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Transforming adult L2 education through translanguaging and multimodal co-creation across the classroom and the museum

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ABSTRACT

EN Educational linguistics increasingly focuses on holistic approaches; however, research involving adults remains scarce, particularly regarding translanguaging pedagogy and arts-based approaches. This study addresses this gap by describing the project "Io vado al museo" ("I go to the museum"), a collaboration between a university in Italy and a local museum. The project involved a group of learners in museum-based interactions with artworks and the subsequent classroom production of artifacts as creative responses to themes encountered at the museum. These artifacts eventually became formal museum objects through the creation of a virtual museum on izi.TRAVEL. By adopting a qualitative critical ethnography, data were collected through student focus groups, teacher interviews, and the analysis of the artifacts. Findings demonstrate a positive impact across four dimensions: linguistic, personal/affective, social, and civic/democratic.

Keywords: TRANSLANGUAGING PEDAGOGY, MUSEUM-BASED EDUCATION, L2 LEARNING, ADULT EDUCATION

ES La lingüística educativa se centra cada vez más en enfoques holísticos; sin embargo, la investigación sobre adultos sigue siendo escasa, especialmente en lo que respecta a la pedagogía del translenguaje y los métodos basados en las artes. Este estudio aborda esta laguna describiendo el proyecto "Io vado al museo" ("Voy al museo"), una colaboración entre una universidad italiana y un museo local. El proyecto llevó a un grupo de aprendices a interactuar con obras de arte en el museo y a la posterior producción de artefactos en el aula como respuestas creativas a los temas encontrados en el museo. Estos artefactos se convirtieron finalmente en piezas de museos formales mediante la creación de un museo virtual en izi.TRAVEL. El estudio adoptó una etnografía crítica cualitativa; los datos se recogieron a través de grupos focales de estudiantes, entrevistas a docentes y el análisis de los artefactos. Los resultados demuestran un impacto positivo en cuatro dimensiones: lingüística, personal/afectiva, social y cívica/democrática.

Palabras clave: PEDAGOGÍA DEL TRANSLENGUAJE, EDUCACIÓN EN MUSEOS, APRENDIZAJE DE LA L2, EDUCACIÓN DE ADULTOS

IT La linguistica educativa si sta orientando sempre più verso approcci olistici; tuttavia, la ricerca che coinvolge gli adulti rimane scarsa, in particolare per quanto riguarda la didattica del translanguaging e gli approcci basati sulle arti. Questo studio affronta questo bisogno della ricerca attraverso la descrizione del progetto "Io vado al museo", una collaborazione tra un'università italiana e un museo locale. Il progetto ha coinvolto un gruppo di apprendenti in attività di interazione e osservazione di opere d'arte e nella successiva produzione in classe di artefatti come risposte creative ai temi emersi al museo. Questi artefatti sono diventati infine oggetti museali a tutti gli effetti, attraverso la creazione di un museo virtuale su izi.TRAVEL. Adottando un'etnografia critica qualitativa, i dati sono stati raccolti tramite focus group con gli studenti, interviste agli insegnanti e l'analisi degli artefatti. I risultati dimostrano un impatto positivo su quattro dimensioni: linguistica, personale/affettiva, sociale e civica/democratica.

Parole chiave: DIDATTICA DEL TRANSLANGUAGING, EDUCAZIONE MUSEALE, APPRENDIMENTO L2, EDUCAZIONE DEGLI ADULTI

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1. Introduction

L2 learning is widely recognised as an essential element to facilitate communication and encourage the full participation of adults with a migratory background in society (see the Council of Europe's LIAM - Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants Guidelines). Mastering this language grants greater access to education, employment, and public services, thereby supporting their role as new citizens. However, it is equally important to recognise the value of maintaining one's L1(s); this fosters a sense of cultural identity and connection with one's community of origin while promoting more effective L2 literacy. Alongside this plurilingual perspective, another important aspect is the need to provide adult learners with embodied learning experiences that are better tailored to their motivations and needs (Morrice, 2017). In this context, cultural spaces and the arts play a transformative role. As Vlachou (2017, 8) notes, they have the power to create open, non-threatening spaces of encounter that promote knowledge, allow one to get to know the 'Other' and their humanity, and help construct a different image from the one often presented by politicians and the media.

The need for such inclusive, non-formal spaces becomes even more apparent when considering that the profile of these learners is highly varied. While some are employed in manual and low-skilled activities resulting in lower wages, others are well-educated individuals who want to enter the job market or enrol in university. Despite these differences, all of them need access to quality L2 education to fully integrate into host societies. Unfortunately, as Pennycook (2021) points out, current L2 education primarily focuses on language skills that are tailored almost exclusively for low-skilled job acquisition. This narrow approach emphasises specific tasks relevant to primary needs, thereby hindering the development of broader skills essential for a diverse range of professional and non-professional opportunities. Consequently, while learners with low levels of literacy might be at risk of poverty and social exclusion, highly educated ones often grapple with profound emotional and professional challenges caused by the mismatch between their qualifications and available jobs. This scenario underscores the necessity for an approach to L2 education that flexibly addresses diverse aspirations and promotes true social inclusion. Specifically, there emerges a need for a democratic approach that goes beyond mere preparation for work and sees adults with a migratory background as "whole persons with hearts, bodies and minds, with memories, fantasies, loyalties, identities" (Kramsch, 2006, p. 251) and with a rich linguistic and cultural repertoire. While several documents have provided guidelines for their linguistic integration (Beacco et al., 2017; LASLLIAM Reference Guide, 2022), a significant gap remains: more training and resources are needed to raise organisations' awareness and educators' competencies regarding the integration of translanguaging and arts-based approaches for L2 literacy development across formal and non-formal education (Minuz et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2020; Waterhouse, 2022).

