



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree programme – Second Cycle
(*D.M. 270/2004*)
in Language sciences

Final Thesis

—
Ca' Foscari
Dorsoduro 3246
30123 Venezia

The intercultural communicative competence

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Graziano Serragiotto

Graduand

Denise Michelino

Matriculation Number 837899

Academic Year

2015 / 2016

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INTRODUCTION

When a person learns a language, and even when this person teaches it, he has to keep in mind that being able to establish an ideal communication with a foreigner, involves not only knowing the language, its grammar, its vocabulary etc. but also trying to know and understand his culture, his lifestyle, his values and his nonverbal language. All these elements, although it does not seem so, are rooted in the language. These elements are expressed through the speech. Words are accompanied by gestures, by expressions and by anything which varies from culture to culture.

If we talk about teaching a language it does not make sense to discuss something abstract: it does not mean just learning grammar rules, morphosyntactic constructions and more. The learner should be interested not only in the linguistic instrument. A person who owns it should also be able to contextualize it and then consider the culture where that instrument is used. This is because language and culture have always influenced each other. When we think about a language, we think about a tool used by a population in order to represent itself, and so behind there is a culture which supports that instrument. We can also say that it does not exist or we do not talk about culture without considering the linguistic instrument. A culture is described through it.

Two teachers at the Cà Foscari University of Venice, named Graziano Serragiotto and Paola Celentin in their essay "The cultural factor in language teaching", claim that: "... there is a language-culture combination according to which there are strong relationships which govern these two elements which influence each other. They are inseparably linked to the very nature of their relationship. According to Vygotsky, the most interactionist current representative, the operation of the mind has socio-cultural origins, that is, the mind is a social and cultural product. Vygotsky emphasizes that culture and language play a very important role in mind formation. According to Vygotsky language generates and precedes thought. "

This is fundamental because everybody has his own mental software and everybody is characterized and differentiated from another individual coming from another country by this software. Often it differentiates a person from another one even if they belong to the same state but not from the same region. A gesture which according to a culture may seem completely harmless or otherwise friendly

and respectful, to others may seem extremely arrogant, rude and inappropriate. The most beautiful experience would be that of going to discover the world which lies behind the language and which constitutes the real difference between two people of different nationalities.

In my paper the first part is dedicated to the communicative competence analysis focusing on the extra-linguistic competence concerning non-verbal communication. It represents that part of communication, which does not include words, and I will describe all its components, and then analyse it at an intercultural level.

In the second part I will propose a case study to two classes at a high school where two questionnaires will be given. Immigrant students will be asked to fulfil a questionnaire different from that one proposed to Italians. The questions addressed to foreign students will be on their approach in the Italian school, their relationships with the other students and with the teachers, possible difficulties that they can meet chatting with Italians etc. In this way I will highlight some differences between Italians and foreign institutions, diversities between several cultures present in the classroom, difficulties that foreign students have settling in Italy. The other questionnaire proposed to Italian students, will include similar questions in order to consider the scholastic situation also from their point of view.

FIRST PART:

Intercultural communicative competence

1. COMMUNICATION

Before talking about communicative competence, it is useful to define and analyse the concept of communication.

Communication is a universal characteristic of life and it is an essential part of the adaptation of each species to its environment. All living organisms are constantly busy to launch and receive messages: finding food, avoiding dangers, mating for reproduction are all vital activities that could not be realized without the support of appropriate signs and signals.

Though communication is a basic element for the survival of any organism it takes place according to very different degrees of complexity. In some species the signals required for interactions between individuals are not very elaborated. The polyps, for instance, lead lives mostly solitary and they exchange each other a few simple signals. With other species, communication is more complex. Ants, bees, elephants, penguins, primates, such as gorillas, chimpanzees, baboons and then humans face their existence and their environment in group. Survival depends on the ability of the group members to coordinate their behaviour to achieve common goals. It is a real team effort, involving many interactions that require good communication. Each group member must know what to do in order to act efficiently.

As V. Matora claims in "Communication and culture", "the ability to interact, that is, going beyond the limits of the organic individuality and establish relationships in space and time with other organisms of the same species but even of different species and, in general, with the outside world, is a trait that humans share with animals". The advantage that the human species has, consists in having at its disposal a much broader range of possibilities, rather than animals, whose possibilities of communication are determined by a very hard genetic nature. People can learn new things and continually modify their behaviour acquiring social roles far greater than those of any other animal.

Defined as the communication tool, language is one of the greatest enigma of human intelligence. To grasp its secret a lot of sciences have been mobilized: those of nature to study its sound reality and its biological basis; those of culture to identify the view of the world and the patterns of living

linked to it; the philosophical sciences, to understand its essence; the linguistic sciences to describe the structure and the immanent mechanisms of language; communication sciences to analyse the methods of linguistic and communicative exchange in statistical or cybernetic terms; the psychological sciences to discover the links and the existing interaction among language, thought, development and behaviour; then we can add also the educational sciences which aim to identify the educational potential of the language and to develop teaching models of the same. Among these there is also the language teaching which involves language teaching and learning.

Natural language is a symbolic extremely powerful communication system, which allows us to exchange information and ideas, express feelings, solve problems and to give orders. Obviously it is not the only communication system available to humans. There are other systems such as the paralinguistic one, kinesics etc. However, a primary role is recognized to natural language because of its great communicative potentials. In fact, language allows us to give and get information on a very wide range of topics; to communicate with people who are not present in the physical space dominated by the speaker and to make references to situations and facts of the past and future time. This is possible because of the unique characteristics of language, not least the possibility of combining a relatively small number of elements (sounds and words) to get very complex structures (speeches).

1.1. Communication definition

Giving a more precise definition we can affirm that communication means “exchange efficient messages”. We isolate the three key words:

- Exchange: communication is never one-way, even when the recipient is unreal (like a diary) or virtual (as the implied reader of a poet who writes alone in his study). Communication involves sharing a message. The word "communicate" has its root in "communis", which implies more participants who put in "common" meanings, negotiate and modify them as mutually agreed.
- Messages: communication takes place through "messages" exchange, which can be defined

as a set of complex verbal and nonverbal language.

- Efficient: we do not communicate just for pleasure, except in very few cases; we communicate to convince, to get or forbid something, to make people laugh or stimulate other feelings etc. Communication effectiveness is evaluated on the result, that is, having been able to get what we wanted.

Communication is perfect when the exchange permits each speaker to achieve his aim. It does not happen nowhere but it is located in a communicative event that occurs in a situational context.

According to Balboni (1999), the communicative situation can be defined taking into account some variables:

- *Place* where communication takes place, which can be divided into *physical setting* and *cultural scene*: intercultural communication occurs between people who come from different *scenes* and who, regardless of the *physical setting* in which they are, keep the rules and values of the cultural place from which they come;
- *Time*, whose concept, as we will see, varies from culture to culture;
- *Topic*, which may seem shared by the interlocutors, but keeping in mind that the underlying values could be dissimilar (and thus can lead to misunderstandings);
- *Role of the participants*, which is conferred and kept in different ways depending on the different cultures.

In a communicative event exists then:

- *A linguistic text*;

- *Extra-linguistic messages* (gestures, tone of voice, mimicry..);
- *Declared and not declared purposes*, with well-defined rules in each culture to explicit them, rules which vary according to the status, hierarchy and to the sex of the people involved in the conversation;
- *Psychological attitudes* towards culture, institution, the group or the sex to which the interlocutor belongs (attitudes which emerge in particular in extra-linguistic messages);
- *A contextual grammar* which provides, beyond place, time, topic, role and a sequence expected for a given event, which can be more or less ritualized and rigid.

1.2. Communication typologies

There are different typologies of communication such as:

- *Social communication* better known as *mass communication*, is realized by one or a few people and it is addressed to many individuals (television, print, radio, advertising, users and recipients).
- *Interpersonal communication* involves two or more people and is based on a relation in which the interlocutors influence each other, even when they do not realize it.

Interpersonal communication is subdivided into:

- *Verbal communication* which occurs through the usage of both written and oral language, and which depends on specific syntactic and grammatical rules.

- *Nonverbal communication* which occurs without the usage of words, but through various channels: facial expressions, gazes, gestures, postures, gaits, clothing, etc.
- *Paraverbal communication* which mainly affects the voice (tone, volume, rhythm), but also pauses, laughter, silence, other sound expressions (clearing of throat, drumming, making sounds) and fiddling with objects.

Nonverbal communication plays a huge role. The information concerning the sight are processed before the linguistic ones. In fact our brain elaborates first with the right hemisphere, which receives global, simultaneous, visual information and then with the left one, more analytical and rational. It has been in fact demonstrated that the 80% of the information passes through the eye and only the 11/15% through the ear. This means that we give more importance to what we see rather than to what we hear and in those moments in which verbal and nonverbal codes do not coincide we tend to believe in the nonverbal one. Therefore nonverbal communication is an enormous contribution to the verbal language and, since communication is strictly ambivalent, we can easily understand how bigger is the risk of not understanding when we are on the phone than when we are talking face to face. Our body, in fact, offers a lot of involuntary information such as sweating, shaking, blushing, but also voluntary in order to highlight meanings expressed through language.

1.3. Communication elements

Communication is made up of different elements such as:

- *The sender*: he is the subject (or subjects) who communicates the message, and who therefore has the objective to communicate, to inform, to influence, directly or indirectly, people in the environment.
- *The addressee*: he is the subject (or subjects) who receives the message, so readers, viewers, listeners, consumers, customers etc.

- *The message*: it is the content of what is communicated. It can be a piece of information, a data, news or simply a feeling.
- *The code*: it is the system of signs which is used when someone communicates and without which there would be no transmission of the message. It can be both a language, a gesture, a graphic and a drawing.
- *The channel* can be interpreted as the technical means external to the subject with which the message arrives (telephone, fax, mail, etc.) as well as the sensory means involved during communication (mostly hearing and sight).
- *Coding*: it is the activity made by the issuer to transform ideas, concepts and mental images in a communicable message through the code.
- *Decoding*: it is the reverse process made by the addressee which transforms the message from code into ideas, concepts and mental images.
- *Feedback*: it is the exchange which takes place between addressee and sender when the information of return allows the sender to understand whether the message has been received and understood.
- *The context or the environment*: it is the "place", physical or social, where the communication exchange takes place. It can encourage or otherwise discourage communication.
- *Filters*: they are related to all that disturbs, alters or more rarely simplifies communication. They can be physical (noise, buzz, low volume of voice, silence) or psychological (expectations, needs, prejudices, emotional experiences). While physical filters are more easily managed, the psychological ones are more complex because they are almost always unaware.

Communication elements act in a circular way because the addressee, if he answers, becomes a sender and the process continues until the end of the conversation. Fundamental is that the sender and the addressee share the same code in order to understand each other. The sender mentally encodes the message and sends it, through verbal, nonverbal or paraverbal channels, to the receiver. During the transmission of the message almost always physical and/or psychological filters intervene. They work both in the sender and in the addressee and this may affect their communication. When the message arrives to the receiver, this has to encode it, that is, understand it mentally in order to answer starting a new communication. At this point the first addressee becomes sender and the first sender becomes addressee, and so on until the end of communication.

Interpersonal communication is always engaging, because it produces, for short- or long-term psychological effects which may be positive or negative, but never indifferent. Besides, in the communicative relationship the interlocutors establish, as the communication goes on, the nature of their communications (confidential, formal, etc.). We have to keep in mind that each of us has its own style of communication which depends on various factors such as social experiences, knowledge, values and lifestyle.

1.4. Communication axioms

Paul Watzlawick, an Austrian psychologist and the first member of the American School of Palo Alto, established a series of theoretical concepts developed from the field testing and he defined the pragmatic function of communication, namely the ability to provoke events in life contexts through the communication experience both in its verbal form and in its nonverbal one. The idea is that within any interpersonal system (as a couple, a family, a work-group, a case of therapist-patient etc.), each person affects the others with their own behaviour and they are in turn influenced by others' behaviour. Paul Watzlawick then creates five axioms of communication.

1.4.1. First axiom: we cannot “not” communicate

In a situation of interaction between people any behaviour is a form of communication.

Consequently, whatever attitude is assumed by an individual (as it does not exist a non-behaviour), this immediately becomes a bearer of meaning for the others: it has message value. Therefore communication can also be unintentional, involuntary, non-conscious and ineffective. Even silence, indifference, passivity and inactivity are forms of communication like the others, since they bring with them a meaning and above all a message to which the other participants in the interaction cannot remain silent. In fact people can also communicate just with the distance between bodies, that is, through proxemics or through vestemics (the choice of clothing that shows both the respect we have towards our interlocutor and the relational attitude that we want to establish). Also gestures and facial expressions represent a kind of communication called kinesics. So it is not possible not to behave and the result is that we cannot “not communicate”.

1.4.2. Second axiom: communicative levels of content and relation

Each communication has an aspect of content and an aspect of relation so that the second classifies the first and we have therefore meta-communication (communication on communication) which determines the relationship between speakers. For instance, an individual who produces an order expresses, beyond the content (the wish that the listener performs a certain action), the relationship between who communicates and who is the subject of the communication, in a specific case a superior versus his subordinate. So any kind of communication, in addition to transmitting information, implies a commitment between the speakers and defines the relationship nature. The addressee receives a message that we can consider objective with regard to the information transmitted, but which also contains a meta-communicative aspect which defines a model which is part of a wide range of several possible relationships between the two interlocutors. "Pathological" communication exchanges are characterized by a constant struggle to define their respective roles and their relationship nature, while the information transmitted by the speakers goes into the background (although these latter are unaware of this). The relation aspect of a communication is defined by terms in which the same communication occurs, by nonverbal elements which accompanies it and by context in which communication takes place. Thanks to the definition of the relationship between the two speakers, these implicitly define themselves.

One of the communication functions is that of providing the interlocutors a confirmation or a rejection of one's self. Through meta-communication people involved in the interaction develop their proper self awareness. It is essential that each speaker is aware of the other's point of view and

the fact that also the other possesses this consciousness (concept of interpersonal perception).

1.4.3. Third axiom: punctuation of events sequences

The nature of a relationship also depends on the punctuation of communication exchange sequences between the interlocutors. This tends to differentiate the relationship between the individuals involved in the interaction and to define their respective roles: they will punctuate exchanges so that these result to be organized within more or less conventional models of interaction. An events sequence punctuation, in a sense, is just one of the interpretation possibilities of the same events, for which also the speakers' roles are defined by their propensity to accept a certain punctuation system or another one. Watzlawick gives an example of a lab rat that says: "I have trained well my experimenter. Whenever I press the lever he gives me food"; the latter does not accept the punctuation that the experimenter seeks to impose on him, according to which it is the same experimenter who has trained the rat and not the contrary.

In a long sequence of communication exchanges each element is at the same time stimulus and response but people punctuate the sequence so that it will seem that the one or the other has the initiative, and so on. At the root of many conflicts there is a disagreement on how to punctuate the events sequence, that is, to determine which behaviour comes first, as a cause, and which comes then as a consequence.

The third axiom thus declares the connection between the exchanges sequence punctuation which articulates a communication and the relationship between the speakers: how to interpret punctuation is a function of the relationship between the interlocutors. In fact, since communication is a continuous alternation of communication flows from one direction to another, in other words a circular movement of information, the direction variations of the communicative flows are marked by punctuation and how to read it, is determined by the type of relationship which links the speakers.

1.4.4. Fourth axiom: numerical and analogical communication (respectively verbal and nonverbal)

The fourth axiom confers to human beings the ability to communicate both through a digital (or numerical) communication module and an analogical one. In other words if, as we remember, every communication has an aspect of content and one of relation, the first will be transmitted essentially by a digital module and the second through an analogical one.

When human beings communicate through images, communication is analogical: this includes the nonverbal communication. When people communicate through words, communication follows the digital module. This is because words are arbitrary signs and without a correlation with what they represent, but they allow a manipulation according to the rules of logical syntax which organizes them.

