

Teachers, parents and partners as social mediators of L2 motivation among Italian informal users of English

CAMILLA DE RISO
University of Pavia

Received 9 February 2026; accepted 9 June 2026

ABSTRACT

EN The growing availability of English in digital environments has fostered new profiles of informal L2 learner-users characterised by autonomy and enjoyment. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 20 Italian university students, this study adopts a retrospective, longitudinally informed qualitative perspective to examine how engagement with English beyond the classroom—particularly through digital media—develops over time and shapes learners' motivation and L2 identity. Findings indicate that early informal engagement is often driven by necessity, as English functions as the default language of online content but gradually evolves into preference-driven use, sustained by enjoyment and perceived authenticity. Participants also frequently trace their initial engagement to the influence of significant others, especially teachers and parents, who act as encouragers and linguistic role models. Interpreted within Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, the results suggest that informal practices and social mediation are closely intertwined in shaping learners' motivational trajectories and developing L2 identities beyond the classroom.

Key words: INFORMAL LANGUAGE LEARNING, L2 ENGLISH, L2 MOTIVATIONAL SELF SYSTEM, AUDIOVISUAL INPUT, TEACHER INFLUENCE

ES La presencia del inglés en los entornos digitales ha favorecido la emergencia de perfiles de aprendientes-usuarios informales de L2, caracterizados por la autonomía y el disfrute. A partir de entrevistas semiestructuradas con 20 estudiantes universitarios italianos, este estudio cualitativo analiza en retrospectiva cómo la interacción con el inglés fuera del aula, especialmente a través de los medios digitales, afecta la motivación y la identidad en la L2 a lo largo del tiempo. Los resultados muestran que el acceso temprano al inglés suele producirse por necesidad, al ser la lengua por defecto de muchos contenidos en línea, para evolucionar posteriormente hacia un uso basado en la preferencia, sustentado en el disfrute y en la percepción de autenticidad. Asimismo, docentes y padres emergen como mediadores clave en las trayectorias motivacionales. Desde el marco del *L2 Motivational Self System* (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), los hallazgos evidencian la interrelación entre prácticas informales y mediación social más allá del aula.

Palabras clave: APRENDIZAJE INFORMAL DE LENGUAS, INGLÉS COMO L2, L2 MOTIVATIONAL SELF SYSTEM, INPUT AUDIOVISUAL, INFLUENCIA DEL PROFESORADO

IT La presenza dell'inglese negli ambienti digitali ha favorito l'emergere di profili di apprendenti-utenti informali di L2 connotati da un uso autonomo e da un elevato apprezzamento dei media in lingua inglese. Sulla base di interviste semi-strutturate con 20 studenti universitari italiani, questo studio qualitativo analizza in retrospettiva come l'interazione con l'inglese al di fuori del contesto scolastico, in particolare attraverso i media digitali, influenzi nel tempo la motivazione e l'identità nella L2. I risultati indicano che il primo accesso all'inglese informale avviene generalmente per necessità, in quanto lingua predefinita di molti contenuti online, per evolvere successivamente in un uso basato sulla preferenza personale, guidato dal piacere e dalla percezione di autenticità dell'input nella L2. Inoltre, docenti e genitori emergono come mediatori e modelli linguistici nelle traiettorie motivazionali. Interpretati alla luce del modello *L2 Motivational Self System* (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), i risultati evidenziano l'interrelazione tra pratiche informali e il ruolo di docenti e genitori come mediatori oltre i confini dell'aula.

Parole chiave: APPRENDIMENTO INFORMALE DELLE LINGUE, INGLESE L2, SISTEMA MOTIVAZIONALE DEL SÉ PER LA L2, INPUT AUDIOVISIVO, RUOLO DELL'INSEGNANTE

1. Introduction

With the emergence of the Internet and the increasing affordances of digital technologies, interest in language learning beyond the classroom has gained momentum (Dressman & Sadler, 2020; Sockett, 2014; Toffoli et al., 2023). While the effectiveness of out-of-class exposure for L2 development has been widely attested (Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2018; Azzolini et al., 2022; De Wilde et al., 2020; Peters, 2018; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016), only recently has research on Informal Second Language Learning (ISLL) begun to address learners' perspectives on informal engagement with English, including their motivation, perceptions and experiences with the L2 (Arndt, 2019; Chik, 2019; Lee & Lee, 2021). The ever-growing availability of English in informal contexts has contributed to shaping new profiles of second language (L2) learner-users, in which autonomy and enjoyment function as key structuring dimensions of learning experience and identity (Mariotti, 2024; Pavesi, 2024). However, comparatively less attention has been paid to the social contexts in which informal learner-users' autonomy develops. Even within media-rich and self-directed learning environments, engagement with informal English remains embedded in interpersonal relationships and shaped by the influence of significant others, such as teachers, parents, partners and friends (Leone & Paone, 2024).

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 20 Italian university students who primarily access English through digital media, the present study investigates the interplay between informal L2 input and learner-users' motivation. The study adopts a retrospective, longitudinally informed qualitative perspective to explore how informal engagement with English develops over time. Framed within Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, it further examines how the influence of teachers, parents, partners and friends mediates learner-users' self-images, learning experiences and engagement with informal English. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to a more socially grounded understanding of ISLL in contemporary digital environments.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces the theoretical framework of ISLL and reviews research on learner users' motivation in informal English learning contexts. Section 3 describes the study's aims and research design, including details on participants, data collection procedure and analytic approach. Section 4 presents and discusses the findings of the qualitative analysis, which is illustrated with interview excerpts. Section 5 concludes the paper by summarising the main results and outlining implications for future research.

2. Exploring motivation in informal English language learning

In the contemporary context of globalisation and media saturation, the unprecedented availability of English across traditional and digital platforms has redirected scholarly attention from the classroom to L2 learners' informal practices. Informal language learning is defined by Pavesi (2024) as implying free, self-directed contact with the L2 in non-educational locations for entertainment, social and information-seeking purposes. Such learning is believed to occur in the absence of any (self-)instruction and mostly incidentally, "as a result of an overriding focus on meaning rather than explicit attention to linguistic forms" (Pavesi, 2024, p. 35). At the same time, the boundaries of informal language learning are not always easy to draw in empirical research. Learner users' engagement with English outside the classroom may remain largely autonomous and non-institutional while also being shaped, at times, by recommendations from teachers or peers, through the use of subtitles or other means of comprehension support and by L2 practices characterised by varying degrees of awareness and intention. These practices do not always fit neatly within a single definition of informal language learning, suggesting that the scope of informal engagement may extend beyond what is typically captured in existing definitions. This diversity is also reflected in the terminology used in the field, where closely related constructs such as Extramural English (EE), Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) and ISLL are used to capture different aspects of informal language learning and use. While EE (Sundqvist, 2009) refers more broadly to out-of-school exposure and use, IDLE (Lee, 2026) emphasises digitally mediated practices. ISLL (Kusyk et al., 2025) encompasses both digital and non-digital forms of informal engagement, including online and offline practices, and is therefore adopted in this study as an overarching term.

