LEARNING ITALIAN AT THE UNIVERSITY: 
AN OBSERVATION EXPERIENCE AT 
POLITECNICO DI TORINO AND 
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO

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Index

0 INTRODUCTION .....................................................................................................................4

1 THE OBSERVATION EXPERIENCE RESEARCH CONTEXT ..................................................8
  1.1 Foreign students in Piedmontese Universities .................................................................8
  1.2 Foreign students at the Università degli Studi and Politecnico di Torino .......................9
  1.3 Italian language courses at the Università degli Studi and Politecnico ..........................12
  1.3.1 The Italian language at the Università degli Studi ......................................................12
  1.3.2 The Italian language at the Politecnico ....................................................................14

2 ANDRAGOGY: WHAT TEACHING ADULTS IS ..................................................................16
  2.1 Cognitive factors .............................................................................................................16
  2.2 Psychological factors ......................................................................................................19
  2.3 Sociocultural factors ......................................................................................................22
  2.4 Knowles and the andragogical model ..............................................................................23
  2.5 An adult-oriented glottodidactic .....................................................................................24
  2.5.1 Methods and techniques in teaching adults .................................................................26
  2.5.2 Young adults as L2 learners ........................................................................................27

3 THE RESEARCH PROJECT ...................................................................................................31
  3.1 Personal purpose for the research ...................................................................................32
  3.2 Timing of the project .......................................................................................................33
  3.3 People involved in the project ........................................................................................34
  3.4 Tools used during the direct observation ........................................................................35
    3.4.1 The research logbook ...............................................................................................35
    3.4.2 Audio recorder .........................................................................................................36
    3.4.3 Observation sheets ...................................................................................................37
    3.4.4 Questionnaires ........................................................................................................38
      3.4.4.1 Questionnaire 1. The Italian language course ......................................................39
      3.4.4.2 Questionnaire 2. The Language Contact Profile ................................................40
  3.5 Ethical principles ............................................................................................................41
  3.6 Students involved in this research project: an in-depth analysis ......................................42
    3.6.1 Students at Università degli Studi ..........................................................................43
    3.6.2 Students at Politecnico ...........................................................................................47
  3.7 Students' motivations to learn Italian as an L2: an analysis ............................................52
  3.8 A theoretical analysis of the students number: its influence on the two didactic situations observed ....................................................................................................................54
  3.9 The classrooms disposition ............................................................................................56
    3.9.1 Classroom spatial disposition at the Università degli Studi ....................................57
    3.9.2 Classroom spatial disposition at the Politecnico .......................................................60
  3.10 The teaching material ...................................................................................................63
  3.11 Two transcribed lessons ...............................................................................................65
  3.12 Some observations about the transcripts ......................................................................73
  3.13 Teacher's talking time ..................................................................................................76
    3.13.1 Teacher's talk time: direct consequences and other observations .........................79
  3.14 Techniques, activities and possible solutions to solve Politecnico problems ..................82
  3.15 Cooperative Learning: a proposal for an useful teaching method at the Politecnico.  
    Benefits, effects and possible problems ........................................................................86
  3.16 Further advice to improve the courses at the Politecnico ............................................91
  3.17 Final exam's results achieved by students in both contexts .........................................95

4 QUESTIONNAIRES AND RESULTS ...................................................................................99
  4.1 Questionnaire 1. Italian language course: results obtained at the Università ..............101
0. INTRODUCTION

The idea behind this thesis comes from my interest in teaching Italian as a second language to foreigners. My desire to teach Italian began to become stronger two years ago as I enrolled in the Master ITALS (I level) organized by Università Ca' Foscari, that showed me the path I wanted to follow from then on. To fulfill my aim I decided to focus on real and tangible learning and teaching situations, in order to improve my personal knowledge and to better understand what teaching Italian means. For this reason I looked for a good didactic context that could allow me to follow what happens in a language class. What I was looking for was a class composed of very motivated students and with a good educational background, in order to have the possibility to follow, day by day, the improvement of each student and, at the same time, of the entire class. I did not want to conduct a survey on a class of inconstant students and so I really needed - and wanted - to find a teaching context in which the students were motivated and continuously participating, to have the chance of understanding deeply what goes on during the whole period of an Italian language course. For this reason I decided to move to Torino to follow the Italian language lessons promoted by the Politecnico di Torino and the Università degli Studi di Torino, where I found the learning contexts I was looking for. I had the possibility to follow two classes, one at the Politecnico and the other one at the Università. To be honest I also started analyzing a third class, at the Politecnico, but that teacher decided to stop my personal research in her class, so the information I could collect was insufficient to permit me to examine in depth that teaching context.

Therefore, I was involved in an observation experience in two Italian language classrooms, obviously different from each other but nevertheless realistically comparable: they were both composed of young adults with a good educational background, most of the participants were university students and are living in Italy for a short and definite period of time. The reasons they have to learn Italian are mostly the same: the majority of them need University credits or Italian language certifications, while others are simply interested in learning the language. Whatever the reasons to attend the class may have been, the students attending the Italian
language lessons were strongly motivated and, so, most of them took part to each lesson. As I have already said, a constant attendance was the most important characteristic I was looking for to perform my personal research.
1 THE OBSERVATION EXPERIENCE RESEARCH CONTEXT

First of all, I believe that it is necessary to give some exhaustive information about the presence of foreign students in the universities of Piedmont. The academic system in Piedmont is composed of four different universities: Politecnico di Torino, Università degli Studi di Torino, Università del Piemonte Orientale and Università di Scienze Gastronomiche.

1.1 Foreign students in Piedmontese Universities

The Osservatorio regionale per l'università e il diritto allo studio universitario annually publishes data and information about the internationalization that affects the university system in Piedmont. The following information refers to the academic year 2012/2013.

The entirety of the students enrolled in the Piedmontese university system is of about 104,743 students, approximately shared this way: 67,000 at the Università degli Studi di Torino, 28,000 at the Politecnico di Torino, 10,000 at the Università del Piemonte Orientale and 260 at the Università di Scienze Gastronomiche. The foreign students registered in the Piedmontese university system are more than 8,000 (precisely 8,724), divided as follows: 3834 at the Università degli Studi di Torino (6% of the total amount), 4229 at the Politecnico di Torino (15%), 582 at the Università del Piemonte Orientale (5,5%) and 79 at the Università di Scienze Gastronomiche (29%).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC YEAR</th>
<th>PIEDMONT</th>
<th>ITALY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003/2004</td>
<td>1,7%</td>
<td>1,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/2005</td>
<td>2,2%</td>
<td>2,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/2006</td>
<td>2,4%</td>
<td>2,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/2007</td>
<td>2,9%</td>
<td>2,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/2008</td>
<td>5,6%</td>
<td>2,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/2009</td>
<td>5,7%</td>
<td>3,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/2010</td>
<td>6,8%</td>
<td>3,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/2011</td>
<td>7,2%</td>
<td>3,5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/2012</td>
<td>7,9%</td>
<td>4,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/2013</td>
<td>8,2%</td>
<td>4,2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Percentage of the number of University foreign students in Piedmont and in Italy. Data obtained by Osservatorio regionale per l'Università e il diritto allo studio universitario. November 2013.

Approximately 45% of the foreigners in Piedmont obtained their high school degree in Italy, while the remaining 55% got it abroad. Specifically, on average, every 100 students 45 have their residence in Italy and obtained here their degree, so it means that they moved to Italy during primary school, middle school or high school; 40% of the students have their residence abroad and got their degree in their own countries, and 15% have their residence in Italy but got their degree abroad.

1.2 Foreign students at the Università degli Studi and Politecnico di Torino

Since this thesis is focused on the Università degli Studi and the Politecnico, I think it is important to explore deeper these two academic organizations. The Osservatorio regionale per l'Università e il diritto allo studio universitario drew a classification of the countries where foreign students come from. Concerning Università, the
department that has the most copious number of foreigners is the one of Lingue e Letterature Straniere (15% of the total amount of students), followed by Scienze politiche (9%), Economia (8%) and Giurisprudenza (6%); at the Politecnico, the principal choice is for Ingegneria dell'informazione (17% of the total amount), Ingegneria I (12%), Organizzazione di impresa e Ingegneria gestionale (9%).

The next two tables show the percentage of foreign students enrolled in the academic year 2012/2013, divided in the different degree courses that Università degli Studi and Politecnico offer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEGREE COURSES IN UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO</th>
<th>TOTAL AMOUNT</th>
<th>FOREIGN STUDENTS</th>
<th>% FOREIGNERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lingue e Letterature straniere</td>
<td>1409</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scienze politiche</td>
<td>1165</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economia</td>
<td>1612</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giurisprudenza</td>
<td>1358</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interfacoltà</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scienze matematiche, fisiche e naturali</td>
<td>1268</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agraria</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicina e Chirurgia</td>
<td>1807</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmacia</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scienze della formazione</td>
<td>1569</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicina veterinaria</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letteratura e Filosofia</td>
<td>1179</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psicologia</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scienze motorie</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL AMOUNT</td>
<td>14159</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Italian and foreign students enrolled in the academic year 2012/2013 and divided for each degree course. Source: Osservatorio regionale per l'Università e il diritto allo studio universitario.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEGREE COURSES IN POLITECNICO DI TORINO</th>
<th>TOTAL AMOUNT</th>
<th>FOREIGN STUDENTS</th>
<th>FOREIGNERS %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ingegneria dell'informazione</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingegneria I</td>
<td>2441</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizzazione di impresa e Ingegneria gestionale</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interfacoltà Architettura</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architettura II</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architettura I</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL AMOUNT</strong></td>
<td><strong>4294</strong></td>
<td><strong>564</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.6%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Italian and foreign students enrolled in the academic year 2012/2013 and divided for each degree course. Source: Osservatorio regionale per l’Università e il diritto allo studio universitario.

The next two diagrams show the countries where foreign students come from:

*Diagr. 1: Countries of origin of foreign students in Università degli Studi di Torino. Source: Osservatorio regionale per l’Università e il diritto allo studio. Last updated at November 2013.*

*Diagr. 2: Countries of origin of foreign students in Politecnico di Torino. Source: www.polito.it*
The considerable number of Chinese students in Politecnico is referable to the development of an Italian-Chinese Campus, done on purpose of the Italian Ministry of Education and due to the collaboration between Politecnico di Torino, Politecnico di Milano and Tongji University in Shanghai.

1.3 Italian language courses at the Università degli Studi and Politecnico

Having done a general overview on the presence of foreign students in the universities in Piedmont, and in particular in the Universities on which this survey is focused, it becomes necessary to give some specific information about the Italian language courses for foreigners organized and provided by Università degli Studi di Torino and Politecnico di Torino.

1.3.1 The Italian language at the Università degli Studi

Università degli Studi di Torino offers a wide range of possibilities to learn Italian:

- Comitato Torino Estate, established in 1998, was born with the main aim to give the students the possibility to attend Italian language courses and seminars of very high quality, but also to improve the image and the notoriety of the city of Torino and of the Università itself
- Summer School, organized by Comitato Torino Estate, offers 3- or 4-weeks long Italian language and cultural programs. The main purpose is to give the students the possibility to feel integrated in the cultural, social and linguistic life of Torino, given their decision to undertake an university course in the
city. Summer School offers three different levels of Italian language (pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate, corresponding to the European frameworks levels A2, B1 and B2)

- CLA (Centro Linguistico di Ateneo), born to offer to the students the possibility to improve different languages, Italian for foreigners included. Italian language courses are addressed to Erasmus students, postgraduate students, scholarship holders of Università degli Studi and to everyone who wants to learn Italian to work or study in Italy. It also offers the certification in Italian as a second language CELI

Concerning CLA, during the academic year 2012/2013 five different Italian language courses were activated: an half-intensive course level A2, a three-month course C1, an half-intensive course A2, an half-intensive course B1-B2 and an intensive course B1-B2.

In the academic year 2013/2014 6 Italian language courses were activated: one half-intensive course level A1, an intensive course B1-B2, an half-intensive course A2, an half-intensive course B1, a course for the language certification CELI 3 (level B2) and one for CELI 4 (level C1).

In the first semester of the academic year 2014/2015 just one language course was activated, the one I examined as an observer: a 3-month long course of level A2-B1.

For what concerns the second semester, just one Italian language course was activated, that is an A2-B1 level intensive course.
1.3.2 The Italian language at the Politecnico

Politecnico recently encouraged the incoming of foreign students with a very high-quality educational curriculum, and actually the number of foreigners enrolled in the courses provided by Politecnico has increased: during the academic year 2005/2006, in fact, the percentage of foreign students was close to 3%, while now it is around 13%. This attraction is also due to the academic organization, that gives the students the possibility to take courses in English: during the academic year 2013/2014, in fact, 30% of the educational syllabus was completely in English. The stable growth of the number of foreigners at the Politecnico solicited an increasing responsibility to CLA (Centro Linguistico di Ateneo) in the organization of Italian language courses. Politecnico policy is, in fact, to provide Italian language lessons to every incoming student; as the Manifesto of Studies of the academic year 2013/2014 says, in fact, every student who studies at the Politecnico (whether for a short period or for a long-term) has to learn Italian, even if the university course he is attending is completely in English. The linguistic proficiency can be proved by a certification obtained passing a test issued by CLA. Particularly, the following table shows the Italian language level required for each type of student, depending on the course attended (Bachelor of Science or Master of Science) and on the language he has chosen for the university course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of University course</th>
<th>Italian language level required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science with courses in Italian or with the first year in English</td>
<td>Italian language – Level B1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Science with courses in English</td>
<td>Italian language – Level A2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Science with courses in Italian</td>
<td>Italian language – Level B1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Science with courses in English</td>
<td>Italian language – Level A2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4: Italian language courses provided for students. Source: www.polito.it*
The supply of Italian language courses organized by Politecnico CLA in the last years (from 2009 to 2013) is summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief courses (25 hours)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional courses</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-institutional courses</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total amount of didactic hours</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>1245</td>
<td>1075</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Italian language courses provided by Politecnico during the academic years 2009-2013.
Source: www.polito.it

For the current academic year, six 60-hour courses level A2 (named Level II) and four 60-hour courses level B1 (named Level III) are planned. For those students who still do not know the Italian language, Politecnico decided to create an Italian language course level A1 in streaming, available from each foreign student personal page.¹

¹ For further information about the organization of Italian language courses:
http://international.polito.it/it/ammissione/programmi_di_scambio/a_a_2014_15_requisiti_linguistici_studenti_in_mobilita
Starting from the consideration that this research project is focused on two classes composed of adult students both at the Università and at the Politecnico, I think that a reflection on what teaching adults means is strongly necessary and unavoidable. For a good and satisfying teaching, in fact, the first characteristic to consider stays precisely on who the students are, what they look for when attending the language course, which are their needs, and so on. This is the reason to give some cues to understand deeper what andragogy is.

The andragogical model is characterized by a particular concept of the adult, that becomes a sort of «self-learner», since the teacher starts to be just the facilitator of the learning process; the adult has to find the motivations to learn and, for this reason, he deals with personal and social factors influencing, in this case, the second language acquisition process, that have to be considered when teaching adults. For this reason it is important to focus on what teaching to adults means, before analyzing better the context in which this research was conducted. Various hypotheses have been proposed around the question of how much age can influence the learning of an L2; a second language teacher to adult students has to be aware of some reflections on the neurological process that intervenes in the acquisition of an L2.

2.1 Cognitive factors

According to Penfield and Roberts, before the age of 9 «a child is a specialist in learning to speak. At that age he can learn two or three languages as easily as one»

because of the plasticity of his brain; after the age of 9, however, «the human brain becomes progressively stiff and rigid»; the progressive lack of plasticity is considered the end of the critical period for the acquisition of a language. At that time, these sentences meant that after puberty an adult could not successfully learn a second language, and these concepts were also the main way to explain why children learn a second language easier and faster than adults. Lenneberg (1967) picked up this concept of plasticity to explain the cerebral lateralization of linguistic functions that starts from puberty – ordinarily lateralized to the left hemisphere, the one that intervenes in a more considerable way on the functions of language. Lenneberg also recognized that an adult is able to learn and to communicate in a foreign language but in a different way and with different rates of success:

[…] one implication of the critical period hypothesis, derived by biology, is that while acquisition of a behavior outside the period in which it normally occurs is not impossible, it will proceed by a different route and will generally be less successful and less “natural”.

Lenneberg also confirms that, after the beginning of puberty, there are more possibilities of language-learning-blocks and that, starting from an age of 11 to 14, the acquisition of a second language becomes more difficult and complex. Scovel (1969) and Seliger (1978) argue that puberty closes the critical period for the acquisition of a second language at a native-level, but they add their personal contribution to the question. Scovel in fact, says that an adult has the possibility to reach a good fluency in syntax and vocabulary of a second language in later life if exposed to adequate language inputs; Seliger states that there are multiple critical periods: phonology seems to be the most linked area to age (it could explain why talking without foreign accents seems to be a trait of children up to the age of 6), while morphology and syntax can be learned at native speaker level also later (up to age 15). A good lexicon, instead, is reachable at any age.

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3 Ibidem
Contrary to children, adults can rely on their abstraction capability: they do not have to acquire thousands of new concepts to create and organize their own second-language structure, but only “the new verbal symbols representing these concepts”. Adults always rouse explicit reflections on L2 to understand its inner mechanisms; young children, as Ausubel states, «are limited to the much less efficient approach of discovering syntactical rules through repetitious exposure to models and corrective feedback». Adults, moreover, can resort to their self-built learning style, that specifically is the personal an individual pattern of acquiring and organizing linguistic information in a learning context.

Felix (1981) adds to the discussion the consideration that, in L1 acquisition and in childhood L2 acquisition, there are language-specific cognitive structures (LSC), that turn into what he calls problem-solving cognitive structures (PSC), that intervene starting from age 10-12. Environmental and personality factors can influence the PSC system, while the LSC structures seem not to be sensitive to them. Second language adult learners, in his hypothesis, have both working PSC and LSC structures; the latter, in fact, are not completely replaced after childhood, while the first one can not be stopped. The competition between LSC and PSC structures «seems to be the reason why adults are inferior to children as to how successfully they achieve a native-like command in a foreign language», and «the more the PSC structures shape the learning process at the expense of LSC system, the smaller the chances will be for the learner to achieve a native-like command on the second language».

Krashen (1978), in his second language acquisition theory, makes a distinction between natural language acquisition and conscious second language learning: the former, in his hypothesis, plays a fundamental role in the development of second language proficiency in children as in adults (he calls this function monitor). The Monitor model can be useful to explain why adults have a faster initial progress in

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6 Ibidem
L2 than children: using it, in fact, adults can produce utterances in the second language before they acquire an effective and strong ability for a “natural” performance. In second language acquisition the Monitor is used to compare the personal L1 with the L2, in order to build up a valid morphological structure. Krashen states that this L1 transfer to L2 is unnatural, but can allow adults to learn the second language faster. Anyway, it is demonstrated that, on the long run, who starts his L2 acquisition process in childhood obtains a better ultimate L2 knowledge, because from puberty forward biological and cognitive changes turn on some filters, making adolescents and adults more inhibited.

Considering all these factors, it is credible that some adults could find hindrances in an L2 acquisition, and be always more unmotivated; this is why Balboni\(^8\) stands that it is fundamental to explain to adult students the reasons for their struggles during second language acquisition, in order to prevent them from losing their motivation.

### 2.2 Psychological factors

It is undeniable that each student, at any age, is different from another. Even if this is not the place to analyze what is that differentiates students, some brief reasons for this diversification are to be given. Carroll (1965)\(^9\) lists the identification components that characterize everyone's language aptitude: phonemic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, inductive language learning ability and rote learning ability, which is the ability to create connections between *stimuli*, and is very important to the creation of the vocabulary. These characteristics can be extended to any student, both children and adults; what is important here is to focus on the psychological factors that can influence, positively or not, the participation to second language lessons and its acquisition for what concerns adult students. The first detail to be considered is the

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personality of each student: introversion, extroversion and anxiety are person-specific and must be considered thoroughly, particularly when facing adults. Adult students, in fact, have their own personalities and are usually afraid to participate to activities in which they may feel ridicule or uncomfortable; this commonly does not happen with children. The teacher has to consider this factor, trying to propose activities that can involve every student but without forcing the participation of the ones that show to be more insecure. Another aspect to consider when teaching adults is the relationship that rises between the teacher himself and his students, a relation that is strongly different from the one with children: the teacher stops having an educative function and starts having just an instructive role. This is why some negotiations between teacher and students are necessary, first of all because the adult has a previous experience in what didactic and learning are and, moreover, because adults have a glottomathetic competence that can affect their behavior toward the teacher and to the language course itself. An adult's previous scholastic experience is, in fact, very important because the adult makes comparisons between what he already knows and what he has to face in the language course. Adult students have a range of expectations about the learning process based on their previous schooling experience, and the concept of what education is changes widely. The student's ideas on how a language should be learned and taught may be strongly different to what the teacher proposes and, if not understood, this misunderstanding could damage the acquisition process itself. Furthermore, the cultural background can play an important role in this sense, even more if added to the individual cognitive styles and personalities that characterize each adult student. The teacher needs to explore and understand these views from the very beginning of the course, as early as when he begins creating the course program. As Balboni (2002) suggests, it is another good reason to clearly illustrate the methodological principles at the base of teaching

10 Balboni, P.E., *op. cit.*, p. 180
11 «This is the term to indicate concepts such as “autonomy in learning” or “learn to learn” […]. The glottomathetic competence allows the students two operations, one synchronic trough transfer: when he uses for a discipline knowledge or abilities previously acquired for another discipline, and a diachronic one, when having already studied a language teaches, lifelong, how to refine that language and how to acquire more easily other languages». Source: www.itals.it. The translation is mine.
12 Balboni, P.E., *op. cit.*, p. 186
Another binding premise in teaching adults is considering the motivations that lead adult students to learn an L2: everyone of them has his own specific reasons to approach a second language, and it is interesting to give more attention to the inner pressures that trigger this wish of knowledge. The first, main difference stays between instrumental motivation and integrative motivation: the former represents an effort linked to functional reasons, such as for work-related needs; the latter stands for an interest that the students may have for the people and the culture that the target-language group represents. Students moved by this kind of motivation show their will to become part of the society represented by the L2. Motivation can also be divided into intrinsic or extrinsic; the intrinsic motivation constitutes the inner and sensitive reasons that bring the student to study a specific language – for instance, relatives coming from the country in which that language is spoken. The extrinsic motivation, on the contrary, is developed by the desire of a materialistic fulfillment, for instance job promotions or university credits. The last differentiation divides causative from resultative motivation; these two categories interpret motivation as a psychological factor: the former influences the learning process, while the latter is linked to the learning success of the students; it means, for instance, that students who experience more success in learning may be more motivated to learn more.

Anyway, motivation is a complex phenomenon and it is not possible to determine which kind of motivation urges adult students to face the study of a second language the most; motivation can result from learning as well as cause it, and it is not a characteristic that a student has or does not have, but something that can vary – depending on the moment and on the learning context. What the teacher should do, anyway, is choosing the teaching materials and the information content of the lesson, that have to correspond to students’ motivation.
2.3 Sociocultural factors

In teaching adults it becomes necessary for a teacher to consider more details, that go beyond the specific field of language: if it is true that adults can learn a language, it is also undeniable that they bear a cultural background that can affect their behavior toward the new target culture, and that may be learned less easily than the language itself. Schumann (1976) proposes his acculturation model, that contemplates many cultural and social factors than can have a good or a bad influence on foreigners' integration. The first and fundamental characteristic of the social background in which the adult foreigner arrives is the social distance from his Culture 1 and the Culture 2; a good learning situation, as Schumann states, is the one in which:

[...] there is little social distance because the target-language group and the L2-group view each other as socially equal, both groups wish the L2-group to assimilate the target-language group and the L2-group share the same social facilities, the L2-group lacks cohesion, the L2 is small, both groups display positive attitudes towards each other, and the L2-group is relatively permanent.\(^\text{13}\)

If, on the contrary, the target-language culture is perceived as dominant on the L2-group, the repercussions on the learning process could be negative. Also the opposite situation does not have good influences on the acquisition of the second language.

