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How to Facilitate foreign and second language learning through the use of ict: the potentialities of Web 2.0

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to explain how ICT (*Information and Communications Technology*), especially Web 2.0, can facilitate language learning from both teachers and learners' point of view: teachers have the possibility to take advantage of some new ways to motivate their students while the latter can improve their knowledge and/or study on their own becoming autonomous. However a few negative aspects will come to light as well, but some solutions are provided. Moreover the potentialities of Web 2.0 are explained in this thesis and shown further by the creation of a web site, *Weareitalians.altervista.org*. The starting point is Professor Fabio Caon's song, *Italians*, to which some PDF activities, that can be found in *Bonaccieditore.it*, are linked. They have been adapted to the web page and they are preceded by a motivational game: *Quanto Italian sei?*. So we will deal with the importance of *ludicity* and music in language learning and we will see how it is possible to have access to every kind of material inside a web page. Web 2.0 allows every user to create many multimedia and multisensory resources for language learning and to put them in a virtual community where learners and teachers can collaborate and share their knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation is to explain how ICT (*Information and Communications Technology*) can influence and facilitate language learning. For this purpose I created a website, *weareitalians.altervista.org* that I will describe in details in order to give some concrete examples of how the web has changed the way of learning and teaching.

First of all, the meaning of facilitation for both students and teachers will be dealt with. Then, it will be explained how the role of the teacher has changed over time and how ICT have influenced this change and why.

Thanks to the characteristics of Web 2.0 a lot of things have changed. People can interact and collaborate in virtual communities and through *Social Networks*. This is very important as far as language learning is concerned, because learners are given the possibility to collaborate and cooperate with each other (and with their teacher if they like to). Moreover, the online environment is useful in order to develop autonomy. Web 2.0 is full of multimedia and multisensory resources that make learning more interesting and motivating: games, blogs, social networks and Youtube give students and teachers a huge range of choices to innovate traditional learning. So in this sense it could be an important instrument for both teachers and learners. Moreover the use of technologies has also some important implications from the neuroscientific point of view.

Some negative aspects are present as well. One of them is the *digital divide*, that is to say the inequality, in terms of skill, between teachers (*Digital Immigrants*) and learners (*Digital Natives*) but also the often inadequate presence of ICT in schools with respect to its presence outside the learning environment. As for the former, it can be solved by the collaboration between teacher and learners, meaning that educators can take advantage of what their pupils know about technologies. As a consequence students would feel more motivated and an active part of their learning process. As for the inadequate presence of technologies in the schools, instead, some Italian provisions are described in order to solve this problem. Of course, the Ministry of education has, among its aims, that of training new teachers in order for them to improve their digital competences.

UGC (*User-Generated Content*) can be another problem: every user can create and share whatever he/she wants and this generates a lot of materials and links that can confuse and distract students from what they are really looking for. Moreover, not all the content

are trustworthy and one of the roles of education in this field is teaching students how to use these new tools which are also important as far as lifelong learning is concerned. In fact, it is the European Parliament that lists the digital competence among the other eight needed for a lifelong learning.

Another issue that will be dealt with is cognitive overload. Hypertexts can be difficult to read: there are so many materials that the working memory can be overloaded. As a consequence it does not elaborate the information. Users need to develop selective attention in order to have control over the hypertext. Multitasking and videogames will be proved to be useful for this purpose. The “zapping” among different devices and media works when students are gathering information, but then, some order is required to learn. However, online learning is considered to be quite useful: given the fact that learning is considered as a social and cooperative process, Web 2.0 completely fulfils these requirements. In fact it can also be referred to as the Social Web.

As far as *Weareitalians.altervista.org* is concerned, some tools that can be used in order to motivate and involve students will be described. The starting point of this project is *Italians*, a song written and sung by Professor Fabio Caon for the Italian Language Week in the World (from 19th to 25th October). The project was carried out by Labcom Laboratory and Itals. So the importance of music and songs in language learning will be dealt with: culture and language are usually both embedded in a song. In fact *Italians* has two purposes: language improvement and getting over stereotypes. Moreover rhythm, repetitions and rhymes can help students to memorize some language structures.

There are also some exercises and additional learning materials linked to the song and they are divided into four language levels: from A2 to C1. What I have done, is to adapt the PDF activities, which are also available on *bonaccieditore.it*, to digital ones in a web page and make them compatible with every digital device by using Wordpress. The aim is to give students the possibility to study on their own, so one of the characteristics of the activities is: close-ended questions which provide the student an objective evaluation given by their computer/laptop/tablet/Smartphone. Thus not only have the students the possibility to learn on their own and to gain a certain learning autonomy, but they can do it wherever and whenever they want to.

The exercises are preceded by a motivational activity, a quiz game: *Quanto Italiano sei?*. Motivation is very important in both traditional and online learning environment because there is no acquisition without it and the reasons why will be explained by dealing with different kinds of motivation and their implications in language learning. Thus, I chose a game because *ludicity* is strongly linked to motivation. Moreover, as a digital game it embeds the positive aspects of both ICT and game playing in language learning.

As far as the creation of the website is concerned I will explain why I chose Wordpress which is one of the best known CMS (*Content Management System*). As for the graphic aspect, instead, I set it in order to respect the *Web Usability*, that is to say that the exercises, the information and the game must be as attractive and clear as possible.

Web 2.0 gives everyone the possibility to become a content manager, to create a website dedicated to language learning: there is no need to be a professional to create it. As a matter of fact one can find many websites on the Internet, often made by common users, which can be used in order to learn or improve a foreign or second language.

Furthermore I asked some students, aged from 15 to 25, whether they know and/or use online learning environments and most of them answered they do not. When I asked them why, some of the interviewees told me that they have never heard of these instruments before, others, instead, claimed that they do not want to use them because they are never totally free. This is another reason why I decided to create a free website and to publicize it in order to let students know about it.

Moreover it will be made clear that thanks to Web 2.0 teachers can create something different from the traditional activities, something that motivates students and make them study, collaborate, cooperate and play together in a virtual community. So ICT can potentially help language learning if they are used in the correct way and if users are aware of all their potentialities.

CHAPTER 1

Facilitation and facilitators: change and innovation in language learning

La realtà delle tecnologie accessibili autonomamente dagli studenti [...] erode sempre di più il monopolio del docente come fonte, come Language Acquisition Support “Person” trasformandolo nel perno, nell’elemento chiave di un Language Acquisition Support “System”. (Balboni, 2014: 69)

The aim of this chapter is to describe some of the most important elements in a language facilitation perspective: motivation, autonomy, cooperation, songs and games. These same elements are also the reasons why *weareitalians.altervista.org* has been created. As a matter of fact, as a learning environment, all the elements described on this chapter can be embedded in this single website. What technologies do, as it can be inferred from the quotation above, is giving students the possibility to be autonomous, among other chances that will be explained later. This does not mean that the teacher disappears, on the contrary, educators must be there to facilitate the learning process (cf. 1.1). What teachers can also do is to create something for their students, if they have some digital skills, or give pupils some advices about the huge range of choices provided by the Web. Moreover the digital competence and the use of technologies are also listed among the skills needed for a lifelong learning by the European Council (cf. 1.3)

1.1 How to facilitate the learning process

The Italian school has been characterised by a formalistic approach until the eighties. The teacher was “la fonte di informazione, il modello da seguire, il giudice insindacabile” (Balboni, 2012: 13), while the student was just “una *tabula rasa* su cui incidere, una personalità da *plasmare*” (Balboni, *ibid*). So teachers had a central role in language learning and they had to transfer their knowledge to the students who were considered as “empty containers” (King, 1993: 30). As a consequence, a lot of teachers who studied in the eighties and who are still working, use this kind of approach which does not consider the learner as an active part of learning. To say it with King’s words

the teacher is still, in some cases, “the sage on the stage” (King, *ibid*). However considering the student as a passive learner, who just reproduces someone else’s knowledge, is hopefully an outdated idea because didactics is moving towards a central role of the student who is just guided by the teacher, meanings that the teacher’s role should be limited to a “guide on the side” (King, *ibid*) and that the student is the central and active part of the learning process. Evidences of this change can be found in some psycho-didactics scholars’ masterpieces such as Gardner’s *Frames of Mind: the Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983), Bruner’s *Toward a Theory of Instruction* (1966), Krashen’s *Second language Acquisition and Second Language Learning* (1981) and Shumann’s *The Neurobiology of Affect in Language* (1997). The new approach which comes out is the affective-humanistic that put the learner as the central part of the process. As for the adjective “affective”, however, Balboni (2012) claims that it is an useless pleonasm given the fact that affectivity is obviously included into the humanistic nature. Moreover it can lead to some misunderstandings: it is as if a teacher should be sentimental in order to be good, but this is not the case.

The need for learners' central position is due to the fact that learners are emotional, they come from different cultural backgrounds, so they belong to distinct cultures, they have their own values and they have different aims as well. There should be a balance between them and the teacher who is not identical to them. As a matter of fact the learning process is:

Delicato perché esso implica la necessità di stabilire sintonie fra stati d’animo, psicologie, background culturali, orizzonti d’attesa che sono inevitabilmente diversi e che richiedono tutta una serie di mediazioni spesso difficili da mettere in atto; tanto più che l’insegnamento in quanto relazione dinamica, mette costantemente in gioco gli equilibri eventualmente raggiunti. (Caon, 2010: VII)

Each student is different from the others, there are many features that differentiate a learner from his or her mates. Besides age and gender, there are some other personal factors which are crucial and have to be taken into account by the teacher in order for the learning process to be successful:

- a. Multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983);
- b. Different cognitive and learning styles (Kolb, 2001; Cadamuro, 2007).

Gardner “proposed the existence of seven separate human intelligences” (Gardner, 1999: 41) in his 1983, *Frames of Mind*:

- a. *Musical Intelligence*;
- b. *Linguistic Intelligence*;
- c. *Logical Mathematical Intelligence*;
- d. *Spatial Intelligence*;
- e. *Intrapersonal Intelligence*;
- f. *Interpersonal Intelligence*;
- g. *Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence*.

(Gardner 2011; 2006)

According to Gardner another intelligence should be considered and it is the *Natural* one. Moreover, he also talks about an *Existential Intelligence* but he did not give it the “ninth place of honor” (Gardner, 2006: 27). However, as far as the language learning is concerned, the first six intelligences of the list above are the only ones that seem to be involved.

All these intelligences are present in different ways and quantities in each human being, as a matter of fact each person is characterized by a different combinations of these abilities depending on one’s personality and cultural and educational backgrounds (see Gardner, 2006).

As a matter of fact, according to Gardner “we are all so different largely because we all have different combinations of intelligences” (2006: 31). The use of ICT in language classrooms can involve all kinds of intelligence (an in-depth analysis will be provided in chapters 3), as a matter of fact Veenema and Gardner (1993:70) claim that “applications of the new technologies should provide ways for a variety of minds to gain access to knowledge”.

When it comes to cognitive and learning styles, instead, they deal with different aspects: the first one can be defined as a “modalità prevalente di elaborazione delle informazioni, generalizzabile a compiti diversi” (Cornoldi, 1993: 17), while the second one is:

La tendenza di una persona a preferire un certo modo di apprendere-studiare; riguarda la sua modalità di percepire e reagire ai compiti legati all’apprendimento, attraverso la quale mette in atto, o sceglie, i comportamenti e le strategie per apprendere. (Cadamuro, 2004: 71).

So the cognitive style deals with new information acquisition while the learning one is about the way one accommodates information in his or her mind.

Cadamuro (2007) affirms that many studies about cognitive styles have been carried out since the Fifties, but they are often different as far as both language and classification. According to Cadamuro, one of the scholars who tried to go over this problem is Miller, who classifies the cognitive styles as follows:

- a. Globalists Vs Analysts;
- b. Leveling Vs Sharpening;
- c. Verbalizers Vs Imagers;
- d. Cognitive complexity Vs Simplicity;
- e. Convergent Vs Divergent;
- f. Holists Vs Serialists;
- g. Field dependent Vs Independent;
- h. Intuitionists Vs Analysts;
- i. Impulsive Vs Reflective;
- j. Literal Vs Metaphorical.

Caon (2010:XX), instead, listed the most important dichotomies from a glottodidactic point of view:

- a. *Stile analitico/globale;*
- b. *Stile sistematico-intuitivo;*
- c. *Stile impulsivo-riflessivo;*
- d. *Stile dipendente/indipendente dal campo.*

As for the learning, styles, instead, Kolb's study will be taken into account. In fact, his *experiential learning theory* (ELT) defines learning as:

The process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 2011: 228).

According to Kolb (*ibid*: 228), there are two ways of grasping experience:

- a. *concrete experience* which characterizes people “who perceive the reality through experiencing the concrete qualities of the world”;
- b. *abstract conceptualization* which is typical of people who prefer “analyzing, or systematically planning, rather than using sensations as a guide”;

and two ways of transforming it:

- a. *reflective observation* which belongs to people who prefer observing somebody else’s experience before acting;
- b. *active experimentation* is typical of people who want to “jump right in and start doing things”.

As for the learning styles, they result from the combination of these four modes of grasping and transforming experience. The table below explains which combination creates each one of the four styles:

	Reflective observation	Active conceptualization
Concrete experience	Diverging style	Accommodating style
Abstract conceptualization	Assimilating style	Converging style

Table 1 (cf. Kolb 2011)

Of course some personal traits such as introversion/extroversion or cooperative/competitive can influence the learner’s style.

The teacher, in order to facilitate the students, should take into account all these features and vary the activities to avoid “losing” students who have a different kind of intelligence, style and personality. As a human being, the teacher has his/her own cognitive and learning style, personality and perception of the instrument he or she decides to use during the lesson.

Thus, the role of the teacher, in order to facilitate language learning, is that of a guide, director, facilitator, tutor and counselor (cf. Balboni, 2012). He or she should observe the learning process and be aware of the differences among the students and help them discovering their learning styles. In this context, technologies can enter the classroom

and play their role as facilitators if the teacher decides to stick to his role of a guide. The potentialities of ICT give teachers the possibility to vary activities giving students a huge range of choices in order to learn the language in class, with their mates or by themselves and autonomously at home. Furthermore, technologies give teachers the possibility to collaborate with learners, especially in this field in which the former are just *Digital Immigrants* while the latter are *Natives* (Prensky, 2001a). As a matter of fact, Porcelli and Dolci (1999:129) write that:

L'insegnante scende, per così dire, dalla cattedra e interagisce con essi: egli diventa insomma uno stimolatore, un consigliere, un tutore in grado di manipolare e creare materiali, di mettere appunto percorsi formative e guidare gli studenti a percorrerli.

As it has been said before, some in-depth study about the role of technologies will be given in the following chapters. Moreover some other important themes, such as learner autonomy and digital immigrants/natives divide will be discussed further in this dissertation. Anyway, another important factor which influences language learning and deserves to be analyzed more in details is *motivation* because there is no learning without it (cf. Balboni, 2012)

1.2 Motivation

According to Dornyei (2001: 7) “Motivation explains *why* people decide to do something, *how hard* they are going to pursue it and *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity”. So, a motivated student is somebody who wants to reach a goal and who is able to elaborate a strategy to do it in a certain period of time and with a specific effort. Titone’s ego-dynamic model better explains what it has been said so far. As a matter of fact he says that there is a *ego*, who is the person who has a project and who aims to realize this project, he or she finds out a strategy. After that, there is the *Tactic Moment* in which:

Se si ottengono risultati non troppo distanti dall’attesa senza dover pagare costi fisici, economici e psicologici eccessivi, si rinforza la strategia e questa invia un feedback positivo all’ego, che quindi continua a mantenere in movimento il processo (Balboni, 2012: 86).

Nevertheless, there are different theories and subcategories of motivation, but two of them are particularly suitable to the aim of this dissertation:

- a. The intrinsic orientations which “refer to reasons for L2 learning that are derived from one’s inherent pleasure and interest in the activity” (Noels, 2002: 45);
- b. The extrinsic orientations which “refer to reasons that are instrumental to some consequence apart from inherent interest in the activity” (Noels, *ibid.*).

However, the intrinsic motivation seems to be preferable in a facilitation perspective because the student, as Noels says, autonomously finds his/her own need, pleasure and interest in the subject of study, the language, in this case. Nevertheless it is well known that some students need an extrinsic orientation, they need a sort of gratification by the teacher. This is the reason why both orientations should be taken into account even though the intrinsic one is preferable and should be promoted. The first thing that has to be considered in order to motivate students is that:

There are no magic motivational buttons that can be pushed to ‘make’ people want to learn, work hard, and act in a responsible manner. Similarly, no one can be directly ‘forced’ to care about something...Facilitation, not control, should be the guiding idea in attempts to motivate humans. (Martin Ford 1992:202)

Thus, teachers should not transfer their passions and their knowledge to students, but they should motivate them and facilitate their learning processes, that is to say that they should make an effort to keep their motivation alive. Teachers have a very important role in the classroom system:

lo sforzo di non disperdere il patrimonio emozionale di chi studia per piacere o di crearlo in chi studia per bisogno o per obbligo è nelle mani dell’insegnante (Balboni, 2013a: 18).

Moreover, according to Dornyei (2001: 21) motivation consists of several distinct phases:

- a. first of all, motivation should be generated and this phase is called “choice motivation”;

- b. the second phase is about maintaining and protecting motivation and it is referred to as “executive motivation”;
- c. the third phase, instead is the “motivational retrospection” in which students can process “how things went”.

So, teachers play an important role in the classroom environment because they give students the input they need in order to learn a language and they should create interest and keep motivation active.

When it comes to promote the intrinsic orientations for the reasons that have been explained so far, according to Noels (2002:54) a solution:

Rests on the fundamental assumption of self-determination theory that human beings have certain psychological needs, and fulfillment of these needs is necessary for individuals to behave in a self motivated manner.

In order to fulfill these requirements, Noels (2002: 54) suggests that teachers:

Must encourage learners to be self-initiating, provide them with choices about learning, allow them to solve problems independently, and avoid asserting authority and control over them.

