knowledge of lexical items, morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology. In other

words, the grammatical competence enables learners to produce comprehensible utterances.

(b) Sociolinguistic competence: it comprises sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse. Sociolinguistic competence provides students with the ability to use socially determined cultural codes in meaningful ways.

(c) Strategic competence: it consists of the verbal and non-verbal strategies that can be used to compensate a breakdown in the communication due to different causes. They are grouped in two sub-categories: those connected to the grammatical competence (e.g. paraphrasing) and those connected to sociolinguistic competence (e.g. conversation fillers).

(d) Discourse competence: it is a combination of grammatical forms and meanings. It enables learners to encode act into cohesive and coherent texts.

In the 1970s new syllabus including topics gathered around language functions instead of grammatical categories started to circulate, also due to Wilkins' works.

These influences lead to a project funded by the Council of Europe that aimed at the creation of the threshold syllabi. At the beginning, the beneficiaries were adult beginners, then the materials were adapted for schools. The syllabi contained the language needed for "vocational and social purposes, in terms of situations, language functions and semantic "notions", as well as the more traditional dimensions of grammar, vocabulary and language skills" (p.36). The threshold level was first developed for English (1975), then for French (1976) and later for nearly 30 languages. However, the comprehensive framework that included all the six levels of competence was developed only in the 1990s and launched in 2001⁷. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) enabled the creation of a "transparent", "coherent"

⁷ The CEFR was later republished with new descriptors in 2018

and “comprehensive” (Council of Europe, 2001: 7) basis for the creation of foreign language syllabi and for the assessment of language competence. Each level of the framework is defined through descriptors that explain what the user of the language can do at that step. Descriptors are provided to define linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competence and they are holistic. This means that they provide an overview of functions, grammatical forms and vocabulary, that are then presented in separate language specifications (p.30). The competence considered in the framework includes knowledge, skills, existential competence and ability to learn. With knowledge, it is meant the declarative knowledge as resulting from empirical knowledge and formal learning. Each piece of knowledge is not simply added to the previous knowledge, but, according to the Council of Europe, it is conditioned by the pre-existing conditions of the personal knowledge of the individual. Similarly, skills are developed considering the pre-existing competences of the individual. Existential competence is seen as the togetherness of individual characteristics and personality traits, and this, again, influences the acquisition of new knowledge. Finally, the ability to learn, considers the three previous aspects of competence to create new competence and knowledge.

1.3.2 The Principles

According to Richards and Rodgers (1986: 71) the Communicative Approach is marked by some basic principles connected to language:

- (1) language is a system for the expression of meaning;
- (2) the primary function of language is for interaction and communication;
- (3) the structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses;
- (4) the primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

Danesi, Diadori and Semplici (2008: 32) indicate the followings as the main principles on which Communicative Approaches in general are based:

(a) the learning material has to be selected according to linguistic “acts” or “functions”. Examples of these are “apologizing”, “Saying goodbye” etc;

(b) the elements of the learning module, such as grammatical structures and vocabulary, are expected to be inserted in the learning programme according to their communicative value. This means that each unit has to be organized around a certain communicative function;

(c) the communicative situations should be organized according to their frequency of use and not according to their complexity. In other words, teachers should put the communicative situations in order of priority;

(d) the order in the analysis of the L2 should not be dictated by the grammar rules, but from the communicative functions;

The main objective should be that of developing the communicative competence of the students, in order to enable them to survive in the outside world.

A more comprehensive list of the main principles is offered by Larsen-Freeman (1986: 123) who summarizes the problem that lies in teaching starting from vocabulary and grammar as follows: “Students may know the rules of language *usage*, but will be unable to *use* the language”. And it is from this point that the principles of the Communicative Approach start. The main aim is that of providing students with the language they need in order to accomplish some functions in real-life situations. This is the reason why lectures should use “authentic language” and start lessons using language in a real context. Lessons should provide students with two kinds of competence: linguistic and communicative. This means that they should be able to understand forms and meaning and to choose the right form appropriate to the situation

they are involved in. Therefore, culture is part of the syllabus. The syllabus is organized according to functions, and forms are introduced. Students should be able to interpret the social situation they are in and choose the forms, meanings and functions that are more adequate to that situation. Attention is paid also to the non-verbal communication, since students might need to use or understand it in authentic contexts with native speakers. Moreover, an important competence that has to be acquired is that of being able to comprehend the writer's or speaker's intentions. Therefore, the foreign language has to be used as vehicle of information throughout the entire lesson, not only when required by a specific exercise. Students should speak in the foreign language to the other students for any information exchange, also for those which are not directly connected to the lesson topic. They should be encouraged to interact and cooperate among themselves to learn to negotiate meanings. Negotiation takes place also when students read a written text. In this case, the negotiation is between the reader who tries to comprehend the writer's intentions, and the writer who writes keeping the reader's perspective in mind (p.134). Language should be presented in all its variety and students should be able to choose among a wide range of options and synonyms they have at their disposal to communicate in a certain situation. In addition, they should also learn not only to speak the language, but also to speak about the language and become familiar with concepts such as cohesion and coherence. Students should be fluent and accurate in the language production and mistakes are considered a natural part of the development of communication skills, and therefore are tolerated. However, the focus is not only on speaking, but on all four skills: oral and written production and oral and written comprehension.

The teacher is a facilitator. Teachers are responsible for creating situations where communication is promoted and then, while students are engaged in communicative

activities, teachers should act as advisors. They might engage in the conversation with students and communicate with them, but the main role is that of answering their questions and monitoring the performance. Consequently, students are responsible for their own learning, they do not regard the teacher as the main actor inside the classroom, but as a manager of the exchanges. Students are therefore often organized in pairs and groups (small or whole) so as to interact with one another as much as possible. Students are supposed to gain confidence when speaking the foreign language and become always more fluent and competent. The teacher is a good listener that acts as a referee or monitor on the student's performances.

Students are supposed to experience high levels of motivation inside the foreign language class since they should feel that the language they are learning is useful for real-life situations. In addition to this, students are regularly invited to share their feelings and emotions about certain topics. They are encouraged to share ideas and opinions connected to the topics they are studying, so as to connect their personality to the use of the language. Djumaniyazova (2022: 437) synthesizes the motivational aspects: "Student's motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics". Real-life situations are expected to change from day to day and the related exercises should change during the lesson according to how students react and respond to the stimuli presented. Lectures become something created for the students of that class and not something taken from an anonymous book that might be used by hundreds of different classes.

Student's mistakes are considered part of the learning process and are tolerated. Teachers are supposed to monitor and intervene in the language production of the students, but this does not imply an immediate correction of the mistake. Correction might be demotivating and should be avoided if it interrupts the language production

process. The evaluation of the performance is based on a balance of the accuracy and of the fluency of the language production.

Alibekova and Urinboyeva (2020: 186) highlight the importance of the connection that exists between the situations presented to students as learning materials and their age and psychological characteristics. Moreover, the materials can be “real, conditional, imaginary, fabulous” (p.186) and students always have to consider them relevant for the learning to take place. It is important that the connection that exists between the materials and students gives them the chance to give a personal character to that input.

Danesi, Diadori and Semplici (2008: 33) highlight also some drawbacks of the Communicative Approach. The scholars maintain that the communicative context does not always determine the structures and vocabulary that have to be used. Furthermore, it may be difficult to organize the learning material according to the communicative functions, ignoring the complexity of the grammar structures. Finally, the communicative functions presented in the textbooks might often result artificial, since they are planned and do not arise from a necessity of the moment. Abate (2014: 131) adds that it may be difficult to find qualified teachers that are able to organize and direct communicative lessons. Moreover, there are still teachers that prefer traditional grammar-based methods for different reasons, that include the lack of time or the belief that those principles are better (p.132). As to student's, Abate maintains that they might not always have the proficiency needed to carry out CLT activities. In addition, there are some factors that the teacher might not be able to control, such as the upbringings of learners, that have a significant influence on how they interact in the classroom. Introvert students can be hard to manage inside a communicative classroom because they might not be willing to actively participate in the activities. Furthermore, students

might not always be interested in the topics proposed by the teacher, even if they are appositely picked for them (p.33). Class size is another factor that might cause problems in the implementation of the Communicative Approach. As a matter of fact, large size classes might be difficult to handle for the teacher, specifically there might be problems in implementing communicative activities and techniques. This might limit the teacher-student interaction that is crucial for evaluating the progress made by students and intervene to solve problems.

1.3.3 The Techniques

The number of techniques that can be used within the Communicative Approach are unlimited, provided that they are in accordance with the principles mentioned in section 1.3.2. This section will firstly present some principles and features that are fundamental in communicative activities as maintained by Krashen (2008), Breen (1987) and Morrow (1981). Later, some practical examples of communicative tasks applied in the foreign language class will be suggested.

Krashen (2008) outlines three principles that need to be followed when organizing speaking activities with a Communicative Approach:

- (a) first, the activity has to be divided into three stages: pre-activity stage, during activity stage, and conclusion stage;
- (b) second, each stage should focus on different areas of knowledge;
- (c) third, the role of the teacher during the activity is that of monitoring the correct use of the foreign language in the during activity stage and of giving feedbacks in the conclusion stage.

Breen (1987, as cited in Drohomyska 2021: 37) identifies three important aspects on which classroom work depends: participation, procedure and subject

matter. Participation includes how the member of the class are going to work (individual, pair, group) and which role is assigned to the teacher. Procedure concerns the type of activity and task that is being carried out, the resources that are going to be used and how the results of the activities are shared or evaluated. Finally, subject matter considers the focus of the work and the purpose of the learning process.

According to Morrow (Johnson and Morrow, 1981) communicative activities have three main features: information gap, choice and feedback. The information gaps start from a situation in which one of the two interlocutors does not have an information that the other interlocutor has. This situation is considered the most appropriate because it is prompted from a real necessity: that of filling an information gap. The choice consists in giving students the opportunity to choose what they are going to say as in real-life situations. The feedback is provided considering whether the aim of the communication has been achieved or not. Similarly, Johnson (1982, as cited in Drohomyska 2021: 36) identifies three criteria on which communicative materials are based: the principle of information transfer, the principle of information gap and the correction of content principle. The first principle entails the ability to translate language from one channel to another, such as translating oral directions into a map or a diagram into a paragraph. The principle of information gap implies, as already explained above, a gap that needs to be filled by negotiating information. The correction of content principle means that the focus of the lesson is on the content rather than on the grammatical accuracy.

According to Littlewood (1981, as cited in Richard and Rodgers 1986: 76) activities in the Communicative Approach can be distinguished in “functional communication activities” and “social interaction activities”. The first ones include noting similarities and differences among sets of pictures, finding missing pieces in maps or pictures, learners giving instructions to each other on how to draw pictures or

maps. Whereas social interaction activities comprehend “conversation and discussion sessions, dialogues and role plays, simulations, skits, improvisations, and debates” (p. 76).

