



*A mio marito Michele, grazie per il tuo supporto amorevole.*



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**Dyslexia & FL speech production  
and oral communicative competence**

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## *Introduction*

Foreign language (FL) classrooms have become increasingly diverse. The variety of students is definitely greater than in the past and their needs present such peculiarities that make it fundamental for the teacher to know who learners are, as a group and as individuals. When it comes to students affected by dyslexia who present difficulties with processing language and identifying language patterns on their own, many people think that they should not even try to study a foreign language. For those teachers, however, who believe it is a right of everyone to be helped to realize one's potential in FL learning, the struggle is to find appropriate accommodations that may lead to a successful outcome. Unfortunately, as Schneider and Crombie (2003) pointed out, training in "this type of accommodations for students with language processing difficulties has not been a routine part of teacher education in most foreign language teacher education programmes" (p.2).

As I have realized this in the schools where I have worked, my desire is to clearly outline, for myself first and for those interested in the issue, some teaching and assessment strategies for those learners with specific language processing difficulties that are associated with dyslexia. Moreover, since I firmly believe that one of the main aims of studying a foreign language is to be able to communicate effectively in the target language, a special focus of this thesis is on FL speech production and oral communicative competence.

According to Kormos (2006) in fact "conversation is one of the most frequent and fundamental means of communication and its primary and overriding function is the maintenance and establishment of social relationship" (p.xvii). Nowadays more and more people acknowledge the importance of being able to speak at least two languages, with English being the most widely used means of communication worldwide. Indeed in our world without borders, English has become the "international language" used in business, technological and academic communication. This trend of English globalization, as a worldwide phenomenon, makes it necessary to communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and in a variety of settings. Effective use of English as a second language (L2) or FL in oral communication is a very difficult task people need to learn for their interpersonal communication and apparently, for most of them, learning to speak is even more important than reading and writing. Schools are the first places to offer the chance to learn a foreign language, however, when considering the oral competence

students acquire at the end of their studying career the result is very disappointing, at least in terms of oral proficiency, as showed by a study conducted by the Center for Applied Second Language Studies in 2010.

When thinking about dyslexic students and their chances to reach a sufficient communicative competence at the end of their studies, difficulties increase even more if the accommodations and approaches mentioned previously are not implemented within the classroom. It is generally believed that problems for learners affected by dyslexia are confined to reading and spelling and that they will be able to listen and speak in a FL without problems. However, this is not taking into account the difficulties in recognizing language patterns that are introduced orally and other problematic areas. Dyslexic students might also, therefore, display oral and auditory shortcomings that need specific interventions. It is important here to make clear that difficulties vary in severity between individuals, with each student showing a different pattern of strengths and weaknesses.

Soren Kierkegaard wrote that instruction begins when the learner first instructs the teacher by helping the teacher to understand their individual learning style. It is therefore important to know the students and their particular learning profiles through regular dialogue in an atmosphere of trust, in order to find the strategies that work best for each learner. Bearing this in mind, I found it important to include some interviews in the last chapter, in order to give voice to students themselves.

Although most FL learners and maybe some teachers believe that oral communication problems can be solved through “more practice” in vocabulary and structure or through immersion programs in the FL, this appears as a very simplified solution to a more complex issue when taking into account dyslexia. To develop the knowledge to deal with oral communication problem in a FL context, teachers and educators should focus on the real nature of those circumstances in which “problems” are constructed (Jamshidnejad, 2011). Specifically, in the case of classes with dyslexic students it is important to consider more than just one aspect involved. The present work sets out therefore to inform about dyslexia and its impact on FL learning with particular attention on the oral aspect and it is widely supported by literature on the matter. I believe that this is just the starting point in order to become more aware of the ample issue represented by dyslexia and to offer some ideas on how to boost FL speaking.

# Chapter 1

## **1. THEORIES OF SPEECH PRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW**

In this first chapter I am going to analyze what the main theories of speech production are, considering both the spreading activation theory and the modular theory. Levelt's model still represents one of the most thorough theories available to date, nevertheless, it seems important to analyze different positions and contributions as well. For this reason, an in depth view of some stages of speech production is also offered here. Furthermore, I am going to briefly take into consideration the role of attention and automaticity within speech production as well as some issues and corresponding strategies that might be employed to be successful in communication. Since the main interest lies in how dyslexia impacts on speech production, a brief paragraph drawing some general considerations also follows.

### 1.1 Main theories of L1 speech production

The research into oral L1 production has become an autonomous discipline within the field of cognitive psychology. The majority of theories of monolingual and bilingual speech production follow two main directions: the spreading activation theory and the modular theory of speech processing. Researchers working in the first area believe that speech processing is executed in an interactive network of units and rules in which decisions are made on the basis of the activation levels of the so-called nodes that represent these units and rules. Traditional modular theories, on the other hand, suggest that the speech-encoding system consists of separate modules, in which only one way connections between levels are allowed (Kormos, 2006).

Based on Chomsky's tenets of generative grammar, Dell's spreading activation theory implies four levels of knowledge involved in producing L1 speech: semantic, syntactic, morphological, and phonological. The mechanism devoted to produce sentences is the process of spreading activation. In a normal processing, the node of the required category that has the highest level of activation is accessed. Subsequently, this node spreads its activation further to the lower level nodes and to the phonological segment nodes. Once the encoding of the first syllable of a word is finished, the level of activation of this syllable node decreases so that it would not be selected repeatedly and then the encoding of the next syllable can start. It is important to underline that activation spreads across levels

as well. For instance, at the lexical level, semantically and phonologically related items in the lexicon also receive some activation. Kormos (2006) provides us with an example: if “dog” is the target word, “hog” and “cat” are also activated to some degree. This accounts for the occurrence of lexical substitutions and phonologically related lexical errors. According to Dell, activation can spread bidirectionally if we are considering both production and speech perception. The latter is in fact seen as the backward spreading of activation. An example of this could be the following: if one hears the phonemes [k] [æ] [t], they will activate the syllable node [kæt] which passes on activation to the word node “cat” which in turn selects the concept CAT. Likewise, the process of monitoring would be experienced in the same way as understanding the interlocutor’s speech (Kormos, 2006).

However, the most widely used theoretical framework in FL (foreign language) production research is Levelt’s model. He claims that speech production is modular so it can be described through the functioning of a number of processing components that are relatively autonomous in the system (Kormos, 2006). In Levelt’s model (1999) there are three knowledge stores: the store for the “knowledge of the external and internal world”, the “mental lexicon” and the “syllabary”. The first store includes the “discourse model”, which is “a speaker’s record of what he believes to be shared knowledge about the content of the discourse as it evolved” (Levelt, 1989), the “model of the addressee” (the present context of interaction and the ongoing discourse), and “encyclopedic knowledge” (information about the world), (Kormos, 2006) .

According to Levelt, people produce speech first by conceptualizing the message, then by formulating its language representation (by encoding it) and finally by articulating it. Concerning speech perception, speech is perceived by an acoustic phonetic processor, then it is decoded by means of a parser and it is finally interpreted by a conceptualizing module. Each processing component has a specific role and the processing is incremental so the conceptualizer starts working on the next chunk as soon as it has passed the previous one to the formulator. As a result, the articulation might start before the planning of the whole message has been completed.

It is hypothesized that all the knowledge stores described so far are shared between L1 and FL: there is a common episodic and semantic memory for L1 and FL, a shared store for L1 and FL lemmas and lexemes, and for L1 and FL gestural scores. In FL production,

however, we need to postulate the existence of a fourth and FL specific knowledge store: a declarative memory of syntactic and phonological rules in FL.

## 1.2 Kormos' speech model based on Levelt's

Despite a few shortcomings, the modular theory of speech processing provides the most detailed and systematic account of the generation of verbal messages to date and has therefore been the most influential in the study of FL speech. Let's take a look at it before getting into details of other spreading activation theories, which also have a lot to offer to the FL field.

### *1.2.1 Conceptualization*

The processing of FL speech starts with conceptualizing the message, which involves activating the relevant concepts to be encoded and deciding on the language in which the message will be spoken. L1 and FL concepts are assumed to be stored together in the semantic memory. In this model a concept is seen to be a conglomerate of inter-related memory traces consisting of information concerning word meaning. When a concept is called on, not all the memory traces are activated, only the contextually relevant pieces of information become active. The extent to which L1 and FL concepts are shared depends on the concept. If the two languages were learnt and are used in different environments concepts might be separated, then at the beginning level FL concepts are completely mapped onto L1 concepts, whereas at advanced levels the FL conceptual representation is greatly enriched.

In the first phase of conceptual preparation the message is generated through macro planning and micro planning. Macro planning involves the elaboration of the communicative intentions which are later expressed by speech acts (e.g. directing, requesting etc.). In order to perform a speech act one needs to select the information to be encoded and decide on the order in which this information will be conveyed. Once these decisions at the "macro" or content level have been made, micro-planning, which involves planning the linguistic realization of the content, can start. In micro planning speakers decide on the perspective, the "accessibility status" and if a noun, or phrase or pronoun must be used. Other decisions concerning what constitutes new and old information, giving propositional content to the message, specifying the referents, the mood of the message must be taken. The micro plan also needs to contain language-specific info as well, for

example the selection of the appropriate tense. The outcome of macro and micro planning is the preverbal plan.

As the name suggests, this preverbal plan is not yet linguistic, although it is linguistically accessible; it is assumed to contain all the necessary information to convert meaning into language. The language of the message also needs to be set in the conceptualization phase, depending on sociolinguistic factors such as the nature of the communicative situation, the relationship of the interlocutors and the prestige of the languages involved. The language choice is indicated in the form of a language cue which is added to the activated conceptual info. During micro planning speakers have to select language-specific conceptual features and need to tailor their message in a way that is encodable in the selected language.

It is assumed that in semantic memory not only the concept that the speaker wants to encode is activated but semantically related concepts also receive activation. When the bilingual speaker uses one of his languages, the concepts in the other language will also be activated to some extent. Only the intended concept in the selected language however is chosen for further processing.

Still at the phase of conceptualization, we also need to consider the problem that not every instance of language is creatively constructed: the majority of our utterances are combinations of memorized phrases, clauses and sentences which together are called formulaic language. Selection of larger production units, chunking, is done at the level of the conceptualizer. It is assumed that there is duplicate storage for elements of a chunk, for example, for the formulae of “good morning”, each concept is stored separately as “good” and “morning” but there also exists a common unit that combines both of these components as one chunk into “good morning”. When the communicative context calls for the application of this formula, the chunk “good morning” will be activated and retrieved. The process of routinization lessens the cognitive load involved in planning the message and conceptual chunks activate corresponding readily-assembled linguistic constructions stored as one lemma. According to Kormos (2011), routines still go through the same processing stages but they are produced faster and with less conscious effort than creatively-constructed elements of the message.

### *1.2.2 Encoding*

Lexical encoding means, according to Kormos (2011), matching of the conceptual specifications and the language cue with the appropriate lexical entry in the mental lexicon. The mental lexicon contains L1 and FL lemmas and lexemes, it is a depository of a speaker's knowledge of word forms (lexemes) and their syntactic and morphological features (lemmas). The bilingual lexicon is assumed to consist of single L1 and FL words as well as longer word sequences in L1 and FL that correspond to conceptual chunks. The strength of connections might vary: for instance, at the beginning of the learning process links between L1 and FL items might be stronger than links among FL lexical entries. Moreover connections might also be asymmetrical, which means that in certain cases it is possible that there is only a one-way link pointing, for example, from an FL entry to an L1 item (passive vocabulary that one is able to recognize).

Syntactic encoding in L1 production entails two important procedures: the activation of syntactic information related to a lexical item, such as gender, optional and obligatory complements; and the use of syntactic encoding mechanisms to assemble phrases and clauses using the activated words and their syntactic features. In the first phase, the L1 speaker relies on declarative knowledge whereas the second stage involves applying procedural knowledge.

There is no fundamental difference between L1 and FL production with regard to the general process of syntactic encoding. This is lexically driven and consists of distinct stages that follow each other. The first major stage is the activation of the syntactic properties of the lemma. According to Bresnan's lexical theory of syntax, it is believed that the selection of the lemma activates its syntax that later triggers syntactic building procedures (quoted by Kormos, 2011, p.47). It is hypothesized that for balanced bilinguals FL lemmas point to syntactic information that is specific to the given FL entry, while for lower level learners FL lemmas might point to the syntactic information of the corresponding L1 item. The next major phase involves phrase and clause structure building and arranging phrases in the appropriate order. At this stage L1 speakers and balanced bilinguals use procedural knowledge of syntactic and morphological rules of the language which are automatically applied. FL learners at lower levels might proceed in several ways, for instance some rules might be acquired already in the form of procedural knowledge while other rules might be stored in declarative memory and used consciously.

If the rule is not acquired at all, some strategy might be used like the conscious transfer of the rule from L1 .

The next phase of processing is phonological encoding which involves the activation of the phonological form of the word to be encoded, syllabification and setting the parameters for the loudness, pitch and duration of intonational phrases which may consist of one word or several words. According to Kormos (2011) the mechanisms of phonological encoding are not different in L1 and FL production. Both L1 and FL lexemes compete for selection in bilingual phonological encoding. As a next step phonological word forms are assumed to activate the phonemes of the word in serial fashion, starting from the first phoneme and ending with the last one.

Phonemes are assumed to be stored and retrieved as one unit. Both L1 and FL phonemes are stored in a single network within the lexicon at the lexeme level and memory representations for phonemes that are identical in L1 and FL are shared. Once acquired, phonemes that are different in L1 and FL are stored as separate representations. At the beginning of the acquisition process, however, FL specific phonemes are frequently considered equal to an L1 phoneme that is similar to the target phoneme as pointed out by Flege (quoted by Kormos, 2011, p.48). In the case of balanced bilinguals syllabification and metrical encoding proceeds in the same way. In a similar way to the processes of syntactic encoding, FL learners at lower levels might need to resort to the declarative knowledge of lexical and post-lexical phonological rules or, where they are lacking, transfer these rules from their L1. Syllable programs for L1 and FL are assumed to be stored together in the syllabary. According to de Bot, beginning FL speakers mostly rely on L1 syllable programs, whereas advanced FL speakers usually succeed in creating separate chunks for FL syllables (quoted by Kormos, 2011, p. 48).

### *1.2.3 Monitor Loops*

It proceeds in a similar way in both L1 and FL production. Levelt (1989) assumed that the same lexicon is used for both production and perception and the same speech comprehension system attends to one's own speech and to other speakers' utterances (via the acoustic-phonetic processing module). Furthermore, the interpretation of the perceived message is carried out by the same conceptualizing module as the one in charge of generating one's own messages.

In Levelt's system of speech processing there are three monitor loops for inspecting the outcome of the production processes. The first loop compares the preverbal plan with the original intentions of the speaker before being sent to the formulator. The second loop monitors the phonetic plan before articulation, also called "covert monitoring". In certain cases in fact the speaker notices an encoding error (e.g. erroneously selected word before it is actually uttered). Finally the generated utterance is also checked after articulation which constitutes the final external loop of monitoring, involving the acoustic-phonetic processor. Upon perceiving an error or inappropriate event in the output in any of these three loops of control, the monitor issues an alarm signal which triggers the production mechanism for a second time.

#### *1.2.4 Speaker-Hearer interaction in speech production*

The situation model is assumed to guide the macro-planning phase of speech production. In a dialogue, which is a joint activity, it is evident that the situation models of the listener and the hearer interact. How does it happen? Pickering and Garrod suggested that the basic process responsible to account for successful communication between interlocutors is alignment (quoted by Kormos, 2011, p.50). Speaker and listener need to have a shared representation of the context of the conversation. Not only the situation model needs to be aligned but also lower levels of linguistic representations (lexical and semantic representation). According to them, alignment is automatic and proceeds through priming: this is why people tend to use similar words, expressions and linguistic structures to the ones produced by their interlocutors. This model can explain how FL learners try to incorporate new constructions into their speech through the repetition and reconstruction of the received input, and how frequently-heard constructions can raise the activation level of the learner's representation of linguistic items and can help accessing and automatization of existing knowledge of the FL. I am going to analyze this aspect more deeply in chapter 3.

### 1.3 The role of attention and automaticity in speech production

The individual is constantly bombarded by a high number of external stimuli and needs to be able to decide which of these stimuli are relevant to the particular activity one is engaged in. Therefore one aspect of attention, called "selective attention", involves the volitional control over choosing relevant stimuli and ignoring irrelevant ones. Another

aspect of the notion of attention is “sustained attention, vigilance or alertness”, which denotes a state in which one is responsive to incoming stimuli and is ready to receive and process information.

There are multiple resource pools for different processing modalities. The existence of multiple attentional resources, such as the separate attention pools for auditory and visual info can explain for example how one can listen to music while typing a letter. There seem to be problems though if two tasks for instance draw on the same group of attentional resources. As an example one cannot maintain a conversation while composing a letter because both involve verbal processing. Wickens argues that four factors are important in determining what aspects of the incoming stimuli one pays attention to: salience, effort, expectancy and value (quoted by Kormos, 2011, p.51). The model predicts that when different pieces of information compete for attentional resources, the information will be heeded that is salient, requires less effort to process, is expected in the given situation and has high value in terms of the task to be solved.

In L1 speech production two processes are subject to conscious attentional control: conceptualization and monitoring, whereas linguistic encoding mechanisms are largely automatic. It is logical to assume that planning and monitoring might compete for attentional resources and it is in these two stages of L1 speech production that speakers can decide what they will attend to. As lexical items are selected by the activated concepts, it is the complexity of the message and the syntactic characteristics of the activated lemmas that determine the syntax of the utterance. Therefore high attentional demands on planning might even result in increased syntactic complexity.

What L1 users pay attention to in producing speech is influenced by two interrelated factors: task-demands and the context of the interaction. The context, the social status, and power relations of the interlocutors might determine what concepts are activated to encode the speaker’s message (Levelt, 1989). One more aspect of attention in L1 speech production is attentional control. Attention has a regulatory function, it regulates the level of activation of the relevant items and processing procedures in memory and ensures that processes and memory traces required by task schemata remain activated and that irrelevant procedures and items are inhibited.

For a FL speaker it is not only the stages of planning and monitoring that are subject to attentional control. This is because, depending on the level of proficiency, FL speakers

display varying degrees of automaticity in linguistic encoding. For instance it might require a conscious search mechanism to retrieve the appropriate lemma matching the activated concept and to perform the ensuing syntactic and morphological encoding procedures. If conceptualizing the message requires particular attention on the part of the speaker, fewer resources will be available for lexical, syntactic and phonological encoding as well as for monitoring which might result in more errors in the students' output and in reduced fluency. This dimension of task demands has been termed the "resource-dispersing" dimension of task complexity by Robinson (quoted by Kormos, 2011, p.53).

As regards automaticity, L1 speech is mostly effortless, fast, does not require attention on the part of the speaker and can be done during while other activities are performed, such as cooking, washing etc. This automaticity represents the result of years of practice and exposure. According to Schneider, Dumas and Shiffrin the two most important characteristics of automaticity are that it does not need processing capacity and attention (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.39). Researchers are divided and some consider automaticity to be the conversion of declarative (factual) knowledge into procedural rules (the rule-based approach), other consider it to be a single-step access of a memorized item (item-based approach). In the first case the degree of attention paid to the process plays the most important role, whereas according to the second set of theories, memory-based retrieval is central.

According to Pawley and Sider, most of the utterances that one produces are not composed of sentences constructed word by word using syntactic rules, but of sequences of words or phrases retrieved from memory as one unit, namely formulaic language (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p. 44). Whatever model of speech production we consider, the only place where formulaic knowledge can be stored is the lexicon. In any model of speech production, concepts activate lexical items, therefore we have to assume that chunking or the creation of larger units of meaning takes place at the conceptual level (Kormos, 2006).

The acquisition of formulas is explained through chunking theories of automaticity and by Logan's (1988) instance theory. Most of the research views both L1 and FL vocabulary and idiom acquisition as chunking, that is, lexical items that often occur together tend to form chunks which are later retrieved as one unit. According to Logan's instance theory, at the beginning of the learning process, the application of rules is faster because linguistic units are not yet sufficiently encoded in memory. However, after some time of practice, the

speed of memory retrieval exceeds that of rule-based processing and formulaic expressions are accessed in memory as one unit. The recent version of the theory, the exemplar-based-random-walk model of Nosofsky & Palmeri, seems more applicable than the previous one because it allows for memory retrieval in the case of similar and not necessarily identical stimuli as it was before (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.44).

For what concerns automatization of lexical encoding processes, the first step is accessing lexical items stored in the mental lexicon. Memory strength theories, including connectionism, suggest that practice strengthens the links between concepts and lexical items and automaticity would result in the activation of the nodes connected to the node first activated in the network. With reference to syntactic and phonological rules, it is possible to draw some conclusions from the perspective of both rule and item-based theories of automaticity. Some rule-based theories have been tested on L1 acquisition and evidence was found that automatic application of syntactic rules is the result of proceduralization. To date no studies have been conducted on automatization in the field of phonological rules but findings concerning syntax might be transferable to this field. On the other hand, chunking and connectionist theories argue that rules of syntax are rather learned by acquiring a high number of exemplars first and by abstracting linguistic rules from these items.

## 1.4 An in-depth view of some stages of speech production

I have already discussed the main stages of speech production reformulated by Kormos (2011) on the basis of Levelt's model (1989). I am now going to explore them more deeply in order to get an idea of what current research has come up with. Namely, I will examine lexical, syntactic and phonological encoding processes. Finally I will take into consideration monitoring.

### *1.4.1 Lexical encoding and the bilingual lexicon*

Having briefly analysed what lexical encoding is, I am now going to discuss it in more detail. Some questions that might arise are: what are the processes involved in lexical encoding? What is the structure of the bilingual lexicon? How do code-switching and transfer take place at the level of words? How are lexical items acquired? Research in the field of cognitive psychology appear to suggest that in lexical encoding both L1 and FL lemmas are activated and they compete for selection. Scholars disagree, however, on how

lexical selection is controlled. To date, the view of “complex access and simple selection” seems to be the most accredited one. According to this theory, the preverbal plan contains all the necessary specifications to recall the appropriate word in the intended language. As regards the organization and structure of the bilingual lexicon, the mainstream position suggests there is no need to presume that semantic information is distinct from conceptual information. There are different models of the Organization of the Bilingual Lexicon but the hierarchical models, for instance, present several problematic aspects. Kormos (2006) suggested that the network model instead seems to be a more viable theory of how words are organized in the mental lexicon. Concerning code-switching and transfer, La Heij’s (2005) theory of complex access and simple selection provide a satisfactory explanation of intentional and unintentional code-switching.

According to Widdowson, knowledge of vocabulary in a foreign language is essential to communicate (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p. 55). Furthermore, in the modular model proposed by Levelt (1989), lexical encoding plays a central role since lexical items govern syntactic processing. As already stated, the language for communication is selected in the conceptualization phase but the first issue that has been taken into consideration by researchers is whether the conceptual system spreads activation only to the lexicon of the intended language or to that of the unintended language as well. Several studies provide evidence for the fact that the conceptual system sends activation to both L1 and FL lexical items and this would account for L1 lexical substitutions.

There are actually two views related to how activated words are selected: the first is called “non-language-specific selection” view and the second is known as “language-specific selection”. To support the first view, Poulisse (1999) brings the occurrence of blends that involved parts of words from both L1 and FL as an example of this competition (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.60). On the other hand some scholars like Costa, Colomé et al. tried to account for these interferences suggesting that competition takes place at the phonological level and, in lexical selection, the lemmas of the unintended language are not considered (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.62). There is however stronger evidence for the non-language-specific selection hypothesis, that is, in lexical encoding both L1 and FL lemmas enter into competition.

With reference to control in lexical selection there are three possible directions. The first involves the use of a checking mechanism, the second suggests the existence of inhibitory

processes and the last postulates that lexical selection is only based on the word's activation level, which is regulated by the language cue and the frequency of use. This third theory is rather simple but, unlike previous ones, is able to account for most phenomena observed in research on lexical encoding. According to La Heij's view, who elaborated Poulisse and Bongaert's theory of control in lexical access, the presence of a language cue at the conceptual level is sufficient because it ensures that lemmas in the language in use receive higher activation than lemmas in the nonselected language (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.67). What is more, words in the selected language rest at a higher level of baseline activation because repeated use raises their level of activation, making their selection easier (frequency effect).

Kormos (2006) also offers some insight into models of organization of the bilingual lexicon. It can be seen in different ways: it might be the store of conceptual and semantic information, the depository of words forms only or a memory store for both word forms and semantic information. The main problem is that the majority of researchers do not express what exactly they mean by the bilingual lexicon and for this reason it is difficult to decide whether they refer to the semantic/conceptual and/or to the linguistic structure of the lexicon when discussing the organization of bilingual lexical memory.

In the early work on bilingual lexical representation, three important distinctions were made concerning the organization of the lexicon. Weinrich suggested that speakers of a FL might represent words in a compound, coordinate or subordinate manner (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.72). What does it mean? In compound storage, the conceptual representations of a given word are shared and the speaker has two words for the same concept in the language spoken. In the coordinate mode of representation, speakers have separate concepts in their two languages and these concepts are lexicalized by the respective words in the two languages. Finally, in the subordinate manner of representation, the concept for a given lexical item is directly linked to the L1 word, which is connected to the FL word.

According to Kroll and Tokowitz, the characteristics of the words (e.g. their similarity in the two languages), the word class they belong to and abstract versus concrete status, are thought to be connected to the way they are encoded in the lexicon (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.73). Additionally, it has been suggested that lexical representation changes along with the development of language proficiency. This would mean that with more experience

in FL, a word initially stored in a subordinate manner might become represented in a compound manner.

Other alternatives have been proposed, namely the hierarchical model that assumes separate levels for concepts and word forms. They postulated there are two different ways in which concepts can be related to words in FL through the concept mediation alternative, the word association alternative. Later on, Kroll and Stewart proposed a revised hierarchical model (RHM), which incorporated both the earlier concept mediation and word association model and assumed different strengths of links between concepts and words at various stages of language development (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p. 75). However, these models that have just been outlined, present numerous limits and raise a lot of questions.

According to Kormos (2006), if we assume that concepts are shared in L1 and FL, based on the task instructions, a language cue is added to the conceptual representation and the concept will activate the FL lemma. Kormos suggested translation cannot simply involve accessing the equivalent FL word through the L1 lemma: lemmas are always accessed through conceptual representations. Yet, since FL words are learned through associating them with their L1 equivalents, very strong associative links are formed between them. This is probably what occurs when learners acquire the words by linking them to their L1 counterparts (in the early stage of acquisition). On the other hand, above a certain level of proficiency, learners acquire words associating them with their conceptual representations and not with their L1 counterparts, that means the strong associative links between L1 and FL words become weaker and do not require translation anymore. In the case of cognates though, it can be assumed that when a L1 word has a similar phonological form to the FL translation equivalent, the L1 lemma passes on activation to its phonological form, which enables the phonological encoding of the FL word at advanced levels.

The model of bilingual lexical memory that is truly concerned with lexical and conceptual representation is de Groot's conceptual feature model according to which words are linked to concepts which are made up of a set of interconnected features (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.79). This theory suggests that both concepts and word meanings are represented as a network of interconnected features or memory traces, a certain group of which is activated together to form a unit (concept or lexical meaning). Its most important claim is that conceptual representations are not necessarily shared, they might only overlap.

Kormos (2006) analyzed what it means to know a word and how the different types of knowledge might be represented in the bilingual mind. According to Nation, when learning a new word, the following types of information need to be acquired: (a) phonological, (b) orthographical, (c) syntactic, (d) morphological, (e) semantic, (f) pragmatic/ sociolinguistic and (g) idiomatic (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.80). As regards the first four types of knowledge there seems to be an agreement: the phonological characteristics of a word are stored in the mental lexicon at the level called the lexeme and the syntactic and morphological information is represented at the lemma level. Idioms are also assumed to be stored as one lemma in the mental lexicon (Levelt, 1989), and once acquired, FL idioms are also represented as one unit. I have already stated that there is disagreement among researchers as regards where information regarding semantic features is encoded whereas the pragmatic and sociolinguistic information would be stored at the conceptual level. FL research suggests that in decontextualized settings, pragmatic and sociolinguistic information is difficult to acquire and for this reason, even advanced FL speakers frequently rely on the pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge associated with the L1 word. If the relationship between the items stored in the lexicon is taken into consideration, Wolter gave an account for how L2 words are organized. According to him, they are organized in a network in which depth of world knowledge determines whether the items occupy a central or a peripheral position. Well known words are located at the core of the lexicon and the less words are known the further away they can be found from the center of the network. Words that are well known tend to have semantic connections with other items in the lexicon, whereas words on the periphery seem to have phonological or non-semantic connections with other words. Additionally, he observed that connections between FL items are not stable, and might be lost or strengthened during the learning (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.81).

As regards code-switching, it involves the use of two or more languages in the same discourse and can be intentional or unintentional, the latter corresponding to an accidental slip of the tongue. Poulisse and Bongaerts proposed that besides having semantic and syntactic tags, lemmas are also labeled with a language tag and lemma activation will take place only if all the features of the preverbal message, including the language specification, match those of the lemma (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.84). La Heij adopted this view but, arguing that lemmas do not need to contain a language tag, rather a language cue at the conceptual level is sufficient because in Levelt et al.'s (1999) more recent model of lexical

encoding, lemmas do not contain semantic information, only syntactic information is stored at this level. According to them all, unintentional code-switching can occur because the concept to be encoded erroneously sends activation to both the L1 and FL lemma which further activate the L1 and FL lexemes. Since L1 lexemes are more frequently used than FL lexemes, they will be selected for further phonological processing. In addition to that, they suggest intentional switches are produced when speakers do not know the FL lexical item, or because the L1 item meets the conceptual specifications better than the FL word.

How about the influence of L1 on lexical encoding? The influence of L1 on acquisition, language use and comprehension is known as transfer. L1 conceptual system is an important source of influence in FL vocabulary use and acquisition since “L2 (FL) acquisition largely involves learning a new system of linguistic forms to be mapped onto an already existing system of mental concepts that has been constructed and organized according to a person’s total experience with language and concepts” (Jarvis, 1998, p.25). Pragmatic, stylistic and frequency information concerning a particular word is also located in the conceptualizer and transfer of this information might occur as well until they are acquired. What is more, transfer of word-meaning also happens in the conceptualizing phase, if we assume that word-meanings are also stored at the conceptual level. Transfer can also occur at the lemma and lexeme level, that is, syntactic information concerning FL words might be transferred from L1 and at the lexeme level is less frequent and especially occurs in the case of cognates. Poullisse pointed out that although phonemes are often transferred from L1 to FL, it is rare for learners to pronounce an FL word as if it was an L1 word, it might occur when the FL word is a cognate, for instance (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.86).

Finally, it is important to consider the mental processes involved in vocabulary acquisition. Two aspects need to be considered: the establishment of memory traces and the encoding of various types of information related to word knowledge on one hand and how relationships between lexical items change as a result of the development of language proficiency, on the other hand (Kormos, 2006). As regards the first issue, two theories have been developed, namely Truscott’s and Sherwood- Smith’s acquisition by processing theory (APT) and Meara’s acquisition theory (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.87). Unfortunately, they have been concerned with rather limited aspects of vocabulary knowledge, word meaning and syntax, and have not taken into consideration other

information such as phonology, orthography etc. N. Schmitt, however explored how different aspects of lexical knowledge are acquired and found that the knowledge of word meaning “moved from receptive to productive and from unknown to receptive” (Schmitt, 1998, p.301), setting up a developmental hierarchy for word knowledge types assuming that if such hierarchy exists in the case of syntax, it is logical that different kinds of lexical knowledge would be learned in a specific sequence. However, only few participants took part in his study, and he could not establish a development order for word knowledge types. Concerning the second aspect, that is, how relationships between lexical items change as a result of the development of language proficiency, Meara claimed that vocabulary learning consists of the establishment of associative links, which might not mean connections only to L1 items but also to other FL words (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.89). He also argued that links might be unidirectional (e.g. only from word A to word B and not vice versa) and bidirectional, permitting the flow of activation in both directions. Furthermore, he suggested that words that are well known by the speaker have a high number of links to other words in the lexicon, whereas poorly known lexical items have few links to other items. It seems to be generally recognized that new information is memorized better if learners pay sufficient attention to it and if they create rich associations between old and new knowledge.