According to Caon (2012: 13), instead, there are different factors that can help in promoting the intrinsic orientations:

- a. *I contenuti* which can meet the students’ interests or these interests should be created by the teacher;
- b. *Le metodologie*, because the way a subject is presented can play an important role in motivating students;
- c. *La relazione*, which should be based on trust and clarity in order for the communication between teacher and students to be successful;
- d. *I materiali e gli ambienti fisici e virtuali*” which, according to Schumann, should be attractive to motivate students.

Schumann (2004: 8) talks about somatic value “which consists of preferences and aversions, likes and dislike [...] which are acquired during the lifetime of the individual”

and this system of value is referred to as “stimulus appraisal system”. It is based on five criteria:

- a. *Novelty*;
 - b. *Pleasantness*;
 - c. *Goal significance*,
 - d. *Self and social image*;
 - e. *Coping ability*.
- (Schumann, 2004: 9)

The evaluation of these criteria is made by the amygdale which assesses “the positive or negative value” (Schumann, 2004: 26).

If these criteria are considered in the field of ICT, it is crystal clear that technologies can play an important role in all of these (cf. Caon, 2012):

- a. Technologies are a novelty, in fact they can give students the idea of novelty even if they are embedded in traditional learning;
- b. They create pleasantness because they are well known by students and they are full of creative materials so they can foster both pleasantness and novelty;
- c. As for the goal significance, students can create activities using the pc, in this way learning becomes a tool to create something pleasant and satisfying;
- d. If the student is not at ease in using the language, maybe he or she can be very good at using technologies, in this way he or she can be accepted more easily by his or her mates;
- e. Technologies often offers materials which are game based and promote the learner autonomy providing step-by-step activities, so the student has to deal with his limits and manage them alone or in a situation of cooperative learning provided by the web (learner autonomy and cooperative learning will be analyzed in the following chapters). Thus ICT gives learners the possibility to improve their coping ability.

1.3 Learner Autonomy

Holec (1981: 3) is the first who defines the learner autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. Another definition, among many others, is the one given

by Porcelli and Dolci (1999:130). They claim that it is a process “in cui lo studente lavora, da solo o insieme ad altri, senza il diretto controllo dell’insegnante”. This definition sounds more suitable to the aim of this dissertation, in fact, if analyzed in details, some important features of learner autonomy are highlighted:

- a. *Da solo*. According to Little (2001: 30) “the autonomous learner is capable of managing, monitoring and evaluating his or her own learning”, in fact, autonomous students are responsible of their learning process, but as it will be explained later the ability to work on one’s own depends on some other factors;
- b. *Insieme ad altri*. Autonomy is not innate, but it should be developed, in fact “in formal learning the capacity for autonomy develops from appropriately focused interaction with teachers and other learners” (Little, 2001: 31). As a matter of fact, later, on this dissertation, it will be analyzed the importance of the teacher in helping students to develop their autonomy and the importance of other learners in a cooperative learning context;
- c. *Senza il diretto controllo dell’insegnante*. This does not mean that the teacher is not present at all, indeed, Little (2002:81) claims that “autonomy is not limited to learning without a teacher”. So teachers are there, they are present, but as we have seen in 1.1, they are facilitators, they are no more “sages” who have to fill students-empty containers with their knowledge, they are more like counselors so they do not have “diretto controllo” over learners.

There are also some cognitive and psychological aspects linked to learner autonomy. When it comes to the former, autonomy means being aware of yourself as a learner, that is to say that students should be “aware of the learning techniques they instinctively favor and capable of judging how effective those techniques are” (Little 2002: 86). This can be referred to as learning to learn:

Learning to learn requires an individual to know and understand his/her preferred learning strategies, the strengths and weaknesses of his/her skills and qualifications, and to be able to search for the education and training opportunities. (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning).

As for the latter, instead, according to Menegale (2015: 15) the psychological aspects linked to autonomy are mainly three:

- a. *Volontà*: it is the result of an intrinsic orientation, “si basa sulla motivazione” (Menegale, 2015:17);
- b. *Attribuzioni*: some students consider their achievement as the result of external factors while others recognize that they have the control over their learning process, and this is very important in order to develop autonomy because it is just a learner who takes charge of his own learning (see Little, 2001 above) that can be defined as autonomous;
- c. *Senso di autoefficacia*: a student who is self-confident about his or her capacity of learning is more likely to become autonomous, as a matter of fact, “ritenersi capaci [...] significa aumentare la motivazione” (Menegale, 2015: 18).

As it has been said before, teachers play an important role in this field and the first thing they have to do in order to commit themselves to learners autonomy is to become facilitators, counselors, that is to say that they should:

- a. “Increase learner involvement in organizing the learning process” (Dornyei, 2001: 104). In fact, learners should be involved in some choices about their learning process, such as materials or topics. Moreover they should be given the possibility to be responsible of themselves by working in group or carrying out some projects;
- b. Give students the instruments they need in order to become autonomous, meaning that they should be given the possibility of learning to learn. As a matter of fact, Porcelli and Dolci (1999: 134) state that the main task of the teacher is:

Aiutare lo studente a sviluppare le nozioni metalinguistiche e metacognitive; consigliare o preparare i materiali, dare suggerimenti sulle tecniche e sulla pianificazione del lavoro; fornire supporto psicologico, tenendo viva la motivazione e aiutandolo a superare i momenti critici.

So, it has been highlighted again the role of the teacher as a facilitator and the role of motivation as the core of learning;

- c. Help students to be aware of and improve their cognitive abilities, in fact, the language teacher, thanks to his or her knowledge “favorisce la crescita cognitiva del discente, soprattutto quella linguistica” (Menegale, 2015: 14).

When it comes to the relationship between ICT and learner autonomy, indeed, they seem to complete each other. First of all, it should be noticed that autonomy is not related to the school system only, but it is something useful in social life as well (see Porcelli and Dolci, 1999:131). Moreover, in *the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning*, the Digital Competence which is listed among the other eight and it is defined as follows:

Digital competence involves the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet (European Parliament and the Council, 2006)

As a matter of fact, autonomy and lifelong learning are strictly linked to each other and in the Recommendation, another competence which is listed is that of learning to learn which is fundamental, as it has been said before, in order to reach autonomy. So, in a lifelong learning perspective, the self-access is a key word that deals with a “personale libero accesso all’istruzione” (Porcelli and Dolci, 1999: 130) and consists of a variety of digital materials which are available for whoever wants to learn a language on his own. Lifelong learning, of course, is something that lasts forever, is not limited to school only, but the school and the teacher are important as far as learning to learn is concerned. As a matter of fact, since computers are the main instruments people can use in order to learn on their own and that web 2.0. is full of different, even though not always trustworthy, contents (see also chapters 2 and 3), teachers during the school period should give students the instruments they need to carry out a research or to be able to learn on their own. This means that a teacher is given new competences (cf. Porcelli and Dolci, 1999).

1.4 Cooperative Learning

La lingua è un fenomeno sociale. [...] Le attività basate sulla mediazione sociale sono di natura costruttivistica e anche se con una certa approssimazione, possono essere ricondotte all'apprendimento cooperativo (Balboni, 2013b: 27).

Cooperative learning allows students to use the language they are studying in a meaningful way. Moreover, working together also means helping each other to solve problems they might encounter during the learning process. What students do, when cooperating, is to put together their knowledge in order to complete a certain task. In fact, according to Dornyei (2001:100) peer collaboration is useful “to building the learners’ communicative competence”.

When it comes to the psychological effects cooperative learning has on learners, they are usually positive. As a matter of fact:

Students in cooperative environments have more positive attitudes towards learning and develop higher self-esteem and self-confidence than in other classroom structures (Dornyei, 2001: 100).

When students become self-confident, they become motivated, and learning a language becomes a pleasure that deserves all the efforts the learners have to make. Moreover, when they feel like they are actually sharing a common goal and that they are dependent on each other, they develop an helpful feeling of solidarity. So, cooperative learning “foster class group *cohesiveness*” (Dornyei, 2001:100). According to Dornyei, another positive psychological effect is that students belonging to a group do not experience anxiety because they work “without the immediate supervision of the teacher”. So they work autonomously in a way, and, as it has been said before, autonomy develops from the collaboration with other learners among other factors.

In order to reach these positive results and facilitate language learning, the teacher should choose tasks in which the students must work together and “provide students some ‘social training’ to learn how best to work in a team” (Dornyei, 2001:100) because there might be the risk of inside competitions which is just the contrary of cooperation and could lead to the opposite result (cf. Balboni, 2013b).

As far as ICT is concerned, it has given its contribution to this field as well. As a matter of fact, in the web 2.0 context, everyone has his/her role in the group (Di Sparti A., Dell’Aria C., 2010) and they develop the problem solving ability by cooperating with each other. Web 2.0 is social, there are groups of people, groups of learners who work together to build their knowledge. Some advantages of this possibility of working in virtual communities, according to Di Sparti and Dell’Aria (2010: 160) are:

- a. *Scambi reali con i parlanti nativi;*
- b. *Abbassamento del filtro affettivo* which is a barrier that prevents the student from acquiring language because of “low motivation, high student anxiety, and low student self-esteem” (Krashen, 1989: 10);
- c. *Grande utilizzo della multimedialità e della multisensorialità* (cf. 3.2.2 for an in-depth study);
- d. *Creazione di gruppi “in-world” per la comunicazione, collaborazione e costruzione di conoscenze e competenze;*
- e. *Sviluppo di abilità cognitive e sociali: si apprende dagli altri e la conoscenza è un costrutto sociale;*
- f. *Apprendimento attivo per immersione.*

Moreover, in *blended* and *e-learning* contexts (see Chapter 3), the teacher could ask students to work together in virtual groups, in order to carry out a project or to complete some other tasks. According to Davison and Cummins (2007: 970), “relationship involving cooperative learning and project work is required to truly exploit the potential of ICT”. So, to conclude, it is clear that cooperative learning and ICT are strongly related to each other.

1.5 Game playing in language learning

This chapter is split into two parts. In the first section some literature about the meaning of ludicity will be provided, as play and game and their social and psychological influence on human beings, while the second section deals with how to use ludicity in language learning in order to facilitate students.

1.5.1 Literature

According to Lopes (2008: 275) the concept of ludicity and its consequences, “that is game and game-playing” have their roots in Ancient Greece in which there was a difference between the word *paidéia* and *agôn*. While the former, says Lopes, is “specific to child play [...] but also refers to adult amusement”, the latter “means game” (*ivi*). But why are social sciences so interested in this field? Johan Huizinga answers to this question noticing that “la cultura umana sorga come gioco e si sviluppi” (Huizinga.,1973: XXXI). So game-playing is something that is part of human beings and develops with them and this happens thanks to the nature of game as a pleasant activity. However, what Huizinga does not say about this theme is how games can be categorized and that is why the French Roger Caillois criticizes him, in a way. As a matter of fact, Caillois (1981: 28-29) suggests:

Una suddivisione in quattro categorie principali a seconda che, nei giochi considerati, predomini il ruolo della competizione, del caso, del simulacro o della vertigine. Le ho chiamate rispettivamente: Agon, Alea, Mimicry e Ilinx. [...] tuttavia, queste designazioni non esauriscono ancora l'intero universo del gioco. Esse lo dividono in quadranti ciascuno dei quali è dominato da un principio originale. Delimitano dei settori che racchiudono giochi della stessa specie. [...] E li si può contemporaneamente ordinare fra due poli antagonisti. A un'estremità regna, quasi incondizionatamente. In principio comune di divertimento, di turbolenza, di libera improvvisazione e di spensierata pienezza vitale, attraverso cui si manifesta una fantasia di tipo incontrollato che si può designare con il nome di paidia. All'estremità opposta, questa esuberanza irrequieta e spontanea è quasi totalmente assorbita, e comunque disciplinata, da una tendenza complementare, opposta sotto certi aspetti, ma non tutti, alla sua natura anarchica e capricciosa: un'esigenza crescente di piegarla a delle convenzioni arbitrarie, imperative e di proposito ostacolanti, di contrastarla sempre di più drizzandole davanti ostacoli via via sempre più ingombranti allo scopo di renderle più arduo il pervenire al risultato ambito [...]. A questa seconda componente do il nome di ludus.

So according to Caillois there are four categories of games and they are distributed between these two opposite poles which are *paideia* and *ludus*. While the former is dominated by an unrestrained freedom and fantasy, the latter is more regulated.

From the psychological and social points of view there are a lot of researches in this field. One of the scholars who studied the role of games in humans' life is Vygotskij.

He finds a strict relationship between game-playing and learning and he gives reasons for that by using a metaphor:

Come il fuoco di una lente d'ingrandimento, il gioco contiene tutte le tendenze dello sviluppo in forma condensata; nel gioco è come se il bambino cercasse di saltare oltre il livello del proprio comportamento normale (Vygotskij, 1966: 675).

Bruner agrees with him saying that game-playing is linked to learning and states that this link is realized through language, in fact, games:

Forniscono la prima occasione al bambino per l'uso sistematico del linguaggio con un adulto e offrono la prima opportunità di esplorare come far fare le cose con le parole. Infatti le parole del gioco sono potenzialmente dei puri performativi (Bruner, 1987: 37-8).

So, as it will be clearer in 1.5.2 game-playing is very important in language learning because it gives students the possibility to use the language as a way to reach a goal (language is not the goal itself in game based learning) and in a meaningful context. Moreover, another scholar who agrees with Bruner and thinks that language can be learnt in a ludic way is Demetrio who claims that:

Si dimentica spesso di considerare che il nostro rapporto con le lettere dell'alfabeto, via via combinate in parole e frasi sensate, rappresentò per ciascuno di noi anche una sorta di iniziazione al gioco e, simultaneamente, di iniziazione alla scrittura come gioco (Demetrio. 2006:1).

So, as it has been said so far, both language and writing can be learnt in a ludic way because ludicity is linked to learning. But what does ludicity means? Lopes who has been already quoted above, defines game and game playing as two consequences of ludicity. This latter, says Lopes, comes from the Latin verb *ludere* which means “to exercise” and “from the adjective *ludus* which characterizes that exercise” (2008: 277). Moreover, according to Lopes, ludicity is something that involves both children and adults.

When it comes to *game* and *play*, instead, Lopes claims that they “can both be said to be consequences of human ludicity and yet different in the way they manifest themselves”

(2008: 275). As there is a difference between *paideia* and *agôn* and *paidia* and *ludus*, a third dichotomy is game and play. These two terms can be defined as it follows:

- a. Play is “caratterizzato da libertà e assenza di limitazioni, gratuità, piacere, creatività, movimento, relazione con l’ambiente fisico e umano, sperimentazione, manipolazione” (Caon and Rutka 2004: 30). Play is a *competence* (Lombardi, 2013: 52)
- b. Game is a *performance*, “la trasformazione della volontà ludica in un atto solitamente governato da regole personali e sociali” (Lombardi, 2013:52).

Now that some definitions have been provided, it will be clearer how ludic didactics can facilitate language learning.

1.5.2 Ludicity in Language Learning and Teaching

The link between ludicity and language learning can be explained using the goals of modern linguistic education listed by Freddi:

<i>Metè generali dell’educazione linguistica</i>
Autorealizzazione del soggetto
(culturalizzazione)
(socializzazione)
(relativismo culturale)

Table 2
(adapted by Lombardi, 2013: 71)

The goals listed between brackets are part of the process of self-realization, but they can also be considered as separate goals. The role of ludicity, in this field, can be explained through the concept of “etnomotricità ludica” (Staccioli, 2004: 70) which means that the way students play is a witness of their culture and their social values. But as Caon and

Rutka highlight in their study, game-playing is also something which goes over the single culture. It can unify different learners belonging to different cultures because:

Tutti i bambini, indipendentemente dalla loro provenienza geografica e culturale, giocano e condividono alcuni aspetti appartenenti a una 'grammatica universale ludica'” (Caon, Rutka, 2004: 41).

Thus, by playing, students learn to know and understand each other and themselves which means that they reach two of the linguistic education goals: cultural relativism and culturalization . As for the other two, socialization and self-realization, they are both fulfilled using ludicity as a learning methodology, as a matter of fact, game-playing gives birth to a community of learners who are also players, which means that, as Lombardi affirms:

Il singolo è accomunato ai suoi pari, è connotato da un'identità di gruppo e aderisce al sentire comune, ne condivide le regole e ivi instaura legami, ma, allo stesso tempo, acquisisce una sempre maggiore consapevolezza di sé (Lombardi, 2013:73).

So, by playing, the students learn to know themselves and their mates, in other words they are able to work autonomously or in a cooperative way. As a matter of fact, Lopes states that ludicity “influences our states of mind, the way we understand ourselves and others” (2008: 282).

The ludic methodology in class is also useful thank to *the rule of forgetting* by Krashen because one learns better when he or she is not aware of learning a language. According to Freddi (1990 in Balboni, 2013b: 29) there are different components of ludicity that are able to facilitate language learning which are:

- a. *Cognitive*: as it has been said before, students learn to know themselves while playing. Moreover, ludic activities often requires to elaborate a strategy and this means that game-playing allows the enhancement of different types of intelligences. Moreover, game-playing stimulates the bimodality of the brain, that is to say that both cerebral hemispheres are involved while playing and using the language (see Balboni, 2013b; Novello, 2007)
- b. *Linguistiche*: Bruner (cf. quotation in 1.5.1) states that by playing students learn to explain things, as the game rules in this case, with new words and to convey

meanings. Moreover, they use language in a meaningful situation and they learn cultural routines such as playing rock scissor paper;

- c. *Sociali*: a single student cooperates with his or her peers in order to reach the goal of the game and learns to know the other members of the group. As a result, game-playing leads to better class living conditions;
- d. *Emotive*: as said above, pleasure is one of the feelings given by playing, but there are other feelings involved such as fear and anxiety, but also fun. However, Krashen's *rule of forgetting* is applied and students use the language without feeling anxious.

Moreover, according to Balboni (2013b), playing helps memorization as well. In this way activities characterized by repetition, which are usually considered to be boring, become a pleasure in a ludic environment because ludicity itself is characterized by repetition.