Adults willingly accept the corrections of linguistic mistakes, but their behavior could be much different when the teacher corrects something they perceive as concerning their sociocultural background (for instance, sociopragmatic elements, extra-linguistic codes or whatever can cause an inter-cultural encounter). Adult foreigners and students have to accept the C2 background without erasing the culture they possess and from which they come from, and the teacher plays an important role in making it clear and possible.

\(^\text{13}\) Schumann, J.H., 1976, *Social distance as a factor in second language acquisition*, p. 12, in Ellis, *op.cit.*
2.4 Knowles and the andragogical model

After this description of the main characteristics of adult learners, it seems appropriate to analyze deeper the foundation of andragogy. According to Knowles (1989), the six most important principles of the andragogical model are the following:

- Regarding the need to know: adults want to know why it is necessary to learn something and what it can be useful for. Tough (1979) discovered that adults spend considerable energies in starting learning something for themselves and in trying to understand the benefits that they will receive by learning it and the negative consequences they would experience in not learning it.

- Regarding the self-concept: adults feel responsible of their own lives. Once they reached this self-concept, they develop a deep psychological need to be treated as being capable of self-direction. For this reason they avoid situations in which they perceive that somebody is trying to impose his will on them; this could be a problem in teaching, because even if they posses their personal previous educational experience, they also want teachers to teach them.

- Regarding the role of the learner's experience: a classroom composed of adults presents numerous previous experiences, very different from each other in the sense of quality and quantity – for instance: social and cultural backgrounds, learning styles, needs, purposes, interests, goals, and so on. As Knowles states:

  It means that for many kinds of learning the richest resources for learning are within the learners themselves. Hence, the greater emphasis given [...] to techniques that tap into the experience of the learners, such as group discussion, simulation exercises, problem-solving activities, case

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method, and laboratory methods over transmittal techniques. Hence, too, the greater emphasis on peer-helping activities.\footnote{Knowles, 1989, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 84}

- Regarding readiness to learn: adults become willing in learning things they need to know or to be able to do when necessary, to face real-life situations.
- Regarding orientation to learning: if children present a subjected-centered orientation (such as at school), adults' learning become life-centered. In the adults' view, education is always overshadowed by the real-life concerns. This is the main reason for a teacher to develop learning experiences centered on real life: it should not be divided from their background and it should be effective.
- Regarding motivation to learn: even if an adult's strong motivation for learning can be extrinsic (a better job or salary, etc.), also in adult learners the strongest motivators are intrinsic motivators.
- Knowles also adds that, for adults, experience is used to create a self-image, a self-identity. So, it is important that teachers give importance to students' previous experience: if it is devalued or ignored, this implies a rejection of the entire person and not just of the experience itself.

2.5 An adult-oriented glottodidactic

All the characteristics already listed can be useful for a brief description of the pragmatic didactic context to adults. Dynamics inside a class of adult students are characterized by the presence of different cultures and values, of which anyone of the students becomes a bearer. For this reason it is strongly important to give them the possibility to compare everyone's different experiences, in order to give them the same importance, by an intercultural point of view. Furthermore, in each class there...
are students who tend to be more participating, monopolizing and leading the conversation; the teacher, also in this case, should be a good moderator in order to permit everybody to take part to the conversations in the most fitting way possible to everyone's character. He has to comprehend the ways to make everyone part of the learning process, but without forcing those students who do not want to be an active part of the lesson.\textsuperscript{17} As Rogers (1986) states, «a group is more than a collection of individuals»: it is an entity, with its inner interconnections. As Rogers also stresses, «there is a \textit{continuum} of groups: at one end, the tightly knit team, the integrated group where all the members have submerged their interior individuality; at the other, the loose-knit bundle."\textsuperscript{18} This is what diversifies a team and a collection of students.

As Serragiotto lists, there are some details that the teacher has to consider when facing adults:

- Il gruppo deve essere coeso, cioè ognuno deve sentirsi accettato e parte integrante del gruppo in modo che le attività abbiano successo, nonostante ogni persona abbia un ruolo diverso all'interno del gruppo
- Il clima all'interno della classe è fondamentale perché le relazioni tra i membri siano positive in modo da favorire la partecipazione e questo lo si può ottenere attraverso una particolare disposizione della classe e il clima emotivo
- L'interazione che si viene a creare tra studenti ed insegnante e tra gli stessi deve essere proporzionata e non unidirezionale in modo che non ci sia una prevalenza troppo marcata di qualcuno
- Hanno bisogno di conoscere la lingua nelle forme colloquiali e nei registri formali […], devono imparare a leggere comunicazioni, avvisi, devono saper compilare bollettini postali, leggere le voci delle buste paga e degli estratti-conto bancari\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Luise, M.C. and Serragiotto, G., \textit{Insegnare italiano come lingua straniera a bambini, insegnare italiano come lingua straniera ad adulti}, modulo on line http://www.unive.it/itals, per i corsi FILIM, Università Ca’ Foscari di Venezia, p. 12
2.5.1 Methods and techniques in teaching adults

I have already stated that each adult student bears his own set of values, certainties and self-concepts: this is the main reason to expect the teacher to create educational materials that can involve adult students and be useful to them. It is not easy to give precise directions and advice for choosing the best glottodidactic techniques, because each class is different from the others. As also Begotti states, it does not exist

«un approccio o un metodo che sia universalmente adatto a tutte le tipologie di studenti adulti, [...] per la glottodidattica efficace si rende necessaria una valutazione a priori delle esperienze pregresse, degli stili cognitivi e d'apprendimento, delle motivazioni e dei bisogni dei singoli apprendenti, al fine di proporre la metodologia che meglio si adatti al tipo di destinatari»

However, it is possible to give some wide indications for a good learning context that involves adults. Begotti\textsuperscript{21} is sure that also with adult learners it is possible to use an Humanistic-Affective approach, and not only with children. The Humanistic-Affective approach places great emphasis on student's emotional and relationship-wise aspects, and focuses its attention on student's self-realization. A group of students is not only an amalgam of students: it is a living system, and for its nature it is necessary to analyze the inner connections and to guide them towards their best fulfillment. The reason to focus on this particular approach is related to decision of the teacher I could observe during my direct observation experience, who chose to avail of it, with good and positive consequences on the learning context.

It is also necessary to state that the adult student generally prefers those activities that can give him the possibility to understand his level of proficiency, rather than

\textsuperscript{20} Begotti, P., La glottodidattica umanistico-affettiva nell'insegnamento dell'italiano LS ed L2 ad adulti stranieri, Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia, p.4
\textsuperscript{21} Ibidem
activities that put him in comparison with his classmates. This is a good reason to prefer pair works, because the students do not feel judged by classmates and by the teacher too. For the same reason adults, in general, do not like playful activities, because they do not want to lose face; anyway, it is also true that each group is different from the others. It could mean, for example, that a group of adults in which the inner climate is very good and positive can like this kind of activities, and ask the teacher for them. In substance, the teacher must have a clear profile of the classroom he is facing, in order to give the best educational materials, activities and methods for that particular group.

In the end, as Serragiotto counsels, audiovisual materials can be very useful to the teacher, also with adult students. He states that recent studies demonstrated that 83% of sensations reach the brain through the sight, and the remaining 17% through other senses. Furthermore, audiovisual contents are strictly referred to a specific communicative situation, giving the students a clear indication on how to manage different registers and language functions.

### 2.5.2 Young adults as L2 learners

Before giving an in-depth analysis of the learning contexts I conducted my research, I think it is required to distinguish the students I could observe for this inquiry. The information I gave about adult learners must be considered as important and believable, but it is necessary to state that the students I have studied are a little different from the general portrait I have given until this point. The students I observed, in fact, are have to be considered as young adults; most of them are university students, and their age is most likely included between 19-25 years. There are, of course, some exceptions (especially in the Università class, where the average

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23 Serragiotto in Luise, M.C. and Serragiotto, G., *op. cit.*, p. 14
is a little higher), but most of the students I observed are in this age-group.

It is important to ponder briefly on young adults' characteristics, to understand more what teaching them means. In fact, even if not completely different from adults in general, young students have their own traits that have to be known, in order to guarantee the best approach to them. Daloiso (2006) describes some characteristics that differentiate young adults as learners, starting with an analysis of their neurological features; he states that young university student (aged 18-25):

[...] rientra nell'arco temporale del terzo periodo critico relativo all'acquisizione delle lingue (Fabbro, 2004); potenzialmente, dunque, lo studente che rientra nella fascia d'età tra i 18 e i 25 anni può raggiungere un'elevata competenza morfosintattica e lessicale, mentre troverà maggiori difficoltà a livello di discriminazione e riproduzione fonetica (accento straniero).  

Later, Daloiso analyzes the psychological aspects that can be observed in young adult learners; their psychological characteristics are similar to the ones that can be seen in adults in general, but anyway it is important to focus on them for a confirmation:

- L'apprendimento linguistico è possibile solo se viene vissuto come atto volontario e mosso da una forte motivazione; nella maggior parte dei casi i giovani adulti studiano l'italiano per loro scelta, ma la motivazione varia notevolmente da persona a persona [...];

- Il giovane adulto spesso desidera sentirsi protagonista del proprio percorso d'apprendimento, tende a considerare l'insegnante come un pari e richiede un patto formativo chiaro, fondato sulla trasparenza e la condivisione di mete, obiettivi e metodi didattici (Balboni, 2002); non mancano tuttavia situazioni in cui i giovani adulti provengono da sistemi universitari molto strutturati, dove poco spazio è lasciato alla condivisione del percorso formativo tra studente e docente; in questi

casi lo studente tende a lasciare all'insegnante ogni decisione di carattere formativo e didattico e a seguire il percorso didattico in maniera spesso passiva;

- Ogni studente ha ormai maturato un proprio stile d'apprendimento linguistico, che dipende dall'interazione tra fattori intrapsichici (personalità, percezione, processi cognitivi e mnestici) ed extra-psichici (rapporto con la cultura d'appartenenza, atteggiamento socio-relazionale, rapporto con il sapere e l'ambiente di apprendimento).²⁵

So, as Daloiso maintains, young adults are quite different from adults in general for some characteristics that a teacher should consider in teaching them; they share almost the same characteristics with adult learners (motivation, a personal learning-style, general need to feel participative and active, etc.); anyway, on the contrary, most of them can be immature, even if they possess the same behaviors and manners observable in adults. They made their own choices, they feel responsible and they have clear opinions on their scholastic and working future. Begotti²⁶ states, for the reasons already given, that some activities that can be useful and well-accepted by mature adults are not equally usable with young adults, for instance role-plays or simulations, that expose them in public. This attitude can be explained by the emotionality that strongly concerns them in learning contexts and by the fear to appear immature.

As Begotti says:

«è possibile interpretare questo dato come una risposta fisiologica e psicologica da parte dei giovani, il cui stato infantile o adolesenziale appena concluso, o ancora in corso, rende difficile l'accettazione di attività considerate come tipiche infantili».²⁷

²⁶ Begotti, P., op. cit., p. 10
For this reason the teacher who faces young adults has to consider that young adults have their own specific needs and aims, and that it is necessary to create an educational material able to make them participating in the appropriate way they desire. Also activities should be conceived for their particular condition, and teachers should pay attention to the composition of the class itself, maybe more than in other circumstances. Young adults, in fact, are most of the time university students, with their strong ideas concerning what a good teaching method is and which is their role in learning; they could still be very attentive to their identity and to how they want to appear, making some activities hard to be managed by the teacher because of their refusal to take part in them. All of this characteristics should be considered by a teacher who starts teaching to young adults, in order to give them the language course they expect.
3 THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The foundation of this thesis starts from my strong will to understand deeper what happens during a real and tangible Italian language course, and to take advantage of the opportunity to compare different didactic situations. This is the reason behind my personal need to undertake my research as an observer in the two classes, one at the Università and the other one at the Politecnico: it was the easiest and deepest way to reach my purpose. Undoubtedly, each class is realistically completely different and not totally comparable to the others, and I personally think that discovering such differences and analyzing them can be positive not only for the personal and professional growth of the observer, but also useful to the observed teacher too. The general tendency verifiable in most of the didactic situations, unfortunately, is characterized by an hostile behavior toward the presence of an observer in the language lesson; I think, however, that the observation could be one of the most important methods to conduct a deep and qualitative research on what happens in a class, and – as a consequence – to become aware of behaviors, certainties and attitudes of students and teachers themselves, in order to encourage and to improve the tight interaction between them during the language lesson.\textsuperscript{28} Undoubtedly, it is responsibility of the observer to behave in order to be as discreet as possible; the observer must be useful to the teacher – in the event that the teacher is interested to the remarks of the observer, of course - and has to conduct his research cleverly not causing a disturbance in the class interaction. Observing means describing what happens in the classroom as accurately as possible, to discover peculiarities of each particular situation or a specific conduct of a student or of the entire class, and why it takes place. But, inasmuch the observation is carried out by a person, with his personal and distinguishing ideas, prejudices and certainties, the risk is to go into the so-called observer's paradox\textsuperscript{29} (in the definition of Labov). This paradox stands on

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Pozzo, G., \textit{L'osservazione: uno strumento per conoscere cosa succede in classe}, Perugia, Master in Didattica dell'italiano lingua non materna, Università per Stranieri di Perugia, p. 1
\item \textit{Idem}, p. 2
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the following question: can the observer's description be reliable, if managed by a person with his own – and, by their nature, strong and stable – opinions? And do the behavior of students and teacher change, because of the presence of a stranger in the classroom? This last perspective is known as the Hawthorne effect: the fact that the learners are aware of their participation in a research may influence them, changing their genuine behavior.30 Second language students may be more participating and motivated simply because they know that they are involved in a study that will help the observer to understand how second language acquisition works.

Another issue involves the problem of the objectiveness of a research of this kind: Braga and Tosi (1995) sustain that effects of subjectivity can negatively influence a study, even when the observer tries to use objective methods as much as possible. Objectivity and the perfect adherence to reality have to become the first goals for the researcher, although observing people entails having to do with emotions, opinions, attitudes, and so on.31

In substance, it is necessary to focus on the methods and the resources at the observer's disposal, in order to analyze the class in the most objective way possible and to not threaten the effectiveness of the research itself.

3.1 Personal purpose for the research

As I have already said, the main aim of my research is to comprehend the inner work of teaching the Italian language in two different contexts. Although generalizations are not possible in this field, because the teaching methods depend on the composition of the classes themselves, on the students, on their language, on their

31 Braga, P. and Tosi, P., La ricerca sul campo in educazione. I metodi qualitativi, in Pozzo, G., op. cit., p. 3
culture, etc., I am sure that the observation and the comparison of two different realities could be absolutely interesting and formative. The main goal I set myself was to analyze how different spatial dispositions, contexts and students can influence the second language acquisition; it was the main reason for trying to find two classes with the same language proficiency and where the students were the same age, to have the possibility to compare two different realities but with similar backgrounds, goals and wills.

Actually, I succeeded in this sense: as I will describe in the following pages, the two contexts I could observe during this research can be easily compared for what concerns the age of the students, their social background, and especially the level of the course they attended. The possibility I had to take part to the lessons and to analyze the inner interactions of the two groups was really formative, because it gave me some more experience about teaching the Italian language as an L2. My personal purpose to enrich my knowledge has been fully reached with this direct observation experience.

3.2 Timing of the project

A research project has to be planned. In September, 2014 I started contacting CLAs at the Politecnico and at the Università to negotiate my presence during the lessons, my duties, and what I would have had to do to reach the purpose I had set myself on. The CLA at the Università gave me the possibility to observe the entire Italian language course starting from the second lesson – because CLA’s director wanted the first lesson to be focused only on the students, to let them free to talk about their aims, their previous Italian language courses, why they wanted to learn Italian, and so on. So, the real fulfillment of this project, that is the effective observation experience, took place from October 8th, 2014 (when the course at the Università started) and February, 2015 – also considering the time for the analysis and the data
elaboration –, excluding Christmas break. I worked on the Università class from October 8th, 2014 to December 15th, 2014 – it was a 3-month course (details about it can be find in Attachment 1). The total amount of hours for the course at the Università was of 30 hours. The final exam took place on December 15th, 2014.

Instead, Politecnico CLA gave me the possibility to start observing the class starting from the ninth lesson; whereas Università had accepted observers before, in Politecnico I was the first observer ever. So, it was necessary some more time to better understand my position within Politecnico. My research engagement in Politecnico started on October 22nd, 2014 and finished on January 17th, 2015 (more details in Attachment 2). The final exam was on January, 22nd-23rd and, for those students who preferred to take the exam during the second exam session, on February, 16th. The total amount of hours dedicated to the Italian language course in Politecnico was of 60 hours, exactly twice the amount of hours of the course provided by Università. This detail must be considered to understand deeply and distinctly the differences I noticed between the two contexts, above all because the two courses goals were reached in very different ways and with different results, as we will see later.

### 3.3 People involved in the project

These are the persons involved in the research project:

- students in Politecnico di Torino
- students in Università degli Studi di Torino
- E.P., Italian language L2 teacher in both classes (Università and Politecnico)

The presence of the same teacher in both classes is, in my opinion, one of the strongest points of this project. I think that the comparison of two different learning
contexts could be difficult – and also maybe senseless – if conducted on learning situations that have nothing to share. I had the possibility to inspect two different contexts, distinguished by aspects I will examine later, but fortunately associated by the same teacher: for this reason I had the possibility to compare how much those aspects that differentiate the classes can affect the situation itself.

The assistance I had from different persons to carry out this inquiry has to be pointed out: D.U., CLA's administrative director within Politecnico; A.B., responsible for the Italian language certifications CELI at the Università; M.V., Università CLA's director.

### 3.4 Tools used during the direct observation

I have already talked about the importance of objectivity in a research; this is a good reason to prearrange tools that will be used during the direct observation. Tools have to be useful and exploited on the strength of their limits and their advantages. For my research project I used the following tools: a research logbook, an audio recorder and four observation sheets. Even if not a significant part of the research itself, I also created two questionnaires, directly submitted to the students, to have a more precise portrait of who the students were, what they thought about the Italian language course and which was their relationship with the Italian language outside the classroom.

#### 3.4.1 The research logbook

One of the main means used for this project is the research logbook: its first purpose was to allow me to take notes of what happened in the classrooms, in order to
observe directly the interactions among the students and between the students and the teacher. The first reason to choose the research logbook in a direct observation is that one of its best characteristics is the possibility it gives to the observer to review – in a diachronic way – the whole development of the students and of the project itself. The annotations should be as impersonal as possible\textsuperscript{32} and the observer's personality and opinions should not transpire, because of the need of objectivity; this is what I tried to do for all the observations I noted down: notes are honest and immediate.

\subsection*{3.4.2 Audio recorder}

The will to be as objective as possible is also proved by the use of an audio recorder, in order to have the possibility to listen at any time what happened in the classrooms and to change my mind – if necessary – on the annotations I wrote down during the lessons. As I have already said, one of the most important characteristics of a good direct observation stays in its immediacy and honesty, in order to realistically outline the didactic situation that becomes the subject of the research; even if an observer must be constantly concentrated on being as objective as possible, the audio recorder permits him to be more focused and it is usable at any time. The audio recorder is also very useful to analyze the language of each student in a deep way, such as the pronunciation, his errors and mistakes, the interference of the learners' language on the acquisition of the target language, and so on. Even if the observer is strongly focused on writing down in the research logbook what he sees and highlights, in my opinion it is really important to record each lesson in order to have the possibility to perceive better what happens in the classrooms, and to rethink every single detail. I started recording the lessons from the beginning of the courses, until their end.

It is also fundamental to cross and compare the data taken with the direct observation during the lessons and the information provided listening to the audio

\textsuperscript{32} Pozzo, G., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 6
recordings: in the classroom, in fact, the observer has the possibility to understand deeper what happens in a specific moment and to note it down, for instance, the teacher and students behavior, how they act, the level of concentration, the interaction among classmates, and so on; but he can be also distracted or too much focused on a particular detail, losing other important aspects of the lesson. The audio recorder is really helpful to complete later on the information taken during the presence of the observer in the classroom.

3.4.3 Observation sheets

One of the best and most useful tools at the observer's disposal is the observation sheet. It has to be clear for the observer and pertinent to the aim that he wants to reach, in order to organize the direct observation and make it complete. The most important aspect in using an observation sheet is to organize it very well: the observer wants to analyze a single particular – such as the interactions between the teacher and each student, the insertion of new lexical elements or the treatment of errors – during the constant and continuous classroom interaction, and so it must be possible that the observation sheet may be filled out quickly and in a satisfying way. I chose to use four different observation sheets, created by Maria De Luchi and used by Master ITALS's students for the internship scheduled for this course of study; a brief description of the four observation sheets is necessary:

- Observation sheet 1: it is the so called C.O.L.T. (Communicative Organization in Language Teaching) observation sheet (Attachment 3). It permits to describe in detail the structure of a lesson or to focus on a particular aspect of it. It has to be used at least three times during the entire course. It was used in both universities

- Observation sheet 2: this observation sheet has been used for checking how
and when the mistake is correct. I used it in both cases. (Attachment 4)

- Observation sheet 3: the main purpose of this observation sheet is to test how students and teacher behave in front of new lexical elements: how they are inserted, how they are assimilated, and so on. It was used in both classes. (Attachment 5)

- Observation sheet 4: this one wants to check the level of attention and participation of the students during a lesson. It requests the observer a constant concentration, because he or she has to record every kind of interaction realized during the lesson. This is the reason why I decided to use it only in the Università class – it was smaller than the Politecnico one, and there I could catch all the interactions (Attachment 6).

It is necessary to state that these observation sheets were used for personal purposes. They helped me focusing on what happened during the lessons, and I wanted to use them to have the possibility to compare the two situations observed. As the audio recorder, so, observation sheets were an important mean that helped me focus more on what I could write down in the research logbook.

### 3.4.4 Questionnaires

My participation to the lessons consisted in a direct observation, but I rarely had the possibility to interact with the students: I sat behind the students both at the Università and at the Politecnico, and I did not want to cause any annoyance or to bother the normal evolution of the lessons. But I also wanted to understand deeper the background of each student, in order to analyze – on the light of those gathered data – the behavior of each student and of the entire class; the only way I had to know the backgrounds, the motivations and the relationships between the students
and Italian native speakers – without disturbing the teacher and the students themselves – was to send them an e-mail containing the two questionnaires. I decided not to focus the questions only on the Italian language course they were attending, because it was not the main subject of my research and because I wanted them to be as honest as possible; what I was interested in was the social background of each student, and how they perceive the Italian language – in a personal and intimate way, to understand how much each of them is motivated to learn Italian and to interact with native speakers. I wanted the students to understand clearly the questions, and for this reason I decided to send them questionnaires in English. I paid attention to this detail, because during my observation I noted that the students proficiency in English is surely better than the one in Italian. As a matter of fact I thought to send the the questionnaires both in Italian and in English, but in the end I preferred to submit to the students just the English version.

3.4.4.1 Questionnaire 1. The Italian language course

The first questionnaire was created\textsuperscript{33} for understanding the attitude of students toward the study of a second language, specifically Italian. What I wanted to reach with the first part of the questionnaire (questions 1-8) was to understand briefly the background of each student involved, such as his age, the country where he comes from, his reasons to stay in Torino, etc. However, its first aim was to comprehend the students ideas about the Italian language course they were attending: what, in their opinion, should be modified to improve the course itself, the reasons to attend it, which were its best and worst characteristics, and so on; questions 9-13 were created with this will. The last questions (14-17) intended to focus on the personal desire of each student and on the motivations that lead them to attend the course; I also wanted to analyze which were the most important aim they wanted to reach (for instance:

\textsuperscript{33} For the creation of this questionnaire I have taken Paterna, E., \textit{L’offerta dei corsi di italiano al Politecnico di Torino}, Venezia, Master ITALS II livello, 2012, pp. 77-78 as starting point
grammar competence, speaking, etc.) in order to have a wide profile of the classes I observed (the questionnaire can be read entirely in Attachment 7).