Larsen-Freeman (1986: 135) outlined the main techniques employed in the Communicative Approach. The first one is the already mentioned use of authentic materials. These include newspapers article, radio broadcasts, menus, timetables: anything that is somehow connected to real-life and that can therefore be perceived by the students as useful even outside the classroom. This type of materials is more suitable for students with high levels of proficiency, however also students with lower levels of proficiency can be taught using authentic materials. In this case, teachers might use realia with a lower level of language or might decide to rewrite authentic materials using a more comprehensible language but keeping the “real-life” outlook. Scrambled sentences are a further technique that can be used. Here students are presented with scrambled language and are asked to put it in a logical order. To complete the exercise, students need to be able to create a cohesive and coherent text by identifying all the elements that can help them unscrambling the text. Games are also used frequently in the Communicative Approach. Students carry out enjoyable tasks and practice language at the same time. Furthermore, games have all the three features of communicative activities developed by Morrow (1981). Similarly, problem-solving tasks share these three features and are therefore apt to the Communicative Approach. Here students are supposed to work together and negotiate meanings to solve the problem. Finally, in role play students practice the language in different roles and context. Here they are expected to use the competence they have developed during the lessons to choose the right register and expression. Depending on what the teacher decides, roleplays can be more or less structured. Students might know the

role they have to play, the situation they are in, the topic they are to talk about, but in the end, they have to decide what to say. In less structured role-plays, students do not know what the partner is going to answer, and this creates a more authentic information gap.

Alibekova and Urinboyeva. (2020: 187) discuss also the efficacy of the method of language projects. Here students are encouraged to search for information independently, develop communicative competence and increase their ability of critical and creative thinking. Students are always monitored at each stage as they work with texts and produce texts or oral presentations themselves. Here communication with the peers is at the highest level, they have to learn to communicate and negotiate in the foreign language to achieve a goal, that is the language project. Language projects have an important educational value, since not only the foreign language is actively used, but also students are involved as people and invited to cooperate and listen to each other. Students have the chance to show verbal independence and they usually start to correct each other, even if it is not asked by the teacher. They are supposed to feel free to express their own opinion in a friendly environment where each member of the group is at the same level and psychological barriers are removed.

1.3.4 Empirical Research

This section of the research will present some studies conducted on the use of the Communicative Approach to enhance students' speaking skills in different contexts.

A study conducted by Lumy (2018) investigated how the implementation of the Communicative Approach in language teaching affected the speaking skills of 24 students of English a foreign language at the English Department of Manado State

University. The quantitative research involved an experimental group and a control group that were assigned a pre- and post-test covering speaking skills. The experimental group was taught according to the Communicative Approach principles, whereas the control group was taught using traditional methods. The Communicative Approach techniques involved were pair and group work, role play, brainstorming, and sharing of thoughts and opinions. The results of the tests showed a significant increase in the score of the experimental group, supporting the thesis that CLT method is effective in improving students' speaking skills. Lumy attributes the big difference between the scores of the experimental group and the control group to two main causes. First, the experimental group had the chance to practice real-life situations that, as it has been already mentioned, is usually seen as relevant by the students and consequently enhances their motivation to learn. Second, the experimental group interacted with mother-tongue speakers to recreate real-life situations.

Darmayanti and Arif (2022) applied the Communicative Approach to Elementary students of English in order to study the development of their speaking skills. Students' speaking skills were analysed before and after the use of the Communicative Approach in language teaching. Speaking abilities were measured using a table that graded from 1 to 6 different descriptors, including: fluency, pressure, grammar, vocabulary, smoothness, and understanding. The scores in the pre- and post- test were statistically analysed and highlighted a significant rise in the results. The scholars concluded that the Communicative Approach increased the levels of self-confidence and fluency, and it affected positively also the correctness of grammar and the appropriateness of vocabulary.

A mixed-methods research by Maulana et. Al (2020) investigated the teaching methods employed to develop students' communicative competences in classical

Arabic as a foreign language in Indonesia. The objective was to develop students' verbal skills and the techniques employed included: "dialogue, information exchange, role play, description, lecturing, debate, and conversation" (p. 805). In this study also, students were pre-and post-tested before and after being taught using the Communicative Approach. In addition, students were divided into two groups, the experimental group, and a control group. The difference between the scores of the two groups was significant, with the experimental group registering 10.80 points out of 100 more than the control group in the final test. The researcher also commented on the difficulties teachers encountered in applying the Communicative Approach in class. Namely, they commented on the amount of time needed to carry out the communicative activities, the difficulty in finding authentic material and the impossibility of controlling grammar errors while doing the activities.

Aalaei (2017) conducted a study on the implementation of the Communicative Approach in the teaching of English as a second language to Secondary School Students. The research involved a control group and an experimental group, each of which had 20 members. Furthermore, the experimental group was administered a final questionnaire in which students were invited to express their opinion about the employment of CLT. Students were tested before and after the course using the Oxford Placement Test (2001). The test consisted of 60 multiple choice questions and aimed at measuring the students' proficiency in both speaking and listening in the foreign language. On the whole, the implementation of the Communicative Approach affected the results of the post-test positively. As to the questionnaire, students showed a general positive attitude towards learning the foreign language using the Communicative Approach.

Al-Twarish (2009) carried out a study in the Communicative Approach and its effect on the development of the speaking skills. The study involved 37 students that were part of the experimental group and 41 students that constituted the control group. The students were learners of English as a second language attending the third year of a secondary school. The performances of the participant were measured before and after the use of the Communicative Approach in teaching in the experimental class and the use of traditional, non-Communicative Approach in the control class. The results of the tests highlighted a significant increase in the results of the experimental group.

Finally, Saputra (2015) conducted an investigation into the use of the Communicative Approach in a Higher School of Teacher Training and Education. The research was carried out using Action Research ⁸and involved 30 students. The problem identified was the weak achievements of students in speaking. Therefore, the Communicative Approach was implemented in language teaching and students' scores were registered before and after the introduction of the new approach. Moreover, data were collected during the lessons using field notes, observation checklist and speaking skill tests. The results of the study suggested that the use of the Communicative Approach was appreciated by the students as they showed more self-confidence and engagement in the class's activities. They were encouraged to actively participate in the lesson, to exchange ideas and negotiate meanings.

On the whole, the studies presented seem to suggest that the implementation of the Communicative Approach in the foreign language curricula has positive effects on the development of students' speaking ability. Generally, students seemed to accept

⁸ In Action Research, the researcher initially observes the class in order to identify a problem, then sets a plan for solving the problem, and in the end the researcher implements the plan in the classroom.

the new method and be willing to learn with that, achieving good results in the final tests.

After presenting in this first chapter the direct method and the communicative approach and trying to discuss their main characteristics, in the second chapter we will present the research project. The study concerned the analysis of the application of the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach in a school of Italian as an L2 in Venice.

CHAPTER 2: The research project

In this chapter the research project will be presented. After a brief introduction of the context in which the study was carried out, the participants and the instruments will be outlined. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the methodology, how the collected data were analysed.

This research project was carried out during an internship within a Master's Degree Programme in Language Sciences at The Ca' Foscari University of Venice. The internship lasted six weeks, between November and December 2021, and was implemented at *Istituto Venezia*, a private school of Italian as an L2 in Venice (Italy).

The aim of the research was set beforehand; however, it underwent some changes during the class observation. The initial plan comprised the use of a checklist in order to collect data on the teaching techniques employed in the language classroom, and of a questionnaire that would investigate the teaching beliefs of the teachers. The aim was to understand whether some techniques were chiefly employed for specific levels of competence and why. However, as the observation started, it became clear that the way lessons were structured did not permit this type of research. The teacher seemed to focus mainly on oral production and the used techniques did not match the ones selected in the observation grid. Consequently, the direction of the research changed, and the focus was set on the two methods employed by the teacher inside the classroom: the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach. The instruments used also were adapted to the new focus.

The research, that that initially was supposed to be mixed, was then turned into a qualitative study. Data were collected using field notes and a semi-structured interview and were later analysed using only the qualitative methodology.

2.1 Research questions and hypothesis

As it has been already explained, this research was carried out during an internship project. Consequently, the researcher was actively involved in the environment in which she observed, with a dual role, that of observing and that of learning.

The research investigated three research questions:

- (1) Which are the main methods employed by the teacher inside the L2 class?
- (2) How does the teacher develop students' speaking skills during the L2 lessons?
- (3) Do the teacher's practices reflect her beliefs?

Data collected using the field notes will be used to answer to all the three questions, whereas the interview will be analysed only to answer to research question n. 3.

On the basis of the theories and studies previously presented, the following hypothesis were formulated:

- (1) The teacher primarily employs the direct method and the communicative approach when teaching the L2;
- (2) The teacher uses the main techniques exposed in sections 1.2.3 and 1.3.3 of this work. In other words, she mainly employs traditional techniques within the direct method and the communicative approach;
- (3) The teacher's actions inside the classroom are consistent with the beliefs formulated in the interview.

2.2 Context

The research was conducted in a private school of Italian as an L2 in Venice. The school offers intensive Italian courses in small groups and private lessons to single students.

Lessons take place from Monday to Friday, and last three hours a day. The groups are formed by a maximum of 12 students and involve learners of all nationalities and ages with different educational or working backgrounds. The teaching program is structured to enable students to pass from one level of competence⁹ to the other after four weeks of intensive course.

Teachers are free to organize their own lessons and materials as they believe. However, there are some guidelines they need to follow. Firstly, they are instructed to use only Italian inside the classroom and to encourage students to do the same even with beginners. Their courses are thought to be a full immersion in the Italian language and culture. Furthermore, since students come from different countries and speak different languages, it would be unfair to decide to use a foreign language, such as English, as a bridge language, because not everyone might be able to understand it. Secondly, teachers are provided with a list of topics that they are supposed to cover during each week of the course. This includes grammar, vocabulary and communicative situations selected following the CEFR indications. Thirdly, teachers have an extensive number of books at their disposal from which they are supposed to select the materials for the lessons. The chapters of each book are subdivided by the school into the different levels. In addition to printed books, teachers have access to digital books, and they are also free to use original or authentic materials. They are

⁹ The levels are based on the Common European Framework of Reference: *Livello 1 (A1)*, *livello 2 (A2)*, *livello 3 (B1)*, *livello 4 (B2)*, *livello 5 (C1)*.

also invited to vary the type and the source of the materials as much as possible. For any problem, teachers can refer to the school coordinator, who is a teacher himself and supervises other teachers' work. Finally, teachers are invited to structure lessons so as to work on the development of all the four basic skills. However, the main objective of the course is offering students the instruments they need to be able to actively communicate within the Italian speaking community. Consequently, during lessons, much attention is paid to the development of the speaking production. Therefore, students are encouraged to work in pairs and groups during classroom activities, to communicate using Italian also during the tasks' organization.

Lessons are held inside small classrooms that can accommodate up to 12 students. Desks are placed in the room according to teachers' necessities. Teachers have at their disposal a whiteboard with markers of different colours, magnets to hang paper on the board and a printed Italian map. In addition, audio or video material can be presented using a television set or iPods and portable speakers. The walls are almost empty, but teachers are encouraged to create posters to hang during the lessons, so as to show the results of students' learning.

2.3 Participants

The data collection was carried out using two instruments: the field notes and the semi-structured interview.