According to Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) and their involvement load hypothesis, involvement in processing is assumed to include three aspects: need (to learn the given word), search ( which refers to how the meaning of the word is found out), evaluation that “entails the comparison of the word’s meaning with other words, a specific meaning of a word with its other meanings, or comparing the word with other words in order to assess whether a word does or does not fits its context” (p.544).The components of involvement are known as involvement index, and the higher it is the more words will be kept in long-term memory.

#### *1.4.2 Syntactic encoding*

There exist many grammatical theories to date but Kormos suggested considering Kempen and Hoenkamp’s model of grammatical encoding based on IPG, Incremental Procedural Grammar (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p. 91). According to IPG, syntactic encoding subprocesses work autonomously, following a principle of incrementality, that is, a processing component can already start working with a fragment of its characteristic input.

In addition to that, IPG states that “the output of the processor is linear, while it may not be mapped onto the underlying meaning in a linear way” (Pienemann, 1998, p.2). Finally, IPG is concerned with a special grammatical memory store, where the output of intermediary processes can be held temporarily (Kormos, 2006).

As we already saw, the first stage in grammatical encoding involves the activation of the lemma and the further access to the syntactic properties (category, gender, singularity, specifications on complements etc.) encoded at this level. Later, the category procedure follows, which “inspects the conceptual material of the current iteration for possible complements and specifiers and provides values for the diacritic features” (Pienemann, 1998, p.4). Then, the phrasal procedure assigns a grammatical function to the phrase (e.g. whether an NP is the subject or object of a sentence). Lastly, the S-procedure builds the syntactic structure of the sentence and following the word order rule, it organizes the constituents.

One of the few areas of second language syntactic processing that has been studied is the encoding of grammatical gender in a few Indo-European gender-marking languages. Kormos suggested that whatever has been discovered with reference to gender might account for the encoding of other types of grammatical information stored together with a lexical item such as countability status and plural markers of nouns, transitivity of verbs, and so forth (Kormos, 2006). There are two main issues to consider. Firstly, whether the L1 and FL gender systems can be shared across languages if both languages have similar gender structures. On one hand it might be possible that the gender system of the two languages is shared and L1 and FL words are connected to the same gender node, that is the gender-integrated view, elaborated by Costa, Kovacic et al. On the other hand, the scholars expressed the possibility of the language autonomy view, that suggests the gender systems are separated and two separate gender nodes thus exist for FL words (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.93). Secondly, the other important issue is whether the selection of the gender feature is an activation-based mechanism or an automatic process. According to Costa and Kovovic, both in the gender-integrated view and in the language autonomy view, gender features might be accessed either automatically or with the help of an activation spreading mechanism. However, some experiments showed that if the gender system of the L1 and FL is integrated, access of the gender feature is not based on spreading activation. This is why further research is needed to test whether FL speakers

rely on a single gender system for the two languages, and if not, whether gender values are accessed automatically or based on spreading activation (Kormos, 2006).

Another important aspect to examine is how morphemes, the smallest units of language that carry meaning, are stored and accessed. Myers-Scotton and Jake developed a model that entails four different types of morphemes: content morphemes and system morphemes, further divided in early system morphemes and late system morphemes (subdivided in turn in bridge late system morphemes and outsider late system morphemes) (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.97). Content morphemes are words that assign and receive thematic roles (e.g. agent, patient) and head their maximal projections (e.g. nouns head NPs) so basically nouns and verbs, whereas system morphemes include among others determiners, inflections and some prepositions. According to Myers-Scotton, the four different types of morphemes are accessed differently in both L1 and FL: content morphemes and early system morphemes are activated in the mental lexicon based on the conceptual specifications of the preverbal message. After they are selected, they further activate the syntactic building procedures that call the late system morphemes (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.97). Similarly, Pienemann (1998) distinguished lexical, phrasal and interphrasal morphemes and following one of the basic tenets of his Processability Theory (PT), he postulated that these three types of morphemes are encoded in this order. This means that if learners have not acquired the procedures necessary for activating the morphemes at a given level, they will not be able to process their intended message grammatically at a further level.

Only few experimental studies have been conducted on the activation of syntactic building procedures. Meijer and Fox Tree argued that “syntactic rules necessary for both languages are centrally stored” and that they “are not labeled with respect to language” (Meijer & Fox Tree, 2003, p.193). Kormos stated they are probably right assuming that syntactic rules for L1 and FL are stored at the same place once the FL rules become fully proceduralized, so when they can be applied automatically. At lower proficiency levels, however, rules are often used consciously and are stored in declarative memory, located in a different part than procedural knowledge. Pienemann also underlined that FL learners have to acquire lower order syntactic procedures first to be able to transfer this knowledge from their L1.

It was formerly believed that learners start out by applying L1 rules to build up FL utterances. But it is not as simple as that. When we reflect upon FL grammar acquisition and the role of transfer, we have to consider four major theories: the nativist paradigm, connectionist theory, the acquisition by processing theory and the processability theory. Nativists postulate the existence of an inborn language acquisition device (LAD) that is also available in FL learning. The PT entails a sequence in which various FL syntactic encoding processes can be acquired based on the restrictions of the syntactic system, whereas the competition model and APT are concerned with how syntax is learned from the available input. According to the competition model, acquisition of syntactic rules is possible through the analysis of input, whereas in the APT and nativist theories it is argued that there exists a separate innate language module.

### *1.4.3 Phonological encoding*

One of the most detailed accounts of how phonological processing might work in monolinguals come from Roelof's "Weaver" model of phonological encoding (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.110). Firstly, the mental representation of the phonological word is accessed and it contains information on the metrical structure of the word and the phonological segments that constitute it. Secondly, the syllabification process assigns the segments their position within the syllables following the syllabification rules of the given language. This theory is known as "Weaver" since syllabification follows a pattern: from the first segment to second, from second to third and so on (it is like weaving a fabric). In phonetic encoding, metrical representations are used to set parameters for loudness, pitch and duration, and the program is made available for the control of the articulatory movements. Unfortunately there is scarce research related to the psycholinguistic processes of learning FL phonological encoding mechanisms.

To date there seems to be ample evidence that the phonological form of translation equivalents in the unselected language also becomes activated when accessing the phonological form of the word in the target language, that is, activation can cascade from the lemma in the language not in use to its phonological form. Some researchers suggested that phonemes that are identical in two languages have shared memory representations in advanced speakers. As regards nonidentical L1 and FL phonemes, Poulisse claimed that they are retrieved from a common store of L1 and FL phonemes (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.121). Other studies indicate that FL phonemes are acquired on an individual basis and

that combinations of sounds that constitute words or morphemes are not learned as one unit. All the studies agree on the central role of L1 influence but no agreement is found with reference to factors constraining transfer. To date there is no unanimous theory of how FL phonological encoding takes place and is acquired.

#### *1.4.4 Monitoring*

Three basic psycholinguistic models of monitoring exist in L1 speech production research: the editor theories, the activation spreading theory and the PLT. I already stated that Levelt's PLT appears to provide the most reliable account of how monitoring takes place in L1 production. It has been pointed out that there are three loops for inspecting the outcome of processes: in the first one the preverbal plan is compared to the original intentions of the speaker, in the second the message is monitored before articulation and in the last, the produced utterance is checked after articulation.

Research has been carried out to investigate self-repairs. The first type of monitoring mechanism taken into account involves the awareness that the content of the preverbal plan needs to be changed. In case of an error in the conceptualizing phase of the speech production process, speakers might decide to encode new and different information from the one they are currently formulating (different information repair) or they could modify the informational content of their current message (appropriacy repair), (Levelt, 1983). In the first case for example one can decide to convey the different parts of the message in a different order, whereas in the second case the message could be changed because inappropriate. A third reason for encoding new or different information in the preverbal plan could be limited FL competence. A fourth type of repair was identified: repair for good language, which included both pragmatic and good- language repairs. Kormos (1999) argued that these two aspects should be separated because pragmatic self-corrections concern meaning in context, whereas repairs of good language are performed to display a more sophisticated manner of expression.

The second monitoring mechanism is the correction of linguistic errors, that is error repairs. In this case, the preverbal plan is appropriate but something wrong is selected and these repairs can be lexical, syntactic or phonetic, according to Levelt (1983). Kormos (1999) included a third type of repair mechanism, known as rephrasing repair that is employed when FL speakers are uncertain about the correctness of their utterance, thus

entailing competence problems. This last type of repair differs from the error one in the fact that the latter signals lapses of performance not poor competence.

As regards the role of attention in monitoring, several studies that have investigated the distribution of different types of self-corrections suggest that FL speakers tend to pay more attention to the informational content than to the accuracy of their message. However, Kormos showed that this is not valid for all formally instructed learners. Students educated with grammar teaching might spend more attentional resources on accuracy than on lexical appropriacy.

A number of studies have been carried out to compare the nature of self-repairs with the development of competence and metalinguistic awareness in L1 and FL. According to the results, learners make more mistakes and correct only few of them at the beginning of their learning. Once metalinguistic awareness has increased they are supposed to engage in an higher degree of correction of their output. Since they benefit from a higher degree of automatization as well, learners' attention seems to shift from lower level lexical, grammatical, and phonological mistakes to problems arising at the discourse level. According to Poulisse, as a result of the various mechanisms of the development of automaticity, advanced learners make fewer errors than less-proficient speakers do, which explains the decreased frequency of low-level linguistic error repairs in their speech (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.134). This would imply that error repairs signal not yet fully automatized processes; thus, they can serve as good indicators of automaticity in FL speech production.

The role of monitoring in SLA has also been studied from the perspective of Swain's output hypothesis, which claims that output in general as well as pushed output, that is, output that is slightly above the learner's level of competence, promotes second language (foreign language) acquisition (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.134).

## 1.5 Issues in speech production and communication strategies

First, I want to briefly examine both level of speech production: of L1 and FL. A very important difference between L1 and FL production lies in the knowledge of the target language which is rarely complete in the case of FL and thus FL speakers often have to make conscious efforts to overcome problems in communication. These efforts are known as communication strategies. Dörnyei and Scott distinguished four main problem sources

in FL communication: (a) resource deficits, (b) processing time pressure, (c) perceived deficiencies in decoding the interlocutor's message, the last of which we discussed in a previous paragraph (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.137). Resource deficit needs to be conceived in relation to three stages of speech processing: lexical, grammatical and phonological encoding. In addition to that, FL speakers often have to cope with the fact that they are not able to process their message within the time constraints of real-life communication because of their limited attentional resources. With reference to (c), FL speakers might encounter difficulties in the monitoring phase, while deciding if their message has been accurate, appropriate and understandable.

Another issue that must be taken into consideration and has already been mentioned, is the influence of L1 on the FL in bilingual speech processing: L1 and FL compete for selection and unintentional code-switches might occur. What is more, we remember that L1 can also have other types of influence on FL production, which manifests itself in the conscious and unconscious transfer of L1 production procedures. The role of L1 is also central in FL phonological processing because there is accumulating evidence that FL learners frequently substitute L1 phonemes for similar but non-identical FL sounds and they often use L1 rules when phonologically encoding words or phrases. The third important difference between L1 and FL production is the speed with which FL speakers talk. The reason lies in the fact that L1 speech production is largely automatic whereas FL speech processing requires attention in both the grammatical and phonological encoding phases.

Numerous studies on communication strategies, in order to cope with problems arising in FL speech production, have been carried out. There are different definitions of communication strategies available to date and four different views. According to the "traditional view", communication strategies are considered "potentially conscious plans for solving what, to an individual, presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (Faerch & Kasper, 1983, p.23).

Following the interactional view, communication strategies are defined as "a mutual attempt of interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" (Tarone, 1980, p.420). In this case, the focus is not only on speaker's performance problems but also on comprehension problems that occur in communication. According to Dörnyei and Scott (1997) "every potentially intentional attempt to cope with any language related problems of which the speaker is aware during

the course of communication” (p.179). Poulisse’s definition sees communication strategies as an expression of a different speech plan when the original plan resulted unencodable (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.138).

Dörnyei and Scott (1997) pointed out that the conspicuous number of definitions in this field is due to the fact that two main issues, namely problem-orientedness and consciousness have not been appropriately defined. They identified four kinds of communication problems: resource deficits, own-performance problems and other-performance problems. With reference to consciousness, three aspects play an important role: consciousness as awareness of the problem, consciousness as intentionality and consciousness as awareness of strategic language use. This aspect of consciousness is extremely important to distinguish situations in which learners are using a strategy from those in which they think they have conveyed an appropriate expression in FL.

The first problem area, resource deficit (associated to FL speakers’ deficient FL competence), assumes three problem-solving processes in the planning and encoding of the preverbal message: lexical problem-solving mechanisms, that copes with the incapacity to retrieve the appropriate FL lemma that corresponds to the concepts specified in the preverbal plan; grammatical problem-solving mechanisms deals with the insufficient knowledge of the grammatical form and the argument structure of the lemma; finally, the phonological/ articulatory problem-solving mechanisms provides support for overcoming difficulties in the phonological encoding and articulatory phases caused by the lack of knowledge of the phonological form of a word.

The second main problem area, processing time pressure is due to the fact that FL speech processing requires more attentional resources than speech in L1. Speakers might then employ stalling mechanisms while planning the message and encoding the preverbal plan.

### *1.5.1 Lexical problem-solving mechanisms*

When faced with difficulties in lexical retrieval, Poulisse argued that the speaker might opt for one of the two options: he can abandon or change the original speech plan, or keep the macroplan unchanged and modify the preverbal message only (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.141). In the first case, when the macroplan is reformulated, it can be done in three different ways: through the avoidance strategy, known as message abandonment, through

message reduction (parts of the content are deleted), or message replacement (parts of the content are replaced with other components).

In case the option chosen corresponds to reformulation of the preverbal plan only, Poulisse identified three possible strategies: the substitution strategy, which consists in substitution of a lexical item by an alternative one; the substitution plus strategy, where the speaker might also apply L1 or FL morphological and/or phonological encoding processes; the reconceptualization strategy, that involves the alteration of more than one chunk of the preverbal message (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.141). Kormos (2006) suggested to further subdivide this last strategy in microreconceptualization, which implies reconceptualizing one preverbal chunk, and macroreconceptualization, which involves the modification of more than one single chunk in the preverbal message.

### *1.5.2 Grammatical problem-solving mechanisms*

Grammatical encoding follows lexical retrieval process, when the grammatical form of the lemma and the argument structure are accessed and encoded and the lemmas are ordered in a phrase. What are the main problems encountered in grammatical encoding? Kormos suggested they might be found: when the lemmas activated by the preverbal message are inspected for optional and obligatory complements, specifiers, and diacritic values; when the complements, specifiers and diacritic parameters are handled; when phrases and clauses are assembled. Among problem-solving mechanisms activated to cope with deficiencies in grammatical knowledge we find: grammatical substitution mechanisms, which involve changing certain features of the lemma in terms of either its grammatical form or argument structure; grammatical reduction, where the speaker employs simplified grammar. In the former, the speaker can rely on syntactic information of the corresponding L1 or L3 lemma (transfer) and the syntactic information of a similar or synonymous FL lemma (overgeneralization) (Kormos, 2006).

### *1.5.3 Phonological problem-solving mechanisms*

After having retrieved the lemma and completed the grammatical processing phase, the structure needs to be encoded phonologically and then articulated. According to Levelt (1989), L2 speakers might face difficulties in all the three major stages of phonological encoding: when generating the metrical frames, which consists of phonological words; while adding segmental information, the specifications of the phonemes and inserting them

into the frames; when the speaker maps “the syllabified and metrically specified phonological strings onto phonetic or articulatory programs” (Levelt, 1993, p.5).

When these problems arise, speakers can resort to some mechanisms like phonological retrieval, whereby the speaker attempts to retrieve a lexeme for which only incomplete phonological information is available. Secondly, phonological substitution, allows the speaker to encode and articulate the lexical item by substituting certain phonological features and it possibly includes the use of similar-sounding words. Finally, there are two phonological reduction mechanisms. A more extreme version of the use of a similar-sounding word is a mechanism Dörnyei and Scott (1997) called mumbling: a nonunderstandable word is uttered within the utterance and the listener tries to guess the missing item from the context.

#### *1.5.4 Time pressure-related problem-solving mechanisms*

The need for processing time is particularly acknowledged in two phases of speech processing: during macro and microplanning when the content and the form of the message are generated and while the preverbal plan is processed to generate the articulated message (Kormos, 2006). When speakers understand that language production (conceptualization, formulation and articulation) will take more time than the situation allows, they can rely on three possibilities: message reduction or message abandonment, employment of other resource deficit-related strategies or they can apply stalling mechanisms, though these options are not mutually exclusive.

Pauses and repetitions are also employed in order to gain time. Pauses may involve: unfilled or nonlexicalized filled pauses, lengthening a sound or drawling while thinking ahead, lexicalized pauses. On the other hand, repetitions can involve own repetition and other repetition, whereby part of the interlocutor’s utterance is repeated. These stalling mechanisms are also used in L1, though their use is probably conspicuous in FL since encoding processes are less automatized.

In conclusion I want to briefly consider the role of communication strategies in promoting second language acquisition. Researchers disagree on whether to develop students’ strategic competence. Dörnyei claimed they are teachable and help increase fluency. What is more, they help FL speakers stay in communication and produce more output. Indeed, according to Swain, the more output is produced the more creative solutions to problems

are found and the learners' existing resources are expanded resulting in a promotion of second language acquisition (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.153).

## 1.6 Fluency and automaticity in FL speech production

There are many definitions of fluency available to date and this term might be used in two different ways: in a broad sense, conceived as a global oral proficiency, that is a high mastery of the foreign language or in a narrower way, as just one component of oral proficiency. The latter would result in the ability to produce talk smoothly within the time constraints of real-life communication. Researchers have given definitions in one or in the other sense. In a more recent study, Lennon (2000) synthesized earlier definitions and suggested that "a working definition of fluency might be the rapid, smooth, accurate, lucid, and efficient translation of thought or communicative intention into language under the temporal constraints of on-line processing" (p.26).

In order to account for how learners' speech becomes fluent, three processes need to be considered: the automatization of syntactic, morphological, and phonological encoding processes, the creation of formulaic sequences from smaller units of language and the deduction of rules from memorized chunks acquired as an unanalyzed unit (Kormos, 2006).

One of the most thorough accounts of how the application of rules become automatic was provided by Anderson's ACT adaptive control of thought and his ACT-R theory (adaptive control of thought-revised) (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.156). In this model it is assumed that the development of automatic processes not only involves the faster application of rules and the withdrawal of attention from rule-based processing, but also qualitative changes such as the creation of macroproductions, that is, chunks from smaller units, generalization and discrimination. Anderson's theory of learning has great relevance in FL production research. FL speech production has two important processes where rule-based knowledge plays an important role: syntactic and phonological encoding and it has been shown that it is in these two steps of encoding where major changes contributing to fluency takes place. This theory was found to be appropriate for explaining how linguistic rules become automatized, whereas strength theory and theories of chunking could provide a viable explanation for the acquisition of formulaic language and could also account for how various rules of language are inferred from memorized units (Kormos, 2006)

Indeed, despite the fact that the role of memory-based theories of learning is often questioned in SLA research, certain aspects of L1 and FL fluency can be explained with reference to these models. Pawley and Syder claimed that fluency involves not only the automatic application of rules but also the memory retrieval of the appropriate expressions (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.159). Numerous studies have shown that adult learners acquiring the language, memorize certain formulaic expressions without analysis and use them to achieve particular communicative functions. Studies on formulaic language, namely those carried by Ellis, indicate that there is empirical support for the assumptions of theories of chunking that cognitive skills such as speaking are learned by creating macroproductions from smaller units and that it is possible to abstract rules of the language from chunks memorized as a whole (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.159).

As previously stated, strength theories of automatization also have relevance for the development of fluency. In these theories it is assumed that the major process of automatization in lexical encoding involves the strengthening of links between concepts and FL lexical items. According to Oppenheim, strength theory and theories of chunking can explain that participants applied the recurrent phrases in a variable manner (quoted by Kormos, 2006, p.160). Strength theory would allow for variability through the different levels of connections that can exist between words, whereas theories of chunking can explain that students create larger units from smaller ones or that they break down larger phrases into shorter sequences.

## 1.7 L1 and FL speech production and Dyslexia

Having seen the basic mechanisms underpinning speech production, I now move on to consider what are the main problems dyslexic children might encounter when involved in speech production activities. According to researchers, phonological aspects of language are responsible for many of the reading/writing problems observed in dyslexia. Every writing system makes use of phonological information. Alphabetic and syllabic writing systems are based on the notion that speech can be represented in units, and when children learn to read and write they have to be able to do two things: segment spoken words into relevant units and acquire how specific units are represented in writing (orthographically).

The latter process is called phoneme-to-grapheme mapping and this causes difficulties for dyslexic learners (resulting in slow and/or inaccurate word-recognition), as previously

stated. Apparently, speaking and listening abilities in L1 and FL on the other hand seem to be less affected by dyslexia than literacy based skills such as reading and writing. As seen before, in L1 speech production, planning the message requires attention, whereas formulation and articulation are automatic. Processing mechanisms can therefore work in parallel and this makes L1 speech generally smooth and fast. Having considered these features, Kormos claimed that phoneme awareness is not directly involved in speech production and since L1 speech is largely automatic, phonological short-term memory also plays a limited role in it (Kormos & Smith, 2012). However, some dyslexic students find speaking a FL quite challenging.

Catts (1898) suggested that the phonological processing deficits of dyslexics may explain some of their difficulties in speech production/articulation as well as comprehension. However, Catts reported, in line with Kormos, that not all errors made by the dyslexic subjects could be explained on the basis of inaccurate phonological representations. He proposed that difficulties in the processes of articulating and/or planning speech sound sequences might account for the problems dyslexic subjects had in the production of the phrases and he carried out a study to investigate these aspects further. The results indicated that dyslexic subjects repeated the speech stimuli at a slower rate than did normal subjects. This was valid for the repetition of the three-syllable complex phrases but not for the two-syllable phrases: the length in repetition was at that stage approximately equal. The results also showed that the dyslexic subjects made more speech sound errors than the normal subjects in the repetition of the phrases, especially in complex phrases, whereas errors were quite rare in the case of simple phrases.

To sum up, in the complex condition, dyslexic subjects not only repeated the phrases at a slower rate than did normal subjects, but they also made more errors. Thus, the combined speed and accuracy data point to at least some group differences in speech production abilities namely difficulties dyslexic individuals have in planning and/or articulating speech. The speech sound errors revealed in this study were almost entirely context-conditioned slips of the tongue. Whereas errors like these might sometimes be explained in terms of difficulties in actual articulation, most are thought to arise from breakdowns during the planning stage of speech production. For example, an anticipatory substitution is thought to result from a sound segment becoming prematurely active and displacing an earlier occurring and phonetically similar unit in the phonological plan. Dyslexic

individuals made more errors and thus appeared to be less proficient in selecting and ordering phonological segments for speech production.

According to Catts, the difficulties dyslexic people have in planning speech sound sequences could be an extension of the phonological processing deficits. As already stated, dyslexics have problems in developing phonological representations and retrieving these representations from memory. Furthermore, the deficiencies in speech production underlined by Catts may directly be linked to some of the problems dyslexic individuals display in oral reading. Since the processes involved in reading aloud overlap with those involved in speech production, individuals who have difficulties in articulating and/or planning speech could have problems in oral reading.

The subjects of Catts' experiment were having problems in speech planning rather than difficulties in word recognition: they seemed to have correctly accessed the lexical item but had difficulty in formulating and/or executing the output plan for its pronunciation. Speech articulation and/or planning deficits may then account for many of the hesitations, false starts or other fluency disruptions that frequently occur in oral reading of dyslexic individuals.

When considering FL production, this requires attention also in the grammatical, lexical and phonological encoding phases and as a consequence, part of the speech output can only be processed serially. FL speakers have to pay attention to the content of the message as well as to selecting the right words, formulating correct grammatical units and phonologically encoding the utterance (Kormos, 2006), thus attentional resources play a very important role. In the FL, different units of verbal material have to be kept in working memory to be able to create a sentence and it is easily understandable how phonological short-term memory capacity influences the quality of speech output in FL as a consequence.

Dyslexic students commonly experience problems because of the reduced attention span and phonological short-term memory capacity and these might produce difficulties in FL speech production, which also requires sufficient levels of lexical and grammatical competence and not only in the form of declarative knowledge, but also as procedural knowledge. Since these students have a narrow range of vocabulary and restricted knowledge of grammatical structures in FL as well as problems in proceduralizing knowledge, their speech production and correlated fluency might be hindered.

As regards interaction and understanding speech, this is a complex interactive process, during which listeners associate acoustic sound signals with the abstract representations of speech sounds (phonemes). I stated that problems with phoneme awareness and phonological processing skills are the major cause underlying reading problems and it has been seen they are apparent in the global speech comprehension rate of children with dyslexia in their L1. Furthermore, they might have difficulties in listening in the FL when they need to identify phonemes in that FL and associate a string of phonemes with a FL word.

In understanding, phonological short-term memory also plays an important role since it holds different units of auditory material in working memory for further processing. Dyslexic students might not be able to recall a series of verbally presented information due to the reduced phonological short-term memory and since they have serious difficulties in speech perception might find it difficult to understand longer spoken texts and speak in a FL. What is more, the time pressure of oral communication increases the difficulty with word retrieval from memory.

When considering FL learning, an important factor is also the language in which the learning takes place. Some languages have a transparent orthography like Italian, German or Hungarian. This means they are characterized by simple sound-letter conversion rules and a predictable writing system, there are very few digraphs and diphthongs. Dyslexic learners speaking these languages may, however, still have word retrieval difficulties, motor- skills problems or difficulties with their short-term memory. Other languages such as English and French present complex phoneme-to-grapheme mappings and the difficulties for dyslexic learners increase as we are going to see in the following chapter.

All in all we can conclude by pointing out that speech production effort is rather different in L1 and FL. In L1 only planning the message requires attention while formulation and articulation are automatic. In this case phoneme awareness and short-term memory play a minimum role. Catts proposed then that difficulties at the level of planning/articulating speech sound sequences might account for speech production difficulties in L1. On the other hand, while dealing with a FL, Kormos suggested more attention is required during encoding phases as well and that output can only be processed serially. Besides, units of verbal material have to be kept in working memory to be able to create sentences. Due to the reduced attentional resources and the restricted capacity for phonological short-term

memory, FL speech production, as well as comprehension, might result in an even greater challenge for dyslexic students.

## Summary

In this chapter I examined the main theories of bilingual speech production that follow two main directions, namely the spreading activation theory and the modular theory of speech processing. Researchers working in the first paradigm believe that speech processing is executed in an interactive network of units and rules in which decisions are made on the basis of the activation levels of the so-called nodes that represent these units and rules. Traditional modular theories, on the other hand, suggest that the speech-encoding system consists of separate modules, in which only one way connections between levels are allowed. I pointed out that Levelt's model is the most widely used in the theoretical framework of FL speech production and then Kormos' speech model based on Levelt's was briefly outlined. This model includes different phases: conceptualization, encoding and the monitor loops. In addition, speaker-hearer interaction as well as attention and automaticity were briefly analyzed. An in depth view of some stages of speech production followed as some processes of encoding, namely lexical, syntactic, phonological and monitoring needed further explanation in the light of the different researches and contributes of the most recent years. In the second part, the main issues of speech production and correlated communication strategies were drawn as well as the concepts of fluency and automaticity in FL speech production. Finally, I briefly analyzed how dyslexia might affect L1 and FL speech production, drawing from Catts' research some conclusions. The following chapter will deal with some cognitive and neurological explanations of dyslexia.

## Chapter 2

### **2. DYSLEXIA AND COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING**

When looking for a definition of dyslexia today, that of the International Dyslexia Association is probably one of the most well-known. It states “Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction” (quoted by Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.24). This definition tries in itself to integrate all four levels of descriptions: biological, cognitive, behavioural and environmental.

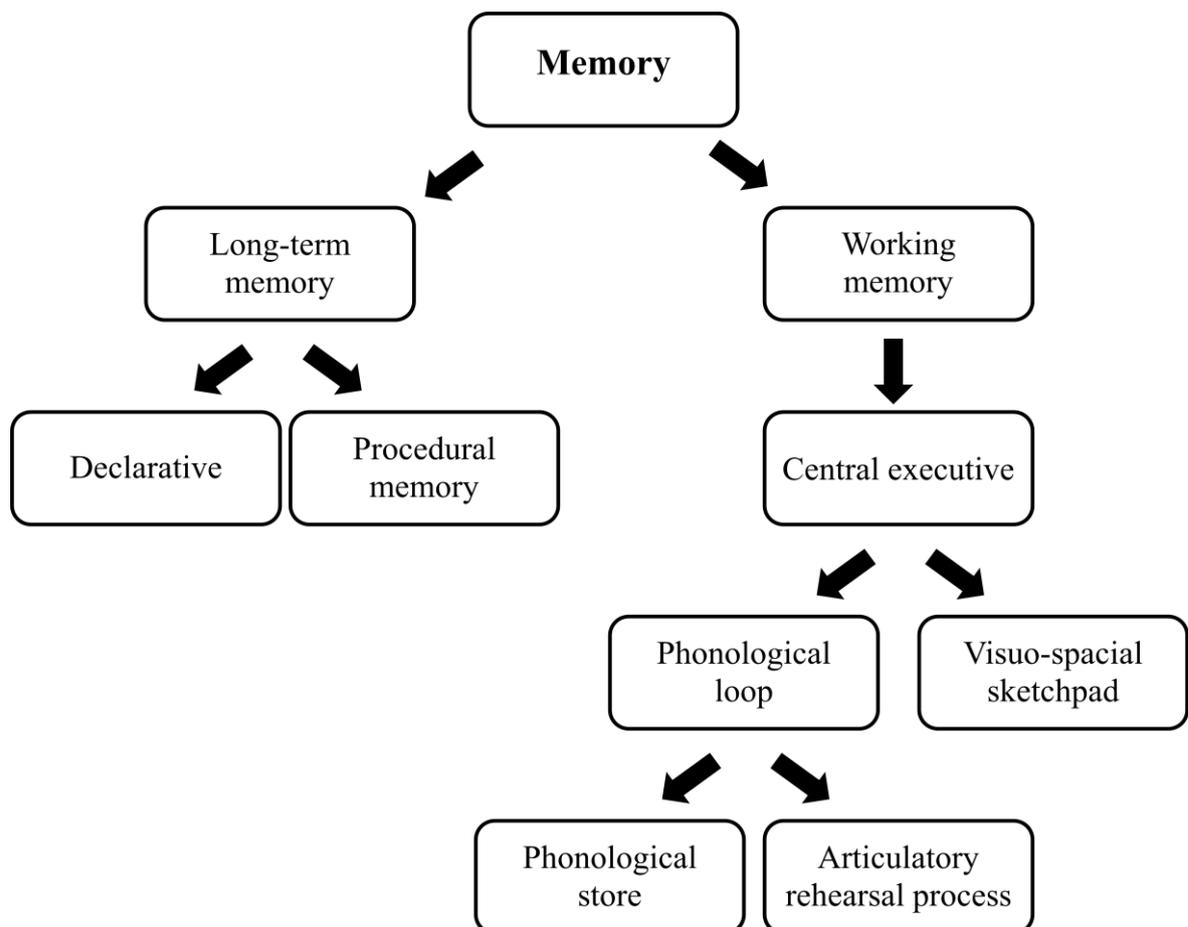
However, it specifically focuses on the behavioural manifestations of dyslexia and does not provide enough information about the neurological characteristics of dyslexic children. I have already outlined some of the main behavioural signs of dyslexia in childhood, such as reading and spelling difficulties, as well as problems with memory and organization. Reading difficulties are evident in word-recognition and are assumed to be caused by difficulties in converting letters to sounds and dyslexic children seem to have problems recognizing existing words as well as decoding non-words.