When it comes to ICT, Web 2.0 is full of multimedia and multisensory resources that make learning more interesting and motivating. Moreover, as it will be explained later on, it is an instrument which is well known by nowadays students who find it pleasant. Web 2.0 is social so it allows cooperative learning situations and yet it gives learners the possibility to learn on their own. Furthermore, Mezzadri (2004: 146) states that “*si impara facendo, si impara e si prova piacere*” which means that a ludic activity, which is supposed to be pleasant, in a digital context, allows students to learn by doing, by using the language for a purpose which goes over the language itself. In fact, Mezzadri notices that “*una dimensione tipica del mondo di oggi porta i bambini, gli adolescenti e gli adulti a dedicarsi alle più svariate attività di simulazione in Internet*” (*ibid*: 147). In addition, playing on the Internet gives students the possibility to challenge themselves. An in-depth study about ludicity and videogames will be provided in chapters 3 and 4.

1.6 Language Learning through Music

Before starting this chapter, it should be convenient to recall the Multiple Intelligence Theory by Howard Gardner. As it has been stated before, Gardner lists eight

Intelligences in his study, but there are two which are particularly interesting to the aim of this chapter:

- a. *Musical*: Sensitivity to rhythm, pitch, meter, tone, melody and timbre. May entail the ability to sing, play musical instruments, and/or compose music (e.g. musical conductor).
- b. *Linguistic*: Sensitivity to the meaning of words, the order among words, and the sound, rhythms, inflections, and meter of words (e.g. poet). (Sometimes called language intelligence.)

(Gardner, <http://multipleintelligencesoasis.org/about/the-components-of-mi/#box-4>)

One can notice that some of the words used by Gardner in order to define these intelligences make these latter pretty related to each other: sound, rhythms, meter belong to both music and language environments. As a matter of fact, Kristina Robertson (2014) notices that “music and language are linked in Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences” and that they can be supported by doing the same activity, that is “by listening to and analyzing popular songs from the times”. Therefore, the question one could pose is: why can music be so important in language learning? As everybody knows, music is part of our daily life and it is very important, especially as far as adolescents are concerned. It is well known, as Caon and Spaliviero notice (2015), that music has some important implications in the emotional, social and cognitive development. When it comes to emotions, Mark Joseph Stern (2014) observes in his article, published on *Ilpost.it*, that nothing produces such an emotional reaction as music does. The reasons for that, can be found in the mode of operation of the brain. As a matter of fact, music and songs, says Stern, “stimolano le regioni del cervello che regolano il piacere e che rilasciano dopamina, serotonina, ossitocina e altri elementi neurochimici che ci fanno sentire bene”. All these elements facilitate student's process of learning because they prevent them to activate the affective filter, which, as it has been observed before, does not let students acquire the language. So, pleasure and the effects it has on one's brain are some of the reasons why music can facilitate language learning. This effect is even stronger in teenagers and young adults from 12 to 22 years old (Stern, 2014) because this pleasure is even amplified by the growth hormones. In fact these hormones “dicono al nostro cervello che ogni cosa è incredibilmente

importante: specialmente quelle canzoni che formano la colonna sonora dei nostri *teenage dreams*” and this is the reason why people remember and appreciate songs belonging to the period of their adolescence more easily. Consequently, it can also be observed how this can be very useful in language learning, because songs linked to learning in this period of time (12-22) are more liable to be remembered.

The fact that music is important for both emotional and cognitive developments means that it involves both cerebral hemispheres and according to Guglielmino (1986: 20) “l’emisfero destro impara la melodia, quello sinistro le parole”.

Moreover, music facilitates memorization because it is repetitive and while, as already stated before, repetitions are usually considered to be boring, in songs, instead, repetitions are appreciated because they make a song even more catchy. Therefore it is likely to last longer in one’s mind and to facilitate language learning. In fact, Caon and Spaliviero (2015:99) write that a song:

Facilita una memorizzazione ‘spontanea’ del testo, grazie alla sua fusione con la musica: la ripetizione di elementi lessicali e strutture, caratteristica peculiare del testo cantato (si pensi ai ritornelli), si rivela un grande vantaggio per la facilitazione dell’apprendimento linguistico, anche perché essi non vengono appresi in modo isolato, ma fanno parte di una struttura narrativa, in cui contesto e contesto favoriscono tanto la motivazione quanto la comprensione.

Memorization is easier thanks to some particular features of songs, which according to Nicosia (1996: 7) are: “la melodia, la rima, la ripetizione e la ridondanza”. Given the fact that students like music and they learn songs in an unconscious way, teachers could take advantage of what students have learnt unconsciously to make them aware of what they already know, increasing their motivation. In fact, one of the advantages of the use of music in class is that it can involve students in a more active way, because songs are able to involve students from both motivational and neurolinguistic points of view. Furthermore, songs are also good witnesses of sociolinguistic because singers often reveals typical sociolinguistics aspects, so it can be understood where the singer comes from and what are the peculiarities of his or her idiolect. As a matter of fact, songs are very important in language learning because they present language in a meaningful context: “[la canzone] è materiale autentico di lingua” (*ibid*: 97).

However, music is also a way to socialize with others, in fact, Giordano Dall'Armellina (2004: 125) writes:

Molti giovani apprendono le canzoni perché le cantano gli altri, perché questo [...] è un modo per socializzare, 'fare gruppo' e soprattutto per condividere uno stato emozionale.

Not only is music a way to socialize with others but also a way to know other cultures because it belongs to what Caon and Spaliviero (2015:112) define “universalia”, which means something linked to all human beings' common needs. So, on the one hand, music unifies cultures because it is linked to emotional and cognitive needs which are human specific, on the other hand it is:

Codificazione ed espressione originale e diversificata di un sentire comune radicato in un luogo, in un tempo, in una tradizione e in una cultura peculiari (Caon, Spaliviero, 2015:112).

Thus, not only songs are useful in language learning environments because they are witnesses of language used in a meaningful context but they are also important witnesses of the culture of people belonging to a certain community. When it comes to teachers, music is an important instrument they can use in order to get students more involved. Songs and music are something young adults know, understand and, most important, like.

As far as technology is concerned (see also chapter 3 and 4), YouTube and Mp3 give teachers the possibility to use two powerful instruments in order to make students listen to music. Moreover, these instruments are also well known by young learners and this gives them the possibility to cooperate with their “digital immigrant” teacher (see chapter 1.1 and 2).

CHAPTER 2

Information and Communication Technologies

The aim of this chapter is to present the technologies, especially those related to Web 2.0, which are available in learning context. First of all, a general description of Italy's National Plan for Digital education will be provided in order to understand what Italy has done and is going to do in order to innovate school. Later on, the characteristics of Web 2.0 will be analyzed and some general consequences of the use of this resource at school will be introduced (for an in-depth study, see also chapter 3). At the end of this chapter, the problem of the digital divide will be discussed.

2.1 Italy's National Plan for Digital School

In 2007 the Italian Ministry of Education commissioned the National Plan for Digital Schools (PNSD, Piano Nazionale Scuola Digitale) in order to innovate the educational school system. The aim of this plan is to introduce technologies in classrooms, indeed, this is a turning point with respect to the past when computers were just used in specific laboratories. Moreover, as specified in the *Review of the Italian Strategy for Digital Schools*, ICT can actually be used “in all subject fields and at all levels of education” (Avvisati *et al.*, 2013: 15). This Plan has been commissioned in order to increase teachers and learners ICT skills, in fact, as it has already been stated before, the digital competence is one of the eight competences listed by the *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council* in 2006. In addition, this digitalization of schools is seen as a “catalyzer for the renewal of teaching practices” (*ibid*: 16), which means, using Prensky's words: “adapting materials to the language of Digital Natives” (Prensky, 2001a: 4). As a matter of fact, one of the aims of the introduction of ICT in class is that of integrate the traditional methodologies with new ones based on technologies and these latter, as it will be explained later on, are more suitable for 21st century students.

In the period from 2007 to 2012, many projects have been promoted to realize the aims of the PNSD:

- a. *IWB* (Interactive Whiteboard) action (Piano LIM, Lavagna Interattiva Multimediale): the Ministry of Education starts this project in 2008 and provides schools this technological kit. The aim is to make teachers and students more familiar with technologies. However, still by August 2012, just “22% of all Italian classrooms had been equipped with interactive whiteboards” (Avvisati, 2013: 18);
- b. *Cl@sse 2.0* whose slogan is “non più la classe in laboratorio, ma il laboratorio in classe” (MIUR, 2015: 12). It starts in 2009 and the goal is:

To pilot IT-rich learning environments that radically innovate on the traditional organisation of teaching and learning, and thereby to identify effective approaches to embedding ICT in pedagogy and particularly in whole-class activities (Avvisati et al., 2013: 19)

So, again, it deals with the integration of new methodologies of teaching and learning with old ones. Furthermore there is an attempt to find the best way to realize it. Of course, this requires a specific teachers’ training which is managed by INDIRE (Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa) and it works as follows:

The training system is based on a blended model that includes face-to-face meetings and online activities performed on an e-learning environment built on constructivist instructional design principles. Trainees-teachers are divided in groups of 20 to 25, sharing an online virtual classroom and supported by an e-tutor. The e-tutor meets the group of teachers in the face-to-face meetings and supports and moderates the online activities administrating the virtual classroom collaborative tools (ibid: 20).

The project involves just 416 classes (MIUR 2015; Avvisati *et al.*, 2013), but the outcomes are definitely positive. In fact, 90% of students affirms that they feel more engaged and motivated (Avvisati *et al.*, 2013);

- c. *Scuol@ 2.0* starts in 2011 and it has the same aims as *Cl@sse 2.0*, but it involves the whole schools instead of just classes;
- d. *Azione editoria digitale scolastica* starts in 2010 and it wants to equip schools with digital contents. It involves 20 schools and its aim is “to stimulate editors to

supply contents for technology-rich classrooms” (Avvisati *et al.*, 2013: 22). In addition, these contents, according to INDIRE and the ministry of education

Must satisfy a multidisciplinary and pluri-disciplinary approach, be flexible in terms of its possible uses (graphic display, practice, individual and social production), and be highly accessible (multi-platform, multi-device, and offline availability) (Avvisati et al., 2013: 22).

- e. *Azione Centri Scolastici Digitali (CSD)* which was born in 2012 and its aim is to set up distance learning in order to involve schools located in geographical uncomfortable places (MIUR, 2015: 13);
- f. *Accordi MIUR-Regioni* for which the ministry signed agreements with 12 Italian regions in 2012 in order to spread the use of ICT in schools (*ivi*).

However, according to the most recent survey commissioned by the European Union, in 2011-12, the presence and the use of ICT in Italian schools with respect to the rest of Europe (27 countries are involved in this survey), is not so spread. As a matter of fact, according to this survey there are 12 students per computer which puts Italy among the bottom countries (European Schoolnet, 2013: 6). Moreover, computers connected to the internet are very few. This is also true, as far as LIM is concerned, in fact, there are 77 students for interactive whiteboard at grade 8, which puts Italy at the tenth position, but at other grades the situation gets worse (*ibid*: 7). As for the use of ICT by teachers, instead, Italy is more or less in a middle position.

Hopefully, in order to increase the presence, use and quality of ICT in schools, there are other projects commissioned by the ministry of education:

- a. *Azione wi-fi* in 2014 in order to ameliorate the internet connection in schools (Miur, 2015: 14);
- b. *Azione Poli Formativi* which starts in 2013 and has as its aim, the teachers’ training in order to increase their digital competence (Miur, 2015: 14).

Moreover the Technology observatory registers a presence of 7.9 students per device in 2014, which means that the situation is better with respect to two years before. However, teachers’ digital competence is still insufficient in 2013 and this is why:

I dati dell'indagine OCSE TALIS 2013 vedono l'Italia al primo posto per necessità di formazione ICT dei propri docenti: almeno il 36% ha infatti dichiarato di non essere sufficientemente preparato per la didattica digitale, a fronte di una media del 17% (Miur, 2015: 19).

The project known as La Buona Scuola (MIUR, 2015), puts among its aims those of make schools better from the digital point of view. In fact, some of the many goals it wants to achieve, by 2016, are:

- a. A broadband connection;
- b. New didactic digital environments;
- c. BYOD: Bring Your Own Device is a project that aims to allow students to use their personal devices for educational purposes;
- d. A common framework for the students' digital competences which are important “in quanto parte dell’alfabetizzazione del nostro tempo e fondamentali competenze per una cittadinanza piena” (Miur, 2015: 72).
- e. A better teachers' training guided by a professional;
- f. The introduction of the *animatore digitale*: a new important figure whose role is that of spreading innovation at school.

2.2 Web 2.0

The Web has been developed at the beginning of the nineties for scientific purposes. Then it started to involve other contexts (cf. Bonaiuti, 2006), but the real change occurred with Web 2.0. It is a great evolution of the World Wide Web because, as Andrea Kárpáti states (2006:2):

While Web 1.0 was the “readable web” where the dominant activity was reception of texts, sounds and images, Web 2.0 is the “writable web”, where creation of new content is dominant.

Thanks to the potentialities of this evolution, it is possible to create, edit and share any kind of content, from a text to a video. Moreover, Web 2.0 can also be defined as the “merge between private and public knowledge” (ibid: 6). This idea will be clarified by

explaining some of the most important features which differentiate Web 2.0 from the previous stage:

- a. UGC;
- b. Social Networking;
- c. Cloud Computing;
- d. Mobility;
- e. Scale free

(Sankar K, Bouchard S. A., 2009: 18)

UGC, means User-Generated Contents, which is one of the main characteristics of Web 2.0. It is the possibility to create and edit one's own digital materials. Content creators can work on their own or together, in fact, Kárpáti (2006: 6) defines Web 2.0 as a "knowledge building community" and this also has some positive effects on language learners and teachers, as it will be clearer in chapter 3. In fact, teachers can create digital materials to share among each other and with their students: websites, activities, games, learning objects (see chapter 3) and so on and so forth. In addition, they can have their students create something together in order to make them feel more involved in the learning process. The perfect example of how UGC works is Wikipedia, a digital encyclopedia where "an entry can be added by any user and edited by any other" (*ibid*: 7):

Nata nel 2001, è uno dei siti più visitati al mondo, con circa sessanta milioni di accessi al giorno (dato del 2012). Utilizzando un sistema di modifica e pubblicazione aperto, quest'enciclopedia è scritta dai suoi stessi utenti, i quali collaborano al progetto a titolo gratuito e senza la mediazione di esperti (Giusti, 2015:93)

The risk of UGC might be that of false or incorrect information, but, hopefully, "Wikipedia editors exchange good practice about detecting and correcting incorrect data and banning harmful or incorrect content" (Kárpáti, 2006: 7). However many of the contents created online are not so trustworthy, in fact, as it will be explained later on, one of the main roles of school, as far as digital competence is concerned, is to give students some guidelines in order to carry out a research or find information they need, in fact:

Skills needed include the ability to search, collect and process information and use it in a critical and systematic way, assessing relevance and distinguishing the real from the virtual while recognizing the links. (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning).

So, the positive outcome of UGC is that teachers can integrate their traditional materials with digital ones created by themselves, while the negative aspect is that contents created by many other common users are not always trustworthy. This phenomenon, however, has very good potentialities as far as communication and creativity are concerned. In fact, using CMS, Content Management System, they can create their own websites and their own digital environment in order to get students more involved and motivated (see chapter 4 for an in-depth study). Unfortunately this practice does not seem to be so spread, in fact just a small part of European users is a content creator (Cf. Giusti, 2015). However, for those who actually are content creators, the trustworthiness of information is not the only issue they should face while creating a website or some digital materials. In fact, as it will be shown in chapter 2.3, new students are digital natives and they give a lot of importance to graphic. Moreover, there is a rule, in website creation contexts, that must be respected: *web-usability*. The European Commission defines it as follows:

Web usability is an approach to make websites easy to use for an end-user. Without requiring her (or him) to undergo any specialized training. The user should be able to intuitively relate the actions he needs to perform on the web page with other interactions he sees in the general domain of life, e.g. press of a button leads to some action ([http:// ec.europa.eu/ ipg/design/ usability/ index_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/design/usability/index_en.htm)).

Social Networking, is one of the reasons why Web 2.0 is also referred to as the Social Web. There are plenty of social network such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr and so on, and students seem to be very fond of their social profiles. This is probably due to the fact that people feel at ease if they know that they are part of a community because, as Kárpáti (2006: 4) affirms “being part of a community enhances self-respect”. This is typical of human nature, according to Di Sparti and Dall’Aria (2010: 157). In fact, generally speaking, the use of social network and social web “va incontro ad una esigenza di comunicazione complessa, ricca e multisensoriale, tipica del sistema

conoscitivo umano”. In addition, to understand how popular these social networks are, it is sufficient to think that Facebook had millions of users in 2009 and some of them declared that they used it fifty times a day (Sankar, Bouchard, 2009: 19). In the last seven years, this number increased and increased, and today (last updated 1st January 2016) Facebook counts 1,100,000,000 users all over the World (<http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-networking-websites>). In this context, people can write, comment, edit, share their own or somebody else’s post. Moreover, they can publish pictures, music, newspaper articles, everything one can find in web 2.0 can be shared, commented, modified without using external devices, computers can do this all. As far as learning is concerned, social networks are populated by students who consider them familiar and pleasant and this is why social community based learning is really appreciated by pupils. Social networks answer the need to be part of a community. In fact they allow contacts among people “sulla base di competenze, hobby o interessi di ricerca, studio e lavoro comuni” (Bonaiuti, 2007: 27).

Cloud Computing. It is a web storage where people can publish and share different contents. All the resources published on a *cloud* can be accessed by any device with an internet connection. Moreover, it gives people the possibility to have access to all sort of content. So, given the fact that Web 2.0 is based on “knowledge building community”, it is clear how much this source can be useful in order to be aware of and share information about something of common interest. The best example of Cloud Computing is Dropbox which allows people to storage up to 2GB for free (Giusti, 2015: 73). Of course, this instrument is very useful for students who want to share their notes or for teachers who created digital materials for pupils or for other teachers.