Instead in the analogical communication this correlation exists: in what it is used to represent the thing in question, there is something else similar to the same thing. Numerical communication possesses a degree of abstraction, of versatility, as well as of complexity and logical syntax enormously higher than the analogical communication, but it possesses also big limitations as regards the transmission of messages on the relationship between the interlocutors. On the contrary, while analogical communication is richer and more meaningful when the relationship is the subject of the communication in course, at the same time it may result a little ambiguous due to the lack of syntax and of logic and space-time indicators.

1.4.5. Fifth axiom: complementary and symmetrical communication

This last axiom refers to a classification of the relationships nature which divides them into relationships based on equality or on the difference. In the first case we speak of symmetrical relations, in which both participants tend to mirror the other's behaviour (for instance when the communication is between director-director, or employee-employee). In the second case we speak of complementary relations, in which the behaviour of one of the interlocutor completes that of the other (for instance between director-employee). The context helps to establish the type of

relationship between the speakers. In the complementary relation one of the two communicants assumes the one-up position (upper) and the other one-down (inferior). The different behaviours of the participants reflect and reinforce each other, creating a relationship of interdependence in which their respective roles one-up and one-down have been accepted by both of them (for example the mother-child, doctor-patient, instructor-student, teacher-student relationships etc.).

It goes without saying, however, that symmetrical and complementary relationship models can stabilise each other and that the changes from one model to the other are important homeostatic mechanisms. It is crucial to have clear the concept that symmetrical and complementary relationships can never be equated with "good" and "bad", nor the one-up and one-down positions can be compared with such epithets as "strong" and "weak". It is just a subdivision that allows us to classify each communicative interaction in one of the two groups.

1.4.5.1. Two typologies of symmetrical communication

Symmetrical communication can be "one-way" or "two-way." "Two-way" communication does not want either persuade or handle and it is the only communication modality which can make effective the interpersonal communication. "One way" communication is, effectively, characterized by the fact that those who communicate pursues exclusively their objective, they attach little importance to the feedback, while the message addressee is only a target to hit and that, for some aspects, depends on the sender. So this is an asymmetrical relationship where the issuer of the message "wins" and the receiver "loses", as he cannot intervene or converse. Two-way communication is possible only in a relationship of trust and interdependence, where it is important that also the addressee is pleased to have achieved his objectives. In this type of communication, so there are no winners or losers, because all the subjects in the field are in a position for achieving their goals. This communication modality involves very high relational benefits because it does not create resentment, it does not generate jealousy and does not produce neither exclusions nor indifference. Besides it is symmetrical because it puts all the parties on the same level and the achievement of the overall objectives depends on the satisfaction degree.

2. NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal communication is that part of communication made up of all those aspects of a communication exchange which do not concern purely the semantic level of the message, (that is, the literal meaning of the words which forms the same message), but which regards the body language: the non-spoken communication between people.

Much of the face to face communication is made up of nonverbal signals; nonverbal communication includes everything that passes through the motor-tactile, chemical-olfactory, visual-kinesthetic channels (ie facial expression, gaze, gesture, proxemics, posture, touch, etc.), and all the paralinguistic or para-verbal aspects (such as pauses, silences, interlayer, etc.). Nonverbal communication mainly uses an analogical code, reproducing, that is, through images what we refer to, using gestures, rituals, etc. Aspects of this type of communication are also the physical aspect and the clothes choice: height, colour of eyes and hair, the facial features constitute our look which is an important communication instrument, a real language. The way a person dresses, how this person takes care of the hair, of the make-up, the way of presenting to one's self constitute together with the physical appearance, immediate nonverbal communication signals.

2.1. Nonverbal communication functions

Nonverbal communication has multiple functions:

- of expressive communication: used to express emotions, feelings, moods (smile, wink ..)
- of interpersonal communication: used to indicate friendship, hostility, availability, aggressiveness (shake hands, frown ..)
- of interaction control: monitors the face to face communication (punctuation, the conclusion of a turn ..)

- of verbal communication: it serves to emphasize what is said in words (gazes, facial expressions, gestures ..)
- of spoken messages replacement: used when two speakers, who do not share the same language, try to make themselves understood.

2.2. The different forms of the nonverbal communication

In the communication sciences field nonverbal communication is divided into four components:

- *Paralinguistic/paraverbal system*

- *Kinesics system*

- *Proxemics*

- *Haptics*

2.2.1. Paralinguistic/paraverbal system

Also called nonverbal voice system, it includes the set of all the sounds emitted during the verbal communication, regardless of the meaning of words. This system involves four different aspects such as tone, frequency, rhythm and silence.

- **The tone** which is influenced by physiological factors (age, physical constitution), and by

the context: a high social level person who is talking to a lower level one tends to have a more grave tone.

- **The frequency**, as in the tone, is influenced by the social aspect, in fact, a subdued who talks to a superior will tend to have a lower frequency voice than the normal one.
- **The rhythm** which in a speech gives greater or minor authority to the words pronounced: speaking at a slow pace, including some pauses between sentences, gives a solemn tone to what is being saying. On the contrary speaking at a faster rhythm confers not much importance to the spoken words.
- **The silence** which has ambivalent characteristics. Indeed the silence between two people who are ignoring each other has a very different meaning than the silence between two people who love each other. Also in this case the social aspect has relevance. An example is the official who addresses to his troops in the general silence, considered a form of respect for the role played by the speaker.

2.2.2. Kinesics system

The kinesics system includes all the communicative acts expressed through body movements.

First, we can consider the eye movements so the visual contact between two people. It plays a vital role in the relationship with others, especially in the face-to-face exchanges and it is characterized by a plurality of meanings, from communicating interest, attention to the challenge gestures. The social aspect and the context influence also this aspect: a person in a difficult situation, will tend to look down. Analyzing the duration, the frequency of glances and the dilation of the eyelids, the level of attraction can be proved. In fact an individual tends to look more whom interests him. Through the gaze we can even show our superiority over others as dominant people such as leaders who are more secure and autonomous. They keep less time looking at the others, but they are the last to take their eyes off.

Another component of the kinesics system is the facial mimic. It includes, as already mentioned, the facial expressions which are not always under our control (such as to blush or to pale) and a large portion of purely voluntary facial expressions which can be adapted at one's will to the circumstances presented (such as a squint, frowning, and so on).

A key element of the kinesics system is represented by gestures, primarily those made with hands. The hand gesture can be a useful emphasis on the spoken words, reinforcing the meaning, for example in Italy to emphasize the concept of "crazy" we can put the tip of the index finger against our temple, or we can move our hand up and down in front of our eyes, or still, with closed fist striking our forehead. But we can also provide a reading key which deviates from the meaning of the message expressed verbally, expressing also the exact opposite in an ironic way. For example when we say a certain thing, putting a hand with the thumb that touches the other fingers and moving it from the bottom upwards repeatedly, all slightly approaching the head towards the hand.

Gesture also includes head and feet movements. Some gestures fall into disuse, as time passes they are lost or changed (such as the hand-kissing considered a "flirty" gesture for those people who do that nowadays). Others are linked to socio-cultural contexts (for example in southern Italy, gestures are more pronounced than in the north).

Another element is the posture. Also in this case the social elements and the context have a great importance. For instance the soldiers who stand at attention in front of a superior as form of respect. A person who usually has a straight posture, with the head turned slightly upward, and with his shoulders held a bit wide, denotes a person very sure of himself, fair, who is not afraid of anything. On the contrary a person hunched, with curved shoulders and with his head kept down, denotes an insecure person, uncomfortable with others and intimidated.

2.2.3. Proxemics

The proxemics aspect of communication analyses the messages transmitted by space occupation. The way in which people tend to take position in a certain situation, seemingly casual, is actually codified by very specific rules. We all have our own personal "bubble" that we need to remain so.

Even in the animal world if an animal or a person invades another animal's territory there is a reaction. That is because, if the animal finds a stranger too close, it feels attacked and tries to defend itself. Returning to the human world, all of us tend to divide the space around us in four main areas:

- Intimate area (from 0 to 50 centimeters) is the most restricted: as a rule inside this area only a few close family members and partners are allowed. The access of other people in the intimate area is perceived as an invasion which causes discomfort and varies depending on the subject. As confirmation of this we can just think of the embarrassment situation which comes when we are forced to admit some strangers in our intimate area, for instance in the lift or on the bus; the consequence of this situation is an attempt to show the discomfort of our "invasion", then we tend to tense up and not to make eye contact with other people. We will try to arrange ourselves in order to have an escape route, in the position which makes us feel more at ease.
- Personal area (from 50 centimeters to 1 meter) is less restricted: less close relatives, friends and colleagues are admitted.
- Social area (from 1 to 3 or 4 meters) refers to that area in which we carry out all activities involving interaction with unknown or little known people. It is the area in which formal meetings take place, such as a business meeting, but it represents also the distance between a table and another in a restaurant.
- Public area (over 4 meters) is that of the official occasions: a political meeting, an assembly, a conference, a university lesson etc. In this case the distance between who speaks and who listens is relatively high and generally codified. There is a strong asymmetry between the participants in the communication: only one person usually speaks while all the others listen.

2.2.4. Haptics

Haptics consists of the communicative messages expressed through physical contact. Again we pass from codified communication forms (a handshake, a kiss on the cheeks as a greeting to friends and family), to others of more spontaneous nature (a hug, a pat on the shoulder). Body contact is the most immediate kind of nonverbal communication where the distance between sender and receiver is abolished; an example is in the aggressive behaviour or in the affective-sexual relationships.

In the following chapters I will witness what kind of role nonverbal communication covers, in an intercultural perspective.

3. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

As already mentioned, to the concept of "knowing a language" is often attributed knowing in a perfect manner vocabulary, language syntax, grammar etc... Actually knowing how to communicate in a language also includes many other skills such as the extra-linguistic and the (inter)cultural ones. Important is knowing how to master these skills and so working with the language and knowing how to use this knowledge in a specific communicative event. Over the years the idea of what language is and what knowing a language means has radically changed.

In 1962, Austin published "How to Do Things with Words" in which he no longer speaks of knowing "on" the language but of knowing what to do "with" the language. So, he emphasizes the language pragmatic purpose. Later in 1967 the Modern Language Project of the Council of Europe leads to some communicative acts repertoires (called function in English) such as "to greet", "to thank" etc., today called threshold levels which are already 23 and also more repertoires for other European languages are still being completing. Ten years after the American anthropologist and sociolinguist Dell Hymes in 1972 proposed the concept of communicative competence. Communicative competence, which primarily represents a critique of Chomsky's notion of "linguistic competence" adopted to define the human linguistic ability, is understood by Dell Hymes as the speaker's ability to use a language in the manner deemed most appropriate for the communicative event which occurs. Hymes sustains that linguistic competence is only a component of the socio-linguistic competence as the choice of how verbally realize what is meant to be said, descends directly from the socio-situational aspects of the context in which communication takes place. While the notion of "linguistic competence" underlies a vision of language as an organized code into a system of fixed and immutable rules, whose respect goes to the formal correctness of language use, with communicative competence, according to Dell Hymes, also the socio-situational variables are deemed essential and they are summarized in the acronym SPEAKING:

- *S (setting)*: each place offers various opportunities and different cultural models as an aid to communication. For instance, in the face to face interaction it is possible to gesture, to point something etc., actions that could not be possible in a book or in a letter.

- *P (participants)*: role and relationship of the participants fundamental for understanding the

deep meaning of a communicative event. An individual cannot communicate if he does not know the rules which govern the role relationships and the way they are reflected on the nonverbal language and on the language in general.

- *E (ends)*: purposes for which an individual communicates. Understanding a text does not mean comprehending only the referential information, but above all it means understanding declared and not declared purposes, of the person, who produces that text.

- *A (act sequences)*: acts performed to achieve a purpose (apologize, relate what happened, ask the way...). Important in this case is not to focus on the single words but to get the sense of the linguistic expressions for example “Thank you” can express gratitude or it can be a way to say goodbye.

- *K (key)*: it regards the psychological dimension and the relationship between the participants in the communicative event: sarcasm, irony, ire, availability, etc. are essential elements to communicate. Knowing how to express them according to the rules of the foreign culture avoids misunderstandings and involuntary messages of aggression and lack of respect.

- *I (instruments)*: tools used to communicate which can be verbal, nonverbal, but also physical (telephone, internet etc.). The world where we live makes more and more important the role of the communication instruments which sometimes require specific grammars.

- *N (norms)*: interaction rules, rules of word passage, of respect which vary from culture to culture. Knowing these diversities makes communication more fluid.

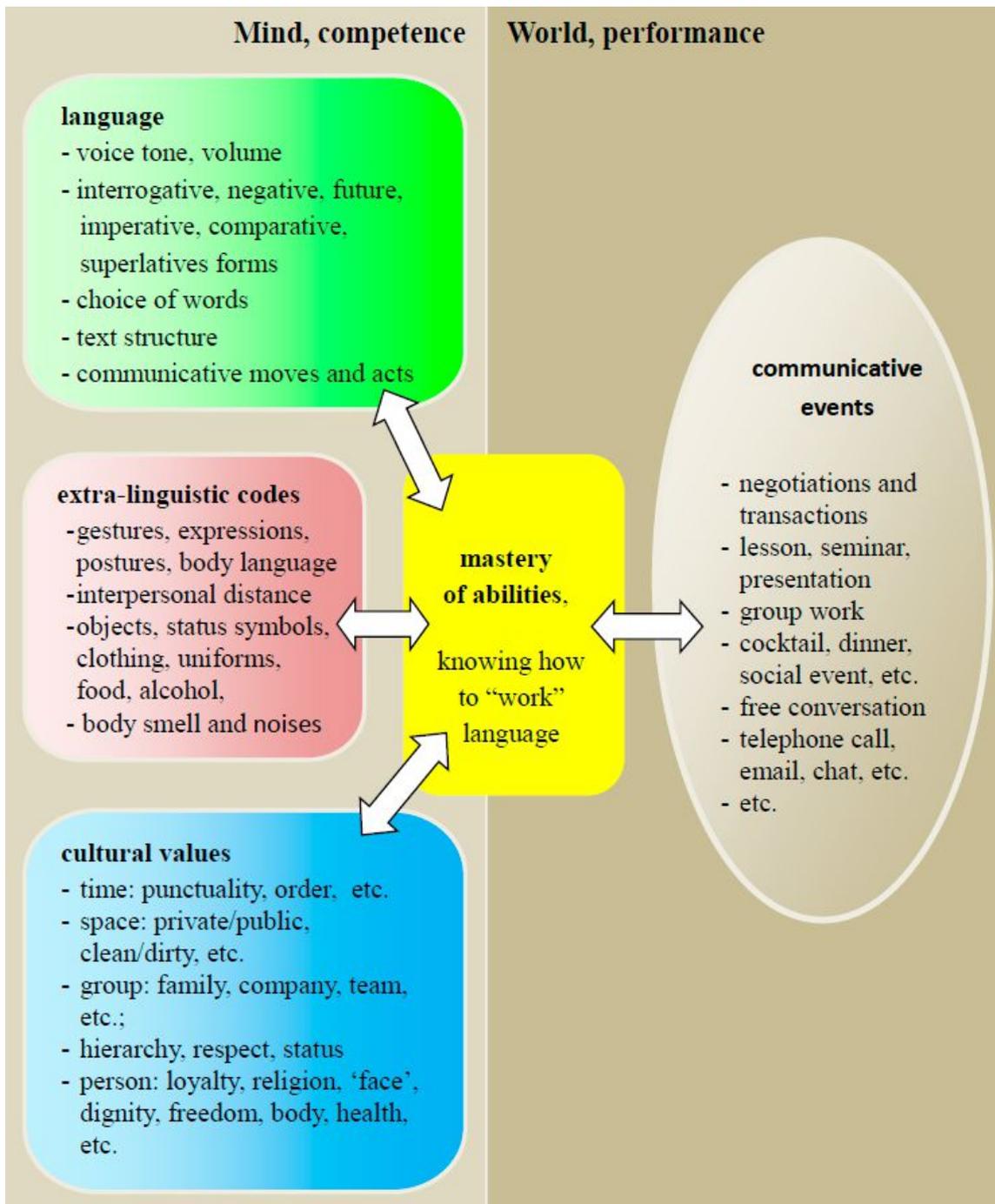
- *G (communicative genre)*: such as conferences, conversations, jokes, contracts, etc. Each kind of communication requires components and these often vary depending on the culture. For example a letter presents a specific layout and different linguistic conventions.