It seems, though, that in order to understand dyslexia we must know about the basic cognitive mechanisms involved in learning. In this chapter I am going to take into consideration working memory, implicit and explicit learning and automatization. With adequate instruction, support from the home environment and practice, reading and spelling difficulties might decrease, but dyslexic adolescents and adults frequently continue to struggle with other problems associated with dyslexia, such as problems with working memory, sustained attention and the coordination of motor skills.

#### **2.1 Basic learning mechanisms**

As Kormos and Smith (2012) reminded us, memory consists of two systems: long-term memory and working memory. Long-term memory contains “knowledge, skills and habits

acquired by a person during his or her lifetime” (p.25). It is composed of declarative and procedural memory: the former stores knowledge about “facts and events” (p.25), whereas the latter is the place which stores “motor and cognitive skills and habits” (p.25). Declarative memory includes, in turn, semantic memory and episodic memory. The first contains “concepts as well as meaning related memory traces associated with these concepts” (p.25), such as the concept that the cat is a furry four-legged animal. The second is the store of “temporally organized events or episodes experienced in one’s life” (p.25): being bitten by a cat, for instance. Inside the working memory processing and manipulation of information occur and this is the “gateway to long-term memory, through which information passes before being encoded in long-term memory” (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.25).



### *2.1.1 Working memory*

Research suggests that people have different working memory capacity (or working memory span), and that these differences account for general intelligence, and even the speed with which certain skills are acquired. As regards dyslexic individuals, they are usually associated with working memory deficits, together with less activity in the prefrontal and parietal cortex, this is why it seems necessary to briefly analyze these mechanisms.

Working memory is limited in its capacity and can keep information actively for a couple of seconds (Baddeley, 1986). Kormos and Smith underlined that if elements of the incoming stimuli become encoded in long-term memory, this is the evidence that learning took place. Working memory is for this reason a “key cognitive component in learning and it has been found that it influences several skills and abilities” (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p. 25).

Working memory includes the central executive that coordinates the phonological loop and the visuo-spatial sketchpad and guides the information through the system and planning. The former is in charge of manipulation and retention of speech whereas the latter works with visual and spatial information. The phonological loop consists of a phonological store that retains information for a few seconds and an articulatory rehearsal process, which refreshes information declining. Let’s look at these components in detail.

As previously stated the Central Executive, which is considered the main component of the model, is responsible for deciding “which information is attended to and which parts of the working memory to send that information to be dealt with” (McLeod, 2012, “The Central Executive”). It drives attention and decides which activities need to be given priority. Baddeley (1986) suggested that while the central executive mainly controls attentional processes, the phonological loop and the visuo-spatial sketch pad act like storage systems.

Curiously, Baddeley (1986) described the role of the central executive comparing it to a company boss. In order to describe the way in which it works, he refers to the “boss” who usually makes decisions about “which issues deserve attention and which should be ignored” (McLeod, 2012, “The Central Executive”). What is more, it opts for strategies to tackle and find solutions to problems but since it can only cope with a restricted number of things at a time, it will gain information from various sources. This is why working

memory combines information from the two “assistants” represented by the phonological loop and the visuo-spatial sketch pad, and also relies on information contained in the large database of long-term memory.

I said that the Phonological Loop consists of two parts. The phonological store, which is linked to speech perception, acts as “an inner ear and holds information in speech-based forms (spoken words) for 1-2 seconds” (McLeod, 2012, “The Phonological Loop”). McLeod explained that “spoken words enter the store directly whereas written words must first be converted into an articulatory (spoken) code before they can enter the phonological store” (2012, “The Phonological Loop”). The articulatory control process on the other hand, which is connected to speech production, operates like “an inner voice rehearsing information from the phonological store, it circulates information round and round like a tape loop” (McLeod, 2012, “The Phonological Loop”). Through this process written material is converted into an articulatory code and it is conveyed to the phonological store.

Interestingly, behavioral studies have suggested that phonological and articulatory factors exert a strong influence on verbal working memory performance. For instance, there is the phonological similarity effect that happens when some elements, that sound the same, are kept in working memory at the same time and have to be recalled and the final performance is definitely poorer. Apparently this is caused by confusion that arise when similar sound-based codes become activated for the two distinct elements in the phonological loop. As regards articulatory processing, it is connected to the word-length effect: when longer words have to be recalled performance appears to be poorer and the reason seems to lie on the time required to pronounce them.

In support to that, it has been shown that for two-syllable words that have long vowel sounds performance is poorer than for two-syllable words with short vowel sounds. Pronunciation time would therefore impact the speed of silent rehearsal, which needs speech-based processing. As a result, if it takes long time to rehearse some elements in working memory, there are many possibilities that those elements will vanish in the phonological store.

The Visuo-Spatial Sketch Pad is “a sort of inner eye that deals with visual and spatial information” (McLeod, 2008, “The Visuo-Spatial Sketch Pad”). This device indicates where we are in relation to other objects surrounding us. While moving around, our position in relation to objects change and it is therefore important to constantly be aware of

where we are. Additionally, the sketch pad manipulates visual and spatial information contained in long-term memory. To give an example, the spatial layout of our house is held in long-term memory since an image has been retrieved from it and pictured on the sketch pad (McLeod, 2008, “The Visuo- Spatial Sketch Pad”). Research evidence suggests that working memory employs therefore two distinct systems for dealing with visual and verbal information and this is why, a visual and a verbal processing task can be carried out simultaneously. In case two tasks of the same kind were performed at the same time, they would interfere with each other and result in poor performance.

What, then, is the link between Dyslexia and Working memory? Students with Dyslexia usually display poor verbal working memory and they struggle to remember information shared orally like instructions, new lexicon and names. Due to their poor verbal working memory they have troubles when asked to recall and repeat unfamiliar verbal messages. As previously seen, working memory is limited in its capacity and to keep in mind fundamental speech sounds and concepts to identify words and sentences is for dyslexic students particularly demanding. When asked to write, students need both verbal working memory and phonological awareness to build words by combining phonemes, putting words together to create sentences and texts while also remembering what they want to convey. There is a double difficulty they encounter: they have to combine these elements and then write them down in a notebook. When considering reading difficulties as well, dyslexic students present shortcomings in rehearsing important information because they are not fast enough to prevent memory loss.

A study by de Jong (1998) found that, at the core of poor readers’ problems there are deficits in central executive function that in turn result in incapacity of simultaneous processing and storage of information. He claimed that problems mainly arise because they are not capable to store phonological information in short term memory. Poor readers will therefore have more severe difficulties at the level of the central executive than of the phonological loop, whereas visuospatial sketchpad performance appears unimpaired. Students with dyslexia display a more reliable visual-spatial working memory, and there is evidence they perform similarly to normal students in this sense.

Nevertheless, if they are asked to name objects for instance, they might perform poorly because they should be supported by verbal working memory. They can rely on good visual working memory and this is why they learn words as a unit, rather than paying

attention to individual sounds. However, they usually struggle to learn new words because they do not have the ability to match the sounds to the letters to decipher them. At least the presence of an unimpaired visuospatial short-term memory allows dyslexics to benefit from certain approaches to language learning. In many cases these approaches are already being used with great success. Multisensory techniques for instance, present information in different modalities so that less efficient parts of the cognitive system are not overloaded as I am going to discuss later in chapter 4.

The question which naturally arises is whether working memory can be trained. Unfortunately, in a recent article published by the American Psychological Association with the title “Memory Training Unlikely to Help in Treating ADHD, Boosting IQ”, research analysis shows there is no evidence of an improvement in general cognitive performance through working memory training programs. “The success of working memory training programs is often based on the idea that you can train your brain to perform better, using repetitive memory trials, much like lifting weights builds muscle mass” said the study’s lead author, Monica Melby-Lervåg, PhD, of the University of Oslo. “However, this analysis shows that simply loading up the brain with training exercises will not lead to better performance outside of the tasks presented within these tests” (Melby-Lervåg & Hulme, 2012).

In this meta-analysis, scholars from the University of Oslo and University College London analyzed 23 peer-reviewed studies with 30 different comparisons of groups that were in line with their requirements. “The studies were randomized controlled trials or experiments, had some sort of working memory treatment and a control group” the article reported (Melby-Lervåg & Hulme, 2012). The studies included numerous participants of different ages, from young children to children with cognitive impairments and adults. At the end of the treatment it was found that the performance on tasks connected to the training itself was better but it did not result in an improvement of more general cognitive performance like attention, verbal skills or reading. “In other words, the training may help you improve your short term memory when it’s related to the task implemented in training but it won’t improve reading difficulties or help you pay more attention in school”, said Melby-Lervåg (Melby-Lervåg & Hulme, 2012).

Melby-Lervåg stated therefore that “In the light of such evidence, it seems very difficult to justify the use of working memory training programs in relation to the treatment of reading

and language disorders” and she added that “Our findings also cast strong doubt on claims that working memory training is effective in improving cognitive ability and scholastic attainment” (Melby-Lervåg & Hulme, 2012).

### *2.1.2 Development of automaticity*

I have already outlined some important aspects of automaticity with reference to speech production in the previous chapter, hence, I am just going to draw the key aspects of this basic mechanism in learning without repeating the two main groups of theories of automaticity. Kormos and Smith (2012) underlined how the automatization of word-recognition is an example of the development of the automaticity of a specific skill. They claimed that “automaticity is necessary for efficient, quick, effortless and accurate performance in a number of skills because our attentional resources are limited , and when carrying out a complex activities such as reading a text, we cannot pay attention to all the processes involved at the same time” (p.26).

When thinking about human activities they are the product of both automatic and controlled performance. Kormos and Smith (2012) suggested the example of reading in the native language, this is an example of automatic performance since “we automatically decode the words, retrieve the meaning associated with them and process the sentence structure” (p.26), but if we want to gain an interpretation of the text it is necessary to rely on background knowledge to recall what we read before. Here we have an example of controlled processing.

Automatic processes are generally quick, are performed parallel, and do not cause fatigue. They represent the outcome of consistent practice and are not subject to interferences. It is quite another story for controlled processing that appears not so efficient and takes more time and effort due to the limited working memory capacity. I am later going to explore how the automaticity deficit hypothesis tries to account for problems in the automatization of new skills experienced by dyslexics.

## 2.2 Cognitive, neurological, genetic explanations of Dyslexia

There are numerous researchers working on different theories of dyslexia. In this paragraph, I will provide some explanations of them. There is a cooperative action of these

theoretical developments that lead to a more thorough explanation of the causes of dyslexia than the individual theories on their own.

Fawcett (n.d., “Cognitive and brain bases of dyslexia”) underlined that three “levels” of theory have been proposed: the biological, the cognitive and the behavioural level. The behavioural level examines the symptoms of dyslexia, such as poor reading or rhyming deficits. The cognitive level entails problems in phonological awareness, automatization and slow processing speed. Finally, at the biological level, it is necessary to differentiate between magnocellular pathways, and the cerebellum. Every explanation that aims at accounting for dyslexia correlated problems usually takes into account all three levels, since the cognitive level provides a necessary connection between brain and behavior.

The phonological deficit theory, the automatization deficit and the double deficit hypothesis are cognitive; the Sensory (magnocellular) deficit hypothesis and the cerebellar deficit theory are brain based; finally, the procedural learning deficit theory is at the Neural systems level between brain and cognition.

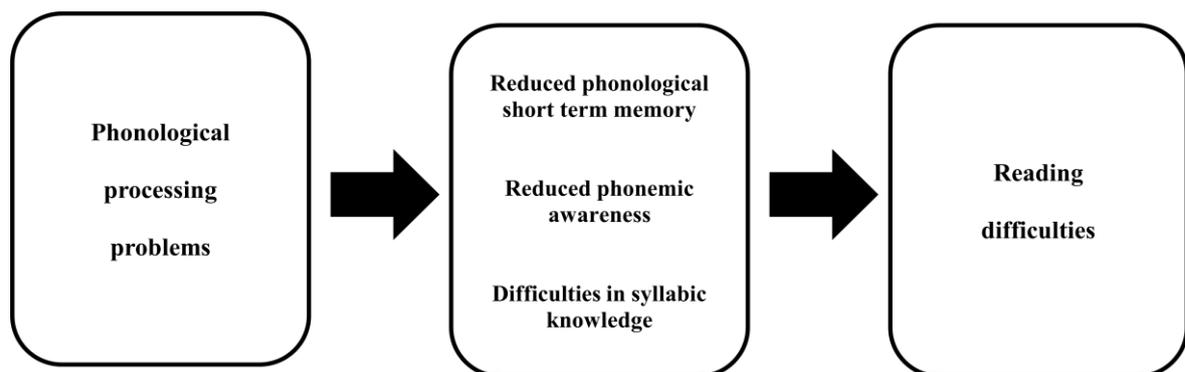
### *2.2.1 Cognitive theories: phonological deficit, double deficit and automatization deficit*

The most widespread cognitive theory of the causes of dyslexia is the Phonological Deficit Hypothesis, which posits that dyslexia is caused by “an underlying phonological processing problem, namely impaired phonological awareness” (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.33). It consists of two levels: syllabic and phonemic knowledge. The first entails “the capacity of segmenting words into syllables and delete or add syllables in words. The second involves the ability to divide words into sounds, differentiating sounds from each other and manipulating sounds” (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p. 34).

The kinds of test used to assess phonological awareness include identifying which word is “odd man out” on the basis of its initial, middle or final sound; rhyme judgment; and rhyme generation. Kormos and Smith (2012) pointed out there are a lot of researches demonstrating that phonological awareness is impaired in dyslexics and this in turn results in difficulties in forming stable mapping between phonology and orthography in the case of immature phonological representations. We can say therefore that “difficulties with phonological processing skills can provide a good explanation for why dyslexic people

have problems in lower level reading skills, specifically in word recognition and why they experience spelling and speech perception problems” (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.34).

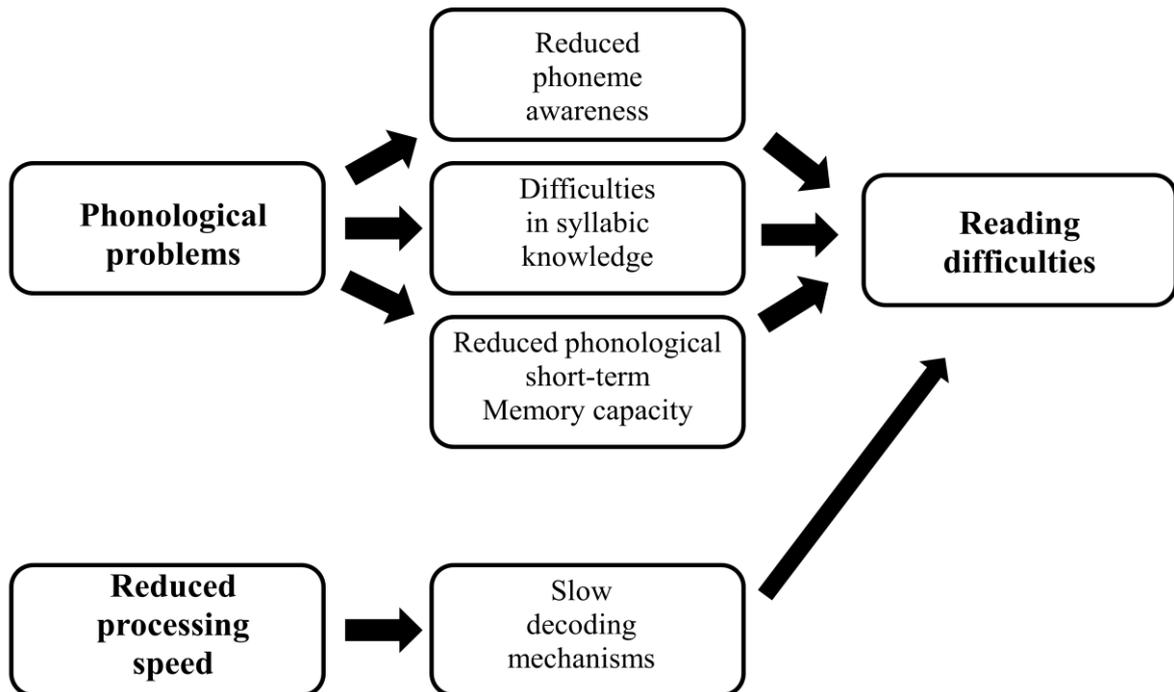
However, some researchers suggested that the exaggerated emphasis on phonological awareness in studies concerning dyslexia may be improper and that probably other elements might be implicated in the difficulties children experience when mapping between orthography and phonology, not just segmentation. What is more, Kormos and Smith (2012) underlined that training in phonological awareness is not always an effective means to cure dyslexia, as has been shown by many scholars, and this is another aspect that shows that phonological awareness is not central. Bishop and Snowling (2004) for instance reminded us that some children who have been trained and might infallibly state which sound goes with which letter and can segment words into sound, still present problems and cannot read fluently.



*An illustration of the Phonological Deficit Hypothesis (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.34)*

A second version of the Phonological Deficit Hypothesis is the Double Deficit Hypothesis according to which, “in addition to phonological processing problems, naming speed deficits also play a role in developmental dyslexia” (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.34). Kormos and Smith (2012) reported that research evidence by Denckla & Rudel pointed out that dyslexic children present shortcomings in word naming tasks and this is reflected in the amount of time they need to perform this task (p.34) This aspect might be connected to the speed processing deficit some dyslexics suffer. Wolf and Bowers argued that

“differences in naming speed and difficulties with phonological processing are two independent sources of dyslexic reading problems” (quoted by Kormos & Smith, 2012, p. 34). Findings seem to suggest that this Double Deficit Hypothesis might not be supported, nevertheless, it had important consequences for reading remediation (Kormos & Smith, 2012).

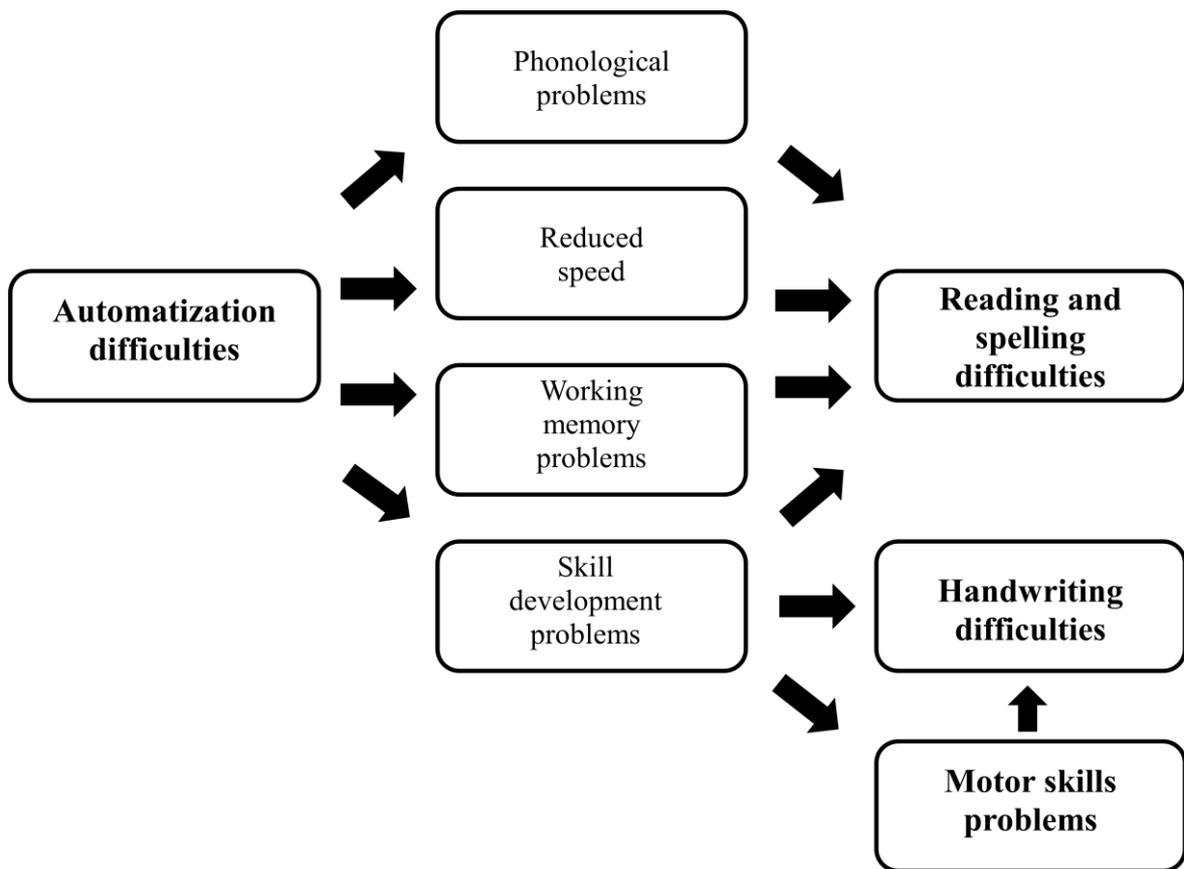


*An illustration of the Double Deficit Hypothesis (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.35)*

A further cognitive theory is that of automaticity and it is based on the evidence that dyslexia often “co-occurs with other types of learning differences such as motor coordination problems (dyspraxia) and general language processing difficulties (Specific Language impairment) and ADHD” (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.35). Dyslexia seems therefore to be the result of a learning difference which is not only limited to reading.

Nicolson and Fawcett suggested dyslexics experience problems in the automatization of new skills in different areas of their life (quoted by Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.35). According to them dyslexics will have difficulties and will not reach fluency in all those

skills that should become automatic through practice. This hypothesis states that “dyslexic children show difficulties in the proceduralization of skills in general and they find it hard to reach the stage of automatic skilled performance not only in phonological processing but also in fine and gross motor skills” (Kormos & Smith, p.35). It is fair to say that the concept of automaticity deficit is now universally accepted in dyslexia research. However, research on automaticity and dyslexia has been considered in a more comprehensive area: that of cerebellum and dyslexia. As a consequence a neurological model has been developed.



*An illustration of the Automaticity Deficit Hypothesis (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p. 36)*

### 2.2.2 Brain based theories: magnocellular and cerebellar

Another neurological theory of dyslexia connects the causes of literacy problems to difficulties in processing visual and auditory stimuli in the cerebral cortex, the part of the brain that is devoted to understanding incoming speech (sensory information). Many

researchers underlined that one of the pathways in the brain that transmits auditory and visual signals, called the magnocellular pathway, is possibly impaired in dyslexic people.

Two different theories of dyslexia were developed: one in which the visual pathway is affected and another in which the auditory pathway shows differential functioning. “The auditory “rapid processing deficit” was introduced by Tallal in the US, whereas the visual magnocellular deficit comes from Stein and his group in Oxford” (Fawcett, n.d, “Brain based theories-Magnocellular and Cerebellar”).

It has been shown that the dyslexic brain anatomy presents some differences in visual and auditory magnocellular pathways. As regards audition, dyslexics seem to take longer to process sounds that rapidly change and are presented close together. According to Stein & Walsh, differences in the visual magnocellular pathway may provoke on the other hand “visual persistence” during eye movements, that is, while reading letters in a word blur, because “when trying to look at the next letter, there is an after image from the previous letter” (cited in Fawcett, n.d., “Brain based theories-Magnocellular and Cerebellar”). This explanation provides some information concerning symptoms of blurred vision and letters that keep moving, as reported by dyslexic students. However, it is now generally recognized that the magnocellular system is not the source of problem for visual persistence. A magnocellular deficit, wrote Fawcett “would affect most types of rapid processing” (n.d., “Brain based theories- Magnocellular and Cerebellar”).

All in all, with vision, dyslexic learners have problems with low contrast and/or slowly moving stimuli and, in audition, with rapidly changing stimuli (Fawcett, n.d., “Brain based theories-Magnocellular and Cerebellar”).

With regard to the cerebellum, dyslexic learners may have problems with motor skills and automatisations, because this area, at the base of the brain, is known to be connected to motor skills but has not really been taken into account until recently, because no connections with language had previously been found. Fawcett (n.d.) pointed out that to date it has been shown that the cerebellum is “involved in both language and cognitive skill, including specific involvement in reading” (Fawcett, n.d., “Cerebellar Deficit”). Nicolson, Fawcett and Dean carried out a study and they first found that “dyslexic children showed a pattern of poor performance on time estimation and normal performance on loudness estimation that some researchers detected only in cerebellar patients” (quoted by Fawcett, n.d., “Cerebellar Deficit”).

Secondly, children with dyslexia displayed a range of problems with muscle tone and balance which are clear cerebellar signs. Further evidence of cerebellar deficit came from a PET scan study as reported by Nicolson et al., which suggested that dyslexic adults did not present the usual pattern of activation when carrying out a motor sequence learning task (quoted by Fawcett, n.d., “Cerebellar Deficit”).

### *2.2.3 Neural systems and learning: procedural learning deficit*

As the name itself suggests, procedural learning deficit implies that there is a gap in procedural learning in dyslexia while declarative learning may be preserved. The procedural system includes neural systems for learning, with the cerebellum as well as other circuits in the brain. This is why there could be co-morbid deficits and this would account for a variety of developmental disabilities.

### *2.2.4 Genetic roots and environment*

Finally, Kormos and Smith reminded us that dyslexia might have genetic origins and that environmental factors might also play an important role. Research evidence claimed that male children whose parent or sibling is dyslexic have a 50% possibility of being dyslexic. Interestingly, new discoveries in genetic research “have also been made in terms of identifying the potential genes that might be responsible for dyslexia” (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.37).

Strikingly, environmental factors often seem more influential than genetics ones (Kormos & Smith, 2012). There are some dyslexic parents who cannot provide the necessary literacy and academic support to their children which might predispose them to reading problems, whereas a home environment in which “literacy activities are supported and which creates optimal conditions for the cognitive development of the child might reduce the severity of reading difficulties associated with dyslexia” (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.37).

## **2.3 Language learning**

How do cognitive factors associated with dyslexia influence language learning? What are the emotional and motivational consequences these difficulties have on language learning processes?

Before seeing the answers to these questions it is important to consider what it means to learn a language in general. Kormos and Smith (2012) reminded us that to acquire a language means to learn a lot of words together with their meanings, spelling and pronunciation. Furthermore, we have to learn numerous rules of syntax and morphology and we need to know how sentences are combined to form meaningful texts of different types. Only this way do we become able to read and listen to longer parts of discourse and to produce texts both in writing and in speech.

However, it is not just important to acquire knowledge, since speakers of the language also need to become aware of how to apply the knowledge. In other words, declarative knowledge of the language is not sufficient because, as seen in the first chapter, we have to be able to properly use this knowledge in different contexts and the capacity to do so is called procedural knowledge.

One more aspect to be taken into consideration is that not every type of language knowledge and skill is acquired through explicit, conscious learning. When dealing with naturalistic environments and childhood for instance, L1 learning involves implicit learning since the learner is not conscious of learning. In this case it is important to remember that the learner is subject to lots of input and is able to define generalizations on the basis of co-occurrences he or she can attest.

### *2.3.1 Cognitive abilities in L1 and FL learning*

Carroll (1974, 1981) proposed the first language aptitude test and defined language aptitude as that characteristic of an individual which exerts control, at a certain point, to affect the pace of improvement that he will make in acquiring a foreign language. The author, Carroll, (1981) identified four components of language aptitude: “phonetic coding ability”, which is “the ability to identify distinct sounds to form association between those sounds and symbols representing them and to retain these associations” (p.105), “grammatical sensitivity”, meaning the ability “to recognize the grammatical functions of words (or other linguistic entities) in sentence structures” (p.105), “rote learning ability”, which was defined as “the ability to learn associations between sounds and meanings rapidly and efficiently and to retain these associations (p.105) and “inductive language learning” that is, the ability “to infer or induce the rules governing a set of language materials, given sample language materials that permit such inferences” (p.105). Numerous

researchers claimed there seems to be evidence for the important link between language aptitude and achievement in language learning.

Another important aspect involved both in L1 and FL acquisition is phonological short-term memory. As previously seen, phonological short-term memory is a significant factor in FL learning both in instructed and in naturalistic contexts. Speciale et al. stated that phonological sequence learning, as well as phonological short-term memory capacity, play a fundamental role in the acquisition of vocabulary and also in the learning of syntactic structures (quoted by Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.62). In fact, the successful acquisition of syntax is influenced by short-term memory capacity, given that it is responsible for remembering sequential information. What is more, O' Brien et al. underlined that there is a link between phonological memory and oral production skills in another language (quoted by Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.62). Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that linguistic skills in one's first language represent the basic and essential foundation for foreign language learning.

Among other basic cognitive capacities that are fundamental to acquire one's L1 and literacy skills in the first language there is, according to Kormos & Smith (2012), memory for verbal material that is linked to phonological short-term memory and it is essential to remember words in our first language as well as in the FL. Furthermore there is the phonological short-term memory that is very helpful to decode sequences of sounds and associate them with words and their meanings, as well as verbal reasoning skills that are connected to grammatical sensitivity and inductive learning ability which aids in the acquisition of syntax and morphology.

Numerous studies have found that students with dyslexia show problems in phoneme awareness, word recognition and present smaller ranges of vocabulary in their L1. In addition, their phonological short-term memory capacity is more restricted and this results in difficulties in many areas of FL learning. This is the reason why, Kormos & Smith claimed it is expected that students with dyslexia would record a poorer performance in tests of language aptitude than non-dyslexic students.

### *2.3.2 Affective factors in language learning*

Motivation, anxiety and self-confidence are usually taken into consideration when dealing with affective factors that might influence language learning outcomes. When people

decide to start doing something, they are moved by motivation, this represents their reason and the acquisition of language is impossible without it, it relies somehow on strong objectives. Language learning anxiety is usually defined as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process in the classroom” (Horwitz et al., p.128). Anxiety has important effects on cognition as well since the working memory capacity of anxious students is limited and this in turn can render the processing of input and the production of output slower as well as increase the number of mistakes in these processes. What is more, it seems that anxiety might prevent the encoding of new information in long-term memory.

Self- confidence plays an important role as well. Bandura stated that without a positive recognition of one’s skills and possibilities of success, chances of effective learning are extremely low (quoted by Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.64). In the case of dyslexic students it is easy for them to lose their motivation for learning a foreign language because of their problems in language learning and they might have a negative self-concept as a result of their failures.

Kormos and other researchers conducted interviews with dyslexic language learners to examine their motivational characteristics and found dyslexic learners displayed less positive motivational characteristics than non-dyslexic students. This is particularly threatening, since if they lose motivation they might easily experience further failures. They also reported how the instructional setting had a great impact on them. Their desire to invest in language learning and their efforts seemed to be affected by the behavior their teachers had in class, their method of teaching and attitude to dyslexia. As a result, it seems that an encouraging and dyslexia-friendly learning environment is vital to boost students’ self-concept and self-efficacy.

### *2.3.3 A two-system view: explicit/implicit, declarative/procedural knowledge in SLA*

Implicit knowledge implies an automatic processing, whereas to access explicit knowledge controlled processing is needed, usually when the language user is not under any time pressure. I have already examined the importance of working memory and this is at the core of processing of explicit knowledge that is limited in its capacity and is subject to individual differences, as previously seen. Since it utilizes working memory, the use of

explicit knowledge is cognitively demanding. Implicit learning on the other hand, is usually related to settings of incidental, and therefore non- intentional, learning.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) field, has long been interested in the topic of implicit and explicit learning. This interest was in part raised by Krashen who suggested that learners present two independent ways of developing knowledge of a FL. According to him, “language acquisition is an incidental process that results in tacit linguistic knowledge while language learning is an intentional process that results in conscious, metalinguistic knowledge”. He added “in speech comprehension and production, learners are thought to rely exclusively on acquired (or implicit) knowledge. The role of learnt (or explicit) knowledge is to monitor utterances for mistakes” (quoted by Rebuschat, 2015, “introduction”).

In addition, Krashen stated that there is no connection between explicit and implicit knowledge. As a result, when thinking about rules for instance, the explicit knowledge of them does not imply their implicit acquisition. This is why, according to Krashen “language pedagogy should focus on creating the conditions for language acquisition to take place, as opposed to language learning” (quoted by Rebuschat, 2015, “introduction”). Scholars pointed out that Krashen’s Monitor Model fostered important disputes on the matter, but it also raised interest in the implicit and explicit learning/knowledge in FL acquisition.