Field notes were taken during lessons and they included the actions of the teacher, as well as of students. While the teacher was always the same person during the entire classroom observation, students changed from week to week and sometimes from day to day. The classroom size ranged from 4 up to 10 learners and

students were of different ages and nationalities. Namely, their ages ranged from 19 to 78, whereas the nationalities included Japanese, South Korean, German, Austrian, Dutch, French, American, and Indonesian. Also, their stay in the school varied much, some students stayed for the entire six weeks, while others stayed for one, two or three weeks only. As far as their occupation is concerned, some of them were students, some were workers and others were pensioners.

The semi-structured interview was conducted with the teacher that held the classes. The teacher is an Italian native speaker with 23 years' experience in the field. She started teaching Italian as an L2 in the school in 1999, after graduating in foreign languages – English and Spanish – at The Ca' Foscari University of Venice. She has been working full-time in the school since, and now she teaches Italian as an L2 in a three-hour- group course every morning, and then gives private online and in person lessons in the afternoon.

2.4 The instruments

This research employed two instruments for data collection:

- (1) a semi-structured interview;
- (2) field notes;

These two instruments were chosen because of the degree of freedom the researcher has when using them. Both are generally employed in direct observation, in which researchers register information and events as they develop in front of their eyes. In this study, the interview was used as a starting point for the research, and it chronologically preceded the direct observation in class, during which the field notes were taken.

2.4.1 Interview

The interview can be considered a technique used to elicit information (Coonan, 2005: 23). Data are usually collected using written notes or/and audio recording the conversation. In this case, the researcher used both methods: written notes were taken while, at the same time, the conversation was being recorded. The interview was conducted in Italian via Skype and involved the participant (the teacher) and the interviewer. As to the structure, there are three main types of interviews, each of which gives the interviewer and the interviewee a greater or smaller degree of freedom. For this research the semi-structured interview was chosen. In semi-structured interviews the interviewer predisposes a sequence of questions or topics that will be covered during the meeting, but the order of the questions does not necessarily have to be followed. Furthermore, the participants can at any time decide to add new questions. By so doing, questions can be considered a way to start to start the interview, which should become then a more spontaneous conversation.

The interview aimed at investigating the beliefs of the teacher as far as teaching principles and techniques are concerned. Therefore, the questions were organized around some main aspects that define principles and techniques in teaching approaches (as presented in paragraphs 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.3.2, 1.3.3).

The questions asked during the interview are gathered in the following table.

Table 1

Interview questions

Uso della lingua: quali lingue e quali altri codici non verbali vengono usati durante le lezioni?
Ambiente: come vengono organizzati gli spazi?
Ruolo dell'insegnante e rapporto studenti-insegnante.

Gli studenti: come lavorano? (da soli, in coppia, in gruppo, in plenum) Devono essere autonomi? Come viene sviluppata l'autonomia?
Correzione dell'errore: quando e come vengono corretti gli errori?
Materiali: come vengono scelti? Cambiano in base alla classe? Viene utilizzato anche materiale audiovisivo?
Motivazione: come e quando viene stimolata?
Grammatica: come viene insegnata? Quanto tempo viene dedicato alla grammatica?
Quattro abilità: produzione orale e scritta, comprensione orale e scritta. Qualcuna prevale? Come vengono bilanciate?
Produzione orale: come viene insegnata? Che tecniche vengono usate per svilupparla?

As it has already been pointed out, this was a semi-structured interview and therefore, the questions in Table 1 were only used as a guideline. During the talk, additional questions were asked by the interviewer and also the interviewee added some comments and observation that had not been requested by the researcher. Furthermore, the order of the questions was not always respected, sometimes the discussion went from one topic to the other, following the natural flow of a normal conversation.

2.4.2 Field notes

Field notes are descriptive data that can be considered more objective than other direct observation instruments such as a diary. In addition, they enable the researcher to take accurate and clear notes for a long period of time. Therefore, they are typically used by researchers in longitudinal studies.

In this study, field notes were taken during the entire duration of the observation (6 weeks). Lessons lasted three hours a day from 9.00 to 12.30 with a 30-minute pause

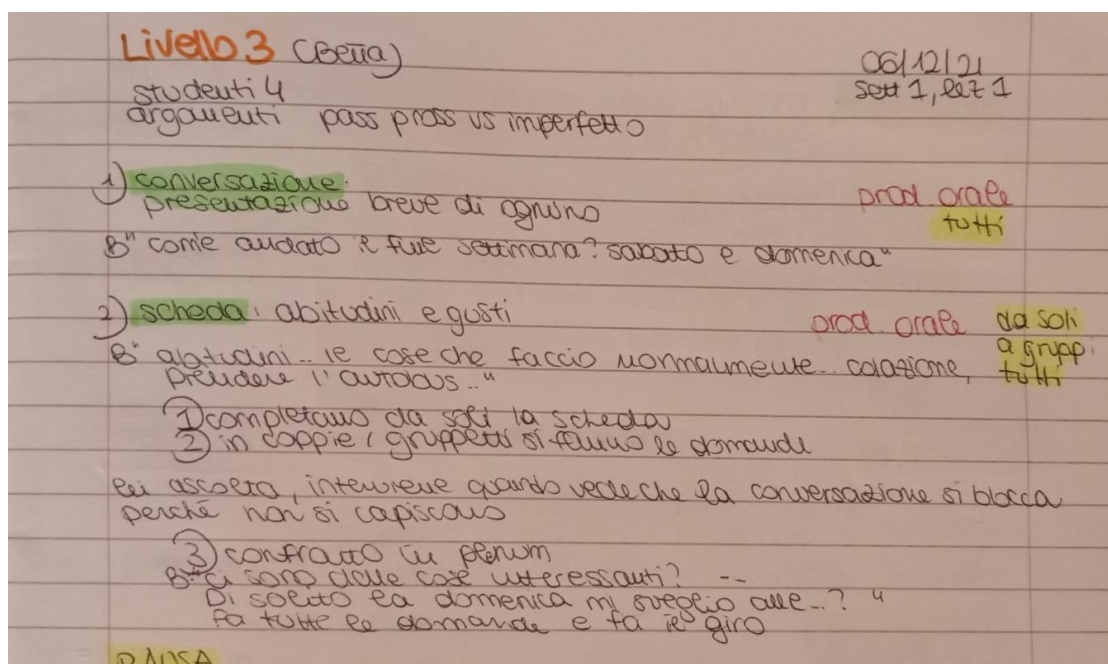
from 10.30 to 11.00. Notes were written on a lined paper copybook using pencils and highlighters of different colours to classify different aspects of the lessons.

For each day the number of students and the main topic of the lesson was noted. Afterwards, each activity was listed and notes were taken. They concerned:

- (a) the type of activity;
- (b) the way students were supposed to work (alone, in pairs, in groups, in plenum);
- (c) which ability/ies was/were developed in the activity (written production, oral production, written comprehension, oral comprehension);
- (c) the way the activity was presented by the teacher;
- (d) any utterance, sentence or action that was considered relevant because it was connected with what emerged in the interview with the teacher.

Here follows an example of how field notes were taken on December 6th from 9.00 to 10.30. According to the notes, the lesson took place on the first day of the first week of the B1 level course and involved four students. The main topic of the lesson was the use of two verbal tenses (*passato prossimo* and *imperfetto*). The lesson started with activity n. 1, a conversation that involved all the students. Students were invited to introduce themselves to the class and later the teacher asked “*Com'è andato il fine settimana? Sabato e domenica*” (transl. “How was your weekend? Saturday and Sunday?”). In activity n. 2 students were asked to talk about their habits and tastes. They were presented with a paper and first they were asked to answer the questions and later they were asked to interact with each other in pairs or small groups. Finally, the entire class discussed the interesting things that emerged during the conversation in small groups. In between some notes were taken regarding how the word “*abitudini*” was explained.

Figure 1. Field notes example



Each activity presented in class could be more or less interesting for the aims of the research. Some activities created an extensive amount of relevant data that could be used to answer to the research questions, whereas other activities did not produce significant materials. Notwithstanding this situation, each activity was carefully observed and annotated.

2.5 Data analysis

Data were analysed using a qualitative method. In qualitative research, researchers try to find codes that emerge from the data and that should be helpful to read and interpret the information collected.

In this case, the data collected using two instruments were analysed in two different moments. First, the interview with the teacher was administered. The

interview was already subdivided into subtopics and the analysis followed the preestablished order of thought. Some information was moved from one question to the other when it felt it would fit better in that category of discussion. Second, the in-class observation was conducted, and field notes were taken. In this phase of the research, data were collected on a copybook following a specific order of thought as it has already been explained in the instrument section (see 2.4.2). Afterwards, the data collected were analysed in order to answer to the three research questions.

As to question n. 1 (Which are the main methods employed by the teacher inside the L2 class?), during the note taking process, the researcher observed and then noted whether the techniques employed during the lesson belonged to a particular teaching approach.

Question n. 2 (How does the teacher develop students' speaking skills during the L2 lessons?) was also confronted using the field notes. During the in-class observation, activities that aimed at developing students' speaking skills were carefully noted to observe the techniques employed. Later, the researcher searched for similarities or discrepancies in the management of the different tasks.

Finally, question n. 3 (Do the teacher's practices reflect her beliefs?) was answered by directly comparing the words of the teacher in the interview and the actual management of the activities in the class.

Now that the main features of the current research have been presented, the results of the study will be exposed. First, the interview with the teacher is going to be analysed, and afterwards the data collected using the field notes will be summarized.

CHAPTER 3: The results

In this chapter the results of the research will be reported. First, the content of the interview with the teacher will be presented. Second, the data collected using the field notes will be analysed using the method suggested in the previous section (2.5).

3.1 Interview

The interview with the teacher was conducted before starting to collect field notes. The questions asked were the one reported in section 2.4.1 (see Table 1). The interview lasted about 1 hour and was conducted over the Skype platform. Notes were taken by the interviewer using pencil and paper and in the meantime the interview was being recorded using a mobile phone.

As to question n. 1 (Use of language: which languages and non-verbal codes are employed in the lesson?), the teacher reported that she only uses Italian during her lessons, starting from the very first levels of competence. Together with verbal language, she mentioned some non-verbal codes she uses in the classroom in order to convey meaning: mimicry, gestures and visual aids (drawings on the whiteboard or printed images). The teacher added that she usually moderated the volume of her voice depending on what she wants to highlight. For instance, she raises her voice when she wants to emphasize a new word, a crucial concept or just to attract attention. Body language is also very important for her, and during her lessons she usually never sits. She always stands and when students are working autonomously or in groups, she walks around the classroom in order to shift different perspectives on the students.

Question n. 2 (Environment: how is the space arranged?) investigated the management of the classroom space. Desks are usually placed by two and in a U shape. This, she believes, is the best way to get pairs to talk also when it is not necessarily asked by the exercise instructions. This position of the tables is supposed to create an atmosphere similar to that of a bar, where students are encouraged to interact freely with each other. She prefers to form pairs and not triplets to avoid situations where one student is excluded from the conversation. In addition, pairs are not formed randomly, she usually asks students to change chair and she forms herself to mingle the students' skills and abilities to better perform a certain task.