The communicative approach is characterized and has as main goal the achievement of a

"communicative competence" and on this notion different interpretations, analysis and models have been proposed. What follows illustrates one model.

3.1. A model of communicative competence

In the early 90s professor P. E. Balboni and other scholars of this field proposed a possible communicative competence model, which after a series of adjustments, can be represented in this structural diagram:



The scheme can be read as follows:

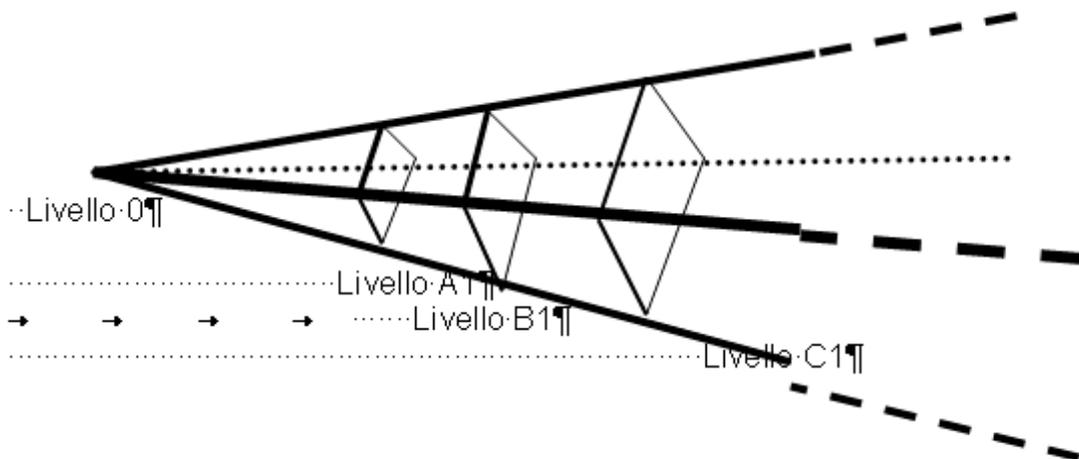
Communicative competence is a mental reality which is realized in the world, in communicative events realized in social settings where a certain language is used to make an action to achieve a goal.

In the mind we can identify three groups of competencies that together represent knowing the language. These groups are:

- the linguistic competence: ability to understand and produce sentences well formed from the phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical and textual point of view;
- the extra-linguistic competences: the ability to communicate with the body (kinesics) and to codify the contact between bodies (haptics), to evaluate the communicative impact of interpersonal distance (proxemics) and to use and recognize the communicative value of objects and clothing (vestemics);
- the core of contextual skills related to language in use: sociolinguistic, pragmalinguistic and (inter)cultural competence.

Mental skills become communicative action when they are used to produce, understand, manipulate texts. We can refer to the language abilities which are not only the five basic (listening, reading, monologue, dialogue and writing) but also manipulative skills such as sum up, taking note, translate and writing under dictation. All this represents the language mastery which is used in communicative events governed by social, pragmatic and cultural rules depending on the place where communication takes place. This is knowing how to deal with language.

We can also have a dynamic diagram, evolutionary, beyond the structural one seen above, which starts from "zero" point of competence and makes visible the progressive increase of the total volume:



We have therefore a sort of three-sided pyramid, each of which indicates "knowledge" or "know how to do".

a. *knowing how to do language*

It regards mastering linguistic abilities which do not include only understanding, reading, knowing how to write and how to do a monologue (for instance during a conference, a presentation of a project, etc.), but also how to participate in a dialogue, how to sum up, paraphrasing, writing under dictation, translating and taking notes. These communicative competence components are universal processes, even though the products, that is, texts which are understood or written, dialogues in a specific situation, etc., vary from culture to culture according to the rules included in the other two faces of the pyramid.

b. *knowing how to do with language*

This face of the pyramid regards the ability of using the language as an action instrument and it includes different kinds of dimensions:

-b1. *social*: who knows how to communicate must know how to identify and respect the role relationships (or how to attack them, if necessary), he can confer correctly the social and hierarchy status to the various participants in the communicative event, he is appropriate in the use of appellatives (titles, Mr/Ms, etc.), and so on: this sociolinguistic grammar changes a lot not only between cultures, but also within the same state.

-b.2. *pragmatics*: a person communicates in an efficient way when he reaches his goal. This goal is pursued through a series of acts, that is, intentional "moves" in order to have a specific effect. Also pragmalinguistic grammar is strongly culturally connoted: as mentioned above, some acts are acceptable in a culture but not in another.

-b.3. *cultural*: the anthropolinguistic grammar and that, more generally, anthropology of a community constitutes the common fabric on which all the events in a given culture intertwine. Varying cultures, also these grammars vary and some problems arise about which I will discuss in the next chapters explaining how in this second face of the pyramid there are the major problems of intercultural communication.

c. *knowing the language – verbal and nonverbal languages*

This "face" includes the traditionally grammars (for two centuries it was considered that knowing a language meant to know pronunciation, vocabulary and morphosyntax) and those, generally neglected, of nonverbal languages. So we will have:

c.1. *linguistic competence* made up of several components such as:

- lexical, for instance choice of words, how to modify them and to create others new, etc.

· *morphosyntactic*, that is, the mechanisms such as the singular, the plural, how to ask something, how to neglect, to forbid, to express comparisons, to talk about the past or the future, etc.

· *textual*, that is, the mechanisms series which grant logic coherence and formal cohesion in a text, as well as the rules of the various genre (dialogue, conference, joke, letter, etc.). It is a very complex and delicate grammar: a text constructed in a straight line, *straight to the point*, is correct for an American but rude for a Chinese, who prefers a spiral process (as we will see later).

· *phonologic*, which concerns the pronounce: we do not have problems of intercultural communication in this area.

· *paralinguistic*, that is, that "external" component of phonological competence which regards the tone of voice, the underlining of words, the speed at which a person speaks, and so on: here the intercultural problems are relevant.

c.2. *extra-linguistic competence*: it includes (as explained previously) skills like: kinesics, proxemics, haptics and vestemics.

Two faces of the pyramid are visible in the world of real communication, linked to the mastery of the language and to pragmatics. The other faces are not visible because they form the mental dimension, the skills. If we imagine this pattern into a time line going from left to right, we see that at 0-level the competence is null and as we proceed to the right, the competence abilities increase till reaching a level A1, A2 up to C1 and C2. Relevant is, as also professor Balboni says in his book titled "Teaching Italian as second and foreign language", "... if only one side is treated, for example the grammatical aspect at the expense of the pragmatic one, the base is no more perpendicular to the pyramid axis, and therefore this results to be skewed, unbalanced". Therefore, it is important to develop the various language skills, more or less in the same way, always improving each capacity of it and not only focusing in one because each ability is required to communicate.

4. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Multinational corporations were born in the '80s and individuals working for them had several opportunities to interact with people coming from other countries and speaking different languages. Over the years the employees realized that, despite their knowledge of foreign languages and their capacity to develop business relationships, many misunderstandings and various difficulties occurred, interacting with individuals coming from a different cultures. This is due to the fact that knowing a language does not guarantee an optimal intercultural communication. There is the need to go beyond the language, trying to understand the interlocutor's mental software, that is his culture, his values, the type and level of education and lifestyle. Understanding this aspect is crucial, as communication can happen between speakers coming from cultural perceptions and symbolic systems so different, that the communicative exchange and the interpretation given, can be deeply affected and the result totally altered, in other words, learning a language without understanding the culture behind, makes it only a code without social meaning.

In the '30s and '40s, Malinowski and Firth, respectively an anthropologist and an anthropologist, identified culture as an essential aspect of the “situation” in which communication happens. In the '50s and '60s Robert Lado made a significant step forward from the language teaching point of view: culture is considered not only a situational problem but also a communicative one, since it characterizes, and modifies the nature and the way to communicate. This perspective was further developed in the early '70s by Hymes and all other scholars engaged in sociolinguistics and in communication ethnography. In fact, culture or rather the (inter)cultural competence becomes an essential element of communicative competence. Later, in 1991 Geert Hofstede, an influential Dutch researcher, published his book "Softwares of the mind". According to him, beyond values and cultural models, the “forma mentis” changes particularly: this is what he calls mental software. Hofstede created the concept of culture based on it. In fact in the 90's, intercultural communication began to be studied. The first book was published in Italy in 1999 and it was entitled "Common words, different cultures", written by Paolo E. Balboni. The book was translated in different languages and it is still published and constantly updated. This is because culture changes quickly so it has to be kept in mind that what is known today might not be appropriate in ten years. Based on the studies conducted, it clearly emerged how much culture can influence exchanges with foreigners and how a simple gesture can be misunderstood, badly affecting relations.

Intercultural communication aims at improving the exchange of efficient messages between people who have different mental software, related not only to individual characteristics, but also to different languages and cultural background (Balboni 1999).

As mentioned by Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester in their “Intercultural competence”:
“Interpersonal competence in intercultural interactions is a difficult objective to achieve, because cultural differences create dissimilar meanings and expectations which require even greater levels of communication skill. The study of intercultural competence has been motivated primarily by practical concerns. Business, government agencies, and educational institutions who will be successful. Lack of intercultural competence means failed business ventures, government projects that have not achieved their objectives, and unsuccessful learning experiences for students”.

To develop a good intercultural communication it is important to have:

- awareness of the peculiarities which differ from person to person as belonging to different communities. It is fundamental to recognize that each individual has a different mental software that derives from the way and the culture with which a certain person grew up;
- knowledge which includes trying to know as much as possible about other cultures, such as the way they communicate, their symbols, myths, ideas, values, etc.;

As said by Hofstede (1991): “...while we may never share their values, we may at least get an intellectual grasp of the extent to which their values differ from ours”.

- ability of being able to combine theoretical knowledge and practical experience which derive therefore from awareness, knowledge, and also from personal experience. The symbols of the other cultures have to be acknowledged and understood, as much as possible, that means to acknowledge their heroes, to practice their rituals, and to experience the satisfaction of getting along in the new context, being able to solve problems of life among the others.

For a number of reasons, competence in intercultural communication, cannot only be learned from books, but it is a learning process continuously in progress which requires effort and attention.

In this sense, intercultural communication can be described and an ideal model identified, that can provide instructions on how to observe communication in intercultural environments, but it cannot be taught from a quantitative and qualitative point of view:

- quantitative because cultures are so many and so diversified, that it is impossible to learn all of them;
- qualitative because each culture, as said before, is constantly evolving, so the elements characterizing a culture nowadays cannot be the same within a decade.

Even if it cannot be taught we can use an observation model of reality, an intercultural communicative competence model, that is, a conceptual structure which identifies all possible realizations of the phenomenon indicating all critical areas, and it is able to generate behaviours in fact those who apply this model can draw a guide through it. The intercultural communicative competence model derives from that of communicative competence in fact it is composed by the same categories and it adds one. The basic integration, differentiating the competence in a given language from the intercultural communicative competence, is placed in the box which signs the connection between mental skills and actions in the world. That is because in order to be competent in an intercultural perspective, language skills should be also supported by the relational ones.

As stated by Graziano Serragiotto, expert of linguistic evaluation, a student cannot be evaluated on his intercultural competence, because it is primarily a student's attitude towards a specific language/culture. Instead, the student can self-evaluate (or think about) his intercultural competence using ad hoc instruments, such as a reality observation manual created by the same student. It can be considered a sort of "database", on paper or on electronic document that has to be updated on the basis of the student's life experiences such as an encounter with foreigners, the viewing of a film in a foreign language or settled in a foreign country, the arrival of new non-Italian classmates etc.

Intercultural communicative competence must also develop a mastery of abilities (which are part of the communicative competence model seen previously), that enable to interpret other individuals' point of view, using appropriate cognitive resources. In other words, the competences acquired should minimize the risk of making generalizations or of building interpretative grids of reality, which then could leave the room for prejudices and stereotypes. An exchange with another person is always a unique and unrepeatably event.

Intercultural education moves exactly in this direction, trying to eliminate stereotypes and clichés, which may lead to racist attitudes. A well-fitting example refers to the stereotyped characteristics attributed to Italians, such as “pizza”, “the player of mandolin of Marechiaro”, “the Venetian gondolier” or the “mobster of Italian mafia” comedies. Generally, these stereotypes generate uncomfortable feelings, as this type of novels, movies or books present a distorted and unappropriated image of Italy. Equally Italians make a mistake identifying, for example, the United States citizen with the typical cowboy, the astronaut, the oil magnate, etc. Everyone should try to develop a more comprehensive, mature and balanced vision of the other cultures.

Having some reference categories to observe the reality and experiences gained helps a lot to develop awareness, but in order to possess a really intercultural communicative competence, it is necessary to have relational skills which always allow for flexibility and leave room to "surprise".

Embracing an intercultural perspective means to understand the others, to tolerate differences, to respect diversity, to accept that some cultural models can be better than ours, and also to challenge our own cultural models.

Some of the fundamental skills to develop a good intercultural communication include:

- suspension of judgement: it is the cornerstone of everything. In front of an incomprehensible offensive and irritating communicative behaviours, it is wise to suspend judgement and to take time to understand possible reasons for those behaviours that seem not understandable or acceptable.

- Seeking for feedback, especially in front of communicative acts that are not understood or that do not follow rules of good manners, the best thing to do is to ask politely and calmly, if in our interlocutor's culture a certain tone or a way to behave is considered acceptable, explaining that this same behaviour is perceived as rude, almost an insult, in ours: "Is this your mood? Am I misunderstanding?";
- active listening is another skill to be developed. It includes listening, avoiding to immediately apply rigid dichotomies as right/wrong, normal/strange, submissive/aggressive, and so on.

The three skills mentioned here above pertain to a rational behaviour but there are other capacities, related to the emotional sphere. When getting in touch with another person, it is necessary to take into account also interlocutor's emotions. These skills include:

- empathy, that is, the ability to participate in an active way in the emotional state of the interlocutor and to be able to put ourselves in his shoes in order to recognize the quality of his emotional experiences. This will also lead to connections with our past and we can imagine what kind of emotions the interlocutor feels and which thoughts and reactions can generate;
- decentralization from our social roles, from our usual behaviour, from the way we imagine ourselves. This means being able to interpret the communicative event from a "third" position, different from that of our interlocutor and different from ours: we observe ourselves from the outside and talk about us in third person.
- the exotopia represents the extreme border of the two attitudes seen above: it means seeing oneself with external eyes and with those of the interlocutor.

4.1. Issues affecting the passage from communicative competence to the intercultural one

When a communicative exchange takes place between two speakers, who do not share the same culture, there is a transit from a communicative competence to an intercultural one. As a result the skills required are not limited to understanding, creating and manipulating texts, but they also envisage intercultural knowledge. In other words, the tacit rules regulating events, both formal and informal, such as a conference, an encounter at the bar, a working group, etc. will no longer be those, for example, of the Italian culture (sometimes even different between north and south), but they will also envisage interactions also between social values and attitudes of the two cultures involved.

The use of language in an intercultural context leads to significant communication problems which remain strong even if a person has a C2 level of command of English or Chinese or German or whatever, because our mind remains always Italian. Despite the proficiency and the knowledge of a foreign language, an individual maintains the social values and behaviours pertaining to his/her own culture, such as the concept of respect, hierarchy, etc.