3.4.4.2 Questionnaire 2. The Language Contact Profile

The second questionnaire I submitted to students at the Università and at the Politecnico was created with reference to Seliger's (1976) Language Contact Profile questionnaire, used to study learners' contact with the target language and their motivation. I have reshaped and recreated this questionnaire, but the aim is still the same: quantifying the learner's motivation and the extent of contact with the L2 outside the language lessons. With this questionnaire I wanted to understand the connections between the attendance to the language lessons and the effective contact with native speakers that the students had outside the language course. During my direct observation I tried to outline the students who participated more and those ones who, on the contrary, were not so participative. In Seliger's definition (1977) students can be divided into HIGs (High Input Generators, that practice initiating interactions and creating new inputs for their fellow students) and LIGs (Low Input Generators, that do little to initiate situations that could cause inputs); the first aim of this questionnaire is to understand if HIGs have a better contact with the second language outside of the regular language classes. The questionnaire wants to confirm or not the following hypothesis: HIGs and LIGs differ in the amount of out-of-class language activities and contacts. Each answer the gives students a different score – that, obviously, student could not see when filling in the answers – and the total sum of these scores creates a language contact profile that can explain the relation of each student with the Italian language, in order to confirm the hypothesis already cited. The first questions (1-6) were created to focus on the students background (age, the country were they come from, mother tongue, etc.). Questions 7-9 were to

34 In Allwright, D., Observation in the Language Classroom, Longman Group, Harlow, England, 1988, p. 229 and 236-238
understand their relationship with the Italian language and their personal opinion on their proficiency. Questions 10-15 concerned what the students did daily to improve their Italian: listen to the radio, talk Italian to native speakers, read newspapers, etc. and the relation they maintain with their mother language. Finally, questions 16-19 were used to understand the connections they have with native speakers outside the classroom and the names of the closest friends they have in Torino, to focus on the quantity and quality of their links to Italian.

I also wanted to use it in order to give a wider and more specific portrait of the two classes I observed and studied during this research project, because I think that the level of participation to the lessons can itself be referable to the interest for the Italian language showed by the students also outside the class. A comparison between the scores obtained by the students in the two contexts is really interesting in this sense. This questionnaire can be found in Attachment 8.

The main reason to create these questionnaire is principally linked to a personal curiosity and desire to understand more who the students I observed during all the months of my research were; the data gathered thanks to the questionnaires are more interesting for this personal purpose than for a real and strong usefulness to the research project. However, it does not mean that they are not beneficial: the data recollected with the questionnaires, in fact, (and, in particular, questionnaire 1, related to the Italian language course) can give the teacher some useful information, that she can take in account.

3.5 Ethical principles

The research I conducted involved many people, first of all the teacher and the students. I do not want to undermine anybody’s privacy, and this is the main reason to choose to refer to them only with their names and, in some cases, surnames initials.
Furthermore, I chose that the questionnaires I submitted to the students had to be anonymous, and the students could obviously decide if answering or not to some of the questions – as actually happened, in some cases. Particularly for what concerns their answers to the questionnaire focused on the Italian language course, I preferred not to write any name, to respect their privacy and their opinions.

3.6 Students involved in this research project: an in-depth analysis

The students are the real and most important subject of this research, immediately followed by the teacher; for this reason, an in-depth examination of the composition of each class is absolutely necessary. The differences I noticed and analyzed are, in fact, often attributable to the differences among the students and the two classes; however, even if every group of students is different from the others, it is also possible to compare them and to conclude with some generalizations. The two contexts I worked on were really different from each other for some aspects, and this is one fundamental reason for the different approach I had toward them: I realized that the information I recollected at the Università is, in some cases, more complete than the one I got from Politecnico. This is something I could not change, because of the differences registered in the contexts themselves: at the Università there where just 7 students, while at the Politecnico the situation was quite diverse. As we will see later, the spatial disposition itself of the classrooms was completely different, and my presence was perceived by the students in very different ways: at the Università I had the possibility to interact with them, even if not often, unlike at the Politecnico. Anyway, the students of the two classes are easily comparable, first of all because the age group is the same: they are both composed of adults, with the same level of Italian language, and with a good education background. This is why, although some differences existed, a comparison between these two learning contexts was possible and satisfying.
3.6.1 Students at Università degli Studi

The class I observed at the Università was attending a 3-month long course promoted by the CLA; unlike the situation at the Politecnico, where the students are forced to attend Italian language courses by the academic organization, at the Università the students are completely free to register for the courses. This is, in my opinion, one of the most noteworthy detail to consider, because it can probably explain the reasons behind the differences I noticed between the two classes: the motivation to attend Italian language courses is surely different. This factor entails, in fact, that the students at the Università were probably more interested and motivated than the average student at the Politecnico, that can be moved not only by integrative and inner motivations, but mainly by academic duties.

Students in Università are, in the aggregate, seven:

- M., Egyptian, male, aged 26
- B., Lebanese, male, aged 26
- I., Lithuanian, female, aged 32
- F., Venezuelan, female, aged 23
- R., Spanish, female, aged 26
- Y., Japanese, female, aged 30
- S., Georgian, female, aged 22. This student, however, did not get the certification of attendance because she did not attend the minimum number of lessons. Also for this research she is not completely reliable, because of her sporadic presence; while, with the other six students, it was possible to register and to work on the improvements and on the general linguistic evolution, with her the situation was different. I prefer not to consider her for my final results.
The reasons the students at the Università started attending this course were very different: some of them (B., M., R.) started studying Italian primarily to integrate more easily in their university courses in Torino, while others (F., I., Y.) principally decided to be enrolled for personal reasons or simply because they want to live in Italy. At the beginning of the course the difference between the students was very marked; the most interesting and significant aspect was the division that appeared – from the very beginning – between the hispanophone students (R. is Spanish, F. is Venezuelan, but also B. has a very good linguistic proficiency in Spanish language) and the other classmates: it is undeniable that an hispanophonic learner generally has less difficulties than the others in the acquisition of the Italian language, and it is also really undeniable the fact that R., without any previous Italian language knowledge, at the end of the course reached – and beat – the linguistic proficiency of the Egyptian and the Japanese classmates, that on the contrary had been enrolled in another Italian course before. At mid-course, anyway, the students levels began to be more similar. In particular it is interesting the situation of Y., Japanese: at the beginning – even if she had attended a course A1-A2 at CLA before – she showed to be very lacking if compared to her classmates, but from mid-course and further she disclosed her very good lexical proficiency, better than most of the other students (attaccabottone, borsa di studio and other example can prove her good lexical proficiency). Maybe it is also a matter of culture, and this could be one reason at the root of her little participation during the first lessons: Japanese students generally prefer to not take an active part to the lessons, unless directly questioned. M. too, the Egyptian student, deeply changed his attitude toward the course and his classmates: at the beginning he preferred to grow apart and to fill out the exercises by himself, without the will to take part to the lesson, but in the end he started to be more participative and to try different learning strategies, with a clear positive influence on his language developments. For what concerns I., the Lithuanian student, she showed a normal and constant improvement, maybe also due to the assistance she constantly had from her Italian boyfriend – I understood she could rely

35 Davies, R.J. and Ikeno, O., 2007, La mente giapponese, Meltemi editore, Roma
on him because, during the group homework correction, she often admitted he helped her. In general, she never had particular problems neither with the learning of the language nor with the participation to the activities proposed by the teacher, and her linguistic development can be considered really satisfying. B., from Lebanon, was undoubtedly the positive leader of the group; his substantial improvements are due to different factors: first of all, to the good proficiency he has in Spanish and French languages, that in all probability helped him acquire faster the Italian language by a positive linguistic interference; he also shares his flat in Torino with Italian housemates, and this is surely one of his strong points in learning Italian. The same positive interference of mother language can be found in F., from Venezuela: she showed an increasing improvement, and the fact that her boyfriend is Italian contributed to her fast linguistic development. Nevertheless, even if positive in the end, the influence of her L1 was the strongest I registered in this group of students: thanks to her mother tongue she was able to speak fluently and better than the majority of her classmates, but at a grammatical and syntactical level she had difficulties in changing the structures of her mother tongue in order to adapt them to the Italian ones. R., instead, paid more attention to learn the language structures and to avoid the interference of her mother tongue.
In substance, in this classroom I had the possibility to notice a real and perceivable improvement, both in each student and in the class in general, also confirmed by the teacher herself. The group of students in Università always proved to be motivated, interested and operative during the lessons, as also the stable number of presences per lesson can show; this is, in my opinion, one of the first reasons for the success of the entire group and of each student.

Table 6. Number of students per lesson at the Università course.
3.6.2 Students at Politecnico

The situation I observed at the Politecnico was different, in particular for what concerns the number and the characteristics of the students involved in my research. First of all, at the Politecnico the students do not have the compulsory attendance to Italian language courses lessons, and this can explain why the number of students per lesson always changed during the entire course. Only at the end of the course the number of students has become stable, on average around 10-15 persons per lesson:

Table 7. Number of students per lesson at the Politecnico course

Another characteristic of the course I observed at the Politecnico was the composition of the class itself: even if every student was in theory assigned to a specific class and teacher – in a mere alphabetical order –, actually they attended the course they preferred and they chose following their preference for a specific teacher or because of the presence of friends of theirs in that class. It means that the composition of the classes often depended on different factors and was not
completely organizable and controllable, with a resulting non-homogeneous structure of the group of students. Furthermore, the replacement of the Italian language course level A1 with an online course for beginners has – probably – influenced negatively the students basic preparation, who as a consequence attended the course A2 without strong and experienced basis. It has inevitable bad consequences on the learning context itself.

The average trend of the courses at the Politecnico has always been characterized – as the teacher told me, from her personal teaching experience there – by a decrease in the number of the students; for this reason I think it is necessary and more truthful to consider the class starting from a certain point of the course, when the total amount of the students attending reached its stability around 10-15 students. It has to be underlined also the significant difference of participants to the lessons, depending on the day of the lesson itself: on Saturday mornings, in fact, the amount normally decreased. This is a phenomenon already registered by the teacher during her six-year experience.

My presence at the Politecnico class was almost imperceptible, since I was sitting behind the students and they could not see me during the lessons; the teacher also did not explain the reason of my presence in the classroom, on the contrary of what happened at the Università, where my presence would have been surely noticed because of the restricted number of students. Actually, some of them started becoming curious of my presence, because I obviously did not take part to group works and so on; the reason of my presence was revealed only at mid-course, when I asked them for their email addresses in order to send them the questionnaires. I think, anyway, that this is a strong point of this research, because the students were not influenced by the presence of an observer; for what concerns the Università group, however, I always thought that they behaved in a natural and spontaneous way, despite my presence. This impression can be confirmed by their behavior during the lessons: they interacted with me – even if rarely, as an observer should do – in a spontaneous way, as a part of the group. However, Politecnico CLA asked me not to analyze in depth the situation of each student during the lessons and to conduct my
research as discreetly as possible; besides this precise request (maybe due to the fact that I was the first observer ever at the Politecnico Italian language classes) also the number of the students, the spatial disposition of the classroom and the decision to not reveal my presence influenced the possibility to investigate deeper on each student. However, it does not mean that I do not have a clear profile of the class’ composition. The group of students which was more participating to the lessons, from its beginning to its end, was composed this way (it has to be kept in mind that the group always changed during each lesson and that not everyone of them participated to every lesson, but the following students can be considered the more active group):

- WL., Chinese, male
- CA., Turkish, male
- FG., Turkish, male
- AL., Venezuelan, female
- AB., French, female
- EV., French, female
- YA., Syrian, male
- MB., Iranian, male
- one Chinese, male

Here, there are some other students who attended the lessons, even if more inconstantly:

- two German students, both males
- one Syrian student, female
• two Venezuelan students, one male and one female
• three Rumanian students, one male and two females
• one Portuguese student, male
• one Nigerian student, male. He has a really good proficiency in Rumanian; he was a special case because his presence during the lessons was not very constant (he was also occupied with an Italian language course for the residency permit), but when attending he was very participating
• one hispanophone student, female. I could not recognize her native country

This group of students, unlike the Università one, was very various concerning the students linguistic levels. It is true that at the Università too the students were quite different from each other, but at the Politecnico the students levels were really differentiated; the problem can be attributed to the obligation – for some students – to have a level A2 of Italian language (as decided by Politecnico academic organization) obtained attending the course A1 provided in streaming. This decision entails that some students do not really attend the course level A1, or maybe they do not learn effectively the basis of the Italian language with this teaching method. However, this is not the place to analyze if the decision to give this kind of courses is right or not; what concerns us is that it could be one of the reasons for the very differentiated levels present within the class. Undoubtedly this characteristic of the Politecnico class has to be generally interpreted as a negative aspect, that does not affect positively the normal development of the lessons: the students are slower, less active and, as a consequence, they can lose their motivation early. I think it is explanatory the fact that a decrease in the number of students is always registered (Table 2, Attachment 10 will explain directly the strong loss of students starting from the beginning of lessons): it is true that a decreasing trend is often and generally registered from the beginning of every course – it also happened at the Università, where S. did not get her certification of attendance – but here at the Politecnico the numbers are very unambiguous and highlight a phenomenon that creates non-
practical didactic situations, for both teachers and students.

Anyway, the mixture of different levels can also have – even if not so much – a positive implication for what concerns the support among the students; it is something that actually I did not register much, but in some cases few students helped each other in the learning process. In addition, the fact that all the students attending Italian language courses are enrolled at the Politecnico and – for this reason – can build a relationship outside the Italian class can be, in some cases, a positive strong point. This is, for instance, the case of YA. (Syrian, male) and FG. (Turkish, male): YA. started attending this course later than FG. (precisely at lesson 15th), but he had previous knowledge of the Italian language. They probably met outside the Italian language course and established a friendship; in fact, after a while, YA. started to help FG. fill out his exercises or he helped him improve his grammar proficiency. It is true that YA. probably could not always pay attention to the teacher, because of his dedication to his needy classmate, but the mixture of levels can produce more support and a positive mutual help among students. As a matter of fact, anyway, this is the only case in which I noted that such differentiation of levels had a positive effect in the inner interactions among the students.

However, the most relevant and remarkable aspect that concerns the composition of the group at the Politecnico is the variable presence of each student during the lessons. Since a regular attendance is not required, the students were not forced to attend the lessons; this detail entails that the variable composition of the group did not permit a stable and continuous relationships among classmates, with negative outcomes on the climate of the class itself (see paragraph 3.8)
3.7 Students' motivations to learn Italian as an L2: an analysis

One of the most useful methods to understand the differences between the two classes in which I conducted this research is to compare the motivations that brought the students to participate to the Italian language course. As already stated in chapter 2, every person is moved by a particular and personal purpose, following different reasons and motivations. As a matter of fact, one of the first differences that it is possible to point out between Università and Politecnico is the motivation that led the students to attend the Italian language course.

At the Università the students paid to learn Italian: this detail conveys to two different and important considerations. The first one is that they themselves decided to learn Italian, quite certainly to ease their own integration process (I. and F., for example, have Italian boyfriends); therefore, the most important purpose they had to attend the course was to learn the language to get closer to native-speakers and to the culture they represent. The second and more materialistic consideration is that, since they paid for the course, not attend it would mean a loss of money. Adults in general, as Balboni\(^\text{37}\) states, apply the theory of «value for money»: adult learners, in this case the ones attending the course at the Università, attended the course with constancy not only to reach their personal goals but also to get tangible and satisfying results. The only exception in this case was, as already stated, S., who did not conclude the course.

As for the Politecnico students, the situation was completely different. They did not have to pay for the course since it was included in the academic program proposed by the Politecnico. As I have already explained (see paragraph 1.3.2), the students at the Politecnico have to pass the Italian language exam primarily to get course credits, in accordance to the subject they are majoring in. This means that these students were led to attend the Italian language course more by an instrumental motivation than by an integrative one. It entails that most of the students were probably more concerned by their academic study plan than by the importance itself of learning the

L2. This hypothesis is supported by the decrease in the number of students attending the lessons as the end of the course approached (Table 2, Attachment 10), which clearly shows how the Italian language exam was seen as an exam like many others. Or, even worse, the loss of students registered during the last lessons may mean that the students preferred to focus on the preparation of other exams rather than looking after the Italian language one. Obviously it does not signify that every student was only moved by an instrumental motivation: it is probable, in fact, that the students who always took part to the course right to its end were mainly led by an integrative motivation. Their constant presence could be considered indicative of their main purpose to follow the course, which would be to be able to get closer to native-speakers and to native-speakers culture. Furthermore, those who attended the course the most were those planning to spend a long time in Italy (years, in some cases), thus the urge to effectively learn the target-group language: to feel part of the native population and to know its culture.

A previous study conducted at the Politecnico by Paterna\(^{38}\) (Master ITALS II level, 2011/2012) focused, among other things, on the motivations that brought the students to attend the course during that academic year. Giving them a questionnaire, Paterna discovered that many students were led by integrative motivation, unlike she expected. Obviously each class is different from one another and the results she obtained must be considered specific to the classes in which she conducted her research. Her data anyway underline that, in spite of everything, at the Politecnico, as well as at the University, the students may be first of all moved by a desire of integration. However, as stated before, this type of motivation may probably only be peculiar to those students who constantly participated to the lessons.

3.8 A theoretical analysis of the students number: its influence on the two didactic situations observed

The Cooperative Learning method helps us to understand the importance of the students' number in a class and how it can influence both the teaching and the learning processes. Theorists are certain that small groups of students are more advisable and, even if an ideal number of students per group is not given, the general idea is that the smaller a group is, the better is the didactic situation. When deciding the number of students to assign to each group some characteristics and factors, as Angelino lists, should be kept in mind:

- Il gruppo dovrà essere tanto più piccolo quanto minori sono le abilità comunicative
- L'aumento dell'ampiezza del gruppo introduce dei fattori che possono influire negativamente sulla qualità dei rapporti interpersonali dei componenti e, quindi, sulla dinamica generale del gruppo stesso
- Quanto più numeroso è il gruppo, tanto più diventa importante dare la possibilità ad ognuno di esprimersi, di coordinare le azioni, di raggiungere il consenso, di elaborare e assimilare il materiale che deve essere appreso

The most valuable characteristic that small groups have is that they allow the teacher to better evaluate the progresses each student makes; this way, the instructor is more likely to find out which communicative and cognitive barriers a student has, being able to quickly intervene on them, thus following each student abilities. When comparing the two didactic situations I have observed and studied, the positive aspects of a small group of students become incredibly evident. At the Università, in a small class, the teacher had the possibility to discover more easily each student's

39 Angelino, M., Introduzione al cooperative learning, Venezia, Laboratorio ITALS, Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio, Università Ca' Foscari, pp. 19-20
problem and to adjust her lessons to the students linguistic abilities and progresses. At the Politecnico, unfortunately, the situation was quite different: there were more participants and the relationship among the students themselves and with the teacher was not as good as the one established by the Università students; this situation, inevitably, brought negative consequences to the learning process. At the Università the teacher actually showed different approaches when confronting with diverse students: the small number of people she had to manage gave her, in fact, the chance to better customize the lessons to their problems, needs and personal aspirations. The more the end of the course approached, the more she could weight her expectations to the single student abilities. For instance B., as a matter of fact the best student in the class, was more and more asked to be as correct as possible and the teacher showed to be expecting more from him than from the others; Y., the Japanese student, was instead obviously trying to speak correctly but giving her natural shyness she was questioned only when she was at ease and already participating to the debate.

At the Politecnico class the teacher could not use such different personalized methods, mostly because of the high and variable number of people attending the class: in the beginning of the course there were up to forty-one students and from mid-course on fifteen. These numbers, added to students inconstancy, made it very hard to focus on their peculiarities and progresses from the beginning to the end. Nevertheless the teacher was able to adjust some aspects to the group's characteristics: she understood, for instance, that when the Chinese students sat in the back of the class they did not want to participate actively to the lesson, therefore she did not involve them in the debate. Because of the different number of people present in the classes although, the degree of attention the teacher was able to give to each student was very different from the Università class to the Politecnico one, and this is one of the first reasons explaining the differences registered between the two institutions.
3.9 The classrooms disposition

The spatial organization of the classroom itself may influence positively or negatively the atmosphere in the class: the place in which the lessons are given is decisive. The position of the teaching post and the disposition of the students' seats can condition the interactions among the students and between students and teacher. As Johnson, Johnson and Holubec state\textsuperscript{40} the classroom disposition is very important for the following reasons:

- La disposizione dello spazio e degli arredi dell'aula mostra simbolicamente quali sono i comportamenti che vengono considerati appropriati in classe e ciò che si aspetta che gli studenti facciano
- L'organizzazione dell'aula può facilitare o ostacolare direttamente il rendimento scolastico
- Una buona organizzazione spaziale aiuta lo studente a focalizzare l'attenzione sia a livello visivo che auditivo
- L'organizzazione dell'aula può determinare – positivamente o negativamente – la qualità dell'atmosfera dell'apprendimento
- L'organizzazione dell'aula può facilitare o ostacolare la gestione della classe
- L'organizzazione dell'aula può agevolare o ostacolare il funzionamento dei gruppi di apprendimento
- L'organizzazione dell'aula può agevolare o ostacolare le relazioni tra gli studenti\textsuperscript{41}

The way a classroom is organized should also be versatile and easily variable,

\textsuperscript{40} Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T. and Holubec, E., 1996, Apprendimento cooperativo in classe, in Angelino, op. cit., p. 21. Translation in Attachment 9

\textsuperscript{41} Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T. and Holubec, E., op. cit., in Angelino, M., Introduzione al cooperative learning, Venezia, Laboratorio ITALS, Università Ca' Foscari, Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio, pp. 21-22
depending on the learning activity suggested by the teacher: group works, couple works, and so on. The furniture has to be arranged in such a way to allow the teacher to easily move the students' seats, in order to organize different activities and to allow group activities, following the different linguistic abilities the students may have. A classroom in which changing the position of the students is possible at any moment is for sure a valuable tool to a teacher; for these reasons, the classroom organization should always be considered in planning a language course. A good classroom disposition is not only helpful to the teacher but also to the students: the seats organization, in fact, greatly influences the relationships between the students and between them and the teacher, sometimes making the last one like a part of the group. It may also help create positive interactions favoring situations of mutual help and encouraging the participation of everyone.

For the great importance of this aspect and for the resulting consequences it can have on the learning atmosphere, I think it is necessary to focus on the direct effects of the disposition itself in the two contexts I observed.

3.9.1 Classroom spatial disposition at the Università degli Studi

The two classrooms in which the Università Italian language course was organized are in Palazzo Nuovo, one of the Università degli Studi di Torino main buildings, in the area dedicated to the CLA. The first room (VC room) has a seating capacity of 10 people, a computer available in a corner of the room, a movable white-board, a projector and loudspeakers. In this room the chairs are around a rectangular table, five for each long side and one on each short one. The students sat along the long sides of the table, three on one side and four on the other – when S., the girl who did not receive the language certification, was present – and three on each side when she was not. The teacher sat at the head of the table. It is interesting to point out with whom the students sat at the beginning of the course and how this changed during it.
I., B. and F. had already attended a course together at the Summer School center and had become friends also outside the lesson; when the course started they sat on the left side of the table while Y., R., M. and S. sat on the right one. As the course proceeded, the students began to interact positively and their seating disposition became variable. This is a good example that shows the positive interconnections that arose inside the Università class: the students started to cooperate and to work together more. This is one of the positive consequences of a good classroom disposition listed by Johnson, Johnson and Holubec above.