According to Ellis the current situation can be summarized as follows. “(...) There is broad consensus that the acquisition of a FL entails the development of implicit knowledge. However, there is no consensus on how this is achieved; nor is there consensus on the role played by explicit knowledge” (Ellis, 2005, p.143). It was proposed then that, generally, two-system theories (e.g. implicit/ explicit, declarative/ procedural) appear to account for first and second language acquisition.

However, according to scholars like Hulstijn (2015) for instance, a two-system view appears too bland, given the complexity of language systems, of the human brain and the possibility that consciousness should be thought of as a scale rather than as a dichotomy. With regard to how language is stored and processed in the brain, Ullman (2001, 2004, 2005) proposed a two-system declarative-procedural model with respect to language, based on different brain systems. The declarative system would be associated with activation in medial temporal lobe regions, including the hippocampus. As previously seen, it is devoted

to the storage and use of facts and events, including lexical knowledge, grammatical knowledge stored as multi-word chunks, and explicit language rules. The procedural system on the other hand, would be associated with a network of specific frontal, basal-ganglia, parietal and cerebellar structures. This in turn supports the learning and execution of motor and cognitive skills, including the morpho-syntactic regularities of language.

It is widely recognized that every child in a speech community acquires a native language, given the possibility of verbal interaction. However, not everyone succeeds in acquiring a FL. Researchers implicitly or explicitly agree that speakers need to make more of an effort and concentrate more to process a FL. What seems to characterize the use of declarative memory is effort, difficulties, variability and increased activation. Much evidence shows early childhood is a favorable period for children to acquire in an incidental manner, while acquisition becomes more difficult as they grow up.

Paradis (2009) underlined there is a moment, namely the cognitive developmental stage, when individuals begin to use learning strategies consciously. The difference lies in the fact that they begin to pay attention to linguistic input and as a result they learn aspects of the FL consciously. The use of declarative memory to learn a FL leads to inter-individual variability, resulting from differences in working memory capacity, level of education, motivation etc. Some people achieve high proficiency through the use of declarative knowledge and this results in speeded-up control of their output. Paradis (2009) however, stated that neither speed nor accuracy are clear signs of automatized implicit linguistic competence, since the main characteristic is systematic output.

Once the language is learned in fact, its automatization depends on the effective use in interaction with FL speakers. This corresponds to the acquisition of an independent system, namely implicit linguistic competence (Paradis, 2009).

Several studies have reported a link between dyslexia and implicit learning deficits. It seems that the shortcomings in implicit learning observed in dyslexic individuals may be related to sequential processing and implicit sequence learning while explicit learning ability is intact. Howard et al. (2005) provided evidence and argued that the implicit sequence learning deficit in dyslexia is associated with selective deficits in the fronto-striatal-cerebellar circuits that underlie implicit sequence learning. It has been shown that fronto-striatal circuits are involved in sequence processing after implicit grammar

acquisition. However, further research is needed because of the controversial results on the matter.

## 2.4 Why is then learning a FL particularly demanding for dyslexic students?

According to Raid, Fawcett, Manis & Siegel (2008) the foreign language learners need to be able to use their:

- a. “analytic skills in order to understand the formal linguistic structures of the foreign language learning;
- b. meta-cognitive skills to enable self-correction and error analysis;
- c. memory, for example, in storing and subsequently accessing new vocabulary;
- d. confidence to use foreign language both productively (speaking and writing) and receptively (listening and reading)” (p.440).

I talked about how learning a foreign language is a complex process, requiring the interaction and application of several skills. Scholars agreed that to acquire a foreign language, dyslexic students have to rely on those language skills in which they are already weak in the L1. Many studies within the field of foreign language learning and learning disabilities have shown that if one has language problems in his or her native language, these problems will be carried over to the foreign language, as previously stated. This phenomenon is called the Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis (LCDH) by Sparks and Ganschow (quoted by Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.63). According to this Hypothesis, the same linguistic problems students experience in their native language system, will be reflected in the oral and written aspects of foreign language as well.

For instance, dyslexic students experience troubles in spelling, not only in L1 but even more in the FL. Similarly to word recognition, spelling requires segmenting spoken words into phonemes and converting these phonemes into letters or letter combinations. Another aspect that records deficits within dyslexia is sustained attention: to learn new information attention to input is essential and dyslexic children might therefore need repeated exposure to acquire new knowledge. As previously mentioned, attention is also needed to monitor output and this gap might lead to mistakes, even if the students have acquired the relevant knowledge and skills. Difficulties with attention in turn might result in difficulties in organizing one’s school work, in time-management and keeping deadlines.

Additionally, research evidence shows that dyslexic individuals present differences in accuracy and in speed while processing orally presented information. Dyslexic children performances have been found to be worse in sound-discrimination and in word repetition tests than their non-dyslexic classmates. Phonological short-term memory plays a fundamental role in both of these tasks since it assists maintaining verbal information active for further processing. As previously seen, impairments in phonological short-term memory and in phonological processing result in speech delay, a slower rate of speech, sometimes with an undiscriminating pronunciation and a smaller vocabulary range for expression and reception. Dyslexic children not only exhibit a smaller vocabulary but they are slower in retrieving words. These limits result in greater difficulties when facing the FL.

As we can easily assume, learning a foreign language can be an extra load for dyslexic students, because of problems in acquiring not only advanced language skills but also basic ones. Dyslexic students may therefore have problems “distinguishing between words in the foreign language, storing new words and retrieving words from long-term memory (vocabulary)” (Reid et al., 2008, p.440). They might also have problems learning “the pronunciation of foreign words, becoming aware of the sound structure of foreign words (phonological awareness), learning the phoneme-to-grapheme correspondences, the syntactic structures, the word format patterns and the grammar of the foreign language” (Reid et al., 2008, p.440). These problems might make it difficult for the dyslexic students to develop a satisfactory interlanguage and growing in confidence to use FL.

#### *2.4.1 The interlanguage*

The idea of interlanguage is based on the idea that the FL learner is using a language system which is neither his or her L1 nor the FL, at any stage of his learning experience. It is a third language, with its own grammar, its own lexicon and so on. The rules used by the learner cannot be found, either in his own L1, nor in the target language. One can define the interlanguage as a developing linguistic system of a FL that the learner has been building that is, however far from being fully comprehensive and correct, getting closer to the target language. It preserves some characteristics of the mother tongue while speaking or writing the FL and creates innovations (Reid et al., 2008).

An interlanguage is based on the learner’s experiences with the foreign language he or she has in the process of learning. Taking the interlanguage into account, linguists have tried to

clarify to what extent the process of FL learning can be compared to learning the mother tongue or the L1. Conclusions drawn by researchers on the matter show there are many similarities but also many differences. It has been proved that learners never register failures when learning their mother tongue. However, some learners fail to learn a FL. Also it has been shown that children do not need classroom teaching to learn their mother tongue, while learners learning a FL definitely benefit from being taught the FL in school settings.

What is more, the native language learner corrects his own mistakes along the way whereas many FL learners become rigid while learning a second language, they get stuck on a certain linguistic level. This shows that learning a FL is not at all a simple and linear process, where the learner automatically and easily achieve the objective of learning and speaking the target language.

#### *2.4.2 Dyslexic students in the FL classroom*

In an interview study conducted in Hungary, Kormos and Kontra asked language teachers with a lot of experience in teaching students with dyslexia what type of difficulties their students encounter in language learning. They mostly reported difficulties with writing and spelling, but also problems in acquiring reading and listening skills, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, emerged. In FL learning contexts dyslexic students experience difficulties in writing, spelling, reading and also struggle sometimes to acquire vocabulary and grammatical constructions, both in the classroom and from naturalistic input (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.79). Furthermore, the acquisition of pronunciation of new sounds and syllable patterns might prove very difficult.

Research shows us that most language teachers and schools acknowledge that dyslexic students might have difficulties learning a foreign language and a majority of schools are trying to adopt and respect a policy of inclusion to include dyslexic students in “normal” FL learning classes. Most of the teachers also strive to encourage dyslexic students to learn all four basic receptive and productive skills in the FL. However, at the same time, many language teachers seem unprepared and have no idea how they should use remedial tools in or out of the classroom. Also, it seems that most of the schools are not offering support from above to language teachers who are left alone to face problems arising from dyslexic students learning a FL.

### 2.4.3 Dyslexia and English learning

The global challenges of today demands that both children and adults learn at least one foreign language. In the majority of European countries that don't have English as a native language, English is today taught as an obligatory foreign language. Why do dyslexic Italian students find English to be so difficult?

An important element which influences language acquisition is orthographic depth. The orthographic depth hypothesis “proves that the more complex or “deep” the orthography of a language, the more difficult it will be to learn” (Dyslexia association of Ireland, n.d.). A language is transparent when there is a clear letter-sound correspondence and enough regularity. On the other hand, a deep or opaque language is characterized by a more complex phoneme-grapheme correspondence and often presents more irregularities, as seen in the previous chapter.

English is one of the most difficult languages in Europe while Finnish has been referred to as the most transparent European language. Languages like Italian and Spanish are considered transparent as well, whereas French and Danish are more opaque like English (Dyslexia association of Ireland, n.d.). The orthographic depth hypothesis therefore accounts for why students can learn some languages more easily than others and this is valid for all students, but in particular those with dyslexia and other language acquisition related difficulties. In English there are so many irregularities! Some examples might be taken from the slide presentation of M. Youman (2012) to show difficulties that dyslexics might encounter, such as:

- a. “single letters that represent multiple sounds (e.g. *cone* and *pot* where the letter “*o*” represents both the sound /ou/ and /o/; *cup* and *pencil*, where the letter “*c*” represents both the sound /k/ and /s/.
- b. silent consonants like *lis(t)en*, *(w)rite*, *(k)now*.
- c. double vowels or diphthongs pronounced differently: *good*, *blood*.
- d. spellings that change morphological meaning, but are pronounced differently (e.g. *-ed* suffix to indicate past tense pronounced differently in *painte*d** /ed/, *playe*d** /d/, and *like*d** /t/).
- e. phonemes or sounds that can be spelled in several different ways (e.g. the sound /f/ can be spelled with *f* as in *frog*, *ph* as in *phone*, *ff* as in *stuff*, *gh* as in *cough*, and *lf* as in *calf*).

- f. several letters represent one single sound or phoneme (e.g. *fight*, *might*, *night*, where the grapheme *ght* represents the sound /t/).
- g. different spelling possibilities to represent words that sound the same but have different meanings (i.e. homophones; e.g. *to*, *two*, *too* and *heal*, *heel*, *he'll*).
- h. identical words that change meaning depending on the context in which they appear (e.g. “She cannot *bear* to see her father in pain” and “The *bear* attacked the campers”).”

Dyslexia does not mean however that a student cannot learn English, but students must be prepared that it takes longer. Dyslexics students are slow at memorizing data and this can only be achieved through “overlearning”, allowing for knowledge to be stored into long-term memory. If the method was emphatically oral, with clear explanations given in the native tongue and written down in the form of a handout for instance, the student would probably have more chance to become proficient. Unfortunately, most language tests and activities are in written form and this penalizes dyslexics who particularly find problems in reading and writing in English. It is important to realize that spelling will always be a problem for dyslexic students in this sense.

## Summary

In this chapter I first reviewed a definition of dyslexia from the International Dyslexia Association which was not totally thorough. Hence, before taking into consideration more detailed explanations of dyslexia, a further insight into the basic learning mechanisms, was offered. A brief description of working memory and automaticity was indeed given in order to understand the deficits underlying some of the difficulties dyslexic students encounter. Next, some cognitive, neurological and genetic explanations of dyslexia followed. All the theories account for at least some of the symptoms of dyslexia: the phonological deficit explains many of the difficulties which children show linking sounds with symbols in reading and spelling. The double deficit suggests that there is a speed problem in addition to the phonological deficit, with more problems for those with both deficits. The sensory deficits suggest that these problems are visual as well as auditory, at a basic perceptual level, leading to cerebellar impairment. The cerebellar deficit suggests that there is a problem in central processing linked to learning and automaticity, which may occur with or without sensory impairment. The procedural learning deficit provides an explanation for co-morbidity in dyslexia based on differences in the areas impaired within

neural systems broader than the cerebellum. I also dealt with language learning features, namely cognitive abilities, affective factors and the two-system view related to the concept of knowledge. Finally I analyzed specific difficulties in FL learning and correlated aspects such as the difficulty in reaching a satisfactory interlanguage and the problems related to the FL classroom. A short final paragraph was devoted to some peculiarities of English learning.

## Chapter 3

### **3. ORAL INTERACTION IN THE FL**

In the first chapter I was mainly concerned with speech production and the mechanisms underpinning it. I now would like to drive the attention towards speaking and oral interaction in the FL and how to teach it.

The aim behind learning a FL is indeed to speak and to communicate in that language and the teaching of FL is an interactive process in nature, which involves active participation of both the teacher and the learner. The learning occurring within the classroom and in natural settings is rather different and for this reason a greater opportunity for classroom interaction is demanded and a special concern for learning through actively using the language is increasing.

Yet, it is generally observable that EFL learners have difficulties in communicating in the target language. Possibly the fact that they spend too much time on doing exercises rather than getting involved in intensive interactions does not contribute in developing their communicative abilities. For many years, teaching English-speaking in Italy has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. The methodology followed within the classroom is, then, essential for language development since it is the only context in which Italian students have the possibility to use the target language.

As regards dyslexia, it has always presented teachers and their dyslexic pupils with a major challenge. As previously stated, young people who have difficulty in learning in their own mother tongue will face problems when it comes to learning an additional language, it is believed. The reasons are easy to understand: young people who lack awareness of the sound system of their own language which they have spoken since early childhood, are unlikely to rapidly grasp a different tongue as claimed by the Hypothesis of Ganschow and Sparks that has been seen before.

Those students with short-term memory problems will have difficulty in remembering vocabulary and even when vocabulary seems to have been memorized, word-finding difficulties will present a challenge to accessing the memorized vocabulary. Dyslexia implies that information is processed more slowly than for others and thus a speech

presented in the FL at normal speed might prove too fast to follow. These are only few of the problems dyslexic students may face within the classroom. I am going to briefly discuss the difference between natural and instructional settings and I am going to consider some pedagogical implications related to teaching speaking and how dyslexia exerts its influence on it.

### 3.1 The nature of oral communication

We speak for many reasons: to express our feelings and thoughts, to exchange information, to respond to someone else, etc. As seen in the previous chapter, the process of interaction entails the encoding of the message the speaker wants to convey in the target language and the decoding of the message by the listener. Speaking is an active skill since that include the creation of a message, the communication of this message and the interaction with other people.

Furthermore, it involves the ability of receiving information as Byrne (1976) stated: “Oral communication is a two-way process between speaker and listener (or listeners) and involves the productive skill of speaking and the receptive skill of understanding (or listening with understanding)” (p.8). Speaker and listener both play a role, since it is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information.

According to Kramsch (1986) speaking involves: “Anticipating the listener’s response and possible misunderstanding, clarifying one’s own and the other’s intentions and arriving at the closest possible match between intended, perceived and anticipated meaning” (p.367). Elsewhere, context in which interaction takes place is also indicated as an essential feature of communication process. Adler and Rodman defined communication as a social systematic process of creating symbolic meaning and responding between communicators, constructed in a specific context (quoted by Jamshidnejad, 2011, p.4). According to Tubbs and Moss, each communicator (speaker or hearer) needs input, that is past and present stimuli that provide the communicator with his/her information about the worlds, to create meaning and respond to other participants in the process of communication surrounded with a “fluid context” which is changeable depending on contextual variables (quoted by Jamshidnejad, 2011, p.4). Successful communication would then result from correct reception and interpretation of the message intended by the communicator.

This activity is however more complex since it relies on a variety of factors including characteristics of the communicator such as perception of self, attitude towards language learning, perception of others, linguistic components, the purpose of interaction and the context in which interaction occurs (Jamshidnejad, 2011). Any interruption in any of these components of communication above mentioned may result in unsuccessful communication as I am going to analyze later (see 3.3.2).

As regards functions, Brown and Yule (1983) drew a useful distinction between two basic language functions, namely transactional function and interactional function. On the one hand, transactional function is devoted to the transfer of information and it is message oriented; on the other hand, the interactional function is listener oriented and its main aim is to maintain social relationships. Naturally both functions often occur together, since even if our primary aim is to give somebody information, we will always try to present that information in a way that will make it comprehensible, and acceptable to the person we are speaking to. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify instances of language use where the focus of the speaker's attention is on the transmission of information and this is particularly clear in examples of "public" speech such as broadcasts, debates, etc. (Brown, 1990).

### *3.1.1 The context of oral communication*

Based on a review of current literature on interpersonal communication, context may consist of the following factors:

- a. "physical (environmental factors such as place, time and other physical condition; the distance between communicators, seating arrangement);
- b. social (different class groups, different genders, different racial or ethnic groups, different social roles and norms, dominance, status and power);
- c. psychological (the moods and feelings each participant brings to communication, intimacy, affiliated need, willingness to make commitments);
- d. cultural (the beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, social hierarchies, religion, notions of time and the roles of the group of people);
- e. historical and Relationship (the background of the previous communication between communicators, the nature of the relationship existing between the participants, the participants' view towards relationship, the way and the purpose of their relationship)" (Verderber & Verderber quoted by Jamshidnejad, 2011, p.15).

### *3.1.2 Natural and instructional settings*

Learning and using a language takes place in a social context. Most people think that learning a second language in a non-instructional setting is different from learning in the classroom, that learning “on the street” is more effective. Natural acquisition contexts should be understood as those in which the learner is exposed to the language at work, in social interaction or at school among other students who are native speakers of the target language. On the other hand, in instructional environments, the language is taught to a group of second or foreign language learners.

Students generally share a common mother tongue and have little or no natural exposure to the FL outside the classroom. Thus, the classroom constitutes the primary (or only) target-language speech community for most of the language learners who are very far away from a larger target-language community. The main difference between learning in natural contexts and in the classroom concerns the focus that in the latter case is on the language itself, rather than on the messages carried by the language. The teacher has to teach students vocabulary and grammatical rules of the FL. The students’ aims within instructional contexts, are often bound to the need of passing an examination rather than to the desire of being able to use the FL for daily communicative interaction beyond the classroom. Indeed, opportunities for interaction with non-native speakers (e.g. tandem projects) are not so frequent because they need specific technology and support and the written skill has therefore gained primacy over its spoken forms. This might be the result of grammar-translation methodology since grammar too much focuses on how to write correctly.

In natural acquisition settings, language is not presented step by step and students are exposed to a wide variety of vocabulary and structures. Their errors are rarely corrected and they are immersed in the language for several hours each day. Students find themselves in different situations, they need to sort out on their own how to use their limited resources in order to respond to questions or get information.

In instructional settings, linguistic items are presented to students in isolation, from the easiest to the most complex ones. Some teachers still stress accuracy rather than meaningful interaction and errors are frequently corrected. Learning is unfortunately limited to a few hours a week and students often feel the pressure to speak or write the second language from the very beginning. What is more, students in instructional settings

experience a limited range of language discourse types and when teachers use the FL, they tend to modify their language in order to ensure comprehension. It is different for students of English as a FL at university level since they might get the opportunity to practice English through English newspapers, movies and Internet communication. However, FL oral communication remains mostly limited to class interaction rather than real communication (Jamshidnejad, 2011).

### *3.1.3 The classroom, the teacher, the learners*

Having drawn the main differences between natural and instructional settings, it is easy to understand how difficult it is to teach a FL in a classroom, given that teachers attempt to teach what is normally, and perhaps best learnt outside it, as already pointed out. In the previous paragraphs I stated that the main aim behind learning a FL is to be able to communicate in that language and thus developing understanding as well as speaking skills is essential but, unfortunately, there are many hurdles to overcome.

The physical environment in the FL context limits communication in the classrooms, most of which are not physically appropriate. It is important to consider some limitations: first, the size of the class, second the distance between communicators, then the seating arrangement of the classroom, which does not contribute to favoring communication. Furthermore, the limited amount of hours available and last but not least, several different needs and learning styles need also to be taken into account. As if these aspects were not enough, classrooms tend to be overcrowded and include many students with specific learning differences such as dyslexia and the syllabus sometimes seems not to entail adequate attention to the spoken language.

Having briefly seen what the main hurdles are, we may reflect upon the role of teachers who basically have to provide the best conditions for learning. They are the means to an end: an instrument to see that learning takes place (Byrne, 1976). Until the '70s the English teacher had played a very dominant role, maybe based on the supposition that the teacher was the source of all knowledge whereas the learner had always been viewed as a receptacle to be filled with the knowledge given by the teacher.

There has been a shift in the perception of teachers and their role though, starting from the 1980s. Yet, it is completely wrong to believe that learning depends on articulate or "eloquent" teaching for, as Kumaravadivelu (2006) pointed out that "teaching, however

purposeful, cannot automatically lead to learning for the simple reason that learning is primarily a personal construct controlled by the individual learner” (p.44).

Hence, the teacher can at best create and maximize learning opportunities by involving the learners in the learning process because, as we saw before, teaching and learning are collaborative in nature. The new perspective in teaching is now based on “learner-centredness” and reflects, as Tudor (1996) pointed out “a widespread desire in the language teaching community to develop means of allowing learners to play a fuller, more active and participatory role in their language study” (p.1). The teacher should not be the focus anymore but she is expected to perform an important “mediational” role, becoming a facilitator of learning for the language learners, guiding them through dialogic communication as they co-construct knowledge with the teacher.

As we previously said, classes are not homogeneous and display a wide range of intellectual abilities, language aptitudes, aspirations, interests, etc. How can the teacher cope with such an intriguing mixture of personalities? Teaching needs to be conceived of as a kind of shaping process from start to finish: at the start, there is the same “diet” for all, though how they actually digest it will vary greatly from one learner to another (Byrne, 1976).

Indeed, the goal of teaching a FL has been defined as enabling “the learner to behave in such a way that he can participate to some degree and for certain purposes as a member of a community other than his own” (Corder, 1973, p.27). As a consequence it is very important that the students are allowed to try out the language for themselves through activities in the classroom. Byrne (1976) underlined that it is the “here-and-now” use of the language which gives them immediate satisfaction and transforms it, from a remote goal into something real and tangible.

### 3.2. Pedagogical implications of oral interaction: listening comprehension

We pointed out how important it is to learn how to speak in the FL and that the process of interaction entails the encoding of the message the speaker wants to convey in the target language and the decoding of the message by the listener. It is therefore generally recognized that learners’ ability to understand need to be considerably more extensive than their ability to speak.

How does comprehension work? Brown (1990) gave a good account for it. Humans are active searchers for meaning. When somebody starts speaking, the co-operative human listener is actively trying to work out what he is saying, what he is likely to say next and what he is likely to mean by what he says. The active listener will employ all relevant background knowledge: knowledge of the physical context of the utterance, knowledge of the speaker, knowledge of the topic. Provided with all this activated knowledge, the listener monitors the incoming acoustic signal, which will simultaneously shape and confirm his expectation (Brown, 1990).

Teachers in the FL classroom often rely on this view of comprehension, creating rich contexts for listening that will in turn activate any relevant knowledge that the learner can use to achieve a good interpretation. However, a problem for the foreign learner of a language still lies at the phonetic level. One of the problems of listening to a FL is that you are listening to the sounds of a FL that are not organized in the same way as the sounds of your own familiar language.

Brown (1990) underlined that being able to monitor the incoming acoustic signal entails using all the phonetic cues that a native speaker takes for granted, using the segmental cues present, recognizing how they are likely to be distributed in the acoustic continuum and using the information provided by the regular saliencies of speech.

Furthermore, simplification of the non-salient pieces of speech, intonation and other features must be taken into account when dealing with FL comprehension. However, students typically learn the FL, particularly if the learning setting is a classroom, in terms of words and sentences, clearly written on the blackboard (Brown, 1990). Indeed, when the teacher pronounces these words he or she will tend to pronounce them slowly and clearly, giving plenty of opportunity to recognize them, which is rather different from listening to a native speaker in context. The student is thus exposed to only one accent of English, the one spoken by his teacher, whose speech contains segments that are clearly articulated. This is very different from real life interaction as I pointed out before, and students are often shocked to find they have considerable difficulty in understanding what is being said once they are in a context with native speakers.

Most FL learners will not acquire a comfortable ability to listen and understand the FL as spoken by native speakers if they only listen to their teacher and classmates and feedback from their own spoken production (Brown & Yule, 1983).

What does the process of comprehension entail? It is important to consider the process of understanding what we hear as a process of arriving at a “reasonable interpretation” of what the speaker intended to communicate in order to avoid the dangers of treating comprehension as a 100 per cent notion (Brown & Yule, 1983).

If we take into consideration native speakers, they themselves have to deal with partial interpretations of what they are listening to and it seems therefore unfair to expect non-native listeners to do more. Let’s consider our mother tongue for a moment, we achieve a partial interaction of points of view, a partial understanding of what the speaker intended, most of the time.

In spite of the fact that we are used to achieving only partial success with our own utterances and can only expect a partial understanding of much of the language that is addressed to us, nonetheless we interact on the basis of the expectation of a tolerable degree of mutual comprehension and this should be the aim to develop in our students (Brown and Yule, 1983). Indeed, Brown and Yule (1983) claimed that the aim of a listening comprehension exercise should be for the student to get to a reasonable interpretation and not process every word, trying to work out all that is involved in the literal meaning of the utterance.

As a result, teachers should not train students to expect that they should be achieving 100 per cent correct comprehension because this will only raise panic and anxiety, during the listening of a recorded audio for instance. The student trained this way expects not to understand and will stop trying to understand as soon as he misses a word or expression. What sometimes teachers fail to acknowledge is that students performing certain demanding activities in school are actually asked to treat the spoken language as if it was written. Brown and Yule (1983) added they are asked to ignore differences in form and function between interactional and transactional language and to treat all spoken language as if it were primarily intended for the transference of facts.

### *3.2.1 Changes of paradigm in teaching listening comprehension*

In earlier teaching of the spoken language it was believed that students would simply acquire the ability to understand the spoken form of the language if they occasionally heard their teacher speak it or listened to a tape of it being spoken. It was very soon demonstrated that this approach was not effective (Brown, 1990, p.144). Even very able students found it

impossible to understand the spoken language when it was used in real-life contexts. The first stage corresponded to the structuralist approach that was preparing students to listen to words spoken slowly and thus, clearly, ignoring the important functions of stress and intonation and not preparing students to listen to the stream of normal speech.

A different approach, developed later, was based on the idea that students would benefit from frequent listening to extended discourse. This had many positive effects, since at least they had the opportunity to listen to the FL being spoken. The downside was that they were asked to answer some questions to show they had understood everything being said. Understanding seemed to imply being able to memorize the discourse and to relate the questions to one's own memory of the discourse.

Brown (1990) clarified that a noticeable feature of working in a FL which you are not totally proficient in is that you have less resources, in particular your memory is not as efficient as it usually is, presumably because so much of your processing capacity is taken up with actively and consciously doing in a FL what you would easily and unconsciously process in your own language. As a result of this, most students in such circumstances have considerable difficulty in remembering extended pieces of discourse and in relating a question back to their fading memory of the original discourse.

The most recent listening comprehension materials, however, reflect a development in methodology that is, students should listen selectively to discourse that is presented to them in the context of a pre-specified task which collocates them very much in the position of native speaker (Brown, 1990). What matters is that they demonstrate that they are able to construct enough of a reasonable interpretation to make a decent effort at completing the task successfully. It does not matter if they do not grasp every single word: all this is practice in learning to listen as a native speaker listens.

### *3.2.2 “Bottom up processing” Vs “Top down processing” in listening comprehension*

At the segmental level, students may find difficulty in discriminating between some of the vowel and consonant distinctions made in English and this results in further difficulty in understanding which word is being used unless there is enough contextual information to make this clear. However, there is usually enough contextual information to allow listeners to guess which word is being used (Brown, 1990). What happens in speech is that the

rhythmic structure of English, together with the principle of “least effort”, contribute in reducing many syllables. FL learners are then puzzled and confused because they do not understand how many words are supposed to be in the utterance and where are the boundaries.

Brown (1990) underlined the importance of paying attention to the stressed syllable of a word, being the most stable feature of a word and to the stressed words in the speech that are the richest information-bearing units. Students also need to know how to identify information peaks and how to use the information encoded in this distribution. The FL learner needs to learn to control the phonological code of the target language sufficiently to be able to use the richness of cues at this level with sufficient ease to provide a constrained input for the “top down” inference-driven interpretation to be constructed (Brown, 1990). Students who are able to use the phonological code competently recognize words more easily, how they are grouped into phrases, how they are structured into larger clauses, how they are related to each other.

As regards “top down” processing, it is strictly related to context to make predictions. Native speakers usually have expectations about what will have been said, even if they do not hear everything the other person says: they build up partly from the phonetic cues that they hear and partly from a stereotypic, familiar knowledge of what that particular speaker is likely to say in that situation. This knowledge permits people to deal with reduced phonetic input and relates to specific features: speaker, listener, physical context, genre, topic. FL learners need to establish this knowledge and have to select what from their already existing familiar knowledge can safely be imported into the knowledge base in terms of which they construct interpretations in the new language. Indeed, they will have to develop new sets of “familiar knowledge” if they want to interpret the FL in an efficient manner (Brown, 1990).

### *3.2.3 Dyslexia and listening comprehension*

I explained how understanding speech is a complex interactive process, in the course of which listeners attend to the acoustic sound signals and associate them with the abstract representations of speech sounds (phonemes). I also pointed out that, having identified a string of phonemes, listeners retrieve words and construct meaning from the utterance by analyzing the grammatical relations among words, using their background and textual knowledge (Kormos & Smith, 2012).

Kormos (2012) underlined in L1 speech comprehension all of these processes are automatic and run parallel, whereas FL comprehension is often effortful because of the learners' difficulty in identifying phonemes in the incoming string of sounds. In addition, students might have problems associating phoneme sequences with words and, since they have limited syntactic and textual knowledge in the FL, they might not be able to decode the meaning of the text they have heard. It was discussed that the majority of people with dyslexia show problems with phoneme awareness, phonological processing skills, but also short-term verbal memory and words retrieval. Phonological short-term memory is a key component in understanding speech because, as it was underlined, it holds different units of auditory material in working memory for further processing.

Many people in the dyslexia field regard listening comprehension as something which dyslexics are good at. A common "indicator" of a dyslexic is often stated to be that they will score well for listening comprehension but poorly for reading comprehension. Yet, limited working memory might have a significant impact on listening comprehension and this is the reason why some dyslexics score poorly on listening comprehension exercises, even though their language comprehension is actually good. If we take a learner with poor language comprehension and a smart dyslexic, the former can often answer the factual questions but he might have mis-understood the overall passage because he struggles with the inferential questions. The latter, probably understood the passage but has forgotten the details.

The reduced phonological short-term memory capacity of students with dyslexia, indeed accounts for the fact that learners might not be able to remember a series of verbally presented information accurately or in the appropriate order (Kormos & Smith, 2012). Indeed the main difficulties are retrieving words, not missing knowledge, and reproducing the sequential elements of an oral text, a story for instance.

A study designed to investigate the performance of Chinese dyslexic children in listening and reading comprehensions was carried out at the University of Hong Kong in 2006. Results showed that children had difficulties in understanding and retaining both semantic and sequential elements of the content, though they showed brief understanding of the content. It was pointed out that most dyslexic children are weak in memorizing the flow of events and expressing their understanding of the comprehended content by themselves in real-life situation.

### *3.2.4 Dyslexia and auditory processing disorders*

Another interesting aspect comes from a study published in 2011 in the journal *Science* that was reported in an article on the *New York Times* with the title “Study Sheds Light on Auditory Role in Dyslexia” (P.Belluck, 2011). This study suggested that how dyslexics hear language may be more important than previously realized. Some researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that people with dyslexia have more trouble recognizing voices than those without dyslexia.