When the switch from communicative competence to the intercultural one occurs, some potential issues or challenges have to be taken into account, for example:

- linguistic misunderstanding related to the actual knowledge of the foreign language (communicative competence), which can affect the choice of words and topics; the structure of vocabulary, the grammatical aspects etc.

- problems linked to nonverbal languages (extra-linguistic competence) such as body movement, posture, smells and noises of the body, distance between bodies used as a form of communication, dress code etc.

- communication problems due to cultural values (socio-pragmatic and intercultural competence) such as the concept of time, space, hierarchy, family, honesty, sexuality, the

respect for the others, the religious sphere, and so on.

- Issues related to the ability to act properly in intercultural communicative events, according to the context requirements (dialogue, phone call, business meeting, informal dinner, conference etc.)

The next chapter will focus on potential issues and challenges related to both linguistic and extra-linguistic competence and also to some cultural values, which can affect any communicative exchange, such as gender related concepts or time and respect perception.

5. ANALYSIS OF INTERCULTURAL PROBLEMS LINKED TO VERBAL AND NONVERBAL LANGUAGE AND TO THE VALUE ASPECT

Through communication and language sciences many parameters have been produced to evaluate the quality of a move or of a communication instrument. These parameters make us aware of the fact that knowing a foreign language, only from a linguistic point of view, is not enough, and they help us to understand that in the encounter between cultures, nothing can be taken for granted.

5.1. Parameters to assess intercultural communicative problems on the language

P.E. Balboni, in more than one of his books, speaks about the complexity of intercultural communication and about difficulties encountered during intercultural exchanges. Some of the parameters to evaluate the quality of a communicative move are explained in his book "Parole comuni, culture diverse" that we report below:

a) formal vs. informal

It is an essential opposition. As we have said before we are before seen and then heard and an error made on the formality level required in a given situation, may compromise a communicative exchange. Every culture has its particular way of identifying formality and informality, not only through language, but also through the way of acting, of choosing a gift, of dressing, etc. All this creates some sociolinguistic troubles such as how to give of the you in a language like English, where we cannot give "del lei" as in Italian, when we can pass to an informal register in different cultures, who can propose this transition and so on.

Another thing to take into account is that each culture has its own rules regarding the use or non use of a person's professional qualifications (such as doctor, engineer, teacher, architect, etc.), as well, there is also a different use of "Mister", "Miss" and "Lady". However what can cause more intercultural accidents are people's name and surname. In China it is not allowed to call a person by his name, but only by his surname (and then the name) or by surname preceded by "Mr. X" or "Ms.

Y". Even within the family people do not use names, but the line of blood relationship. Even spouses call each other using epithets. So, it can happen that children do not know their grandparents' or even parents' proper names. It is a very peculiar thing for Italians, and in general for the westerners, but in China it is completely normal. This is due also to the fact that in China there are special terms indicating not only the degree of kinship, but also if a person belongs to the maternal or paternal side and if s/he is older or younger (for instance there is a specific term for the elder maternal aunt, for the elder brother or still, for the younger paternal uncle etc.).

b) *polite versus impolite*

It regards, for example, the sequence "io e te", common in Italy, but considered impolite in Germany, England, America, and also in other countries, where "du und ich", or "you and I" are required.

The interruption during a dialogue is not accepted in all cultures. In Italy we can interrupt to provide more information as aid to communication. On the contrary, in Scandinavia any kind of interruption is unacceptable because it is seen as an aggression, and therefore a sign of rudeness.

From the sociolinguistic point of view different problems emerge. They are related to some syntactic forms which represent a risk during communication. For example an interrogative yes/no can be risky in cultures that are very respectful of the stranger guest, because they use to answer yes in any situations. So even in those cases in which the answer would be negative or, even worse, when people asked for information do not know that information, the answer "yes" is an obligation. So, questions should be proposed in an open form: "Which ...?", "What ...?" etc.

c) *masquerade strength versus explicit strength*

In the act of communicating the strength should not always be highlighted, because the interlocutor might take offence and stop the exchange. It is enough to think about a project group which dissolves because a too dominant personality prevails over the others, or about a negotiation which stops facing a communicative move deemed offensive. Normally in a formal situation the strength

of sentences and of communicative acts cannot be explicit. Therefore imperatives, the verb "must" and the imperious hand gestures are excluded. In this field, intercultural complexity is remarkable: a direct negative form is common in many cultures while in English a ban is rarely expressed by an explicit "no, you may not go" and its strength is rather masquerade and muffled with a gentle "I'm afraid you cannot possibly go there, I'm sorry".

Conversely, there are cultures, such as the Jews, who prefer the direct expression of their thoughts, in a manner that appears rude for all westerners and that creates some problems at the moment in which they are translated linguistically, but not culturally, in English.

The real linguistic difference regards the textual level. It is very important keeping in mind that the structures of the texts vary according to the different cultures. Argumentative texts in Italian, German, Slavic, Spanish, etc. go from point A to point B with a whole series of digressions and could be graphically represented as a broken line. Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians produce a sequence of simple sentences (subject, verb, object with a few complements and subordinates are very rare), and they go straight to the point and all additional information are explained afterwards. Obviously, in front of the complex Latin's subordinates structures, Anglo-Saxons are a bit confused, and on the other side Latins consider them a bit hard and direct. The problem is present daily also within the American culture: white people disguise the strength of their linguistic acts, while black people, like the Jews, believe is right to express their requests, opinions and intentions with strength. Asian text and partly the Arabic one are structured taking the topic remotely and proceeding by progressive approaches to the focus, with a development that could be represented as a spiral. Both Latins and Anglo-Saxons tend to become impatient and to lose attention, offending the person coming from the East, who in turn considers rude and arrogant to go straight to the point (which is, in their perception, a thing shared by Europeans and Americans). Actually the spiral process serves to create more harmony with their interlocutor, to make him feel at ease even repeating information already known, being sure that everything is understood and that they agree. On this point, we can imagine the difficulties that foreign students have in the study of disciplines, accustomed to a particular textual structure, and then to a different arrangement of the information in the text. Probably, in a certain stage of learning, the students tend to transfer, in their texts, the textual structure of their language. They may appear confusing and repetitive for us but, actually they simply follow the textual rules of their language.

Directivity/implicitness is a fundamental dichotomy both in negations, as we have seen above, and in the use of imperatives. An English uses them in simple instructions, but mostly, if he wants to regulate others' behaviour, uses the so called "whimperatives", usually created by the verbs "could", "should" or "would": they are everything except requests, suggestions and recommendations. To make the problem greater, we can add the fact that the explicit/implicit opposition for the pragmatic force of a communicative act is also regulated by another factor: the speaker's gender. Not only the males are more explicit than women (Tannen 1990), but many cultures do not allow women to be explicit in their demands or their orders.

d) *politically correct versus incorrect*

Even if translated into Italian, the term "politically correct" derives culturally from a North American matrix. It is a judgement parameter that is slowly penetrating in Europe.

According to this purely cultural parameter, and so extremely relevant in our perspective, the lexical choice has "political" value. In this sector we find ethnic respect for instance "persona di colore" that we borrowed from American to indicate a non-white person; in Italian is rather politically marked the choice between "nigger" and "black". Then we find the concept of equality between man and woman, which is easily achievable in the English language, where the female is slightly marked and it reduces in couples like these: he/she, his/her, man/woman, etc. These couples become ridiculous in Italian, where the gender (male or female) distinguishes all the names, articles, adjectives and pronouns.

In America the *political correctness* leads to unthinkable situations for Europeans: for example, the concept of gender equality can make a man, opening the door and giving way to a lady, feels considered as a sexist;

e) *free use versus taboo*

Only practice and precise attention permit people attending international environments, to grasp the continuous change of the free use topics and those deemed taboos. For example, Italians often do

not realize how much the reference to psychological care represents taboo in our culture. The advice to go to a psychologist or to a psychoanalyst is felt as an offence. It means: "You are crazy!". If a foreigner asks something about Mafia to a Northern Italian, this starts explaining that the Mafia is in Sicily and then tries to change topic.

Every culture has some known taboos and some others that change rapidly: for example talking about the communist past of Eastern Europe or about the fascism in Chile is something very delicate, because many people, who nowadays have contacts with foreigners from high managerial and academic positions, have a personal history in those regimes and therefore a simply joke said by an Italian, during a dinner, to fill a silence, can be lived very badly from the other person.

Other times there are taboos which result incomprehensible for some cultures. For us it is very surprising that in the Philippines it is completely forbidden giving a child a caress on the top of the head: the affectionate Italian is recognized as a hardened paedophile. Another example concerns the Europeans' confidentiality on their family, attitude which is not shared by the Japanese: making questions about the interlocutor's family, his children, his possible divorce, etc. is considered normal in a culture like the Japanese, in which the origins of the family are the credential basis of a personality.

There are three taboos which can be considered universal (though there are exceptions) which are the topics of sex, death and of body secretions (sweat, mucus, ear wax, semen, urine, faeces and vomit). Even talks about digestion and about personal feelings should be considered taboos in cultures of English origin.

5.2. Nonverbal intercultural communication and dissimilarities among cultures

Body language is partly innate, and partly depends on the processes of socialization. The mechanisms which make up nonverbal communication are very similar in all cultures, but each culture tends to rework in a different manner its proper nonverbal messages.

As said by professor Balboni, people tend to consider this type of communication as universally

comprehensible, and think that they can transcend language barriers but there are many differences. This means that forms of nonverbal communication fully intelligible to people belonging to a certain culture may be instead, for those who belong to another culture, absolutely incomprehensible or even having an opposite meaning respect of what it was intended to convey. In fact individuals usually make three serious mistakes regarding the extra-linguistic competence:

- In most of the cases people are not aware of the fact that nonverbal languages are governed by grammars and therefore also in their own mother language, before, it is required a metalinguistic discovery activity of morphology, of gestures syntax, distances, clothes etc., which can lead to a classification activity as valid as that one conducted with the grammatical analysis, but certainly more motivating.
- Nonverbal languages are often considered "natural", but they are "cultural": their grammars vary from culture to culture, and this creates some problems in second, ethnic and foreign languages.
- People usually forget that many texts that we are accustomed to consider "linguistic" are actually verbal and nonverbal texts together: we can think about the theatrical plays, read in all schools during the teaching of literature, in which the actors have to interpret characters also of opposite sex and they try to be credible and make clear the plot of the story they are showing.

Below I will display a number of examples of nonverbal communication which can lead to misunderstandings.

Smile:

In Europe, a smile communicates a general agreement or attests that a certain thing has been understood, while in Japan, and in Asia in general, a person who disagrees simply remains silent and smile because he does not want to offend his interlocutor. The smile is rare for Russian and they smile only for a specific reason and always with friends, never with strangers.

The head:

In Bulgaria the lateral shake of the head, which in almost all cultures means "No", has exactly the opposite meaning. This generally applies from the Balkans to the Middle East and to the Southern part of the Mediterranean.

Gestures:

Gestures are typical of Mediterranean Europe, while in China they are almost absent and the use of the body, to express emotions or put emphasis in a speech or thought, is very rare. In China, children are taught to hide their emotions and control the use of body and gestures. Again gestures can be misunderstood and misinterpreted: the Italian gesture that plans to bring to the mouth the hand closed in a fist, with the thumb and little finger raised to say "I am thirsty, let's go to drink something", in Russia means "smoking illegal substances". The hand gesture with the index and the middle finger raised with the palm facing the body, that in several countries of the world is normally identified as a sign of victory, in England it is considered a grave offence. The "OK" sign made with fingers shaping an "O", for Italians means "Everything is ok", the same sign for a Japanese means money, for a French nullity and for a Greek it is an insult. The Italian quite vulgar gesture meaning "What do you want?", performed with fingers pointing upwards and gathered together, and with the hand swinging up and down, means "wait" in Arabia and "excellent" in Turkey and in several Greek islands.

Facial expressions:

The facial expression is typical of southern Europe while in the north and in some Asian cultures it is required more control. In China beyond the control of gestures and body use, children are also taught to control facial expressions, in fact they are minimal in China.

Legs and feet:

Keeping crossed legs with the ankle resting on the knee or taking off one's shoes can be a sign of relaxation in some cultures, but offensive in others: showing the soles of the shoes is very offensive in the Arabic culture, as well as in Italy, taking off the shoes is not considered respectful (not in the Arabic culture where it is required to take off the shoes before entering the mosque).

Smells and body noises:

Depending on the culture of reference there is a different degree of tolerance towards what comes out from the body. Almost all cultures consider unclean what comes out from the body, but some rules vary: in Western culture, for example, an individual can blow his nose, while in Japan and also in China it is considered disrespectful. In the East if an individual feels the need to blow his nose and he is in a public place, he will try to hide in some corner to try to dab it (not to blow) because it is considered rude doing that in front of other people. Remaining in the East, it has been noticed that burping after a meal testifies appreciation.

The eyes:

In the West, looking straight in the eye means frankness, while, in the East it can be interpreted as a gesture of challenge or desire. Squeezing one eye can be considered an insult by Pakistanis, Indians and Afghans. In Russia the direct stare is avoided for respect and confidentiality. Eye contact in China, can be interpreted as a sign of defiance or disrespect, especially when it is an employee who looks in the superior's eyes. In a particular way the employee's gaze should be facing down when he is scolded by a superior. Eye contact is more common among friends or acquaintances in informal situations.

Distance among people:

For Europeans the distance between two people is typically given by the distance of an outstretched

arm, while for Mediterranean and Arabic cultures it reduces and often the interlocutors touch each other, for instance an Arab who enters into a lift may stand very close to a stranger, even though they are the only two people inside the lift. In North America and Europe the distance becomes longer and corresponds to about a double arm.

The contact:

In the cultures of the Middle and Far East it is used to take a person by the arm even among men, an action that would be misunderstood by Americans of the United States who consider that a gay behaviour. In Russia an individual embraces another only when there is a great confidence relationship. In China the maximum physical contact is the handshake. The physical contact in interpersonal relations among people of south-European culture is seen as a violent form of invasion by North-Europeans. In Thailand it is considered very rude for an acquaintance or a stranger to touch a child on the top of his head because in that culture the head is seen as the home of the soul or spirit. It is deemed not strong enough to be touched and this could lead to an illness of the child. The contact between two people in Iraq, especially between men and women, follows very strict cultural rules. In some cultures people do not give or offer anything to anyone with the left hand. That's because the left hand is used to clean one's self after using the toilet.

The kiss:

When Russian, French, Polish and also other nationalities run into somebody, they generally kiss each other three times, in the Middle East it happens also among men, while Japanese never kiss each other in public.

Dress code:

Wearing jacket and pants belonging to two different suits is considered elegant in Italy, informal in China, in the United States recalls the immigrants "beggars" and in Japan is excluded. In Russia who possesses a lot of money tends to show off his/her richness and women love to dress up well before leaving their houses.

Objects of status symbol:

Status symbols vary not only from culture to culture, but also from a social class to another. Having certain symbols or emblems, wearing clothes of known brands, having a watch of a particular brand, etc., can communicate the status of richness and well-being in a culture, but being insignificant for others. Showing richness, wearing jewels in gold or heavy rings, may be interpreted by some cultures as a sign of little refinement, but in others it may indicate social welfare and also the educational qualification (as men's heavy rings that are given away for graduation).

Presents:

The gift is definitely a means of communicating respect, friendship and affection, but it may be the cause of intercultural accident. Every culture has objects that absolutely cannot be given away in certain occasions: in Italy, for example, chrysanthemums should not be gifted, pregnant women should not receive flowers before the child's birth (because it would be a bad omen). In Germany bringing a woman flowers in cellophane is offensive. In China watches are not gifted because they remember that time passes and with it death approaches. Also sharp objects are not good presents because a person could hurt and then also handkerchiefs are said to be carriers of tears. Even the rule of unwrap or not unwrap the gifts in front of those who brought them varies: in the West, people unwrap gifts to show appreciation, while in several eastern countries it is considered polite thanking without opening them.