In recent years, research on ISLL has become a fruitful field of investigation, exploring both digital and real-world environments for language learning and use across Europe (Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2018; De Riso, 2025; Krüger, 2023; Lyrigkou, 2023; Muñoz, 2020; Pavesi et al., 2025; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Audiovisual Input (AVI), particularly films and television series, is widely recognised as a valuable resource for second language acquisition (Caruana, 2021; Kuppens, 2010; Montero Perez, 2022; Muñoz, 2022; Muñoz &

Miralpeix, 2024; Muñoz & Peters, 2020; Peters & Webb, 2018; Werner & Tegge, 2022). Research in this area has primarily examined AVI effects on vocabulary and listening (Montero Perez et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2016), grammar (Ghia, 2012; Pattenmore & Muñoz, 2020, 2023; Puimège & Peters, 2020) and pronunciation (Wisniewska & Mora, 2020; Yibokou, 2023), overall highlighting the positive influence of informal exposure on L2 development. Beyond linguistic outcomes, engagement with informal English input has also been shown to influence how learner-users conceptualise the language and their relationship to it (Aiello, 2018; Berns et al., 2007; De Riso 2025; Ferguson, 2015; Pavesi & Ghia, 2020). Consequently, recent research has shifted from a primary focus on learning outcomes to a closer examination of learners' motivational orientations, attitudes and identity-related processes, emphasising learners-users' perspectives on their informal contact with English (Arndt, 2023; Lee & Lee, 2021; Leone & Paone, 2024; Mariotti, 2024).

In a general sense, *motivation* can be defined as a dynamic process driven by the interaction of attractive and propelling forces that guide individuals' cognitive and behavioural activity in selecting, prioritising and pursuing goals over time (Dörnyei, 2009). However, the complex and rapidly changing global, social and virtual landscape in which language learning and use now take place calls for a reconceptualization of L2 motivation as a dynamic process grounded in learners' self-representations and situated learning experiences within the technological and mobility-driven environments they inhabit (Benson, 2021). In response to this need for a more learner-centred and context-sensitive understanding of L2 motivation, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposed the L2 Motivational Self System, a model comprising three components: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self and the Language Learning Experience. The Ideal L2 Self, as further elaborated in Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011, 2021), refers to the image of oneself as a competent user of the target language and represents the personally desired future identity that learners aspire to approximate, therefore providing a powerful motivational drive. The Ought-to L2 Self, also discussed in Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011, 2021), concerns the attributes learners believe they should possess in order to meet the expectations of significant others – such as family members, peers, institutional or social authorities – and to avoid potential negative outcomes. The L2 Learning Experience captures the situated and immediate dimensions of motivation linked to learners' actual engagement in the learning process, including the role of teachers, curricular practices, peer interactions and experiences of success or failure (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, 2021). As motivational influences are continuously reshaped by shifting constellations of internal and external forces, the three components of the L2 Motivational Self System should be interpreted not as stable predictors but as context-sensitive resources whose relative salience fluctuates across contexts and time (Dörnyei, 2009, pp. 210-211). This dynamic perspective highlights the need to examine L2 motivation as a trajectory shaped by learners' evolving engagement with learning environments rather than as a fixed set of determinants.

Lee and Lee (2021) examine the relationship between IDLE, the L2 Motivational Self System and foreign language enjoyment among Korean learners of English. Based on questionnaire data, their findings indicate that both the Ideal L2 Self and engagement in IDLE activities are significant predictors of L2 enjoyment across different educational cohorts. Learners with a vivid L2 self-image, often associated with future-oriented visions involving personal or professional use of English, report higher levels of enjoyment as English learning is experienced as a meaningful step towards desired future identities (Lee & Lee, 2021, p. 366). Similarly, frequent engagement in IDLE practices, such as watching English YouTube videos and interacting with English speakers via social media, is associated with increased L2 enjoyment (Lee & Lee, 2021, p. 366). Conversely, the Ought-to L2 Self predicts enjoyment only among middle school learners, suggesting that motivation based on meeting others' expectations may be particularly salient at earlier stages and may reflect the role of social approval in shaping young learners' affective engagement with English (Lee & Lee, 2021, p. 367). While the study offers robust evidence for the relationship between informal exposure, ideal L2 self-images and enjoyment, it adopts a cross-sectional and affect-focused perspective, leaving the dynamics of individual motivational trajectories and the influence of significant others unexplored.

In a recent qualitative case study, Leone and Paone (2024) investigate university students' motivational thinking in relation to informal English exposure. Grounded in Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with 26 Italian university students to analyse the influence of teachers, parents and peers on motivation, alongside patterns of informal exposure and future-oriented L2 self-concepts (Leone & Paone, 2024, pp. 108-111). Findings highlight the pivotal role of teachers in shaping learners' motivational trajectories. While effective teachers often act as powerful sources of inspiration, encounters with pedagogically less effective teachers do not necessarily result in demotivation, as some learners respond by actively seeking alternative learning pathways, including non-formal instruction. Such responses are characterised by a perceived release from external pressures exerted by parents and

teachers, which coincides with increased learner agency and a stronger alignment with the Ideal L2 Self (Leone & Paone, 2024, p. 128). Media engagement, particularly video games and audiovisual content, also emerges as a salient motivational catalyst, supporting the evolving and context-related nature of motivation in informal language learning. While Leone and Paone (2024) provide valuable insights into the relationship between informal exposure, motivation and social influence, including retrospective accounts of motivational development, the present study offers a more fine-grained reconstruction of how learner-users describe the evolution of their engagement with English across different stages of their lives. Particular attention is paid to how participants describe the transition from early encounters with English to more sustained forms of informal engagement, and to how significant others contribute to the emergence and reshaping of L2 self-images. In doing so, the study extends previous research by examining informal engagement not only as a motivational resource, but also as a socially mediated developmental process through which motivation, identity and language practices become intertwined.

Beyond the L2 Motivational Self System, motivation in informal English language learning has also been examined through alternative theoretical frameworks. Arndt (2023) approaches informal language learning through a behavioural and engagement-oriented framework, conceptualising engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioural, affective, cognitive and linguistic dimensions. Based on questionnaire data and focus group interviews with German secondary school learners, the findings highlight the dynamic and context-dependent nature of engagement, which varies across learners and activity types depending on factors such as interests, proficiency and task characteristics. By contrast, Mariotti (2024) adopts a self-determination theory perspective to investigate Italian university students' motivation and agency in relation to informal English engagement. Drawing on semi-structured interviews supported by questionnaire data, the study distinguishes intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations and analyses learners' expressions of agency. Findings show that informal engagement is primarily sustained by enjoyment, personal interests and internally regulated goals related to language improvement, with higher levels of agency associated with more frequent and strategic exposure to English.