Dr. Shaywitz, director of the Center for Dyslexia and Creativity at Yale University, pointed out the study demonstrated the centrality of spoken language in dyslexia and she said “it is not a problem in meaning, but in getting to the sounds of speech” and added it accounts for the misspeaking of many children affected by SLD. According to her, it is not a matter of not knowing, but rather being unable to attach what you know is the meaning to the sounds. As a result Dr Gabrieli, professor of cognitive neuroscience, said that acquiring reading skills will turn out to be harder if a child cannot grasp the sounds that make up language. Their research showed that spoken language deficiencies persist even when the dyslexic learns to read well and the interconnectedness of the brain processes involved in reading. Dr. Gabrieli said that voice recognition is considered like recognizing melodies or nonverbal things. Strikingly, voice recognition was thought to be a separate task in the brain from understanding language.

But this research seems to show that normal reading involves a “circuit, the ability to have all of those components integrated absolutely automatically”. Wolf, dyslexia expert at Tufts University added that one of the great weaknesses in dyslexia is that “the system is not able to integrate these phoneme-driven systems with other aspects of language comprehension”. These difficulties of most of the dyslexic children are strictly related to the problem of low phonological awareness, as seen before. It is no surprise that more and more children with learning and reading disabilities are addressed to the audiologist for a hearing and an auditory processing evaluation.

Many people make a distinction between auditory processing problems and dyslexia on the basis of the commonly held notion that dyslexia is based primarily on the visual reversal of letters during reading. A pioneer in reading disabilities, Orton, suggested that perceptual impairments either in the auditory or visual domain, or both, were at the root of developmental reading disorders. He recognized that the impairment was not related to

absolute acuity in either the visual or auditory domain, in fact the kids tested had normal hearing and vision, but rather in the processing of information through the visual or auditory system (quoted by Moncrieff, n.d.).

When a child is referred to the audiologist, it is important to know how the diagnosis of dyslexia was made and whether the child is a phonologic or deep dyslexic or a comprehension or surface dyslexic. The phonologic dyslexic is more likely to have problems with non-words or unfamiliar words whereas the comprehension dyslexic is more likely to have problems with irregular words that don't fit customary categories.

There is a remarkable debate about whether the deficits observed in dyslexic individuals are primarily language-based or whether they may be the consequence of an auditory perceptual problem. We know that the auditory system is essential for the development of language and research shows that auditory perceptual deficits in hearing impaired children can cause disorders of language development. As a result, some researchers expect that, for at least some of the children with phonologic dyslexia, there may be a disorder within the auditory system that has prevented the normal acquisition of language. It could be possible that, within the ascending auditory system or at the cortical level, there is an abnormality of function that leads to child's impossibility to normally process linguistic input.

All in all it can be said that the nature of problems some students with dyslexia experience in understanding spoken FL texts depends on their phonological processing skills and phonological short-term memory. Learners who show smaller degrees of phonological processing problems and no associated auditory processing difficulties may not exhibit problems in speaking and listening in FL (Kormos & Smith, 2012). This is why some learners comprehend orally presented information easily, whereas others find it difficult to process FL listening texts because they perceive them to be too fast. I am going to consider some ways of helping develop this particular skill in the following chapter.

### 3.3 FL Speaking troubles: causes and considerations

Having considered the importance of listening comprehension I now go on and deal with what speaking entails. As seen in the introduction, effective use of English as a FL is one of the most complex activities people need to learn for their interpersonal communication and, for most of them, being able to speak in the FL is more important than reading and writing.

However, despite years spent developing their knowledge of vocabulary and structure in school, learners often experience frustration at not being able to participate effectively in FL communication. Dell Hymes introduced the term “Communicative competence” in the 1970s arguing that besides having grammatical knowledge about a language the social and functional aspects of a language are equally important. The researcher clarified the terms as that aspect of our competence that allows us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific context.

Unfortunately, some common beliefs and wrong attitudes in the FL context might hinder communication in FL. Given that students’ beliefs about teaching methods are dominated by a non-communicative approach in other subjects on the curriculum, they will probably resist a communicative language teaching approach. Learners may be discouraged also by the reactions of impatience, for instance, of other classmates while they are trying to speak the FL. Even worse, in some contexts, FL teachers do not foster pair or group discussion to practice the language and rather than facilitate peers, they overcorrect them eventually inhibiting their willingness to communication.

As a result many students are reluctant to use the FL for spontaneous interaction, when they face any problems they tend to abandon the FL and resort to either L1 or silence, they appeal to the teacher to provide them with the “correct” structure and they protest that they “can’t say it”, “I don’t know how to say it correctly” (Gabrielatos, 1993). I am therefore going to analyze these and other problems students experience and I am going to suggest some possible ways of dealing with them.

### *3.3.1 Spoken Vs written language*

For most of its history, language teaching has been concerned with the study of the written language, the language of literature and of scholarship, through the remarkable written models which can be selected and ordered by the teacher. An obvious advantage of the written language is that it has been described by generations of grammar-writers and dictionary-makers. Brown and Yule (1983) claimed “there is a comforting sense in which it is possible to say that a written sentence is correct or not. The rules of writing English sentences are really rather well known and well described” (p.1). Another encouraging aspect is that written language does not vary greatly in time.

As regards spoken language, it made a decisive impact on FL teaching after the Second World War and great attention was devoted to pronunciation at the beginning. Students used to spend hours in laboratories listening to and repeating vowels and consonants of English. Then, stress patterns were added and, eventually, practice in intonation patterns. In most recent times students have had the chance to be given practice in listening to examples of carefully spoken English. In many courses, written texts have been abandoned to switch to extracts from texts of authentic conversations, radio broadcasts, lectures etc. This innovation needs to be welcomed as a positive one since it offers the ability to talk and listen in the FL, to communicate with speakers of the FL, at least in theory.

It is however quite different for the teacher who used to find himself more at ease when dealing with just the written language. There is no longer a secure, tried-and-tested, teaching tradition to lean upon (Brown & Yule, 1983). For many scrupulous teachers, the demands of teaching the spoken language are really worrying and put them in a disadvantageous position. Indeed, spoken English seems very variable and, like Italian, is very different from one dialect area to another.

Why should speaking skills be taught in the classroom then? As previously stated, many students equate being able to speak a language as knowing the language and therefore view learning the language as learning how to speak the language, or as Nunan (1991) wrote “success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language”. As a result, if students do not get any opportunity to speak in the classroom they may soon get de-motivated and lose interest in learning as previously outlined.

Speaking is fundamental to human communication: in our daily lives most of us speak more than we write, yet many English teachers still spend the majority of class time on reading and writing practice almost ignoring speaking and listening skills. As I am going to discuss later, if the objective of the language course is truly to enable students to communicate in English, then speaking skills should be taught and practiced widely in the language classroom. However, it is not just as simple as that. Teaching and learning speaking skills is rather demanding and multidimensional and, as I am going to point out in the following paragraphs, many aspects that might hinder speaking production should be carefully examined beforehand.

### 3.3.2 *Speaking: the big struggle*

I stated that achieving fluency in oral communication is probably the main motivation that a great number of students bring to language classes. However, all FL students have probably experienced, at a certain stage, the frustrating feeling of not being able to participate effectively in FL oral communication (see 3.3), experiencing what Horwitz called “communicative apprehension”. Adler and Rodman stated that communicators’ perception of self and others and verbal and non-verbal language skills are the main inputs influencing the process of communication (quoted by Jamshidnejad, 2011, p.5). FL learners often struggle with lack of the very resources needed to communicate their intended meaning, so that instead of saying what they “want to say” they have to limit their output according to what they can actually say. As a result, negative feelings like anxiety, apprehension and stress are often experienced by learners.

According to Arnold, learning and using language in a foreign context is strongly connected to the learner’s constructions of self (quoted by Jamshidnejad, 2011, p.5). Most students lack opportunity for real life communication in the FL and identify “how they speak” based on their “image of self” constructed during their studies. Self-perception and attitudes might sometimes hinder learners’ effective output in FL oral communication . Furthermore, their attitude and beliefs toward the native speakers of the language might influence their learning since they possibly think that (Gabrielatos, 1993):

- a. native model of communication is perfect and native speakers are the only people who have full knowledge of oral communication in their language;
- b. FL learners should be more concentrated on accuracy rather than on experimenting with language;
- c. there is only one correct way of producing responses and expressing ideas in foreign language communication;
- d. “native-like” expression is the only correct way of conveying meaning in a FL oral communication;
- e. to perform as a perfect speaker in FL communication, the FL learner must imitate the native speakers’ performance;
- f. imitating “scripted” dialogues and interviews extracted from native discourse is the only method of learning “native-like” expressions.

These assumptions seem actually to encourage the FL learner to be a “perfectionist” who speaks fluently, with neither grammatical nor pronunciation mistakes and as if he was a native speaker. However, the above assumptions are very far from the reality of English communication in its natural context as I am going to explain later. These idealistic high standards might eventually prevent learners from speaking, unless they are certain of their result as well as effectiveness in self-expression or comprehension of others.

Numerous scholars found a direct relationship between erroneous, unrealistic beliefs and frustrating, anxiety-inducing experiences of language use (Jamshidnejad, 2011). Language learners, in Chee and Troudi’s research, described their English language learning in secondary school as dependent on teachers, as difficult to learn and causing unwillingness when using English (quoted by Jamshidnejad, 2011, p.7) . This means that the FL learner’s attitude toward FL learning is mostly problematic and enhances a low level of self-confidence and feeling of anxiety.

Moving beyond perception of self and personal attitudes, learner’s perception of others (e.g. teachers, classmates and other friends) is another main input when building communication in the FL as I mentioned also in 1.5. The FL learner is often very scared of “losing face” in front of others and the fear of embarrassing oneself by making mistakes often prevents students from speaking and this affects self-construction and confidence. Indeed, most students are scared to be laughed at by classmates. It is this struggle between the desire to speak in the classroom and the fear of losing face in front of the classmates that seems to be a common characteristic in language classrooms settings.

However as Jianing stated “the less they speak, the less they improve their speaking skills, and the more they are afraid of speaking” (quoted by Jamshidnejad, 2011, p.8). What is more, FL learners can be also discouraged by teachers’ feedback and reactions to errors: if they constantly correct them, they might feel foolish in front of others. The learner’s concept of “self” and “others” based on these unrealistic assumptions may therefore lead to lack of self-confidence and breakdown in FL communication.

“Language skills” is another input that can threaten effective communication. Problems in language skills are related to the communicators’ inability to overcome difficulties at different stages of speech production (see chapter 1) and being able to quickly answer to what an interlocutor has just said. As seen in 1.5, Dornyei and Scott classified the problems in language skills into four main categories: resource deficits, processing time pressure,

own-performance problems and other-performance problems. Resource deficits are related to a deficiency in speakers' FL linguistic knowledge possibly due to FL system of speech production not complete as the L1 system, or the process of retrieving the words or structure not being as automatic as L1 speaking and L1 transfers. L1 transfers may influence learning and use of the FL. Processing time pressure entails problems of time pressure in the "communication" process when learners are eventually faced with speaking in real-life contexts (quoted by Jamshidnejad, 2011, p.9).

Although their knowledge of FL is enough to communicate, they find themselves unable to process language "on time" and speak quickly enough, to handle the conversation. Own-performance problems include deficiencies perceived in one's own language output and during the process of monitoring speech. The first chapter already discussed the most useful strategy to cope with this problem, namely self-repair. Other-performance problems entail comprehension problems perceived in the interlocutor's performance. Possibly, the FL speaker has not acquired the words, idioms or grammatical structures the conversational partner is using. Dornyei and Scott in another study categorized other-performance problems into two groups according to whether the speaker finds problematic, something perceived to be incorrect, or has an uncertainty of understanding something fully.

### *3.3.3 English native oral production*

In the light of what has been said so far, it is important to analyze certain aspects of native oral production, given that the aim of most of the students is to reach a near-native level of proficiency. Gabrielatos (1993) underlined that:

- a. syntax seems to be less complicated than in written language since speakers tend to favour:
  - parataxis: phrases connected by coordinating connectors (and, or, but) or even phrases not explicitly connected, but understood as being linked to each other by the way they are uttered by the speaker in a given context.
  - ellipsis: speakers tend to omit elements of the sentence they feel are redundant – given the context and the shared knowledge of interlocutors;
- b. the utterances are not always grammatically correct (if they are compared to the correctness of the written language);

- c. native speakers sometimes coin new words when they are faced with vocabulary shortcomings (especially native-speaking children);
- d. native speakers frequently encounter shortcomings while communicating orally (due to time/memory/vocabulary restrictions). Speakers may be lost for words, self-correct or pause. Particularly with reference to pauses it was found that most people pause between 40 and 50 percent of the time while describing pictures for instance (p.24).

In order to compensate for these shortcomings, native speakers employ fillers (i.e. phrases like “well”, “you know”), paraphrase and restructuring (Gabrielatos, 1993).

### *3.3.4 Spoken language model and correctness*

As previously stated, while teaching the written language is easier in that several models of almost any kind of writing are available, when it comes to speaking models, it is not very obvious what sort of model is appropriate to offer the foreign learner. Brown and Yule (1983) underlined how native speakers’ performance “reveals so many examples of slips, errors, incompleteness, produced by the speaker, speaking in the here-and-now, under pressure of time, trying to tie-in what he is saying now with what he has just said, and while he is simultaneously working out what he is about to say” (p.21), in line with what was stated in the previous paragraph. They also stated that foreign students should clearly not be taught to produce incomplete sentences and thus the teacher needs to sort out a good compromise.

At the beginning of the learning, the teacher is usually the one providing the model and students simply stick to it. However, once they get in contact with “real” native speakers they are faced with language produced spontaneously, very far from the well-constructed, ready-to-use sentences they learned within the classroom. It seems reasonable therefore that foreign students are allowed some mistakes otherwise they would sound too foreign. Indeed, native speakers rarely produce complete correct sentences in spoken language! “Correctness” in terms of complete sentences, seems an inappropriate notion in spoken language. Native speakers usually produce short, phrase-sized chunks and it is therefore illogical to expect FL learners to produce complete sentences.

“Correctness” in terms of pronunciation is also a frequent goal in spoken language programs. The norm for those learning to speak British English is usually taken to be

“RP”: the southern British, non-rhotic accent, which is also called “Oxford English” or “BBC English”. In the fifties and early sixties rigorous attention to pronunciation was observed whereas now many teachers accept that the aim of achieving native-like pronunciation is not only unattainable but unreasonable. Besides, students, less competent ones in particular, trained within courses that put a strong emphasis on pronunciation, would eventually find them extremely boring and this would inevitably result in increasingly less competence.

All in all, if too much emphasis is put on “correctness” in speaking the FL, many students will probably consider themselves to be failures given that only few people achieve “perfection” and completeness in this skill. Therefore, it seems that a more reasonable approach would be one that is characterized by a more relaxed attitude to “correctness” so that many more students can attain success, argued Brown and Yule (1983).

### *3.3.5 Realistic objectives of a spoken FL course*

Having drawn some considerations on teaching oral skills and the notion of correctness, it is now important to take into consideration what the aims of the course should be. Often the aim of a spoken English course is the student should be able “to express himself” in the FL, to cope with basic interactive skills like exchanging greetings and thanks and apologies, and to express his “needs”: request information, services, etc. (Brown & Yule, 1983). The student should be simply able to communicate effectively in the FL.

As a result, the syllabus would prepare students to produce short turns of transactional and/or interactional type. It would consist of a list of forms which may be used to perform a range of social/cognitive functions, speech acts performed by taking a short turn. However, if the real aim is “expressing oneself”, the syllabus has to go beyond short turns and include long turns and, hence, strategies for controlling them need to be taught. In this course a student should be making progress from easier long turns to more complex ones, rather than simply learning more and more lists of things to say (Brown and Yule, 1983).

Since the point is to develop fluency in “self-expression” in the spoken language, few things are more inhibiting than being constantly corrected. If the student makes mistakes while speaking, the teacher should note the error and deal with it separately, after the task the student is concerned with is completed. In practice sessions, if there are two students

interacting, for instance, and it is not quite clear what the student is saying, the person who should ask for clarification is the interlocutor, not the teacher.

Furthermore, the listener should be encouraged to ask questions if he does not understand, just as native speakers do in real contexts. Brown and Yule (1983) pointed out that if the listener can make sense of what the speaker is saying, it means the speaker is communicating successfully!

### *3.3.6 If students do not talk: motivation in the FL classroom*

It is widely recognized that, when acquiring new knowledge, motivation has a decisive influence on the result. It is a very challenging task for FL teachers to get the pupils to take active part in conversations where they express themselves freely. We saw in 3.3 that many teachers complain that students do not talk or say anything during oral activities. I have already explored some possible reasons with reference to perceptions and notion of correctness in this chapter, but I would like to raise some questions as well. First of all, are the class activities boring or pitched at the wrong level? It might happen that, sometimes, those activities that seems interesting are not effectively catching students' attention and do not create a real need for communication.

The problem is students do not really have a reason to talk to each other and as a result the FL classroom appears too artificial to them sometimes. Some scholars maintained, therefore, that it is important to raise interesting discussions and discourse, and that they must have a meaningful purpose. Surely, language should be taught and practiced in context. According to most of the researchers indeed, for language to be acquired in a meaningful way as Brown (2000) clearly stated "The FL classroom should not become the locus of excessive rote activity: rote drills, pattern practice without context, rule recitation and other activities that are not in the context of meaningful communication" (p.61). Usually learners associate FL to what they practice in school, but they should be made aware of the fact that what they learn is meant to be used in reality instead.

Secondly, it is very important to speak English or the FL in the classroom. If a teacher is shy, how can he/she expect the students to overcome their fears about speaking English? Swain (1985) reminded us that "we learn to speak by speaking" and that goes for teachers as well as students. The more a teacher practices the more he/she will improve his/her own oral skills. Teachers should allow students to practice freely through pair and group work,

asking each other questions and responding in a natural way and should practice different language functions (e.g. disagreeing, requesting, clarifying etc.).

Teachers could also use the internet and other tools in order to provide authentic context: e-mail, chats, Skype are all possible means that must, however, be used responsibly. Thirdly, it is important to give students all the tools and language they need to be able to complete the task. If the language is pitched too high they may revert to their L1, likewise if the task is too easy they may get bored and revert to their L1. As regards the use of L1, teachers should also keep in mind that, especially at the beginning, students might rely on it as an emotional support, translating word by word, but this reliance is going to disappear once they become more confident in the FL. While working in pairs for instance, the teacher should walk around the classroom to monitor the students and feed new vocabulary in order to prevent them from switching to their L1.

### *3.3.7 Dyslexia and FL speaking: the role of PM*

I have already pointed out that speaking in L1 and in the FL is very different in terms of attention and memory requirements. I said that in L1 speech production, planning the message, requires attention, whereas formulation and articulation are automatic, and that processing mechanisms can therefore work in parallel, which makes L1 speech generally smooth and fast. As previously stated, L1 speech is largely automatic and phonological short-term memory also plays a limited role (Kormos & Smith, 2012).

FL speech production is quite different in nature, since it requires attention in all the encoding phases and part of the speech output can only be processed serially. To put this in other words, encoding mechanisms are only partially automatic even in the case of advanced FL learners. Moreover, in FL speech, different units of verbal material have to be kept in working memory to be able to create a sentence. As a result, dyslexic students with reduced attention span and phonological short-term memory capacity might face difficulties in producing FL speech.

Unfortunately, little research has been carried out on the role of phonological memory (PM) in the development of speech production and there is almost none that has looked at FL speech production. There is the reason why O'Brien, Segalowitz, Collentine and Freed (2006) investigated the role of PM in FL speech production and in the development of grammatical abilities as they manifest themselves in real-time speech. They discovered that

PM plays an important role in narrative development at earlier stages of FL learning and in the acquisition of grammatical competence at later stages. The role of PM in FL speech production had not been investigated directly before, but PM was widely recognized as being related to children's FL vocabulary, as it predicts their ability to learn new FL vocabulary (O'Brien et al., 2006).

As regards FL grammar acquisition, PM seems to be involved in the ability of children and adults to learn and generalize grammar learned in class. O'Brien et al. maintained, in fact, that PM appeared to be related to the development of grammatical skill and, although research in this area is far from conclusive, it suggested that the relationship between PM and grammatical abilities may be driven by vocabulary skills. The study carried by O'Brien et al. revealed that PM is related to vocabulary use: those with better PM abilities produced a larger variety of words than those with weaker PM skills. Secondly, the study found that PM is related to development of narrative abilities in low ability participants: those with better PM skills demonstrated greater narrative gains than those with weaker PM skills.

All in all, according to these researchers, those people with good PM skills would be able to hold longer and more complex utterances in PM, which would then be transferred to long term memory. These stored representations would then, according to them, provide the basis for constructing grammatically correct speech. On the other hand, those with poorer PM skills who would be able to hold only shorter and less complex utterances in PM would fail to build an adequate store of complex templates (O'Brien et al., 2006). They also reminded us that, good grammar skills reduce dependence on PM: those people with greater knowledge of the FL grammar, would in turn rely less on PM as the study showed. As a consequence, for those participants who possessed less-developed grammatical skill, PM played a very essential role in (narrative) discourse.

O'Brien et al. suggested at early stages of language learning, when grammatical knowledge is weak, the learner focuses on acquiring content words. During this stage, grammar acquisition relies on vocabulary acquisition which is only possible through PM. As a result, at this stage, PM capacity is highly employed by the learner to learn vocabulary, whereas it is mostly used for learning more complex grammar during later stages of learning. Reliance on PM should decrease as language production becomes more automatic.

The problem with dyslexic learners is they display problems in proceduralizing knowledge (see 2.2.3) and this might result in a lack of fluency in the FL. Learners require, in fact, sufficient levels of lexical and grammatical competence in the form of procedural knowledge, and not just as declarative knowledge, to be able to speak the target language. Indeed, if learners cannot access and use their knowledge in real-time, communication cannot be successful. Following the considerations just made, the fact that most dyslexic students have a limited vocabulary and restricted knowledge of grammatical structures in FL due to PM restricted capacity, may easily result in speech production problems.

Further difficulties in oral interaction can be caused by students' problems in understanding and normally-processing linguistic input (i.e. children affected by auditory processing disorders, see 3.2.4). As previously stated in fact, phonological difficulties are also apparent in the global speech comprehension, as students might have problems in identifying phonemes in the FL and associate a string of phonemes with a FL word.

As previously claimed, therefore, the nature of problems most dyslexic students experience in speaking and listening to the FL depend then on their phonological processing skills and phonological short-term memory. Research evidence, however, suggests students with a SLD experience varying degrees of difficulty when producing and understanding FL speech.

In Kormos and Kontra's study different perspectives of teachers, regarding pupils' production of continuous stretches of oral discourse are offered: some learners could only speak using given sentence frames, whereas other teachers remarked that some of their students could express themselves fluently but with a large number of mistakes. Other teachers noted that they had students with dyslexia who could not express themselves in long sentences, and that there were learners who did not want to say anything in the FL class (quoted by Kormos & Smith, 2012, p. 78). In an interview study by Kormos and Mikó, some dyslexic students stated that they can express themselves easily and successfully in English, whereas others find it difficult to speak in the FL. Specifically, one of the students claimed that she struggles to recall the appropriate words under the time pressure of oral communication and another student realized that she could not put words in the right order when building up sentences in speech production (quoted by Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.79).

Surely students with dyslexia must be aware they can only overcome their difficulties if they invest sufficient effort into the process of language learning. Given that they can be expected to communicate successfully in speech, a supportive classroom environment in which the teaching and methods are adapted to their needs need to be created. Furthermore, strategies to help additional language learning are about motivating students. Dyslexic students can be encouraged to learn, not just by specific techniques, but also by realizing the purpose of their learning, as previously outlined.

### 3.4 FL teaching methods and some DSA related issues

Over the last few decades, modern language teaching has undergone a series of stages characterized by changing theories, learning strategies and methods. However, they all present numerous shortcomings when employed to teach students with specific needs such as dyslexia. The problem these learners have to deal with, is then, twofold, since they have to cope with their disability in the first place, and their needs are not always met by the method and approach their teacher uses in class.

#### *3.4.1 A shift in language teaching*

As previously seen, in the 1940s and 1950s a structuralist view among linguists was dominant. The structural school only investigated the evident data and, as a result, aspects like consciousness and intuition, were not observable area. In the 1960s a behaviouristic paradigm developed from the structuralist view that used empirical methods while studying human behavior and argued that humans could be trained to respond in a certain way through reinforcement (Brown 2000). Skinner and other behaviourists viewed language as behavior, they saw language as verbal habits which have been acquired by the speaker through imitations and rewards. As a result FL teaching was largely influenced by these beliefs for years where students learnt the FL through imitation and various kinds of pattern drill, thus learning how to produce grammatically correct sentences, but they were eventually unable to communicate correctly in the FL.

In the 1960s Chomsky gave way to the generative-transformational school of linguistics. According to him language learning is genetically conditioned, that is all humans are born with a native ability to acquire a language and that language develops automatically within us when we are exposed to stimuli around us. Since the 1980s the constructive perspective has dominated the theory of second language acquisition. Constructivists argue that all

individuals create their own perspective of reality and thus different ways of knowing must be accepted (Brown 2000). The social constructivist perspectives focus on language as communication between individuals. The 1980s and especially the 1990s saw therefore an increased interest in the kinds of assignments and activities in which learners might get involved to foster acquisition.

Collentine and Freed (2004) underlined the dominant assumption, that a cognitive model of SLA could best explain the interaction between (a) input-oriented, output-oriented, interactional and task-based instructional techniques and (b) acquisition. The results of this research suggest there is no clear-cut superior methodology or instructional technique that facilitates acquisition, even if techniques that emphasize meaningful language use are more commensurate with what psychologists know about how the brain internalizes new knowledge (Norris & Ortega, 2001). It is generally recognized that there has thus been a shift from a rigid grammatical to a more dynamic communicative approach in FL teaching. Using a variety of communicative strategies and spoken language in the classroom is far more visible today than it was twenty years ago. However, as I stated at the beginning, most of the students coming out of school are not able to sustain conversation in the FL effectively.

### *3.4.2 Cognitive perspective in SLA: the UBI approach*

Gettys and Lech (2013) claimed that one of the possible reasons for low efficiency in teaching students to communicate orally in an FL is a gap between the psycholinguistic reality of speech production and the general practice of teaching languages.

In order to give strength to their thesis, they rely on Levelt's speech model that was outlined in the first chapter. First, they claimed that, as the model demonstrates, lexis and grammar represent an inseparable unity, and speech is lexically driven, in that lexical components precede and pre-determine syntactic processing. They complained about the fact that most of today's foreign language textbooks treat grammar and lexis separately, thus failing to apply this characteristic of speech production.

Secondly, in Levelt's model, grammar is tied to individual words, that is, is stored in lexical entries and constitutes part of the speaker's lexical knowledge. In schools, learners are usually taught rules that apply to a group of words. What is more, in Levelt's model, most attentional resources are devoted to conceptualizing, and speech is quite fast in its

pace. As a result, neither sufficient time nor attentional resources are left for conscious application of rules during the formulating process. Without automaticity, it is, then, impossible for the conceptualizing and formulating stages to happen at the same time, without interference. Gettys and Lech underlined that this is not taken into account when students are asked to create with the language while applying these rules at the same time.

The two authors suggested the reason for this inappropriateness of some teaching approaches might rely on the fact that today's dominant teaching paradigm is based on Generative (Chomskyan) Linguistics. As stated in the previous paragraph, according to Generative Linguistics, the mind has a LAD available that is an autonomous device, separate from the rest of cognition. This perspective entails, as Ellis pointed out, "competence grammar", that is, knowledge about language that allows people to detect ungrammatical sentences (quoted by Gettys and Lech, 2013, p.54). This theory, then, underlines the importance of memorizing rules, lists of vocabulary items and exceptions to the rules.

An alternative view on language and language learning has been offered by the Cognitive Perspective in SLA. According to them, learning a language is like learning anything else as stated by Ellis and LAD does not exist, added Littlemore (quoted by Gettys and Lech, 2013, p.55). Ellis stated that language acquisition entails associative learning mechanisms, and the formation of associations depends on memory, relies on reinforcement, frequency and distribution of practice (quoted by Gettys and Lech, 2013, p.55). Ellis and Larsen-Freeman added that these associations connect form to meaning and associative learning relies on cues, whose strength is based on their frequency: the more entrenched a form, the easier it is to retrieve (quoted by Gettys and Lech, 2013, p.56).

An important role is played by memory, since language use, automaticity in speaking and even emergence of creative linguistic competence, are seen as memory-based phenomena. Gettys and Lech stated that much of what we say consists of sequences of words and phrases retrieved from memory as one unit. Challenging the main postulate of the UG, Cognitive Perspective sees language as a product derived from language use rather than from an abstract set of rules, for this reason it is said to be usage-based. Learning a language is thus exemplar-based: it is based on a store of concrete "exemplars" from which regularities are abstracted rather than on linguistic rules. According to this perspective, language is learned inductively: rules are inferred from examples.

As seen before, Cognitive perspective emphasizes form-meaning linkage: grammar and meaning are considered to be inseparable, with meaning (rather than syntax) being central to language learning. According to Goldberg, any pairing of form with function is recognized as a construction and any utterance includes a number of constructions (quoted by Gettys and Lech, 2013, p.57). Therefore, knowledge of a language is knowledge of the constructions in the language and comprises several constructions, form-meaning-use combinations used for communicative purposes as explained by Ellis & Larsen-Freeman. Acquisition of constructions begins with input and through use they become ingrained as grammatical knowledge in the mind. Ellis stated that “an individual’s creative linguistic competence emerges from a combination of memories of all the utterances in their entire history of language use and from frequency induced abstractions of regularities within them” (quoted by Gettys and Lech, 2013, p.58).

The UBI (Usage-Based Instruction) approach, as Gettys and Lech defined it, borrowing the term from Usage-Based Linguistics, is based on language samples that students learn to use and it is taught inductively through the process of learning from examples. This approach sees construction as the basic unit of language learning and the language course is perceived as a process of adding up new constructions to the learner’s developing linguistic system. Constructions are identified as specific language exemplars within specific conversational themes and each lesson’s aim is to acquire those exemplars. Constructions are presented and taught incrementally and the process of learning is both input and output based.

As regards input, learners are exposed to specific instances of the targeted construction and at this stage lots of activities are conducted with visual aids, both pictures and gestures. The researchers agree that it is important that students “do” something with the input, for instance they stand up and point at something. Gettys and Lech suggested the instructor may slowly proceed to forced choice activities in which students begin to produce the target structure, while it is still in their short-term memory, a very important step between input and output stages, given the importance of the role of phonological loop in forming stable, long-term mental representations. It is essential to provide enough input before leading to a series of communicative activities that gradually lead students from comprehension to full production.

Next stage is called “scaffolded output” and the teacher should aim to lighten students’ mental overload, through guided dialogues in which students speak from simultaneous prompts. UBI must be personalized since, as Lieberman highlighted, personalization grants better memorization and deepens the processing of the language constructions learned (quoted by Gettys and Lech, 2013, p.57). Eventually, distributed practice represents the last stage, based on the idea that associations are reinforced through usage over extended periods: if the aim is long-term retention, then practice needs to be spaced. As seen in the first chapter, Levelt’s model demonstrates that automaticity of encoding operations is essential for achieving fluency in FL speaking. Given that frequency is the main factor in memorization and automatization, constructions have to re-occur multiple times in practice distributed over long stretches of time (Gettys and Lech, 2013). All in all, much of classroom time should be taken to recycle what has been memorized from prior use and the teacher should prepare activities where repetition and focus are natural, thus conducting several question-answer sessions and letting students engage in scripted conversations with each other.

### *3.4.3 Teaching methods and Dyslexia*

Having seen the main teaching methods employed within the last seventy years, it is now important to consider their feasibility with reference to dyslexic students and their learning. As regards structuralist view, I said that students used to learn the FL through imitation and various types of pattern drill, but that this method was not leading to effective communicative skills. The downside of this approach is that it mainly offers one type of input, an auditory one that, as I stated, might be impaired in dyslexic students, and does not entail explicit phonetics training, thus the student is not taught how to discriminate the sounds of the FL. Moreover, it is too focused on grammar that is learned through pattern drill, but does not effectively lead to autonomous speech production, as previously underlined (Daloiso, 2012).