Tone and volume of voice

In terms of "sound", that is the tone and volume of voice, there are subdued cultures, as those in Asia and northern Europe, and noisy cultures, as the Balkans and Latin ones, but the mutual discomfort is minimal. In fact, Italians are known for being a bit noisy and some cultures think that when Italians talk each other, it seems that they fight, even if it is not so.

5.3. Issues affecting the value aspects

In addition to linguistic and non-linguistic elements mentioned above, there are others more general which, as explained in several works made by professor Balboni and his colleagues at the Cà Foscari university, cause discomfort in language learning, especially in the scholastic environment such as:

- *the socio-linguistic context:*

It includes all those features which characterize a specific environment, for example in a school, the possible preponderance of the written on the oral, or of rationality on affection. These disparities cause difficulties not only for students coming from other cultures, but also belonging to different social classes.

- *the historical context:*

Learning the language of a colonizing country, may be considered not so influential regarding Italian but it can result relevant in learning French and English.

- *Logic against syncretism in the language:*

It regards the absence of correlation of times, the juxtaposition of ideas, little coordination, approximation against precision in the eastern culture, the absence of conjunctions which should ensure the bonds logic links in Arabic or Turkish, etc.

- *The status of language:*

In the West language has essentially a pragmatic function: it is used to express, represent and organize thoughts. We can remember, as an example, that Arabic is the sacred language of the

Koran. In many African cultures the word has a particular power, it is reserved for the elderly while the youth have to remain silent. In these cultures the word has a specific value, as a progressive revelation of knowledge; writing for these cultures weakens the power of the word. It is true that even in the Western culture the word has a magic, evocative and religious value, but this aspect remains in the background and is increasingly reduced to a marginal use, seen as part of popular credulity and superstition.

- *The concept of time:*

The concept of time varies from culture to culture according to different aspects. In the language the correlation of times and the conjugation follows different criteria: in Turkish the degree of certainty of a thing or action, in the use of perfective and imperfective, prevails over time; in the language of the Hopi Indians, verbs do not have time, but indicate the validity of a claim, the knowledge and experience that the speaker has had.

Muslims think that time is oriented towards the origin and when they talk, they do not make reference to the future, in fact in Arabic the words “front” and “past” have the same root: “QDM”. Non-Western interlocutors may consider rude that Westerners often use certain verbal tenses such as the future and the imperative. Westerners very often make reference to the future and they speak about what they are going to do in the following days without hesitating. Arabs say “inshallah”, meaning that the future is in God's hands: no one actually knows what is going to happen tomorrow, and it is pure presumption to claim it with certainty.

These kinds of differences can be noticed also with other cultures. For instance, between Americans and “Athapaska” (Northern Native America). They do not have a good relationship and they often have arguments, and some scholars said that one of the causes is the custom, by the Americans, to end the conversations with "See you soon" or "See you tomorrow" which are sentences that sound arrogant to the “Athapaska”, as Americans treat the future as if it were in their possession (moreover for “Athapaska” talking about the future can be a bad omen).

Even in the Italian language, however, the future tense is not much used. It often expresses uncertainty, while regarding the actions still to be done, but of which we are sure, we use the present (I take the train at 7:30, next week I'm going (in Italian “vado”) to America).

Regarding punctuality the Italian culture, especially the north, has a rigid sense of time and the delay is unacceptable, but several cultures do not give the same value to punctuality. In fact, for other cultures of the East and of Africa, the day begins with the sunset, not with the dawn. Besides it is to consider that a lot of populations of the Mediterranean use the lunar calendar, and so some holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, progress of some days every year. These examples are useful to understand the complexity of this aspect and the risk of damage a communicative process.

- *Fundamental differences concerning the concepts of family, individual, religion, gender etc.:*

In the Western world it is expected that concepts like gentleness, sensitivity, emotionality and intuition correspond to a female behaviour. In Iran, on the contrary, men are associated with these features, in fact, they read poems, they show gentleness and a great intuition because in their culture it is women who cover more practical roles and who have qualities that generally, in the Western world, are attributed to the male sphere.

- *The concept of space:*

Many cultures consider the use of open spaces (such as a park, a forest, but also a courtyard, a hallway or a bathroom, etc.) as something belonging to anyone and then where it is possible to throw anything, while other cultures, including more and more Italians, consider the common space as belonging to everyone and then as something that must be respected;

- *the concept of hierarchy and status:*

It is an obvious value in its importance, but it is risky because it is not so easy to manifest respect through language, most of all in a foreign language: also the rules which govern this aspect vary from culture to culture;

- *the concept of honesty:*

In the Italian perception if a boy takes an unattended snack is a thief. In other cultures, the same episode shows that it is the Italian who cannot look after his own things and then abandons them, that makes them available to those who want to take them. Conversely, an Italian who copies is often considered immoral and dishonest: copying and deceiving the teacher are unimaginable actions in other cultures.

6. CULTURE, CIVILIZATION AND LANGUAGE

The words “culture” and “civilization” have been at the centre of a philosophical and sociological debate, in fact, the definitions of the term “culture” are numerous and undergo variations from discipline to discipline. Generally an aspect is favoured over another depending on whether it is anthropology, psychology, sociology or linguistics. The concept of culture is, therefore, something very extended, which covers everything concerning the human being. It is important to remember, however, that culture is something elusive, which changes over time depending on who perceives it and interprets it. Here some definitions made by some scholars will be proposed.

6.1. *Culture and civilization*

As G. Porcelli sustains in his book “Principi di glottodidattica”, from the language teaching point of view, the terms “culture” and “civilization” were used in, at least, two very different ways. The first identifies, indeed the culture of a population with the best intellectual products such as works of art, scientific discoveries, religious and philosophical conceptions and social achievements. This is the most traditional and usual sense of the term: under the Italian civilization (or French, English, etc.) we expect to find texts or essays on literature, philosophy, history, law, architecture, music and other elements recognized as "cultural".

The second meaning of the word is offered by anthropology in which the term "culture" is a word of everyday usage and embraces all manifestations of the way of life of a population and defines the manner in which people response to the needs of nature such as: how to eat, to dress, to form families and social groups, the family law, the way of imagine the deities, the initiation rites of puberty, dead burials (or cremation, or other), and many others. If the term “culture” in the first sense finds its temples in schools, universities, academies, museums, research laboratories, historical and/or artistic buildings, culture in the anthropological sense it can be found in the houses, villages, work place, etc.: anywhere it is possible to observe how the social groups act and interact.

In the 19th century the word “*culture*” was generally used to refer to Western civilization. It was considered superior than the others. Hofstede (1994) classified some elements of culture into four

categories:

- *symbols* that refer to the whole area of language both verbal and nonverbal. They include modes of address, slang, abbreviations, dress codes, etc.
- *rituals* which are the socially essential collective activities within a culture. They include formal activities such as a meeting and the ways in which the activity is performed: who speaks to whom, who can afford to be late for what meeting, etc.
- *values* which are often unconscious and not open for discussion about what is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, normal or abnormal, which are present in a majority of the members of a culture, or at least in those who occupy pivotal positions.
- *heroes* are real or imaginary people who serve as models for behaviour within a culture. The heroes of a culture are expressed through myths which can be the subjects of novels and other forms of literature.

Fabio Caon, professor at the University Ca 'Foscari of Venice, underlines the fact that culture and civilization are two different concepts, even if they are often used interchangeably, by saying that:

- *culture* is the way of life and it includes, therefore, food, dress code, driving on the right or on the left, and so on. It is essential to know the way of life to communicate. Fundamental is to use categories to classify our observations such as: "public places": how should a person behave in a restaurant? In America there is a sign "Wait to be seated" even in low-value restaurants, and a person cannot go inside and take place without the permission of the staff, even if the place is empty. Another category can be "public transport" we may wonder how to behave in a railway station, and we can only understand if we know the everyday culture that a sentence like "Let's take a taxi", is pronounced only by rich Italians, but it is very common and daily in NYC or Barcelona or other cities.

- *Civilization* is instead the way of thinking and it includes values and behaviours that make a person feel part of a population, for which he is ready to fight, and make him define “uncivilized” people who do not share them: it is interesting to know the civilization of a country because it puts all the individuals in crisis and it allows them to define who they are and who they want to be.

P. E. Balboni in his essay published in 2003 entitled “Cultural conflicts in a class of immigrant students” claims: “For the cultural models it is not necessary to quarrel, maximum we can surprise, but for the models of civilization we are ready to fight because they represent the essence around which a population recognize itself”. From these considerations, it is important to have an attitude of openness and interest in cultural diversity, and the will to "let be infected" by different cultural models, unless they enter in conflict with ours. The author also considers the terms multiculturalism and interculturalism, and clarifies the difference among "tolerance", "respect" and "interest" for the other, and believes that only an attitude of interest in diversity, which presupposes study, hard work and will to question themselves, can lead to the interculturalism. While in a multicultural school a different culture is only accepted and respected in an intercultural school, diversity becomes a source of research, comparison and decentralization of point of view.

6.2. The cultural model

P. E. Balboni in 2008 published his work “Imparare una lingua straniera” in which he explains that the smallest unit of analysis of culture is the “cultural model”. A cultural model is the answer to a problem such as the way a culture responds to the need to feed during the day, the way it responds to the need to organize the road conditions (that is, how to divide the street and deciding the driving on the right or on the left), the way they organize the school life of teenagers etc. The cultural models are characterized also by the way to create houses and clothes, courtship rules and so on. They tend to change quickly and unpredictably because of tourism and emigration. The main remain: social relations and organization, the house and the family, the city, the school and the mass media.

Some cultural models can be more productive than others and they form the civilization of a population, but otherwise all cultures are equally worthy. This attitude of respect and, possibly

interest in cultural diversity, is an essential educational goal of language teaching and it is called cultural relativism: an education based on the acceptance of difference, on the variability and on the observation of cultures, is the best strategy to use. Starting from the comparison between cultures, from the discovery of the differences, the mechanism which leads to this relativism, can be activated. The comparison process is very important because our models are unaware, but we notice immediately those of the others. We tend to consider (as previously mentioned) “natural” what is rather “cultural”.

If, as suggested by anthropology, we assign an inclusive, global meaning to the term culture, which includes not only artistic or intellectual products of the classical tradition (music, literature, painting, poetry, etc.), but also the cultural models, we come to the conclusion that the language is not only a product of culture but it is also the mirror and the vehicle of cultural models and an indispensable tool for "noble" productions like poetry, philosophy etc. (Freddi 1968)

6.3. Bond between language and culture

As sustained by professor Graziano Serragiotto, language is a product of the culture, the most extraordinary cultural product of the group, that speaks it. Some anthropologists and sociologists, when they speak about learning a second language, they speak about the effect of a second culture of such learning. Language is not something artificial and, therefore, it makes no sense to talk about the language isolation from the culture. The interaction between language and culture is very narrow, so that the very expression "language and culture" can be a source of misunderstanding, implying a distinction, when instead they are part of the same thing. An obvious influence can be seen in the vocabulary: how Boas says, the words of a language are adapted to the environment where they are used.

It is enough to think about the numerous and various words to express a certain phenomenon in a country: the languages of the subpolar populations, for example, hit linguists for the large amount of words available to name the snow in its various manifestations: from the flakes to the blocks used to build igloos. At the same time many African languages lack a word that designates snow, completely unknown atmospheric phenomenon, while they abound of terms for different types of coconuts, their parts and products (semi-finished or finished) obtained from them. Each language

crystallizes within itself the cultural experience of the population who speaks it.

Without going that far, we find in the Italian language traces of all the psychological theories that our civilization has known (Porcelli, 1994):

- the theory of humours, or fluids that circulate in our body and impact on an individual's personality and temperament, has left us terms like: phlegmatic, sanguine, bilious, lymphatic, and others; in addition to the same mood and its derivatives: humour, humorist, and so on;
- the theory of astral influences makes us talk about lunatics, jovial and martial people and it is responsible for idiomatic expressions such as in Italian it is said “*avere la luna storta*”, that means “be in a bad mood”;
- the recalls on the predominant organ gave us adjectives such as cerebral and cordial;
- psychoanalysis made enter in the common language words such as troubled, stressed, neurotic and many others.

In this way we understand how culture has influenced the language; a specific cultural phenomenon has as response a linguistic variety to describe it. On the other hand the linguistic instrument influences the culture: a certain variety of words is useful to describe a specific phenomenon. The members of a cultural group, in fact, in order to understand each other, have necessarily to use a language whose cultural connotative meaning is shared by all members of the linguistic-cultural community of belonging. According to the pragmatic-cultural perspective of Bruner, learning a language also means learning the cultural models related to the language in question. An individual, to interact effectively and to be an integral part of a social system, has to possess not only good language skills but also a good social and cultural mastery of the native culture.

The language codifies in its lexicon, in its linguistic forms and grammatical structures the historical

experiences of the group, the values in which this group identifies, its ways of living and thinking, which sign and direct its history. Besides, the structure of society and the social dynamics are reflected in the language, as is proved by the history of the language which records continuous functional adaptations to the speakers' needs. Language, therefore, can be considered as the vehicle of culture, due to its characteristic of being intimately connected to various cultural factors and to its being the instrument for the interaction and communication among the members of a certain group.

The bond between language and culture is evident when somebody attempts operations, for example, of translation. Translating means not only finding an equation of meaning for each word, but it also includes the research of the true meaning that a word has in a culture, considering, as a result, the actual cultural value of a word in a given culture.

An example is the word "bread" which is not enough to designate any types of bread, from the French "baguette", to the dough in use in a lot of Arab countries and to the hundred varieties of Italian bread (Porcelli, 1994). Only at an elementary level of communicative interaction it can be worth, but it is still reductive with respect of the true knowledge of the language. "Bread", as in Italian "pane", is by definition the principal food, and by extension the economic livelihood of a family. But alongside with "to win one's bread" (to earn a living) and its derived "breadwinner" (the person, who with his work, procures the money that the family needs, or a substantial part of it), there are idiomatic expressions like "bread and butter" (the activity that constitutes the largest source of income), "They know which side their bread is buttered on" (they know how to get along with others) and "It's the best thing since sliced bread" (it's the best a person could ask for, or it is something very successful): sliced and buttered bread is typically the English bread.

The approach to a foreign civilization has, therefore, a two-way link with the study of the foreign language: we resort to the elements of civilization to understand and explain many phenomena of (social)linguistic nature; at the same time the language is a privileged instrument to understand from the inside, many cultural data. In English, a clock has a face and two hands (in the sense that British people use the term "face" to refer to the "dial" of the clock and "hands" to refer to the "needles"): those who ignore this cannot understand the meaning of certain children's stories or the origin of certain scenes of cartoons. The word "leg" is used both to refer to humans and animals and this can be taken as a further indicator of a tendency of anthropomorphizing animals and things. To this

tendency, in turn, there are some difficulties met by the Anglo-Saxon culture to accept bullfighting as an expression of the struggle between the brute force (of which the bull is the symbolic representation) and intelligence (played by the bullfighter): if the bull is to some extent humanised, the perception of the relationship between the two contenders changes and it is unacceptable that one of them is doomed from the start to succumb because of the other. The example is useful to emphasize the limits of this approach: in the Italian language the pair “gamba/zampa” is symmetrical to the Spanish “pierna/pata”, but this does not prevent us from recognizing bullfighting as extraneous to our culture and mentality.

There is also a gap between what is present in the language and what is present in the consciousness of the speakers. In English “to undergo an operation” is symmetrical to Italian “subire un'operazione” in the sense that the compound under+go corresponds to the Latin sub+ire, but surely not all the Italians have the awareness of the etymology of “subire”.

Despite these difficulties, it remains the fact that the double bond between language and culture is fruitful of mutual illuminations, that can help us better understand both of them and catch more and more precise and deeper meanings.

Established that learning a language coincides largely with the approach to the civilization of the country in which that language is expressed, over the years it has been necessary to better define the terms of the issue both on the cultural side and on the language teaching. Also in this case the interweaving of theoretical and applied problems is very complex.