Across these frameworks, teachers emerge as a relevant influence on learners' motivation, whether implicitly through affective engagement (Arndt, 2023) or explicitly through externally regulated motives and agency development (Leone & Paone, 2024; Mariotti, 2024). Extensive research has focused on teachers' behaviour aimed at fostering learner engagement and persistence (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021; Henry & Thorsen, 2018; Lamb, 2017; Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012). While teachers' motivational influence is widely acknowledged, its role in learners' informal language practices remains only partially explored, particularly in relation to how it intersects with learners' autonomy, motivation and identity beyond formal learning contexts. Building on these insights, the present study adopts a qualitative, learner-centred approach to explore how engagement with informal English input and the influence of significant others, with particular attention to teachers, shape learners' motivation over time.

3. The study

3.1 Research questions

The present study approaches informal English language learning as a socially embedded and temporally evolving process, in which learner-users' engagement with English beyond the classroom intersects with the influence of significant others. While existing research has highlighted the role of informal exposure in supporting L2 development and motivation, less is known about how learners themselves interpret the origins and evolution of their out-of-class English practices, particularly in relation to teachers, parents, partners and friends. By adopting a qualitative, learner-centred approach, this study examines retrospective accounts of informal English use to explore how motivation, L2 self-images and engagement with English are described as developing over time. The study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do Italian university students describe the development of their informal engagement with English over time, and what motivational orientations and L2 self-related dimensions emerge from their accounts?
- 2) How do significant others (i.e., teachers, parents, partners and friends) mediate learner-users' motivation, L2 self-images and engagement with informal English input across different stages of their learning trajectories?

These questions are examined within the L2 Motivational Self System framework (Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021), with particular attention to the dynamic interaction between informal English practices, motivation and social influence. Interview data are analysed using qualitative content analysis, supported by the compilation of a small, purpose-built corpus in Sketch Engine¹ (44,696 tokens). This analytic approach enables the reconstruction of participants' reported motivational trajectories and the identification of three central themes: 1) early informal exposure to English audiovisual media; 2) motivational change and emerging L2 self-images; and 3) the mediating role of teachers, parents, partners and friends. As the study relies on retrospective accounts, the findings reflect participants' interpretations of their experiences rather than directly observed developmental processes.

3.2. Participants

Participants were selected from a larger quantitative survey investigating students' patterns of exposure to informal English input outside institutional settings that was conducted at the University of Pavia, a mid-sized institution in Northern Italy (De Riso, 2025). Out of the total sample of 605 respondents, 264 students consented to be contacted for a longitudinal qualitative study. Given the size of the volunteer pool and the need to ensure sustained participation over time, a selection process was applied.

Following a combination of criterion-based and convenience sampling (Dörnyei, 2007), participants were selected based on their self-assessed English proficiency (CEFR B2-C1), degree programme and reported levels of informal English exposure. No independent proficiency measure was administered; self-assessment is therefore treated as an approximate indicator of participants' L2 level. To capture a diverse range of learner-users' experiences, the study focused on first-year undergraduate and postgraduate students, excluding language specialists, students attending English-medium courses and those with prior study-abroad experience. These criteria were applied to ensure a focus on participants whose engagement with English was primarily shaped by informal practices rather than by extensive formal instruction or immersive experiences. Indices of informal exposure were derived from self-reported frequency and intensity measures in the questionnaire, allowing the identification of learners with average to high engagement with informal English input (De Riso, 2025; Pavesi & Ghia, 2020).

Based on these criteria, 73 students were initially contacted in December 2020, of whom 20 ultimately confirmed participation in the study. The final sample comprised four male and 16 female students (mean age = 23), enrolled in degree programmes within the Humanities (n = 1), Social Sciences (n = 6) and STEM fields (n = 13). To ensure anonymity, participants were assigned alphanumeric codes (P01-P20) with an additional letter indicating disciplinary area (A = Humanities, B = Social Sciences, C = STEM).

3.3. Data collection: semi-structured interviews

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, designed to elicit in-depth, retrospective accounts of participants' informal engagement with English, their motivational trajectories and the influence of teachers, parents, partners and friends over time. Interviews were conducted during the second session of a six-phase longitudinal study (March, 2021) originally designed to track the development of linguistic complexity, accuracy and fluency (De Riso, 2024, 2025). Participants' previous responses to the questionnaire were used to inform the interviews and to encourage continuity and retrospective reflection.

Interviews were structured around four main thematic areas: 1) participants' early encounters with English in informal contexts; 2) patterns of engagement with informal input, with particular attention to audiovisual media; 3) perceived changes in motivation, attitudes and language use across different life stages; and 4) the role of significant others in shaping participants' relationship with English. The semi-structure format allowed for participants to elaborate on salient experiences and to introduce topics they considered relevant to their individual trajectories.

Interviews were conducted in Italian to facilitate reflection and minimise linguistic constraints, and lasted between 25 and 45 minutes, depending on participants' willingness to share personal experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Prior to analysis, the data were anonymised and all identifying information was removed from the transcripts. Data were analysed using a qualitative, corpus-assisted approach combining close reading with exploratory tools in Sketch Engine (SE) to examine how participants referred to informal practices, motivation and the role of

¹ Available at <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>

significant others. No formal coding scheme was applied; instead, recurrent patterns were identified and interpreted by the researcher through an iterative analytical process, with SE serving as a supporting tool.

4. Findings from the qualitative analysis

4.1. Early informal exposure to audiovisual media

Across participants, early informal encounters with English are predominantly mediated by audiovisual media and retrospectively framed as curiosity-driven and necessity-based. Most participants (13/20) describe their first sustained exposure to English as occurring during early to mid-adolescence (middle school), when access to personal devices and online platforms became more common. In many accounts, YouTube emerges as the first sustained point of contact with English, primarily because Italian alternatives were scarce or perceived as lacking in quality. As P11B recalls, her early exposure to English was guided more by content availability than by linguistic choice:

- (1) *“Ho iniziato, ero piccola, forse terza media che avevo il mio computer e quindi andavo sempre su YouTube e mi guardavo i video che erano video di trucco, video sui vestiti tutti in inglese perché ci sono tantissime pagine che trovi su tantissimi canali su YouTube. In italiano, pochi che siano anche di qualità.”*

[“I started when I was little, maybe in the third year of middle school. I had my own computer, so I was always on YouTube watching videos that were makeup videos, clothing videos, all in English, because there are so many pages you can find on so many YouTube channels. In Italian, there are very few, especially ones that are good quality.”]