Question n. 3 focuses on the role of the teacher (Role of the teacher and relationship between teacher and students). She asserted that she doesn't want to be the central figure of the lessons, she wants students to speak and be the protagonists of their learning. She sees herself as a moderator or facilitator who always tries to be less invasive as possible when students are speaking to the entire class, or in small groups. She usually intervenes only when it's necessary, for instance when the conversation between students stops and she wants to stimulate this. In addition, she might decide to step in when students are asking for her help or might need further guidance. During students' talking time she always tries to listen to what students say and collect information that might be used later during the discussion *in plenum*.

In question n. 4 (How do students work? Do they work in pair, in groups, *in plenum*? Do they have to be autonomous? How is students' autonomy developed?) the teacher talked about how student usually work during her lessons. She maintained that she prefers to have them working in groups or pairs, instead of working alone. They usually work autonomously when they have to confront a new topic that is particularly challenging or that might take different time to each student. However, even

when students are asked to carry out a task alone, they are then required to discuss their results in pairs and finally *in plenum*. The development of autonomy is an important aspect on which the teacher tries constantly to work. Pair and group activities have also the objective of creating an increased sense of autonomy, as a matter of fact, during these activities, they do not report directly to the teacher, they have to cooperate with other learners and negotiate meanings to a common conclusion. In these situations, she tries not to answer directly but she stimulates the reasoning to let them understand the answer.

Question n. 5 explored the attitude towards students' mistakes (Correction of mistakes: when and how are students' mistakes corrected?). When students are working in groups or pairs she usually ignores mistakes and intervenes only if they do not allow the conversation to unfold smoothly. In this way, her intervention becomes a help and not an interference. When mistakes are made during the correction of written grammar exercises, she has to intervene and highlight the mistake. If such mistakes occur, she says that a mistake has been made and sometimes she provides the correct form directly, whereas other times she tries to get students to self-correct or to seek help from other students. She might also write the incorrect sentence on the whiteboard and guide the entire class to the correction of the mistake. The teacher maintained that sometimes students correct other students' mistakes, when they feel that they have a higher level of competence than other students. In this case, she usually ignores it if it happens only once, but if a student continues to correct other learners' mistakes without being asked, she usually explains that the teacher is the one that decides when and if some mistakes have to be corrected. Moreover, she tries to point out that some students might take a longer time to reach certain levels of competence.

In question n. 6 the teacher was asked to comment on the use of learning materials (Materials: how are they chosen? Do they change according to the class? Are audio and visual materials used?). As it was explained in section 2.2, each teacher disposes of a wide range of Italian as an L2 textbooks of all levels of competence. The teacher added that she also usually uses materials which she has been producing in her years of teaching. Even if she has been teaching for more than 20 years, she does not usually use the same resources. The choice of materials depends on different factors including the class members (age, nationality, level of competence) and the topic she has to introduce. Sometimes she uses more than one source to introduce a topic, and on other occasions she uses casual conversation as starting point for the lesson. She usually proposes videos for the upper levels of competence (B2 and C1), and she generally does not use audio-recorded materials often at all levels of competence.

Question n. 7 regarded motivation and the way the teacher tries to strengthen students' motivation (Motivation: how and when is it stimulated?). The teacher instantly clarified that each class can be significantly different. The strategies employed include the use of printed images, listening comprehensions, personal questions, casual conversation, and writings on the blackboard. Every lesson begins with a 10-minute conversation that usually starts with the question "*cosa avete fatto ieri?*" (Italian for "what did you do yesterday?"). This is supposed to make students feel at ease because they should speak about how they spend their free time. It is an ice-breaking topic, it is a chance for them to practice their Italian to speak about practical things of their everyday life. This conversation can also be a starting point for the introduction of the topic of the day. A further element that might cause an increasing or decreasing sense of motivation in students is the way pairs or groups are arranged. The teacher asserts

that she takes different aspects into account before forming them. One is the friendships that have been established inside the group and, depending on the moment, she might decide to split pairs of friends to encourage them to make new friends, or keep them together in order to make them feel comfortable. An additional aspect is the nationality of the students. She usually places people of the same nationality in different groups to promote cultural interchanges. In addition, she also considers the age of the learners. As explained, students can be of very different ages, from young adults to elderly people and depending on the topic she might decide to group people of similar ages together or to create more variegated groups prompting intergenerational relationships. Finally, also competence in the language is a factor. According to the situation, she might decide to create homogeneous groups where all components have similar knowledge and no one prevails, or differentiated group, where more competent students might help less competent students.

Question n. 8 investigated the teaching of grammar (Grammar: how is it taught? How much time is dedicated to grammar?). The teacher maintained that she usually prefers to teach grammar deductively but, sometimes she might recur to the inductive method. Each grammar topic is usually presented using a written text or an extract from a real conversation and it is then analysed and worked on for at least three hours (one day) or more, depending on the topic.

In question n. 9 the four basic skills were discussed (Four basic skills: oral and written production, oral and written comprehension. Does one of them prevail? How are they balanced?). The teacher claimed that she favours the oral production. Written production is considered usually at high level of competence (B2 and C1). At lower levels, she might ask students to write simple sentences connected to the topic discussed in class in order to assess their ability to produce language. Therefore,

written production can be considered a way for the teacher to obtain feedback on which structures learners can use and cannot use. The teacher also considered pronunciation. Usually, she does not focus on pronunciation given the limited amount of time at her disposal and the extensive variety of topics defined by the school. She asserts that she considers fluidity and fluency more important. However, sometimes she might correct students' mistakes in pronunciation if it prevents them from conveying the message. In addition, she teaches the most difficult Italian sounds to people attending the A1 course.

The final question focussed on oral production (Oral production: how is it taught? Which techniques are used to develop this skill?), the skill that the teacher describes as the more important. She uses different techniques to develop this ability. The first one, is the already mentioned 10-minute conversation that precedes every lesson. Here students answer the teacher's questions, but they are also encouraged to recreate a real conversation in which all the participants ask questions to each other. The second one is the constant assignment of pair or small groups works. In such activities students are always strongly invited to use Italian to communicate and negotiate meanings. She fosters students to cooperation from the very first level of competence and, as they grow in competence, she asks them to carry out always more difficult negotiations. Finally, there are some activities that are specifically designed to develop communicative skills. These include board games explicitly created for learning purposes, describing images, ball games, and differentiated readings.

In conclusion, the semi-structured interview with the teacher provided the researcher with some information about her beliefs concerning language education and the way she usually manages her classes. These data will be used to answer to

research question n. 3 in the last chapter of this dissertation. Now, this chapter will present the data collected using field notes.

3.2 Field notes

The field notes were collected during a six-week observation period. The method of collection was described in section 2.4.2 and here, the data collected will be summarized and presented following the order of the core topics of the interview.

Namely:

- (1) use of language;
- (2) space organization;
- (3) teacher;
- (4) students;
- (5) mistakes and correction strategies;
- (6) materials;
- (7) motivation;
- (8) grammar;
- (9) the four basic skills;
- (10) speaking skills.

3.2.1 *Use of language*

The teacher always used Italian and did not recur to any other language. However, it happened that some students used English when they could not find the exact Italian word to express a meaning. For instance, one day they were speaking about habits they used to have when they were children. Specifically, they were speaking about what they liked and what they did not like eating. The teacher was talking about Brussels sprouts and in order to let everyone understand, she drew the vegetable on the whiteboard, and she described the colour and the shape of it. However, not everyone seemed to understand, and one student translated (without

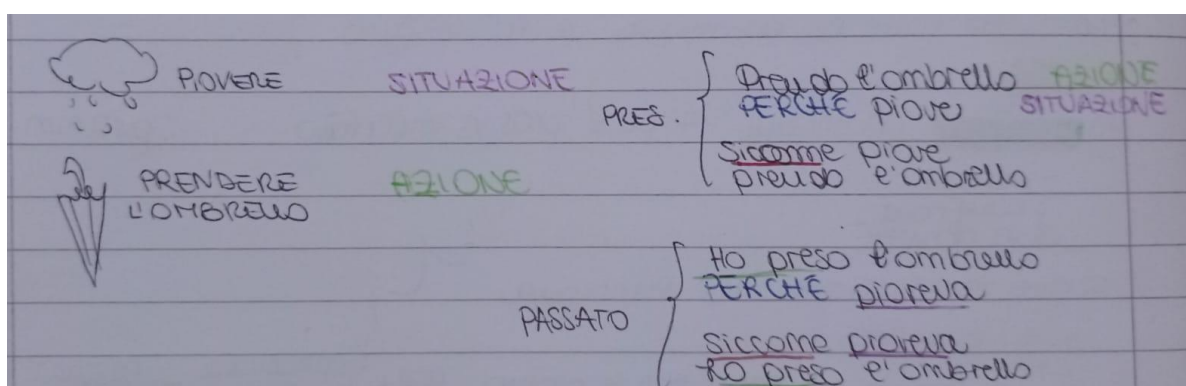
being asked to do so) the word in English so that all students could learn the new word. Similar circumstances repeated during the six weeks, however, every time that languages different from Italian were used inside the classroom, the teacher would always comment and say that only Italian ought to be used during the lesson.

Apart from verbal language, the teacher used other codes including mimicry, drawings and acting. Mimicry and drawings were used to represent simple words such as verbs, nouns and adjectives, while acting was used to recreate sentences and wider situations.

Mimicry was used widely throughout the entire duration of the observation. It was employed primarily by the teacher, but sometimes also students would mime things they were not able to express in Italian.

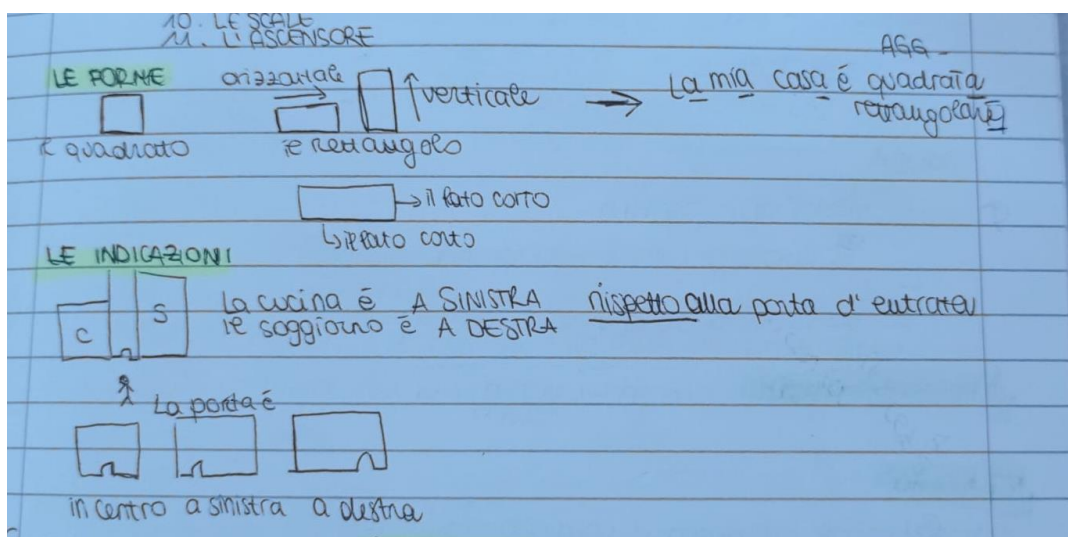
Drawings were also used on a regular basis. They would represent simple words like “Serpente”, or “tappo di sughero”, and also situations. For instance, on December 6th, in order to represent the sentence “Siccome piove, prendo l’ombrello”, the teacher drew a cloud with rain pouring down and an umbrella, indicating that each drawing represented a different situation or action (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Piovere e prendere l’ombrello*



A further example of drawings is represented in the field notes of November, 19th 2021 (Figure 3). The teacher used drawings to represent shapes and directions students needed when describing a room.