6.4. Language and identity

According to Titone, the linguistic behaviour is the expression of the individual and social personality of every human being. The language in addition to being an associated form of meaning culturally determined and pragmatic, is mainly an expression of the deep structure of the ego. When the human being speaks, therefore, expresses his inner world, his personal philosophy of life and his conscience.

The identity function of language is very strong. The linguistic actions are identity actions. The language spoken by somebody and his or her identity as a speaker of this language are inseparable (Tabouret - Keller, 1997). The language is a manifestation (a cultural behaviour) that activates the speaker's identification process in two directions:

- at the collective level when a person is identified by others as a member of a certain group;
- at the individual level when it is the same speaker who through the language that he speaks, recognizes himself as belonging to a certain group.

Through the identification of a person in a certain group this person accepts also the system of symbols and meanings as well as norms of conduct of that group. Knowing the identification of a person in a certain group helps us to understand the opportunities and challenges that each individual in that culture has to deal with.

The individuals, who encounter us from the first time, immediately notice our way of talking and our accent and they identify us according to the language we use. Language and identity are strictly connected and they are personal. For this reason, our ethnic affinity is determined a lot by language, rather than by our physical characteristics.

Our identity is a process that can change over the years. The relation between the language and the identity involves a series of social, political, cultural and linguistic factors which shape the individual mind, building his proper identity and giving a sense of belonging to a specific group of people or excluding it from another. The identity is what we want to be and this is an emotive fact, an attachment to a place of origin, but it sometimes has nothing to do with the place where we were born and where we brought up. The identity has to do with the place in which somebody identifies himself or herself socially and culturally and from which a person acquires not only customs, uses and the way of thinking but also the language and the accent of the place that become the new true language and the new identity on the same level.

In Italy a lot of people identify themselves in their origins, but there are some, for instance, that

after leaving the place where they brought up, for economic reasons, they do not identify themselves any more with that place but they consider themselves just Italians. These Italians normally try to avoid speaking with the accent of their native language or their dialect also with acquaintances and members of the family, using instead a different accent. Other Italians, instead, especially those who left Italy and live abroad, identify themselves as Italians, but they specify the region and the place of origin. These Italians have preserved the Italian language and their dialect.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In light of the above, we can conclude that the best strategy, for the research of a possible winning outcome in the interactions among people coming from different linguistic communities, is the acquisition of a communicative competence that, at the same time, results to be intercultural competence.

The observations made so far have been intended to make us aware of the issues affecting the intercultural communication: they do not regard surface differences, but they derive from behaviour models rooted deeply inside people (mental softwares), which operate in all the interactions of the communicative events. Therefore, we can understand that intercultural communication is complex, but essential.

If the objective of learning a foreign language/civilization is essentially to communicate with those who express themselves through it, the knowledge of customs, traditions, the daily habits and social organization of a population allows to figure out exactly not only what people tell, but also what they mean; in other words, it is essential in a pragmatic dimension. It is not enough, in the educational context of a citizen, to know other civilizations. The real goal is to understand and appreciate them in their true values. People should keep trying to know other cultures and analyse them in order to get a good intercultural communicative competence. Of course, a person is never aware 100% of what he is communicating and of the effect that it can cause to the other individual. It is, therefore, the task of a good interlocutor continuing, always, to improve his knowledge and never stop analysing other cultures, especially for their developmental characteristic. The learner has, therefore, to learn to reflect on his own culture, and to project himself in the others, tolerating ambiguity and developing cultural relativism, and he should ask to himself how his values relate to the languages and cultures that he studies. Only in this way he can open up to different cultures, learning to integrate them into his experience.

In the following chapters it will be offered a case study that highlights the importance and the impact of intercultural communication, in this case, in two classes of a high school, where there are pupils of different nationalities. There will be the encounter between different cultures, the clash of thoughts, the difference of values and how all this can affect the relations between individuals.

SECOND PART: Case study

8. THE SITUATION OF SCHOOLS TODAY

Italy is living, like other European countries, this new millennium in a climate of growing migration together with the presence of worlds, cultures and different beliefs among local contexts rich in language, smells, tastes and colours of various origins. In the current social context, the meeting with a foreigner, is no longer limited to sporadic episodes, but falls in everyday situations and in order to understand the global society it is essential to take it into consideration. Only during the last years our country has begun to reverse its traditional vision to one which includes migration flows, turning from a country of emigration, into a country of immigration.

In the modern global society, intercultural communication becomes a priority to promote a full social and human integration. In fact, the consistency of the migration phenomenon in Europe and elsewhere, has prompted increased attention to other traditions, for which the multiplicity of cultures, initially viewed with suspicion, tends to be more and more recognized as a normal and inevitable condition of Western societies. In this context it has emerged the need of intercultural dialogue and education, which are necessary tools to get closer to other cultures and to promote the integration of foreigners.

As for the Italian school the growing presence of foreign children and teenagers, mostly immigrants or refugees, always puts in crisis the mono-cultural and monolingual model offered by the Italian school. It is a model already historically impractical (although sometimes proposed) in the areas of social bilingualism and already severely challenged over the last thirty years, when, as a result of internal mobility, contacts between regional cultures and different dialects have become more and more frequent. It became clear, even to the school, that for many children the Italian language was the first foreign language.

With the presence of pupils coming from different nations, the class has become a multilingual and multicultural reality, over the years, and therefore, also the way of teaching has been adapted to these differences. A simple example can be the organization of additional courses for foreigners to learn better the Italian language. One can imagine that in such a context different problems or misunderstandings arise, not only between Italian students and foreigners, but also between Italians from the South and from the North. Over the years education has added the adjective

“intercultural”, oriented then, to a perspective in which cultures communicate each other, they mingle together and create new social realities. Adopting an intercultural perspective means to promote dialogue and exchanges among cultures, to all pupils and at all levels: teaching, curricula, disciplines, relationships and class life. Choosing the intercultural perspective means, therefore, not be limited to mere immigrant pupils integration strategies, or to compensatory measures of special character. However, it is to consider diversity as a paradigm of the same school identity in pluralism, as an opportunity to open up the entire system to all differences (origin, gender, social status and educational history). This approach is based on a dynamic conception of culture, which avoids both the closure of students in a cultural prison, and stereotypes and folklore. In fact becoming aware of the relativity of cultures does not mean reaching an absolute relativism, which postulates the neutrality towards them and impeding, therefore, relations.

Intercultural strategies avoid separating individuals in autonomous and impermeable cultural worlds, and, on the contrary, they promote debates, dialogues and even the mutual transformation, to make coexistence possible and to deal with conflicts arising through them. Interculture in the schools joins the ability to know and appreciate differences, and promotes the research of social cohesion, in a new vision of citizenship adapted to the current pluralism, in which special attention is paid to build consensus around common values.

Beyond family, school is the environment in which students acquire the values that will accompany them for all their lives. At school they are subjected to the first forms of social integration, beyond the borders of their own family. School plays a key role as the first mediator of social integration which tends to prevent separation on ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural bases, through the teaching and learning of socialization dynamics inevitably characterized by principles (of inclusion or exclusion) impregnating the shared messages. Consequently there can be no inclusion and cultural and social exchange without an adequate integration of the educational and scholastic systems of the reality of inclusion, intended as a key instrument not only for individual growth, but also, and especially, for the prevention of prejudice, intolerance and discrimination.

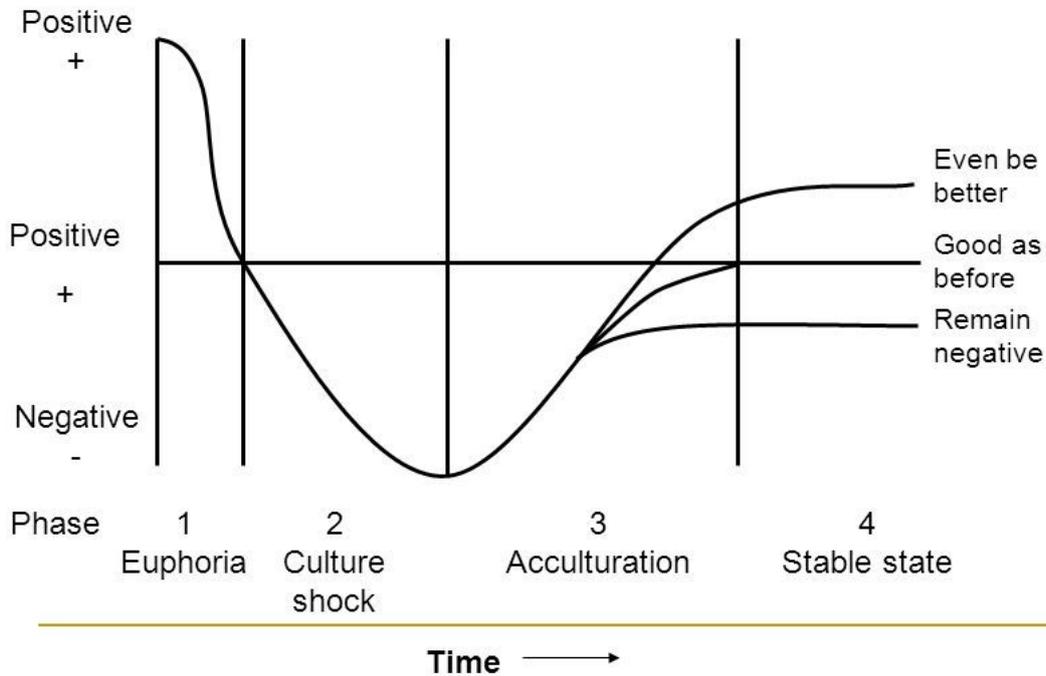
8.1 The mental situation of the foreign student

Intercultural encounters are generally accompanied by social and psychological processes. The simplest form of intercultural encounter is between a foreign individual and a new cultural environment. Hofstede said that the foreigner often experiences a sort of “culture shock”. As explained in earlier chapters, our mental software contains basic values. These values that we have acquired early in our lives, have become so natural as to be unconscious. They represent the basis of our conscious and more superficial manifestations of culture: rituals, heroes, and symbols.

A person's world view, his self-identity, and his systems of thinking, acting, feeling, and communicating can be disrupted by a contact with another culture (D. H. Brown, 2000). The inexperienced foreigner has to make an effort to learn some of the rituals and symbols of the new environment (how to greet people, when to bestow presents, knowing the best words to use in specific contexts, etc.), but it is unlikely that he can recognize, let alone feel, the underlying values. In a way, the foreigner immersed in an unknown culture returns to the mental state of a child, in which he does not know how to behave and even the simplest things have to be learned over again. This situation often leads to feelings of helplessness, of hostility and of distress towards the new environment. Sometimes even the individual's physical functioning is affected.

People residing in a foreign cultural environment follow a series of shifts of feelings over time that follow more or less the acculturation curve in the image below (Hofstede, 2010):

The Acculturation Curve



Feelings (positive or negative) are represented on the vertical axis, and time is plotted on the horizontal axis. Phase 1 is a period of “euphoria” which includes the honeymoon, the excitement of travelling and of seeing new countries. Phase 2 is the period of “culture shock” when real life starts in the new environment and a natural anxiety emerges within a certain person. The individual feels the intrusion of cultural differences. This normal tendency to feel worried about the new culture and about how to response to it, however, it can become fear, turning to mistrust, and it can sometimes lead to a possible return to the proper culture. Phase 3 “acculturation” regards the process trough which the foreigner learns how to act in the new circumstances, he adapts to the new cultural behaviours, he starts to adopt some of the local values and he finds increased self-confidence. In other words the individual integrates into the new social context. Phase 4 is the “stable state” of mind eventually reached. It can remain negative compared with home (lowest line), for instance, if the individual continues to feel uncomfortable and discriminated by the other people. It may be just as good as before (second line), in which case the foreigner is deemed bi-culturally adapted. In the last case it may even be better (third line), that is, it is said that the visitor has “gone native”. The

new person who develops in that specific culture, is characterized by acceptance, assimilation of the new culture and a stable self-confidence.

The length of the time scale varies. It seems to adapt to the length of the expatriation period. It has been analysed that people on short assignments of up to three months have reported euphoria, culture shock, and acculturation phases within this period, maybe they were sustained by the expectation of being able to go home soon. Instead people on long assignments of several years have reported culture shock phases of a year or more, before acculturation set in.

So, what it is important to understand is the fact that the foreigner, who comes from another country and begins a period or a completely new life in a new culture, has to face a lot of difficulties and emotional states. It is not easy to get used to new habits, a lot of mistakes can be made involuntary and something such as a gesture, a tone, an expression or a body movement can be misunderstood. Then thanks time and patience an individual starts to be more confident and creates also strong and lasting bonds with the local people. The foreigner shares intense moments of joy, difficulties and emotions of all kinds with local people, who can be friends, teachers, but also the host family. On the way back, everything will not disappear, but will accompany the individual throughout his whole life.

As regards children who have to attend a new school with a new organization, new rules, new teachers, new classmates and so on, they need to be followed in a particular way. Before inserting children in a new school, it is necessary to know their scholastic history, their results, the characteristics of the schools that they attended in the past, abilities and skills possessed, etc. Then, regarding the organization of homework, texts, research, etc., it is important that the teachers know if in the previous school they were asked to make some research, if yes, how many per week, how many tests they were used to make each month, etc.; all this because also this aspect depends on the country of origin.

The foreign student may need more time to reach the scholastic objectives, in comparison with the other classmates: his results will be inscribed in a range of essence and acceptability with respect to the starting point of the linguistic and disciplinary skills. The teachers have to accept and respect the time of learning of the student: the language to communicate, is learned fairly quickly, while for the

acquisition of the study language also several years may be needed, given the complexity of the specific languages.

Teachers have to pay special attention to the way they explain the different subjects to foreign students, trying to make the several topics as clear as possible.

Intercultural encounters at school can lead to much perplexity. This happens not only in Italy between local teachers and foreign, migrant, or refugee students but also abroad, between expatriate teachers, hired as foreign experts or sent as missionaries, and local students. There may be discomfort both from the teacher and from the other students in seeing behaviours, habits, ways of speaking and reaction times which differ to those of the majority of the group. Foreign students need assistance to overcome their difficulties; so, teachers make a big effort to make the lessons possible and understandable, to adapt the new arrived in the new context and to make them participate in class.

Next chapter will introduce the case study, touched on previously, made to prove the different difficulties and debates that can occur in a multicultural class and some of the difficulties met not only by foreigners, but also by local people in contact with them.

9. CASE STUDY

Taking advantage of the situation of schools today, which offers a lot of possibilities for what concerns the intercultural field, I have decided to realize a case study to confirm the role of the intercultural competence in the encounters with foreigners. Here it will be proposed a sort of survey in order to realize something more practical which can testify a lot of observations made till now. There will be questionnaires, together with the data collection and the analysis of what comes out from the students' answers.

9.1. Presentation of the case study

This case study includes two different questionnaires addressed to Italian and foreign students. The questionnaires are similar, but they differ in some points. This helps us to get two different point of views of the intercultural situation which occurs in the classes today. The case study has been realized in a high school in the Veneto region where finding mixed classes is very common. The students who have filled out the questionnaires are so divided: 10 foreigners and 30 Italians.

9.1.1. Questionnaire addressed to foreign students

Firstly, foreign students have been asked to specify the duration of their stay in Italy, which represents a fundamental data to understand if students are beginners with the Italian culture and system, or if they have already begun to get used to that culture. In some cases, the student has foreign origins but was born in Italy, so he feels more Italian than foreign. They are also asked to say if they know their foreign language and if at home, with their familiars, they use to speak that language or Italian. Thinking in a different language is a sign which testifies the fact that also the student's gestures and all the nonverbal language is foreign and so when this person speaks to an Italian there can be more misunderstandings.

Then there are questions about what/who they have left abroad such as a part of the family, friends, other familiars and if they sometimes return there during the year. This can help to imagine the personal and sentimental situations of the individuals and as a consequence their difficulty of being

alone or without somebody for them important.