Similarly, several participants (7/20) describe English as the default language of online content, which was accessed without subtitles or with imperfect automatic captions, gradually normalising English as a default medium for media consumption. Access to English-language films and television series was often facilitated by unauthorised streaming websites prior to the widespread availability of legal platforms, further reinforcing L2 exposure through necessity rather than deliberate choice.

As participants grew older, typically during late adolescence and early university years, their informal media practices expanded with the emergence of new streaming platforms, which introduced greater choice and control over how English was accessed, particularly in relation to subtitle use and language settings. About half of the participants describe this phase as involving more deliberate viewing choices and a growing preference for original-language content, motivated by perceived authenticity and immediacy. As PC10C says, she switched to English because she preferred *“la voce vera dei protagonisti”* (“the real, original voice of the actors”) and because new episodes were released earlier, making her unwilling to *“aspettare quella settimana per il doppiaggio”* (“wait a whole week for the dubbed version”). Subtitling choice varied considerably across participants and media types, reflecting different attentional, affective and instrumental orientations. Several participants (8/20) report selectively using subtitles depending on perceived comprehension demands. As P17C explains, subtitles were unnecessary for YouTube videos since *“lo YouTuber parla col microfono attaccato”* (“the YouTuber wears a microphone”), but were occasionally used for films and television series due to reduced audio clarity or the need for additional contextual support. Other participants (6/20) reported avoiding subtitles altogether, describing them as distracting and detrimental to enjoyment. By contrast, a smaller number of participants (4/20) described subtitles as a strategic resource for language learning, deliberately using them to notice and look up unfamiliar vocabulary.

Increased exposure to English audiovisual media was retrospectively associated with an emerging awareness of linguistic improvement and perceived usefulness for L2 development. Most participants describe this awareness as developing gradually alongside increased exposure. As P11B states, *“prima e poi, dopo c’è la, diciamo l’effetto collaterale è che sai che aiuta anche la tua conoscenza della lingua”* (“and then, as a sort of side effect, you know it also helps improve your knowledge of the language”). This emerging awareness of choice, control and perceived benefit contributed to subsequent changes in motivation and to the development of more explicit L2 self-images.

4.2. Motivational change and emerging L2 self-images

Participants’ accounts reveal dynamic patterns of motivational change shaped by informal exposure, perceived L2 competence and future-oriented considerations.

In several responses, engagement with informal English input supports the emergence of an Ideal L2 Self that is articulated through visions of mobility, international communication and personal development. About half of the participants (9/20) describe developing such future-oriented perspectives, typically during late adolescence and early university years, as their engagement with English becomes more sustained and driven by personal interest.

For instance, P12A situates their Ideal L2 Self at the intersection of enjoyment and anticipated usefulness, framing English as a competence to be cultivated even in the absence of concrete plans for studying or working abroad. She describes maintaining English as intrinsically valuable and linked to a sense of personal satisfaction:

- (2) *“Non so se andrò in Erasmus e non so nemmeno se vorrò andare a lavorare all'estero, in ogni caso sicuramente è bene coltivare la conoscenza dell'inglese, anche un po' per una questione di... non saprei se dire orgoglio.”*

[“I don't know whether I will go on Erasmus, and I don't even know if I will want to work abroad, but in any case, it is certainly good to cultivate knowledge of English, even just for reasons of... I don't know whether to call it pride.”]

For other participants, motivational change is described as gradual and visible only retrospectively. Several participants (7/20) describe early engagement as driven primarily by the desire to access content rather than by language learning intentions, with its beneficial impact becoming apparent only later through embodied practices, as P17C explains:

- (3) *“Non credo che ci sia stato un momento in cui mi sono detta ‘Ah, effettivamente questa cosa mi sta aiutando’, perché è stato talmente graduale. Dalla musica ai video su YouTube, la mia motivazione era: voglio fruire di questi contenuti. Se sono in inglese, pazienza. A un certo punto a scuola mi sono resa conto che anche senza studiare, andando a orecchio, ci prendevo.”*

[“I don't think there was ever a moment when I told myself ‘Ah, this is actually helping me’, because it was such a gradual process. From music to YouTube videos, my motivation was simply that I wanted to access that content; if it was in English, so be it. At a certain point, at school, I realised that even without studying, just by relying on my ear, I was getting things right.”]

Over time, this form of engagement is described as shifting from content access to a more internalised and personally meaningful relationship with English, framed in terms of self-development and intercultural competence. This shift is reported by several participants (6/20), typically during adolescence, as English becomes increasingly integrated into everyday cognitive practices (P17C):

- (4) *“Trovo che sia fondamentale saperlo non solo se ti vuoi guardare qualcosa su internet, ma perché conoscere nuove culture, saper comunicare con gli altri, è una skill necessaria e qualcosa di cui essere anche un po' orgogliosi.”*

[“I think it is essential to understand English today, not just to access online content, but because knowing other cultures and being able to communicate with others is a necessary life skill and also something to be proud of.”]

- (5) *“Dopo un po' che ascolto cose in inglese mi viene da pensare in inglese molto spesso [...] a volte mi capita di scrivere pensieri miei in inglese.”*

[“After listening to things in English for a while, I often start thinking in English [...] sometimes I even write my own thoughts in English.”]

- (6) *“A volte faccio la lista della spesa in inglese... perché alcuni ingredienti tipo l'avena o la curcuma li ho scoperti in lingua inglese guardando YouTube.”*

[“Sometimes I write my shopping list in English because I discovered some ingredients like oatmeal or turmeric in English while watching YouTube.”]

P17C's account thus points to an emerging Ideal L2 Self characterised by the integration of English in everyday life. Rather than being driven by external obligations or explicit career goals, English is described as a naturalised part of their cognitive repertoire and personal identity.

Not all participants, however, reported a strong affective or identity-based investment in English. A smaller group (4/20) described more instrumental, obligation-oriented Ought-to L2 selves, often associated with lower self-perceived L2 competence. These students generally report becoming aware of their linguistic limitations during mid-to-late adolescence. Such feelings of insecurity appear to persist over time, leading them to approach informal media primarily as an opportunity for self-improvement, even when engagement is also enjoyable. P16B clearly distinguishes enjoyment from their primary motivation, which they identify as improving their language skills:

- (7) *"Diventa anche svago [guardare contenuti audiovisivi], ma la motivazione principale è imparare e migliorare la lingua."*

[*"It [watching English audiovisual content] also becomes a form of entertainment, but the main motivation is to learn and improve language skills."*]

This orientation is closely linked to feelings of linguistic insecurity, particularly regarding pronunciation, which she retrospectively describes as *"uno schifo"* ("really poor"). In this case, exposure to informal English media functions primarily as a compensatory strategy aimed at addressing perceived gaps in proficiency and aligning L2 performance with externally valued standards of competence. A similar instrumental orientation emerges in accounts where English is framed primarily as a professional tool. Only one participant (P20B) explicitly distances English from leisure and personal enjoyment:

- (8) *"Guardando al futuro penso che con l'inglese avrò un rapporto strettamente professionale. Salvo per le cose che sono già in lingua, diciamo che se dovessi leggere o guardare qualcosa per il mio piacere personale è improbabile che lo faccia in inglese."*

[*"Looking to the future, I think my relationship with English will be strictly professional. Apart from things that are already in that language, if I had to read or watch something for my own personal enjoyment, it's unlikely that I would do it in English"*].