Figure 3. Shapes and directions



Acting was used on November 23rd to explain the difference between two sentences:

- (a) “*Mentre Lucia studiava ascoltava la musica*” and
- (b) “*Mentre venivo a scuola ho incontrato Paolo*”

In sentences (a) and (b) the same conjunction is used, but two different tenses are employed. The teacher explained that in sentence (a) *imperfetto* is used because the two actions are performed at the same time and last long. On the contrary, in sentence (b) the action expressed using *imperfetto* lasts more than the action expressed using the *passato prossimo*, that interrupts the previous action. However, various students seemed not to understand the difference in the use and therefore, the teacher decided to play a scene with one of the students. She played the subject of the sentence (b)

and a student played “Paolo”. They performed the story and after that, students admitted they could now understand better why different tenses were used.

These codes were used alone or, more often they were combined. For instance, one day during the initial conversation, one student came back school after three days of illness. Consequently, the teacher asked her how she was feeling, but the student did not know how to say that she still had sore throat. She pointed at her throat and made a gesture with the hand meaning “not good”. The teacher provided the student with the right expression “*ho ancora mal di gola*” and drew the face of a girl with a red throat on the blackboard. Then, she asked the student whether she had “*un po’ di...*” or “*tanto...*” drawing thicker red lines for “*tanto...*” and only a red line for “*un po’ di*”. Here, verbal language, drawings and mimicry were combined in order to conclude a successful communication between the teacher and the student.

In addition to the above-mentioned non-verbal codes, the teacher often uses markers of different colours to highlight some aspects of the sentences presented on the whiteboard. Sometimes she uses red and blue to represent respectively feminine and masculine. The notes in figure 4 were collected on November 29th during a lesson with a A2 level class. The topic of the day was direct pronouns, and, in Italian, there are different pronouns depending on the genre of the object they substitute. In the given example, the blue colour is used to frame masculine nouns (“*il caffè*”; “*i biscotti*”) and their corresponding masculine pronouns “*lo*” for the singular and “*li*” for the plural. Similarly, the red colour is used to frame the feminine nouns, “*la verdura*” and “*le caramelle*”, and their corresponding pronouns, the singular “*la*” and the plural “*le*”.

Figure 4. Pronouns and genre

1. Al mattino bevi <u>il</u> caffè?	Sì, <u>lo</u> bevo No, non <u>lo</u> bevo
2. Mangi <u>i</u> biscotti?	Sì, <u>li</u> mangio No, non <u>li</u> mangio
3. Dove compri <u>la</u> verdura?	<u>LA</u> compio al mercato
4. Mangi spesso <u>le</u> caramelle?	Sì, <u>le</u> mangio spesso No, non <u>le</u> mangio spesso mai

Similar coding was used to differentiate among the three conjugations of the Italian language, different functions in a verb tense or different types of verbs (for instance reflexive and non-reflexive verbs or transitive and intransitive verbs).

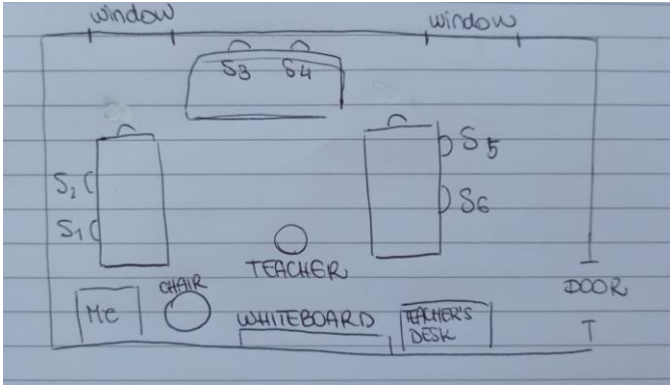
3.2.2 Space organization

Inside the classroom, desks were usually arranged in pairs and forming a “u” shape all together. The teacher would arrange the desks as indicated every morning and she usually asked students not to move the desks during lessons. She also placed chairs to ensure that students were sitting in pairs or triplets, and no one was excluded from the group. According to the task students were assigned, she also changed the disposition of learners to form new groups or pairs. Sometimes she would also ask students to move around the classroom to converse with new partners.

Sketches of how the class was arranged were taken by the researcher. In figure 5, six students attended language class and the tables at their disposal were three. Students would gather into three pairs and their sits were oriented so that it was possible for them to watch the whiteboard and to see the teacher and all the other learners. The teacher also arranged two additional chairs in two of the tables. Those chairs were normally used when students were asked to complete an activity in triplets. The teacher would normally stand in front of the whiteboard or at the centre of the room. She also had a chair where she normally sat when students were carrying out

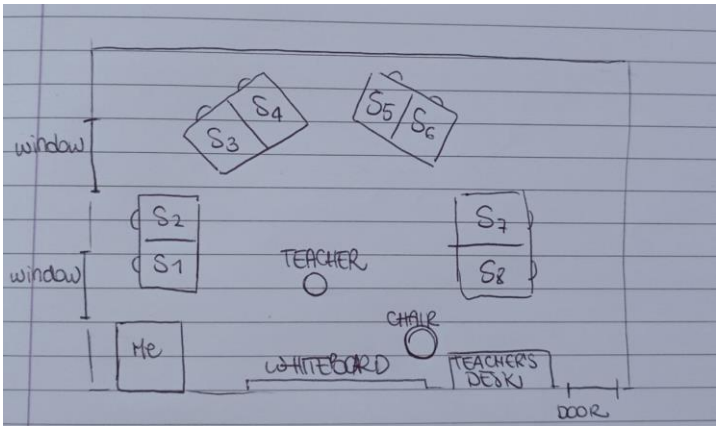
tasks on their own. The observer was sitting at a desk in the corner of the room, so as not to disturb the normal course of the lesson.

Figure 5. Class arrangement 1



Similarly, in a different classroom (Figure 6) with eight students, desks were placed in a “U” form and students sat in pairs. The teacher would normally stand in front of students, and she would sit on her chair when students were carrying out tasks autonomously. If one learner was absent and students were in an even number, the teacher asked one student to move with a pair and form a triplet.

Figure 6. Class arrangement 2



3.2.3 Teacher

During the lessons, the teacher would mainly stand near the whiteboard, to be able to write notes while she was speaking, or at the centre of the “U” formed by the students’ desks. Students would normally look at her or at the whiteboard during lessons.

She regularly used different verbal and non-verbal codes when lecturing. For instance, when confronting the topic of animals, she used verbal language to explain what a “*mucca*” was, saying that it is an animal from which we usually get milk, but she also imitated the mowing of the cow. Similarly, when she had to explain what a “*Serpente*” was, she imitated the hissing of the animal, while she moved her right arm like a snake. Her behaviour was often emulated by learners, when they did not understand the meaning of a word referred to an animal, students who knew the meaning started to imitate animal calls or tried to recreate some famous features of the animals with their body. In the examples that will follow in this section, the teacher will be indicated with “T” and students will be referred to as “S”, and they will be numbered in order to distinguish them when more than one student takes part into the exchange.

S₁: Da piccolo avevo un animale in casa... piccolo...marrone.

S₂: Un criceto.

S₁: Criceto.

S₂: squit squit [she mimes a pair of ears with her hands]

S₁: Sì, criceto!

However, students sometimes seemed to ignore the rule that prohibited them from speaking other languages, and in that same lesson, during a similar exchange, a student translated the word in a foreign language.

S₁: Cos'è “uccello”?

S₂: Vogel.

T: Ragazze niente tedesco, parlate in italiano e se non conoscete una parola chiedete a me.

In the example above, a student used her language to translate a word to another student of the same nationality. However, according to the rules of the school students are not allowed to use other languages inside the classroom and therefore, the teacher invited students to avoid using their own language and to ask for her help when they did not know the meaning of a word.

When students were working in pairs or in groups, she normally explained them what they were asked to do by the assignment, and then she walked among the tables, listening to what students said. Sometimes she remained silent, whereas other times she engaged in the conversation. This might be due to a direct request of one of the students who raised his/her hand or who looked at her insistently:

S₁: [looks at the teacher insistently]

T: [name of the student], posso aiutarti?

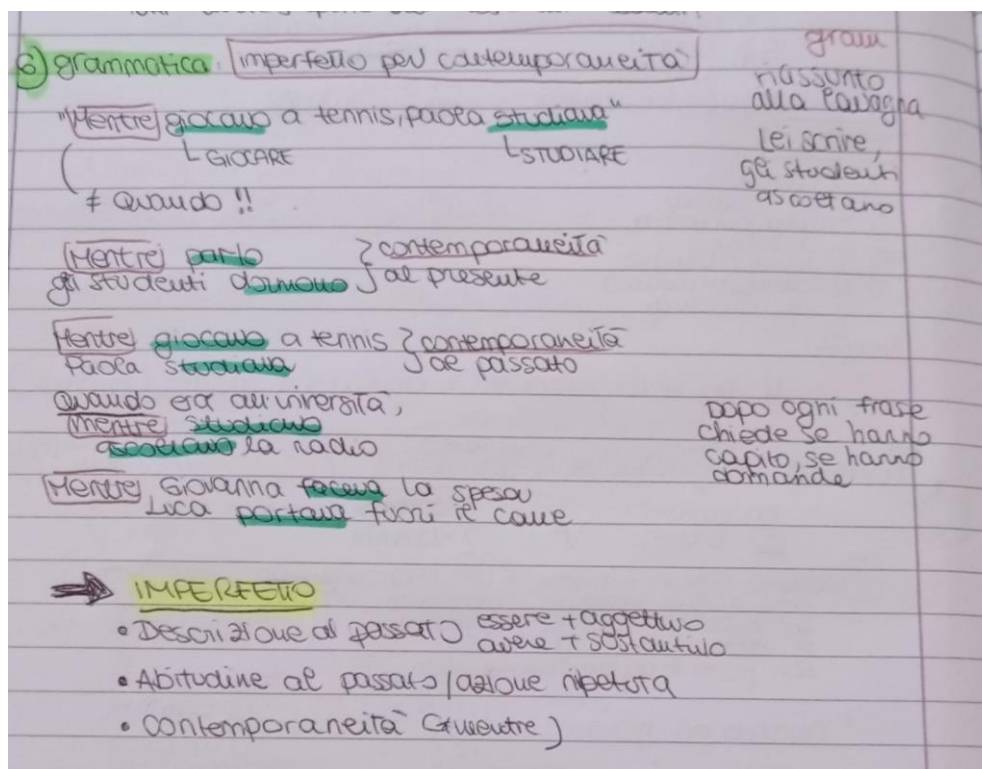
S₁: Sì, grazie!