I always sat at on the opposite side from the teacher. It was a good position to observe without being too much involved in the lesson because the students always faced the teacher, partially giving me their shoulders. I actually was some times involved in the lessons, thing that almost did not happened at the Politecnico, but I do not think that my partial involvement caused any disturbance to the lessons; in fact, they always proceeded without hindrances. I took part to the lessons only if the students or, more often, the teacher wanted to include me; otherwise, my position permitted me to observe the lessons without interfering, as I had set myself to do.

As I have already stated, the furniture disposition in the Università classroom helped create a positive environment, demonstrating to be absolutely appropriate for a language course; furthermore, it surely had a positive influence on the learning process of this specific group of students. A rectangular table, in fact, permits the students to have a face-to-face view of each other, which is very important for different reasons but mainly because it facilitates the interactions among classmates. Such a disposition also encourages every student's progress, since a shared learning process allows everybody to give suggestions, help and correct the others. Furthermore, a face-to-face disposition allows every student to perceive the classmates extra-verbal communication and could undoubtedly allow a good participation of everyone; on the other hand, it is true that every student always has his particular and specific way to take part to a lesson. How a student interacts is, in fact, always influenced by his personality and not predictable nor completely modifiable. What concerns us is the fact that the rectangular table and the face-to-
face view put the student in the best position to participate in his personal way and, thus, are strongly appropriate to create a good climate in the classroom.

For what concerns the possibilities that this disposition gives to the teacher, it is undeniable that she could control the progresses and the problems of every single student. The central position and the proximity to any of them, in fact, made her able to be an important part of the lesson, becoming not a teacher *stricto sensu*, but first of all a member of the group. The students often addressed her to ask something about her, going beyond the central subject of the lesson; between her and her students the relationship was strong and genuine, and the atmosphere was absolutely relaxed and spontaneous. Undoubtedly, this was a very good learning context: the students always felt free to participate to the lesson, showing their linguistic doubts or asking the teacher for more explanations. In a context like the one I observed at the Università, affective filters barely turn on; this particular situation permits the students to reach easily not only the learning, but also the acquisition of L2:

The Affective Filters hypothesis embodies Krashen's view that a number of “affective variables” play a facilitative, but non-casual, role in second language acquisition. These variables include: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Krashen claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to “raise” the affective filter and form a “mental block” that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is “up” it impedes language acquisition. On the other hand, positive affect is necessary, but not sufficient on its own, for acquisition to take place.  

It is also true that this is not the only factor to be considered judging the classes I observed; anyway, the classrooms spatial organization and what it entails is, in my opinion, a point on which it is necessary to focus.

From the 14th lesson on the students were moved to another classroom (Aula 2) with a maximum seating capacity of 30 people. The room had a white-board, a computer, a projector and loudspeakers but was organized in the traditional way: a teaching post in front of the first row of the students seats, both placed at the same height. In this new classroom the students frequently sat the same way: B., F. and I. in the first row of desks, while Y., M. and R. sat in the second one. S. never came to the lessons in this room. I sat behind the students, in the third row, because in the new classroom I had the possibility to choose my position and I wanted my presence to be as imperceptible as possible. I expected to observe a difference in the students behavior because of the change of disposition. On the contrary, the strong connections built in the previous thirteen lessons helped maintain a good and creative learning environment, even if the interactions between the students were, in this new room, less dynamic because of the disposition of the furniture. However, it is important to focus on the fact that, to communicate with the others, the students in the first row had to turn around: this need did not allow the same spontaneous conversations that characterized the previous situation, and the shiest students like Y. or sometimes M. did not have the same incentive to take part to the lesson. Anyway, not even this second classroom and its problems are comparable with the situation present at the Politecnico. The good working group created during the first half of the course, in fact, resisted to the worse conditions of the second part. It is anyhow interesting to notice how the classic desks' disposition had a bad influence on the dynamics of a group that had already established good connections.

3.9.2 Classroom spatial disposition at the Politecnico

The Italian language courses at the Politecnico are held in the same classrooms where the academic lessons take place everyday. Every classroom at the Politecnico is equipped with all the technological supports for the didactic: loudspeakers, an
overhead projector, five blackboards (four of them movable and one, at the center, fixed), a projector, a computer and a microphone. Politecnico is a very good and organized structure as for the classrooms and the organization of workers, such as the technicians, always prepared to intervene if necessary. On Mondays and Wednesdays the lessons took place in classroom 1I, situated in Corso Castelfidardo, with a maximum seating capacity of 160 people, while on Saturdays they were in classroom 2C, in Corso Duca degli Abruzzi, with a seating capacity of 120 people; both of the rooms are equipped as I have already described.

However, the disposition of desks and teaching posts in the Politecnico classrooms reflect the traditional academic classrooms organization: the teacher is situated in front of the students, in a higher position, and the students take place in long rows of linked desks. As Balboni (2002) states:

“La struttura tradizionale, a file di banchi, è la peggiore sul piano comunicativo: mette in evidenza l’insegnante ma al tempo stesso lo isola, lo fa parlare ex-cathedra; inoltre essa impedisce l’interazione tra studenti: si vedono le nuche e non i volti dei compagni seduti più avanti, e non si vedono per nulla quelli seduti dietro”

The description given by Balboni is totally referable to what I could see at the Politecnico. The interactions among the students are inconsistent, infrequent and reduced to the moments in which the teacher proposes, for instance, group works. The students difficulties socializing are evident, because also the creation of groups requires a lot of time time and the teacher has to intervene directly to join the students together, often reluctant to work with classmates they do not know. The general tendency I could register is that the students, outside the language course, tend to make friends with people coming from their own countries – this is a normal and common behavior among foreigners –, but in this case it has negative repercussions on the normal development of the lesson itself, when more interaction

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between students is required. With absolute certainty, a different classroom spatial organization could help the students socialize as happened at the Università, with a positive influence on the learning process too. At the Politecnico, on the contrary, the organization of the desks does not allow the students to be more communicative; I could observe the students general tendency to create more or less always the same groups, often composed of people from the same country: for example, the two French girls did not ever interact with their classmates, but only between them. The same description can be referable to the three Rumanians too. A relevant problem that comes out from this classroom organization, in fact, is that learners are not nearby their fellow students, because of the dimension of the classroom itself: the students could decide were to take place, and this entails a remarkable scattering of the students all over the room. This detail involves that the students never had the possibility to be closer among each other and to create a more comfortable climate in the classroom, with resulting negative effects on the learning process of the entire group. It is necessary to remark (see chapter 2) that adults make real efforts to feel accepted by the teacher and by the fellow students themselves, and that, as a consequence, a good and harmonious climate in the group becomes one of the most crucial problems to deal with. Unfortunately, the disposition of the students cannot be changed for what concerns Politecnico, because of its unmovable desks and the modest space that remains; for this reason it is not possible to create a better climate within classrooms in this location.

For what concerns the possibilities given to the teacher by this classroom arrangement, it is undeniable that she could not be part of the lesson as happened in the Università classrooms. The interactions among the teacher and the students were restricted to those in which she, from her teaching post, asked them questions or tried to interact with them giving stimuli for oral productions. Of course she also tried to create a more intimate connection with them, but the organization of the classroom did not permit a natural and spontaneous conversation with the students; it only happened, for instance, during writing exercises or for group works, when she left her post to get close to the students and help them carry out their activity. But the disposition of the students seats, in very long rows each one of 15 desks, could allow
her only the possibility to interact with the students in the first seats of each side of these rows. An explanatory detail that can be useful to understand the general climate in the group at the Politecnico is that the students did not have problems talking to the teacher, for example to ask her some questions about their activities, when she was walking nearby them; it means that the lacking and unsatisfactory interactions among the students and the teacher is not attributable to her, but to the climate that was established among fellow students. Their hindrances speaking during the activities are not teacher's fault, but are mostly due to the missed creation of a strong, working and dynamic group.

3.10 The teaching material

It is important at this stage to focus on the teaching material used in the two classes. A fundamental detail to consider is that the teaching material used at the Politecnico was for the most part created according to the students needs and to the goals of the course. The material was created, year after year, by the teachers E.P. (the teacher I observed during this research project) and E.B., one of her colleagues at the Politecnico. Actually all the teachers involved in teaching Italian language at the Politecnico created, few years ago, a common educational material, to fulfill the needs of the students at the Politecnico; but, then, each teacher decided to modify this material creating a new one, depending on their personal purposes and opinions. Another reason why the teachers created the educational material by themselves is related to their previous teaching experience with Politecnico students, who often did not have the textbook required for the course. They, in fact, often preferred not to buy it, because of its cost or for some other reasons. The teaching material proposed to the students at the Politecnico was realized to fulfill the needs and the goals of an A2 Italian language course, and the teacher used it properly and suitably for the entire duration of the course. Her attention was always focused on the students needs
without forgetting the main goals of the course itself. The handouts, produced by the teacher and her colleague, is really well-organized: its structure follows a precise and logical structure, that can surely help the students learning process. Grammar is explained in a simple way, always starting from the general rule and then dealing with exceptions; the texts fit the students necessities and goals, and also their length is appropriate to the students language proficiency. The layout is stimulating since it has some drawings and pictures, always fitting the age of the students. Another important detail is that this handout is suitable for different learning style: the teacher can choose which activities should be proposed to the students, having the possibility to change them according to the students she is facing; moreover, the learners can practice at home on very different types of exercises. New words are introduced gradually and with the right background, to allow the students understand the situations in which those words can be used appropriately. As for local culture, the handout also gives some information about the Italian culture and allows some further analysis.

Really interesting to this research is the use the teacher made of the Politecnico handout material: she, in fact, used it in both the observed classes, thus allowing comparisons between the two groups and giving a wide picture of the two different contexts. Even if using the Politecnico material also at the Università, the teacher did not always propose the same lessons because of the dissimilarities between the two groups; but, generally, the activities proposed to the students were similar or based on the same materials. Furthermore, the lessons for the Politecnico class were probably planned with a tighter schedule and prearranged more precisely than the ones for the Università class, where the teacher could decide from time to time what to submit to her students. In fact the Università students did not have a preset handout: each lesson the teacher gave them parcel of sheets, most of the time photocopied from the Politecnico material.

The nerve center of the question is the following: both groups learned Italian more or less at the same level (A2 at the Politecnico and A2-B1 at the Università) with the same educational materials. The main difference between the two groups studied in
my direct observation experience stays in the number of hours planned for each course: 30 hours at the Università to reach an A2-B1 level and 60 hours at the Politecnico for the A2 level.

Given the fact that the teacher used more or less the same material in both classes it is really interesting to highlight the different general proficiency levels reached by the two groups. Even if the Università course was supposed to be of a slightly higher level than the Politecnico one, the disparities between the levels achieved by the two groups were higher than expected. The Università students generally acquired a better knowledge of the Italian language than the Politecnico students, in particular for what concerns the speaking skills; furthermore, for what merely concerns grammar, they also had the possibility to learn and practice the formal imperative tense. Generally, however, the results achieved by the students in the Università course are surely more satisfying than the ones reached by the students at the Politecnico; first of all, speaking skills are completely different if the two classrooms are compared. Let's focus, in this sense, on the two transcriptions I report in the following paragraph.

3.11 Two transcribed lessons

To better understand the differences between the two contexts observed, it is really useful and helpful to focus on the different approaches the students had towards the lessons. To do this I decided to report a transcript of two lessons, one kept at the Politecnico and the other at the Università; the topic of the two lessons is the same: the indicativo futuro semplice. The educational material used in both classes and to which the teacher refers is the same but, as the transcripts will show, the response of the students is completely different. To write the transcription of the two lessons, the recordings taken during class were used. The two moments I chose should be representative of the general attitude the students showed during the entire course,
even though a one lesson long transcript is not enough to fully describe it. These two transcripts although are good examples of the classes behavior and fulfill my effort to give the clearest idea of the classes attitudes.

The first one is a transcript from one of the Università lessons and portrays 6:35 minutes (from 01:06:15 to 01:12:50, lesson 9, November 5th, 2014). The second one refers to what happened at the Politecnico, and it is a recording of 4:27 minutes (from 00:27:33 to 00:32:00, lesson 22, November 26th, 2014). To understand the transcripts, a brief list of conventional signs here used can help:

| Name of the speaker, within slashes                  | /STUD/          |
| End of interrogative sentence, with question mark   | sentence?       |
| End of an exclamatory sentence, with exclamatory mark| sentence!       |
| End of an affirmative sentence, with descending intonation| sentence.          |
| Brief pause (max. 1 second)                         | +               |
| Medium pause (within 1 second and 3 seconds)        | ++              |
| Long pause (more than 3 seconds)                   | +++             |
| Ascending intonation at the end of a word          | word^           |
| Descending intonation at the end of a word         | word_           |
| Suspensive intonation at the end of a word         | word-           |
| High volume in saying a word, with capital letters | WORD            |
| Lowering of the volume in saying a word             | %word%          |
| Beginning and end of a conversation among speakers, without pauses | sentence = = sentence |
| Beginning and end of a conversation with overlaying of voices of different speakers | &sentence& &sentence& |
| Suspension of the speaker for a self-correction    | word\          |
| Elements of a speech different that are not Italian words | *word*          |
| Related speech, in quotation marks                 | “sentence”      |
| Comments and observations coming from the observer (for instances laughs) | [action] |
| Elements removed by the observer                    | [...]           |
| Unintelligible syllables                           | (xxx)           |
Numbers alongside the table indicate the turn-takings, to better understand and underline the differences among the two contexts.

Six students participated to the lesson at the Università (S. was not attending). Student 1 is B., from Lebanon; Student 2 is F., from Venezuela; Student 3 is M., from Egypt; Student 4 is R., Spanish; Student 5 is I., from Lithuania. Y., Japanese, was attending but she did not take part to this conversation. Her lack of participation does not surprise: as already stated, she revealed serious reluctance to speak, despite her satisfying grammatical and lexical competence. This transcript is not only useful to show the differences between the two observed classes for what concerns the participation of the students to the lesson, but it can also help understand the various levels of participation of each student in both classes. It is a good cross section which exemplifies the different types of involvement in the lessons showed by each student: B. and F. were the two students more involved during the lessons, and also the more participative.

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<td>/INS/</td>
<td>ma ++ avete mai pensato ecco proprio di + di leggere il futuro? ++ vi è mai capitato?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>/STUD1/</td>
<td>si + per ridere!</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>/INS/</td>
<td>[ride] per ridere ad esempio l'oroscopo? &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>/STUD1/</td>
<td>&amp; [annuisce] &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>/INS/</td>
<td>&amp; cosa pensate dell'oroscopo? =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>/STUD2/</td>
<td>= mia mamma + pazzo =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>/STUD1/</td>
<td>= [ride]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>/INS/</td>
<td>= tua mamma è PAZZA per l'oroscopo? [ride]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>/STUD2/</td>
<td>si, importa + eeh + <em>desde</em> + <em>como se dice since</em> (xxx)=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>/INS/</td>
<td>= DA DA =</td>
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</table>
= da quando aveva tredici quattordici anni aaa + aaa una + dove una ragazza &

& [annuisce] &

& che legge + le tarocchi =

= legge I TAROCCHI quindi le + le CARTE &

& si ma spenzi tanti soldi

[ride]

& ma terribile proprio

Ah è tua mamà? &

&io le odio si

aaaah

[ride]

io mi dicono che oggi incontro l'amore di mia vita - mai [ride]

[ride] ancora non l'hai incontrato! [ride]

[ridono]

Quindi non- non leggete l'oroscopo? &

& No&

&o solo quasi per- quasi per divertimento uno dice si leggiamo cosa (xxx)

[ride]

NO io ho fatto + ok legge l'oroscopo - ho fatto i tarocchi &

& quindi anche- quindi anche le CARTE &

e cafè &

& ANCHE i fondi del caffè &

& sigaret- *cigarillo* =

*Como el cigarillo- como como*

tu fumi il *cigarillo* - e te lo leggiono anche =

=*como*

ma tu lo FUMI &

& & come leggere il caffè? % [ride]

[ridono] (xxx)

ah questa non la sapevo (xxx) [ride]

(***e la + e la lettera che tu&

68
& ah ecco quindi è come si
& tu scrivi =
= ah grafologia =
= la grafologia si
(***)
& (***), che dipende se scrivi verso l'alto se scrivi se quando scrivi vai verso il basso se scrivi rotondo allungato =
= si si + anche quello
ah tutte le hai provate! [ride]
mi mama (***)
[annuisce] ma alla fine ecco visto che hai provato l'oroscopo i tarocchi i fondi del caffè + dicevano la stessa cosa + o cose completamente diverse =
= no diverse
completely diverse [ride]
si + ma solo una ha certato tante cose + solo una ++ e ho tornato perché (***)
= sei tornata ah ecco =
= sono tornata perché lei ha *despertato en me* la curiosità =
= ah quindi ti ha- ti ha un po' STUPITA =
= però dopo quando- quando sono arrivata al posto ho pensato "ma ++ che" =
= cosa ci faccio qua? (***), + avevi un po' paura? + o era più paura o come dire (***), + incredulità
no prima era curiosità ++ eeeeh *porqué* lei la prima volta mi ha detto "tu sei una ragazza completamente incredula- non credi niente di questo &
& e tu proprio &
& mi odi =
[annuisce]
= ma io te leggio questo =
= leggo si- leggo [ride]
*porqué* c- c'è anche la parapsicologia e + ci sono le parapsicologi che fanno *esta* roba + si te (***), le reazione che tu avevi quando lei te dice qualcosa che loro leggiono quello &
& [annuisce] &
& e continuano- ma + si come + *porquè* quando qualcuno te
dice qualcosa vero tu- tu come se dice- quando qualcuno te dice
qualcosa vero tu- tu reazione *de una manera* =

| 68 | /STUD2/ | & e continuano- ma + si come + *porquè* quando qualcuno te
dice qualcosa vero tu- tu come se dice- quando qualcuno te dice
qualcosa vero tu- tu reazione *de una manera* = |
| 69 | /INS/ | = ah si la tua reazione- si si si si = |
| 70 | /STUD2/ | = ok- già + ho fatto tutto |
| 71 | /INS/ | [ride] le hai provate- le hai provate tutti eh? Quindi nessuno +
oroscopo niente eh? Non siete %quindi% di quelle persone che
la prima cosa che fanno al mattino %è leggere l'oroscopo% ++
| 72 | /STUD1/ | = no = |
| 73 | /INS/ | = devo sapere- COSA succede! |
| 74 | /STUD1/ | (xxx) c'è anche le + mmm + %*sign*% + (xxx) ++ come = |
| 75 | /STUD5/ | = (xxx) *sign* (xxx) scorpio = |
| 76 | /STUD1/ | = si si- *y* le caratteristiche\ le caratteristiche^ di ogni + ogni = |
| 77 | /INS/ | = di ogni segno? Di ogni segno = |
| 78 | /STUD1/ | = di ogni segno. *Y* quello + forse- è un po' vero + |
| 79 | /INS/ | [annuisce] si |
| 80 | /STUD1/ | si quello è un po' vero %penso io% = |
| 81 | /INS/ | = che ci siano comunque delle- delle CARATTERISTICHE in
comune = |
| 82 | /STUD1/ | = si esatto + (xxx) tutti |
| 83 | /INS/ | = si si tutti i segni- tutti i segni zodiacali |
| 84 | /STUD1/ | (xxx) |
| 85 | /INS/ | segni zodiacali (xxx) si |
| 86 | /STUD1/ | penso che + qualcosa c'è |
| 87 | /INS/ | [annuisce] |
| 88 | /STUD1/ | se (xxx) perché è vero – eehh + più o meno + si quando incontro
le gente che hanno- le stesse = |
| 89 | /INS/ | = lo stesso segno zodiacale = |
| 90 | /STUD1/ | = segno- sembrano |
| 91 | /INS/ | [annuisce] delle- delle somiglianze ci sono = |
| 92 | /STUD1/ | = si = |
| 93 | /INS/ | = delle somiglianze ci sono & |
| 94 | /STUD1/ | & delle somiglianze ci sono & |
| 95 | /INS/ | quindi (xxx) quindi oltre a + Fabiana non siete? Altri non siete |
ma stati + da un cartomante un veggente uno che legge [ride]

una- una amica- de la mia mamma è sen\ sensitiva =

È una sensitiva [esprime stupore] ah mi %fa paura%

dice- dice lei

sensitiva cosa (xxx)?

si una- una persona proprio proprio ecco che- che sente che vede + una veggente o che vede il futuro che sente =

= (xxx) quelli possono guardate l'aurea- che tu hai *el* colore de l'aurea =

= ma è (xxx) pazzi (xxx) =

= no quello è vabbé proprio un cugino che (xxx) &

& no bisogna &

& no quelle già si credono =

= (xxx) prende un capello + lascia il capello *en* un bicchiere di acqua e puoi dire che- che cosa- succede =

= che cosa- che cosa succede [ride]

e sempre quando un *examen* o un lavoro la mia mamma &

& la chiama &

& (xxx) va bene mia mamma dice "*es* perché (xxx) =

= ah ecco perché! [ride]

lo ha fatto no perché io ho fatto l'*examen* molto bene

no che sei stata brava tu che hai studiato è grazie al [ride] è grazie- grazie a lei ++ vediamo proprio- parlando di veggenti di di chi legge il- di chi legge il futuro + abbiamo questo dialogo “Al verde e senza un tetto” + senza un tetto quindi

senza (xxx)?

Tetto *is roof* senza un tetto quindi possiamo- cosa significa “essere senza un tetto” significa non avere una casa + non avere- non essere coperti da- da un tetto mh + vediamo [...]
This second transcript depicts the situations observed at the Politecnico. It is not possible to identify each student taking part to this moment of the lesson, but given the little students participation it is not really important to identify them. The situation is here very different from the one observed at the Università: the same stimuli lead to a different behavior: the students, in fact, almost never take part to the lesson and the teacher is talking most of the time.

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ha deciso di diventare + veggente eh? eh qualcuno ha fatto così eh [ride] ci sono persone che hanno perso il lavoro e sono diventate [ride] ad un tratto improvvisamente veggenti mh + ma vediamo voi la mattina leggete l'oroscopo? ++ o no_ + c'è qualcuno che lo legge? + no niente nessuno + quindi non- non ci crede mh? ++ no + ogni tanto? ++ [ride] (xxx) voi andreste mai da una veggente? ++ a leggere il futuro? o no_ + no è una cosa che non fareste mai? + ma perché non ci credete + o perché non siete curiosi? + o perché avete paura delle risposte + + preferite non sapere o dite “no tanto non è vero non è possibile leggere il futuro” eh? +++ quale quale (xxx) [ride] quale risposte delle tre? ++ (xxx) non credete &

12 /STUD?/ & (xxx) =

13 /INS/ = non ci credi non è possibile che uno + sappia sappia leggere + nessuno ci crede? no + o ha più paura ++ un po’ di paura per sapere cosa succede? + no ++ ma e neanche curiosità? per il futuro non l’avete- non siete curiosi di sapere cosa succede nel futuro? +++ non volete sapere niente del futuro_ + eh un po’ curiosi- un po’ c’è la curiosità di sapere vero? eh [ride] un minimo di curiosità c’è (xxx)

14 /STUD?/ (xxx)

15 /INS/ Ho capito che l'avete già letto + provate a rileggere [...]
speaking rate rather than talking too easy. As shown by the transcripts, however, the students reactions to this use were quite different in the two classes. Some explanations in this sense may be found in the already analyzed different motivations that brought the students to study the language, in the disposition of the classroom and in the composition of the class-group itself.

In my opinion, however, also the teacher's behavior is important to understand the differences between the two contexts. As the transcript shows, at the Politecnico the teacher talks for the greater part of the lesson: even if she tries to stimulate the students to participate, they do not react and stay silent for the most part. The teacher tries to create a good and positive climate inside the class: as shown by the transcript, in fact, she often laughs, she pauses to allow the students to intervene, she rephrases the sentences in order to make the learners understand what she is saying (in this context, she tries to change the so called teacher's-talk if students do not comprehend what she is saying) and, even if it the transcript can not show it, she uses a calm and reassuring tone of voice. These efforts however do not lead to a more active participation, except for when sometimes a few students say some words, but almost always whispering.