Mobility. This is a consequence of the pervasive power of cell phones and, because of that, “mobile web has become a moniker for Web 2.0” (Sankar, Bouchard, 2009: 24). This is also why many web sites are created in order to be responsive, that is to say compatible with mobile devices. Sometimes producers create apps in order to make it easy for users to browse certain sites, and this is the case of Facebook or some newspapers such as *The Guardian* or *Corriere della sera*.

Scale free. This is a very important aspect of Web 2.0 because “there is no upper or lower limit to the number of users that visit a site” (*ibid*: 23). This means that people can surf, write, comment on the same site at the same time. As for the learning context,

scale free gives students the possibility to work together, at the same time as if they were at school during a cooperative activity.

Of course, Web 2.0 gave its own contribution to learning. First of all, most of didactic material which is present in the Internet has the form of an hypertext which can be defined using Landow's words:

Definirei l'ipertesto come qualsiasi forma di testualità – parole, immagini, suoni – che si presenti in blocchi o unità di lettura collegati da link. Si tratta, essenzialmente di una forma di testo che permette al lettore di abbracciare o di percorrere una grande quantità di informazione in modi scelti dal lettore stesso, e, nel contempo, in modi previsti dall'autore. Se dovessi definire l'ipertesto con una o due frasi, direi che l'ipertesto è una forma di testo composta da blocchi di "scrittura" e immagini collegati da link, che permette una lettura multilineare: non una lettura non lineare o non sequenziale, ma una lettura multi sequenziale (Landow, 2005: 39)

The main features of an hypertext are web navigation, interactivity and multimedia (cf. Cremascoli, 2000) which allow to create useful learning tools and environments:

- a. LIM: an interactive whiteboard with which the teacher can integrate the traditional teaching practice with the digital one.

La LIM è uno strumento di integrazione con la didattica d'aula poiché coniuga la forza della visualizzazione e della presentazione tipiche della lavagna tradizionale con le opportunità del digitale e della multimedialità (Fenu, 2014)

Teachers, in this way, can access all that sources which were just accessible in specific and not always working laboratories before the advent of this new technology. Moreover, thanks to cloud computing, there are texts in many languages that the teacher can access and read in class with his/her pupils. There are also some websites such as Youtube that allow language learners to improve their language by listening to music or watching some videos. However, next chapter will highlight a problem related to teachers' competence in ICT: as immigrants of the digital language, they do not always feel at ease in using LIM.

- b. E-tandem: it gives the students the possibility to work at school or at home, they only need an internet connection. In fact, in e-tandem learning, two students of

different mother tongues collaborate in order to learn each other language, and this is possible, according to Lewis (2005: 166) using:

- i. *E-mail;*
- ii. *Chat;*
- iii. *Audioconferencing;*
- iv. *Videoconferencing.*

The difference among them is that while e-mail is asynchronous and requires “greater explicitness to maintain effective communications” (*ivi*), the other three instruments are synchronous and so more effective as far as communication is concerned.

- c. e-learning: usually platforms/website in which students can learn by cooperating, playing and sharing information;
- d. videogame: they are very useful in order to develop some cognitive skills, such as problem solving ability and selective attention, which will be better explained in chapter 3.3.

For an in-depth study about the consequences that these digital innovations have on education see chapter 3, that deals with how to facilitate language learning using all these digital instruments.

2.3 Digital Divide

“Our students today are all ‘native speakers’ of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet”. This is what Prensky declares (2001a:1) when trying to describe this new generation of learners. However, every generation of digital natives distinguish itself from the others in the use of different digital instruments. Giusti (2015:19-21) lists four generations:

- a. *Text Generation*. It is characterized by the use of e-mails, SMS, chat and Newsgroup. The spread of this technology leads to the creation of new virtual communities with no space limits and the creation of a new language;
- b. *Web Generation*. The web allows people to have access to all kind of contents and this leads also to piracy in some cases;

- c. *Social Media Generation*. It consists of those people who belong to Web 2.0 society. Users of this new web evolution, as it has been said before, can write, comment, edit and share any kind of file;
- d. *Touch Generation*. It is typical of the “baby digital native” who does not know the language and yet they are able to use a Smartphone. Mobile devices, such as Smartphone and tablet, allow people to play, read news, listen to music, send messages and use social networks everywhere thanks to this new technology which is internet-connected.

The expression “digital natives” is used to describe the relationship between “individuals and digital technologies” (Giusti, 2015: 21) in every context so it can include the learning one as well.

What is going to be analyzed in the next lines is what separates the digital natives from the immigrants and what is the difference between the use of technologies outside the school and in the learning environment.

In order to better understand these two different language “speakers”, it could be useful to provide some definitions:

- a. *Digital natives* are “ ‘native speakers’ of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet” (Prensky, 2001a: 1). They are people who were born in 1996, when the first browsers came out (Ferri, 2008a), and that can use the new digital instrument with no difficulty;
- b. *Digital immigrants*, instead, are “those of us who were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in our lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology” (Prensky, 2001a: 1).

Digital immigrants, however are getting used to new technologies, but in a different way. In fact, Ferri (2008a) claims that “per noi nativi Gutenberg, il blog o la posta elettronica sono strumenti, per loro sono una parte integrante dello loro immagine del sé e delle loro relazioni sociali”. So, digital immigrants do not use technologies with same frequency and to the same aim as natives. Moreover some practice of the immigrants might be seen as pretty funny by natives. In fact, Prensky (2001a) tells some stories about it, saying that some of them use to print an e-mail they have just received or they

make a phone call in order to verify that somebody else has received the one they have sent. In fact, Prensky (2001a: 1) affirms that digital immigrants “always retain, to some degree, their accent”.

There are evidences, according to Ferri, who based their theories on Prensky’s study, that students, as digital natives, have changed their way of learning, in fact “students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors” (Prensky, 2001a:1). Growing up in a multimedia and multi-sensory world characterized by hypertexts, virtual realities and multi-task, students’ brain seems to have physically changed. In fact they proceed for “parallel process and multi-task” (*ibid*: 2). Moreover, “they prefer their graphic before their text [...], random access and games [instead of] serious work” (Prensky, 2001a: 2). As for digital immigrants, teachers in this case, they seem not to understand how it is possible that their pupils learn by watching television or by playing videogames. Moreover, they are not always likely to abandon their “step-by-step” lessons. Thus students get bored and motivation falls apart. When it comes to suggest what teachers should do, Prensky (2001a: 4) suggests that “today’s teachers have to learn to communicate in the language and style of their students”. This does not mean, of course that they have to change or lower the meaning of what is important, but they just need to find “new ways to teach old stuff”, that is to say, as Prensky declares: “we need to invent digital native methodologies for all subject, at all levels, using our students to guide us” (Prensky, 2001a: 4). This is very important as far as motivation is concerned, because as it has been said before, the collaboration between teachers and pupils, in this field, makes the latter more confident about their competences and they feel more part of their learning process. So they also feel definitely more motivated.

To summarize all the ideas expressed by Ferri and Prensky in this field, they are, according to Giusti (2015: 19):

- a. *Tutti i membri delle nuove generazioni sono trasformati dai media;*
- b. *Tale trasformazione riguarda i comportamenti, i processi cognitivi e la dimensione simbolica;*
- c. *Tale trasformazione avviene nella prima fase della vita del soggetto, che si differenzia così dalle generazioni precedenti;*
- d. *Il risultato della trasformazione è la “trasparenza” delle tecnologie, cioè il loro uso immediato ed intuitivo.*

So digital natives are actually a new generation of people who were born in a digitalized society. They use digital instrument very easily because they know them since ever. That is why they are so different from the immigrants who are trying to learn a new language and as Prensky (2001a: 2) says, “a language learned later in life, scientists tell us, goes into a different part of the brain”. However, Riva (2014: 15-16) does not agree with Prensky and Ferry. Actually, he recognizes that something has changed in students’ brain, but it does not think that a digital native belongs to a specific generation and that digital immigrants cannot reach the same competences. In fact, he declares:

Un nativo digitale non è qualcuno che fin dalla nascita è in grado di usare le tecnologie, ma piuttosto chi le sa usare intuitivamente senza sforzo. Questo però non avviene per caso. Si diventa nativi digitali solo dedicando una quantità significativa di tempo e di energie all’interazione quotidiana con i nuovi media.

So, according to Riva, everyone can become a digital native if he or she wants to. What is needed is training and, as it has been highlighted by the PNSD, teachers’ training in digital competences is one of the aims they want to reach in order to innovate school. Moreover, if Riva is right, it means that students and teachers will speak the same language again.

The most important reason why instructors should get closer to their pupils, as far as ICT is concerned, is that the latter:

Are used to instantaneity of hypertext, downloaded music, phones in their pockets, a library on their laptops, beamed messaging and instant messaging. [...] they have little patience for lectures, step-by-step logic, and tell-test instructions (Prensky, 2001a: 3).

As a result students do not pay attention, because the way of processing information at school is too different from their own. In addition if their attention is short at school, this is not the case in different contexts. In fact, says Prensky (2001b: 4):

Their attention spans are not short for games, for example, or for anything else that actually interests them. As a result of their experiences Digital Natives crave interactivity an immediate response to their each and every action.

Today's pupils, or better digital natives, are already used to look for something that matches their interest online. For example, they usually connect to "interest driven networks" that "permettono di entrare in contatto con altre persone che condividono medesimi interessi" (Favaro, 2012: 72). This is the case of groups on facebook, for example. Nowadays there are groups for everything, especially among students who use them to share notes, information and to ask questions. Moreover, interest-driven networks can also be exploit to show off one own creativity, in fact, Favaro (*ibid*: 73) describes them as places where:

I ragazzi condividono le loro creazioni e ricevono il feedback degli altri partecipanti sviluppando così una forma di apprendimento autonomo legato ai propri interessi.

This is, of course, a very good possibility offered by Web 2.0: people can get in contact with people who not only share their own interest but they are also specialist in the field. However, what is striking is that students declare:

Che questo tipo di feedback è, ai loro occhi, più autentico rispetto alle valutazioni scolastiche, perché il lavoro svolto non era semplicemente legato all'assegnazione di un voto (Favaro, 2012: 73).

In a situation like this, teachers cannot ignore the fact that their students have achieved a different way of learning and this should drive them to consider the use of ICT in class as a good way to innovate their lessons and, most important, to motivate their students. In fact, "per I ragazzi queste tecnologie sembrano costituire degli strumenti naturali di apprendimento e di socializzazione" (*ibid*: 77).

However, even if pupils seem to be familiar with digital technologies, they do not always use them in the correct way, or at least they are not totally aware of the potentialities they might have in language learning context. So they need a guide, a facilitator who will guide them in order to reach a higher digital competence. In fact, says Giusti (2015: 27):

Lo sviluppo della competenza digitale è affidato a tutti i docenti, che, di fatto, sono chiamati in prima persona a utilizzare le tic [ict] e a riconfigurare il loro metodi di insegnamento.

Consequently, the divide that exists between school use of technologies and the outside one is strongly linked to the digital natives/immigrants divide. In order to close it, teachers, who are responsible for their pupils knowledge, should guide them and yet learn from them who are more competent in this field. Another problem, linked to the presence and use of ICT in classrooms is of course that highlighted on the previous chapter: there are still not enough digital instrument at school. But this does not mean that teachers could not create their own virtual learning classrooms. In fact, space is not a problem anymore since the advent of web 2.0 and school homework can be done online as it will be explained in chapter 3 when talking about CMS (Content Management System).

CHAPTER 3

The use of ICT to facilitate language learning

This chapter will deal with the relationship that exist between ICT and education. Moreover it will be given a description of the digital resources (both physical and virtual) that teachers can use in order to motivate students, in particular, the creation of websites and the tools to do it, will be provided.

3.1 ICT and Education

A definition of digital competence has already been given : it consists of the ability to use TSI in a confident and critical way by using ICT. However, students do not have to do this on their own, they can take advantage of a guide, a tutor: their teacher. It has also been discussed above that, the importance of a digital competence is not linked to the school period only, but it is something that last all lifelong. In fact, in order to achieve competences for a lifelong learning, students first need is learning to learn and this latter requires ICT skills, among others. As a result, students should reach some ICT competences since primary school level. As a matter of fact, in the National Recommendation for Curriculum written by the Education Minister Francesco Profumo in 2012, two of the aims pupils should achieve by the end of their first cycle of school are:

- a. *Riesce ad utilizzare una lingua europea nell'uso delle tecnologie dell'informazione e della comunicazione;*
- b. *Ha buone competenze digitali, usa con consapevolezza le tecnologie della comunicazione per ricercare e analizzare dati ed informazioni, per distinguere informazioni attendibili da quelle che necessitano di approfondimento, di controllo e di verifica e per interagire con soggetti diversi nel mondo.*

(Indicazioni nazionali per il curriculum della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione, 2012: 10)

As far as high school is concerned, instead, there are also some suggestions destined to teachers. As a matter of fact:

L'acquisizione delle competenze digitali è, al contempo, frutto del lavoro "sul campo" in tutte le discipline. L'utilizzo delle tic, infatti, è strumentale al miglioramento del lavoro in classe e come supporto allo studio, alla verifica, alla ricerca. Al recupero e agli approfondimenti personali degli studenti (Gazzetta ufficiale, allegato A).

So, it can be inferred that the use of technologies by educators is useful to students' learning to learn. It is the school that gives pupils the tools with which they will continue to learn all lifelong. To better understand the relationship between education and technologies, some important sciences such as pedagogy, sociology, anthropology and psychology must be taken into account and the best study, in this field, is Antonio Calvani's (2004: 22-4). He claims that the link between education and technology can be explained as follows:

- a. *Educare nella tecnologia.* Given the pervasive power of technologies in everybody's life, they cannot be ignored in learning environments. The role of education is that of make students aware of the instrument they use;
- b. *Educare alla tecnologia.* This means that information technology is also a school subject and it is taught by professional teachers;
- c. *Studiare con la tecnologia.* There are plenty of tools such as computers, laptops, DVD players that can be used in learning contexts, but there are also specific websites and virtual learning environments that can be exploited in class using the interactive whiteboard or LIM;
- d. *Studiare l'educazione avvalendosi della tecnologia.* Voice and video recorders can be used for both teachers and students' performances in order to analyze and evaluate them; For example, students can create their own radio or video podcast, meaning that they can build their own series of episodes about an argument of interest, using the language they are learning;
- e. *Studiare l'educazione sub specie tecnologica.* It is one of the main goals of education and consists of studying learning environments as "complessi di apparati strumentali o configurazioni di sistemi per i quali possono valere modelli tecnologici, ad esempio quello cibernetico";
- f. *Progettare tecnologicamente l'educazione.* This means to create educational projects which are based on technologies.

As for point *a*, in learning contexts it is very important to make pupils aware of what they can find on the Internet. As already anticipated in chapter 2, not all contents provided by the web are trustworthy. Carrying out a research is not as easy as students think, information should be verified first and written down later. In fact, Balboni (2012b: 45) states that:

Avere a disposizione quel gigantesco repository che è internet e quell'universale fonte di contatti che sono i social network è senza dubbio un "bene", perché permette un "incremento indefinito della capacità di realizzare scopi" come dice Emanuele Severino, ma il bene è tale solo se è basato sul "vero", e in internet e nei social network il vero è sommerso da un enorme rumore di fondo.

That is to say that it is good to introduce technologies in schools, but students should get used to exploit the resources they have in the correct way and by verifying what they find.

This dissertation mainly focuses on letters *a* and *f*. In the next paragraphs, it will be discussed if technologies can actually facilitate language learning. Then, some specific tools will be described more in detail to introduce what chapter 4 will deal with: the creation of a website for language learning, especially Italian as a second or foreign language.

3.2 Can Technology facilitate learning?

As already anticipated, this chapter deals with the digital resources that teachers and learners can use in order to facilitate the language learning process. Many of the themes discussed in chapter 1 will be adapted to the ICT context in order to highlight what has changed with respect to traditional education and what, instead, has become even easier.

3.2.1 Different activities, more motivation and cognitive involvement

Chapter 1.1 focused on Gardner's Multiple Intelligence theory: there are at least eight intelligences that are combined in different ways in human beings. In fact, each student differs from the others because of the personal combination of "mental representations

and intellectual languages” (Veneema, Gardner, 2012). The conclusion of the chapter dealt with the importance of varying activities in order to give chance to all intelligences to access knowledge. However, cognitively speaking, not only do people possess different minds, but studies in this field also demonstrated that “in the first years of life, the mind/brain becomes engraved with a certain scheme or frame by which it apprehends part of experience” (ibid: 71). Moreover these early representations are very difficult to change and teachers consider them as something that must be corrected. Gardner and Veenema also state that it does not matter if one is a successful learner because his/her mind keeps being “unschooled”, unless students are particularly involved in a topic. Educators must recognize and give value to these mental representations to build more adequate ones “that themselves become robust and enduring” (ibid: 71). One way to do so is by using new technologies. Veenema and Gardner, in their 2012 study, observed that history textbooks usually do not present a battle from all points of view and students are usually asked to present it in the same way as it is presented on their book. This leads to facilitate “individuals who favor linguistic modes of learning” (ibid: 72) only. So they carry out an experiment, using ICT, to see if they can actually enhance understanding and involve more intelligences. In order to explain the battle fought at Sharpsburg in 1862, they use the CD-ROM *Antietam/Sharpsburg* (the two different names of the battle with which people of the North and of the South respectively call it). Its aim is to present the battle from different perspectives by including “both pictorial and textual renderings” (ibid: 73). As for its features, it includes four paths, each one showing the battle in a different way:

- a. *The map path* which provides learners pictures, audio and texts in order to give them an all-encompassing view of the battle;
- b. *The observer path* which consists of some physical representations provided by people who actually witnessed the battle;
- c. *The battlefield walk path* which allows students to experience the landscape;
- d. *The archive and activities path*, instead, gives pupils the chance to choose what they want to know.