While acknowledging its usefulness, P20B describes English as lacking personal appeal, suggesting a limited connection to the language beyond professional purposes.

Overall, these responses suggest that engagement with informal English input contributes to the development of multiple, coexisting motivational orientations, in which Ideal and Ought-to L2 Selves intersect in dynamic and non-linear ways. These self-images are shaped through learner-users' social experiences and evaluative contexts, a dimension that becomes particularly relevant in participants' reflections on the influence of teachers, parents, partners and friends.

4.3. Social mediation: the influence of teachers, parents, partners and friends

4.3.1. Teachers' role as a double-edged driver of L2 motivation

Across participants' observations, teachers emerge as particularly relevant mediators of motivation, shaping students' affective orientations towards English, their confidence and the meanings attributed to informal practices in the L2. Most participants (14/20) refer to teachers as influential figures in their learning trajectories, although the nature and direction of this influence vary considerably.

Positive accounts highlight teachers' function as aspirational models, associating English with competence, cultural value and personal identification. In these cases, teachers' influence operates both indirectly, through modelling attitudes, enthusiasm and linguistic competence, and directly, through recommendations of resources and practices extending beyond the classroom. P01B, for instance, recalls initially perceiving her high school teacher as "terrifying" but retrospectively remembered as being exceptionally competent and charismatic:

- (9) *"Eravamo tutti traumatizzati da questa professoressa che era bravissima a insegnare, aveva un accento bello, però ecco dovevi imparare per terrore [...] Questa professoressa demoniaca è stata molto capace di trasmetterci l'amore per la lingua, la cultura e la letteratura."*

["We were all traumatised by this teacher who was incredibly good at teaching and had a beautiful accent, but you had to learn out of fear [...] this demonic teacher was actually very capable of transmitting/conveying a love for the language, its culture and literature."]

The participant also reports that, she provided and suggested additional materials beyond classroom instruction for independent consultation, such as online resources and YouTube videos, promoting engagement with informal English input. Over time, this teacher became a powerful model for linguistic aspiration. P01B reports admiring their accent, style and confidence to the extent of rehearsing spoken English alone, emulating their tone and delivery:

- (10) *"Questa professoressa veniva vestita tutta stupenda, la vedevo come un mito, anche se ci terrorizzava. Parlava un inglese molto bello e io allo specchio mi sforzavo di parlare come lei."*
 ["This teacher was always impeccably dressed; I saw her as a kind of idol even though she terrified us. She spoke such beautiful English, and I would practise in front of the mirror trying to speak like her".]

In this sense, identification with the teacher translated into out-of-class engagement with English, suggesting a link between modelling and the development of an Ideal L2 Self. Similarly positive experiences are reported by several participants (8/20) who describe their teachers as actively encouraging curiosity and engagement by linking English to students' personal interests and future possibilities. They would do so, for instance, by recommending specific films, TV-series or YouTube channels, promoting the use of original-language materials and suggesting strategies such as a selective use of subtitles. At the same time, participants' accounts suggest that teacher support is most effective when it aligns with learners' individual interests and preserves the nature of informal engagement. Rather than directing students towards specific practices or overly structuring informal activities in school-like ways, teachers appear to foster motivation by recognising and building on learners' existing media habits and preferences. In this sense, informal input becomes a meaningful resource for L2 development when it is integrated in ways that maintain learners' autonomy and allow them to engage with content they find personally relevant.

Nevertheless, participants' reports also highlight the adverse impact of teacher practices perceived as emotionally unsupportive, which in some cases hindered motivation and contributed to anxiety, disengagement or delayed confidence. Several participants (6/20) report negative or ambivalent experiences with teachers. P06C contrasts their positive experience in lower secondary school with a negative relationship in high school, where a teacher described as "cold" and "bitter" led her to develop a strong aversion towards English and to approach the subject reluctantly. P18C recounts how repeated negative evaluation by an English teacher led her to internalise failure and disengage emotionally from the language, until a change of school and a more supportive teacher radically reshaped their self-perception. These contrasting experiences highlight how teachers can directly influence students' confidence, aspirations and perceived linguistic potential, particularly through their role in shaping the L2 Learning Experience. Other negative accounts point to classroom practices that were perceived as overly grammar-focused and conducted largely in Italian, thus offering limited opportunities for spoken interaction. In some cases, however, such negative teacher experiences acted as indirect catalysts for increased informal engagement. P12A describes how prolonged discomfort and low L2 confidence prompted a deliberate decision to seek English outside school:

- (11) *"Alle superiori ho avuto la sfortuna di avere una professoressa problematica, diciamo che non era molto portata per l'insegnamento, e questo mi ha portato a trascurare molto l'inglese fino al punto che mi sentivo molto, molto a disagio con la mia incapacità di parlarlo, di capirlo. E quindi ho deciso che la soluzione non era evitarlo ma affrontarlo quindi mi sono messa a guardare sempre più cose, ho fatto il concorso per vincere la vacanza studio all'estero, poi ho fatto le certificazioni. Adesso con l'università non ho tempo di studiarlo ma lo mantengo come posso."*
 ["In high school I was unlucky enough to have a problematic teacher, who was not really suited to teaching, and this led me to neglect English to the point that I felt very, very uncomfortable with my inability to speak and understand it. So, I decided that the solution was not to avoid it but to face it. I started watching more and more things in English, I entered a competition to win a study holiday abroad, and then I obtained certifications. Now, with university, I don't have much time to study it, but I try to maintain it as best as I can."]

These accounts suggest that teachers may shape learners' informal trajectories not only through encouragement, but also through practices perceived as misaligned with students' communicative needs, prompting alternative pathways to L2 competence. In such cases, externally imposed expectations may activate Ought-to L2 Self dimensions, while informal engagement emerges as a self-directed strategy that supports the development of the Ideal L2 Self.

4.3.2. *The role of affective and social relationships in motivation*

Parents and romantic partners also play a significant role in motivating participants, functioning as sources of support, pressure and negotiation. For some participants (5/20), parental encouragement acted as a powerful enabling force, with participants describing their parents as recognising and supporting their early interest in English, thereby fostering sustained engagement over time. In these cases, parental support is associated with positive affective investment and the development of long-term motivation. Other narratives describe the ambivalent or constraining effects of parental involvement. P06C recalls speaking English at home during adolescence despite their parents' lack of comprehension and their father's irritation:

- (12) *"Mio padre si arrabbiava tantissimo e diceva 'Tu con me devi parlare in italiano'."*
 ["My father would get very angry and say, 'You have to speak Italian with me'."].