The communicative approach seems to be then the right solution to boosting oral proficiency within the classroom as it is marked by the final aim of communicative effectiveness. This approach is characterized by inductive orientation and no explicit teaching of grammar. However, it seems that this proves rather confusing for dyslexic children, who need to be taught some grammar and to be familiar with meta-cognitive processes, to aid their understanding of learning, if they want to succeed. Problems with

this approach include communication pressure, since students find themselves in a situation where they constantly have to produce language, the input is, again, mainly of one kind, training in phonetics is not contemplated, and some teaching techniques are not always appropriate. Eventually, the aims of the lesson are not always clearly stated and the dyslexic student might perceive it as being confusing.

Yet, there are more positive advantages to other teaching methods, especially if one of the main aims is supposed to be communicative effectiveness. Surely this kind of approach is focused on communicative competence and focuses on meaning rather than form. Furthermore it fosters top-down strategies and language, in context, through purposeful and authentic material, that enables socialization within the classroom and raises intercultural competence. However, studies seem to indicate that for dyslexic students, direct teaching of the phonological/orthographic (and grammatical rule) system is essential.

The same is valid for the UBI Approach. It clearly highlights the main problems and possible causes underlying the lack of oral competence registered in most of the students. It also seems to offer many positive aspects that could benefit dyslexic students, as it stresses the importance for the input to be accompanied by visual aids, such as pictures and gestures and for the students to “do” something with it. What is more, it underlines the need for frequent revision and distributed practice over extended periods of time. However, it is based on language samples that students learn to use inductively through the process of learning from examples. As previously stated, this could be confusing for dyslexic students since it lacks explicit teaching of linguistic structures and does not seem to provide direct learning strategy training.

#### *3.4.4 Conclusion: hurdles to be overcome*

Taking into consideration what has been said so far, there is a possibility that dyslexic students have problems with learning about how to communicate in the FL because of two main reasons: the disability itself (see chapter 2) and the manner in which FLs are commonly taught in schools. As regards disability, it has been seen that those dyslexic children who develop slower within their first language will have problems when learning a FL and that, if one has language problems in his native language, these problems will be carried over to the FL, leading to an inability to learn the FL fully (see 2.4). This could explain why, even students who have “overcome” (Schneider, 2009) their dyslexia through

the use of learning strategies, may have to re-learn these skills as they embark on learning a FL.

With reference to the way the FL is commonly taught in schools, the curricula has to be blamed. It is usually based on, and created for, an “ideal FL learner” (Schneider, 2009): one who has a good grasp of universal grammar as well as an almost natural ability to comprehend and learn new languages. This curricula is often built on the belief that, in order to learn a language, one must be immersed within it, as suggested by Krashen’s Natural Approach and Curran’s Communication Approach. As stated before, these teaching methods are based on how one first learns their native language and could prove very effective for students who have a natural understanding of language, yet can be confusing and demoralising for a dyslexic child (Schneider, 2009). Indeed, learning a language as an additional language cannot be compared to L1 learning, given that a classroom cannot be a complete immersion programme to be experienced from infancy.

What is the best approach then? Nowadays it is generally recognized that teaching should not stick to just one approach, but it should rather be a combination of approaches and strategies that best meet the needs of the students within a particular classroom. As seen in the previous paragraph, the communicative approach, as well as the UBI approach for instance, posit some interesting ideas, however, they seem to lack important components.

Research from the United States, which emphasizes a systematic structured approach to a multisensory nature, suggests that this is the most effective method for poor language learners. Furthermore, new measures have to be taken. The way the language is presented for instance, needs particular consideration: the speed, has to be reduced, so that pupils will have the maximum chance of hearing and comprehending. Second, if language teaching is purely oral, dyslexic students will have no visual hook to hang their learning on. This is why learning through words and pictures presented visually, will support learners’ memory processing and also begin to help an understanding of a different phonological system (Crombie, 2005). I am therefore going to draw more considerations on strategies and approaches that need to be adopted in the following chapter.

## Summary

In this chapter I summarized the main aspects of oral interaction in the FL. First I dealt with the nature of oral communication: the reason we speak, the different roles of the

speaker and the listener and the functions/components of it. I pointed out that communication is a process of creating symbolic meaning and that the context in which it takes place also plays an important role. I also differentiated the natural from the instructional setting, claiming that the latter present numerous limitations and less opportunities for practicing the FL. As a result, the teacher confronts herself with a very demanding task: she has to teach what is, perhaps, best learnt outside the classroom. As regards teachers, I reported how the perception of their role has greatly changed in the last decades, in favor of a more learner-focused paradigm. Secondly, I analyzed some pedagogical implications of interaction, that is listening for comprehension and speaking-related troubles. With regard to listening for comprehension I drew some considerations, bearing in mind that it should be regarded as a process of arriving at a “reasonable interpretation” of what the speaker intends to communicate. This was to underline the importance of not aiming for 100 percent correct comprehension, which is impossible, even for native speakers of English. I also briefly discussed the problems dyslexic students might face when listening to the FL and the possibility of a connection between phonologic dyslexia and auditory system disorders.

In the second part of the chapter I took into consideration difficulties related to speaking the FL and the difficulty all students have in reaching good communicative competence. I explained that problems may arise because of common beliefs and wrong attitudes that might prevent students from speaking out because of their “perfectionist” approach to the language, for instance, and their idealistic model of FL correctness. This is why I argued that realistic objectives and aims for a FL course should be set, and motivation fostered, as the FL classroom context might appear itself too artificial. I went on to discuss the practical difficulties dyslexic students might face while speaking in the FL, due to their reduced attention span and phonological short-term memory capacity. Finally, I considered some FL teaching methods and the reason they prove inadequate when it comes to teach students with dyslexia. In the following chapter I am going to offer an insight into inclusive teaching and some approaches and strategies that have been proven effective in teaching students with specific needs.

## Chapter 4

### **4. INCLUSIVE TEACHING AND FL SPEAKING**

In the previous chapter I underlined that the objective of a FL course is to achieve communicative competence, and that to reach that target there are many issues that need to be taken into account when dealing with both dyslexic and non-dyslexic students and their learning. A different approach and teaching method is needed to support dyslexic students within the classroom and it is important to establish its main objectives.

According to researchers, however, it is not just a matter of designing new methods and strategies for dyslexic students, but there is a need to reconstruct the FL curriculum as a whole, since it is believed this will lead to effective inclusion of students with learning disabilities. It has been shown that most schools are not prepared to give dyslexics the support they need. Most FL teachers complain they receive very little education within the field of special needs and they are, therefore, not equipped to help their dyslexic students.

FL teachers should first understand the strengths and weaknesses of the students in their class and, for this reason many studying assessments could be taken by students to pinpoint where the “gaps in knowledge” are most common. This can also be done with direct interviews with the dyslexic student or questionnaires where they describe their weaknesses and strengths (see chapter 5). It is essential to identify the needs of the student for the teacher to be able to select the appropriate approach.

Once the approach has been found, it is important to keep in mind that students may need added support in other aspects, such as the adaptation of school tasks, as well as using appropriate tools and devices to enhance learning in general and oral production in the FL. This chapter will deal with general principles of inclusive teaching, on the one hand, and the possible application of these principals, to improve oral production and competence on the other.

#### **4.1 Inclusive teaching that benefits dyslexic and non–dyslexic students**

Generally, when thinking about the aims of teaching I would say that all teachers should strive to enable the student to get involved since, while dyslexic individuals (and non-dyslexic alike) may be physically included in a FL classroom, they may themselves opt out of involvement and develop negative attitudes within that environment, if the curriculum,

or the ways of presenting it, are inappropriate to their ways of learning (Schneider & Crombie, 2003).

Secondly, students should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own studies and be led to become autonomous learners. Indeed, I stated that (see 3.1.3), as Kumaravadivelu (2006) pointed out, “teaching, however purposeful, cannot automatically lead to learning for the simple reason that learning is primarily a personal construct controlled by the individual learner” (p.44). The student, in general, needs to become aware that he is responsible for improving his own knowledge. The process of learning a FL entails a project, with some precise targets, that need to be achieved through a real involvement within the classroom.

However, the teacher should accompany the student throughout this journey towards autonomy in which he has to learn to accept both his strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, instead of just giving way to despair and alienation because of failures he might experience, the learner has to grow in self-awareness and confidence. In this journey the teacher should strive for the development of the learner’s self-efficacy in planning time, in constructing meaningful texts (either oral or written), in being able to grasp the most essential information when confronted with an oral/written text. It is important that students become active learners without remaining passive vessels to be filled. Shouldn’t this be the target for every student, dyslexic and non-dyslexic?

This is quite an ambitious target, but it is important to keep in mind that all students display a wide range of lived experiences and these influence the way they engage in learning. It is true that each student should be responsible for his own learning, but the teacher has the responsibility to teach in a way that respects all students’ needs and learning attitudes, that is in an inclusive way. For this reason, let’s first see what inclusive teaching means.

Inclusive teaching entails teaching in a way that reaches everybody, without excluding any students from opportunities to learn. Inclusive teaching should not just be addressed to students with a Specific Learning Difference or a disability, but should be implemented for all students, taking into account their own specific attitudes, learning styles and personal background. It should be kept in mind though, that probably many of the specific principles adopted within the inclusive teaching of disable or dyslexic students, eventually

turn out useful and beneficial for everybody, regardless of their ability. Various aspects need to be taken into account when discussing inclusive teaching:

- a. accessible planning;
- b. differentiation;
- c. language and communication within the classroom;
- d. self-esteem;
- e. feedback;
- f. classroom management;
- g. metacognitive awareness;
- h. different learning styles;
- i. assessment.

## 4.2 Planning the teaching and the curriculum

For the teaching to be accessible from the start, the planning stage should be carefully considered in order to demolish any barriers to learning. First of all, teachers' and students' background and culture should be taken into consideration in order to get off on the right foot.

### *4.2.1 Background*

It is important for teachers to be aware of the fact that they have absorbed particular prejudicial stereotypes and biases that they carry along with them as they step into the classroom. These can impact highly on the way teachers teach and on their assumptions about students. It seems, therefore, essential that teachers reflect on their practice and ask themselves some questions. First of all, they should take into consideration how their personal assumptions and experiences might affect interaction with the students. Once their background and experiences have been taken into consideration, then it is possible to verify whether students actually possess the pre-requisite knowledge the teacher is expecting them to have before moving on, taking it for granted. New knowledge is built on existing knowledge, and for this reason, when planning the course as well as the single lesson, it is essential to define what the students are likely to know and how well they know it. If the students do not present the level required, the teacher should support them by providing missing resources, adapting the teaching to the learners needs from the start. Indeed the course should accommodate all students.

A quiz to test their background knowledge could be a possible solution to gain information but, maybe, a more engaging idea for getting to know students better, could be starting the course with an open discussion. This discussion, or interview, could include many oral questions to find out particular attitudes, learning experiences, expectations and points of weakness or strength for the students. This could possibly help to “break the ice” and allow the teacher to gain a general idea of the students’ background. The last question could be addressed from the teacher directly to the pupils: “Is there anything you would like me to know about you?”. Students could write this final answer on a piece of paper for the teacher to collect at the end of the first lesson.

It is also important to remember that, with regard to dyslexic pupils, they do not all present the same pattern of difficulties and that each of these students has a unique profile of strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it is necessary to get to know their particular strengths through regular dialogue and agreement between teacher and student. Success, in this sense, can only be accomplished if there is harmony in this relationship, built in an atmosphere of trust (Schneider & Crombie, 2003).

#### 4.2.2 The curriculum

Having considered the background of the teacher and the learners, the syllabus of the course should also take into account the students’ various needs. Although the actual content of the curriculum is usually not decided by the teacher, the way in which the content is presented and organized is primarily a responsibility of the teacher. It should include clear objectives, assignment details and deadlines to help students plan their schedules accordingly.

Moreover, the teacher should re-evaluate, if necessary, how much can be covered in each lesson and where breaks should be allowed, without necessarily following the pattern proposed by the book (Kormos & Smith, 2012). In order to succeed, FL educators should realize that inclusion is not about staying the pace whatever the costs.

Supplementary materials should also be provided to dyslexic students as it usually takes them more time to absorb new information and transfer it to long-term memory. Kormos and Smith suggested that for this to happen, opportunities for “over learning” should be granted, that is, revisiting the same information in numerous situations, would result in development of automaticity, through the “chunking of single actions or sub skills into one

action, which then in turn can become a sub-routine” (p.111). Researchers agree on the fact that dyslexic students need to be taught and given explicit instructions and need to know what they will learn during a particular lesson. As a consequence, it is recommended that a handout be given out at the beginning of the lesson with the purpose of outlining the day’s topic.

What is more, summarizing the key points at the end of each lesson, could help students understand the logic of the teacher’s organization, as well as give them more time to record the information. This would prove useful for the teacher as well, who would benefit greatly from having a clear track to follow throughout each lesson. Kormos and Smith (2012) suggested helping learners make connections with previous topics and information they already know, in order to foster long-term acquisition. Indeed, constant repetition and revisiting material would turn out, not only beneficial to dyslexic learners, but also to the rest of the class as a whole: they could create mind maps, diagrams, pictures to show to what extent they have assimilated the target language.

All in all we can summarize the important actions to consider when planning teaching as follows:

- a. take into consideration personal and students’ background;
- b. do not move on, feed students if pre-requisites are missing;
- c. find out about personal attitudes and learning preferences;
- d. re-evaluate patterns proposed by books;
- e. provide extra materials to foster long-term memory retention;
- f. revisit the same information frequently;
- g. prepare a handout to give at the beginning of each lesson;
- h. make connections with previous topics;
- i. summarize the key points at the end of each lesson.

### *4.2.3 Differentiation*

It has been claimed that a one-size-fits-all curriculum should be transformed into a curriculum accessible to all. As a consequence, differentiation should also be implemented within the classroom. As Kormos and Smith (2012) clearly pointed out, it is necessary to treat students in a different way, rather than in the same way. This differentiation can be achieved considering many aspects such as materials, tasks, expectations and support.

Differentiating in terms of materials implies addressing the students to specific sections in their books and to additional exercises in workbooks. This should not be perceived as a punishment, but should rather be explained as a way of reinforcing and supporting their learning. The activities and tasks assigned within the classroom could be differentiated in a way that respects everybody's ability.

Students might be set, for instance, different amounts of work to complete, or even different tasks, but using the same materials. Kormos and Smith (2012) gave the example of an activity based on the reading and comprehension of a newspaper article: some students could highlight the names they can see in the text, others could read for gist and others could look for specific details. Oral feedback could then entail asking the first group to say what the text is about, the second group to say what happened, and the third group to provide the details. As a result, everybody would contribute to the discussion doing what the teacher consider the minimum necessary for the class. Kormos and Smith (2012) also suggested that differentiation should also be visible in the expectations a teacher has towards the students. Differentiation of expectations could result in encouraging students to progress, without setting unachievable goals.

### 4.3 Communication and language in the FL classroom

The main objective of the FL course is to achieve communicative competence. It is, however, important to first consider whether communication itself is handled effectively within the classroom. Later I am going to consider to what extent the FL should be used during the lesson, but surely the students should be exposed to the FL as much as possible, and they should also get the chance to practice it themselves.

#### *4.3.1 Clear instructions and language*

As regards communication from the side of the teacher, I claimed in the previous chapter that teachers sometimes pitch the language at too high a level, or use ambiguous structures that might prevent dyslexic students from comprehension. Communication has to be clear, especially for students with dyslexia, and those with auditory processing problems: the teacher has to make it sure they understand as the lesson progresses, frequently checking their overall comprehension. If the student does not understand, the same sentence has to be repeated, granting them more time to process the information. To allow the students to

understand all instructions carefully, for instance, the teacher could prepare a list of bullet points beforehand and give time for students to get started before the lesson.

In addition, flexibility in how information is delivered (not only instructions) should be also taken into account: students could be given written or graphic as well as information in verbal form. Finally, eye contact should be maintained and the teacher should show respect and should welcome all questions and comments.

The “accessible” teacher’s language should therefore be:

- a. jargon-free;
- b. clear and concise;
- c. not too quickly conveyed;
- d. free from acronyms and abbreviations;
- e. free from metaphorical language

It is also important to consider that all students need to get the opportunity to interact during the lesson. It is important to give them time to ask questions, and the teacher should be ready to repeat each question out loud, so that everybody can understand it, and benefit from the answer. A wide range of opportunities for participation in the FL, such as discussion in groups or pairs should also be included, to allow all students to speak and demonstrate their abilities. TTT (teacher’s talking time) should be reduced to the minimum to give students maximum time to practice the main structures learned during the lesson.

#### *4.3.2 Self-esteem*

It is not difficult to imagine that self-esteem might be quite low for those students who view themselves as less competent and less clever than other learners. This is possibly the situation of a dyslexic student, who thinks that schoolwork is much easier for the rest of her classmates. Negative self-image and low self-esteem might lead the student to withdraw from the classroom environment, either physically or emotionally. It is generally seen, in fact, that students will often find ways to avoid starting an activity if they are not sure they will be able to succeed (Kormos & Smith, 2012). The problem is, if they face a challenge and then back down from it, their self-esteem might easily suffer, this is why it is important for them to tackle those challenges and give their best to overcome hurdles that are in their way. This is the only way their self-esteem will have the chance to increase. It

seems therefore essential for teachers to encourage students to persevere and push through the pain barrier they might sometimes experience in regards to their work.

Obviously, teachers should carefully adopt sensitive measures to protect learners and to prevent them from quitting. There are some activities that are supposed to be carried out in class that might need to be slightly adapted to the needs of the learners. For instance, some of them might struggle with reading or speaking aloud in the target language, and teachers could allow them to prepare the passage they have to read or act it out in advance. Furthermore, when addressing formal questions to dyslexic students, the teacher should be sure they can actually answer them. Kormos & Smith (2012) claimed it is essential for teachers to prepare activities and tasks, that all students are easily capable of, to support them before moving on to the following stage. They underlined that “small tastes of success can help to motivate and give confidence to all learners, but to those whose egos are especially fragile, this is invaluable” (p.117). It certainly is important to correct mistakes and provide correct models, but without highlighting every small mistakes, as it would result in frustration.

#### *4.3.3 Feedback*

In the previous paragraphs I referred to the importance of giving clear instructions to students. This appears to be necessary also when giving feedback, which needs to be frequent and focused on learning rather than marks. It is very important to reward engagement and praise ideas and contributions within the class, even if they might not be totally relevant to the lesson’s aims. Given that the aim of the teacher is to help students to learn to overcome hurdles, students should be encouraged all along and be motivated by setting up clear and achievable goals (as seen in 4.3.2).

Surely, positive feedback helps enhance self-esteem and confidence, but it is also important to be honest, in case the student needs to work harder. When giving feedback, either in oral or written form, the teacher might want to explicitly state which aspects are positive and what needs further work, possibly providing a clear model of how the work could be improved (Kormos & Smith, 2012).

## 4.4 Classroom management

It is widely recognized that classroom dynamics play a very important role in the quality of learning that takes place and that the teacher should do her best to promote a learning-friendly environment. Kormos and Smith (2012) suggested this can be done by organizing interaction and establishing routines and a stimulating but respectful pace. As previously stated, a range of opportunities for participation, group discussion and pairwork has to be granted to allow all students to demonstrate their abilities in the FL. Learners could be paired with different classmates every time in order to work with diverse personality types and ability levels. Guided pairwork activities are essential to practice and reinforce a concept, through pairing a strong student with a weaker one, for instance.

Routine is also very important, since students with dyslexia generally benefit from knowing exactly what they are going to do during the lesson and what is expected of them. It does not necessarily mean, however, that lessons should become boring, as previously seen it is, in fact, the responsibility of the teacher to motivate students through engaging lessons, by providing real-life learning opportunities. Routine could be established, for instance, through opening and closing sessions, to focus on what will be and what has been covered in that particular lesson (see 4.2.2). Kormos and Smith (2012) suggested that it is also useful to establish sub-routines for “checking written work, for completing activities or for using time between activities” (p.119). This way all learners could become more autonomous and the teacher would have more time to dedicate to the students in need.

With regard to pace, the teacher should find a balance, in order to allow all learners to work at their own pace. As previously stated, the teacher is responsible to cover the particular programme set by the Ministry of Education but she can decide which structures or topics must be prioritized and could provide extra materials, differentiate them or set out self-study tasks to supplement the work done in class, without having to rush through the material too quickly. Furthermore, it is important to remember that it proves very effective to revisit contents frequently, before moving on with the following topic, to avoid weaker students being left behind.

## 4.5 Metacognitive awareness

The role of metacognition in learning is of great impact as it refers to the learner’s awareness of thinking and learning. Metacognition relates to thinking about thinking,

becoming aware of the process of learning and employing this in new learning. It has been suggested that dyslexic learners may have difficulty with the metacognitive aspects of learning (Reid, 2001) and this implies that they need explanation of how to learn, for example through identification of connections and relationships between different learning tasks.

The cognitive and metacognitive aspects involved in the learning process are essential to acquire the strategies to cope with the main difficulties dyslexic students have. Basically, the student has to become aware of the stages needed to reach a particular decision and while, for some students, this is mainly automatic, for dyslexic learners it could be beneficial to develop routines that “enable them to work out the answer each time, and check their choices” (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p. 121). It has been highlighted that thinking out loud is one technique that works for learners who can also ask themselves questions such as:

- a. have I come across this situation before?
- b. how did I resolve it last time?
- c. what options are available to me?
- d. what are the main factors I need to take into account?
- e. does my choice of language work in the context of the whole text? (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p.122).

Kormos and Smith (2012) highlighted the positive benefits of asking these questions, since they offer insight into areas that need more practice. What is more, they suggested memorization techniques such as mnemonics and visualization should be developed.

Related to what has been said so far, is the idea that the learning process should also be conducive to the dyslexic student’s learning preferences. Thus dyslexia and learning styles need to be taken into consideration alongside the need to develop metacognitive awareness (Reid, 2001). This is what I am going to analyze in the following paragraph.

## 4.6 Different learning styles

What are cognitive or learning styles? Cognition is linked to knowing, and the study of cognition examines the ways in which people structure and organize knowledge, including particular mental processes such as problem solving and reasoning. These mental processes are used to understand the world around.

Although the terms cognitive style and learning styles are sometimes used interchangeably, it is important to distinguish between them. Learning style is one aspect of cognitive style, it is the “application of a person’s preferred cognitive style to a learning situation” (Mortimore, 2008, p.6). Individuals learn in different ways: some people prefer to see information (visual learners), some prefer to hear information (auditory learners) whereas others learn best by using hands, touching, making, feeling (kinaesthetic learners). Although students have a preferred way of learning, they can still learn through the other modes. It is important for the teacher however, to align the overall curriculum with all three learning styles in order to meet the needs of all the pupils in the classroom.

Dr. Gavin Reid (see website citations) also reminded us that learners with dyslexia do not always display the same difficulties and profiles, therefore intervention and teaching programmes should be tailored to the profile of needs of the individual learner. He agrees that this depends on the preferred learning style and cognitive profile of each dyslexic student. In his article “Dyslexia: Teaching Approaches”, the consultant suggested it would be useful to adopt a holistic perspective and ask oneself some questions:

- a. under what conditions would the student be most likely to learn?
- b. which approaches may be preferred by the learner?
- c. in what way would these approaches help to maintain the learner’s interest and motivation, as well as enhancing self-esteem?

It is generally recognized that allowing students to access information in terms they are at ease with will boost their academic confidence. It is also interesting to point out that the teacher has a preferred mode of learning as well and this will inevitably impact on the teaching, although the students do not generally follow the teaching styles of their teachers, since they tend to maintain their learning style. Yet, some teachers like to teach students the way they were taught and they are probably convinced that is the best way to teach. Sometimes they might choose topics and activities based on their learning preferences but this is a risk, as this could result in demotivation of large part of the class.

It is recommended, then, that the teacher should recognize how students learn, in order to prepare materials and lessons that are really responsive to their style. One major hurdle could be that students have diverse learning styles and this would result in an even greater challenge for the teacher who really has to struggle to cover all styles in the same

classroom. A possible solution could be to determine the different styles at the beginning of the academic year, through specific actions, in order to save time and efforts (see 4.2).

#### 4.7 Assessment

I have previously suggested that one of the main aims, if not the first, of most English teachers is to make their students capable to communicate effectively in spoken English. In order to accomplish this, the teacher might want, and need, to be able to assess whether students are progressing or not, and in which areas of spoken, as well as written English, they find more difficulties and, therefore, need more practice and guidance.

In planning the general assessment process, Kormos & Smith (2012) suggested some relevant aspects to take into consideration:

- a. what will be assessed;
- b. when the assessment will take place;
- c. what tasks and methods of assessment will be used;
- d. what accommodations and modifications in assessment need to be implemented;
- e. how the information gained will be analysed and evaluated. (p.157)

As regards what will be assessed, both strengths and weaknesses of all students, dyslexic ones in particular, need to be taken into consideration. It is possible that they are expected to reach less, or modified learning objectives, in order to prevent anxiety and discouragement.

With regard to the timing, it is generally recommended that teachers use continuous assessment, which proves very helpful to adjust the teaching to students' learning pace and their specific needs (Kormos & Smith, 2012). In order to test the effectiveness and the pace of teaching, students' achievements could be tested after small units are finished and ,since they need frequent revision, this could be a good opportunity for a further brush up of the structures previously seen.

What is more, this is an occasion for feedback, which is essential, for dyslexic students in particular, to raise their motivation and lower their anxiety. In the planning stage teachers also make decisions on the kind of accommodations students with dyslexia are to be granted. Kormos & Smith (2012) underlined how these accommodations involve task input, response format, the timing of the assessment and the setting in which the evaluation will take place.

Some general accommodations include, for instance, large print, coloured overlays, spelling assistive devices, extension of time, frequent breaks, testing in separate rooms etc. During oral examinations, it is widely recommended that students are able to make use of concept maps, schemes or printed key words to support them while speaking.

With reference to the types of tasks and methods used, the same principle of authenticity and the selection of engaging and motivating tasks I discussed before, should be respected. Before carrying out the task, the constraints of the learning environment should also be considered and whether there are alternative task types that would suit dyslexic learners better. What is more, instructions for completing the task need to be clear, and the teacher has to be sure they understand what students have to do.

If accommodations in processing the task input, or in the response format need to be implemented, teachers should be ready to do so, as well as making it easier, if the difficulty level is not appropriate. Some methods of assessment are oral and written quizzes and essays/monologue, which may just need to be adjusted and shortened. Another way of assessing is through observation of students' performance in the classroom (Kormos & Smith, 2012) without them being aware of it, thus preventing them from experiencing test anxiety.

Most assessment of spoken English is undertaken as the students speak. It could thus prove very useful to record the student as he/she speaks, to later check whether the former impression was correct, but also to give students the possibility to re-listen to themselves speaking and self-correct. Students could therefore be asked to share the responsibility of assessment with the teacher and to give an evaluation of their own abilities (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p. 162), taking more responsibility for their own learning (see 4.1).

Self-assessment promotes critical reflection on the efficiency of one's learning too and can help the student to become more autonomous. This activity could also be carried out in groups to give pupils the possibility to correct each other and offer alternative ways to express the same concepts or to provide the missing words. If performances were to be recorded over a period of weeks or months, this could also help check the improvement in speaking.

Tests, whether oral or written, should present a similar structure every time, in order to reduce students' anxiety and to let them know what to expect. Indeed, if they know what to

expect, they will face less difficulties while studying. Besides, they should be given an example of how to answer the questions of each exercise or oral quiz, since they may find it hard to understand the instructions, as seen before.

During the oral test teachers could provide positive reinforcement and supportive comments to assist the students who might be struggling with the language. After the oral or the written test, an evaluative comment should follow that takes into account the targets reached and highlights the things the student can do. If there were gaps, these should be presented as areas that require more work and attention, without referring to them as lack of abilities (Kormos & Smith, 2012). As regards correction of mistakes, they should not be highlighted too frequently, in order to avoid interruptions and discouragement of the student. The teacher could simply take notes of what she considers the most relevant mistakes and report them, along with the correct model, in the final feedback.

Criteria to mark students' work should be consistent and, whether they are different from those used to evaluate the rest of the students in the classroom is up to the teacher. Once the teacher has decided how to score students with specific learning differences and those with no apparent need, parents and institutional authorities should be apprised. What is obvious is that scores of dyslexic students will have a different meaning (Kormos & Smith, 2012).

#### 4.8 Methods and techniques for dyslexic students: the MSL approach

In the previous chapter (see 3.1.3), I discussed the shift in the perspective of the role of the teacher in the last decades, as best conceived of as a facilitator who provides support and guidance to learners, not only to acquire the language, but also to learn how language works and to learn through the use of language.

Following this paradigm, many methods and programs have been created to teach dyslexic students and to help them become more proficient in their native language first and then in the FL. Concerning FL teaching, the theories are many and which one is the most successful is difficult to say. Some believe that dyslexic students work best by combining language studies with physical movement, music or art, as seen in the Total Physical Response (TPR) Approach by Asher.

Other researchers believe that using a "whole language" approach with dyslexic students is not sound, for they are not given enough information about phonetics and grammar of the

FL, as seen before. On the other hand, Mabbott, a professor within SLA field pointed out that, rather than focusing on the grammar, a “communicative approach” where the dyslexic is asked to speak more, would work better.

Many teachers today agree on the effectiveness of working according to those students’ preferred modes or channels of learning that we saw in the previous paragraph. However, while working to the learners’ strengths is advantageous, it does not mean that their weaker learning channels are neglected (Kormos & Smith, 2012). What is more, in every class there is likely to be a mix of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners. Ganschow and Sparks therefore, believe that the best way to help dyslexic students when learning a FL is the use of the Multy-sensory Learning Approach (MSL) that has proved to be an effective method for learning the language as well as learn about the language.

This method became known as the Orton-Gillingham (OG) approach and is particularly popular since it provides learners with explicit and direct teaching in sound-letter correspondances and activates different sensory channels simultaneously (Kormos & Smith, 2012). This explicit teaching of the FL rule system is very different from the communicative language approach I outlined in the previous chapter. As previously stated, this latter approach aimed at providing learners with numerous communicative opportunities and expects them to infer regularities of the FL from direct exposure to it. However, it is generally recognized that students with specific learning needs, and dyslexics in particular, need specific and explicit explanation of the FL linguistic system with reference to all aspects: phonology, spelling, morphology and syntax. It has been suggested, therefore, that explanation of rules of the FL must be as clear as possible, and possibly carried out in the L1.

This approach seems to follow precisely the main principles of inclusive teaching as it is carefully structured, proceeds in small steps and offers frequent practice and revision opportunities. Indeed, the main objective of this method is to develop learners’ phonemic, morphological and syntactic awareness, to help them to acquire reading and spelling skills (Kormos & Smith, 2012). This target is achieved through the activation of all the different channels: auditory, visual, tactile, and kinaesthetic. This chance of learning through various channels results in benefits to dyslexic students, since it helps them to cope with their weakness in phonological processing.

This also proves therefore useful in providing overlearning within a slow pace frame: structures are frequently repeated and practiced. That is essential in leading to automaticity. It is widely recognized in fact that dyslexic students can be successful in encoding elements of language in their long-term memory if they are presented in small units and are practiced frequently in various settings (Kormos & Smith, 2012).

As regards frequent practice, MSL approach largely employs drills for practicing grammatical structures. As previously seen, these were characteristic of structuralism, which has somewhat fallen out of use in modern language classrooms, being replaced by the communicative approach. Yet, they are very helpful for learners with specific needs since they foster the acquisition of the syntactic and morphological system of the FL (Kormos & Smith, 2012).

The MSL approach also stresses the importance of strategies for learning: reading and listening, as well as metacognitive strategies appear very effective in helping learning processes. Students should be encouraged to look for the techniques that are best in line with their strengths and weaknesses and need to experiment with them extensively, under the supervision of the teacher, to be eventually used autonomously. Since the focus of the present work is on speaking and communication in the FL, only those aspects that are related to them will be examined in the next paragraphs.