As a result, technologies can, actually, enhance learning. In fact, Veenema and Gardner (2012: 73) say that “technologies that include a variety of media may well be able to

help more students from rich representations of an event and cultivate deeper understanding”. That is to say that learners can choose what is more suitable to their mental representations and this, of course, has some consequences in the way students’ knowledge should be verified. As a matter of fact, the virtual environment offers a huge range of choices and, as a result, teachers should provide pupils the same amount of resources to demonstrate what they have learnt (see Veenema, Gardner, 2012).

When it comes to motivation, as it has already been discussed in chapter 1.2, it is clear that ICT can play a very important role in this field. In fact, Gardner (2000: 35) affirms that “the new technologies make the materials vivid, easy to access, and fun to play with”, which means that students actually like learning by using new technologies and find it quite easier, too. The reasons for that can be found in Schumann’s stimulus appraisal theory that has been already explained in chapter 1.2. So, technologies can help teachers in varying activities. As a result:

- a. From the cognitive point of view, technologies possess digital resources that are suitable for every kind of intelligences, which means that people who prefer linguistic and logical modes of learning are no more the only ones that can more easily understand lessons, but everybody can, because ICT offer a huge range of choices: images, audios, videos, texts, maps and so on and so forth;
- b. From the motivational point of view, students know technologies very well, they are able to use them and they are a “novelty” in learning contexts. So they can take advantage from what they know and what they like in order to feel capable of and more involved in the learning process. Moreover they are considered to be pleasant and fun to play with because of their multimedia, multi-sensory and interactive interface. However these features can be tricky, they can lead to the cognitive overload which prevents the working memory from sending information to the long-term memory. However, this problem will be faced farther in this dissertation.

3.2.2 Self Media and E-learning

Every tool which is able to manage and spread information can be referred to as *media*. And yet in 1984, Cosimo Scaglioso (1984: 48-9) provides a distinction between self media and mass media:

Nel caso dei mass-media è sufficiente saper “leggere” per decodificare i messaggi che vengono veicolati dalla stampa, dal cinema, dalla radio, dalla televisione, con i self-media, invece, è necessario anche saper “scrivere”, utilizzando linguaggi acustici e visivi, linguaggi audio-visivi e scripto-visivi. Ne deriva che l’uomo moderno può diventare un Emerec, cioè un uomo completo, allo stesso tempo eme/ tteur e rec/ epteur.

Since 1984, technologies have undergone a deep development and nowadays all the self-media can be gathered inside one device: the computer. Moreover, most of the computer features can be found in laptops, smart-phones and tablets which are the technological devices that people commonly use every day (see Giusti, 2015). From what has been said in the previous chapters, it can be inferred that Web 2.0 is the new social media where not only can people look for and collect information, but they can also be creators and publishers. Even though ICT can be useful for language learning purposes, they were not born for this reason, but they can perfectly be adapted to learning contexts (see Giusti 2015). Of course, before using them in class, teachers and learners should develop certain competences such as *visual literacy* and *media literacy* (*ibid*: 35) which are fundamental in order to exploit all the potentialities of ICT. In fact, one of the most important changes that technologies and new media brought to learning processes, is the attractive graphic: not only are information told, but they can also be seen. This leads to a deeper development of visual intelligence, memory and procedural knowledge linked to mirror neurons. In other words:

La mente, non più vista come deposito statico di informazioni bensì concepita come una rete complessa e plastica di nodi fra di loro interrelati, si specchia nei nuovi media trovandovi conoscenze strutturate e veicolate in modo più naturale (Varani, 2001: 1)

So, thanks to neurosciences researches and technologies development, it has been possible to find out that human’s mind works in a similar way to a “computer mind” and this is why it is often easier, for 21st century students, to access knowledge using

this new digital tool. The attractive graphic is provided by cross-media, meaning the totality of multimedia contents combined together in digital platforms such as e-learning environments in which students can collaborate with their mates and with their teacher or tutor. They can share and build their knowledge and take advantage of the huge variety of texts, videos, images and audios. Moreover they can play and interact with their mates or with the computer. E-learning has been defined as:

The use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration (Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, The eLearning Action Plan - Designing tomorrow's education, 2001).

In this definition, three important features of e-learning can be inferred, according to Midori (2006: 66):

- a. *Access to resources and services.* Both traditional learning and e-learning share the same planning. In fact, in both cases, materials, testing activities, aims, and so on, must be drafted. As for the creation of materials and lessons, more in general, learning objects (LO) gained success in e-learning contexts. They are digital didactic resources created to allow users to achieve some competence and test them with specific testing activities. As a consequence LO are self contained and modular. Moreover they can be used and reused whenever the user wants to (cf. Giusti 2015);
- b. *Remote exchanges.* Cloud computing has already been described above (chapter 2) and it is a perfect example of remote exchange: students can share videos, texts, music, whatever they want to, and put it in a common space. Some other examples are groups on Facebook or other social network and e-learning websites or, better, LCMS (Learning Content Management System). This latter is the merger of CMS (Content Management System) and LMS (Learning Management System). The former deals with the organization and publishing of digital contents, while the latter is responsible for students' subscription (cf. Giusti, 2015). However, not only can users share specific materials, but they can also talk or write to each other and develop problem solving skills together;
- c. *Collaboration.* Midori talks about a "comunità di pratica" (2006: 69). To explain this concept, he uses the example of the Renaissance workshops where students

learnt in a real contexts and the result of their learning was linked to the skill of their professional teachers. Midori's "comunità di pratica" is characterized by the cooperation of different members/students/users in order to reach a common aim using common materials and sources (cf. Midori, 2006). What develops from this collaboration is a collective intelligence "un'intelligenza distribuita ovunque, continuamente valorizzata, coordinata in tempo reale, che porta a una mobilitazione effettiva delle competenze" (Levy, 1996: 34). Web 2.0 offers different tools in order to reach the aim of collaborative learning: Skype, chat, instant messaging, wiki, blogs and so on and so forth.

Moreover, in order to be successful, e-learning should be "learner centered and learning-team-centered" (Bonaiuti, 2007:38). So, the pupil/user is the most important part of the learning process and this latter has more possibilities to succeed if users collaborate in order to achieve a goal. Sometimes, the goal can be to find a solution to a specific problem and the user asks the community to help him/her. In this way every user involved gives his/her contribute and learns something new. Siemens claims that this phenomenon has to be referred to as *connectivism* and that this term better explains what learning online, actually, means: "Learning (defined as actionable knowledge) can reside outside of ourselves (within an organization or a database), is focused on connecting specialized information sets" (Siemens, 2004: 4).

An interesting study about the ability of technologies to enhance learning has been provided by Monica Banzato (2006). In fact, she adapts Vigotskij's theory of learning as a social process to the functions of ICT and e-learning contexts. Vigotskij claims that the learning process starts with the interaction with others, and then it is embedded in the individual mental structure. Moreover, Vigotskij calls *Zone of Proximal Development* what can be reached by the collaboration with other students. In this sense ICT can, actually, enhance learning because they use:

Strumenti per discorrere, discutere, scrivere in modo collaborativo e risolvere problemi fornendo sistemi di supporto online per sostenere l'evoluzione della comprensione dello studente e la sua crescita cognitiva (Banzato, 2006: 57).

In an e-learning context, students can interact with their peers through e-tandem communication (see chapter 2), but also with their teacher. In fact, in chapter 1

cooperative learning and learner autonomy have been dealt with. It is clear now, how technologies changes the way of learning and teaching as well. On the one hand autonomous students are provided with a huge variety of activities and materials in order to learn on their own or to continue what they have done in class, on the other hand they can collaborate and cooperate with other students in order to help each other and reach a common aim. Educators in this context can be either online tutor, who are there to solve some problems linked to the site or the activities, or physical teachers, who uses LCMS in order to integrate traditional lessons with activities to do online either in groups or alone. As for the teachers, Giusti (2015: 40), lists their tasks in e-learning contexts:

- a. *Progetta l'ambiente secondo principi didattici*, meaning that they choose the materials and create LO;
- b. *Stimola la partecipazione*; they can post on forum to motivate pupils;
- c. *Risponde a domande formulate dagli studenti*: educators as facilitators and guides should help their students;
- d. *Monitora le attività*. Teachers or tutors' role is that of guiding students if they need them. Moreover they can post something on forums in order to motivate their pupils.

The situation in which the teacher/tutor integrates what he/she has done in class with online activities, is a particular type of e-learning which is called *blended learning* (cf. Bonaiuti, 2007; Giusti, 2015).

3.2.3 Multitasking and Videogame as a Solution to Cognitive Overload

Before entering the heart of the chapter, it should be useful to see how technologies can also involve different learning styles. First of all Kolb's experiential model has to be taken into account. According to Kolb, as it has been shown in chapter 1.1, learning is the result of experience and experiences are what the Web is made of. Concrete and active students will feel at ease while managing hypertexts. In fact, if it is true that the Web is able to develop problem solving skills, the former users will certainly succeed. As for the latter, they prefer active experience and sharing information, so they feel very

comfortable in cooperative situations. Abstract learners, instead, need to observe other experiences before elaborating their own strategy, and this is definitely possible in the Web: every user can be both editor and publisher, he/she can tell his/her own experience in order to be an example for other people in the same situation. When it comes to reflexive student, they usually prefer to be autonomous. As it has been said above, the Web is rich of texts, video, audio and pictures that can be exploited.

So, thanks to his characteristics, the Web provides solutions for all kind of students. However, learning material online is organized in hypertexts, say Cremascoli and Gualdoni (2000: 31-2) (see chapter 2) whose main characteristics are:

- a. *Web navigation* which is the contents organization. The more the contents are well organized, the more the user is able to explore a website. From a didactic point of view, navigation develops one's sense of direction and it is an exercise which tests wit, inductive and deductive skills and personal reworking;
- b. *Interactivity*, meaning that the user can exploit and modify all kind of contents inside an hypertext. Different students can work on the same text and modify it at the same time because it is scale free (see chapter 2). This leads, of course, to promote cooperative and collaborative activities and team work;
- c. *Multimedia* is the merge of different kind of resources inside the same hypertext: music, animations, videos, pictures and so on. As a result, the meaning of the content is even deeper.

Another characteristic of the hypertext in general, and online learning in particular, is the presence of multisensory resources. So, there are different inputs at the same time and in the same place: auditory, visual and textual. The presence of different inputs at the same time has both positive and negative consequences. The latter will be explained further on this paragraph. According to Dall'Aria (2012) the former allows the learner to use the language in a meaningful context and this facilitate both comprehension and acquisition. Furthermore, talking about positive aspects, multimodality should be taken into account. In fact, Jokinen and Raike (2003: 2) define it as:

The use of a variety of sensory input/output channels which allow sensory data to be received and transformed to higher-level representations, and through which manipulation of the environment can take place.

However, multimodality is not something new, or linked to technologies only, but it is something human beings are accustomed to. As a matter of fact, human-computer communication is not so different from human-human communication. Both are characterized by the need for processing different inputs at the same time. Yet in 1946, Edgar Dale found out that humans remember: 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what they say and 90% of what they say and do. So the more the student is involved in what he/she is doing, the more he/she will learn. Moreover, the research carried out by Futurelab and the NTEL – *Neuroscience and Technology Enhanced Education* (2010), demonstrated that inputs presented multimodally are more likely to improve memory. Multimodality is the property of primary cerebral cortexes. In fact, Meyer *et al.*(2010), for example, demonstrated that the primary auditory cortex can be activated by watching a mute video in which some particular sounds can be inferred: if people see a dog barking, they would probably connect this barking to a particular sound they know. Multimodality can also be extended to the primary motor cortex (cf. Ronga, 2014). As a matter of fact, mirror neurons can be activated by doing a certain movement or by observing someone else doing the same movement. What mirror neurons do, is to imitate an action. In this way learners are able to experience something in their mind and this phenomenon is called embodiment. According to Riva (2004) mental representations of actions and actions themselves are important in order to develop cognitive and social skills. An online learning environment is an hypertext, as it has already been said above, so, it is characterized by multisensory and multimedia resources which provides learners with multimodal inputs.

All these characteristics of online learning contexts can be seen as facilitators or as elements of distraction. In fact, says Mariani (2000), the hypertext is a little big world and to get lost is extremely easy. What is useful, to prevent users from getting lost, is control, meaning that while looking for something in the Internet, students should judge if a source is trustworthy or not, if they should change page or look for something else and so on. But this control, according to Mariani (2000: 30) requires an effort:

Se devo usare molte energie mentali per tenere sotto controllo quello che faccio, avrò meno energie per elaborare i contenuti di quello che sto studiando. In altre parole, corro il rischio di arrivare presto e spesso ad un "sovraccarico cognitivo". Questo sovraccarico cognitivo è ulteriormente aumentato,

paradossalmente, proprio dalle maggiori libertà e possibilità di scelta e di navigazione offerta dagli ipertesti, rispetto ai libri tradizionali.

So, what students risk is a cognitive overload which prevents them from elaborating the information they need. The more the information is complex the more the working memory is not able to elaborate it (cf. Mariani, 2000). Nevertheless, as Longo affirms (2001: 44) technology has modified humans' mind in such a way that he talks about a *homo technologicus*:

Un homo sapiens modificato dalla tecnologia [che] vive anche in un ambiente artificiale, fortemente segnato dall'informazione, dai simboli, dalla comunicazione e, sempre più, dalla virtualità.

This is even truer when talking about digital natives, in fact, as it has been shown in chapter 2, they see ICT as a social and communicational tool. Moreover, they are developing new strategies to catch and understand information which are modifying their learning styles (cf. Ferri, 2008). They can learn by watching TV, playing and listening to music and in the meanwhile they can keep in contact with their friends and write a new post on Facebook. New generation of students are multitasking:

Il problema del sovraccarico cognitivo è risolto attraverso il continuo passaggio da un media a un altro, tramite uno zapping consapevole tra le differenti fonti di apprendimento e di comunicazione (Ferri, 2008: 56).

So according to Ferri, multitasking is one of the solutions to the cognitive overload. The mistake people usually do, is to consider concentration and multitasking as two opposite forces, because they actually are “abilità complementari” (Ferri, 2014). Digital technologies, says Ferry, are creating the conditions to do different things at the same time in the same space and this is why new learners are more and more multitasking. They prefer non sequential reading and they find it more natural than a step-by-step lessons because they were born surrounded by hypertexts, screens and videogames. Even though all these different input might threat the selective attention, Ferri thinks that the ability to work in multitasked contexts is a new intelligence:

Impegnarsi a focalizzare l'interesse all'interno di un ambiente mediale ricco e facendo ricorso al multitasking è una nuova forma di intelligenza (Ferri, 2014).

What attention does in multitasked contexts is to unload the working memory by selecting the quality and quantity of information:

I multitasker tentano di ridurre le richieste sulla memoria a breve termine mappando i luoghi in cui i differenti dati sono depositati esternamente nell'ambiente più prossimo (Ferri, 2014).

So the “zapping” prevents them from getting lost among all these different inputs.

Videogames also play an important role in developing new learning strategies. As a matter of fact they help students to intensify the selective attention, which can be considered as another “cure” to cognitive overload. Videogame, according to Ferri (2008: 56), is important because:

Implica una costante attenzione selettiva, la ricerca incessante di soluzioni a problemi, la sperimentazione di ruoli differenti all'interno del contesto del gioco: per questo, rappresenta una nuova modalità di attivare apprendimenti ed esperienze anche sociali, dal momento che ormai si gioca online con altri esseri umani e non solo con o contro la macchina.

So, not only do videogames help students to grow their selective attention, but they also cooperate in problem solving and communication skills. This happens thanks to new way of playing which allows players to interact with each other and not only with the computer. This is also very important from the linguistic point of view because there are games such as *World of Warcraft* which is played by users from all over the World.

Lombardi (2013: 103) agrees with Longo and Ferri. In Fact, he recognizes that new technologies modifies teenagers’ “*forma mentis*”. Of course, he says, the cognitive overload might be a risk, but videogames have some positive effects on learning. As a matter of fact they allow students to sharpen perception, attention and memory. This is possible because videogames are a good example of learning by doing. Players should elaborate a strategy, collaborate and communicate with other players, solve problems and so on. In addition, according to Prensky (2001c: 98), game-playing and videogames are motivating in language learning contexts, in fact:

The engagement power of electronic games for this generation (and those to come) may be, if used correctly, the biggest learning motivator we have ever seen.

Games are a pleasant tool, as it has been said before, and the fact that students like game-playing is definitely useful for learning. So not only do videogames improve the selective attention, but they also procure pleasure and high motivation. The reason that pushes learners to play is the gratification, they want to overcome the obstacles they encounter (Prensky, 2001; Lombardi, 2013). In addition, besides what has been said so far, there are other features, according to Lombardi (2013: 106) that make videogame so useful in language learning:

- a. *Interattività;*
- b. *Adattività;*
- c. *Feedback immediate e a lungo termine;*
- d. *Conflittualità e competizione*
- e. *Collaborazione e cooperazione;*
- f. *Problem solving;*
- g. *Interazione;*
- h. *Emotività.*

Learners have the possibility to interact with their mates and with the screen. And this is very important for new digital learners who prefer to be active part of their learning process, meaning that they prefer to learning by doing. In addition, they adapt themselves to situations in which there are some problems to solve and they need to compete or to collaborate with other players and, most important, they feel involved and motivated. Moreover they can immediately see the result of what they have chosen to do and this leads them to fix the possible mistakes they might have done. However, even though videogames and multitasking can be useful, some order is always required for the learning process to be successful. In fact, while creating an online environment, the teacher becomes, according to Calvani (2007:89), an online “documentalista”. This new figure is supposed to have some digital skills because its role is to collect all the information found on the internet and systematize them.