On the other hand, at the Università the teacher takes part to the lesson in a very different way: her role is to provide the students with some inputs to start the conversation. As the transcripts proves, she almost becomes just another speaker: she is often interrupted by the students and the length of her speeches is very short. Furthermore, as shown by the transcript, there is also a frequent overlaying of voices, most of the times from B., F., and the teacher herself. The reported transcription actually mirrors the majority of the lessons I observed at the Università: the teacher only had a directive role during the lessons – as a matter of fact, as it should be when teaching to adults. The general atmosphere was relaxed and positive, as demonstrated by the frequent laughs and by the continuous participation of everyone. Even if the transcript can not show it I could always see that also those students that did not talk as much as B. and F. were interested in the lesson and entertained. Even if they did not practice their speaking as much as B. and F., all the students always took part to
the lessons actively; more important, they always felt comfortable, and this entails that they could always intervene in the debate even when it was dominated by B. and F.. The teacher always behaved nicely and managed the lessons paying attention to give to everybody the chance to speak; she knew that students like B. and F. were important to animate the debate but, in those times when they involuntarily started overlooking their fellows students, she brought everything back under control to permit the others to speak. As for Y., the situation was quite different: she was, in fact, the only exception to the general behavior of the teacher: her decision to not to push her into the discussion was due to the personality of Y., that did not want to be too much involved in the conversation with her classmates. This, however, does not mean that she was forgotten; I paid a lot of attention to her, because of her different behavior towards the lesson, the teacher and her classmates: what I could see is that she was paying attention and that she liked being in the classroom.

Such deep analysis of the students behavior is not possible for the Politecnico class. The first obstacle is the inconstancy of the students presence during the lessons. It is although possible to give a realistic portrait of the situation if considering the last lessons, when the students came more regularly to class. AL. (Venezuelan, female), for instance, participated more to the lessons than her classmates; this could have happened for diverse reasons, among which the proximity of her mother tongue to the Italian language and the presence – even if not constant – in the class of both one friend of hers and her boyfriend.

The same could be said about WL. (Chinese) and another Chinese student, that always tried to practice their speaking skills and were curious and interested toward the lessons. It is not by chance that those students always sat in the first rows of the classroom, and that the others took their seats in the back side. This does not mean that those students sitting in the back rows were not interested at all in the lessons; if they were not, they simply would not have come to class, as many others did. The students in the last seats were simply not interested – for different reasons – in participating to the lessons, and even those few who did take an active part did it very differently from those who participated to the class at the Università. The
Politecnico students mainly just wanted to listen to the teacher, intervening only when necessary. I also observed how AL.'s boyfriend (from Venezuela as well) began to attend the course constantly only during the very last lessons; then he started questioning the teacher, prevalently about the final exams and about some grammar issues he had, while during the previous part of the course he was either absent or not very involved in the lessons. His description could be extended to the majority of the Politecnico students who showed this common attitude toward the course with, of course, some exceptions.

3.13 Teacher's talking time

Starting from the considerations already done, it becomes necessary to understand which are the main consequences of these different learning situations. I agreed with the teacher when she told me that at elementary levels, like an A2 or A2-B1, the most important skill to strengthen is the speaking. As a consequence to her belief, the majority of the activities and drills proposed to the classes focused on making the students capable of speaking using different registers and according to different real-life situations.

Even though the teacher's strong will was to improve the students speaking abilities first, the handouts she created actually focused on all four skills: speaking, listening, writing and reading, to have to possibility to focus the lessons on different topics and contexts, when needed. Obviously she wanted her students to also improve their listening and reading skills, as for their writing abilities instead she did not work on them as much; because of the course level, in fact, the students were first of all required to gain self-confidence in speaking. The teacher only once asked the students to write a text as a homework: she did not force them to do it, thus letting them free to decide whether or not they wanted to try improving their writing skills. At the Politecnico she asked to write a text in which the students spoke about their
character, while at the Università she asked the students to write something about their relationship with their mobile phone; in both cases, the topics were first discussed during a lesson. As expected, only a few students in both groups actually wrote the essays and gave them to the teacher. It was quite surprising to see that this happened also with the students in the Università class: they, in fact, always showed to be more participative and the homework were often done by everybody. Probably, they felt insecure practicing writing abilities and chose not to do it, or maybe other extra-curricular activities prevented them from engaging in a type of homework surely more demanding than the usual. The most important detail is, however, that the teacher herself was not so involved in enhancing the students writing skills; this is also confirmed by the final exam she gave to the Università students, where she asked the students to try to write a text, promising to consider it only for a possible improvement of the final mark.

The central question, however, stays in the speaking skills and in the way the teacher managed her lessons. It is necessary to refer to the transcribed texts reported before, because they also show for how long the teacher talked during the lessons. Using the two transcripts as a reference does not mean I only used them to draw the following considerations: they, in fact, only summarize the general trend of the courses that I could observe in their entirety. The transcribed speeches furthermore were selected because they allow to compare two very similar lessons. The term teacher's talking time (TTT), refers to the percentage of time during the lesson in which the teacher talks; as Balboni states:

[il] teacher's talk time […] è una variabile utile per osservare lo stile didattico di un docente dal punto di vista della comunicazione. Più un docente parla, meno parlano gli studenti: più un docente parla, meno gli studenti acquisiscono; più un docente parla, più risulta evidente allo studente che il vero protagonista è il “prof.”, non lui – con tutte le conseguenze motivazionali e relazionali che si possono immaginare.44

The TTT is really different in the two contexts: at the Università the teacher intervenes just as another member of the debate, while at the Politecnico the situation is the complete opposite. There, in fact, despite her efforts the attempt to captivate the students participation was often unsuccessful. These observations lead to the conclusion that the teacher's talking time does not only depend on the teacher but may also depend on the students – or, at least, this happened in the classes I observed for this project.

As a consequence, as stated in Balboni's quote mentioned above, the students receive very different benefits depending on how much the teacher talks. This said, it is not surprising that at the Università class the students generally showed fast and satisfying progresses especially in their speaking abilities, but also in the other skills. They demonstrated to be capable of talking about themselves, their past, their culture, their dreams and life-plans, etc.; of course, not everybody reached the same level and they all spoke in different ways and with a wide range of behaviors and capabilities. As already stated, the main role the teacher had in this context was as a moderator: she focused on maintaining the lessons on a particular subject, so that there could be a leading thread which could also allow her to introduce new grammar aspects when needed. Even so, her general attitude towards the Università students was quite relaxed: she usually let them free to talk with their fellow students, also about somethings that went beyond the central topic of the lessons. Her first interest was, in fact, to make the students feel relaxed and comfortable when dealing with the Italian language; she succeeded so much that, in some occasions, she even had to stop the students talk to start the actual lesson.
3.13.1 Teacher's talk time: direct consequences and other observations

Starting from Balboni's consideration that the more the teacher speaks, the less the students learn, I think it is interesting to analyze the direct effects that the teacher's attitude produced on the classes I observed. I engaged myself in examining how much the students of both classes felt comfortable when using the Italian language at the end of the course. I also tried to evaluate the importance of the relationship existing between the amount of time of teacher's talked and the final achievement the students reached. At the Università I noticed how, starting from lesson 13 (11/17/2014), the students began to speak Italian to chat outside the classroom and to talk between each other, also when not strictly participating to the lessons: for example, when doing homework or exercises together, to comment on something, to help each other out, etc. Before lesson 13 the language the students used the most to communicate was English and second to it Spanish, especially among R., F. (Spanish and Venezuelan) and B. (Lebanese, with good proficiency in Spanish). The language the students used to interact between each other is, for sure, one of the most trustworthy indicators to define how successful and useful a language course is, and furthermore it helps determining the linguistic awareness it produces in the students. The Università students surely became quite comfortable with the Italian language: this is not only demonstrated by the considerations written above, but also by the fact that they tried hard to speak Italian to the teacher too, asking her questions and pieces of advice to speak Italian also outside the class and to improve their abilities (this happened, for instance, with M., Egyptian). This last example – that could be extended also to M.'s classmates in general – proves that the students wanted to use Italian also in the real-life and leads to two considerations. The first one is that the students felt very comfortable during the lessons, where they evidently had the right and good climate to try to speak Italian thus improving it. The second one is that they started being more aware of their abilities and more comfortable with their speaking skills, enough to want to start using the language also in other contexts.

The situation at the Politecnico is surely harder to define, mostly because of the
wide range of students present in the same class. It is undeniable that the students were generally less interested and participative to the course than at the Università, even if it is although not fair to extend such a description to all of them. In this analysis I want to focus on those Politecnico students who regularly attended the lessons since they are more useful to describe the course situation. For example: WL. (Chinese), YA. (Syrian), AL. (Venezuelan) and another Chinese student always tried to be participative and active during the lessons: their attendance was mostly frequent and stable, and they always tried to intervene during activities such as group homework corrections, thus showing to be interested and longing to learn Italian. Even so their participation to speaking activities such as debates or conversations was not nearly comparable to the one showed by the students at the Università. I have already stated that the classroom environment was not appropriate to create a relaxed and comfortable learning context; I am referring to the high number of students in the class, the disposition of the seats and of the teaching post and the inconstancy of the students attendance, which produced an unsurprising bad consequence: an ever changing class-group that did not allow the creation of a strong and positive learning group. These conditions compelled the teacher to speak more frequently and for longer periods of time and the students did not enhance their speaking skills, since they mostly kept silent. As we can easily understand at this point, such a situation can not be considered the teacher's fault. The transcribed text reported before does in fact prove her efforts to make the students talk, and it also shows the results: make the students talk in front of all their fellow students was not possible. Anyway, some students did have strong motivations to learn Italian (it does not matter if integrative, as it was for WL., or strictly instrumental) and willingly participated to all those activities they felt safe, like exercise corrections. When asked to speak Italian though they rarely did, except for AL. (Venezuelan, so surely more confident with the language) who actually often tried to improve and test her speaking skills; she, however, generally spoke when nobody else was answering to the teachers inputs – a behavior that makes me believe that she rarely intervened to merely practice but more likely she did it to give the teacher a feedback. This conduct can not be judge negatively in a context in which the other students did not
take any active part to the debate. There are also two more students that can be used as examples of the difficult situation present at the Politecnico for what concerns the speaking skills improvement: AB. and EV., both French. These girls attended almost all the lessons, but never spoke in front of their classmates and were rarely asked to try to do it. In fact, at the beginning of the course, the teacher paid attention to all the students in order to understand their character, their behavior and their will to participate actively or passively to the lessons. Furthermore, it is not a coincidence that AB. and EV. also took place in the same position in both the classrooms in which the course was organized: in the last seats, always at the right end of the row, hidden by AL. and WL. who, on the contrary, always sat more centrally and in the first rows, showing to be more open and willing to take part to the lessons. This detail proves that they did not want to be an active part of conversations and activities, even if their constant presence also demonstrated their strong will to learn Italian. This is why the teacher decided to avoid forcing them to talk in front of the whole class, and even if this was not a positive system to help them acquire an L2, it was also the only and inevitable choice possible. The two girls only talked to the teacher in those moments in which she was walking around the room, checking on the activities the students were involved in (for instance, group works or exercises); this shows their will to learn Italian and to brighten some aspects of the language they did not understand, but only when they could have a close relationship with the teacher.

This general atmosphere did not have many positive consequences: as predictable, the students kept speaking English to talk to each other up to the end of the course, and only a few of them tried to talk to the teacher in Italian to ask her, in private at the end of the lessons, something about the final exam or about the course in general. Even if limited to few students, this last positive behavior must be considered to draw a truthful picture of the Politecnico situation. It, in fact, reinforces the opinion that some students were really interested in learning the Italian language, and actually tried to practice it but only in particular and intimate conditions.

The most important consideration that rises from this analysis is that students like AL., WL. and YA. could have learned Italian better, if placed in another context, for
example at the Università. They in fact behave in such a way to demonstrate a positive attitude toward learning Italian, but the conditions of the class did not give them a totally relaxing learning environment, in which an L2 acquisition would have been more easy. The same could be said about AB. and EV., who can be compared with some of the students at the Università: like Y., the Japanese, and sometimes M., Egyptian, the shiest students in that context. It is undeniable that the personality of each student plays a decisive role in the length of his speeches during a lesson, especially if facing strong personalities (see, for instance, B. and F. in the Università class), but generally a smaller and comfortable context could surely help students like AB. and EV. to participate more.

3.14 Techniques, activities and possible solutions to solve Politecnico problems

Starting from the fact that at the Politecnico the teacher tried fruitlessly to make the students speak, it is necessary to focus on the techniques that can be used in a difficult situation like the one I observed there. As stated above (see paragraph 2.5.2) young adults generally prefer not to take part to activities in which they risk to be too much exposed to other people's opinions. In particular, in a situation like the one I could analyze at the Politecnico, in which a strong group was never created, activities such as debates and confrontations may even lead to negative outcomes. As a consequence I asked myself which techniques could have been useful in this classroom in particular, but also eventually in similar teaching situations. The starting point is that the students have to talk to acquire a second language, in particular at an elementary level. For this reason the teacher has to propose activities that allow the students to practice their speaking skills. During my direct observation I could notice that the students at the Politecnico were more participative during group works; my attention was focused especially on those students who demonstrated to be shier than the others, and actually they were more involved and active during these types of
activities. This is an important detail that has to be considered because it proves that, given the right conditions, students can be more active, motivated and interested. When in small groups of 3-4 people, the atmosphere was indeed good and positive. The most important detail to consider when proposing group activities is to create a positive combination of students: not every group works, and not every group is really useful for its participants. It means that the teacher has to pay attention to the groups, in order to create an operating team in which the language can be spoken, used and then acquired. This is why at the Politecnico the teacher always tried to create groups in which there were students who spoke different languages, came from different cultures and had diverse characters; actually, she often had to intervene directly in the formation of the groups, since the students were initially reluctant to be in groups in which they did not know anybody. In the end, although, every group worked well. For example, I could observe EV. and her interactions with her classmates during group works: even if, at the beginning, it was hard for her to take part to the conversations, as the course proceeded she always started to have good interactions with her fellow students if forced to take part to group works. The same happened with two Romanian girls, who can be used as an example even though they stopped attending the lessons more or less at mid-course (one of them found out that she had to attend the B1 level course and not the A2 one). They were very shy and always reluctant to take the floor in front of the class. The teacher always had to intervene directly to separate them, but she had to do it if she wanted to create groups in which different native languages were spoken; but, in the end, both the girls showed to be entertained, participative and active.

Starting from these observations I can firmly state that this group creation technique can only bring benefits to the entire classroom and, as a consequence, to the acquisition process of an L2. The first benefit is that the students can practice more their speaking skills, becoming more comfortable with the language. The second one is that well-built groups give to the entire class the possibility to become a stronger and closer team, with obvious positive effects on the atmosphere in the classroom. It could indeed avoid situations, like the ones I observed, in which the students are too self-conscious to talk in front of other students they do not know. My
personal opinion is, therefore, that small-group works should be used more frequently by Politecnico teachers. However, even though such activities bring along numerous benefits, the teachers will still have to face some problems when proposing them to a class; first of all, the room's structure, which could make it difficult to check on the students when grouped up. In fact, the teacher cannot listen to all the groups if they are scattered everywhere; in particular, it becomes hard to control those ones placed in the center of the rows. It becomes thus necessary to rethink the spatial disposition of the room, to allow the teacher to listen to all of the students, being then able to intervene when required. A possible solution to this problem will be discussed later. It is also true that the presence of the teacher could raise affective filters and interfere negatively with the students activities, but I think that this factor highly depends on the teacher's behavior. What I could notice in both contexts is that the teacher was very well-accepted by the students, and that they established a good relationship with her; it entailed that the learners, the Politecnico ones in particular, often asked her questions, especially when she was walking around the room waiting for the end of their activities. Her ability to build a positive interaction with the students should be used more by the teacher herself, since the risk of raising affective filters in the students seems irrelevant. Especially at the Politecnico, she should propose to her students some activities (like group works) that could help them creating a closer team and, at the same time, acquire speaking skills more easily.

To deepen the analysis on Politecnico problems, however, it is necessary to focus on an additional problem: the final exam. It, in fact, does not test speaking skills but only focuses on grammar competence and lexicon. It is true that the same type of test was also used at the Università, and also there speaking abilities were not tested at all. Furthermore, in neither structure the students' writing skills were tested; nevertheless at the Università the students situation permitted them to reach an adequate level of competence to eventually deal also with a written test. The difference between what is strengthened more during the lessons and what is actually tested at the end of the course does not seem a problem when facing contexts like the one found at the Università; the situation is, although, completely different in a situation like the one found at the Politecnico. There, in fact, after a 60-hour long
course the students still had troubles dealing with every linguistic skill. This became evident especially during the last two lessons, in which the teacher proposed a general review of all the course topics. During the very last lesson, furthermore, the teacher gave the students a facsimile of the final test, in order to give them the chance to better understand its structure, the timing, the type of questions, and so on. At the end of the simulation, the majority of the students showed to be not prepared enough; this gave me the possibility to confirm my opinion on their preparation which I had built up lesson by lesson. A key to solve the situation present at the Politecnico is my opinion to use the Università model to create a better climate in the classroom. This would, in fact, give the students the possibility to improve their speaking skills not only to help them face real-life's problems but, at the same time, to reinforce all the language skills, in order to pass the final test.

Starting from the considerations that group works are surely the best technique possible to reach good results in a discontinuous context, like the one observed at the Politecnico, and that the students should speak as much as possible, to both be integrated in the Italian sociocultural context and to drill all the other skills, I asked myself what could be done to create at the Politecnico a situation similar to the one found at the Università. I came to the conclusion that the most fitting method may be the one that follows the precepts of Cooperative Learning. The strength provided by a group is in fact undeniable and, as I could see, the most suitable for the Politecnico students' needs. This is why it would be interesting to evaluate the efficacy of the Cooperative Learning method in such context, in order to confirm or reject my hypothesis. It is true that the Politecnico main problems are the inconstancy of the students attendance and the continuous change of students inside the same class, but I think that a better inner climate could encourage the participation of the students to the lessons. In fact, if we consider that some students come alone to class, it is important to make them feel well-accepted by the entire group. The Cooperative learning method can, in this sense, be useful and may lead to real and positive effects.

I would like to report the main principles that are the basis of the Cooperative Learning method to analyze the reasons why I think it could be useful and formative in Politecnico context. As Joyce (1992) states, the main advantages of Cooperative learning are the following:

- La sinergia generata in contesti cooperativi produce più motivazioni di quella creata nei contesti individualistici, competitivi. I sentimenti di coesione producono energia positiva;
- I membri dei gruppi cooperativi imparano gli uni dagli altri: in un contesto cooperativo ciascuno può essere di aiuto più che in una struttura che genera isolamento;
- Interagire con altri in modo reciproco produce complessità cognitiva e sociale e crea una maggiore attività intellettiva che a sua volta migliora l'apprendimento;
- La cooperazione produce migliori sentimenti nei confronti degli altri, riducendo l'alienazione e la solitudine costruendo le relazioni e fornendo una visione positiva degli altri;
- La cooperazione migliora l'autostima non solo attraverso il migliore apprendimento ma anche attraverso la sensazione di essere rispettati e di importare agli altri;
- Gli studenti rispondono all'esperienza del lavoro di gruppo cooperativo aumentando il loro livello di competenza sociale;
- Gli studenti […] possono imparare a migliorare le loro abilità di lavorare assieme.45

This list, even if brief, summarizes the most important benefits that this teaching method could bring to Politecnico classes. The Cooperative Learning method is, in fact, built on the positive interactions among students that it may create, to which all the positive effects listed follow. The number of attending students may actually increase if this method were to be used; creating a positive and relaxed situation

45 Joyce, B., Cooperative Learning and staff development: Teaching and method with the method, p. 14, in Angelino, M., op. cit., Master ITALS, Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia, p. 5. Transaltion in Attachment 9.
could, in fact, encourage the students to attend the lessons. But, even if not, I believe this method would still only have positive influences on the acquisition of the Italian language by the students. Up to this point, it is necessary to also consider the number of hours taken by the course. The one organized at the Politecnico was 60-hours long, surely enough to reach the main aims of the course, especially if compared to the results obtained by the students in the Università course, which was half as long.

The Cooperative Learning methods for sure requires the teacher to do a great effort in planning the lessons and, especially at the beginning of the course, creating small groups out of a high number of students could be really stressful and difficult. As shown by Table 2 (Attachment 10), the number of students attending the first lessons is usually very high. It always experiences, however, a significant and natural decrease; even if the main purpose of this proposal is to maintain a stable and durable number of students throughout the entire course, it is truthful to consider that it could decrease, especially after the very first lessons. In both cases, anyway, the method really presents some positive aspects: even if a very numerous and varied group of students presents some managing issues not present in smaller groups, once it reaches stability (for what concerns the number of students, their mutual interactions, a cooperative structure\textsuperscript{46}, a positive interdependence\textsuperscript{47}, etc.), the many different contributions it may feature surely represent an added value for both the sociocultural factors and the language acquisition. Furthermore, the Cooperative Learning method is based on the organization of small groups (3-4 persons each), so the entire number of students in a class can only have minor effects if the situation is well-managed. Of course, it is undeniable that organizing activities in a class composed of 40-45 people could be more demanding. The maintenance of the initial number of students is the most satisfying result that the teachers at the Politecnico

\textsuperscript{46} Because of the nature itself of this research, I did not want to focus too much on the principles at the basis of Cooperative Learning. Anyway, it becomes necessary to give some brief explanation of its concepts. Cooperative Learning methods wants to make the cooperation among students as frequent and useful as possible: this is the so-called cooperative structure. It is based on an active and prolonged interaction among students in a small group, for reaching – by everyone's efforts – successful results for each student and for the entire group.

\textsuperscript{47} The positive interdependence is another fundamental concept in Cooperative Learning method; it consists of the idea that only a strong interdependence among students in the same group can lead them to successful and satisfying results. Without a positive interdependence, in fact, there is no possibility to build a cooperative structure.
could accomplish using this method, and this is the reason to include in this examination also such an event. In this hypothetical situation the class should be managed well and with perseverance, in order to reach the set purposes and to make the students work in the best way possible. Undoubtedly the classroom spatial disposition would not be a negligible problem, since the fixed and unmovable seats placed in long rows do not allow the teacher to create a nice educational context. Following the Cooperative Learning method precepts, in fact, 3-4 desks should be joined together to improve the interaction among students in the same group, placing them face-to-face. In both cases (whether a big or a small group of students), considering the classroom arrangement at the Politecnico, the only way the students have to group together sitting on the same row is if they formed groups of 3, independently on how numerous the class is its entirety. This is surely not a perfectly good arrangement to make the students work together, but if I have to be real this is the best solution possible. The problem of a big group of students of 40-45 people is its disposition itself: as Angelino maintains, in fact, «nella disposizione dell'aula […] l'insegnante deve tenere presente che deve accedere facilmente a tutti i gruppi e quindi deve poter controllare l'intera classe». 48 The disposition of the two rooms in which the course at the Politecnico was held does not permit the teacher to easily check on the students activities; one possible solution is to ask the students to seat at the ends of the rows of desks, in order to allow the teacher to participate, if necessary, to the group works or to listen to what they are saying (especially in a situation like the one at the Politecnico, in which a switch to English is easy because of the students difficulties with Italian). But this entails that, with a great number of students, there would not be enough space to sit all the groups; and, moreover, the groups of students would be excessively divided. The problem created by the spatial disposition of the classrooms used at the Politecnico is really complicated and it will be further discussed later. Standing to what I could analyze there, and assuming that the situation will not change, this is surely one of the worst problems in using the Cooperative Learning method with a great number of students. However, the teacher could pay attention to arrange the groups in the best way possible, in order to

maintain the students as close as possible to other groups of classmates.