On other occasions, she interrupted the conversation willingly, in order to provide them with further guidance. For instance, during a pair activity in which students were asked to reorder the ten steps of a recipe, when some pairs finished with the ordering, she gave them the instruction to reflect on the recipe and discuss about whether they usually cooked that dish following the same steps or not. In addition, she stepped into conversations when she felt students were at a dead end and could not continue the exchange autonomously. Finally, she intervened simply to participate in the conversation and chat with students, recreating a more informal exchange.

Despite the teacher's efforts to let students conduct conversations and work in groups for the majority of the time, there were also teacher-centred moments. When

frontal lessons were taught, the teacher would talk and write notions on the blackboard. Frontal lessons were mainly used to review topics that had already been presented to the class. Typically (example in Figure 7), she would provide students with example sentences of rules concerning themes discussed in the previous lesson, or at the end of the lesson in a form of summary. However, during teacher-centred moments, she often asked students if what she had written was clear and if they had any questions or doubts.

Figure 7. Teacher-centred moment



3.2.4 Students

Students always sat in pairs or triplets. They worked alone, in pairs or in groups according to the given task and to the teacher's instructions. Pairs and groups members were established by the teacher who changed them often, usually not leaving the same groups working together for the entire lesson. In groups, students were mixed as far as nationality and age are concerned. Sometimes, the teacher explicitly

explained the factors she considered when forming groups. In a group activity about old and new means of communication, for example, she specifically created groups with members of different generations. Similarly, in a group discussion about Christmas traditions in their countries, she separated people of the same nationality. Sometimes the class included more than three or four speakers of the same language and consequently it was impossible for the teacher to split them in different groups. In such cases, learners with the same mother tongue were specifically recommended not to use their own language in the group.

3.2.5 Mistakes and correction strategies

The teacher did not always intervene to correct students' mistakes. Sometimes she would just let students speak and she would listen to them talking, or she would ask new questions.

S₁: Ieri sono andato a Zattere. Ho bevuto spritz con alcuni amici. Il tempo era molto bello.

T: In che bar sei andata?

On some occasions, students themselves were not sure of the utterance produced and they asked for the teacher's help. In these cases, the teacher provided them with the correct sentence.

S₁: I ragazzi italiani hanno vestiti buoni... buoni?

T: I ragazzi italiani si vestono bene. I vestiti non sono buoni, la pizza e il gelato sono buoni.

Here the teacher repeated the sentence again, using the correct structure. This was the technique she preferred when correcting mistakes. Similarly, in the following example, the teacher corrects a mistake by repeating the correct form immediately after the student. The conversation from which this utterance was extracted regarded the sources they usually use for retrieving information about news items.

S₁: Giornale? Certo, lo leggio ogni giorno.

T: Certo, lo *leggo* ogni giorno.

S₁: Lo leggo ogni giorno.

In addition to reformulating the sentence, the teacher also raised her voice pitch and lowered her pace when pronouncing the correct word. Consequently, the student understood that the utterance produced was not correct and repeated the correct form.

In other circumstances, when mistakes were made, the teacher took the opportunity to turn it into something from which all students could learn. For instance, one day, students at the third week of A2 level course were asked to write five sentences using *passato prossimo* and five sentences using *imperfetto*. As students started to read the sentences to the entire class, the teacher realized that there were many mistakes regarding different aspects of the language. Therefore, she decided to write on the whiteboard the sentences and invited the entire class to cooperate to find the correct version.

S₁: Ieri sono svegliato alle 7.

T: [writes the sentence on the whiteboard] C'è un errore. Svegliarsi che verbo è?

S₂: Riflessivo

T: Quindi com'è la frase corretta?

S₂: Ieri *mi* sono svegliato alle 7.

T: Esatto... *mi* sono svegliato [she writes the correct form on the blackboard]

S₁: Ah... *mi* sono svegliato alle 7. Ieri *mi* sono svegliato alle 7.

On other occasions, students tried to express concepts that were too difficult for them. If such situations occurred, the teacher would provide the correct sentence and write it on the whiteboard for everyone to see.

S₁: La bambina aveva un cane che non era molto *gentile*.

T: Gentile si usa con le persone, qui è meglio usare buono.

[she writes on the whiteboard] La bambina aveva un cane che era molto *buono*.

As to mistakes in the pronunciation, she usually did not correct them unless they were repetitive. In the following exchange, the student repeats a mistake twice and consequently the teacher corrects it.

S₁: Per la mia famiglia il Natale è una festa molto *speziale*.

T: Lo festeggiate tutti insieme?

S₁: Sì, i miei figli mangiano a casa mia sempre... è molto *speziale*.

T: Bene, è una festa *speciale*.

S₁: Sì, molto *speciale*.

Moreover, the teacher would correct pronunciation mistakes when they were included in a common word, like in this example the word “*amici*” that means friends.

S₁: Ho fatto una cena con *amiki* del mio ragazzo.

T: Con gli *amici* del mio ragazzo.

3.2.6 Materials

The materials presented to students were different every day. Some materials were extracted from printed books, whereas others were produced by the teacher. For each lesson, the teacher selected texts, exercises, and activities from different sources and sometimes she used two or three different books. Materials included images and audio recordings. However, texts and grammar exercises were predominant. The materials used for developing speaking skills included board games (with board, cards, dice and pieces), a ball, posters, and maps. Often the teacher conducted the class without using a support printed on paper, like texts and exercises, she used the whiteboard as she taught the lesson and students took notes.

3.2.7 Motivation

Students generally were prompted by an intrinsic motivation. They were all adults of different ages that mainly learned Italian willingly and paid for their lessons. The teacher's main aim was that of teaching them the things they were interested in learning. Therefore, she spent a good part of the lesson talking with them, asking them about their interests and passions. In those moments, she could gather information about their personal lives and provide them with the vocabulary and expressions that regarded their favourite activities. The teacher also created some playful moments in which students worked in pairs or groups and played some games. These activities were always connected to the main theme of the lesson to show students that they could learn and practice Italian and, at the same time, enjoy themselves.

3.2.8 Grammar

Grammar was primarily taught inductively. The teacher presented students with a written text, some scattered sentences or an audio recording and then she guided them through the discovery of the grammar rule. Normally, she asked them whether the written or oral source contained something new, or she directly suggested to focus on some new structures and to think what they might indicate. Then, a reflection on the structure and the functions of the new grammatical item followed. Reasonings and reflections were always reported on the whiteboard, using schemes and coloured markers.

The conditional, for instance, was introduced using a book exercise in which students were required to match eight sentences containing verbs in the conditional tense, to images representing the sentence. Although the conditional was a new grammar topic, the teacher maintained that students ought to be able to understand

the meaning of the sentences and complete the exercise autonomously. Students finished the exercise on their own and then the teacher invited them to compare their work with that of the desk-mate. After all pairs had finished, the whole class checked the exercise together, and as expected, most of the sentences had been correctly matched to the corresponding image. During the revision, the teacher copied each sentence on the whiteboard and at the end, she read the eight sentences once again. Next, students were asked what they thought those sentences expressed meant and she wrote their hypothesis next to each sentence on the whiteboard. She used different colours for each function of the conditional tense (Figure 8). Later, she summarized the functions of the conditional tense in a bulleted list using the red marker (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Conditional sentences

1. Vorrei andare in vacanza	DESIDERIO
2. Verresti con me a Parigi?	INVITO
3. Dovresti chiamare il dottore	CONSIGLIO
4. Ti andrebbe un gelato	OFFERTA/INVITO
5. Dovresti studiare di più!	CONSIGLIO
6. Mi passeresti l'olio?	} RICHIESTE GENTILI
7. Le dispiacerebbe aprire le finestre?	
8. Potrei parlare col dott. Franceschi?	

Figure 9. Conditional functions

CONDIZIONALE
1. Esprimere un desiderio
2. fare un invito / offerta
3. dare un consiglio
4. fare richieste gentili:

Later the focus moved to the structure of the new tense. First, the teacher invited students to consider how two irregular verbs formed the conditional tense, starting from the base form and then reconstructing the endings for each grammatical person. Finally, the class reconstructed the structure of regular verbs for each conjugation of the Italian verbs (Figure 10). She used different colours to distinguish among different and equal endings.

Figure 10. Conditional conjugations.

PREPARARE	LEGGERE	DORMIRE
preparEREI	leggEREI	dormIREI
preparERESTI	leggERESTI	dormIRESTI
preparEREBBE	leggEREBBE	dormIREBBE
preparEREMMO	leggEREMMO	dormIREMMO
preparERESTE	leggERESTE	dormIRESTE
preparEREBBERO	leggEREBBERO	dormIREBBERO

The inductive method was employed also to introduce a new grammar tense starting from a listening activity. The new topic was the *imperfetto* tense and it was inserted in a dialogue. The conversation was at first only listened to, without any written support that might help the comprehension, and after some true or false exercise and some discussion on the plot of the dialogue, students were provided with the written version of the exchange.¹⁰ The dialogue consisted of a conversation between two friends who chatted about the animals they used to have as children. Past habits and descriptions were expressed using the new grammar tense, the *imperfetto*. The teacher instructed students to read through the dialogue in pairs and identify the new tense that was being used. Later, students dictated the sentences containing the verb to the teacher who copied them on the whiteboard. Next, students were invited to

¹⁰ This example will be further analysed in section 3.2.9.

identify the base form of the verbs and elaborate the sentences to create a summary of the dialogue. Later, the sentences created by the students were noted on the board (Figure 11). The discussion then moved to the function of the new tense and to the expressions that hinted that the action expressed by the verb took place in the past.

T: "Da bambina aveva un cane" è una frase nel passato o nel presente?

S₁: Passato.

T: Perché?

S₁: Da bambina... non adesso... da bambina

Figure 11. Imperfetto verbs.

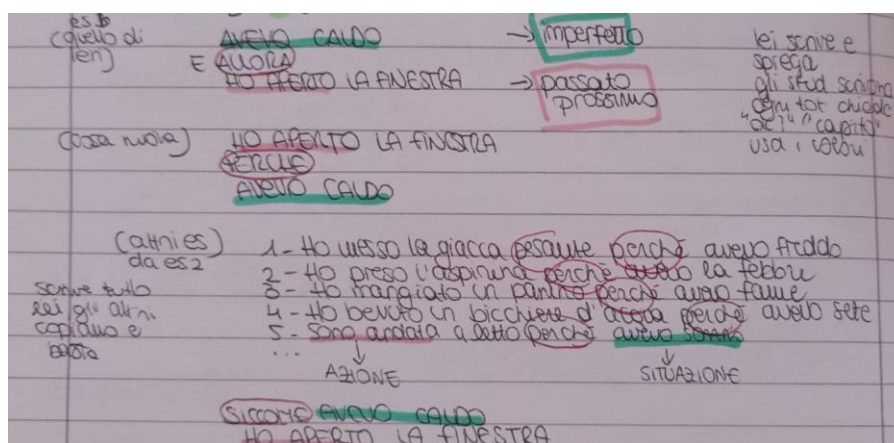
1- Da bambina	AVEVA	un cane	AVERE
2- Il cane	SI CHIAMAVA	Romeo	CHIAMARSI
3- Romeo	ERA	un cane molto intelligente	ESSERE
4- Quando Laura	TORNAVA	a casa, Romeo	TORNARE
Laura dietro alla porta	ASPETTAVA		ASPETTARE
5- Romeo	RICONOSCEVA	le rumore dell'auto	RICONOSCERE
6- Sandra da piccola	VIVEVA	in campagna e	VIVERE
molte animali			AVERE

After discussing the functions of the new tense, the teacher guided the class through the reconstruction of how the new tense was formed, starting from the conjugation of the verbs to be and to have and then moving on to regular verbs. The way this new grammar topic was introduced was significantly similar to the first example with the conditional tense, suggesting that this is a fixed pattern that the teacher follows when she introduces a new grammar topic.