Il suo è un lavoro non solo esplorativo e selettivo delle risorse che Internet mette a disposizione per migliorare la qualità dell'informazione e della comunicazione, ma è anche quello di raffinamento, di riordino e sistematizzazione della documentazione (Calvani 2007: 89)

So when creating a learning environment online, some order is required, materials need to be systematized. If learning objects, described in the previous chapter, are taken into account, it is clear that they are similar to a didactic unit so they have to present a certain order. What is different is the possibility to combine different media that, if organized correctly can definitely facilitate learning as proved by Venema and Gardner in their case study. So, in a learning environment students can take advantage of both multimedia materials and a certain kind of order which facilitate learning. As already shown above, among other advantages of technologies there are: pleasantness and a low affective filter. However something else is required in order to acquire language: comprehensible input and $i+1$ (cf. Krashen, 1991: 409). Technologies can give comprehensible input if users are able to manage it. However, some inputs might come too early for the learner to acquire the language. In fact, if he/she listens to a difficult song, or watches a particular difficult video, he/she can lose self-esteem and motivation. In fact, Krashen (1991: 409) states that “the input needs to contain ‘ $i+1$ ’, an aspect of language that the acquirer has not yet acquired but that he or she is ready to acquire”. So, order is required in online learning as in class to respect the student’s readiness to a certain topic.

CHAPTER 4

Weareitalians.altervista.org

In this chapter I will explain what pushes me to create a website destined to Italian language and culture learning. The idea was born in October, when Professor Fabio Caon told me about the song and the project for the Italian Language week in the world, carried by Labcom Laboratory and Itals. Some activities linked to the song, *Italians*, had already been created and published in the Bonacci Editore website. However, as they are printable PDF files, I thought to create something which was more “students’ style”: something more digital and more game-like.

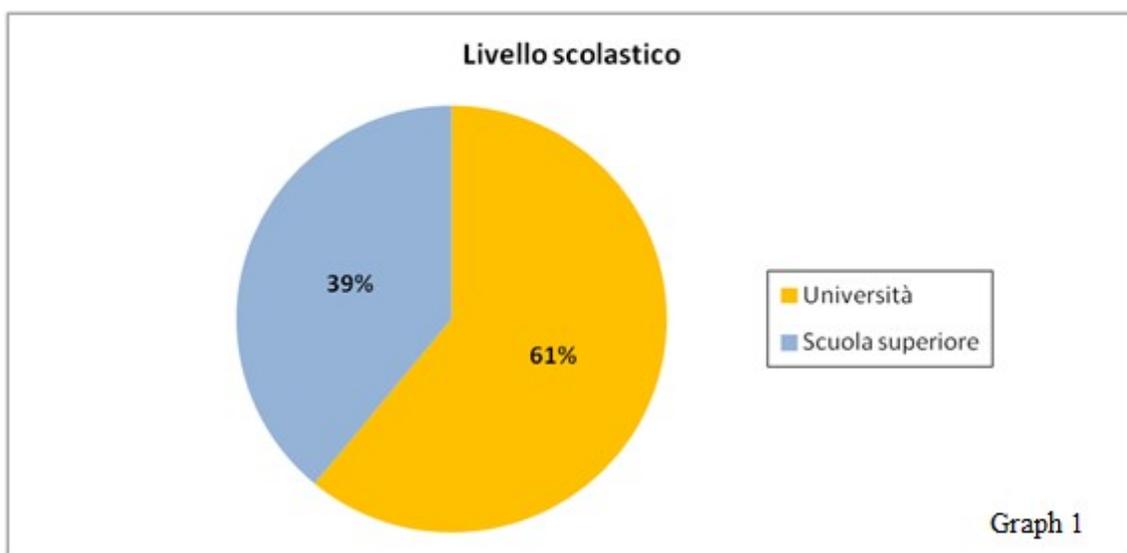
I really believe in the potentialities of Web 2.0 for language learning because I, personally, have always taken advantages from it: I use to listen to foreign songs and read their lyrics, watch movies in the original language, look for some grammar rules when I need them and so on. So one the first step has been to ask university students if they use technologies as I do (see chapter 4.1). Then I tried to find a way to create what I had in mind: there are a lot of tools offered by the Web, but some of them came out to be more suitable to the aim of my project. After I eventually found the right tool, I had to adapt analogical activities to digital ones (chapter 4.2). The activities are based on the song and its related video while the importance of music in language learning had already been discussed above. However, when the activities had finally be digitalized, something was still missing: a motivational activity. That is why I choose to create a game, *Quanto Italian sei?*, in order to create curiosity and motivation (chapter 4.3).

4.1 Language learning websites: a survey

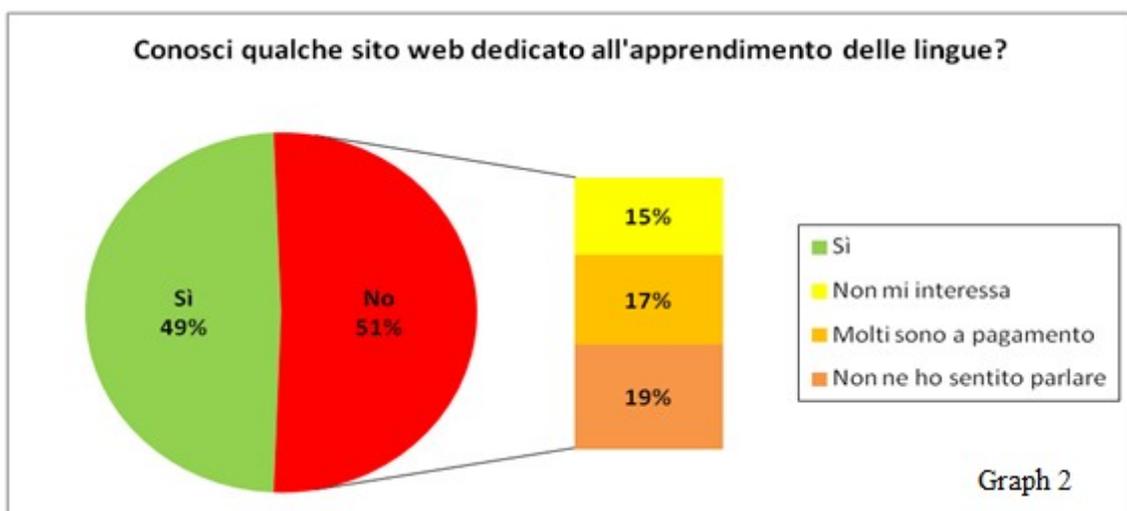
Before starting the creation of my website, I asked some students whether they know/use some language learning websites. The interviewees were students from high school and university. Graph. 1 will show the percentage: 39% of high school students and 61% of University students. The survey was spread out on Facebook among groups

of university and high school students. They were asked to answer the questions on Google form. The questions were:

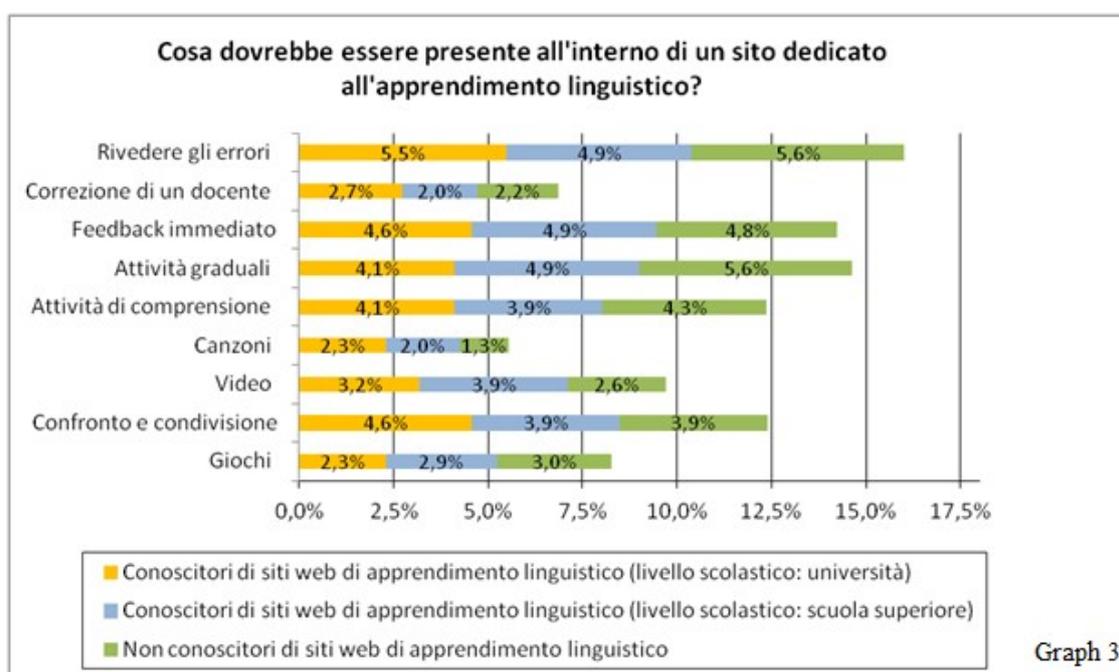
- School Level;
- Do you know/use some website to learn a foreign language?
- If not, why?
- What do you think that should be present in such a website?
- Do you think it could be useful to integrate traditional learning in classroom with some online activities?



As for the first question (Do you know some language learning website?) more than 50% answered they do not know/use any website of the kind, but what I found even more interesting are the reasons why they do not use them.



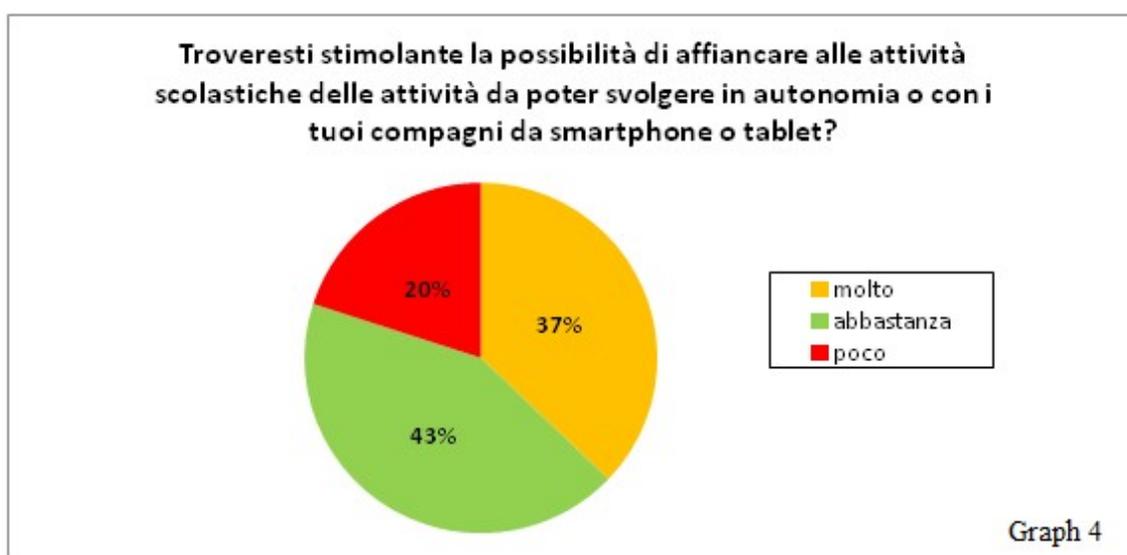
Most of the students who do not use online learning environment justify themselves saying that either they have never heard about them or they do not want to use them because they should pay to subscribe. Of course there is a small part, 15%, who is not even interested in these websites. To solve the first problem, it is sufficient to spread the link of the website by social networks or by word of mouth, for example. However, if language teachers know some useful websites, they can suggest their students to use them in order to improve their skills. As for the subscription problem, instead, the web gives user a lot of possibilities to create free materials. For example, weareitalians.altervista.org, is totally free. There are plug-ins provided by Wordpress which allow creators to transform a blog in a real LCMS, in which students can work together or with their teacher, reading some materials, doing activities, playing games and so on and so forth. Of course a plug-in, such as Learnpress, offers the creator the possibility to create a subscription and a credit card payment, but this is optional. However, it is useful for online tutors who create course for distance learning. There is the possibility to create different lessons, forums and tests and each one of these activities can have its own space on the web page. They are all indicated in the menu and the student can choose what he/she wants to do by clicking on them. Then I asked students what should be present in a language learning website in order to be useful and attractive. Their answers are shown on graph 3.



The possibility to see the mistakes they have made is in the first position. Students need to know what they got wrong. They prefer to have an immediate feedback given by the computer more than by the teacher's correction, as can be seen in the graph. This need is even more clear if one thinks of Favaro's study (cf. chapter 2.3) in which peer's feedback is considered to be more important than teacher's one in interest-driven network. Or if videogames are taken into account: videogames always give players an immediate feedback (cf. Lombardi, chapter 3.2.3). The answers given are pretty homogeneous among students of both university and high school. People who do not know this kind of websites, however, gave similar answers to those who do know them. 5.6% of the answers about the possibility to see one's own mistakes is given by students who do not use learning websites. In addition the percentage of answers is even higher than that given by students of university who do use these websites (5.5%). According to the interviewees, the second most important characteristic is the presence of step-by-step activities, meaning that they still seem to stick to traditional learning structure while learning online. This can be explained by Krashen's *i+1* theory (cf. chapter 3.2.3). They need some order to get ready for the next topic. Moreover, as Calvani says (2008: 89), the online documentalist has, among his/her roles, the capability of organizing materials in an ordered way. The third position, instead, is occupied by discussion and information sharing with peers, 12,4% of the answers deals with this need, which is normal as the Web 2.0 is also referred to as the social web (see chapter 2). Students use to write, share and ask everything on Facebook or other social networks. They are accustomed to share information with their peers. Moreover, as Davison and Cummins state, cooperative learning can exploit all the potentialities of Web 2.0 (cf. chapter 1.4). Moreover students are also accustomed to collaboration and cooperation which are two of the characteristics of game playing according to Lopes (see chapter 1.5). Collaboration and exchanges are also listed among the characteristics of e-learning contexts provided by the European Parliament. Comprehension activities are considered to be important in a website and they are followed by games, videos and songs. Comprehension activities have been organized following Skehan and Foster's *Limited Attentional Capacity Model* which implies that "humans have a limited information processing capacity and must therefore prioritize where they allocate their attention" (Skehan, Foster, 2001: 189). In an online context, the creator can choose how

many inputs are present in each page. When it comes to comprehension activities, he/se can “obligate” the students to have just one input: a text, a video or a song, without any element of distraction. So the advantage of the screen, according to Ambrosio and Tamponi (2010: 104) is that “lo schermo regola la quantità di informazione resa di volta in volta accessibile all’utente”. In my website I have tried to combine all these features, the results will be explained in the following chapters.

The last question asked aimed to find out whether students could be interested or not in online learning as an integration to traditional one. The answers are quite positive as it can be seen on graph 4.



20% of students are not interested in this kind of activities, but 80% is. So, it is not wrong to create some online environments to integrate traditional learning because most of the students would appreciate it.

4.2 Weareitalians.altervista.org: multimedia contents

Professor Fabio Caon started a project for the 15th edition of the Italian Language Week in the world (19th October- 25th October) which includes: a song, *Italians*, and its related video, a karaoke version, a simplified video with subtitles and some didactic activities which goes from level A2 to C1. The song, the video and the printable PDF activities can be found in *bonaccieditore.it*. What I wanted to do was to digitalize the activities in order to have both the video and the activities in the same place. Moreover, I wanted

them to be more game-like because I thought students to be the direct users and not teachers, who print the activities and distribute the sheets among their pupils. I wanted something available outside of the classroom and something that can be used by students from different countries. But I also thought that it could be useful as an integrative part of a traditional lesson. The first attempt to create what I had in mind, was to be done with Google Forms. But I found it pretty limitative for my purposes, especially as far as the



Fig. 1

result page is concerned. Students can just see what other students have answered, without knowing if it is correct or not. A solution can be found by sending an email with the correct answers after students have taken the quiz, but this implies more time to have a result. So I had to change my mind because, as it has been shown in 4.1, one of the most important characteristics an online learning environment must have, according to students, is the immediate feedback. However, Google Form is quite useful for other purposes such as surveys, or multiple question quizzes that might be discussed in class. The creator can choose among different themes or create them himself to make the quiz more attractive. Moreover different media can be combined: texts, audio, video, pictures. So it can be a sort of simplified hypertext with multimedia resources and simple buttons, but the immediate feedback is not possible. Figures 1, 2 and 3 will show an experiment I made in order to evaluate this tool for my purposes. I chose a song, La Gatta by Gino Paoli, and I tried to digitalize some activities taken from *edumusic.org*. I embedded the video with the song and then I continued with some comprehension activities. As for subjective answers, they are not liable to be analyzed as correct/incorrect and this was another of my mistakes. An example is “quali altri

animali conosci?’. The risk is that of getting many heterogeneous answers and the computer alone cannot give a correct/incorrect feedback using this tool. There are too many correct answers and it is impossible to select the whole animal World as the range of right words that can be written. Actually, some activities, such as gap-fill exercises, allow the creator to select a range of correct words to put in the empty spaces. However this does not work as I expected. In fact, figure 3 shows that if somebody clicks on the gap, the right answer immediately appears. Another problem linked to the cloze activity is that each question must contain only one sentence with just one gap to fill as it will be shown by figure 3. This occupies a lot of space and it is difficult to stop the song in order to fill the gap with the right word.



When it comes to the result page, Google Form sends the user to an excel file in which he/she can see other students' answers, but as it has been said before it is not indicated whether they are right or wrong. Results are just listed as it is shown in table 3.