Based on what I could see and analyze directly during the time I spent at the Politecnico I would like, with this research project, to propose some solutions to solve some of the undeniable problems existing in that environment. Given that normally Politecnico courses start off with a high number of students that drops down after a few lessons, I believe that the Cooperative Learning method could be used to solve the remaining students shyness and unwillingness to talk, thus improving their general abilities and speaking proficiency. With a 10-15 students class, in fact, there are no particular hindrances to the organization and planning of lessons, giving that the teacher is willing to make an effort – especially at the beginning of the course – to modify both her teaching method and part of her material. Furthermore, the Politecnico classrooms spatial organization does not completely impede the use of the Cooperative Learning method, even though it does not make it easy neither; the teacher could, in fact, arrange the groups in order to be able to intervene as quickly as possible. One possible way could be to place some 3-people groups at the end of the various rows and some others on the front rows, by the teaching post. Even though this would not be the best system, it would still work and with a restrict number of students it may not even be noticed. Another possibility is to couple the students instead of grouping them: this option is particularly valuable when the teacher is just starting to use the Cooperative Learning method; couples are equally efficient because:

Nel componere il gruppo bisogna tener conto delle possibili interazioni. Con l'aumento del numero dei componenti c’è un aumento esponenziale delle interazioni. Ad es. Nel gruppo di due sono possibili solo due interazioni, nel gruppo con quattro componenti ne sono possibili dodici.\(^{49}\)

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Furthermore, when using couples the classroom disposition is not as important as when using larger groups. The most important factor, whatever the teacher's choice may be, is to modify constantly the participants to each team. This continuous renewal of the groups would only have positive effects on the general climate inside the classroom, and could permit the students to create a relaxed and friendly environment, as the one I found at the Università. Another important factor to keep in mind, especially when working with couples, is that it is important to make the diverse groups work together, so even if two classmates are not directly working together in that precise moment they still come in contact with each other. The teacher's main purpose is, in fact, to give the students the possibility to get to know each other from the very first lessons, giving them the sensation to be part of an active and open group that could always be more and more friendly and supportive. Probably the Cooperative Learning method requires more time to work and give results than an institutional course, but it is important to state again that at the Politecnico the students have 60-hour long courses, more than enough to reach a level A2.
3.16 Further advice to improve the courses at the Politecnico

It is now necessary to provide some other pieces of advice to further improve the situation I encountered at the Politecnico. My proposals come, once again, from the Cooperative Learning method and I believe they could be used effectively during the lessons right now, without compelling the teachers to modify their whole teaching methods. Anyway, to really modify the situation I observed, some incisive and deep changes should be carried out by the Politecnico organization for what concerns the Italian language courses system. The following advice is then to be considered a set of suggestions that may lead to an improvement of the courses situations; they are drawn from my personal opinions and could lead to strong, long-lasting modifications.

As stated, classes at the Politecnico are composed of all kinds of students, who present a very wide range of abilities and levels; this is mainly due to the lack of an A1 level course if not for the one available on line. Beginners do not normally have grammar or any other linguistic competence bases, and an on line course does not provide captivation nor a motivation strong enough to be really effective. Furthermore, the lack of a direct relationship with the teacher surely has negative influences on the acquisition process of an L2: the students can not debate with a teacher their doubts and can not ask questions, so even those students who actually engage themselves in the on line course end it with fragile bases and unresolved uncertainties. This way, when they start the A2 level course all their deficiencies become clear and evident with destructive consequences: lack of motivation, frustration, inability to communicate with the teacher and their classmates, thus impeding an effective and productive participation to the course. My suggestion would then be to reestablish a class based A1 level course, in order to ease the students learning process, enabling them to reach their purposes and to start the A2 or B1 level courses with strong basis, thus resolving the knowledge disparities that today are a very big problem, especially during the first lessons.

The second problem I would like to address is the one relative to the students
attendance. Even if some follow the lessons pushed by an integrative motivation, most of them are probably there, first of all, because the academic organization set the Italian course as mandatory. Many students may not give the Italian language exam the same importance they give to other exams, and this leads them to focus more on other subjects not considering that the credits they get with the Italian language exam are as important as those they gain doing the other tests. As a result, the students rarely follow the course with continuity, on the contrary to what happens with the course held at the Università, where the learners generally are more constant, more interested and more motivated. The Politecnico students inconstancy can only have bad consequences both on the entire class group and on the student itself. In my opinion it is absolutely necessary to make the target students aware of the importance that a regular attendance has, thus making them come to the lessons more frequently. One solution may be making the attendance compulsory, as it is for the Università course, where the students must have taken part to most of the lessons to be allowed to take the final exam and, hence, the linguistic certification. At the Politecnico the students can decide when they want to engage in the Italian language course and, apart from the Erasmus students, they generally have many years to achieve the Italian language course credits. It is although a fact that the importance apparently given by the faculty to the Italian language course does not correspond to what really happens: the course is, in fact, often seen as one of the less important.

All of the students, and those who follow an academic major where the courses are held in Italian in particular, should be at least advised to obtain their Italian language credits during their first year of enrollment. The introduction of the compulsory attendance may be a good attempt to try to improve the situation since it could lead to the creation of a more stable and constant class composition. The reasons to prefer a more constant class composition have already been listed: better communication among students, less affective filters, more familiarity among classmates and with the teacher, more chances to learn Italian rapidly and with success, and so on. All these could surely allow the students to achieve their aims (integrative or merely academic) quickly and more easily.
The third change that the Politecnico organization committee should take into account concerns the spatial disposition of the classrooms in which the courses are held. I don't know if there actually are rooms with a suitable layout available, but if there were I think they should be used for the Italian language course. Unfortunately I am almost sure that such rooms are not available in any of the Politecnico buildings. As already stated and vastly documented, the rooms used for the courses are not suitable for the creation of a good and satisfying learning context and, even if using the Cooperative Learning method could lead to an improved learning environment, more appropriately organized classrooms would for sure be an even better solution.

To improve the situation, Politecnico classes should be composed of less students; at the beginning of the course, in fact, I registered up to 40 students enrolled in one class, a number absolutely too high to allow the formation of a proper formative environment, especially if one teacher wants its students to develop their speaking skills more than any other linguistic competence, as it happens in A2 level courses. My suggestion to the CLA, responsible for such a decision, is then to increase the number of courses available, in order to distribute the students in less numerous classes. Furthermore there are two more considerations to make on this matter. The first one is about the students freedom to choose in which course they want to be enrolled. Even if the students are divided by the Politecnico organization into classes following the alphabetical order, in the end they still have the final decision and can choose to attend different courses, following a specific teacher or their friends. This implies that an eventual increased number of courses available should be paired with a better and more rigid distribution of the students, mainly to avoid the risk of having significant dissimilarities between the courses in the number of students per class and in the attendance rate. In fact, I believe that if the students are too free to decide in which class they want to enroll there could be courses with too many students and others with too few. Most of them, in fact, see the Italian language course as a hindrance and do not give it the correct importance. When facing this, it could be counterproductive to not only force them to take the course but to also force on them a teacher and a class of strangers they may not want. It is important that the students
feel first of all relaxed and in tune with the teacher and their classmates. To ease both
the formation of small groups and the happiness of the students, I believe that if
Politecnico was to make more courses available they should be kept at different
times. Today, in fact, all the courses are held at the same time: in the evening, from
19:00 to 20:30 (and, on Saturdays, from 09:00 to 12:00). If the courses were at
different times the students would be free to choose the one that fits their schedules
and their needs the most. The decision to organize the courses in the evenings is for
sure related to the fact that at that time there are no other classes, so it is supposed to
be easier for the students to go to the course since they do not have any other lesson
at that time; anyway, it is at the same time hard for them to go to an evening class:
they may be too tired, too far away from home, and so on. In my opinion, to resolve
the attendance problem some courses should be held in the mornings or afternoons, if
only to allow a more reasonable distribution of the students in each class. What is
important, even if hard, is to organize the courses (not just the Italian language ones,
but all of them) in such a way to give the students the possibility to follow them
when they already are at the Politecnico.

All these solutions may help improve the situation I found at the Politecnico and,
even if I am conscious that they would require huge and difficult modifications to
today's system, I believe they could help improve the students context. With this
research and suggestions I do not want to diminish the efforts that the Politecnico for
sure does to provide its courses. My personal opinions are due to what I could see as
an external observer; I am sure that my thoughts do not take into account some
aspects that, given my position, I could not analyze nor know, nonetheless I hope
they may be of use. I am perfectly aware that today's Politecnico situation is the
outcome of many years of hard work, that is why I do not want to judge with
arrogance or superficiality the effort done by each person that every day tries to make
things work better. I want this research to be interpreted as the study of an observer
who would like to give some advice that may be helpful to improve some aspects and
details.
3.17 Final exam's results achieved by students in both contexts

It is interesting, at the end of this project, to analyze the results achieved by the students. A brief list of results can make clearer, at the very end of the two courses, the different situations in which I conducted this research, for some final considerations. For what concerns the students at the Università, it is necessary to state that S. did not receive neither the certification of attendance nor a result of the final exam – as a matter of fact, she did not take it –, while I. only got the certification of attendance but did not take part to the exam for personal reasons.

Starting from the consideration that the level of the course was A2-B1, the result of the exam gave students one of these two levels, depending on the score they reached. These are the final results:

- B. 95/100
- F. 90/100
- R. 90/100
- M. 85/100
- Y. 75/100

The minimum score to pass successfully the exam was 60/100. All the students, except for Y., achieved the level B1; on the contrary, because of her score and the lacking in speaking proficiency that showed during the whole course, Y. achieved the level A2. These results do not surprise at all, because they reflect perfectly what each student showed during lessons: B., undoubtedly the best student, obtained the highest score (95/100), while F. and R. (Venezuelan and Spanish) both achieved a very good result (90/100), probably referable to the proximity of their mother tongue with Italian language. However, R.'s mark, in particular, is really interesting: even if she showed to be really interested and good in acquiring Italian language – and, so, this
score is not surprising in this sense – it is fundamental to state that at the beginning of the course she had not previous knowledge at all. This means that she achieved a level B1 just attending this course, and it can explain well not only her excellent capability in acquiring an L2, but also the efficiency of the course itself. This is surely one of the most important details that must be considered to understand the great value of the teaching itself. M. reached a good 85/100, and I think it reflects well his entire learning process: undoubtedly, he showed more hindrances and difficulties in acquiring the language, but his improvement from the beginning of the course until its end is undeniable. His mark, so, can be considered really satisfying.

These results, in this sense, can summarize well all the considerations listed before about the course in Università. Students reached good marks – in my opinion fitting completely the language proficiency they showed to possess during the course – and, first of all, they could have the possibility to fulfill their personal purposes. At the very end of this research project, so, I could have the possibility to compare my personal opinions to what real and tangible results like these can state.

For what concerns the Politecnico, the situation is quite different. As already said, students had two different possibilities to take the final exam (January, 22\textsuperscript{nd} and 23\textsuperscript{rd} and February, 16\textsuperscript{th}); this entails that most of them decided to sit the exam on the second session. Now I can only list the results coming from few of them:

- FA: 47/50
- JG: 44/50
- EV: 43/50
- SA: 39/50
- CA: 38/50
- AB: 37/50
- WL: 37/50
- NC: 36/50
Some considerations, before giving an analysis of results, become necessary. Only four students of this list attended constantly the course: CA., AB., EV. and WL. The others, on the contrary, took part to few lessons (probably they did not attend any course, or they started attending it and then they changed the course and the teacher). I can not know why some of them decided to stop participating; what is more important, however, is that only four of the most participative students decided to sit the exam at the first session. I would like to give a general consideration about all the results listed here, but I think that giving an opinion on everyone of them would be neither trustworthy nor honest. I can only give my personal point of view about the results achieved by these four students, because I could observe them constantly and, so, I could reach some considerations about them.

The minimum score to pass successfully the exam was 30/50. These results, as a matter of fact, are rather satisfying and surprising. In all fairness, I expected different scores coming from students at the Politecnico, but actually in a way I have to change my idea. The average of marks, if compared with students at the Università, is surely lower – if we consider the proportion between the results, as a matter of fact, they are surely lower – but, anyway, the final results achieved by these students is remarkable. I think that the most satisfying aspect is that everyone of these four students passed successfully the exam. It entails the consideration that, despite the situation at the Politecnico classroom, some students are able to pass the exam and achieve good results. It is interesting, however, to state that most of them decided to take the exam in the second session; it could mean that they wanted to have more time for studying and for feeling more comfortable with the language itself. This is surely a significant detail to consider, because it can lead to the observation that, despite a 60-hour course, students feel the need to have more time to study by themselves; it is, in my opinion, not an unimportant factor. Anyway, for being as trustworthy as possible, it is also true that some of them maybe decided to take the final exam on the second session just for organizational reasons – it is also true, in fact, that the Italian language exam takes place during the academic exams session.
Anyway, if we focus on the average results obtained by these four students, it is undeniable that the students achieved successfully their aims, also those ones who did not constantly take part to the lessons. It is surely positive, especially in light of the fact that the didactic context in which lessons were organized was not the best possible, like stated.

However, the most trustworthy results are actually coming from the students who attended with constancy the course; for this reason, giving a definitive conclusion about the results is actually impossible at the moment, because I think it is important to recollect all the results (including the ones coming from the second session) to understand deeper the situation of the entire group of students at the Politecnico. I will keep in touch with the teacher in order to have further information about the second session of Italian language text, to have a wider and clearer portrait of the final results of each student.
4 QUESTIONNAIRES AND RESULTS

I also wanted to know the students' opinions about the Italian language course they attended at the Politecnico and at the Università; I hope that the analysis of what they think about the courses they were enrolled in can be a good opportunity for understanding their satisfaction, their motivations and what they generally felt and thought when attending lessons. This is why I wanted to submit them the two questionnaires I have already talked about in paragraphs 3.4.4.1 and 3.4.4.2 and that can be found in Attachment 7 and 8; this project I was involved in, in fact, can be enriched by a more personal and deep research on what each student perceives. Actually, as I have said before, I did not want to interfere too much during lessons: this is the reason why I decided to send the questionnaires by email. It entailed, unfortunately, that I could not have the response by every student; anyway I tried my best and I can be satisfied for the results I reached, even if not totally complete. Actually, good results came from students at the Università classroom, where most of them sent me their filled questionnaires; the situation is different for what concerns results obtained by students at the Politecnico class-group; I will explain later the outcomes coming from Politecnico.

I want to state that this further analysis is not completely part of my project, in the sense that it does not add some important information that can change my ideas about the contexts I observed during these months of direct observation. The outcomes of my research have been already expressed in the previous chapters, and the results coming from questionnaires are not able to modify the general outline of the two situations I was involved in. For this reason, data, suggestions and opinions already said have to be kept as trustworthy and definitive. It means that the effort linked to the questionnaires is attributable only to a personal will to enrich my research project, for a total and deep understanding of students I observed and studied for so long. As a matter of facts, I just wanted to examine the students' answers in order to have a clearer and more satisfying outline of every single person
involved in this project. I think that this further research can be useful also to the teacher I worked with, because it can give additional information about what students think about her Italian language course and which are, in their opinion, its best and worst characteristics. It is also important, however, to remind that their opinions are not the ones of “field's experts” and, for this reason, they have to be considered just as their personal ideas and viewpoints; it does not mean, however, that they do not deserve attention and respect.

Some explanations, before analyzing the results, are necessary: for what concerns specifically the classroom at the Università, I was not interested to know the opinion of S., the girl who did not attend enough lessons for getting the certification of attendance. It involves that the questionnaires have been sent to six students, that are all the others. The same happened for students at the Politecnico: I wanted to analyze the opinions of the students that were part of the very last group, that are obviously the ones who showed more interest and constancy toward the course. Because of the nature itself of the questionnaires, in particular of the one concerning the Italian language course, I did not want to involve every student, but also the ones who showed to be able to give trustworthy opinions and ideas.

Because of the nature itself of questionnaire 1, the one that wants to focus on the students' opinions about the Italian language course, I preferred not to report the initials of students' names, in order to preserve their anonymity. For what concerns, on the other hand, the LCP questionnaire, the situation is different because it does not give direct opinions about the teacher's work and, so, students' initials can be related.
4.1 Questionnaire 1. Italian language course: results obtained at the Università

Let's focus on the results obtained by questionnaire 1 (Attachment 7), related to the Italian language course and, in general, on the students' relationship with Italian language. The students at the Università involved in this research are six: B., I., M., R., Y. and F. Four of them sent me both the filled questionnaire (I., M., R., and B.), while F. did not want to fill questionnaire about the Italian language course and Y. did not take part to this research at all. Before giving the results coming from this questionnaire it is necessary to give some brief information about these students:

- I.: aged 32, Lithuanian
- M., aged 26, Egyptian
- R., aged 26, Spanish
- B., aged 26, Lebanese
- F., aged 23, Venezuelan

Most of them (R., M. and B.) planned to stay in Italy for some years, while I. will stay in Torino only for 3-4 months more. Nobody of them, as resulted by the answers to question 8, studied Italian in his own country before coming to Torino.

Let's focus more on the results obtained by this questionnaire, that in my opinion are really interesting because they support some of the ideas I have already listed and stressed above, in particular concerning the validity of small groups. Question 9 is focused on the students' opinions about the course they attended at the Università; I gave them the possibility to choose a mark from a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 = mediocre and 10 = excellent): one student judged the course with 10, two students with 7 and one student, surprisingly, with 4. This student gave his own opinions for judging it with such a bad mark answering this way to question 11, concerning the
worst characteristics of the course itself: “no correction, no explanation, not serious course, no concrete program”. Anyway, all the other students gave a good judgment to the course, and this detail does not surprise me. Let's focus on their responses: question 10 wants to know which are, in their opinion, the best characteristics of the course; these are the results to this question: “the audiovisual materials, the small group of students, a very enthusiastic teacher”; “teaching material, teacher”; “small group” and “we talk often”. These results can support my ideas about the efficiency of small groups of students and the possibility they had to improve their speaking skills; the fact that also the students became aware of these really good characteristics is really important and significant, because it proves that the inner atmosphere was good, relaxed and effective. For what concerns the worst characteristics (question 11), this is the list of their answers: “the book: I missed having an actual book with appendices and grammar that I can check at home. Also the topics addressed were more “high-school topics” than university ones”. This first response focus directly on this student's main aim, easily comparable to the ones of adults in general. In fact, this student showed to be very attentive to learn something that can be easily used in the daily real-life, especially for what concerns the job and the academic context. Another student wrote “no writing exercises”: as stated above, in a course of level A2-B1 speaking skills are surely the most important; anyway, this does not entail that students can not long for possessing also writing skills, as shown by this student's answer. One student decided to write nothing, and actually this person is the same that judged with 10 the course; probably, in this student's opinion there are not bad characteristics to report at all.

Question 12 (“What do you suggest for improving the course?”) gave students the possibility to choose among five different options: less students, more students, a better educational material, different classroom's spatial organization and none of these. Only two students responded to this question: they selected the option concerning the educational material (one of them wrote “a book!!!!!”) and they both selected also none of these, adding “more importance to the blackboard” and “more involved professor”. The answer about the teacher is really surprising, especially if compared to all the other opinions coming from the Università students and also by
the Politecnico ones (see p. 113). Honestly, I can not understand why this student has this bad opinion about the teacher; I really would like to have the possibility to inspect the reasons behind this sentence, especially because it differs too much from all the other opinions I could have by the students in general. Another issue refers to the handout: 50% of students longed for a real book, especially for what concerns the possibility to check some linguistic features at home, when necessary. This is surely an interesting point of view to be considered.

Reactions to question 13 (“Do you think this course has been useful? Why?”) are not unexpected in this sense: just one student, obviously, said “No. Not serious”, while the other opinions about the course are “Yes, because I knew nothing before and I practiced a lot of comprehension and speaking”; “Yes, more knowledge” and “Yes. It made me able to carry out short conversations with Italians”.

Question 14 focuses on the main purposes that led them to attend this Italian course: 75% of them selected the option Learning Italian for the real-life, 100% chose Integration, 25% Future job possibilities and I like the language itself. Again, the integrative motivation seems the strongest reason for following an Italian language course, while extrinsic motivations (such as the possibility to get a job easily) are surely less important. This is a common detail between the students of the two classroom I could observe during my direct observation experience.

For what concerns the answers to question 15 (“List the skills according to their importance), I gave them the possibility to give to five skills (grammar, pronunciation, listening, speaking and writing) a mark between 1 (the most important) and 5 (the less important). The results, when compared, are very different: two students placed grammar as the first and most important skill to acquire, while another student gave more importance to a correct pronunciation. The fourth student involved in this research maybe did not understand properly my request, because he gave the mark 2 to writing, 3 to listening and 5 to grammar, pronunciation and speaking. Comparing his list to all the other answers in the filled questionnaire he sent me, I think that he made a mistake about the order of importance; this is why I think that he pays more attention to grammar, speaking and pronunciation rather than
what he actually responded. (writing and listening, thus, would be the less important skills). So, in this hypothesis, grammar would be the most important skill for three of these students, immediately followed by pronunciation and speaking. Actually, the results coming from the students at the Politecnico are really different (see pp. 116-117); for what concerns the Università students, their answers coincide with the main purpose of students at this level, that is being able to speak and make conversations, in order to be more integrated too. Speaking and grammar skills, so, acquire a considerable importance, even if one student among them put pronunciation and speaking in the first two positions and grammar in the last one. His first aim, so, is completely referred to oral production competences.

The answers to questions 16 will be debate in paragraph 4.2 (pp. 108-109), where the results coming from the questionnaire LCP around the same issue are surely deeper and more satisfying.

Finally, question 17 has been created to know if they want to improve their Italian language, and why. These are the answers: “Of course, it is never enough, would like to speak fluently and also it would be easier to communicate, maybe to find a job and so on”; “YES, I am still here :D «Il Italiano è una lingua dolce»”; “Yes, to integrate”; “I want to speak perfectly, or at least at level C1, because languages are very important and also if you live in one country, it's very important to integrate there”. These outcomes, again, confirm how much the students want to feel integrated in the culture and in the language; even if most of them are enrolled in academic contexts and thus are in Italy primarily to study, what is really interesting and meaningful is their strong will to speak Italian for integrative motivations. At the end of the analysis of this questionnaire, so, I think that the course they attended at the Università was really good in satisfying their purposes. In fact, they could drill and improve their speaking skills more than the others, in order to acquire more self-confidence and to be feel more comfortable with the language itself.
4.2 Questionnaire 2. LCP questionnaire: results obtained at the Università

The second questionnaire (Language Contact Profile, Attachment 8) refers to the contact that the students have with the Italian language outside the classroom, in the daily real-life. This questionnaire, as stated in paragraph 3.4.4.2, was originally created by Seliger (1976): he was interested to discover if the best students in a classroom (whom he calls HIGs, that is High Input Generators) are effectively the best achievers for what concerns the contact with native speakers outside the language course. I was interested too, in a way, to state it or not; but the main aim I had set myself in submitting this questionnaire to the students was, first of all, to have a clearer idea about who are the students I have worked with. Anyway, the differentiation between HIGs and LIGs (Low Input Generators) is also interesting, even if not the most important outcome I wanted to reach. For what concerns the means for differentiate HIGs and LIGs – but, in general, to understand how strong their language contact is – as stated in paragraph 3.4.4.2, some answers gave to the students a particular score; the total amount of scores can give a precise idea about how much every student speaks Italian, which is his effort to improve his language proficiency, and so on. I will list, at the end of the analysis about answers, the score reached by everyone.

The students who took part to the LCP questionnaires are five: I., M., R., B. and F. (who did not answer to the questionnaire about the Italian language course but decided to send me her answers to this one); Y. did not want to answer. It entails that the 83% of students took part to this analysis.