Although this behaviour generated conflict, they remember this period as one of intense personal investment and self-growth:

- (13) *"Ne ero innamorata (dell'inglese) e vedevo che stavo migliorando."*
 ["I was in love with it [English] and I could see that I was improving."]

Conversely, P13C describes English as initially imposed by their parents from an early age, an experience associated with pressure and further exacerbated by a negative relationship with a teacher:

- (14) *"I miei genitori mi hanno iscritto a una scuola di inglese, oltre alla scuola normale, dai sette, otto anni. L'ho fatto un po' come imposizione e poi mi stava molto antipatico anche il professore."*
 ["My parents enrolled me in an English school, in addition to regular school, when I was seven or eight years old. I did that somewhat as an imposition and I also strongly disliked the teacher."]

Although this obligation ultimately led to improvement, it fostered a conflictual relationship with the language, which P13C later summarises through the metaphor of *"batoste"* ("blows") that nonetheless pushed them to study harder:

- (15) *"Andavo in difficoltà con mio padre che conosceva tante canzoni in inglese, facciamo sempre a gara a chi ne indovina di più quindi quello mi ha spinto ad ascoltare di più e leggere i testi [...] Mi faceva stare male non riuscire a capire o parlare, un po' delle batoste, e quindi diciamo le batoste mi aiutavano a studiare di più con l'ottica di migliorarsi."*
 ["I struggled with my father, who knew many English songs, we were always competing to see who could guess more of them, and that pushed me to listen more and read the lyrics [...] Not being able to understand or speak made me feel bad, it was like taking blows, and in that sense, those 'blows' pushed me to study more with the aim of improving."]

Romantic partners and friends similarly influence informal engagement by shaping language choices and viewing practices. Several participants (6/20) describe how shared activities such as watching films or TV-series become sites of negotiation, where language choice reflects differing levels of proficiency, interest and comfort. While P18C describes hosting regular English-language film nights with friends and their boyfriend, P07B reports reverting to Italian-language media in their partner's presence due to their lack of English proficiency. In other cases, participants describe negotiated compromises. P05B, for instance, reports initially imposing English-language series on their partner, before settling on subtitles as a middle ground:

- (16) *“Ho obbligato il mio moroso a guardare le serie in inglese, anche quando lui preferiva in italiano perchè vabbè, ci sta nel senso, lui capisce un po’ meno. Senza sottotitoli mi spara. Siamo arrivati a un compromesso”*
 [“I forced my boyfriend to watch TV-series in English even when he preferred Italian because, well, it’s ok I mean, he understands a bit less. Without subtitles he’d kill me. We eventually reached a compromise.”]

Relationships with non-Italian partners are occasionally mentioned as contexts in which English functions as a shared communicative resource, often positioning it as the default language for shared media consumption.

Overall, these findings highlight the socially situated nature of informal engagement, where interactions with significant others shape learners’ motivation and the negotiation of their Ideal and Ought-to L2 Selves.

5. General discussion and conclusions

This study examined how Italian university students describe the development of their informal engagement with English over time, and how this engagement intersects with motivational orientations and L2 self-related dimensions, as well as the mediating role of teachers, parents, partners and friends.

Participants’ accounts portray informal contact with English as an evolving trajectory shifting from necessity-driven access to preference-driven use. Initially shaped by interest, increased availability and perceived quality of English-language content, informal exposure is later reinterpreted as a meaningful resource for L2 development. Within the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009), findings suggest the coexistence of multiple motivational orientations. Sustained exposure supports the emergence of an Ideal L2 Self articulated through visions of mobility, international communication and desired identity as a confident English user. These learner-users describe deliberate efforts to embed English in everyday routines (e.g., device settings, reading choices, refusal of automatic translation), indicating a form of internalisation in which informal engagement is experienced as self-relevant and identity-consistent. In other accounts, internalisation emerges gradually, with English becoming a naturalised component of participants’ cognitive and linguistic repertoires. Conversely, some accounts reflect a more instrumental orientation aligned with the Ought-to L2 Self, shaped by perceived low proficiency, institutional demands and broader societal expectations around English. Taken together, participants’ narratives often show evolving patterns of enjoyment, self-improvement and obligation across life stages, suggesting that the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self and the Language Learning Experience mutually support and shape one another rather than functioning as stable predictors (Dörnyei, 2009, pp. 210-211).

Teachers emerge as pivotal yet ambivalent mediators of motivation. Positive accounts emphasise their role in modelling competent language use and bridging classroom learning with students’ interests and informal practices (e.g., promoting English-language content), thereby supporting future-oriented self-images and positive learning experiences. On the other hand, emotionally unsupportive or pedagogically inadequate teachers contributed to anxiety, disengagement and low L2 confidence. Nevertheless, these experiences were not universally demotivating. For some participants, negative classroom experiences acted as indirect catalysts for seeking alternative ways of building L2 competence through increased informal exposure. These accounts suggest that teachers’ influence operates as a double-edged driver of L2 motivation, capable of reorienting motivational forces by shaping learners’ affective experiences and their engagement with English outside institutional settings. This finding aligns with Leone & Paone (2024), who similarly show that negative classroom experiences do not necessarily result in demotivation, but may instead prompt learners to seek alternative pathways to L2 development beyond formal instruction. In line with their results, such shifts appear to coincide with a gradual distancing from externally imposed expectations towards more self-directed forms of engagement, often associated with the development of the Ideal L2 Self. Beyond teachers, parents and romantic partners shape motivation as sources of both support and constraint. While parental encouragement may validate early interest and sustain future-oriented aspirations, their active involvement is more often described as a source of external pressure that intensifies obligation-driven motivation and emotional discomfort. Romantic relationships similarly mediate informal engagement through accommodation and compromise, influencing language choice during shared viewing or making subtitles a negotiated tool that enables joint participation, albeit limiting immersion.