#### 4.9 MSL Principles and FL speaking

Having seen the main principles underpinning MSL approach, I now move on to see how these principles can be effectively implemented for the students to become intrinsically motivated and to remain engaged with the FL and its culture. I have already discussed how important it is for the students to be able to communicate in the language they are studying, since they measure their success with reference to the ability and fluency in FL speaking they acquire in the end. Once again, the stress is on speaking and communicative competence as the main objective of a FL course. What is “teaching speaking”? According to Nunan, teaching speaking is to teach learners to:

- a. produce the English speech sounds and sound patterns;
- b. use word and sentence stress, intonation patterns and the rhythm of the FL;
- c. select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting audience, situation and subject matter;

- d. organize their thoughts in a meaningful and logical sequence;
- e. use language as a means of expressing values and judgments;
- f. use the language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses, which is called fluency (Nunan, 2003).

As a result, all the above aspects need to be developed by means of an approach that is respectful of the needs of dyslexic students. First, Sound, spelling, vocabulary and listening should be taken into consideration to prepare students to oral production.

#### 4.9.1 *Teaching sound and spelling system of FL*

It has been said that adjustments that consider students' level of FL oral proficiency are beneficial. How important is it to offer students a solid grounding in the sound/spelling connections typical of the FL they are learning? Oral language proficiency is linked to phonology, the ability to recognize and produce sounds and sound sequences that make up written, as well as oral language. In the previous paragraph it was pointed out that speaking English implies being able to produce the English speech sounds and sound patterns. As a result, it is very important to teach explicitly about the sound and spelling system of the FL.

Some researchers suggest that learning the sound of a word should precede the learning of the spelling. The reason for this is that their pronunciation could be otherwise affected by a tendency to apply the sound/spelling rules of their L1. This is very important, since those students who are not gradually taught the sound/spelling system of the FL, obviously rely on the rules of the L1. What is more, it is essential to provide both text and the sound of the word, in order to grant all students a visual "hook" to foster their learning. The principles of MSL approach that have just been outlined, therefore, play an important role in teaching FL spelling and pronunciation.

The English spelling system is mainly considered irregular, but there are many rules that can be of support for learners through spelling exercises that are available, for instance, on websites such as [www.dyslexia.org](http://www.dyslexia.org). However, Kormos and Smith (2012) reminded us that the spelling of a large number of words need to be learnt by heart and mnemonic exercises and the use of pictures, for instance, could be very helpful for the memorization of these words. To help them avoid confusion of similar words or letters, these should be taught and introduced in different lessons.

The use of activities that involve different sensory channels are very effective, because they give students with difficulties various ways to anchor new information. Depending on age and the level of knowledge, there are different ways to help them to memorize words. Games like word-dominoes and other memory games can enhance their spelling ability and be a different modality for revision. Other activities suggested by Kormos & Smith would involve the manipulation of letter cards or syllables printed to form words, changing the order of them, using hands and working in pairs or groups, for instance, to make the task more enjoyable.

#### *4.9.2 Teaching vocabulary*

Why is vocabulary acquisition so important in foreign language learning? It has been pointed out that the ultimate goal of FL studying is to be able to communicate in the target language. With regards to communication, the mastering of vocabulary appears to be essential and crucial. Most people travel abroad carrying a dictionary, not a grammar book and this is because the worst breakdowns in communications happen because of lack of vocabulary. The linguist D. Wilkins (1972) once said “without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”.

As already discussed, students with specific learning needs, dyslexia in particular, may struggle to acquire new vocabulary due to their reduced phonological awareness and the smaller capacity of their phonological short-term memory. Learning a word entails learning numerous information, regarding meaning, pronunciation and spelling of the word, as well as the morphological, pragmatic and syntactic information it carries. Kormos & Smith (2012) suggested, therefore, teaching only a limited number of words every lesson and to practice them extensively.

The teaching should be explicit, since it is difficult for dyslexic students to acquire words from just listening or reading activities, without focusing specifically on those terms. As seen in 4.2.2, frequent revision of these words is also needed to allow students to transfer the new words to long-term memory. The two researchers also claimed that sound-meaning correspondence should be taught first and words that sound similar should be taught in different lessons to avoid confusion.

Following the main tenets of MSL approach, it is important to keep in mind that the meaning of these new words should be taught employing a variety of channels. A very

useful technique to introduce new lexicon is the use of realia and flashcards. The visual, auditory and kinaesthetic channels are all involved. Numerous games and activities, such as miming, are also a different and enjoyable form of practicing new words. Furthermore, they should be presented in context so that students are allowed to picture a situation in which these words become meaningful. Every context/topic could include a series of keywords that could be memorized and later used as prompts for building up dialogues and conversations in class.

A useful strategy for students to adopt, is to create a personal dictionary using a spare agenda or rubric they have at home. Each lesson the teacher could check whether the words are correctly spelt and invite them to revise them frequently or to recycle them in new sentences, so that they create meaningful contexts and do not learn them in isolation.

#### *4.9.3 Teaching listening*

I discussed before how the teaching of listening and speaking skills, that are strictly correlated, are probably the most difficult aspects for a FL teacher. Successful listening skills are acquired over time and with lots of practice and, unlike grammar teaching, there are no rules to learn. One of the main inhibitors for students is often mental-block: while listening, a student suddenly decides that he or she does not understand what is being said. At this stage, many students just tune out or get caught up in an internal dialogue trying to translate a specific word and, hence, convince themselves that they are not able to understand spoken English.

It is even more difficult for dyslexic students, who often experience difficulties with the auditory discrimination of similar sounds in the FL that do not exist in the L1. What is more, they may struggle to concentrate, for extended periods, to a stream of oral language and to retain a large quantity of auditory information in working memory, as previously seen. Some precautions need, therefore, to be adopted then, which are ultimately useful for every single student within the classroom.

First, Kormos & Smith (2012) underlined the importance for the input to consist of short stretches of talk, better if accompanied by visual support to help understand the content of the text. Second they suggested listening texts should gradually increase in speed, length and in clarity of articulation. Third, these texts should also be interesting and “not beyond

the level of the students' language competence in terms of the vocabulary and grammatical structures occurring in the input" (p. 138).

As seen in 4.7.2, attention to the sound of the words in the listening text is essential to promote understanding. This is why, pre-teaching of vocabulary that the students are going to deal with during the listening is of great aid for the decoding of words, with specific attention to their pronunciation. During the listening students should not be asked to write, as it would possibly prove too demanding for them. Comprehension could be checked through oral questions at the end of the text or during each pause, if the text is too long, and needs to be spaced-out. Listening is very helpful, for it provides ample lexicon that could be recycled during post-listening communicative activities, to promote speaking in the FL.

Multi-sensory teaching elements that could accompany these type of task are obviously pictures or drawings and some listening activities which, for instance, involve responding with movements. What is important is that students are sufficiently exposed to the FL speech, so that they can get to hear it as much as possible.

#### *4.9.4 Teaching speaking*

As previously stated the goal of FL learning is to be able to communicate in the target language, hence this is the area in which students have apparently more difficulties once they have finished school. Dyslexic students, in particular, mainly struggle with efficient retrieval of words, remembering the pronunciation of words, articulating the words correctly, consciously building up sentences from word constituents and producing more complete oral monologues (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p. 140).

Teachers generally agree that students learn to speak the FL by interacting. Students need to become aware of the different functions and purposes in speaking, to be able to employ the FL effectively. Yet, the principle of cumulative progress of MSL instruction must be observed, so that the process follows the same pattern outlined before with regard to listening: students are only expected to produce very simple and short utterances at the beginning, such as answering simple personal questions.

Particular attention should be devoted to pronunciation, as previously claimed, and online dictionaries such as [www.wordreference.com](http://www.wordreference.com) offer the possibility to listen to the correct pronunciation of the word as well. Later, learners can gradually be expected to form more

complex and longer sentences, but they need to practice them extensively and meaningfully, since they have problems in encoding FL words and expressions in long-term memory.

Given that speaking in the FL can provoke great anxiety for the learners, it is very important that teachers provide ample support before the speaking task, granting students time to plan their output. Learners should be explicitly taught how “the various communicative functions in the interaction can be realized using the FL” (Kormos & Smith, 2012, p. 140). The aims of this pre-speaking stage (or presentation stage as I am going to explain later) are mainly to teach new language and sounds, activating existing linguistic knowledge and recycling specific items. In addition, task frames containing phrases and constructions can be given, to support students to express themselves.

Following the pre-speaking stage, students could work in groups in order to rehearse patterns (practice stage, see next paragraph) and structures, without feeling anxious about performing in front of the entire class. Meanwhile the teacher should monitor and feed students with words they do not remember or just give feedback as they carry out the task. In the final stage, some of the groups (or pairs) could repeat the task in front of the rest of the class, to present the outcome of the activity (production stage). At this stage technology could also be employed, as all classes are provided with the Lim and internet access for example. Also Kormos & Smith (2012) added Power Point presentations, as they provide textual support to help students remember their talk. I am going to analyze a possible way to structure lessons and the use and benefits of technology in the following paragraphs.

#### 4.10 Implementation: focus on speaking

I outlined the main areas that require attention to provide students with tools to enable them to speak, however, how it can be actually and effectively implemented within the classroom during every lesson needs to be further examined. In 3.4.3 I pointed out that, nowadays, it is generally recognized that teaching should not stick to just one approach, but it should rather be a combination of approaches and strategies that best meet the needs of the students within a particular classroom.

I firmly believe that MSL approach and principles are the best solution to reach all students' needs, but each lesson should be carefully structured in order to reach a particular objective at the end of it: practice and production of the structures and words studied. It is

in fact essential to provide multiple opportunities for dyslexic students to practise, in order to reach automaticity, and this is even more fundamental for learning how to speak. It is, however, important to move gradually from more guided to less guided activities that are multi-sensory and carefully filtered, to allow dyslexic students to achieve success (Schneider & Crombie, 2003).

A well known TEFL Teaching Methodology that has been largely used in FL teaching is PPP method which consists in three main stages: presentation, practice, production. I am not strictly relying on the conventional way of referring to it, but I am going to stick to the three-stages structure it presents, which can be recycled in this context as a possible schedule to follow. In the PPP Method, the first stage deals with the presentation of a particular aspect of the language, the second stage regards giving students plenty of opportunities to practice new aspects of language and become familiar with it while being assisted and encouraged by the teacher, while the last stage provides learners with the possibility to use real language in context. I am not stating here that this scheme should be applied always, as a whole, in class but it provides a useful and structured frame (three stages) within which all MSL principles and techniques that have been outlined so far, could easily fit in.

At the beginning of this chapter it was stated that routine should be established, so that students know what to expect at each moment during the lesson. It might not be possible to stick to this three-stage structure every lesson, but surely it would be helpful for the teacher to keep in mind that the third stage should be the final aim each time. This would also help students get started for the lesson and give them the opportunity to ask for clarifications, before getting to the practise and production stages. I am now proposing a possible way of planning lessons, that similarly takes into account three stages and aims at fostering oral production.

#### *4.10.1 Presentation*

First, presentation stage should not be carried out in the FL language only. I discussed the importance of giving explicit instruction, and this entails using the students' native language as well to make sure all pupils understand what is being conveyed. At the beginning of this chapter I suggested a handout to sum up the contents of the lesson and a list of key words could be very useful in this initial stage. Language is presented by the teacher by first trying to “fish” for the language item from the learners, eliciting what they

already know from previous lessons. Revision is essential to make sure that everything covered up to that moment has been acquired. If the word or phrase is not known, the item should be clearly introduced by the teacher through feeding.

As I pointed out in 4.8.1, the need for teaching the sound and spelling system of the FL should be taken into consideration, especially during the first weeks of FL learning. I also underlined the importance of MSL approach and this requires the integration of the kinaesthetic-tactile learning channels that will, predominantly, help dyslexic students “focus, catch their attention and increase their ability to remember information” (Schneider & Crombie, 2003, p. 48). Schneider and Crombie (2003) suggested, therefore, that explicit modelling and practising of which mouth and vocal apparatus parts are engaged in producing particular sounds for pronunciation, for instance, is necessary to lead to the development of speaking fluently. They underlined the importance of devoting 5-10 minutes each lesson, during the first weeks, to explicit sound-letter instruction in class. During this time they proposed students could watch themselves and each other in mirrors producing sounds and discovering vocal cords and other voice box parts. This activity could be followed by practise of pronunciation through the reading of short texts and poetry in the FL. When students feel ready they could record the reading on a tape and receive feedback from the teacher.

Having seen sound-letter relationships for proper pronunciation, presentation stage should of course include explicit teaching of common vocabulary patterns of compounds, prefix-root and suffix patterns, grammatical concepts, socio-pragmatic information about the FL such as idioms (see Schnerider & Crombie for a deeper insight) etc. following the curriculum prepared at the beginning of the year. The language should be of interest to the students and put in some context they are familiar with in order to raise their attention. Teachers should also ensure that learners see, hear and understand the target language easily. In case a whiteboard or a blackboard are used for instance, they should be well organized with different colors to differentiate ideas, words and structures.

The teacher could also employ pictures or realia, mime or brainstorming to present what has to be learnt and could make use of different types of fabric and other materials to help with the association and memorisation of different concepts through touch (Schneider & Crombie, 2003). Furthermore, short videos or listening texts could be viewed to present new language in context.

Teachers, however, should check that material has been understood correctly and, at this particular point, learners should not be overloaded with unnecessary information but only the grammatical explanations that are needed to lead to the following two stages. The learners will have to retain the information received during this presentation stage to use it later in the lesson to produce meaningful sentences and to interact with classmates. It is essential, therefore, to provide the forementioned handout or to guide pupils in the creation of a map or diagram.

#### *4.10.2 Practice*

The second stage entails practice of pronunciation and of the new language provided by the teacher in the first part of the lesson. New language must, of course, have been presented clearly and dyslexic students in particular should be given the possibility to have some printed materials or pictures to support them while trying to recycle the material.

Considerable repetition, then, is at the core of this stage, in a non-threatening way and it is essential for automaticity to be reached. Skills could be practised through “games with attractive visual elements which complement the auditory and kinaesthetic and aid memory” (Schneider & Crombie, 2003, p. 49). An example of an activity to practice language is to get students to ask and answer each other for instance across the classroom or in a round (the so-called “weaving”). At this stage accuracy is important and the teacher should be assisting students, providing feedback and correcting but without interrupting them. It is very important for students to have handouts or maps or printed key words to rely on while doing these activities.

In doing so teachers should bear in mind that dyslexic learners have a short attention span and it is therefore recommended to keep each classroom activity to no longer than 15 minutes and to alternate tasks frequently. Other activities that can be carried out during this stage are:

- a. chaining: is carried out in order, one learner after the other in seating order;
- b. statement/response: the teacher provides a statement and the learner replies with another statement (e.g. T: “I like ice-cream” L: “I like it too”);
- c. choral repetition: it is very good for pronunciation and intonation practice and reduces inhibitions;
- d. questions and answers;

- e. weave: the language is woven around the class in random order after the teacher has instructed learners on how to practice exchange with the other classmates.

This second stage is important to consolidate grammatical awareness, every doubt and uncertainty should be dealt with as soon as they emerge, given that the teacher is coordinating the whole verbal exchange and can correct and feed when necessary. The possibility to repeat the structures extensively and through visual materials or realia and the chance for the teacher to ask non-dyslexic students first would guarantee more repetition before dyslexic students are asked to try and repeat.

During this session students could already start working in pairs and as previously stated, dyslexic students should be paired with students who might be of help. Information-gap activities could be carried out, asking and answering questions while the teacher is moving around and checking for mistakes or pronunciation. If visuals are employed, questions about them could be asked using vocabulary and structures seen during the presentation stage.

What is more, tasks like grouping words according to categories could be interspersed with oral activities to raise grammatical awareness and to provide stronger basis for the last stage of oral production. Schneider and Crombie (2003) suggested each word belonging to a different part of speech should be labeled with a different color. These colour-coded cards could be kept in a box and reviewed and practiced every now and then. This brilliant color-coding system could also be employed to simplify the retrieval of different sentence patterns and grammatical word patterns which are essential to speaking. Students could practice building sentences, respecting the pattern indicated by the color representing a specific role in the sentence. The final aim would be to have them repeat sentences and patterns until they are able to perform them orally without looking.

Teachers should bear in mind that the more opportunities every student in the class has to practice the new language, the more effective this stage is, but it needs to be a task that everybody can carry out, with specific adaptations if needed. They should also remember to offer help and praise and to help students who are struggling, showing them where the information can be found on the whiteboard or on a card, map or diagram.

### *4.10.3 Production*

In the previous chapter it has been pointed out that communication within the classroom might sometimes appear too artificial, given that students do not really have a necessity to speak the FL unless authentic activities are promoted. Teachers should create an environment where learners experience real-life communication and tasks are meaningful, to foster oral language. This very important objective might be accomplished if students work in groups or pairs and are asked to complete a task together or achieve a particular goal, for instance.

So far the students have been presented with the language and the grammar and have had the chance to practice it, while being monitored by the teacher. During this final stage students should be allowed to try and produce language on their own with minimal assistance. This stage is important for students to demonstrate their skills while working with other classmates, as addressing just the teacher would highly limit their chance to speak.

Once again it is essential to issue clear and unambiguous instructions for the task so that students understand what is expected of them. It seems sound, therefore, to convey them in the students' native language to avoid misunderstandings and prevent them from experience anxiety.

Production activities involve some form of communication and there are many activities that could be carried out, related of course to the two previous stages. These activities could include once again questionnaires, cue cards, visuals and realia. More activities that could be arranged to promote speaking in this final stage are:

- a. role play: In these kind of activities learners are given some information about the people they have to impersonate and they have to pretend to be in a certain situation. This task could be very useful for students to rehearse words and expressions seen in the presentation stage, but should be carefully structured and planned in order for them to have a clear model to follow;
- b. storytelling: learners could briefly tell a story they know or make up a new one by recycling expressions and words studied during the previous stages of the lesson, using pictures or cards with words printed to support them in the oral production. They could employ the colour-coding system for instance mentioned in the

previous paragraph: they could practice social interaction and metalinguistic thinking while choosing the appropriate cards that could be used as structural cues for retelling information in the FL;

- c. interviews: learners could interview their classmates, working in pairs on selected topic after the target expressions and lexicon have been carefully examined and practiced. At the end of the activity each student could present the information about the friend that has been collected;
- d. story Completion: in this activity students sit in a circle and they have to tell a story using prompts and words which have been previously taught. There is also a dice which can be bought with different pictures on it that can be used for this particular activity;
- e. find the difference: using pictures with differences, learners could be invited to highlight them using lexicon and sentences that are related to the topic of that lesson. Alternatively, they could simply describe the picture they have in their hands, asking then questions to their partner to find out what differs in their picture;
- f. share information: learners could read a short article, watch a cartoon or a short video with subtitles during the lesson and could try to report the main information to the rest of the class, using some key words or graphs they have previously made to support their short presentation. They could also employ power point or other technological aids to do so, but this should be prepared at home and checked beforehand by the teacher.

It is important to remember, once again, that vocabulary should be taught beforehand, during initial stages (presentation and practice stages). During these activities the teacher is still expected to be monitoring students, but she provides individual feedback and supplies words they may not have acquired yet, at the end of the activity. Circulating around the classroom is, therefore, important to ensure they are on the right track. However, if students make mistakes it is important not to distract them from their speech: they could be corrected during breaks and not too often as they could end up being very frustrated (as seen in 4.3.2).

Teachers should also ensure that each student has sufficient tools to practise the activity and that they are granted the possibility to practice it. Dyslexic students, in particular, should be granted the opportunity to keep maps, diagrams, cards and visuals available for use. Additionally, they should keep in mind that it is essential to give positive signs when

they are engaging in the task correctly, for instance by saying “GOOD” or “EXCELLENT”. In case of a presentation made using power point for example, they might also want to provide more thorough feedback, indicating positive aspects or aims achieved, as well as suggesting correct models if there are mistakes, but always with an encouraging attitude.

#### 4.11 Technology to enhance speaking

Generally, technology can stimulate learners within the classroom but also at home, and thanks to it they can be immersed in a variety of contexts that boost their playfulness. As regards technology used in class, it is very useful given that focus on spoken rather than written language can be very challenging for teachers, especially if they lack confidence in their own spoken language skills.

Technological tools like the internet, videos and podcasts have been regarded as ways of helping teachers firstly, but also students, to improve speaking skill. In some schools there are communication labs with computers, headphones and/or televisions. These are all essential means to bring authentic FL experiences into the classroom. After being pre-taught new vocabulary and key-words for each activity, it is essential, in fact, for the students to listen extensively to the spoken FL, better if the podcasts also refer to real-life situations or are taken from the latest news. These listening activities are usually meant to be followed by brief discussions and an exchange of opinion.

Technology-based activities are becoming commonplace in FL classrooms but they have not been designed to meet the needs of students with dyslexia. Schneider and Crombie (2003) highlighted that “without specific and repeated guidance, these students can find themselves at a complete loss with many of these technology-supported tasks” (p.76).

First, during activities at school, it is suggested to pair each dyslexic student with a capable FL learner who is eager to help the dyslexic classmate during technology-based FL activities. Schneider and Crombie (2003) reminded that pairing dyslexic students will result “in more social and less lonely and frustrating experiences when using technological learning tools” (p.80). Second, resources have to be adapted for the abilities of dyslexic students. To do so, content and adaptability of frequently used electronic technological tools have to be analyzed taking into account the specific needs of dyslexic learners.

To date there has been no such a critical analysis with the exception of few anecdotal references as reported by Schneider and Crombie (2003). However, the two researchers listed some of the main features of technological resources that might prove helpful to dyslexic students:

- a. independent access to a resource when the learner wants to use it (for example a computer at home);
- b. possibility of repetition of the resource as many times as are needed for the student to successfully understand;
- c. possibility to slow down the speed of spoken language if it is an auditory resource;
- d. integration of more than one learning channel, including the kinaesthetic-tactile one. This is fundamental to help reinforce learning and helps the student to keep in mind difficult information.

Among the most frequently used electronic technologies there is the CD-ROM that can be also used at home: it proves useful to practise listening as it can be repeated as many times as the students needs. Schneider and Crombie (2003) underlined in fact the importance for all students to have access to computer-based and CD-ROM based exercise opportunities outside of school hours to get more practice. Nowadays most CD-ROM programs contain interactive multimedia videos, music and voices and can be downloaded from the Internet and provide multiple and multi-sensory opportunities for reviewing after school lessons. Given that dyslexic students often feel anxious within the classroom they might benefit more from this individual practice opportunity in a private situation.

Nowadays most classes are provided with an interactive whiteboard which represents a great opportunity for students with different learning styles to really get involved in the lesson and to engage and learn from each other. If used innovatively, whiteboards create an ample range of learning opportunities, adding interactivity and collaboration, including the integration of media content into the lesson and they cost less than, for instance, equipping every student with a portable pc. The teacher can ask a student to interact with the whiteboard while he/she is sitting and the rest of the class provides ideas and suggests what to write. It can be used, therefore, to promote group discussion and participation as they are an effective device to foster brainstorming, as ideas can be noted down and saved as text to be distributed later, for instance.

It can also be used to surf the internet and demonstrate the content available on a website. There are in fact numerous videos, articles and pictures available on the internet that can be used to make the lesson more interesting and engaging and to offer a multi-sensory approach. Teachers should screen any sites carefully before having students access them. The web site information must be simple and well structured since overcrowded web sites could create confusion and overstimulation for dyslexic students. However, dyslexic learners should be taught some strategies to cope with websites with overwhelming information, such as skimming for important information, getting access to native language websites with similar information as a back-up resource and searching for different FL web sites (see Schneider & Crombie, 2003). These strategies are also essential for them to work autonomously at home. What is advantageous is that internet provides dyslexic students with access to cultural information in native and/or the FL so that learners can acquire FL cultural knowledge in both languages, compensating for FL processing weaknesses.

There is also the possibility to use social network applications such as Messenger or Skype or Google Talk (used for conferences on line) that are applications that allow students to connect with friends, other students, teachers and mothertongue speakers. Payne and Whitney (see website citations) conducted an experiment to test whether computer-mediated communication (CMC) can improve FL oral proficiency. They claimed that one of the positive effects of chatroom practice may be to automate some language production processes and as a result, decrease the burden on Working Memory.

They considered two main aspects involved in chatroom interaction. First, the pace of conversational exchange in a chatroom is slower than face-to-face since people cannot type as fast as they can speak (Payne & Whitney,). Secondly, chatroom exchanges do not present people with the same fleeting quality as spoken utterances, since they can reflect upon expressions to use while chatting without the pressure of face-to-face conversation. They suggested that people with reduced Working Memory capacity would benefit highly from this kind of interaction, given that processing demands are reduced. This activity would encourage those students that usually keep quiet and silent within the classroom, to get involved in the first person.

What is more, the necessity to use language, not pragmatics, is real so they have to try-out words and expressions and it is a good opportunity to experiment with the language. From a Working Memory perspective this type of exchange would reduce the memory load

normally imposed by synchronous communication and would allow everyone, dyslexic students included, to communicate without the pressure of face-to-face oral exchange. What is more, since the language is written, they could select the spellchecker to increase their syntactic awareness and to refresh spelling. Eventually, they would have more time to plan the output, as the pace of the conversation is slower. Payne and Whitney underlined, however, that these chatroom sessions may only serve as a conversation simulator for FL learners but could in no way substitute for face-to-face communication. What is important here is that reducing the burden on the Working Memory, helps to meet the individual needs of learners.

This is the logic followed by the Tandem project, based on the idea that the best way to learn a language is to practise it. This is a platform for students to meet up with native speakers from all over the world to practise the FL and improve skills, and in return to teach somebody else the L1. Mutual help and self-study are at the core of this projects which is becoming very popular among schools and universities.

Television could also be employed to watch movies or clips from them. The use of DVDs to watch movies with FL subtitles on, provides a double channel input: visual and auditory that benefit all students, dyslexics in particular. The possibility of pausing and going back allows the teacher to focus on some words and expressions used and to make sure that students are getting the gist of what is being said. The teacher, however, should also consider arranging preview and or post-view film material shown in class to support dyslexic students who might feel lost viewing DVDs at regular pace. Schneider and Crombie (2003) suggested that dyslexic learners should be given guiding questions when viewing movies or videos to increase their comprehension skills.

Unfortunately, many teachers complain that the institutions where they work are short of IT equipment and they are, therefore, not able to make use of important aids such as television or interactive whiteboards. It is undoubtedly true that schools should modernize their technical instruction capabilities and should be equipped with new technologies and laboratories to support FL teaching and teaching in general. However, teachers could remedy this by using Cd-players or their own personal laptop to make sure students get the opportunity to frequently listen to the spoken language.

All in all, teachers should employ technological tools at school to improve students' speaking and communicative skills, paying attention to adapting them to their needs.

Students should also be encouraged to use technology at home, since this allows them to get the maximum practice, teaches them confidence and independence in acquiring FL skills and the latest information about foreign culture.

I already mentioned that the use of CD-ROMs and that access to the internet as a very rich source of information and input in the FL, such as audio, video, radio podcasts, games, voice recording and games. Many other options, however, could be taken into consideration for the student to actively interact rather than to only receive input passively. Some technology in fact provides students with feedback, tracks mistakes and suggests links for explanations and additional help. Some speech recognition software, for instance, recognizes the accuracy of what was read and then gives a positive feedback or allows the user to try again, also providing the correct pronunciation if the student mispronounces a word. Electronic technologies allow dyslexic students to work at their own pace without putting them under pressure.

## Summary

In this chapter I raised some issues related to inclusive teaching. I presented the basic theoretical principles that should be adopted in order to support students with specific learning differences that would also prove highly beneficial to the rest of the class as a whole. First, I considered the planning stage and what the development of the curriculum should take into account. Then I discussed how communication should be handled within the classroom, underlining the importance of clear instructions and language, and of the feedback that the teacher must provide in a way that preserves students' self-esteem. The role of the teacher in managing the classroom effectively and in creating a learning-friendly environment was also pointed out, taking into consideration routine and pace and the importance of raising metacognitive awareness. I later highlighted how recognizing differences in learning styles and adjusting teaching to help students to access information in terms they are at ease with, will boost their academic confidence. At that point, I briefly examined assessment criteria and offered some suggestions considering timing, types of tasks and accommodations that might be implemented.

In the second part of the chapter, the main existing methods and techniques for teaching dyslexic students were illustrated along with some ideas to implement these principles to enhance speaking in class. So far the multi-sensory approach appears to be the most

effective approach, since it is very respectful of all needs and of the main principles of inclusive teaching. Indeed, this approach entails proceeding in small steps, frequent practice and revision opportunities and it addresses all learning styles since it activates all the different channels. Given that oral language proficiency is linked to the sound and spelling system of the FL, vocabulary knowledge and listening ability, all these aspects should be specifically taught considering dyslexic students' shortcomings and needs. I then offered an insight into how to structure a lesson (three stages) to reach the target of FL oral production. I also included examples of activities and tasks that could be carried out in order to promote speaking during the production stage in class and I showed how the use of technology at school, as well as at home, is of great aid in developing speaking skills. Students should listen as much as possible to dialogues, programmes, movies, through the use of cd-players, interactive whiteboards, televisions and computers. They could also be encouraged to practice speaking, spelling and pronunciation at home making use of social networks, skype, chatrooms and speech recognition softwares.

## Chapter 5

### **5. SURVEY ON DYSLEXIC STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FL ORAL TEACHING**

In 3.1.3 I discussed the relationship between students and teachers and I pointed out as Kumaravadivelu (2006) stated that “teaching, however purposeful, cannot automatically lead to learning for the simple reason that learning is primarily a personal construct controlled by the individual learner” (p.44). I suggested that the new perspective in teaching is now based on “learner-centredness” and reflects, as Tudor (1996) claimed “a widespread desire in the language teaching community to develop means of allowing learners to play a fuller, more active and participatory role in their language study” (p.1).

Are students actually in control of their learning? Are they playing this active and participatory role? How important is it to give them voice to express their needs and expectations? I found it important to consider students' feedback on FL teaching, to get a better idea of their opinions. To do so, I decided to plan a survey and held some interviews.

According to Kvale (2006), “in qualitative interviews, social scientists investigate varieties of human experience, they attempt to understand the world from the subjects' points of view and to unfold the meaning of their lived world” (p.481). Interviews allow people to talk about themselves and to build a personal interaction between the researchers and their subjects. Within education, dialogue has been regarded as a humanistic and progressive alternative to the monologues of authoritarian teachers, in support of the new perspective of “learner-centredness” mentioned above.

#### **5.1 Aim of the research**

The present work opened by raising an important issue: the importance of being able to speak a FL, namely English as it is the “international language” used in all relevant contexts nowadays. Schools are the first places to offer the chance to learn a foreign language. However, when considering the oral competence students acquire at the end of their studying career, the result is very disappointing, at least in terms of oral proficiency. I tried to cast light on many aspects that need to be taken into consideration by underlining

some possible gaps that are present in schools that hinder concrete development of this skill, especially when thinking of dyslexic students.

I also evaluated some “false perceptions” and expectations students generically have when dealing with FL learning that too often represent giant obstacles to be overcome. In the third chapter I discussed the notion of correctness, for instance, and the importance of students having a realistic idea of natives’ oral performance (far from being perfect, most of the time) to supplant the idealistic views they have.

As regards teaching methods, I discussed the importance of raising motivation, through authentic activities, that encourage meaningful speaking and stimulate students’ creativity. In parallel, in chapter four I took into consideration the importance of the teachers becoming aware of the weaknesses and strengths of their students and of their learning styles in order to employ techniques that boost their learning.

The previous chapter also highlighted the main approach and strategies that can be useful to enhance speaking competence of all students in the classroom, even though it still appears difficult for teachers to apply them all, given the large-size classes they have to deal with nowadays. However, there are some measures that seem essential and need be taken anyway, in order to foster oral proficiency and to support students with specific learning needs.

The aim of my research, then, is to give voice to dyslexic students and their perceptions on FL learning and teaching, to verify whether the observations made in the previous chapters are matching with the findings. I firmly believe that, as I stated in the previous chapter, knowledge of pupils’ perceptions might shed light on areas teachers must consider in order to respond better to learners’ needs and to reach the target of FL oral competence. What is more, I wanted to find out to what extent some of the common techniques and strategies that have been suggested in the last decades to effectively teach (both dyslexic students and non-dyslexic ones) are nowadays being implemented within middle and secondary schools.