However, it was not always possible for the teacher to use the inductive method and sometimes she employed the deductive method. It was mainly used when rehearsing grammar topics that had already been introduced in past lessons and add

some new information and rules. For instance, when she presented the use of *imperfetto* and *passato prossimo* with the conjunction “*perché*” she wrote sentences on the whiteboard (Figure 12) and explained the uses without involving students in the discovery of the rules. She simply noted the sentences and explained why a certain verb tense was used in that specific context. However, she constantly monitored their understanding by asking them if everything was clear and if they had questions or doubts.

Figure 12. Inductive method example.



3.2.9 The four basic skills

As to the four basic skills, the teacher did not dedicate the same amount of time to the development of each ability. The majority of the lesson was centred on the acquisition of the speaking production abilities and the methods employed will be presented in the following section of this research (3.2.10). This section will focus on oral and written comprehension, and on written production.

During the entire duration of the observation, only one listening exercise was proposed to students. The activity has already been mentioned in section 3.2.8, as the dialogue was used by the teacher to introduce a new grammar tense. However, in this

section, the comment will focus on how the listening activity was presented and carried out. The dialogue was part of a lesson which main topics were the names of animals and the *imperfetto* tense. The first part of the lesson was dedicated to animal names and a discussion about which animals they liked and which animals they had or used to have. After that, the teacher played the audio twice and invited students to listen to the tape without writing anything. Later, students were presented with the audio a third time and they were encouraged to try to answer a true or false exercise. Next, the entire class corrected the exercise: the teacher read the statements and students replied whether the sentence was true or false, and they were requested to present a correct version of false assertions. Finally, the teacher played the audio a fourth time and encouraged students to take notes on what happened in the dialogue. After that, students worked in pairs and tried to write down a summary of the conversation. *In plenum* phase, students read their sentences to the class and the teacher wrote on the whiteboard an official version of the conversation's plot.

Reading comprehensions were presented more often and the way they were presented to students was very similar to the one the oral comprehension was managed. For instance, a reading comprehension was used to introduce the use of direct pronouns. The text was accompanied by an image, which represented a table with some objects above, which were mentioned in the text. Therefore, before reading the text, the teacher invited students to observe the picture and name the objects they recognized, that were later noted on the whiteboard. After that, students read the text once on their own and when everyone had finished, she gave the instruction to complete a true or false exercise. The task was corrected with the entire class, and in addition, students were asked to provide a correct version to the false statements. Then the focus was moved to the plot of the text and the teacher guided students as

they produced an oral summary of the story together. The teacher asked general questions, following the order of the events as presented in the text, and later the whole class organized the information together to produce an oral summary of the text. When students had understood the general meaning of the text presented, the teacher asked them to express their doubts about the words or expressions they did not know.

Written production consisted mainly of the writing of sentences, usually connected to a specific topic. For instance, on their first day of A2 level, students were asked to work in pairs to write a list of questions that people usually ask when they meet someone new. Pairs worked on their own and in the meantime the teacher visited each table and supervised their work, providing them with prompts. Later, when all students had produced a satisfactory list of questions, the teacher invited the pairs to read their sentences to the class, as she wrote a correct version of the sentences on the whiteboard for the whole class to see. Similarly, during a revision of *imperfetto* and *passato prossimo*, the teacher asked students to write five sentences with one tense and five sentences with the other tense. Students worked autonomously and when everyone was ready, she asked them to read their sentences to the class as she noted them on the board. In one lesson, students worked in groups of three and produced a physical description of a famous person. In this case, students completed the description together and they turned to the teacher for help when they did not know how to express a concept. In the end, each group read the description to the class and the other students had to guess the name of the famous person described.

3.2.10 Speaking skills

Most of the lesson was dedicated to the development of speaking skills. The teacher employed different techniques that were specifically created to practice oral

production skills. However, she often encouraged students to speak also outside these moments specifically designed for speaking. In addition, she showed approval when students started conversations naturally with the whole class. For instance, when she was correcting fill-in the blank exercises where students had to insert the right grammar form, she sometimes asked them what they thought about a certain topic or what their experience with a certain situation expressed in the sentence was.

S₁: [reads a sentence about drinking coffee]

T: e tu [name of the student], bevi spesso il caffè?

S₁: Sì, spesso... una o due volte ogni giorno.

Every lesson started with a 10-minute conversation prompted by the teacher who asked “*Cosa avete fatto ieri?*” or “*Cosa avete fatto nel fine settimana?*”. During these discussions, students normally talked about their favourite free time activities in Venice or special events they had attended. Sometimes the talk moved to current events in Italy or in Venice. For example, in the days before the 21st November, day in which Venetian people celebrate the *Festa della Madonna della Salute*¹¹, students often asked in class what the event was about, and if there was any celebration they must witness. Similarly, students sometimes inquired about restrictive measures taken by the Italian government during the Covid-19 pandemic. Any topic was accepted as long as it might be interesting for the whole class and students spoke in Italian.

Moreover, students were normally asked to compare every assignment with that of the desk-mate, or they were directly invited to carry out a task together with one or more learners. In these situations, students were expected to present their results to their partner/s, compare them, and, if the results were different, negotiate a common solution.

¹¹ It is a traditional Venetian feast that lasts from 17th November to 21st November. It celebrates the end of the plague 1630-31.

In addition to conversation, the teacher presented students with communicative tasks. Some of them had a common structure and they were submitted in different lessons, each time covering a different topic. An example is a communicative activity named “*Trova qualcuno che*”, that consisted in a list of questions all connected to a specific grammar topic (e.g. *imperfetto* tense, or *direct pronouns*). First, students were asked to answer to those questions on the sheet, and after that, they were instructed to get up from their seats and walk around the class to ask those questions to the other learners. Usually, students were encouraged to ask other questions apart from those contained in the sheet, to start a casual conversation with the partner/s. While students carried out the tasks, the teacher normally walked around the room to listen and sometimes engage into the conversation, or she stood in a corner of the room observing.

Sometimes grammar structures were applied in playful activities designed to develop students’ speaking skills. Such activities included boardgames and ball games. As to boardgames, they were proposed in different lessons to consolidate their knowledge of *imperfetto*, *passato prossimo* and comparatives. The teacher explained the rule of the game and the names of board game pieces. Then students started to play the game in big or small groups, depending on the occasion. During the game they were asked to produce sentences or answer questions containing the grammar topic. In the meantime, the teacher walked around the class to monitor their answer and help or correct them in case of necessity. In the end, the expected answers were discussed by the entire class and noted on the blackboard for everyone to see. A further example of playful activities was a ball game where students had to throw a ball to each other and then ask a question to the receiver. Also in this game, students usually asked given questions or questions they had previously prepared with the

whole class or in groups. Learners were also asked to say the name of the receiver before throwing the ball. Thus, students could also practice their colleagues' names and it became an occasion for getting to know each other better.

Conversation was sometimes prompted by the observation and descriptions of printed images. On some occasions, images were part of a reading comprehension and were commented by the class before starting to read. Other times, the teacher hung in the whiteboard an image for the whole class to see and describe. During a lesson with the A2 level group, the teacher presented an image depicting a woman working in the kitchen of a restaurant. In this case, the teacher asked students to work in pairs and note all the words connected with the picture they could think of. Then, pairs were invited to share their ideas with the class in a brainstorming. The teacher wrote the words on the whiteboard and meanwhile she asked some questions to stimulate the conversation.

Similarly, brainstorming was prompted by titles. The aim of the activity was producing sentences and starting a conversation around a specific topic. An example is a brainstorming about the future of the Earth titled "Come sarà il mondo tra 20 anni?". Students were instructed to think about some themes connected to the future of our planet, note them down on a common paper in A3 format, and then produce sentences using the future tense orally. Students were gathered around one table with the paper in the middle, they had pencils at their disposal and were invited to chat. Sometimes the teacher engaged into the conversation to suggest themes they might want to discuss.

Finally, the teacher also proposed transcoding exercises. An example is an activity named *Una casa per due* in which students worked in pairs and had to pretend that one of them had been on a house tour with an estate agency and had to describe

the house map to the partner who had to draw it. The students sat back-to-back so that the person who drew could not peek. In the end, pairs compared the original floor plan with the drawing and commented on the differences they could notice. During the activity the teacher did not interfere and let students carry out the task on their own. However, she had previously provided them with the Italian expressions they needed to describe and give directions in a map.

Now that the results of the study have been presented, in the next chapter the data collected will be discussed. After addressing the research questions, the limitations of the study will be outlined and suggestions for further research will be provided.

CHAPTER 4: Discussion

In this chapter the results of the research will be discussed, and the research questions will be answered. On the whole, it can be said that the findings were consistent with the hypothesis formulated in section 2.1. In section 4.1 the research questions will be addressed and answered. Then, section 4.2 will consider the limitations of this study. Finally, section 4.3 will comment on possible further research.

4.1 Research questions

This research aimed at answering three questions:

- (1) Which are the main methods employed by the teacher inside the L2 class?
- (2) How does the teacher develop students' speaking skills during the L2 lessons?
- (3) Do the teacher's practices reflect her beliefs?

Now each question will be considered and answered separately.

4.1.1 *Research question n.1*

Question n. 1 considered the main methods employed by the teacher inside the L2 class. The following hypothesis was formulated: the teacher chiefly employs the direct method and the communicative approach when teaching the L2. In order to answer this question, the field notes collected during the in-class observation will be analysed.

The principles and techniques of the two methods considered in the research were presented in chapter 1 of this dissertation. Now, each method will be separately analysed, and its principles will be compared with the actions observed in class.

The Direct Method is based on some fundamental principles that include the use of the foreign language throughout the entire lesson, the relevance of the development of oral language, the constant interaction among students, the use of the inductive method for presenting grammar, and the employment of relevant materials where words are presented in context.

First, the use of the foreign language will be considered. The teacher stated at the beginning of every week, for the new students, that inside the classroom only Italian was allowed. The majority of the activities presented to the class required students to talk to each other, in pairs, in groups or in plenum using the L2. The teacher would always remind them of this rule when she heard different languages. In addition, she conducted the lesson using only Italian and refusing to translate words in any other language.

A second principle is the predominance of activities that focus on the production of oral language. During the observation weeks, the teacher began each lesson with a casual conversation with the students. When students seemed not to be willing to speak much, she tried to ask them more specific queries. She usually asked them how they had spent the previous days, and then any change in topic was welcomed providing that it might be of interest for the other students. In addition, students were often asked to compare the results of their exercises, and this led to conversation and negotiation using the L2. Finally, some activities were specifically designed to develop oral production skills.