Findings highlight informal exposure to English as a rich and motivationally supportive dimension of L2 development, grounded in enjoyment, authenticity and personal interest. This is consistent with Leone & Paone (2024), who identify media engagement as a key motivational catalyst, while the present study further shows how such engagement becomes integrated in participants' everyday practices and contributes to the gradual development of L2 self-images (Mariotti, 2024; Toffoli, 2023). Pedagogically, these results suggest that teachers can play a crucial role by acknowledging and leveraging students' informal engagement without attempting to "schoolify" it, namely, by avoiding the conversion of self-directed and affectively rewarding practices into mandatory or assessment-driven tasks. At a practical level, this may involve legitimising informal engagement as a valuable form of contact with the language, encouraging reflective awareness of students' media routines and offering optional strategies (e.g., selective subtitle use, noticing routines, vocabulary capture) that enhance L2 learning while preserving autonomy (Ghia, 2012; Montero Perez, 2022; Muñoz & Peters, 2020). Concurrently, findings highlight the importance of teachers' affective stance and feedback in shaping students' willingness to engage with English beyond the classroom. Creating opportunities for spoken interaction and validating communicative progress over native-like accuracy (Cook, 1999; Munro & Derwing, 2015) may strengthen students' confidence and help ensure that informal engagement remains a positive motivational asset.

Informal engagement with English emerges as a socially mediated dimension of L2 development, shaped by the interaction of individual agency, affective experience and social influence. Learner-users' informal trajectories emerge as co-constructed through relationships with significant others, with teachers playing a relevant – though ambivalent – role in shaping how informal exposure is interpreted, valued and sustained over time. Attending to this socially mediated variability contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how informal exposure to English becomes motivationally meaningful and identity-relevant for individual learner-users. It also extends previous findings by offering a more fine-grained account of how informal practices, social mediation and L2 self-development are interconnected in participants' retrospective accounts (Leone & Paone, 2024; Toffoli, 2023).

From a methodological perspective, the longitudinal orientation of the semi-structured interviews supported the reconstruction of participants' motivational trajectories. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based on retrospective accounts collected through single-session interviews, and is therefore susceptible to memory bias. The study should thus be understood as a retrospective qualitative investigation rather than a fully longitudinal design. Second, participants were selected based on self-assessed proficiency which should be treated as an approximate indicator of L2 competence. Finally, the sample presents a gender imbalance (four male and 16 female participants) and excludes specific groups (e.g., language specialists). While the gender distribution reflects the voluntary nature of participation, the selection criteria enabled a focused exploration of informal engagement among non-specialist learners. Nevertheless, these factors limit the generalisability of findings.

Future research could extend this approach by combining longitudinal qualitative designs with repeated interviews and systematic observation of informal practices. It could also incorporate teachers' perspective and examine how family and relational dynamics shape motivation and L2 self-development across different learner-user profiles, including language-specialists.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Italian Ministry for University and Research (MUR) through the PRIN project grant 2020NNJTW3_001. I would like to thank the students who participated in the study for their time and cooperation.

References

- Aiello, Jacqueline (2018). *Negotiating Englishes and English-speaking identities*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315299679>
- Arnbjörnsdóttir, Birna, & Ingvarsdóttir, Hafþís (Eds.). (2018). *Language development across the life span: The impact of English on education and work in Iceland*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67804-7>
- Arndt, Henriette (2019). *Informal second language learning: The role of engagement, proficiency, attitudes, and motivation* (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford). <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:c579077d-61fd-4b94-bd57-de7063389122>
- Arndt, Henriette (2023). 14 Behaviour, thoughts, and feelings. In Denyze Toffoli, Geoffrey Sockett, & Meryl Kusk (Eds.), *Language learning and leisure: Informal language learning in the digital age* (pp. 366–400). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110752441-014>
- Azzolini, Davide, Campregher, Sabrina, & Madia, Joan (2022). Formal instruction vs informal exposure. What matters more for teenagers' acquisition of English as a second language? *Research Papers in Education*, 37(2), 153–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2020.1789718>
- Benson, Phil (2021). *Language learning environments: Spatial perspectives in SLA*. Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/BENSON4900>
- Berns, Margie, de Bot, Kees & Hasebrink, Uwe (2007). *In the presence of English: Media and European youth*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-36894-8>
- Caruana, Sandro (2021). An overview of audiovisual input as a means for foreign language acquisition in different contexts. *Language and Speech*, 64(4), 1018–1036. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0023830920985897>
- Chik, Alice (2019). Motivation and informal language learning. In Mark Dressman & Randall William Sadler (Eds.), *The handbook of informal language learning* (pp. 13–26). Wiley Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119472384.ch1>
- Cook, Vivian (1999). Going beyond the native speaker in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33(2), 185–209. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587717>
- De Riso, Camilla (2024). Complexity, accuracy and fluency in informal L2 learning among university students: Four longitudinal case studies. *Lingue e Linguaggi*, 66, 159–183. <https://doi.org/10.1285/i22390359v66p159>
- De Riso, Camilla (2025). *Informal learning of English at university: A cross-sectional and longitudinal perspective*. Franco Angeli.
- De Wilde, Vanessa, Brysbaert, Marc & Eyckmans, June (2020). Learning English through out-of-school exposure. Which levels of language proficiency are attained and which types of input are important? *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 23(1), 171–185. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728918001062>
- Dörnyei, Zoltán (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410613349>
- Dörnyei, Zoltán (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4000/asp.294>
- Dörnyei, Zoltán (2009). The L2 motivational self-system. In Zoltán Dörnyei & Ema Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 9–42). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293-003>
- Dörnyei, Zoltán & Ushioda, Ema (2011). *Teaching and researching motivation* (2nd ed.). Longman. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315833750>
- Dörnyei, Zoltán & Ushioda, Ema (2021). *Teaching and researching motivation* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351006743>
- Dörnyei, Zoltán & Ushioda, Ema (Eds.). (2009). *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (Vol. 36). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293>
- Dressman, Mark, & Sadler, Randall William (Eds.) (2020). *The Handbook of Informal Language Learning*. Wiley Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119472384>