In the questionnaire there are questions about the differences between the foreign and Italian school noticed by the students who have been attending them for a period during their lives. These questions regard lessons, the teachers and the classrooms. Then a part is dedicated to the relationships between the foreigners and the Italian students, including also relationships among foreigners belonging to different cultures. Moreover the foreigners are asked to say if they have noticed typical Italian nonverbal languages such as gestures, tone and intonation, gaze, distance between bodies, dress code and if these distinctive traits have bothered them. Besides there are two questions about food which is another important element who characterises cultures.

The last part has to do with possible misunderstandings and arguments, between foreigners and Italians, among foreigners, but also among Italians coming from different parts of Italy. These last questions regard also principal topics such as women view, religion and the concept of family. To conclude foreigners are asked to write a little episode happened to them, in which they had a discussion with another student, both Italian and not.

9.1.2. Questionnaire addressed to Italian students

The questionnaire addressed to Italian students is a little different and presents less questions than that of the foreigners, but all the principal contents are present the same. Firstly, Italian students are asked to write their age, the region where they were born and if they have attended different schools during their lives. In this case they have to write if they have noticed differences in the teachers' behaviours, if the school differed from the organizational point of view and if the classes had some particular characteristics, different from that of the current school. From the answers of these questions we can realize how much difference there can be even remaining in the same country.

Then students are asked if they had a stay abroad, how the foreigners approach to them at the current school and if they have some friendships with them. These data help to notice how much the Italian students can get along with the foreigners and if this closeness is productive. Then, there are questions about different attitudes noticed in the way of communicate of the foreign students and

possible misunderstandings related to them. Also in this questionnaire there are questions about the different foods and dress codes not only between Italians and foreigners, but also among Italians.

Successively there is a part dedicated to the presence or not of debates on important topics such as women view, the concept of family and religion. They are asked to say if they have ever assisted to some disputes or conflicts among foreigners, among Italians and between Italians and foreigners. The last part regards the closeness with the foreigner and if this has brought to Italian students the curiosity about another culture. They have to write what they have learned, what surprised them and if one day, in the future, they would like to visit those places in which that culture is present. This is, maybe, the most important element: the curiosity and the interest in knowing something more about a specific culture is the key to develop a good intercultural communication. The interest in learning the different shades of the other cultures should be very strong and intense. As in the questionnaire addressed to foreign students, Italians too are asked to tell a possible personal experience in which they have had a discussion about an important topic such as family, religion, etc. with another student both Italian and not.

10. QUESTIONNAIRES

The two questionnaires are reported below.

10.1. Questionnaire addressed to foreign students

Questo questionario è anonimo quindi lo studente può sentirsi libero di essere sincero e non temere nessun giudizio da parte di terzi. Lo studente può decidere di rispondere in diverse lingue quali: italiano, inglese, tedesco, francese o spagnolo.

1. Et :

2. Qual   il tuo paese d'origine?

3. Da quanto tempo sei in Italia?

4. Conosci la tua lingua d'origine?

5. A casa con i tuoi familiari che lingua parli?

6. Ti capita di tornare nel tuo paese d'origine?
 - a) no, mai

 - b) una volta all'anno

 - c) due o pi  volte all'anno

7. Cosa hai lasciato lì?

a) Una parte della famiglia

b) Amici

c) Altri parenti

8. Segui corsi extra-curricolari?

a) Corsi di italiano

b) Attività di ripasso

c) Altre attività. Se sì spiega quali:.....

9. Hai frequentato solo la scuola italiana? Se no, da quanto tempo la frequenti?

.....

a) Hai notato particolari differenze per quanto riguarda lo svolgimento delle lezioni? La durata della lezione cambia? Andavi a scuola solo il mattino o anche il pomeriggio?

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b) Gli insegnanti che avevi prima erano diversi? Più o meno socievoli, più o meno disponibili, più o meno rigidi?

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c) Com'era l'aula dove seguivi le lezioni? Più grande/piccola? Quante persone vi erano in un'aula? La disposizione dei banchi era uguale a quella della tua classe attuale?

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10. Come si comportano gli studenti italiani con te?

a) Non mi rivolgono la parola

b) Mi parlano poco

c) Sono molto amichevoli, disponibili, cordiali

11. Hai stretto amicizie con gli studenti italiani?

- a)* No, nessuna. Se hai scelto questa spiega secondo te il perché.....
- b)* Poche
- c)* Sì, molte

12. E con quelli provenienti da nazioni diverse dall'Italia?

- a)* No, nessuna. Se hai scelto questa spiega secondo te il perché.....
- b)* Poche
- c)* Sì, molte

13. Secondo te gli italiani gesticolano troppo?

- a)* Sì, abbastanza
- b)* No, non più della mia cultura

14. Pensi che gli italiani siano troppo chiassosi in classe?

- a)* Sì, nella scuola che frequentavo il silenzio era d'obbligo
- b)* No, non più del normale

15. Secondo te gli italiani hanno un tono di voce troppo alto?

a) Sì, abbastanza

b) No, non più della mia cultura

16. Ti mette a disagio il fatto che gli italiani mentre ti parlano ti guardano negli occhi?

a) No, anche nella mia cultura per dimostrare attenzione a quello che si sta ascoltando si guarda negli occhi

b) Sì, nella mia cultura guardare fisso negli occhi è un gesto di sfida/ aggressivo....(se significa qualcos'altro nella tua cultura scrivilo).....

17. Secondo te gli italiani quando parlano fra loro stanno troppo vicini?

a) No, anche nella mia cultura tra amici si sta vicini quando si parla.

b) Sì, nel mio paese la distanza fra due amici è di circa:

- mezzo braccio

- un braccio

- un doppio braccio

18. Cosa pensi del modo di vestire italiano?

a) Non mi ha colpito particolarmente perché più o meno ci si veste così anche nel mio paese

b) Mi ha colpito un po' perché è un po'/molto diverso da come ci si veste nel mio paese. Se hai scelto questa indica cosa c'è di diverso (es. in Italia ci si scopre di più, ci si trucca di più, gli uomini si curano troppo...).....
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19. Durante la ricreazione, mentre facevi merenda con i tuoi compagni ti è capitato di notare cibi per te insoliti che mangiavano i compagni italiani (o non)?

a) No, mai.

b) Sì. (se hai scelto questa indica a quale cultura apparteneva questo tuo compagno e il cibo che stava mangiando)

20. A tua volta gli studenti italiani (o non) ti hanno fatto notare che per loro era un pò insolito quello che mangiavi tu?

a) No, mai.

b) Sì. (se hai scelto questa indica a quale cultura apparteneva questo tuo compagno e il cibo che stavi mangiando)

21. Ti è capitato di confrontarti con i compagni di scuola su temi come la famiglia, la religione, gli usi e costumi, i valori...?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

c) Sì, spesso (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

22. Ti è mai capitato di avere discussioni accese coi tuoi compagni riguardo temi generali come la visione della donna?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

c) Sì, spesso (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

23. Ti è mai capitato di avere discussioni accese coi tuoi compagni riguardo temi generali come il concetto di famiglia?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

c) Sì, spesso (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

24. Ti è mai capitato di avere discussioni accese coi tuoi compagni riguardo temi generali come l'importanza della religione nella tua vita?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

c) Sì, spesso (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

25. Hai assistito a scontri fra italiani e stranieri o tra italiani dovuti a fraintendimenti nel dialogo?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta (se hai scelto questa indica se ti ricordi se provenivano da regioni differenti o non)

c) Sì, più di una volta (se hai scelto questa indica se ti ricordi se provenivano da regioni differenti o non)

26. Hai assistito a scontri anche fra stranieri dovuti a fraintendimenti nel dialogo?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta (se hai scelto questa indica se ti ricordi se provenivano da regioni differenti o non)

c) Sì, più di una volta (se hai scelto questa indica se ti ricordi se provenivano da regioni differenti o non)

27. Se ricordi un evento in particolare in cui hai avuto un litigio o una discussione con uno

studente italiano (o non) legato a un modo di fare, un valore per te importante ecc. racconta qual era il tuo punto di vista e quello dell'altro

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10.2. Questionnaire addressed to Italian students

Questo questionario è anonimo quindi lo studente può sentirsi libero di essere sincero e non temere nessun giudizio da parte di terzi.

1. Et 

2. Di dove sei? (scrivere provincia e capoluogo di provincia)

3. Se provieni da un'altra regione indica da quanto tempo ti trovi in Veneto

4. Hai frequentato scuole di comuni/regioni diverse?

a) No, mai

b) S . (se hai scelto questa indica in quale regione/comune).....

5. Hai riscontrato differenze nel comportamento degli insegnanti?

a) No, nessuna.

b) Sì. (se hai scelto questa indica quali).....
.....

6. Hai riscontrato differenze sulla scuola in generale (classi, organizzazione scolastica)?

a) No, nessuna.

b) Sì. (se hai scelto questa indica quali).....
.....

7. Sei mai stato all'estero anche soltanto per un soggiorno studio?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta

c) Sì, più di una volta

8. Come si comportano gli studenti stranieri con te?

a) Non mi rivolgono la parola

b) Mi parlano poco

c) Sono molto amichevoli, disponibili, cordiali

9. Hai stretto amicizie con gli studenti stranieri?

a) No, nessuna. Se hai scelto questa spiega secondo te il perchè.....

b) Poche

c) Sì, molte.

10. Hai notato un atteggiamento diverso dal tuo mentre parlavi con uno studente straniero?

a) No, nessuno

b) Sì. (se hai scelto questa spiega cosa nello specifico)

11. Ti capita di litigare con loro per qualche fraintendimento?

a) No, mai

b) A volte (spiega cosa nello specifico)

c) Sì, spesso (spiega cosa nello specifico)

12. Trovi un po' insolito il modo di vestire di alcuni stranieri?

a) No

b) Sì (indica cosa nello specifico ad es. troppo s/coperti, con troppi accessori o meno, con abiti di colori tutti diversi...)

13. Durante la ricreazione, mentre facevi merenda con i tuoi compagni ti è capitato di notare cibi per te insoliti che mangiavano i compagni stranieri (o non)?

a) No, mai.

b) Sì. (se hai scelto questa indica a quale cultura apparteneva questo tuo compagno e il cibo che stava mangiando)

14. A tua volta gli studenti stranieri (o non) ti hanno fatto notare che per loro era un po' insolito quello che mangiavi tu?

a) No, mai.

b) Sì. (se hai scelto questa indica a quale cultura apparteneva questo tuo compagno e il cibo che stavi mangiando)

15. Ti è capitato di confrontarti con i compagni di scuola stranieri (o non) su temi come la famiglia, la religione, gli usi e costumi, i valori...?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

c) Sì, spesso (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

16. Ti è mai capitato di avere discussioni accese coi tuoi compagni riguardo temi generali come la visione della donna?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

c) Sì, spesso (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

17. Ti è capitato di discutere con qualche studente straniero in situazioni in cui parlavate del concetto di famiglia in generale?

a) No, mai.

b) Sì, una volta (spiega cosa nello specifico).....

c) Sì, più di una volta (spiega cosa nello specifico).....

18. Ti è mai capitato di avere discussioni accese coi tuoi compagni riguardo temi generali come l'importanza della religione nella tua vita?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

c) Sì, spesso (spiega il tuo punto di vista e il loro)

19. Hai assistito a scontri fra stranieri e italiani o tra stranieri dovuti a fraintendimenti nel dialogo?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta (se hai scelto questa indica se ti ricordi se provenivano da regioni differenti o non)

c) Sì, più di una volta (se hai scelto questa indica se ti ricordi se provenivano da regioni differenti o non)

20. Hai assistito a scontri anche fra italiani dovuti a fraintendimenti nel dialogo?

a) No, mai

b) Sì, una volta (se hai scelto questa indica se ti ricordi se provenivano da regioni differenti o non)

c) Sì, più di una volta (se hai scelto questa indica se ti ricordi se provenivano da regioni differenti o non)

21. Hai scoperto un particolare delle altre culture che ti ha stupito o che semplicemente ti ha incuriosito?

a) No, nulla

b) Sì, in una cultura. (indica in quale cultura e cosa).....
.....

c) Sì, in più di una cultura. (indica in quali culture e cosa).....
.....

22. Vorresti andare a visitare quei luoghi un giorno?

a) No

b) Forse

c) Sì, decisamente

23. Se ricordi un evento in particolare in cui hai avuto un litigio o una discussione con uno studente straniero (o non) legato a un modo di fare, un valore per te importante ecc. racconta qual era il tuo punto di vista e quello dell'altro.

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11. DATA COLLECTION

Now it will be shown what the several students have answered and all the data will be reported in two tables. The first table is dedicated to the answers given by the foreigners:

FOREIGN STUDENTS										
Student n°	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Question n°										
1	16	17	16	16	20	20	17	18	17	18
2	Kosovo	Romania	Guinea Conakry	born in Italy, Moroccan father	Kosovo	Kosovo	Tunisia	Romania	Morocco	Ucraina Ismail
3	16 years	13 years	12 years	10 years	17 years	17 years	17 years	13 years	14 years	13 years
4	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
5	Kosovan	Romanian and Italian	Italian and dialect of his country	Italian and Arabic	Kosovan and Italian	Kosovan and Italian	Arabic and Italian	Romanian and few times Italian	Arabic and Italian	Italian
6	c	b	b	a	b	b	b	c	b	a
7	c	c	c	a, c	c	c	a, b, c	c	c	No one, she was adopted
8	/	c	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	b
9	yes	yes	yes	Arabic school too	yes	yes	Arabic school too	Nursery school in Romania	yes	yes
10	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c
11	c	c	b	c	c	c	c	b	c	c
12	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	c	b	c
13	a	a	b	a	a	b	a	a	a	b
14	b	b	b	a	b	b	b	b	b	a
15	b	b	b	a	a	b	a	b	b	b
16	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
17	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	b

18	a	a	a	b	a	a	b	a	a	a
19	a	b	a	a	a	a	a	a	b	b
20	a	b	a	b	a	a	a	a	b	b
21	c	a	c	a	c	c	b	c	c	b
22	a	a	c	b	b	a	b	b	a	b
23	a	a	c	a	a	a	a	c	a	a
24	c	a	c	b	c	c	c	a	a	b
25	b	c	a	a	a	a	c	c	b	b
26	a	a	c	a	a	a	a	c	a	a

The last answer, the 27th, is not reported in the table because it regards the description of an event experienced by the students and I will focus on those answers in the analysis of data later. Also in the next table the 23rd answer is not reported and will be, then, object of discussion.