Four of them (I., R., M. and B.) have been living in Torino for 1 up to 6 months, while M. is here from more than 1 year (precisely 1 year and 5 months). The question 7 “About how much time do you spend speaking Italian outside of class every day?” wants to know their effort for improving Italian in the daily real-life: 60% of them (R., B. and F.) chose the answer most of the time, while one student (M.) answered very little and one (I.) answered occasionally. The successive question, “How well do you think you speak Italian now?”, can be referred to the previous one, because it
reflects the results of their efforts: one student chose two answers (poorly and fair), one decided to answer fair, two of them selected good and one very good. Nobody selected the excellent, surely because of their awareness concerning the Italian language level they achieved. Question 9 wanted to know something more about any other Italian language course they could have attended before the one provided by the Università: R. never studied Italian before, while B., I. and F. were enrolled in the Summer School course; M. studied Italian also for few months in Verona, before coming to Torino.

From question 10 (“Do you live with anyone who speaks Italian as a mother tongue? How much time do you spend with them on a daily basis?”), the questionnaire starts exploring deeper their contact with Italian language: only one student (M.) does not live with Italians, and so his contact with Italian language is strictly connected to some situations such as his job and little directions, shopping, etc.; all his classmates, on the contrary, live with Italians. Three of them (I., R. and F.) speak Italian more than two hours on a daily basis, while B. for one or two hours. Questions 11 and 15 want to understand which is the contact they still have with their mother tongues (“How often do you read magazines or newspapers in your first language? and “If you have a choice between listening to a radio program in your native language or in Italian, which language do you prefer?”); most of them showed to prefer to read magazines and listen to the radio in Italian, or anyway they are not often into contact with their mother tongues. M. said he never reads magazines in his first language, while B. said he reads them seldom. F. preferred the answer once in a while; I. and R. read newspapers in their first language daily. Nobody chose the option weekly. For what concerns the radio programs, 60% of students prefer to listen to the radio in Italian, while remaining 40% prefers sometimes Italian and sometimes their native language. No one chose the answer I would not listen to the Italian programs. These results can be easily compared with the answers related to question 14 (“Do you watch television programs in Italian?”), that show that 60% of them watch Italian TV programs almost everyday (I., M. and F. chose the answer as often as I can), while the remaining two students never watch TV (B.) or prefer their language (R.); answers once in a while, not every often and at all were not chosen by
Questions 12 ("When you have homework in Italian do you...") and 13 ("During Italian classes do you...") are strictly connected with the Italian language course, to better understand which is their effort to improve the language and which are their feelings during lessons; the results coming from question 12 are very differentiated. In fact, two students (40%) stated that they do homework as soon as possible, other two students (40%) do it at the last possible moment and one student do it if she finds time. It means that some of them connect the efforts to improve their language proficiency also to their constancy in doing homework, but the majority of the students do not give the same importance to homework. On the contrary, the answers to question 13 completely reflect the same effort in paying attention during lessons: 100% of students chose the option listen at all times, even when it's not my turn. This is surely a good aspect to consider, because it proves how much importance students give to the course itself.

Questions 16 and 17 are connected with the closest and strongest relationships they have in Torino, and their answers are able to prove how much each one of them is involved in meeting Italians and in making friends with them. Their answers are really interesting because they reflect how much every student wants to be part of the culture itself, and they also prove their efforts in improving Italian language every day.

Answers to question 16 ("List your three closest friends in Torino and the language spoken with him/her") are the following:

- I. listed Gabriele, Riccardo and Mariarosa. With Gabriele, her boyfriend, she speaks Italian and English, while with Riccardo and Mariarosa she speaks Italian
- M. listed AA, EC and SN. With all of them he speaks just English
- R. listed Michele, Riccardo and Nuria; with Michele and Riccardo she speaks Italian and English, while with Nuria she speaks Spanish
B. did not want to write the names; he speaks Italian with the closest friend, and Spanish with the other two friends

F. listed Claudia, Bashar and another person (without a name). She speaks Italian with Claudia and Bashar and Spanish with the third friend

This list is, in my opinion, really interesting because it shows the strongest relationships that the students created during this period in Torino. It is also interesting to state that M., in Torino from more than one year, only have friends to whom he speaks English; the others, on the contrary, even if they have been here for few months have at least one Italian friend. This detail is really significant, because in my opinion it gives a good portrait of how much each student is confident with Italian language.

Question 17 wants to deepen the relation they have with Italian language: “List the names of the three Italians that you speak Italian the most. In what capacity do you know them? (e.g. teacher, friend, neighbor, relative, boss, etc.)”; these are the answers given by students:

I.: Gabriele, boyfriend; Riccardo, friend; Mariarosa, friend

R.: ?, baker downstairs; Massimo, neighbor; Silvana, secretary at the university

B.: ?, flatmate; ?, class friends; ?, friend

F.: Marco, boyfriend; Claudia, friend; Aurelio, friend

M. did not answer to the question. I do not know if it depends on the fact that he simply did not want to respond or if he does not know any Italian. Both hypotheses are plausible

The last two questions refer to the activities they do to improve Italian, and how
much time they spend in doing them: to question 18 (“Do you spend time trying to improve your Italian outside of the class? How?”) most of them watch TV and speak to Italians, and some of them add further activities: I. says she goes to the cinema, while R. says she goes to the cinema too (“once per month”), she teaches English to Riccardo talking in Italian, she learns sayings in Italian (“especially the ones that are the same in Spanish”). Answers to question 19 (“About how much time each day for each activity?”) are the following:

- I.: talking to Italians, more than three hours; watching TV, more than three hours
- M.: watching TV, two hours
- R.: speaking to Italians, more than four hours; watching TV, two hours
- B.: speaking with friends, four hours
- F.: reading Italian, two hours; watching TV, two hours; speaking with friends, four hours

At the end of the list of results, some considerations are necessary. The outcomes of this research about questionnaires are not surprising at all, because they reflect more or less all my opinions about the students in the Università classroom; with deep regret I did not have the possibility to know Y.'s situation, and I think it would have been interesting to know something more about her daily contact with Italian language. However, these results have been really useful to comprehend how much each student wants to improve his Italian and which are the results of his efforts; as I could state through the results of this questionnaire, it is undeniable that every student in Università tries, everyday, to improve his language proficiency. However, their situations are quite different: most of them – and, in particular, F. and I. who have Italian boyfriends – have more possibilities to improve their competences, while M. did not already reached a good relationships with Italians, maybe due to his shyness or to his general difficulties in learning Italian. Anyway, all these results
prove that they strongly want to feel part of the Italian culture and show their will to be as comfortable with Italian language as possible. This is why I am not surprised: the results coming from this questionnaire maintains that they all want to learn Italian, as shown by their active and constant participation to the language course.

For what concerns Seliger's first aim, that is to know the difference between HIGs and LIGs, the situation is completely different from the one that I expected. I could recognize in F., B. and R. the High Input Generators and in I., M. and Y. the Low Input Generators; I could state it by the direct observation carried out during the lessons, where I could see different behaviors among students. As Seliger states, HIGs generally have more success in using the target language outside the classroom than LIGs; he created the questionnaire (very similar to the one that I submitted to students, because I used it as a starting point) to confirm his hypothesis that HIGs and LIGs differ in the amount of out-of-class language activities and contacts. As already said, in fact, some answers give the students a particular score; Seliger's idea is that the more a student participates during lessons for what concerns speaking skills (becoming, in this sense, a HIG), the higher the score he reaches. This hypothesis, however, is partially belied. Let's focus on the scores achieved by each student:

- I.: 54 points
- F.: 52 points
- R.: 43 points
- B.: 36 points
- M.: 22 points

This list shows that the one I labeled like HIGs are, actually, different from the students who reached the highest amount of points. In fact, starting from these scores, the students who show to be more involved in learning Italian outside the
classroom are I., F. and R.; the fact that I. is the best student in this sense is really interesting, even if this detail does not completely surprise me: she always showed to be attentive and curious, and she proved to be one of the most willing students in learning the language. What really surprised me is the score reached by B., actually the leader of the classroom, who is penultimate in this rank. The other students (F., R. and M.) reached the scores I expected, but I. and B. really surprised me for what concerns their participation to lessons and their efforts to improve Italian language in the daily life. This leads to the consideration that Seliger's hypothesis that HIGs are better than LIGs also in real-life could be not confirmed by all the students in the Università classroom. Surely, I. and F. are more involved in learning Italian because of their Italian boyfriends, with whom they share most of the time; this entails that they also have more possibilities than their fellow students to be in contact with native-speakers, such as theirs boyfriends' friends, and so on. In fact, I. listed three Italian names when she was asked to write the persons with whom is more in touch here in Italy, as also F. did it when she had to write three Italians with whom she speaks the most; F., in fact, listed the names of her boyfriend and of two Italian friends. The difference between this two girls and their classmates stays properly in this detail: R., for example, listed the baker downstairs, the secretary at the university and her neighbor; M. even did not list anybody. Only B. is quite different because he effectively inserted only friends when he had to write with whom he speaks Italian the most (flatmates, class friends and a friend), but actually among his three closest friends in Torino there is only one Italian. This factors lead to the consideration that the students behaves during lessons, in some cases, are not completely reliable for what concerns their capability to reflect their efforts outside the classroom. It is true that I. always showed to be really determined in acquiring Italian, but surely she could not be included in the HIGs group; anyway her score shows that she is the most motivated student for what concerns learning Italian language. So, Seliger's hypothesis, in this classroom, is not completely trustworthy; what a student shows during lessons could, in some cases, be not totally credible, and students' efforts to improve his language proficiency outside the class could be stronger than what expected.
4.3 Questionnaire 1. Italian language course: results obtained at the Politecnico

The situation of the Politecnico is surely more complicated than the one in the Università, also for what concerns the results obtained by the questionnaires. First of all, I received a response by six students; I have some difficulties in judging if the number of replies is satisfying or not, because even understanding which is the average reference number is really hard. If I consider the last lessons, when the number of students reached a stable average of 10-15 students, the number of replies could be considered sufficiently satisfying; but, on the average of the entire course, it is surely lacking. However, I personally think that the most reliable opinions are the ones coming from those students who attended the majority of the lessons, until the end of the course (even if, as stated above, the attendance was never so stable as in the Università context; but, however, it is possible to identify the students who attended more frequently). In this sense, so, the number of replies could be considered satisfying; anyway, I am aware that the results achieved by the Politecnico students are not completely sufficient for a deep analysis, as happened on the contrary for the Università classroom. This is the reason for considering these results satisfying, but not completely at all. I tried my best to obtain the students responses, but the means I had at my disposal were not enough to conduct this research in a deeper way.

It is necessary to list the students who wanted to take part to this further research:

- YA, aged 29, Syrian
- WL, aged 22, Chinese
- BA, aged 24, Nigerian

50 This student stopped attending the course for a while because he started attending an external course for obtaining the residency permit. He also tried to pass the exam for the level B1, but unsuccessfully. Anyway, he attended enough lessons to be considered trustworthy for his opinions.
Most of them (exactly four) have been living in Torino for 1 up to 6 months, while two of them have been living here for more than one year (YA. for one year and seven months and WL. for three years). They will stay in Torino for very different periods of time: some of them for two-three years more, while the others just for some months or weeks.

Question 8 (“Have you ever followed an Italian course in your country?”) shows that only one student already studied Italian before, in his country, with level A1; the others never attended Italian language courses in their countries.

Questions from 9 to 12 want to deepen their opinions about the Italian language course they followed at the Politecnico di Torino. Question 9, specifically, ask them to judge the course, on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = mediocre, 10 = excellent): one student did not give an evaluation, while the others judged the course with 7 (one student), 8 (two students) and 9 (two students). Question 10 (“Which are the best characteristics of the Italian language course you have attended?”) recollected different opinions, really interesting and surprising: “There is a good possibility for making conversation in Italian language”, “Practice with friends”, “Openness. Everyone is involved. We practice Italian orally”, “I like the teacher's teaching style. She is always smiling and joking. She is eager to teach everything as well”; “First of all a good teacher, who was comprehensive, thoughtful, sweet, she tried to make everyone participate”. One student did not write any opinion about the course. The outcomes prove what I said about the teacher's approach toward students, and the fact that some students decided to list her behave as one of the best characteristics of the course is, in my opinion, an important detail to prove that the teacher's efforts to create a good atmosphere have been recognized and appreciated by the students. What really surprised me, however, are the answers concerning the possibility that
the students had to improve their speaking skills. As a matter of fact, I could state a completely different situation in this classroom; it would be really interesting to understand why some of the students decided to write this kind of answers. A possible solution to this discrepancy between my point of view and the students' one is probably connectable to the fact that the three students who focused their answer on the possibility to speak Italian were, effectively, the most talkative among their classmates. The feeling to be more participative than their fellow students could have led them to think that they really practiced their speaking skills; but, in all fairness, I do not think that their point of view is not completely reliable in this sense. Question 11, “Which are the worst characteristics of the Italian language course you have attended?” wanted to focus, on the contrary, on their opinions about what should be changed to improve the course itself; the answers are, again, really interesting. Most of them (exactly five students) decided to write nothing, probably because they did not find any bad characteristic in the course they followed or because they did not want to make an effort to think about something to write. The only student who wanted to participate gave this answer: “The timetable is not in any way convenient”. This detail refers to one of the advice I gave in paragraph 3.16, due to the problem concerning the timetable of lessons at the Politecnico. This student's point of view about the timetable should be, in my opinion, considered in order to improve the range of courses offered.

Question 12 (“What do you suggest for improving the course?”) partially strengthens my opinion that some students did not make an effort to reply to question 11, because most of them (except for one student) gave some advice to improve the course itself. They could choose between some options, and they could also add further advice; one student decided to mark the option less students, while another person chose more students. One student selected the option a better educational material and he added also “More handouts about points” (maybe, with this sentence, he wanted to say that the handout does not provide enough grammar explanations). Nobody preferred the answer different classroom's spatial organization, and two students decided to select the option none, even if with different goals. One of them, in fact, probably meant that the course does not need
any modification, while the other added “Some kind of games helping us to learn more fast”. It is interesting, at the end of the analysis of this results, to see that every student perceive the course in such different ways.

Question 13 wants to know if, in their opinion, the course was useful. Everyone of them – except for one student – answered, and all the responses are positive. Two students just answered “Yes”, but three of them wanted to add some more motivations: “The teacher is very good. She is active and encourages the students to speak”, “Very useful. At least now I can understand part of the courses”, and “I improved my spoken Italian, I met more friends”. Surely, in their opinion the course was useful and interesting; beyond my personal point of view about some improvements that should be carried out, I think that students' satisfaction is one of the strongest points of this course.

The analysis of their reasons for following the Italian language course are really interesting: question 14 (“Which is/are the main reason/reasons for following the Italian language course?”) wants to focus on their needs and purposes. Students had the possibility to choose among different answers: just for getting course credits, learning Italian for the real-life, integration, future job possibilities, I like the language itself and none. The most important aspect to consider is that only a student chose the option just for getting course credits, even if she also wanted to select the answer about integration. The option that received more preferences (exactly five) is learning Italian for the real-life, followed by the ones concerning the possibility to integrate in the Italian culture (three selections) and to get a future job (three selections). Two students decided to select also the answer I like the language itself, while nobody selected the answer none. These data show an important detail: even if the sample group is composed of just 6 students, I think that this information is fundamental to show that those students who wanted to attend the entire course are led more by integrative motivations rather than by instrumental and extrinsic motivations. It would be really interesting to analyze the needs and goals of each student, starting from the very first lessons; I am pretty sure that the option Just for getting course credits should be more selected than what happened with this sample.
group. Anyway, I think that these results can give a precise idea of what I could state about the very last group of students, surely composed of students moved principally by integrative and intrinsic motivations. So, for this reason, I am not surprised at all by this collection of data about students' first motivations to follow the Italian language course. It is also necessary, however, to state that the percentage of selections to the option concerning the possibility of a future job is higher than the one recollected at the Università. This detail, in my opinion, is connectable to the fact that the students enrolled at the Politecnico generally have decided to move to Torino also for ore future job chances; however, the integrative motivations remain the most important.

Question 15 takes an interest in knowing which is the most important skill to learn; I asked them to list, on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 = the most important and 5 = the less important) these five skills: grammar, pronunciation, speaking, writing and listening. A student put speaking as the most important skill to achieve, followed in order by grammar, pronunciation, listening and writing; one of his classmates decided to list them, in order of importance, this way: pronunciation, writing, listening, speaking and grammar. Another one listed the skills this way: the most important is, in his opinion, writing, listening, speaking, grammar and, finally, pronunciation. Three of these students did not understand properly my request, and gave the skills a sort of mark, not listing them from the most important to the less important one. Only in one case it is possible to understand which are the most important aspects of language to be learned: a student gave the mark 1 to pronunciation and speaking, 2 to writing, 3 to listening and 4 to grammar. Results coming from the remaining two students are more uncertain: one of them gives 2 to grammar and pronunciation and 4 to listening, writing and speaking, while the other one classifies skills giving 3 to grammar and writing, 4 to pronunciation and 5 to listening and speaking. At this stage it is difficult to understand which is the most important skill in these two students' opinion, because I can not understand why they decided to not give the highest grade to one of them. It is quite curious to analyze these last two answers; I tried to understand why both of them did not use the number 1, but started directly by numbers 2 and 3. One reason could stay in the fact
that they are simply not too much interested in classifying the skills in order of importance, maybe because they do not pay attention to pursue one of them in particular; but, anyway, I guess why they decided to not start from grade 1. For instance, if in their opinion there is not a most important skill because two or three of them are really similar in order of importance, they could have given 1 to two or three of them; actually, they did it, but giving another grade (starting from 2 or even 3). This is surely misleading. However, the only solution I found stays in considering the listed skills (even if evaluated with 2 or 3) as the most important, in order to create an outline of the situation. The answers, so, show that the students have very different opinions about the most important skills to possess: the general tendency, however, puts pronunciation as the most important skill (with three preferences), followed by writing, speaking and grammar (with two preferences); listening did not have any preference. These results are quite surprising, because I thought that speaking and listening would have been the most important skills in the students' opinion; these results would easily have led me to the consideration that the integrative motivation brings students to focus more on being capable of talking with natives and making a conversation. But, however, these answers really surprised me. I can not know why they decided to put pronunciation as the most important skill to achieve, and another really odd aspect stays in the fact that speaking does not even reach the second place (occupied by writing); I would like to have the possibility to deepen this question. The answers to the following question, anyway, could help us in understanding more the reasons behind these replies.

Question 16 (“What do you do, outside of the classroom, for improving your Italian (e.g. talking to Italians, listening to the radio, watching TV, reading newspapers, etc.)?”) wants to understand what students do, outside the classroom, for improving Italian language in their real-lives. Only three students said they talk to Italians, but it is important to consider their answers given to question 7 in LCP questionnaire: the same three students that stated to try to improve their language proficiency by talking to Italians also say that they speak Italian very little (two students) and occasionally (one student); so, their responses have to be considered in the light of this observation. The other ways to improve Italian are the following:
listening to the radio (one student), watching TV and Italian videos on social networks (two students), listening to Italians (one student), reviewing what has been done during the lessons (one student) and reading Italian web blogs and news (one student). This list shows clearly that these students, unlike the ones at the Università group, do not really force themselves in improving Italian in an active way (such as speaking and making conversations with Italians); they prefer to drill their language competence by other activities, such as watching TV or reading. So, these considerations can maybe explain why speaking, in their opinion, is not the most important skill to drill. Anyway, nevertheless, the answers keep on being very surprising and ambiguous.

The last question (question 17) of this questionnaire wants to know if they would like to improve their Italian. Just one student answers negatively, giving this reason: “No, because I don't think I'll come back to Italy after the end of my semester in Torino”. The other students obviously say yes, and these are their motivations: “Yes. I do not want to leave Italy without learning Italian language”; “Yes, because I would like to learn languages”; “Yes, because I am in Italy and so that I can communicate with people better”; “Yes, because it is interesting” and “Yes of course. Italian is really gorgeous language. I think it is the best among Indo-European languages family. When it comes to the magic question «Why do you want to improve?», the answer is clear for me. I just want to translate all Italian recipes to my language to just cook Italian food :) tiramisù, tagliatelle, lasagne, ravioli, pizza... That's why I would like to improve my Italian”. All their answers, except for the first and last one, give us a clear outline of students' first aim: they want to learn Italian to feel integrated in the language and in the culture. These results do not surprise me at all, especially if I consider that most of them have to stay in Italy still for a long time.
4.4 Questionnaire 2. LCP questionnaire: results obtained at the Politecnico

As for the students at the Università, I wanted to know how much learners in Politecnico are involved in improving Italian outside the language classroom. These results can show a clear outline of their efforts in learning Italian language in the real-life, and can also explain the different situations I found in both contexts, as vastly discussed in the previous chapters. Six students took part to this research, the same of the previous analysis.

Question 7 (“About how much time do you spend speaking Italian outside of class every day?”) shows that most of them spend very little time in speaking Italian when not in classroom: four of them (YA., WL., EV and AB.) chose the option very little, and only one student (BA.) said to talk Italian occasionally. One student (FG.) says that does not speak Italian at all; nobody chose the answer most of the time, and this aspect really differentiates them by the students at the Università (where, among five, three decided to select this option). These data are quite odd if compared with the results obtained by question 8 (“How well do you think you speak Italian now?”), because three of them responded fair, one poorly and two good. Starting from the consideration that I could see each of them during lessons, I think these results are almost trustworthy, except for one student (FG., the same that answered that he does not talk Italian at all outside the classroom, who decided to say that he speaks a good Italian now and that had real difficulties also during lessons. Probably, this discrepancy is due to his high self-esteem).

Question 9 wants to learn if they had already followed an Italian language course before: only one student said he followed a 1-year course in his country (Syria) and another one said he learned Italian at the Politecnico, with a different 3-month course. The others never attended Italian language courses before this one.

From question 10 (“Do you live with anyone who speaks Italian as a mother tongue? How much time do you spend with them on a daily basis?”), the questionnaire starts to explore deeper their contact with Italian language. Three of
them (EV., YA. and BA.) live with Italians, while the remaining three students do not live with native-speakers; anyway, these results are clearly different from the one given by students in the Università group, because only one student (YA.) said he spends one or two hours on a daily basis with his Italian flatmates, while the other two spend “less than one hour” (BA.) or “actually no time” (EV.) with them. This is an important detail that should be considered to understand their lacking feeling of confidence with Italian language, that can be a feasible result coming from the complicated learning context at the Politecnico. However, it is also important to state that this difference is also due to the fact that two of the Università students (I. and F.) raise the average, because they live with their Italian boyfriends and, thus, they can practice Italian more than the others for their particular and relaxed situation.

Questions 11 and 15 want to focus on the contact that these students still have with their mother tongue: also here the outcomes of the two contexts are very different and, so, really interesting. In fact, the answers to question 11 (“How often do you read magazines or newspapers in your first language?”) prove a wide range of situations: the options never, seldom, once in a while and weekly have been chosen each by only one student, while the answer daily has been selected by two persons. But the most interesting data come from question 15 (“If you have a choice between listening to a radio program in your native language or in Italian, which language do you prefer?”): nobody selects the answer I prefer Italian: 50% of students answered that they listen both Italian and their own mother tongue, while the remaining 50% preferred the option would not listen to the Italian programs. These outcomes can give a clear and significant outline of their contact with Italian language, especially if compared with results coming from the questionnaire submitted at the Università students; there, in fact, 60% responded to prefer Italian and 40% to switch from Italian to their mother tongue, depending on the situations, but nobody answered would not listen to the Italian programs. This detail has a strong meaning, because this percentage of 50% of students that would not listen to Italian programs at all is really high and, in a way, serious and grave. It is another, important detail that confirms my opinion about their relation with Italian language, surely not satisfactory at all. Results obtained by questions 11 and 15 can be easily compared
with the ones coming from question 14 ("Do you watch television programs in Italian?"), that in fact gives similar outcomes: only 33% of students say they watch TV programs in Italian as often as possible; nobody chose the answer once in a while and the remaining four students are spread on all the other four options (not every often, never, prefer watching programs in your language and you do not watch television at all); this is surely another proof that shows how low is their contact with the language.