- Ferguson, Gibson (2015). Introduction: Attitudes to English. In Andrew Linn, Neil Bermel, & Gibson Ferguson (Eds.), *Attitudes towards English in Europe* (pp. 3–24). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614515517-002>
- Ghia, Elisa (2012). *Subtitling matters: New perspectives on subtitling and foreign language learning*. Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-0353-0390-2>
- Ghia, Elisa (2024). What drives L2 viewers' informal access to English? A case study on audiovisual input. *Lingue e Linguaggi*, 66, 43–73. <https://doi.org/10.1285/i22390359v66p43>
- Henry, Alastair & Thorsen, Cecilia (2018). Teacher–student relationships and L2 motivation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 102(1), 218–241. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12446>
- Krüger, Maleika (2023). *Media-related out-of-school contact with English in Germany and Switzerland: Frequency, forms and the effect on language learning*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.64152/10125/67469>
- Kuppens, Alnofaie Haifa (2010). Incidental foreign language acquisition from media exposure. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 35(1), 65–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439880903561876>
- Kusyk, Meryl, Arndt, Henriette L., Schwarz, Marlene, Yibokou, Kossi Seto, Dressman, Mark, Sockett, Geoffrey & Toffoli, Denyze (2025). A scoping review of studies in informal second language learning: Trends in research published between 2000 and 2020. *System*, 130, 103541. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103541>
- Lamb, Martin (2017). The motivational dimension of language teaching. *Language Teaching*, 50(3), 301–346. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000088>
- Lee, Ju Seong, & Lee, Kilryoung (2021). The role of informal digital learning of English and L2 motivational self system in foreign language enjoyment. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 52(1), 358–373. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12955>
- Lee, Ju Seong (2026). *Informal digital learning of English*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009641647>
- Leone, Paola, & Paone, Emanuela (2024). The dynamics of motivation and informal English exposure: Evidence from a case study. *Lingue e Linguaggi*, 66, 105–131. <https://doi.org/10.1285/i22390359v66p105>
- Lyrikgou, Christina (2023). Informal second language learning and EFL learners' spoken use of discourse markers. In Denyze Toffoli, Geoffrey Sockett, & Meryl Kusyk (Eds.), *Language learning and leisure: Informal language learning in the digital age* (pp. 91–119). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110752441-005>
- Mariotti, Cristina (2024). *Exploring motivation and agency in informal contact with English: An emic investigation of Italian university students*. Pavia University Press. <https://digital.casalini.it/9788869521836>
- Montero Perez, Maribel (2022). Second or foreign language learning through watching audiovisual input and the role of on-screen text. *Language Teaching*, 55(3), 163–192. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444821000501>
- Montero Perez, Maribel, Van Den Noortgate, Wim & Desmet, Piet (2013). Captioned video for L2 listening and vocabulary learning: A meta-analysis. *System*, 41(3), 720–739. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2013.07.013>
- Muñoz, Carmen (2020). Boys like games and girls like movies: Age and gender differences in out-of-school contact with English. *RESLA*, 33(1), 171–201. <https://doi.org/10.1075/resla.18042.mun>
- Muñoz, Carmen (2022). Audiovisual input in L2 learning. *Language, Interaction and Acquisition*, 13(1), 125–143. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lia.22001.mun>
- Muñoz, Carmen, & Miralpeix, Imma (Eds.). (2024). *Audiovisual input and second language learning*. John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lllt.61>
- Muñoz, Carmen, & Peters, Elke (Eds.). (2020). Language learning from multimodal input. [Special issue]. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 42(3). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263120000340>
- Munro, Murray J., & Derwing, Tracey M. (2015). Intelligibility in research and practice: Teaching priorities. In Marnie Reed & John M. Lewis (Eds.), *The handbook of English pronunciation*, (pp. 375–396). Wiley Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118346952.ch21>

- Papi, Mostafa, & Abdollahzadeh, Esmaeel (2012). Teacher motivational practice, student motivation, and possible L2 selves: An examination in the Iranian EFL context. *Language learning*, 62(2), 571–594. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2011.00632.x>
- Pattemore, Anastasia, & Muñoz, Carmen (2020). Learning L2 constructions from captioned audiovisual exposure: The effect of learner-related factors. *System*, 93, 102–113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102303>
- Pattemore, Anastasia, & Muñoz, Carmen (2023). The effects of binge-watching and spacing on learning L2 multi-word units from captioned TV-series. *The Language Learning Journal*, 51(4), 401–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2023.2211614>
- Pavesi, Maria (2024). The informalisation of English language learning: A first national research project. *Lingue e Linguaggi*, 66, 17–42. <https://doi.org/10.1285/i22390359v66p17>
- Pavesi, Maria, & Ghia, Elisa (2020). *Informal contact with English: A case study of Italian postgraduate students*. ETS. <https://www.edizioniets.com/scheda.asp?n=9788846759368>
- Pavesi, Maria, Bianchi, Francesca, Bruti, Silvia & Zago, Raffaele (2025). *In contact with English. Informal media-driven learning among Italian university students*. Carocci. <https://hdl.handle.net/11571/1530577>
- Peters, Elke & Webb, Stuart (2018). Incidental vocabulary acquisition through viewing L2 television and factors that affect learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 40(3), 551–577. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263117000407>
- Peters, Elke, Heynen, Eva, & Puimège, Eva (2016). Learning vocabulary through audiovisual input: The differential effect of L1 subtitles and captions. *System*, 63, 134–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.10.002>
- Puimège, Eva, & Peters, Elke (2020). Learning formulaic sequences through viewing L2 television and factors that affect learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 42(3), 525–549. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S027226311900055X>
- Sockett, Geoffrey (2014). *The Online Informal Learning of English*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137414885>
- Sundqvist, Pia (2009). *Extramural English matters: Out-of-school English and its impact on Swedish ninth graders' oral proficiency and vocabulary*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Karlstad University). https://www5.kau.se/sites/default/files/Dokument/subpage/2014/01/sundqvist_2009_thesis_extramural_english_matters_p_90876.pdf
- Sundqvist, Pia and Sylvén, Liss Kerstin (2016). *Extramural English in teaching and learning: From theory and research to practice*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccy051>
- Toffoli, Denyze, Sockett, Geoffrey, & Kusiak Meryl (Eds.) (2023). *Language learning and leisure. Informal language learning in the digital age*, de Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110752441>
- Werner, Valentin & Tegge, Friederike (2022). *Pop culture in language education: Theory, research, practice*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367808334>
- Wisniewska, Natalia, & Mora, Joan C. (2020). Can captioned video benefit second language pronunciation? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 42(3), 599–624. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263120000029>
- Yibokou, Kossi Seto (2023). 6 Influence of television series on pronunciation. In Denyze Toffoli, Geoffrey Sockett, & Meryl Kusiak (Eds.), *Language learning and leisure: Informal language learning in the digital age* (pp. 121–139). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110752441-006>

Camilla De Riso, University of Pavia
camilla.deriso@unipv.it

- EN** | **Camilla De Riso** is a postdoctoral researcher in Linguistics at the University of Pavia (Italy). Her research focuses on second language acquisition, with particular attention to informal English language learning, audiovisual translation and L2 learner identity. Her work also explores the constructs of complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF) in L2 development.
- ES** | **Camilla De Riso** es investigadora postdoctoral en Lingüística en la Universidad de Pavia (Italia). Su interés principal se centra en la adquisición de segundas lenguas, con especial atención al aprendizaje informal del inglés, la traducción audiovisual y la identidad del aprendiz de L2. Su trabajo también explora los conceptos de *complexity*, *accuracy* y *fluency* (CAF) en el desarrollo de la L2.
- IT** | **Camilla De Riso** è ricercatrice postdoc in Linguistica presso l'Università degli Studi di Pavia. La sua ricerca si concentra sull'acquisizione della L2, con particolare attenzione all'apprendimento informale dell'inglese, alla traduzione audiovisiva e all'identità dell'apprendente L2. Il suo lavoro esplora inoltre i concetti di *complexity*, *accuracy* e *fluency* (CAF) nello sviluppo della L2.