DOMANDA	RISPOSTA
Nome e Cognome	Pinco Pallino
La canzone che ascolterai si intitola La Gatta, quali altri animali conosci? Elencane 5	elefante canguro topo cane pesce
Guarda le immagini. Secondo te, quali elementi ci sono nella canzone? Perché?	1 gatto contro topo
La gatta aveva una macchia	Nera
La soffitta era vicino	al mare
Il cantante suonava	la chitarra
Se il cantante suonava, la gatta	faceva le fusa
Ora il cantante	non abita più là
Ora il cantante	ripensa alla gatta
C'era una volta una gatta che aveva una macchia nera sul muso e una vecchia _____ vicino al mare con una finestra a un passo dal cielo blu	Soffitta
Se la _____ suonavo, la gatta faceva le fusa	Chitarra
ed una _____ scendeva vicina, vicina, poi mi sorrideva e se ne tornava su	Stellina
Ora non abito più là, tutto è cambiato, non abito più là, ho una _____ bellissima, bellissima come vuoi tu	Casa
Ma, io ripenso a una gatta che aveva una macchia nera sul _____	Muso
a una vecchia soffitta vicino al _____	Mare

Tab 3

So the teacher can see who answer what, but the students cannot know if they gave the correct answer or not. Consequently, I decided to try Wordpress because thanks to the use of different plug-ins I could create almost everything I wanted to. First of all, as Google Form, Wordpress is fully responsive, meaning that it is compatible with all devices. As for the Web usability (see chapter 2), it is pretty easy to use: one can choose among different themes according to his aims and then modify them using different colors or setting a background image. What the theme setting implies is the position of

the header and the article space. As for the former, it includes the website identity and the navigation menu, while the latter is the space where the content is shown. Figure 4

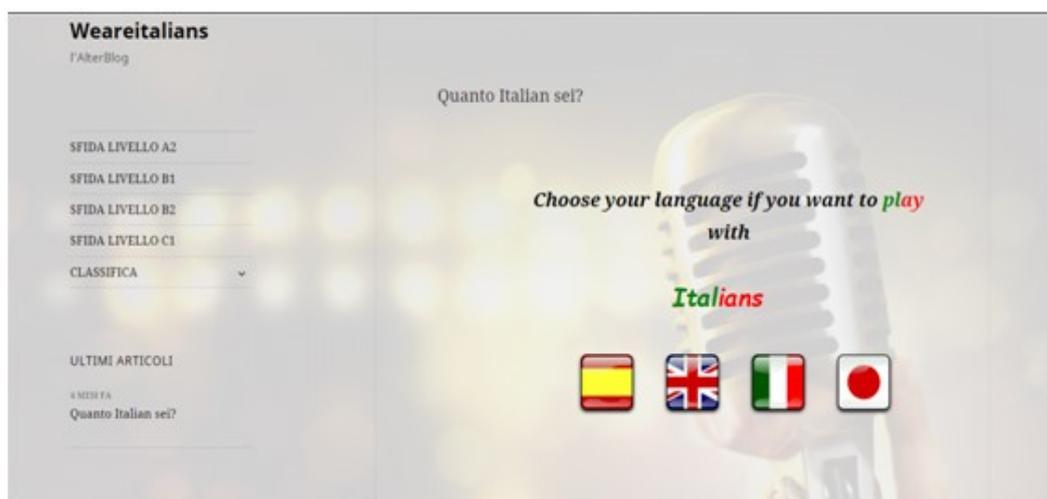


Fig. 4

shows how Twenty Fifteen, the theme I have chosen, is organized. The website identity and the navigation menu are on the left, while the content is on the right. This is the homepage of the website and on the right there is the motivational game I choose to insert before the didactic activities. The structure of the game will be explained on chapter 4.3. As background image there is a hand holding a microphone which suggests that the activities will deal with music. In fact, they are based on Professor Fabio Caon's song, *Italians*. The image was more darker, but in order for the site to be clear and readable, I had to lighten it. As for the activities, they are graduated and the menu puts it clear. Step-by-step activities are needed by students as it has been shown in chapter 4.1. Moreover they are one of the characteristics that an online learning environment should have in order to facilitate language learning. In fact, Ambroso and Tamponi (2010: 116) affirm that:

L'ordine di presentazione deve rispettare il processo di sviluppo sottostante all'acquisizione delle abilità linguistiche implicate, nonché a maggiore o minore complessità delle operazioni cognitive richieste.

I have just selected those activities which require an objective answer in order to be able to give and immediate feedback to the user. I have chosen the plug-in *Wp-pro-Quiz* to create the different challenges. It is really useful because, among its characteristics, it includes:

- a. Multiple choice;

- b. Single choice;
- c. Cloze function;
- d. "Matrix Sorting" Choice;
- e. Random answer and questions;
- f. Multimedia in questions;
- g. Back-Button;
- h. Correct / incorrect response message for all questions;
- i. Result text with gradations;
- j. Quiz-summary.

The possibility to insert multimedia contents is fundamental as the activities are based on the song *Italians*. However, as for Youtube videos, it is always possible to embed them on a web page by using a shortcode such as [youtube]Video Url[/youtube]. Video are considered to be important in a language learning environment, as it can be seen on graph 3. Moreover, Cakir (2006: 67) claims that:

Students like learning language through the use of video, which is often used to mean quite different things in language teaching. For some, it means no more than replaying television programs on a video recorder for viewing in class or private study. For others, it implies the use of a video camera in class to record and play back to learners their activities and achievements in a foreign language teaching.

Video can also mean Youtube music videos. If *Italians* is taken into account, it involves both music and a visual aid. To summarize what has been said in chapter 1.6 about songs, they can:

- a. facilitate memorization thanks to repetitions, rhymes and rhythm,;
- b. create pleasure;
- c. make people feel to belong to a group;
- d. be considered as witness of language and culture;
- e. provide examples of sociolinguistic varieties of language.

What a tool, such as Youtube, does is to put together both video and music, meaning that it also shows something to students. In *Italians*, for example, there are a lot of images, pictures, body gestures which actually teach students something about the Italian language and culture. In fact “Video shows them how people behave in the culture whose language they are learning by bringing into the classroom a wide range of communicative situations” (Cakir, 2006: 68).

When it comes to the activities linked to the video and its related song, instead, I analyzed the activities present on *bonaccieditore.it* and I picked some of them which were more suitable to my project. Once chosen the activities which require a specific answer, I had to find a way to adapt them to a web page. For example, there is a gap-fill exercise in which students should put some words of the song in the right space. While in class, the teacher can stop the song to give learners the possibility to write down the words, when alone, in front of the screen, students should do everything on their own. Next figures will show how the activity was developed for classroom and how, instead, I adapted it to make it more easy as far as its structure is concerned.

If students have a piece of paper and have to do this exercise while listening to Italians, either the teacher or themselves can stop the

In Italia si sta bene,
in Italia si sta _____
in Italia chissà come si sta.

In Italia si fa la pizza,
in Italia si fa la _____;
per dire “Italia” basta già!

Gli italiani e l'Italia,
gli italiani e l'Italia,
gli italiani e l'Italia:
“Goombà”!

Italiani tutti ladri,
italiani tutti onesti.
Parliamo al mondo con i _____
e ci capiamo solo noi!
“Ma ch' vuoi?”

Italiani “that's ammore”,
i figli “so' piezz'e core”,
l' _____ è mammone
oppure fa il gran pappone.

Gli italiani e l'Italia,
gli italiani e l'Italia,
gli italiani e l'Italia,
“Sciuscià”!

Gli italiani e l'Italia,
gli italiani e l'Italia,
gli italiani e l'Italia,
“Paisà”!

C'è un che di _____
nello sguardo rigido,
nel cielo unico
dello stereotipo.

Da un altro angolo

Fig. 5

song on their computer. If, on the contrary, they are doing this activity on a web page, they should listen to the words, write them down and stop the song every time they need to, to prevent them from losing some expressions.

The risk is that of going up and down on the page which might distract students and make them losing concentration. So, what I decided to do is to split both the song and its lyrics to avoid this problem. The result can be seen on figure 6. Few seconds of the song can, thus, be played and students have a smaller part of the text to manage at a

"Goombà"

▶ 0:33 ◀

italiani tutti ladri
italiani tutti _____
parliamo al mondo con i _____
e ci capiamo solo noi!
"Ma ch' vuoi?"
italiani "that's ammore"
i figli "so' piezz'e core"
l' _____ è mammone
oppure fa il gran pappone
gli italiani e l'Italia
gli italiani e l'Italia
gli italiani e l'Italia
"Sciuscià"
gli italiani e l'Italia
gli italiani e l'Italia
gli italiani e l'Italia
"Paisà"

▶ 0:17 ◀

c'è un che di _____
nello sguardo rigido
nel cielo _____
dello stereotipo.
Da un altro angolo
il mondo _____
diventa liquido
e tutto è in bilico
tra _____ e nuvole

▶ 0:42 ◀

italiani peperoni

Fig. 6

time. So, students do not need to go upwards to stop the song, they have everything they need while going downwards on the page.

Many of the exercises present on *bonacceditore.it*, are not likely to be adapted to a web page (open questions or writing activities), I slightly changed the task. For example, one of the activities for B2 level is to write the plot of a Neorealist movie and some hints are given to students in order to organize the structure of this particular kind of text. Of course, such an activity has not one single correct answer. Students might choose different movies, for example. Nevertheless, the structure of this text is supposed to be the same: introduction, storyline and ending. So, instead of a writing

activity, I choose to create a matrix sorting choice, as shown on figure 7. I copied the plot of Sciuscià and split it into three disordered parts. The students' task is to label each fragment with the correct name. The aim of this change is that of giving students an objective evaluation provided by the computer.

So, in order to give users an immediate feedback I had to modify activities and adapt them



to my website. Each question, as it can be seen on figure 7, has a control button which allows the user to know whether its answer is correct or not. Next figure shows what happens if students push this button.

- a. If they do not answer, the result will be wrong and some red squares will be shown around the correct answer;
- b. If they give the wrong answer, the same will happen;
- c. If they answer correctly, the squares become green;
- d. If the exercise is partially correct, wrong answer will be highlighted in red while right ones in green.

Figures 8 and 9 will show two of the possibilities: in figure 7 the student has not answered at all, while in figure 8 he/she got just one right answer:

At the end of all the questions, students can see all their answer by pushing "sommario". So the web usability is respected because there are clear buttons that tell students what they can choose to do inside the webpage. As for the possibility to see what went wrong in the whole activity, once pushed the button "sommario", the score will show up, and under the score there is the function "visualizza domande" which will show the answers that have been given. This of course can facilitate autonomous learning. Moreover,

activities online might be monitored by a teacher/tutor who does not control students directly.

ORDINA ELEMENTI

Pasquale e Giuseppe vogliono comprarsi un cavallo. Raccogliere i soldi necessari solo lustrando sarebbe impossibile così si fanno invischiare in una faccenda di mercato nero e finiscono in riformatorio, dove incontrano una realtà orrenda che li mette a dura prova, compromettendo la loro stessa amicizia.

Gli "sciuscià" sono i ragazzini lustrascarpe (dall'americano "shoe-shine", che significa lustrare le scarpe). Si guadagnano qualche spicciolo sulle scarpe dei soldati americani nella Roma del dopoguerra (1945).

Durante un tentativo di fuga uno dei ragazzi muore cadendo da un ponte, l'amico, prima di essere ripreso

parte centrale dell'intreccio

introduzione

finale

Non corretto 0 / 3 Punteggio

SOMMARIO

FACEBOOK TWITTER

Fig. 8

ORDINA ELEMENTI

Pasquale e Giuseppe vogliono comprarsi un cavallo. Raccogliere i soldi necessari solo lustrando sarebbe impossibile così si fanno invischiare in una faccenda di mercato nero e finiscono in riformatorio, dove incontrano una realtà orrenda che li mette a dura prova, compromettendo la loro stessa amicizia.

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SOMMARIO

FACEBOOK TWITTER

Fig. 9

All the activities that have been chosen, as already said above, allow students to have an objective evaluation. This implies that they might find cloze, true/false questions, matrix sorting choice and multiple and single choices. Sometimes, when it was required to write or summarize a text or to answer to open questions, as in figure 4 and 5, I just changed the task to make it more suitable to the online environment. For example, figure 10 shows an exercise in which students should watch an advertisement on Youtube and answer some open questions.

Approfondimenti culturali

21 ⓘ (Da solo) Guarda la pubblicità al link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2TEiD1R_gY e poi rispondi alle domande.

a. Qual è il tema della pubblicità?

b. Perché il figlio non va a vivere da solo secondo i genitori?

c. Di chi è la colpa secondo il figlio?

d. Quale dei due genitori difende il figlio alla fine?

e. Perché lo difende secondo te?

Fig. 10

What I have decided to do, is to transform open questions into true/false questions and what I obtained is shown in figure 11. Another advantage of the digitalization of this activity on a web page is that students/users have the video and the questions on the same page, so instead of using two different tools to watch the advertisement and answer the questions, they just have both in the same place and they can stop, rewind and play the video every time they want to, in order to make themselves sure of their answers. Advertisements, as music and video, have their advantages in language learning context. What students learn from advertisement is, again, a relationship between language and culture. For example, when it comes to the advertisement used in the activity, it promotes a tomato sauce by telling something quite common in Italy: Italians are “mammoni” and this is a famous Italian stereotype which is mentioned in the song by Fabio Caon and explained in the advertisement. So advertisements are important for language learning because they are:

Una delle manifestazioni più espressive e visibili di quel'imprescindibile rapporto lingua-cultura che da sempre attraversa, più o meno palesemente, il corpo sociale.

Figure 11 shows how the activity looks like on the web page. On the right corner the amount of points is indicated.

In this way at the end of each challenge, students are given a score that they can share with their friends, however, this score can also be seen in the leaderboard which allows students to compare their performances with that of their peers. Leaderboard and score are there in order to make the didactic activities more game-like and motivating. All the activities are pretty mechanic.



Fig. 11

However, they are not considered to be boring by students/users because, as Ambrosio and Tamponi (2010: 110) say:

Implicano l'applicazione di strategie meta-cognitive e cognitive che comunque obbligano l'apprendente/utente ad essere attivo nella selezione e categorizzazione

So students are both motivated by the game-like structure of the activity and cognitively involved in what they are doing. Each activity has its own page and they are ordered according to their difficulty level.

4.3 Videogames and Language Learning

It has already been anticipated that the didactic activities are preceded by a motivational game. What I have created is a quiz with some questions about the video and the Italian culture in general. There are three levels which goes from the easiest to the most difficult. Each level is preceded by a video-question in which learners should answer about something they see/hear in the video. This lead me to create another game which I will explain further in this paragraph. The aim of the quiz is to involve and motivate as

many students as possible. Moreover the questions have been translated into English, Japanese and Spanish in order to reach a huge part of World countries. Everyone who is looking for a website to learn Italian can find weareitalians.altervista.org on Google.

Each level has been set with a specific number of questions. As for the video-questions, for example, just one of them appears in each level and every time the user restarts a level the question is different. The video-question is followed by some multiple choices which ask users about the Italian language and culture. Each level is characterized by the very same pattern:

- a. One video-question chosen among about 10 by the system;
- b. 10 multiple choices chosen among 20-30 by the system;
- c. A landing page with different results according to the score.

The questions that have been created are shown on the following pages. The first step of a didactic unit is usually a motivational activity (cf. Balboni, 2012a). Students, answering to the quiz questions, can make some hypothesis about what they are going to deal with in the didactic activities shown in 4.2. As already discussed in 1.2 there is no learning without motivation. All the activities published on *bonaccieditore.it* are actually preceded by a phase of motivation, but there are many open questions which are not suitable to my digital project (cf. 4.2). If the three phases of motivation theorized by Dornyei (cf. 1.2) are taken into account, weareitalians.altervista.org can be described as follows:

- a. The choice motivation phase is realized by the quiz game;
- b. The role of game-like activities is that of keep motivation active;
- c. Students can analyze how things went thanks to result pages and leaderboards.

Moreover learners/users can repeat the activity every time they want to in order to improve their knowledge and skills.

It has been said on 1.2 that the amygdale gives a positive or negative value to what the student is dealing with. Furthermore it has also been shown that technologies help students in giving a positive feedback to what they are doing. Novelty and pleasure, for example, can be positively valued because activities are game-based and displayed on a screen which is a very well known instrument for digital natives students. Moreover, the

ascending order of the game levels allows student to find out their limits and improve their skills. As for the goal significance and self and social image they can also be positively valued as explained on 1.2.

This is why I decided to include a motivational activity while the reasons why I have chosen a game are linked to what have been said on 1.5 and 3.2.3. The positive aspects of the use of games in language learning can be summarize as follows

- a. Krashen's *rule of forgetting* is what makes language learning through games a useful tool because, as it has been stated above, students better learn while they do not know they are actually using the language;
- b. Game-playing is motivating;
- c. Both cerebral hemispheres are involved while playing;
- d. The language is used in a meaningful context;
- e. Game-playing means learning by doing: every action has its consequences and it is useful to elaborate strategies to achieve the goals;
- f. Games are able to sharpen perception, attention and memory;
- g. They give players an immediate feedback;
- h. Students can challenge themselves or their mates.

Now, the game I have created, *Quanto Italian sei?*, will be described. The plug-in I have chosen is Quiz and Survey Master because:

- a. It allows creators to customize their text and this is very useful as far as translation is concerned because buttons can be translated in order to be as clear as possible for users from different countries;
- b. It provides the possibility to create multiple landing pages. This is important in order to give different feedbacks to different scores;
- c. Questions can be randomized;
- d. Results can be shared on Facebook;
- e. There is the possibility to set a time challenge.

As for the questions, the plug-it randomize and pick a certain number of them among those which follow:

Video-questions level 1

Guarda il video. All'inizio del video c'è una foto di due sportivi. Sono:

- a) Rugbisti
- b) Calciatori
- c) Giocatori di pallacanestro

Guarda il video. Quale parola compare dentro la valigia all'inizio del video?

- a) Fragile
- b) Agile
- c) Fragole

Guarda il video. Di che colore ha la cravatta uno dei personaggi:

- a) verde
- b) rosa
- c) bianca

Guarda il video. Di che colore ha la camicia il cantante:

- a) verde
- b) bianca
- c) blu

Guarda il video. Cosa ha in mano uno dei personaggi maschili?

- a) Una pizza
- b) Dei giornali
- c) Due libri

Guarda il video. Di che colore è il telefono che tiene in mano la ragazza?