## 5.2 Research approach and design

In applied linguistics there has been an increasing acceptance of qualitative research since the mid-1990s (Dörnyei, 2007). The reason for that lies in the recognition that many aspects of language acquisition and use are influenced by many factors that can be more deeply examined by a qualitative type of research rather than quantitative one.

Qualitative research has traditionally been seen as an effective way of analyzing new areas, it has been highly evaluated for its exploratory nature. Other important characteristics of qualitative research are that it allows researchers to approach the research process with an open mind, the objective and the “insider meaning” becomes clearer and clearer only gradually, during the process itself (see Dörnyei, 2007). That is, qualitative research is concerned with subjective “experiences and feelings of individuals and thus the explicit goal of research is to explore the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 38). This assumption is based on the belief that only participants themselves can share the interpretations of their experiences and actions, providing their “insider perspective”. According to Dörnyei this perspective and data collected can add data-driven depth to the analysis of a phenomenon and this was the case of the interviews held for the present survey.

Indeed, as previously stated, the main objective was to gain an idea of students’ perceptions. To do so a list of questions for an interview had been carefully drawn, taking into consideration the main aspects discussed in the thesis. The type of interview was therefore semi- structured and this format represents a good compromise between structured and unstructured ones since the format is mostly open-ended. Although there is usually a set of guiding questions, the interviewee is also encouraged to elaborate on the issues raised in an exploratory manner (Dörnyei, 2007, p.136). The researcher is, in fact, eager to follow-up on interesting developments and to allow the interviewee to make his own elaboration on particular aspects. The researcher usually adopts this kind of format when he doesn’t want to limit the depth of the respondent’s answer.

Eighteen questions (see Appendix) were carefully prepared in order to clearly communicate what was to be investigated and to collect useful information. Questions were formulated using simple words and expressions in Italian in order to allow students with dyslexia to grasp the meaning and the main focus quickly. I opted for some closed-ended questions and some open-ended questions because the main aim was not to get completely uniform answers, but rather to allow respondents to articulate some answers that were true and meaningful to them, although inscribed within a particular topic area.

The questions obviously focused on FL teaching and oral production in classroom. The first question introduced the topic and helped to create an initial rapport, encouraging students to open up. The first questions dealt with the perception of the importance of

English language competence and the model of correctness. Then some questions concerning communication within the classroom (instructions, revision, feedback) followed, along with a specific question on phonetics teaching and on the time allocated to each of the four abilities (speaking, reading, writing, listening). Since fear of speaking and difficulties in oral production were two of the main areas of difficulty analyzed in the thesis, a couple of questions were related to them. Furthermore, students were asked whether some multi-sensory techniques, strategies and technologies are used within their classroom during English lessons. Eventually, they were given the opportunity to share their preferred mode of practicing, whether individually or in pairs or in groups providing the reason for that and they were asked to suggest activities they would like to engage in to improve their speaking skills. The closing question was, therefore, particularly important, to allow students to have the final say.

### 5.3 Participants

As previously stated, the main aim of the survey was to collect students' point of view on the topics discussed in the present work. I already underlined the importance of cooperation between students and teachers and I believe it is important to render learners aware of the relevance of their needs and perceptions and that these have to be shared with their teachers in order to help them know how to plan their lessons effectively (see chapter 4). Qualitative studies are usually carried with a small sample of participants given that a lot of time is needed in order to ask the questions and to take notes and evaluate data. This is why only a restricted number of students from the middle school and secondary school were interviewed.

First of all I prepared a consent form to be signed by the parents of minors I was to interview, as specifically required by the headmaster of the middle school I contacted. The form included a clear explanation of the purpose of the research and the number and type of questions prepared. I also included a statement regarding the fact that results would be kept confidential and reported anonymously. Finally I included the signature of my thesis' supervisor.

As regards students of the middle school, I found it important to get in contact with the state school "Ferraris" in Modena where I had previously worked for a couple of years as an English teacher. One of the teachers helped me to coordinate the project and she took

care of collecting parents' permissions for the interviews. Nine students of the second and third year were interviewed at school in a room reserved for the occasion.

With regard to secondary school, I interviewed three students from Modena whose contacts were given by their support tutor, who was currently working to help them overcome their difficulties. I also interviewed other students I had met previously, who were eager to answer my questions face to face or on the phone, when not available, for a meeting. The total number of them was six.

I got the impression that some of the students were reluctant and a little bit distrustful at the beginning, so it took me some time to create a friendly atmosphere to proceed with the questions. I broke the ice by making some jokes and introducing them to my experience as a student, bearing in mind that the quality of the subsequent responses would largely depend on the climate of trust I was able to create. All students were positively surprised at realizing that their contribution was to be highly valued as essential to help their teachers gain more information on how to help them better in learning the FL.

They were in fact informed about my intention to create a final handout for the teachers with some general suggestions made by the pupils. It is generally recognized that students tend to feel ill at ease when interviewed about their teachers' approaches and techniques, because they are afraid that what they say can turn against them. For this reason I had to make sure they knew that the data from the interview would be kept anonymous and not shown to their teachers and I asked if it would be possible to be alone with the students. This was essential for them, in order for them to answer freely without feeling the constraints of being inside the school.

I asked for their permission to record the interviews and, before starting, I carefully explained to them the main objectives of the survey and I reassured them there were no right or wrong answers. I also made sure they knew they had the basic right to withdraw from the interview at any point if they did not feel at ease. However, these problems did not emerge and the interviews ran smoothly.

## 5.4 Data collection

As Dörnyei (2007) pointed out, we should remember that qualitative research is, by definition, less systematic and standardized in its data collection approach than quantitative research and that the complexity of the data that researchers collect is often only a reflection of the difficult real-life situations that the data concerns (p. 125)

As previously stated, data was collected by means of taking notes and by recording the students' responses while speaking, in order to be able to re-listen to them later. Taking notes is, in fact, not enough, as it is usually impossible to grasp all the details and personal meanings. However as Dörnyei (2007) pointed out, many people do not like to be recorded and it was therefore essential to discuss it with them in advance.

While conducting the interview I tried to maintain a position of neutrality although communication is a co-constructed social exchange (see 3.1) rather than a neutral exchange of questions and answers and taking an empathic position appears almost unavoidable. This empathic approach helps, in fact, to elicit more honesty, as the interviewer is seen as an ally (Dörnyei, 2007). However there should be a balance between non-judgemental neutrality and empathetic understanding and approval. I also tried to stick to Robson's (2002) general advice for interviewers:

- a. "Listen more than you speak. Most interviewers talk too much. The interview is not a platform for the interviewer's personal experiences and opinions;
- b. put questions in a straightforward, clear and non-threatening way. If people are confused or defensive, you will not get the information you seek;
- c. eliminate cues which lead interviewees to respond in a particular way. Many interviewees will seek to please the interviewer by giving "correct" responses;
- d. enjoy it (or at least look as though you do). Do not give the message that you are bored or scared. Vary your voice and facial expression" (quoted by Dörnyei, 2007, p.142).

It was also important to employ other techniques while the interview was going on. First of all I tried to provide "back-channeling" signals by means of nodding, one-word utterances and so on. This was very important to show that I was following and interested in students' answers. Even a sympathetic smile proved essential to make them feel more comfortable, encouraged in their elaboration. Also, even in the case of interviews on the phone, I tried to

smile as much as possible and to provide frequent feedback without interrupting the flow of discourse. It was also necessary in some cases to refocus learners' responses in a kind and friendly way, to go back to the main topic discussed.

I closed the interview by summarising and recapping the main points of the discussion, to check whether I misunderstood something and to give the interviewee the possibility to correct it. Finally, I expressed my gratitude again and underlined how their contribution would be useful to help me and other teachers to gain more awareness on the matters discussed.

## 5.5 Results

In order to break the ice, I started with a general question to test how important it is for students to learn English and why. Only one out of fifteen students answered that it is not so important, whereas everybody else claimed English learning is rather essential for numerous reasons. Firstly, they tend to look ahead, without limiting the use of English within the classroom, but thinking about their future. Almost all of them, in fact, referred to the importance of developing a good knowledge and competence of the language to be able to find a good job and to be able to travel autonomously without the need of an interpreter. Secondly, the younger students mentioned the international status and primacy of English and the desire to travel to the USA on holiday. Interestingly, one of the oldest students, who is already working part-time, was aware of the benefits he could experience at work, if he knew English better, but he complained that he experiences profound shortcomings while speaking. Additionally, some other students believe it is important for one's own personal culture.

In chapter 3 I discussed the importance of the model of reference for students, including the notion of correctness. I stated that at the beginning of the learning, the teacher is usually the one providing the model and students simply stick to it without, in most of the cases, getting in touch with other resources and types of accent, which might be a little bit limiting. The second question concerned, therefore, the point of reference students have in mind when thinking about a correct model of speaking. Most of the students mentioned their professor or a native speaker. Surprisingly, some of them referred to relatives as their model for correct and fluent speaking. A student mentioned his sister who had spent three

years in the UK, another student mentioned his uncle who often travels for work and another his father for the same reason. Only one student answered that he had no model.

The following questions aimed at collecting some of the perceptions learners have with reference to communication within the classroom (discussed in 4.3). The third question was specifically asking whether the teacher speaks in the target language, in Italian or in both languages during the lessons. Only one student answered that his teacher speaks only Italian. A third of the students claimed their teachers speak mostly Italian and only a little bit of English during classes, whereas most of the students said their teachers speak in both languages during the lesson, on an almost equal basis depending on the activity being carried on. I also asked them whether they find instructions and explanations provided before tasks, homework and tests, thorough and clear enough. The stress was particularly placed on which language is employed for instructions and explanations and half of the students stated that explanations are always provided in Italian. The rest of the students answered that they are conveyed in English as well as Italian. As regards accessibility and completeness, the majority of students said they are ok with how explanations are transmitted, whereas a third of them complained that they were not satisfied with the way they are conveyed and would like more precise instructions.

In chapter 4 I largely discussed the importance of clear feedback (see 4.3.3) to support and encourage students and to prevent them from withdrawing. We saw how positive feedback might help enhance self-esteem and confidence. Question 13 was therefore aiming at finding out whether students receive enough feedback from their teachers. I took a while to make them understand what kind of feedback I was referring to: not just the mark but a thorough evaluation including comments and explicit teaching of correct structures when they make mistakes. Some students said they just receive a mark, whereas others said they usually receive feedback that includes only correction of pronunciation and an invitation to “speak more easily”. Only a few learners stated that the teacher takes time to offer them an alternative sentence or word and gives some advice in order for them to improve.

With regard to how the lesson and its content are structured, one of the questions dealt with revision (discussed in 4.2.2) of what has been done during the previous lessons. A third of the learners answered they are offered frequent revision, with some students explaining that it is usually done every third lesson, or every lesson, only if somebody had not

understood something. Some students claimed they only have revision through oral tests at the beginning of each lesson. Only a couple of students claimed there is no revision at all.

When asked to put the four abilities (Speaking, reading, writing and listening) in order, from the most to the least practised during the lesson, the results showed that writing came first, reading second, and listening and speaking last, with speaking practised less than listening. It was no surprise, then, to receive lots of negative answers to question 10, which was inquiring about the opportunity to orally practise at the end of the lesson, the structures and words learnt that day. Only two students out of fifteen said they are given opportunities to practise the language a little bit, but not in pairs or groups, whereas the rest of the students claimed the teacher speaks the most and they can only practise speaking during oral tests or after many lessons on the same topic.

Since, in the previous chapter, I highlighted the importance of specific phonetic training to support dyslexic students (see 4.7.2), I also asked the pupils if some time is allocated to English phonetics learning and whether they have the chance to repeat and practise the sounds of the language. Half of the students answered negatively, whereas the rest of them pointed out they receive some sort of guidance only when they need to be corrected because they mispronounce words. Furthermore, they specified they practise only those sounds found in the dialogues at the beginning of each unit in their books, on which they are later tested.

When asked about assessment, the students gave different answers, but a common denominator was that written tests largely outnumber oral tests that are generally limited to one or two per semester. Surprisingly, a couple of students underlined that, since they are dyslexic, they are always exempted from oral tests and only have to take written examinations. Only one student (of the secondary school) claimed his teacher usually tests students progressively, by asking a couple of questions every now and then, without telling them it was an oral test.

I also considered it extremely important to get an idea of what kind of difficulties the students experience in the FL oral production and whether they find themselves at ease while speaking, or are fearful and, if so, why. With regard to the difficulties experienced, pronunciation was the first answer of many students, followed by difficulties with retrieving words and sentence formulation. A couple of students lamented the inability to build a fluent and clear discourse without getting stuck, because of lapses of memory and

only one added problems experienced while trying to conjugate verbs. When interviewed about their fear of speaking, half of the students stated they are not scared at all, while the other 50 % declared they are worried about making mistakes or say things which have nothing to do with what is being discussed. They also recalled the discomfort they experience because of the fear of being judged by the rest of the class and ultimately by their teacher. More than one student in fact said he feels humiliated when the teacher scolds him in front of everybody and this prevents him from speaking freely.

I also asked whether students are granted the opportunity to have a weekly appointment with a native speaker of English during the FL lesson. In many middle and secondary schools in Italy it is very common to benefit from such an experience as part of the curriculum. All students from the middle school answered positively, while among students from the secondary school, only one said he actually get the chance to join these types of lessons but he claimed that he is not enjoying it fully because he feels scared about making mistakes in front of everybody.

Thinking about other possible ways or tools to boost oral production, I asked students if their teachers employ any technologies for practising listening and comprehension and whether they use realia in classrom (e.g. pictures, objects, cards). Surprisingly, all students said that realia are never used in class and they only see pictures in the book or on black and white photocopies. Concerning technology, most of them pointed out that there is an interactive whiteboard in class, but only a few students claimed that it is used every lesson, with the majority of them underlying that it is employed rarely. Middle school students' books, for instance, present them with a dialogue only at the beginning of each unit and this is the only exercise of listening they do, when the teacher does not forget the cd: they said, unfortunately, it happens very often. Four students lamented that they are not supported by the whiteboard in class and the teacher usually uses the CD player instead, but only when it is available (they complained many CD players were not working properly).

While moving towards the end of the interview, it was interesting to collect some ideas and get to know about students' preferred modalities of learning, and strategies that they do already apply to get started before oral production/test. I specifically asked them if they prefer to work individually, in pairs or in groups. At that point, almost all of them claimed they never have the chance to work with other classmates (apparently there is no time) and

so I asked them to answer hypothetically. Almost all students underlined they would prefer to work in pairs or groups for many reasons. First, to receive help and correction from classmates and secondly to practise FL speaking. Only three students considered working individually to be better, because they said it is usually difficult to find a compromise when working with different people and ideas.

Question 17 was meant to delve deeper into specific strategies students employ to prepare themselves for oral tests and activities. Answers were not homogeneous at all since half of the students do not create maps or diagrams but only study grammar charts at the end of the book or vocabulary lists provided during the lesson and they have never asked their teachers whether they can keep it visible during the oral test or activity. This means they struggle hard to learn them by heart. A couple of students even said they usually write a complete text on the topic they are expected to talk about and they try to memorize it because they are not allowed to use maps or cards with key words. In this way they try to cope with memory lapses and difficulties in sentence formulation. Numerous students from the middle school, though, stated they are familiar with conceptual maps. They said they usually prepare them at home and have permission to use them in class, even though one student in particular said he always tries not to look at them, to see if he remembers words without aid.

Eventually I addressed them with question 18. At this point students were asked to think about effective and engaging activities that they believed could be performed during English lessons to help improve oral production and communicative competence. Surprisingly, ideas flowed abundantly and students felt very encouraged to provide practical examples that could benefit all learners without making any distinction.

Some of them suggested watching movies with subtitles in the original language could be a good way to expand vocabulary and also to enhance discussions about the topic of the film. They also added, something creative could be following the movie to sum up the main points discussed, such as a poster or a diagram, to help memorise concepts. Students also said it would be nice to plan to go to the movies or to go to the theater to attend a performance in English, but this would be done as extra school activity.

Other students highlighted the importance of reading books in English and of giving feedback on the content, so that words and expressions learnt in the book could be recycled while talking about it. As regards reading, some of the older students mentioned the

necessity to be aware of latest news items and proposed to read English newspapers or online articles in class, followed by activities to re-elaborate information in a more accessible way. Viewing documentaries and listening to real interviews was also suggested by some students. Given that students are generally keen on listening to music, it was also recommended that English song texts could be printed out and read (and sung) while listening to the music. Of course, they said, students' favorite groups and singers should be selected for this activity. For the more kinaesthetic learners, some ideas were also put forward.

Interestingly, students expressed the need to use more pictures and objects in class and they underlined the importance of playing games in order to remember better. One of the students explicitly pointed out "if I have fun, I remember". One of the suggestions was to have a "merenda" in English during one of the lessons and that would include preparing it from scratch: cooking and helping each other in the process, using only the target language. Following the same principle, other students mentioned the possibility of doing crafts at school, in English.

Furthermore, all students agreed on the fact that they should be more immersed in the language and some of them referred to the importance of CLIL methodology for instance, and they stated they would like to study one of their school subjects in English. They also introduced the idea of an exchange project that could include two schools: one Italian and the other American or British. They said it could be nice to create and send videos, where everybody introduces him/herself to the foreign students and to wait for similar feedback. They suggested trips could be arranged to meet these new friends in the country they live, stay at their homes, and viceversa, in order to improve fluency and communicative competence. Although this latter idea would be more complicated to implement, surely an exchange of letters or e-mails or Skype sessions could be highly beneficial to students.

## 5.6 Discussion

The data collected showed that all learners are motivated to learn the FL, either for personal interest, desire to travel or for the future, when thinking of obtaining a job, for instance. I have stated that motivation explains the reason why people decide to do something and the acquisition of language is impossible without it: it depends, somehow, on strong objectives (as seen in 2.3.2). I found it extremely encouraging then to see that all

of the students I interviewed were eager to study English, considering that most of the time it is easy for dyslexic students to lose interest in the FL because of discouragement coming from the difficulties they experience.

As regards their points of reference for correctness in FL, I was clearly expecting them to mention their professor or a general native speaker, thus confirming the ideas expressed in 3.3.4. The professor is, in fact, in most cases, the only person they listen to speaking in English and they idealistically think of mother tongue speakers as the best model of FL oral production, without taking into consideration the fact that native spoken language is far from being perfect and correct.

When discussing instructions and explanations, only half of the students answered that they were spoken in Italian and as a result the rest of them are sometimes struggling to understand exactly what they have to do and, hence, are longing for more precise information in their native language. As previously seen (see 4.3.1) communication has to be clear, especially for students with dyslexia and those with auditory processing problems. I also discussed the importance of clear and comprehensive feedback, that needs to be frequent and focused on learning rather than on marks, and that teachers should provide the correct model if students are mistaken. It emerged from the interviews that learners mostly get only a mark or are just corrected when mispronouncing words. Most of them receive no praise nor encouragement and this seems particularly important, especially when dealing with dyslexic students, whose self-esteem might be threatened easily by failures or negative marks.

Given that dyslexic students present limited working memory capacity, it is essential for them to be offered frequent revision, as seen in the previous chapter. However, only a third of the students said they were provided with some form of revision at the beginning of the lesson, although it is not always so frequent, while some students even claimed they are tested orally as a form of brush up, and they receive a mark for that. This could lead to anxiety and fear of asking for further explanations, in case what has been previously done is not clear enough.

In line with what was stated in the introduction to the present work, data reported that listening and speaking are the least practiced skills in classroom and that the only opportunities to practice oral production is during oral tests which seems absolutely

counter-productive and not fair, given that students are tested on something they never have the chance to practice in the classroom.

In 4.7.2 I reminded the reader that oral language proficiency is linked to phonology and therefore speaking English implies being able to produce the English speech sounds and sound patterns. Phonetic training is a necessary requirement for learners studying an FL language, especially English which is a non-transparent language as seen in 2.4.3, and proves, therefore, more difficult for dyslexic students to learn. It seems that the direct teaching of the sound and sound-symbol system of the FL significantly improves the performance of at-risk FL learners (see chapter 4). As previously seen in fact, students who are able to use the phonological code, competently recognize words more easily and this way they can interact more successfully in the FL as seen in 3.2.2. Unfortunately, those students interviewed claimed they receive some guidance and correction only when they mispronounce words but there is no specific training included at a particular stage during the lesson. Learners from the middle school stated they get to practice sounds and pronunciation only when they read the dialogue at the beginning of a unit and this seems to be inadequate as a certain amount of time to explicitly focus on sounds and phonetics should be allocated by teachers. As previously seen, the reason for this is that their pronunciation could be otherwise affected by a tendency to apply the sound/spelling rules of their L1. What is more, without training, they can easily confuse similar words and letters.

As a consequence, the difficulties which the students who were interviewed experience the most are concerned with pronunciation, word retrieval and sentence formulation. It is no wonder that these areas are the most affected, given that students receive very little training in phonetics and they also get almost no opportunity to try to speak in class. Obviously they stated they are not fluent and half of them declared they are scared to speak, because they are worried about making mistakes and being judged negatively by the teacher and their classmates. This is possibly due to the fact that they are not used to working in pairs or groups and this results in a great discomfort since they feel they have to carry their burden on their own, without being able to share tasks and cooperate with other learners.

The reason they are afraid of their teachers' judgment probably derives from their way of providing feedback. As previously seen, teachers tend to evaluate students with a mark only, sometimes by listing mistakes, without explaining thoroughly what can be modified,

and without any word of encouragement, in most of the cases. However, as seen in the previous chapter after either oral or written test, an evaluative comment should follow that takes into account the targets reached and highlights the things the student can do. In case of gaps, Kormos and Smith (2012) suggested these should be presented as areas that require more work and attention, without referring to them as lack of abilities and that mistakes should not be highlighted too frequently.

As regards working in groups or pairs, almost all students answered they would be eager to try out this way of learning and practicing the FL since they said it could be encouraging for them to receive help from more advanced learners. Following the suggestions proposed in the previous chapter, the final stage of the lesson (the production stage) should be carried out in a way that allows students to be the protagonists and to speak more among themselves and not to the teacher only.

The possibility of having a mother tongue speaker to come into class once a week has spread among a lot of schools up to now and this is meant to enhance speaking and cultural awareness. Usually, during this lesson, the native speaker prepares speaking activities and games to encourage students to speak. Data collected showed that only students in middle school reported this experience and they enjoyed it a lot. I firmly believe that some of the activities that are planned for this type of lesson, could be also implemented during “normal” lessons with the English teacher.

Students lamented, in fact, the absence of games and speaking activities during normal lessons and also the limited exposure to the language. They listen only to dialogues on CDs (in the middle school book there is only one for each unit) and only a few students said the whiteboard is used every lesson. With reference to other aids such as conceptual maps and diagrams, almost half of the students are not used to studying with them and, among those who actually use them, only a few keep them in class during activities, while the rest do not know whether they are allowed or not. Furthermore, realia have never been used in class and that is a pity, given that it could be used to convey messages more clearly, to benefit kinaesthetic and visual students, alike.

I found students proposals to question 18 particularly valid and in line with the activities proposed in the previous chapter. I appreciated their interest in getting to know more about latest news worldwide and other cultures and countries, which I consider fundamental for students to have. Schneider and Crombie (2003) underlined how “in the twenty-first

century with its trend towards global civilization, every global citizen, dyslexic included need to possess cultural awareness” (p.96). This involve respect for cultural differences and dyslexic students as a group of people who display learning differences themselves, might be more inclined to cultural diversity than other students, suggested Schneider and Crombie.

All in all, the collected data from the interviews highlighted the fact that dyslexic learners needs are not fully taken into consideration, probably because information on dyslexia and methods to deal with it are not common components of FL teacher training programmes. Teachers should therefore be encouraged to include more teaching and testing strategies that recognize the needs and reality of students with language processing difficulties in FL classes. Success for students with dyslexia can in fact only be achieved when the strategies and techniques considered in the previous chapter and general knowledge of dyslexia are fully considered.

## Conclusion

It has been seen how nowadays English language has become an international language and it serves as *lingua franca* worldwide and is an essential tool for communication. Unfortunately, most Italian schools generally prepare students to be structurally competent but who cannot communicate appropriately. I firmly believe, therefore, that, if every student is considered a global citizen, he or she must get the opportunity to get hold of this tool. Teachers play an important role in providing learners with opportunities and support to express themselves in the FL and they should do that inclusively, “meeting a truly increasingly diverse students body in today’s FL classes” (Schneider and Crombie, 2003, p.96).

As stated in the introduction, it is in fact the right of everyone to be helped to realize his or her potential in FL learning. The present work has specifically introduced dyslexia and its effects on FL learning, considering various aspects, but specifically focusing on speech production and communicative competence. Besides the difficulties of reading and spelling that are generally associated with dyslexia, there are difficulties in recognizing language patterns that are presented orally. This Thesis has identified, therefore, some approaches and techniques to increase the possibilities for dyslexic students to study in inclusive environments and to gain more communicative competence in the FL.

Chapter 1 introduced the main theories of bilingual speech and Levelt’s model that is the most widely used in the theoretical framework of FL speech production. Speech production effort is rather different in L1 and FL due to the reduced attentional resources and the restricted phonological short-term memory capacity of dyslexic learners. Dyslexic students might not be able to recall a series of verbally presented ideas and, since they may have serious difficulties in speech perception, they might find it difficult to understand longer spoken texts and to speak in the FL. What is more, the time pressure of oral communication increases the difficulty with word-retrieval from memory. When considering English, as the main FL studied in schools, it is also fundamental to remember that it is a non-transparent language which presents complex phoneme-to-grapheme mappings. Chapter 2 focused on dyslexia, on the basic learning mechanisms and those areas specifically affected by it: working memory and automaticity. It also provided some possible cognitive, neurological and genetic explanations of dyslexia and considered some features, such as affective factors, that are extremely important to consider in order to

prevent dyslexic students from withdrawing from FL learning. It went on to present a more detailed description of the type of difficulties learners experience when learning English, struggling to reach a satisfactory interlanguage. Chapter 3 introduced the concept of oral interaction by drawing from general considerations on communication and what it means for the pedagogical implications in FL listening comprehension and FL speaking-related difficulties dyslexic students might experience. It also dealt with the downsides of a “perfectionist” approach to the language and an idealistic model of FL correctness that seems to characterize some school environments. It ended by listing some of the most common teaching methods that prove inadequate when applied to teach dyslexic students. Chapter 4 shared therefore considerations on inclusive teaching and strategies to allow dyslexic students to fully engage in multi-sensory, structured, metalinguistic learning activities. After seeing some of the basic theoretical MSL principles, some practical suggestions to enhance FL speaking through a 3-stages-lesson, followed. Technology too can be a valuable support to dyslexic students and some proposals to increase motivation and to enable learners to practice more were provided within this chapter. Chapter 5 reported the data collected from some interviews that aimed at looking at those issues discussed in the thesis from the students’ perspective. It was useful to see how English learning is experienced in some middle and secondary schools and learners themselves provided some final suggestions in order to enhance FL speaking in class.

From the information assimilated in the course of the research for this Thesis, the following implications could be drawn for more effective teaching to dyslexic students that aims at speaking and communicative competence in the FL:

- a. as seen in the introduction, instruction begins when the teacher learns from the learner by putting himself in their place so that it is possible to understand what the student learns and the way he understands it. It is therefore important to be informed about dyslexia and its impact on FL learning. Given that every student is special and presents a particular profile and specific needs, regular dialogue in an atmosphere of trust is needed, in order to find the strategies that work best for each learner. Teachers should also re-evaluate how much can be covered in each lesson and adjust the material in a way that suits everybody, respecting all learning styles and specific needs. As previously seen, inclusion is not about staying the pace whatever the cost. The teacher might need to add clearer instructions through

- handouts, phonetic training and explanations on how to create and use conceptual maps, thus “slowing down” the pre-fixed schedule;
- b. the success of a dyslexic student depends therefore also on the teacher’s flexibility and commitment to integrate his or her current method with maybe different but essential strategies and techniques. Most teachers usually tend to stick to previously learned FL teaching strategies or pedagogical belief systems. Teaching should be a combination of approaches and strategies that best meet the needs of the students within a particular classroom. On one side, the multi-sensory approach and techniques have surely recorded successful outcomes in most cases. However, integration of some aspects like frequent revision and distributed practice over extended period of time suggested by the UBI approach or the possibility to structure the lesson in 3 different stages as in the PPP method, could provide a more solid framework within which to operate;
  - c. it is very important that all students are allowed to try out the language for themselves through interactive games and activities in the classroom, during the production stage (in the model I suggested). It seems in fact that most students are reluctant to use the FL for interaction because they do not practice enough in class. FL teachers should therefore foster pair or group work and discussion since it provides more time to practice and should avoid overcorrection not to inhibit students’ willingness to communicate. If too much emphasis is put on “correctness” in speaking, this creates such an impossible standard to reach that it prevents students from trying to speak unless they are sure to be correct;
  - d. given that interaction is made up by a speaker but also a listener, developing listening skills is also essential. Most FL learners will not acquire a comfortable ability to listen and understand the FL as spoken by native speakers if they only listen to their teachers. It is important for learners to access various resources during listening activities, previously accommodated to meet all their different needs. Although a lot of schools lack technological aids and support, it is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure that students get the opportunity to be extensively exposed to the language;
  - e. self-esteem and motivation are fundamental. As seen in chapter 2, motivation explains the reason why people decide to do something and the acquisition of language is impossible without it. It is therefore essential that dyslexic students are provided with concrete opportunities to experience success through the numerous

techniques and accommodations suggested, since only through success, can self-esteem grow. Teachers should bear in mind that success can only be reached through small achievable steps, acknowledgment of individual styles, effective group work, development of students' responsibility, encouragement of creativity and praise of personal qualities and progress. Last but not least, teachers should provide constant feedback on progress, that should be individualized, as progress is personal, focusing on positive achievements rather than on gaps in knowledge. This appears extremely important for learners to develop and maintain self-belief.

Far from being definitive, I hope this work has stimulated new reflections on the issues discussed and has raised more awareness on the need to focus more on the development of oral communicative competence.

*QUESTIONNAIRE SAMPLE*

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- 1) Quanto è importante per te studiare Inglese? Per quale motivo?
- 2) Chi rappresenta per te un modello di riferimento corretto per la lingua?
- 3) In che lingua parla il professore di inglese in classe?
- 4) Il professore da' istruzioni dettagliate e accurate? In che lingua?
- 5) C'è frequente revisione di ciò che è stato fatto la volta precedente?
- 6) Il professore dedica del tempo all' insegnamento dei suoni (fonologia) della lingua? Se sì, vi da modo di praticarli e di ripeterli?
- 7) In che ordine metteresti le seguenti abilità dalla più sviluppata in classe a quella cui viene dedicato meno tempo:
  - a. parlato
  - b. lettura
  - c. scrittura
  - d. ascolto
- 8) Qual è la difficoltà maggiore che incontri quando devi parlare in inglese?
- 9) Provi timore ad esprimerti in lingua in classe? Se sì, per quale ragione?
- 10) Hai la possibilità di praticare oralmente le strutture apprese al termine di ogni lezione?
- 11) Segui l'ora con la madrelingua in compresenza? Hai possibilità di interagire durante la lezione? Se no, perché?
- 12) Quante interrogazioni e quante verifiche hai a quadrimestre?
- 13) Ti viene dato un feedback dopo l'interrogazione orale? In che modo?

- 14) Preferisci lavorare individualmente/ in coppia/ in gruppo? Per quale motivo?
- 15) Quali tecnologie e mezzi vengono utilizzati in classe per l'ascolto della lingua?
- 16) Il professore usa realia (oggetti/immagini/parole stampate) durante la lezione? Puoi fare esempi?
- 17) Quali strumenti/strategie utilizzi per prepararti alle interrogazioni/attività orali in classe (es. rubrica/schemi grammaticali/mappe concettuali)?
- 18) Quali pensi potrebbero essere delle attività utili per imparare a comunicare?

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