ITALIAN STUDENTS																						
Question n°	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Student n°																						
1	16	Napoli (NA)	3 years	b	b	b	c	c	c	b	a	a	a	a	c	a	b	a	c	c	b	c
2	15	Napoli (NA)	5 years	b	b	b	c	b	b	b	b	b	a	a	c	a	a	b	b	c	b	c
3	18	Bibione (VE)	/	a	a	a	c	c	c	b	a	a	a	a	c	b	a	a	b	c	c	b
4	18	Portogruaro (VE)	/	a	b	a	b	c	b	b	b	b	a	a	c	a	b	a	c	b	c	c
5	17	Cordovado (PN)	4 years	b	a	a	c	c	c	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	b
6	17	Caorle (VE)	/	a	/	/	b	c	c	a	a	a	b	a	c	a	a	a	c	b	a	c
7	17	Ceggia (VE)	/	a	/	/	b	c	c	a	a	b	a	a	c	a	a	c	a	a	c	c
8	18	Pravisdomini (PN)	/	b	a	a	a	c	c	a	a	a	a	a	a	c	a	a	b	c	b	c
9	18	Eraclea (VE)	/	b	a	a	a	c	c	a	b	a	b	a	c	a	a	b	b	a	c	b
10	19	Concordia (VE)	/	b	a	a	c	c	c	a	a	b	a	b	c	a	a	a	a	b	a	b
11	18	Pramaggiore (VE)	/	a	/	/	c	c	c	a	a	b	a	a	a	a	a	a	b	c	b	c
12	18	Pramaggiore (VE)	/	a	/	/	c	c	c	a	a	b	a	a	a	a	a	b	b	b	b	c
13	17	Concordia (VE)	/	a	/	/	c	c	c	a	a	a	a	a	c	a	b	b	b	b	b	c

14	17	Concordia (VE)	/	a	/	/	b	b	b	a	a	b	a	a	c	a	a	c	b	a	b	a
15	17	Caorle (VE)	/	b	b	a	b	c	c	a	a	a	b	b	c	b	a	b	a	b	b	c
16	18	Portogruaro (VE)	/	a	/	/	a	c	c	b	b	a	b	a	c	c	a	b	b	b	c	c
17	17	Portogruaro (VE)	/	a	/	/	c	c	b	b	b	b	a	a	c	a	a	b	c	c	b	b
18	16	Musile (VE)	/	b	a	b	b	c	b	a	b	b	b	a	b	a	a	a	b	a	a	c
19	17	Annone Veneto (VE)	/	a	/	/	b	b	b	a	b	a	b	a	c	a	a	a	a	a	a	b
20	17	Caorle (VE)	/	b	b	b	a	c	c	b	b	a	a	a	c	a	b	b	a	a	a	c
21	16	Portogruaro (VE)	/	a	/	/	c	c	a	b	b	b	b	a	c	a	a	b	b	b	c	c
22	17	Portogruaro (VE)	/	b	b	a	a	c	b	a	a	b	b	a	b	a	a	a	c	c	a	b
23	16	Ceggia (VE)	/	a	/	/	a	c	c	a	b	a	a	a	c	a	b	a	c	c	b	b
24	16	Portogruaro (VE)	/	a	/	/	a	b	b	a	a	a	a	a	b	a	a	a	b	a	c	c
25	16	Venezia (VE)	/	b	a	a	b	c	b	a	a	a	a	a	b	b	a	a	b	b	b	c
26	17	Torre di Mosto (VE)	/	b	b	b	c	c	c	a	b	b	a	a	c	c	a	c	a	a	a	c
27	17	Portogruaro (VE)	/	a	/	/	a	c	b	a	a	b	b	a	b	a	a	a	a	b	b	b
28	17	Portogruaro (VE)	/	a	/	/	a	c	b	a	a	b	a	b	c	b	a	b	a	c	c	b
29	16	Conegliano (VE), Campanian parents	/	b	a	a	a	c	c	a	b	b	a	a	a	a	a	a	b	c	c	c
30	18	Latisana (UD)	Only for lessons at school	b	a	a	a	c	b	b	b	a	b	a	c	b	a	a	b	a	c	c

12. DATA COLLECTION ANALYSIS

What follows is the analysis of all data reported before.

12.1. Analysis of the questionnaire filled out by foreigners

Now, I will analyse the first table which contains the answers given by foreign students. The results obtained from this table highlight that all the students have been living in Italy for different years, from 10 to 17 years. They all know their native language and the majority of them communicate with their familiars both in Italian and in their mother language. So, they find themselves to think in two different language and as, in their lives, they have been living more in Italy than in their country, it is normal that for example, some nonverbal language result to be a mix between their culture and ours. This leads to an increase of the possibilities of misunderstandings with the others. It is a very important point, not to underestimate.

Other data reveals that the majority of the students have left abroad some familiars, in few cases a part of their families such as a mother, a father or a sister, etc., and they go to visit them at least once a year. The feeling of nostalgia is present in a lot of immigrants, because even if they came in Italy to live better and to get a better future, they always have a sort of bitterness in their hearts because they left there someone important for them, or even just their houses, their habits, etc. This feeling is comprehensible and that is also why everyone should try to make a foreigner feel at ease as much as possible.

As regards questions about the school, the majority of the students have said that they do not follow extracurricular courses, probably because they have already been living in Italy for years and so they are already confident with the Italian language and they do not need particular courses. Then, on 10 students, 3 have attended a school abroad, 1 is a particular case of adoption, in fact this student has attended an orphanage, and all the others have attended only the Italian school. Those who have been attending schools abroad, have noticed some differences between the Italian and the foreign schools. One of them has been attending the Arabic school for three years and he says that the classrooms were small with a capacity of maximum 15 people (the majority of the classes were

composed by 10 students), there were lessons both in the morning and in the afternoon, the teachers were very severe and there were punishments when the pupils did not do their homework or if they made no silence in class. Normally the teacher used to hit the student's hands with a stick, the student tells. Another student attended the Arabic school too and adds that there, pupils used to take notes on some small black boards and that also in that school the teachers were very stern. The only difference is that this student says that the classrooms in his school were wide and that his class was composed by 30 people. So, a consistent difference can be noticed even in the same country. A Romanian student attended only the nursery school abroad, and so he has no memories about that period of his life. From these answers it can be noticed that the schools differ from country to country not only for what concerns lessons and classrooms, but also the teachers behave in a different way. It is to underline that teachers are those who educate pupils, and passing from a system which includes corporal punishments to one where this does not exist, may provoke even a change in the way of thinking of a student: he could start to think if that system was better or worse, right or wrong. Surely these changes represent a source for an open minded person, who has had the possibility to experience different realities.

Positive data occurred about the relationships between foreigners and Italians and also among foreigners. The majority of the foreign students have Italian and foreign friends at school and this is essential from different points of view: these friendships promote the learning of another culture, increasing the interest in the diversity and they make the climate inside the class more comfortable.

Questions from the 10th to the 18th are about nonverbal language and the results which occur testifies that foreigners have noticed that Italians use a lot of gestures when they talk, they do not think that Italians are too noisy in class or that they have a tone of voice too high. Besides it does not bother them that Italians look straight in the eyes during dialogues and also the distance that they keep among people when they talk is not reason of discomfort. As regards the question about the dress code, the majority of the foreign students do not notice particular differences in the way of dressing because they say that it is similar to that of their countries. Just two people coming from Arabic countries say that in their culture women have to cover their bodies leaving free only the face. Surely if there were also the answers made by a Chinese student, they would have noticed more differences, not only about gestures, but also about the gaze and the tone of voice, which are almost the opposite with respect to the Italian ones.

As for questions about foods, the majority of the students have not noticed unusual foods eaten by Italians and also Italians have not made particular comments about what foreigners have been eating. Only few students have noticed some differences during the breaks at school. Maybe this difference would have been more highlighted if the foreigners were just arrived in Italy or if they would have lived in Italy few months.

Moreover, questions about possible confronts among classmates on general topics, such as family, the concept of religion, customs, traditions and values, have revealed that students often speak about these important topics and there have been also debates and discussions on them. In a particular way some arguments have occurred when they have talked about the woman view and about the concept of religion, that represent different values according to the culture of reference. Answers given by foreign students show that they usually do not have arguments about the concept of family, but they usually have more fights because of misunderstandings during the dialogues, in a particular way between Italians and foreigners and among Italians, less among foreigners. Here again it is normal to think that these are data which depend on the culture of belonging. If the meeting would have been between an American and a Chinese, maybe there would have been more misunderstandings and someone would have felt offended. It is enough to think that an American goes straight to the point while a Chinese produces spiral texts, as already explained in the previous chapters.

In the last questions foreigners have told some episodes happened to them regarding stereotypes and racist behaviours. A student has written that in the past he received some insults because he is Romanian, another one says that he was called “nigger” in an offensive way, and one has told that in his opinion people generally feel fear when they see a black person and he remarks that people should not judge the others on the basis of their skin colour. The last one, who has answered to this question, has written that he has had a strong discussion with their classmates about the concept of religion. It was the period of the numerous killings made by ISIS terrorists in France who continued to make massacres in the name of Allah. This student believes in Allah too and explains that he is not like them and that believing in this God does not plan to kill innocent people. He also adds that those terrorists are an exception and they abuse of the name of Allah. All these answers make us reflect and understand that individuals should not make generalisations or be biased. Prejudices are never the right way forward.

12.2. Analysis of the questionnaire filled out by Italian students

Also in the case of Italian students, it has been asked if they come from Veneto or other regions because even in the same state, in this case Italy, there are a lot of different cultures and traditions and the most evident can be noticed from the North to the South. Italian students are thirty, two of them come from Campania and few from Friuli Venezia Giulia, while the rest of them belong to Veneto from their birth. Only four people have attended schools outside the Veneto region, two in Friuli and two in Campania, while the others attended other schools in different provinces but always in the same region. The students who have experienced schools in the South have remarked that there the teachers are more severe, the educational proposal is worse than that of the North and also the organization of the school in general is not good. For example the blackboards and the school desks are very old and ruined. As regards those who attended schools in Friuli, only one has noticed that in general, there is more seriousness and respect for punctuality there than in the school in Veneto, but the others have not noticed particular differences. For what concerns the rest of the students who have not attended schools outside Veneto, but only in different provinces, the majority thinks that there are not relevant differences among the schools of the same region.

The majority of Italian students have been at least once abroad. As regards the friendships with the foreigners, most of them have a lot of foreign friends and they find them very friendly and helpful. As said before this launches solid basis for the development of a good intercultural competence.

Then, Italians are asked to indicate if they have found some particular behaviours made by foreigners and if they sometimes have some arguments due to misunderstandings occurred during dialogues. Only few of them have noticed something different in their attitudes, for example one sustains that their way of expressing themselves is different, another says that some foreigners are not open minded and others think that they have another way of thinking in general. Italian students have noticed that sometimes there are linguistic misunderstandings and that some debates occur when they talk about strong topics such as equality and personal freedom. A student writes that foreigners sometimes think that Italians feel contempt towards foreign cultures and so they are biased, ruining consequently the dialogue.

Regarding the foreigners' way of dressing, 15 people do not find it unusual, while the other 15,

instead, find a little strange and peculiar their dress code and they have written some comments. These 15 students say that foreigners sometimes are excessively ethnic or too extravagant, that there are cultures in which women have to keep their body all covered and others in which it is permitted to be even too naked; some students add that, in their opinion, foreigners are not able to combine colours or that they wear too accessories, while others prefer to say that they know that some clothes are typical of a specific culture and so they do not find them unusual, and add that foreigners could say the same thing about Italians' way of dressing. They simply accept and understand diversity.

As for questions about food, the majority of Italians say that they have not noticed unusual foods eaten by foreigners or by other Italians during the breaks at school and vice versa the other students have not commented them. Those few students, who have noticed particular foods, tell that it was the case of a Moroccan who was eating “Kascer” (a type of meat), a Kosovan who was eating “cous cous” and a Chinese who was eating some fried grasshoppers.

As in the questionnaire addressed to foreigners, also in that addressed to Italians there are questions about possible confronts on general topics such as the woman view, the concept of family, etc. The majority of the students have answered that, at least once, they have had the occasion to talk about these topics but they have not had heated debates, just confronts: they have always just accepted the differences. As regards the woman view students say that they do not share the fact that for some cultures the woman is seen as a person who has to take care of the sons and of the house, she has not the same man's rights and she is seen as a submissive woman, without freedom. As for the religion, Italians have noticed that the majority of the foreigners are very bond to their religion, they follow it and respect it daily, and some problems occur when they think that their religion is also more important than others. A student has noticed that also the education is different, some foreigners are not free to go out with friends and to drink alcohol or, at least, they are not allowed to come back home late in the evening. Another student underlines that he has noticed that some foreigners, making reference to Albanians, give more importance to the concept of family than Italians. For example they often meet with their whole family for a lunch or a dinner in order to spend some time together and stay in company. Many of the Italian students, anyway, say that in most of the cases they do not share the foreigners' values and traditions, but they respect and accept them.

The results taken from the answers regarding arguments due to misunderstandings during dialogues, show that the majority of the students have attended some discussions both between foreigners and Italians, but also among foreigners and among Italians. This data show us that misunderstandings occur and it is important to know how to say something in a foreign language and also how to interpret what a foreigner tells us. It is very interesting the fact that also Italians, when they talk each other, have misunderstandings, and generally this happens when one comes from the North and the other from the South. A Neapolitan student has given also the example that when he makes jokes to Venetians, these do not catch the ironic part and so they do not laugh or worse they think that the Neapolitan is kidding them.

The part regarding curiosity in other cultures and the will to visit some countries abroad, has brought to light that students have some interest in the diversity. The majority of the students have noticed particular aspects of other cultures which arouse their attention for example the fact that, in the Norwegian culture parents do not live together with their sons, but in separate houses, then in the Muslim culture the Ramadan and the fact that girls can not choose their future husband and they have to cover almost all their bodies, making visible to other people only the eyes. Other things which have attracted students' curiosity is the Chinese New Year's Eve and the Indian culture with all its costumes and particular accessories.

In the last questions some students have written that they have had some episodes of fights with foreigners in their lives. Most of them born because students did not agree talking about religion and woman view. For Italians, people cannot kill in name of God, and after the attacks made last November in Paris, a lot of discussions issued about what is required from a religion and about what is right. Then for the Muslim culture the woman is seen as something submissive to men, a person who has just to take care of the house and of the family. She does not work and she does not go out to have fun with friends. This is unthinkable in the West but perfectly normal in the East.

The results of these questionnaires have confirmed, again, the fact that in the encounter with a foreigner it is not enough to know the foreign language from a linguistic point of view. Acquiring a second language thus means developing morphosyntactic, phonological and textual competence, but also pragmatic, sociolinguistic and cultural competence. Misunderstandings always occur even if sentences are well structured and words are correct and well pronounced. It regards something deeper which includes a person's software of the mind (Hofstede, 2010) and the interpretation that a person gives to certain words in a specific context.

The development of this case study has been very interesting: seeing mixed classes, observing physical differences, but also different behaviours makes reflect. The answers given by foreign students have demonstrated that different realities exist, some of them are unthinkable and unbelievable but they are followed and each person has a strict bond with his proper culture of origin. The most important thing is to respect and accept them, trying to think and identify oneself in that culture without prejudices or stereotypes.

13. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis has been to show the importance of the intercultural communicative competence. The fact that it is essential in the encounter among different ethnicities in any circumstances, such as at school, in a working environment, along the streets, etc., to avoid offences, misunderstandings and breaks of communicative events, and as a consequence of relationships.

In this paper some of the problems related to the intercultural communication have been analysed. From this analysis a central data emerged: in order to have a good intercultural communication it is important to be well prepared. This preparation includes the knowledge of different cultures, reference values, cultural models, in addition to the knowledge of languages itself. Awareness, as we have already said, quoting Hofstede, is the first step that leads to the acquisition of intercultural competence. Another key component is the experience that, combined with awareness and knowledge appears to be the key moment of the acquisition. Beyond motivation that drives an individual to face the meeting challenge with cultural diversity, there must be humility in the comparison with the foreigner. Only in that predisposition, in fact, there can be a process of decentralization, which makes communication possible, and which represents also the best way to learn and understand better oneself as well as the proper culture of origin.

Discovering and analysing cultures can be a very fascinating experience, most of all if an individual can move personally to another country, living as a specific culture asks to do. Being immersed in another culture and in another civilization means to understand the fundamental elements: not to judge, but accepting that there are differences among the various countries of the world. Accepting to discover the other, adapting to his way of life, respecting his opinions, and communicating without prejudices of race, of religion, and of country of origin: these are the challenges that are launched from this experience, and at the same time the foundations for more tolerance and for a greater openness to the whole world.

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16. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very pleased to express the deepest appreciation for my family who have always sustained me during my studies and who have always had faith in me.

I would like to thank my supervisor Graziano Serragiotto for his punctuality and availability in answering my e-mails and giving me precious advices to make my thesis as complete and accurate as possible.

In addition a thank you to my professor of English, who teaches in the high school that I attended before the university, and who helped me in the organization of the case study that I have developed.

Finally I wish to express my sincere gratitude for my boyfriend who has been as useful as he could in the realization of my thesis, and who has never stopped believing in me and in my capabilities and, most of all, in the fact that I would have always achieved my purposes.