- a) azzurro
- b) rosa
- c) grigio

Guarda il video. La ragazza con il fazzoletto in testa dà al cantante

- a) Un'insalata mista
- b) Un piatto di spaghetti
- c) Una pizza

Guarda il video. Dopo circa 1 minuto, c'è la foto di un importante monumento italiano. Qual è?

- a) L'arena di Verona
- b) Il Colosseo
- c) La reggia di Caserta

Guarda il video. Dopo circa 2 minuti il ragazzo strizza l'occhio alla ragazza. Che cosa significa questo gesto?

- a) Mi piaci
- b) Stai zitta
- c) Mi aiuti?

Guarda il video finché non trovi la risposta giusta. La pasta nel video è:

- a) Al pomodoro
- b) Al pesto
- c) Ai quattro formaggi

Guarda il video. Il cantante ha:

- a) Una collana
- b) Un braccialetto
- c) Un anello

Multiple choice Level 1

Qual è lo sport più famoso in Italia?

- a) Calcio
- b) Nuoto
- c) Pallavolo

La mafia è:

- a) Una città del sud Italia
- b) Un'organizzazione criminale
- c) Un piatto tipico siciliano

Che cos'è un mammone?

- a) Una mamma molto grande
- b) Un abito per donne incinta
- c) Un uomo legato molto alla mamma

Il mandolino è:

- a) Uno strumento musicale a corde
- b) Un tamburello
- c) Una persona poco intelligente

Terrone è:

- a) Un dispregiativo usato per le persone del Sud Italia
- b) Un contadino
- c) Un modo per chiamare il giardiniere

Che cosa significa questo gesto? (gesto “che dici”)

- a) Ottimo
- b) Ho fame
- c) Ma che dici?

Che cosa significa questo gesto? (gesto “indice-medio”)

- a) Andiamo a ballare?
- b) Mangiamo un piatto di spaghetti?
- c) Mi puoi cambiare dei soldi?

I maccheroni sono un tipo di:

- a) Caramelle
- b) Pasta
- c) Castagne

Quali tra questi formaggi non è italiano?

- a) Gorgonzola
- b) Feta
- c) Taleggio

Gli spaghetti sono un tipo di pasta

- a) Lunga
- b) Corta
- c) Ripiena

Il termine completo di pasta è

- a) Pastascutta
- b) Pastaciutta
- c) Pastasciutta

L'Italia è

- a) un'isola
- b) una penisola
- c) un arcipelago

Cosa significa questo gesto? (gesto “andarsene”)

- a) Vai via!
- b) Boh!
- c) Che male la mano!

Che cos'è la polenta?

- a) Un tipo di verdura tipico nel Sud Italia
- b) Un cibo rustico a base di farina di mais
- c) Un tipo di pane usato nel Nord Italia

Quanti mari bagnano l'Italia?

- a) 2
- b) 4
- c) 6

Quali tra questi non è un ingrediente utilizzato per fare l'impasto della pizza?

- a) Farina
- b) Uova
- c) Burro

I giocatori della nazionale di calcio italiana vengono anche chiamati;

- a) Gli Arancioni
- b) Gli Azzurri
- c) I Giallorossi

Cos'è la mozzarella?

- a) Un tipo di pasta
- b) Un formaggio fresco

c) Una piatto tipico della Lombardia

Scegli la parola corretta in italiano.

- a) pepperoni
- b) peperroni
- c) peperoni

Chi è un famoso stilista italiano?

- a) Rocco
- b) Valentino
- c) Biagio

Video-questions level 2

Guarda il video. Come si chiamano la giacca e i pantaloni bianchi che indossa il cantante?

- a) Completo
- b) Frac
- c) Doppiopetto

Guarda il video. Nella cartina dell'Italia appesa al muro al posto dell'isola della Sardegna c'è la foto di

- a) Una pizza margherita
- b) Un piatto di pasta al pomodoro
- c) Una fetta del dolce tiramisù

Guarda il video. Il gesto che il cantante fa circa al minuto 1:34 significa

- a) È un mafioso
- b) Si è fatto male
- c) È simpatico

Guarda il video. Circa al minuto 2 c'è la foto di un famoso ponte. Dove si trova?

- a) Napoli
- b) Genova
- c) Venezia

Guarda il video. Chi è la donna che compare in una foto?

- a) Un'astronauta
- b) Una cuoca
- c) Una scrittrice

Guarda il video. Quale attore italiano viene menzionato nel testo della canzone?

- a) Benigni
- b) Accorsi
- c) Gassman

Guarda il video. Si vedono le immagini di due città, quali sono?

- a) Roma e Venezia
- b) Firenze e Palermo
- c) Milano e Napoli

Multiple choice level 2

“I figli so piezz’e core” significa:

- a) I figli spezzano il cuore
- b) I figli sono parte di noi
- c) I figli spesso si fanno male

Che cosa significa questo gesto? (gesto “mignolo”)

- a) Scusi!
- b) È magro/a
- c) Piove

Roberto Bolle è:

- a) Un attore
- b) Un musicista
- c) Un ballerino

Chi “canta l’Inferno e il Paradiso”?

- a) Petrarca
- b) Boccaccio
- c) Dante

Benigni è:

- a) Un attore
- b) Un giornalista
- c) Un giocatore di calcio

Il pizzo è:

- a) Un tipo di pizza
- b) Un gioco da tavolo
- c) Il pagamento di denaro a un'organizzazione criminale

Un pappone è:

- a) Uno sfruttatore
- b) Un piatto toscano
- c) Un papà molto grosso fisicamente

Che cosa significa questo gesto? (gesto “dito-tempia”)

- a) Ho mal di testa
- b) È matto
- c) È furbo

Qual è il capoluogo della regione Lazio ?

- a) Roma
- b) Palermo
- c) Milano

Come si chiama l'astronauta che compare nella foto?

- a) Samantha Cristoforetti
- b) Manuela Sartori
- c) Francesca Pellegrini

Quale di questi registi ha vinto l'oscar?

- a) Fellini
- b) Rossellini
- c) Rosi

Quale pittore ha dipinto la Gioconda?

- a) Michelangelo
- b) Leonardo

c) Giotto

A quale sorriso fa riferimento il cantante quando dice “c’è un mistero nel sorriso”?

- a) All’Astronauta Cristoforetti
- b) Alla Gioconda
- c) A Roberto Bolle

Quale forma di governo è presente in Italia?

- a) Monarchia
- b) Repubblica
- c) Monarchia costituzionale

L’espressione “soldi sporchi” indica dei soldi:

- a) non puliti perché sono passati di mano in mano
- b) vecchi e per questo sporchi
- c) che provengono da affari non legali

Quali tra questi film è di Fellini?

- a) La dolce vita
- b) Il Gattopardo
- c) Roma città aperta

La P38 è:

- a) Una ricetta italiana al pomodoro creata nel 1938
- b) Una pistola prodotta in Germania a partire dal 1938
- c) Un tipo di condimento piccante, simile al peperoncino

La mafia siciliana è nota anche con il nome di

- a) Casa nostra
- b) Cosa loro
- c) Cosa nostra

L’immagine della pistola nel piatto di spaghetti è comparsa nel quotidiano

- a) Le Monde
- b) El País
- c) Der Spiegel

Chi ha progettato la cupola del Duomo di Firenze?

- a) Palladio
- b) Michelangelo
- c) Brunelleschi

Video-questions level 3

Guarda il video. Quando è stato assassinato Libero Grassi? (trovi la risposta circa al minuto 3)

- a) Il 21 agosto 1999
- b) Il 29 agosto 1999
- c) Il 29 agosto 1991

Guarda il video. Nella cartina dell'Italia al posto delle regioni Veneto e Friuli Venezia Giulia c'è la foto di un famoso compositore italiano. Chi è?

- a) Giuseppe Verdi
- b) Antonio Vivaldi
- c) Giacomo Puccini

Guarda il video. Circa al minuto 2 c'è la foto di un famoso ponte di Venezia. Come si chiama?

- a) Ponte di Rialto
- b) Ponte dei Sospiri
- c) Ponte degli Scalzi

Guarda il video. Nella cartina dell'Italia all'altezza della regione Toscana c'è la foto di un famoso ballerino italiano. Chi è?

- a) Raffaele Paganini
- b) Kledi Kadiu
- c) Roberto Bolle

Guarda il video. Come si chiamano gli oggetti che il cantante porta ai polsi della camicia quando è vestito di bianco?

- a) Fratelli
- b) Gemelli
- c) Polsini

Guarda il video. Al minuto 2:38 compaiono le foto in bianco e nero di due bambini tratte da un famoso film. Come si intitola il film?

- a) La vita è bella
- b) Sciuscià
- c) Amarcord

Guarda il video. La citazione di Proust alla fine del video parla di

- a) Pregiudizi
- b) Viaggi
- c) Amicizia

Guarda il video. La parte del famoso quadro che compare è:

- a) La primavera di Botticelli
- b) La Gioconda di Leonardo da Vinci
- c) La dama con l'ermellino di Leonardo da Vinci

Multiple choice level 3

Un polentone è:

- a) Un cuoco specializzato a fare la polenta
- b) Un modo dispregiativo per chiamare le persone del Nord Italia
- c) Una persona che cammina lenta

Le agende rosse sono:

- a) Un movimento antimafia
- b) Nome dato agli studenti dell'università Ca' Foscari di Venezia
- c) I libri trovati dall'Inquisizione a casa delle presunte streghe

Questo gesto significa (gesto "fame"):

- a) Ho male al fegato
- b) Ho fame
- c) Ho i pantaloni troppo stretti

Renzo Piano è:

- a) Un pittore
- b) Un matematico
- c) Un architetto

Sciuscià è:

- a) Il titolo di un film
- b) Il nome di un rapper napoletano
- c) “sto qua” in dialetto napoletano

Il comitato dei lenzuoli bianchi è:

- a) Un movimento per l’ecologia
- b) Una pubblicità di prodotti per la casa
- c) Un’organizzazione antimafia

Quali sono le cinque regioni a Statuto Speciale in Italia?

- a) Trentino, Emilia Romagna, Basilicata, Sicilia, Sardegna
- b) Trentino, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Sardegna, Sicilia, Valle D’Aosta
- c) Trentino, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Sardegna, Sicilia, Lombardia

Qual è il capoluogo della regione Emilia Romagna?

- a) Modena
- b) Parma
- c) Bologna

Quante sono le regioni in Italia?

- a) 21
- b) 22
- c) 20

Che cos’è lo Slow Food?

- a) Un insieme di prodotti culinari che vanno consumati lentamente
- b) Un’ associazione impegnata a ridare il giusto valore al cibo
- c) Un tipo di cucina che prevede la cottura lenta dei cibi

Il Toro è il simbolo di

- a) Una casa di automobili
- b) Una squadra di pallacanestro
- c) Il vincitore di una gara ciclistica

L’Italia viene definita il Bel Paese, non solo per il suo patrimonio artistico ma anche per le sue bellezze naturali. Quale tre queste sono riconosciute dall’Unesco come patrimonio dell’umanità?

- a) Le montagne Dolomiti
- b) Il vulcano Vesuvio
- c) Il lago di Como

Cosa significa “taccuino”?

- a) Il posto nel portafogli dove si tengono le monete
- b) Libricino per prendere appunti
- c) Animale da cortile

In quali anni si sviluppa il movimento neorealista?

- a) Dal 1922 al 1945
- b) Dalla seconda metà degli anni '50
- c) Dal 1943 al 1955

Quali tra questi registi italiani hanno tutti vinto l'Oscar?

- a) Tornatore, De Sica, Petri
- b) Fellini, Benigni, Monicelli
- c) Virzi, Risi, Leone

Quanti Mondiali di calcio ha vinto l'Italia?

- a) 3
- b) 4
- c) 5

Quando viene proclamato il Regno d'Italia?

- a) 1861
- b) 1948
- c) 1849

Quale tra questi registi non fa parte del movimento neorealista?

- a) Rossellini
- b) Fellini
- c) Monicelli

Quali tra questi tipi di pasta non esiste?

- a) Conchiglioni
- b) Orecchiette

c) Lunette

La P2 è:

- a) un'organizzazione segreta
- b) un'arma da fuoco
- c) un condimento per la pasta

La camorra è un'organizzazione criminale italiana che ha avuto origine in

- a) Puglia
- b) Basilicata
- c) Campania

Quali tra questi stilisti non è italiano?

- a) Miuccia Prada
- b) John Galliano
- c) Pierre Cardin

Qual è e dove si trova in Italia un monumento simile al Colosseo di Roma?

- a) Gli scavi di Pompei
- b) La Reggia reale di Venaria
- c) L'Arena di Verona

Quale tra questi film di Fellini ha vinto l'Oscar?

- a) La dolce vita
- b) I vitelloni
- c) Roma città aperta

Oltre alla Divina Commedia, quale altra opera famosa ha scritto Dante Alighieri?

- a) Vita Nova
- b) Decameron
- c) Canzoniere

Storicamente, da quale dialetto deriva l'odierno italiano?

- a) il milanese
- b) il toscano
- c) il siciliano

Quali sono le Repubbliche marinare italiane?

- a) Genova, Pisa, Venezia, Amalfi
- b) Genova, Livorno, Ancona, Palermo
- c) Venezia, Ancona, Lecce, Cagliari

Oltre ad essere il nome di un capo mafioso e di un film, quale altro significato ha la parola padrino?

- a) colui che inaugura una nuova opera o la presenta al pubblico
- b) il nuovo marito di mia madre
- c) un padre molto basso

As already said above, the quiz starts with a video-question which appears as follows (fig. 12). The learner should listen to the video until he finds the correct answer. Then, by pressing the “Avanti” button, he will be driven to the multiple choice quiz in which they are asked to answer some questions about the Italian language and culture. The video itself introduces many of the themes that will be dealt with in the multiple choice, as it can be seen in the list of questions. Moreover the username is required in



Fig. 12

order for the user to appear on the leaderboard as it can be seen on fig.13.

The task, as it can be inferred from the image is that of answering all the questions as soon as possible in order to be the best. When time is up, the user is not able to answer anymore and questions without an answer are considered wrong. So the score risks to be lower. Ten questions are chosen by the system. An example of how the question appears can be shown on figure 14. The user is allowed to change the answer and to go back to the previous one if he/she needs. Moreover, Quiz and Survey Master, the plug-in I have chosen, allows the creator to embed any type of content for each question:

images, video and text, for example. Furthermore, a countdown is present in order for the user to know how much time is left to complete the quiz.



Fig. 13



Fig.14

At the end of each quiz, there is a landing page which shows different results which depend on the user's score. If the user scores 10/10 he or she is allowed to go to the next level. If, on the contrary, the score is lower, the user will be invited to repeat the quiz. The two different result pages can be seen on figures 15 and 16. In addition, the player can share his/her result on Facebook to challenge his/her friends.



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

The same pattern is repeated for each level: video-question first, multiple choice quiz and result page with the possibilities that have been shown above. Of course this is also the case for translated quizzes (Spanish, Japanese and English).

This game is complete and can be already used by who wants to. It can be used at home, autonomously, or in class. As a matter of fact, Interactive Whiteboards (LIM in Italian) have, among their accessories, the possibility to use a remote with which students can have control over the screen and play. They can divide into two groups and each group can give its own answer.

Moreover, *weareitalians.atervista.org* can be transformed in a real virtual community by using plug-ins such as BuddyPress which allows the editor to create groups and activities, but even simple chats and forums. However, this theme will not be analyzed in this context.

CONCLUSIONS

Technologies can potentially facilitate language learning. As it has been said in chapter 1, the digital competence is necessary for a lifelong learning perspective. From the didactic point of view, it has been shown that cooperative and autonomous learning, songs and music are all possible inside a learning environment and this can definitely facilitate learning. Moreover, given the fact that motivation is the driving force of learning, it has been demonstrated how technologies can motivate students. As a matter of fact, if Schumann's *Stimulus Appraisal Theory* is taken into account, all the criteria on which it is based (novelty, pleasantness, goal significance, coping ability and self and social image) can be positively valued by students. This is true as far as technologies in general are concerned. However, there are other motivating elements in a learning environments such as songs, games and the possibility to work alone or with other users, as it can be inferred from what have been said in the previous chapters. From the neuroscientific point of view, instead, it has been proved that there are both positive and negative consequences of the use of ICT. On the one hand, multimodality can facilitate memorization, meaning that the presence of different inputs helps the student to experience what the screen makes him/her see, hear, and feel. This can be considered as an active experimentation and it can facilitate learning as it has been explained in chapter 3. On the other hand, the presence of so many visual, auditory and textual inputs can provoke a cognitive overload which creates the opposite effect on memorization. However, there are some "cures" to this problem that can be found in multitasking and videogames. In fact, these two elements help students to develop the selective attention. So the reasons why *weareitalians.altervista.org* has been created, have to be found in both didactics and neurosciences. However, in schools, teachers are not as accustomed to technologies as students are. In fact, the difference between digital immigrants and digital natives can create a divide which risks to lower motivation in both students and teachers. Fortunately, the Italian Ministry of Education is trying to find some solutions in order to solve this issue.

Talking about the website, the main reasons that lead to its creation are based on the positive effects songs and games have on learning in e-learning contexts. As for songs, it has been discussed that:

- a. they create pleasure, so they prevent students from activating the affective filter;
- b. they are a way to foster socialization;
- c. they help memorization;
- d. they are considered as witnesses of language and culture.

Moreover, if a song is played on Youtube, these advantages are even emphasized. In fact, not only can students hear something about a language and its culture, but they are given a visual demonstration.

When it comes to game-playing and videogames, instead, they facilitate language learning in the sense that:

- a. While playing students are not aware of using the language, so Krashen's *rule of forgetting* is applied;
- b. Both cerebral hemispheres are involved;
- c. They require the elaboration of some strategies in order to solve problems, so they sharpen perception, and memory as well;
- d. They give learners an immediate feedback.

Moreover being an hypertext, weareitalians.altervista.org gives students multimodal inputs which, as it has been stated above, facilitate memory and learning.

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