Questions 12 and 13 are more focused on the Italian language course itself; these results are better than others and demonstrate the good relationship of students with the course they attended at the Politecnico; in this sense, their efforts come out and prove their motivation to learn Italian. 50% of students say they do homework (question 12) as soon as possible, but the others do it if they find time (two students) and another one at the last possible moment. Better results come from question 13: 83% of students, equal to five of them, say that during classes they listen at all times, and only one student has to force herself for listening and participating. This is surely a good aspect because it upholds the idea that these students, who decided to follow the lessons for the entirety of the course (except for BA., less constant for personal reasons), try to learn Italian by attending lessons. The problem, so, stays in what they do to improve their language outside the classroom; they do not force themselves to speak Italian at all (it is almost unbelievable to state that some of them live with Italians and do not speak at all with them) and they also have to strive for doing homework or to watch TV programs in Italian. This is a clear outline that proves, once again, that they do not feel comfortable at all with Italian outside a learning environment in which they know they can try to drill their skills. When outside, all their efforts vanish and they start being less self-confident. Anyway, even if only one, there is a student who says she has to force herself for listening; but, however, she is the same person who responded she does not want to improve her Italian and that, in the questionnaire concerning the Italian language course, she followed the lessons for getting credit course. In this sense, so, her answer does not surprise me at all.

Questions 16 and 17 focus on their closest and strongest relationships in Torino.
Answers to question 16 (‘List your three closest friends in Torino and the language spoken with him/her’) are the following:

- YA.: Pasquale, with whom he speaks English, Aderiana (or, more probably, Adriana), with whom he speaks Italian and English, and Hanan, with whom he speaks Arabic
- WL.: Simone, Amedeo and Enrico. He speaks English with all of them, even if they are Italian
- BA.: he prefers not to write his friends' names, but he states he speaks English with the first two friends in the list and Rumanian with the third
- FG.: he just lists Elisa, with whom he speaks English
- AB.: she prefers not to write the names, but she says she speaks French with the first and the third and English with the second person in the list
- EV.: she does not write names at all

Among them, only YA. shows to be in contact with Italians and that he tries to improve Italian language also with friends; actually, there is only one person in his list (Aderiana/Adriana) with whom he speaks Italian, but this is surely a good result, especially if we compare his list to the others. What is really interesting is that WL. lists three Italian friends, but he still speaks English with them; it is also important to remind that he has been studying in Torino for three years. The remaining outcomes do not surprise me at all. I can not know why EV. decided to not list three names, but actually I do not rule out that she does not have close friends at all in Torino; all the answers she gave in both questionnaires lead me to this possible consideration. These answers are easily comparable to the ones achieved by question 17, that wants students to write the names of the three Italians that they speak the most. These are the outcomes:
These results are really interesting, because they prove the lacking contact that the students have with native-speakers. Actually, the students at the Università showed to be more in contact with Italians than the ones at the Politecnico, because most of the names listed by them refer to friends, boyfriend or flatmates. On the contrary, these answers give a precise idea of these students' difficulties in begin relationships with Italians: most of the listed names, in fact, refer to teachers, landlords or neighbors. This entails that these students do not have the possibility to practice the language outside the lessons, and, again, that their language proficiency is not strong enough to make them feeling comfortable with the language itself and with the native-speakers too. Surely, a very different situation from the one checked out at the Università.

Finally, questions 18 and 19 want to know which are their activities to improve their Italian language; the answers have already been analysis (see pagg. 117-118); what is important, now, is to state again that the majority of them drill their language with passive activities (such as reading, listening to people talking, watching TV, etc.). The most significant detail is referred to the fact that only two students (YA. and BA.) answered they speak to Italians, while the others prefer activities like the ones already listed. Actually, only M. at the Università did not add speaking activities in his list, while all his classmates said they speak Italian for more than one hour on a daily basis. This is another important detail that can help us understand the real and tangible differences between the two class-groups. These differences can be also proved by the total amount of scores gained by students in Politecnico by filling this
LCP questionnaire:

- YA.: 32 points
- BA.: 31 points
- FG.: 21 points
- AB.: 18 points
- WL.: 14 points
- EV.: 6 points

The average points of the Università students is 41.4, while the average of the Politecnico students stays at 20.3 points. This result does not need any further analysis; actually, for a more trustworthy and honest analysis, I can only state that M., the Università student who gained the lower amount of points, surely showed this way more difficulties than his fellow students. This detail shows that he did not reach a good self-confidence with language as well as his classmates but, unlike the Politecnico students, I am quite sure that his obvious issues in interacting with Italians is linked more to his shyness rather than effective linguistic problems. His improvements during all the entire course can support my opinion about it. The analysis of results coming from the Politecnico students is different: it is true that their low scores are linked to an unreached self-confidence with Italian language, but it is also true that their proficiency is completely different from M.'s one.

For what concerns, finally, Seliger's aim to understand if HIGs and LIGs are different in the contacts they have outside the classroom, this group of students probably reflects more his hypothesis. In fact, if I have to select three HIGs and three LIGs, YA., WL. and BA. can be considered as High Input Generators, while FG., EV. and AB. are Low Input Generators; it is true that the LIG FG. scored a slightly higher mark than the HIG WL., but the difference is so subtle that it is not so important and significant. Therefore, in this classroom it is possible to state that students who
participated more to lessons are effectively the ones who had more success in the real-life, even if it is also trustworthy to say that their results are not even comparable with the ones gained by students at the Università.
Even if, at the beginning, I did not give much importance to the outcomes of these questionnaires, I think I have to change my mind. Actually, all my previous opinions and considerations did not change at all after the analysis of the questionnaires, but they gave me the possibility to understand deeper who are the students I worked on for so long. What I mean is that, at the very end of this research project, I think that a precise outline of the students involved in this survey is really interesting and also useful. Thanks to the analysis of results, in fact, I could reach the absolute certainty that the two different contexts in which the students learned Italian language influenced their improvements and, in particular, their relations with the language. The outcomes of the questionnaires reflect directly and precisely the different attitudes and behaves that these students show in their real-lives; it is important to state that their self-confidence is strictly linked to the language proficiency they could achieve during the course. It is not coincidence that the students at the Università showed, by means of the questionnaires, to be really more integrated than the ones at the Politecnico. As a matter of fact, the outcomes of my research project show that a good, intimate and positive atmosphere during lessons can make students able to acquire Italian language faster and easier, and with better results. But, with the help of the questionnaires, I could also have the absolute certainty that a positive learning environment is also strictly linked to a further and better students integration for what concerns real-life. The two questionnaires helped me understand that the importance of a good learning context is not restricted to the lesson itself, but that it has a great influence also when the lesson is over; it really changes students' chances to be more assimilated and integrated in the language and, thus, in the culture they are immersed in. The results coming from the Politecnico students prove, once again, that there missing self-confidence with Italian language does not allow them to have satisfying relationships with Italians. It is an important detail to consider, if we focus on the fact that their first aim for attending the courses is principally linked to their
will to be integrated and participative to the culture that the target language itself represents. It is true that most of them came to Italy principally for studying, but in the end all their efforts for studying and learning Italian are connected to the desire of being able to lead a satisfying and happy life in Torino.

This is one of the most fundamental reasons to change something in the Italian language courses provided by the Politecnico; the complete fulfillment of students wills has to be considered and reevaluated, in the light of the results coming from the questionnaires. The academic reasons to ask students to learn Italian language should be considered as well as their first needs, that are principally the ones linked to integrative motivations. This is why I gave some advice for trying to improve the didactic context at the Politecnico; I know that such modifications are really strenuous and complicated, but the results coming from questionnaires are too much clear to be ignored. Again, I do not want to criticize the efforts that this organization makes for improving the didactic environment and for giving to students the best Italian language courses possible; I think, however, that a general and external survey could be useful to reassess some aspects. Students satisfaction – the academic ones and, first of all, those related to their everyday life – should be considered as the main purpose.

I think that some personal considerations, at this stage, are necessary and permitted. The main aim I had set myself when I started this observation experience was linked to the possibility I had to dissect and, then, to analyze the two contexts I was involved in. I strongly wanted, in fact, to understand why – and how – two learning situations could be so different one from the other; I really tried my best to examine all the possible aspects in the most objective and unbiased way possible. Actually, I think I reached my purpose. It is not necessary, now, to maintain again all the considerations already done; everything has been profusely debated in the previous chapters, and I think it could be enough for understanding which were the two situations I could study throughout these four months of direct observation. Everything I could note during this experience is contained in this thesis, and I would
really like to have the possibility to experiment if my advice could have good effects in improving the situation at the Politecnico di Torino. This experience has been really formative and fundamental for an actual fulfillment of my university studies, because it completed an important path started with Master ITALS, that showed me what I strongly want to do from now on.

I hope this thesis could also be of service to the teacher I followed in this observation experience – even if I think she really does not need any suggestions nor advice. It was an honor having the possibility to follow her and, first of all, learning how to be a good teacher (grazie di cuore, Emanuela!)
6 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND WEBSITE CITATIONS


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132


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for further information about the Italian language courses organized at the Politecnico di Torino

http://www.cla.unito.it/ for further information about the Italian language courses organized at the Università degli Studi di Torino

http://www.ossreg.piemonte.it/_library/downloadfile.asp?id=2898 for an outline of the situation of enrollments in Piedmont

http://www.ossreg.piemonte.it/_library/downloadfile.asp?id=2839 for an outline of the situation of enrollments in Piedmont

http://www.polito.it/ateneo/colpodocchio/ for information about the enrollments at the Politecnico for this academic year

http://www.polito.it/ for general information about the Politecnico di Torino

http://www.unito.it/ for general information about the Università degli Studi di Torino

http://www.wordreference.com/ online dictionary I used for writing this dissertation

135
7 ATTACHMENTS

7.1 Attachment 1 – CLASS SCHEDULE AT UNIVERSITÀ

The following table is referred to the Italian language course in Università degli Studi di Torino

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Room</th>
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This observation sheet has been used for describing activities in both the classrooms.

| Docente osservatore: ___________________________ | Data: __________________ |
| Ordine di scuola e classe: ___________________ | Lingua: ________________ |
| Stato/regione/città: ________________ | Durata dell'osservazione: ___ |

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<th>Tempo</th>
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### 7.4 Attachment 4 - OBSERVATION SHEET 2

This observation sheet has been used for understanding teacher's way to correct errors, in both classes.

**DOCENTE OSSERVATORE: ____________________ DATA: ________________**

**ORDINE DI SCUOLA E CLASSE: ________________ LINGUA: ______________**

**LIVELLO LINGUISTICO DEGLI STUDENTI: ________________**

**NAZIONE/REGIONE/CITTA’: ________________**

**DURATA DELL’OSSERVAZIONE: ________________**

## LA CORREZIONE DELL’ERRORE

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<th>AZIONE/REAZIONE DELL’INSEGNANTE</th>
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<td>“stelle splendente”</td>
<td>Lettura di un brano</td>
<td>(4) pronuncia la “i” a voce alta</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversazione in classe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Oggi (io) va a casa prima”</td>
<td>(9) scrive “vado” alla lavagna</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Source: Master ITALS, I level, Università Ca’ Foscari, Venezia
7.5 Attachment 5 – OBSERVATION SHEET 3

This observation sheet has been used for analyzing how new lexical elements are introduced by the teacher. Used in both groups.

DOCENTE OSSERVATORE: __________________________ DATA: ________________
ORDINE DI SCUOLA E CLASSE: ______________________ LINGUA: ________________
STATO/REGIONE/CITTA’: ________________ DURATA DELL’OSSERVAZIONE: _____

1. REGISTRA CHE COSA AVVIENE IN CLASSE DURANTE LA PRESENTAZIONE, ACQUISIZIONE E RECUPERO DI ELEMENTI LESSICALI:

- **FASE DI PRESENTAZIONE DI NUOVI ELEMENTI LESSICALI:**
  - La presentazione di nuovi elementi lessicali è contestualizzata e muove da un input ascoltato
  - La presentazione di nuovi elementi lessicali è contestualizzata e muove da un input visivo (poster, immagine, foto)
  - La presentazione di nuovi elementi lessicali è contestualizzata e muove da un input testuale
  - La presentazione del lessico non è contestualizzata
  - Altro

- **B. FASE DI MEMORIZZAZIONE:**
  - Si utilizza il brainstorming per richiamare alla memoria termini noti
  - Si creano costellazioni (*spidergrams*) per recuperare il lessico dalla memoria e si stimola il reperimento di parole associate
  - Il nuovo lessico viene ripetuto ad intervalli di tempo regolari
  - Si favorisce l’associazione di vocaboli a immagini
  - Si favorisce l’associazione di parola e definizione
  - Si sollecitano risposte fisiche o sensazioni
  - Si utilizzano opposizioni binarie (es. bello/brutto)
  - Altro

- **C. FASE DI INTERIORIZZAZIONE:**
  - Si utilizza la drammatizzazione
  - Si utilizzano roleplay o “scenari”
  - Si utilizzano canzoni
  - Si propongono giochi linguistici
  - Si favorisce il reimpiego creativo del lessico acquisito
  - Altro

- **D. FASE DI RIFLESSIONE:**
- Si riflette sulle regole di generazione delle parole
- Si riflette sulla denotazione lessicale
- Si riflette sulla connotazione lessicale
- Altro

2. ELEMENTI LESSICALI PERCEPITI COME DIFFICILI

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3. QUAL È LA RISPOSTA DEGLI STUDENTI?

Source: Master ITALS, I level, Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia
This observation sheet has been used for checking students' attention and interactions among them and with the teacher during the lesson. I used it only in Università degli Studi.

DOCENTE OSSERVATORE: ____________________ DATA: ________________
ORDINE DI SCUOLA E CLASSE: ________________ LINGUA: _______________
NAZIONE/REGIONE/CITTÀ: ________________
DURATA DELL'OSSERVAZIONE: ________________
DOCENTE: ________________

IL LIVELLO DI ATTENZIONE DEGLI STUDENTI

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Source: Master ITALS, I level, Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia
This questionnaire has been produced for understanding the attitude of students toward the study of a second language and their opinions about the Italian language course.

The Italian Language Course

The main aim of this questionnaire is to get some information about what you think of the Italian language course, which are your advice for its improvement, and what you think about Italian language in general. Please, keep in mind that this questionnaire is due to my personal need to understand what happens in Italian language courses; it is a personal research that goes beyond the course and the teacher and, for this reason, you should be as honest as possible. Your privacy will be respected. Thank you.

Date ___ / ___ / ____

1) Name (optional) ________________________________________________________________
2) Sex (M / F) __________________________________________________________________
3) Country of origin _______________________________________________________________
4) Native language ________________________________________________________________
5) Age __________________________________________________________________________

6) How long in Torino? Mark with an X:
   ● less than 1 month
   ● from 1 month to 6 months
   ● from 6 months to 1 year
   ● more than 1 year (how many years?)

7) For how long do you think you are staying in Italy? __________________________________

8) Have you ever followed an Italian course in your country? (yes / no) ____________________
Which was the level? Mark with an X: 
9) Please judge the Italian language course you followed (1 = mediocre, 10 = excellent) _______

10) Which are the best characteristics of the Italian language course you have attended?
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

11) Which are the worst characteristics of the Italian language course you have attended?
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

12) What do you suggest for improving the course? Mark with an X:
   ● Less students in the classroom
   ● More students in the classroom
   ● A better educational material (_________________________________________________) 
   ● Different classroom's spatial organization (try to explain what, in your opinion, could be the
     best setting: _______________________________________________________________)
   ● none of these (_____________________________________________________________)

13) Do you think this course has been useful? (yes / no) ________________________________
Why? __________________________________________________________________________

14) Which is/are the main reason/reasons for following the Italian language course? Mark with an X:
   ● Just for getting course credits
   ● Learning Italian for the real life
   ● Integration
• Future job possibilities
• I like the language itself
• none of these (_____________________________________________________________)

15) List the skills according to their importance (1 = the most important, 5 = the less important):
   • grammar ___
   • pronunciation ___
   • speaking ___
   • listening ___
   • writing ___
   • ________________________________________

16) What do you do, outside of the classroom, for improving your Italian (e.g. talking to Italians, listening to the radio, watching TV, reading newspapers, etc.)?: ____________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

17) Would you like to improve your Italian? Why?_______________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________


This questionnaire has been produced for understanding more the daily contact of students with Italian language outside the classroom.

Language Contact Profile

The main purpose of this questionnaire is to understand your habits outside of the classroom, in order to analyze your relationship with the Italian language. You can choose between writing your name or not; keep in mind that your privacy will be respected.

Date ___ / ___ / ______

1) Name (optional) ________________________________________________________________
2) Sex (M / F) ____________________________________________________________________
3) Country of origin _______________________________________________________________
4) Native language _________________________________________________________________
5) Age __________________________________________________________________________

6) How long in Torino? Mark with an X:
   • less than 1 month
   • from 1 month to 6 months
   • from 6 months to 1 year
   • more than 1 year (how many years? ______)

7) About how much time do you spend speaking Italian outside of class every day? Mark with an X:
   • none
   • very little (directions, shopping, etc.)
   • occasionally (with friends)
   • most of the time
8) How well do you think you speak Italian now? Mark with an X:
   - poorly
   - fair
   - good
   - very good
   - excellent

9) How many years have you studied Italian? ___________________________________________
   Where? _________________________________________________________________________

10) Do you live with anyone who speaks Italian as a mother tongue? (yes/no) ______________
    How much time do you spend with them on a daily basis? Mark with an X:
    - less than one hour
    - one or two hours
    - more than two hours

11) How often do you read magazines or newspapers in your first language? Mark with an X:
    - never
    - seldom
    - once in a while
    - weekly
    - daily

12) When you have homework in Italian do you (mark with an X):
    - do it as soon as you can
    - do it if you find time
    - do it at the last possible moment
    - do it but turn it in late
    - none of these (______________________________________________________________)

13) During Italian classes do you (mark with an X):
    - have a tendency to daydream about your country
    - have to force yourself to listen to the lesson
    - listen at all times, even when it's not your turn
    - listen when it is your turn but do other things when it is not
14) Do you watch television programs in Italian? Mark with an X:
   • as often as you can
   • once in a while
   • not every often
   • never
   • prefer watching programs in your language
   • you do not watch television at all

15) If you have a choice between listening to a radio program in your native language or in Italian, do you (mark with an X):
   • prefer Italian
   • sometimes listen to the Italian programs and sometimes to those in your language
   • would not listen to the Italian programs

16) List your three closest friends in Torino:
   • ___________________ Language spoken with him/her: ________________________
   • ___________________ Language spoken with him/her: ________________________
   • ___________________ Language spoken with him/her: ________________________

17) List the names of the three Italians that you speak Italian the most. In what capacity do you know them? (e.g. teacher, friend, neighbor, relative, boss, etc.):
   • ___________________ Relationship with him/her: ____________________________
   • ___________________ Relationship with him/her: ____________________________
   • ___________________ Relationship with him/her: ____________________________

18) Do you spend time trying to improve your Italian outside of the class? (yes/no) _____________
   How? (list all activities, e.g. watching tv, reading, writing, speaking with friends, etc.)
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

19) About how much time each day for each activity? Choose between A, B, C, D: A = one hour, B = two hours, C = three hours, D = more than three hours
   Activity 1: ________________ A, B, C or D? _____________________________
   Activity 2: ________________ A, B, C or D? _____________________________
Activity 3: ______________ A, B, C or D? _____________________________
Activity 4: ______________ A, B, C or D? _____________________________

7.9 Attachment 9 – TRANSLATIONS

Here I give translations of quotes in Italian found in the thesis. All the translations are mine.

Serragiotto, p. 24:

- The group of students has to be close and strong. Each student in the group has to feel accepted by his classmates, even if everyone has his own role in the group's dynamics
- The inner climate of the classroom has to be good for permitting positive relations and interactions among students. The teacher can reach this situation by a good organization of desks and teaching post, in order to create a particular climate
- Interactions between teacher and students and among them should be proportioned and not one-directional. Even if each student has his particular personality that does not have to be hidden, the teacher has to find the way for permitting to everyone to take part to the lesson, according to his personal character
- In learning an L2 adults look for a good competence in using different language registers, and they have to learn how to read communications, notifications, they have to know how to pay bills, to read pay-slips and bank statements of account

Begotti, p. 25:

«an approach or a method generally suitable to all kinds of adult learners, […] for an effective glottodidactic it is necessary an evaluation a priori about the previous experiences, the cognitive and learning styles, the motivations and the needs of each single learner, in order to suggest the most suitable method possible.»
Daloiso, p. 27:
«[...] is included among the third critic period related to language acquisition (Fabbro, 2004); potentially, therefore, the student who stand in that age-group between 18-25 years can reach an high morphosyntactic and lexical competence, while he will find some difficulties for what concerns phonetical distinction and reproduction (foreign accent)»

Daloiso, pp. 27-28:

- Learning a language is possible only if experienced as a voluntary action and due to a strong motivation; most of the time young adults learn Italian language for their own choice, but the motivation varies considerably from person to person.

- The young adult often wants to feel himself like the protagonist of his own learning process, tends to consider the teacher as a peer and requires a clear formative project, based on openness and the sharing of goals, purposes and didactic methods (Balboni, 2002); there are, anyway, situations in which young adults come from very structured university systems, where there is little space left for the sharing of the formative project among teacher and student; in these cases, the students tends to leave to the teacher any formative and didactic decision, and to follow the didactic course often passively.

- Every student has already reached a personal language-learning style, that depends on interactions between intrapsychic factors (personality, perception, cognitive and mnestic processes) and extrapsychic factors (relationship with his own culture, sociorelational behavior, relationship with knowledge and learning context).

Begotti, p. 28:
«it is possible to interpret this information as a physiological and psychological response by young persons, whose childish or teen-aged condition, just ended or still in progress, makes hard the acceptance of activities considered as typically infantile.»

Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, p. 52:

- The disposition of the space and of the furniture in the classroom symbolically shows which are the behaviors that are considered appropriate in the classroom and what students are expected to do
The organization of the classroom can facilitate or obstruct directly the students' performance.

A good spatial organization helps the student in focusing the attention both on the visual level and on the auditive one.

The classroom's disposition can determine – positively or negatively – the quality of the learning atmosphere.

The classroom's setting can facilitate or obstruct the management of the classroom.

The classroom's organization can ease or obstruct the operation of the learning groups.

The classroom's spatial disposition can facilitate or obstruct the relationships among students.

**Balboni, p. 59**

«The traditional spatial organization, in rows of desks, is the worst concerning the communicative level: it highlights the teacher but at the same time it isolates him, making him talking *ex-cathedra*; furthermore, it impedes the interactions among students: students sat back see the napes and not the faces of their classmates sat forward, and are not seen at all by them»

**Joyce, p. 81:**

Synergy produced in cooperative contexts produces more motivations than the one created in individualistic, competitive contexts. Feelings of cohesiveness produce positive energy.

Members of cooperative groups learn one from each other: in a cooperative context anybody can be helpful more than what happens in a structure that generates isolation.

The mutual interaction with the others produces cognitive and social complexity and creates more intellectual activity, that in turn improves learning.

Cooperation produces better feelings towards the others, reducing alienation and loneliness, building relationships and giving a positive concept of the others.

Cooperation improves self-esteem not only through a better learning, but also through the feeling to be respected and to be important for the others.

Students respond to cooperative group-works experience increasing their level of social competence.

Students […] can learn to improve their skills for working together.
Angelino, p. 83:
«in organizing the classroom […] the teacher has to keep in mind that he has to reach easily all the groups and, so, he has to be able to control all the classroom»

Angelino, p. 84:
In composing the group it must be paid attention to the possible interactions. With the increase of number of the members, there is also an exponential increase of interactions. For instance, in a group of two people only two interactions are possible, in a group of four members twelve interactions are possible.
Table 1: Students' attendance at the Università course

![Bar chart showing attendance dates]
Table 2: Students' attendance at the Politecnico course