The teaching of grammar predominantly employed the inductive method. Normally, the teacher introduced a grammar topic using a written text or an audio recording. Then, the whole class was involved in the discovery of the new topic and its rules. During the explanation, the teacher frequently asked questions to the students

and invited them to make hypothesis on how the grammatical item functioned. However, the inductive method was not exclusively employed. Sometimes the teacher opted for the deductive method and provided students directly with the rules concerning the grammar topic. Nevertheless, the deductive method was employed in a small minority of the cases.

Finally, the direct method contemplates the use of relevant materials and the analysis of words in context. The teacher is therefore required to use materials that respect students' needs and interest. Since students' needs have not been investigated in this research, it is not possible to ascertain whether the materials used are truly appreciated by the students. However, some other observations can be made. The teacher often asked students to talk about their every-day life and past experiences. She did so, to help them finding the right words and expressions they might need when conversing with friends or acquaintances in Italian.

According to the Communicative Approach's principles, students should be familiar with real-life situations that are simulated with the use of authentic materials and teaching techniques such as role-plays. Similarly, motivation is regarded as fundamental and is prompted by using authentic material that is as close as possible to students' interests. The teacher should be regarded as a facilitator and a director of the class. The students are encouraged to work in pairs or groups and to communicate using the foreign language during the entire class. In addition, they are responsible of their own work. Moreover, students are encouraged to share their feelings and opinions about the topics presented in class.

Real-life situations were not typically recreated in class using authentic materials. The materials used were specifically produced by the teacher for learning purposes or they were taken from textbooks. However, as it has been mentioned different times,

the teacher used student's experiences and interests as a starting point for introducing new words and new topics. Therefore, students' interests were considered and discussed during communicative tasks. Students were invited to share their ideas and to make connections between the topics presented in class and their personal experience. They were asked to share their point of view with the entire class or in small groups.

According to the field notes, the teacher persisted in trying to get students to speak and take part in the lesson. She often prompted direct question to learners, and she encouraged them to share their ideas. Learners engaged in conversations in pair, in groups or *in plenum*. Every pair or group work was followed by a conversation that involved the entire class. The teacher decided how much time students had at their disposal for carrying out a task and she checked frequently how far they had come. In addition, she regularly informed them of how much time they had left.

As foreseen in the Communicative Approach, students were often arranged in pairs or groups and asked to work together. When working in groups they were monitored by the teacher who, however, intervened only when directly addressed by the students or when she had to provide them with further guidance. She usually let them work autonomously. The students could be considered responsible for their own learning since it was a private school for adult learners where no test is administered. Furthermore, the teacher does not reproach students if they seem not to have studied the topics covered in the previous days.

On the whole, the field notes seem to suggest that the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach were mainly employed by the teacher, confirming hypothesis n. 1. The teacher fostered the use of the L2 during the whole duration of the classes, she invited students to share their ideas and experiences. In addition,

learners worked in pairs, in groups and as a whole group, and they were invited to be as autonomous as possible. Grammar was primarily taught inductively, and the development of oral production skills prevailed.

4.1.2 Research question n. 2

Research question n. 2 investigated how the teacher developed students' speaking skills during the L2 lessons. The hypothesis was that she would mainly employ traditional techniques within the direct method and the communicative approach as presented in sections 1.2.3 and 1.3.3 of this research. The techniques presented in those sections will now be compared with the actual techniques employed by the teacher during her lessons, summarized in the results chapter (3.2.10).

The Direct Method, as presented by Larsen-Freeman (1986) included the following techniques: reading aloud, question and answer exercise, getting students to self-correct, conversation practice, fill-in-the blank Exercise, Dictation, Map drawing, and Paragraph Writing. The field notes suggest that not each one of these techniques was employed. However, most of them were presented to the class during the six-week-observation.

The question and answer exercise was presented as *Cerca qualcuno che*, in which students had a list of questions they had to ask to their colleagues, and then they were invited to engage in a normal conversation by asking further questions to each other. Conversation practice was widely employed. The teacher often fostered casual conversation during the lessons. This might be prompted by different inputs: casual conversation, brainstorming, image description. Map drawing was presented in a transcoding exercise where students worked in pairs and one learner had to describe a house to the other learner who eventually had to draw the map. Finally, students

were asked to summarize an oral text during the only listening activity that was observed during the six weeks. They listened to the dialogue and were invited to take notes. After the fourth listening, they were asked to work in pairs and write down a summary.

The techniques used in the communicative approach include (Larsen Freeman, 1986: 35): the use of authentic materials, scrambled sentences, games, problem-solving tasks, and role plays. The in-class observation revealed that three out of five of these techniques were employed by the teacher, namely scrambled sentences, games and role plays.

Scrambled sentences consisted of sentences split in two that then were presented in a random order. This technique included grammar exercises taken from textbooks, where the two halves of the sentences were inserted in a different column, or cards that had to be matched as in a domino game. Games were frequently presented to the class. They consisted of board games concerning different topics within grammar and oral production practice. Also, a ball game was proposed, in which students were asked to throw the ball to each other and then ask a question to the catcher. Role plays were employed less often. An example is the already mentioned task in which one learner pretended to have visited a house and then described it to the fellow student who had to draw the map. In this activity the two students played the roles of two flatmates who were looking for a new house. The strategies the teacher employed in the classroom correspond to the ones mentioned in the studies presented in section 1.3.4 (see Lumy, 2018; Maulana et. Al, 2020).

The data suggest that the teacher employed most of the previously analysed techniques during her lessons. These techniques aim at developing speaking skills and are coherent with the use of the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach.

4.1.3 Research question n. 3

Research question n. 3 investigated whether the beliefs expressed by the teacher in the semi-structured interview corresponded to what has been observed in class and collected using field notes. The hypothesis formulated was that the teacher's answers were coherent with what she later put in practice during the observation period. This result is in contrast with what is normally observed in the language classroom (see Borg, 2003; Borg 2006; Borg, 2011). However, Borg himself points out that sometimes longitudinal studies should be preferred because they enable the researcher to investigate more deeply how teachers' beliefs are formed and understand better where they originate. In this case, the limited amount of time at disposal did not enable the researcher to analyse more deeply why this result was registered. Therefore, comments on why the research highlighted coherence would be too ambitious as they cannot be discussed given the limited amount of data.

Each question of the interview (section 3.1) was considered separately and then compared with what was noted during the in-class observation (see from section 3.2.1 to section 3.2.10). It emerged that the teacher's actions in class were coherent with what she had declared in the interview. Interestingly, some additional information was collected during the observation. These data, that will be presented in this section, are however coherent with the principles and guidelines the teacher declared to follow in the interview.

In question n. 1 the teacher was asked what type of verbal codes she usually employed during her lessons. The field notes highlighted that if, on the one hand, the teacher uses only Italian during the lessons, on the other hand, students do sometime recur to other languages. These languages might be their own mother tongue or

English. However, if such events occur, the teacher usually reminds them that foreign languages are not allowed in class.

Question n. 3 investigated the figure of the teacher. In the interview, the teacher maintained that she wants the students to be the protagonists and main actors in the lesson. But, as it can be imagined, teacher centred moments were registered in the filed notes. However, they constitute a small minority of the cases.

In question n. 5 the teacher commented on how and when she usually corrects students' mistakes. The cases and techniques mentioned in the interview correspond to the ones observed. In addition to them, the researcher also noted that on some occasions, students who were not sure of the correctness of their utterance, asked for the teacher's feedback. In such cases, the teacher corrected the mistakes, as asked by the learners.

Question n. 10 investigated the techniques employed to develop students' speaking skills. The activities listed by the teacher in the interview are coherent with what has been later observed in class. The observation highlighted a further technique: asking students their opinion or experience connected to a topic that emerged during the correction of grammar exercises. This was a further technique that fostered students' practice of oral conversation.

4.2 Limitations of the study

This study enabled the researcher to analyse how the methods and the techniques were employed during her six-week internship in a school of Italian as an L2. It enabled the researcher to better understand how classes were managed and more specifically, how the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach can be

employed in an Italian as an L2 class. However, the study presents some relevant limitations.

Firstly, the amount of time at disposal was limited. The research would have benefitted from a longer period of observation. Secondly, the sample of students is small and not homogeneous. Students had different learning background, different ages, different nationalities, and different reasons led them to start learning Italian. In addition, the number of students changed every week and sometimes it varied from day to day. Therefore, the environment in which the teacher was operating changed often. Thirdly, the instruments employed might be considered a limitation. The field notes were noted only by the research and no triangulation was operated on the data.

4.3 Further research

Further studies might benefit from a longer period of observation and a greater sample of students. The amount of time at disposal was limited to the internship period, but a longer observation might enable the researcher to have a deeper knowledge of how the methods are employed by the teacher. Ideally, the observation might last five months. In this way, the observer would be able to witness a complete cycle of lessons from level A1 to level C1 and could notice if and how the techniques change according to the level of competence of the students. In this perspective, a larger sample of students would take part in the research.

In addition, a following research might involve different teachers within the same school. Such a study would provide an overview of the different teachers' classes and would enable the researcher to investigate whether the methods and techniques employed are homogeneous or not. This type of study could be of interest for the

school direction who would be able to understand whether teacher organize their lessons following their guidelines or not.

Students might be actively involved in the research. In this study, students are only observed when they are inside the classroom, and they are interacting with the teacher or with fellow learners. However, their figure might be considered further and their opinion on the methods and techniques could be questioned using a questionnaire. Consequently, the researcher would be able to understand whether the lessons are appreciated, and whether students think that what they are learning is useful or not. In addition, students might be asked to indicate what they would keep and what, if any, they would change in the lessons.

Finally, the efficacy of the method and techniques employed in the school might be analysed by accessing student's speaking skills before and after starting the language course. The researcher could prepare a pre- and a post-test for each level of the CEFR and the results could then be quantitatively analysed.

Conclusion

This study aimed at analysing and understanding how speaking skills were taught in an Italian as an L2 class in Venice.

From the data it emerged that the teacher employed majorly two methods when teaching in the class: the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach. The Direct Method was traditionally implemented in classes of small students in private schools. This kind of environment corresponds to the reality in which the teacher was working: a teacher teaching her mother tongue to a group of maximum 12 students, focusing on speaking production, and using only Italian. Similarly, the Communicative Approach focuses on oral skills and fosters cooperation among students and conceives the teacher as a facilitator of student's learning. These aspects were also noticed during the observation.

The techniques implemented in class also belonged to the two methods. Question and answer exercise, getting students to self-correct, conversation practice, map drawing, and paragraph writing, which are part of the Direct Method. Scrambled sentences, games and role plays, on the contrary are typical techniques of the Communicative Approach.

Lastly, the comparison between the field notes and the interview showed coherence, proving that the teacher is quite conscious of the principles and techniques that guide her teaching,

On the whole, the teaching of the teacher seemed to adhere to some rules concerning the principles and the techniques that ought to be used in a class of students of Italian as a foreign language. These schemes appear to be coherent with the literature that regards the Direct Method and the Communicative Approach,

suggesting that her actions in class are guided not only by her experience, but also by background studies.

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