To address this gap, this article introduces the *Io vado al museo* (*I go to the museum*) project that is currently active in Venice, Italy. Designed to bridge the gap between formal language instruction and cultural spaces, the project positions museums as a central environment for language learning, social and emotional development, and civic engagement.

Specifically, this paper presents ethnographic research that was conducted during the project's implementation of the project, from January to June 2025. By observing and interacting with 22 adult students with a migratory background of Italian L2[1] from a local adult education centre (CPIA of Venice), this study examines their experiences as they navigated museum spaces and utilised their full linguistic repertoires to engage with art. The research further explores how these non-formal, multimodal environments foster language acquisition, emotional learning, socialisation, and a deeper sense of social belonging.

This article is structured as follows. First, it will outline the theoretical framework underpinning the study, focusing on the intersections of translanguaging pedagogy, arts-based approaches, and non-formal museum education. Next, it will detail the methodology of the ethnographic research conducted within the project, describing the participants, setting, and methods of data collection. Following this, the article will present the core findings, illustrating how arts-based activities, multimodal co-creation, and the strategic use of the learners' L1s facilitated the L2 learning process, with an impact on four main dimensions: linguistic, personal/affective, social, and civic/democratic. Finally, the discussion and conclusion sections will synthesise these insights, offering both theoretical reflections and practical implications seeking to implement more inclusive, holistic language programs for adults with a migratory background.

[1] In this article, L2 refers to an additional language learned in a country where it serves as the dominant language. In the Italian context, this definition emphasises that Italian is not just a subject of study, but a vital tool for navigating the host society's systems.

2. Translanguaging pedagogy in adult language education

In the landscape of educational linguistics, translanguaging pedagogy has emerged as a transformative approach that challenges the traditional separation of languages. Rather than viewing the learner's L1 as an obstacle to acquiring a L2, translanguaging posits that plurilingual speakers draw from a single, unitary linguistic repertoire to make meaning of their multilingual worlds (García & Li, 2014; García, 2017). Pedagogically, this means moving beyond the monolingual bias to create learning environments where students are encouraged to leverage their full range of semiotic and linguistic resources (see, among others, Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; García et al., 2017; García & Kleyn, 2016; Paulsrud et al. 2017). For adult learners, whose identities are deeply rooted in their life histories, this approach validates their ,complex lived experiences (García, 2017).

In this context, recent empirical studies in the field of adult education reveal that when translanguaging pedagogy is embraced, it yields consistent benefits across three primary dimensions: linguistic, affective, and democratic.

Regarding the linguistic dimension, this pedagogy appears to impact several key aspects of language acquisition. Park and Valdez (2018) demonstrate how translanguaging supported a class of adult refugee students in both the creation of meaning and the development of cross-linguistic awareness. Also, valuing the students' existing linguistic repertoires and skills was found to have a positive impact on vocabulary learning and written production competence. Choi and Nayer (2017) suggest that these practices allow refugee women attending English courses in Australia to engage meaningfully in listening, writing, and speaking activities. Additionally, Franck and Papadopoulou (2024) provide evidence that this approach enhances morphological awareness through comparative activities that encourage students to reflect on the roots and affixes of the L2. Finally, Beiler and Dewilde (2023) emphasise the crucial role of this pedagogy as a scaffold, allowing students to express complex thoughts in and across familiar languages first, before doing so in the new language.

In addition to linguistic outcomes, the literature highlights the profound impact of translanguaging pedagogy on the affective dimension of learning. Burgess and Rowsell (2020), in their study involving newly arrived refugee students in an ESL course in Canada, found that translanguaging practices expanded opportunities for students to invest emotionally in their target language learning process and, more broadly, in their resettlement in the new country. This finding is echoed by Cox (2021, 2023), who noted that strategic L1 use with a group of newly arrived refugee women in Scotland led to increased empowerment and self-esteem, necessary steps to rebuild oneself within the host community. Franck and Papadopoulou (2024) further argue that this approach reduces negative emotions, such as anxiety, while fostering a sense of enjoyment and curiosity. This alleviation of negative emotional reactions is seen to be crucial to learning trajectories. Dryden, Tankosić and Dovchin (2021) demonstrate how translanguaging fosters the creation of "safe spaces" that are essential for identity negotiation and participation. Their research showed that leveraging a collective linguistic repertoire created a space where students could authentically share their experiences, face-to-face challenges, and language-related anxiety, thereby encouraging them to communicate more frequently.

Moving to a more democratic dimension, Wedin and Berg (2024) conclude that translanguaging pedagogy creates safe spaces that give students the voice to express their views and relate the teaching to their everyday lives and earlier experiences. This negotiation of meaning via diverse linguistic resources allows students to navigate their new environments with greater confidence. This aligns with findings from Kitsiou et al. (2021), who noted that such workspaces in Greece allow participants to develop a heightened awareness of their plural identities, transforming the classroom into a democratic space that honours the totality of the learner's experiences.

Collectively, these studies suggest that translanguaging pedagogy acts as a catalyst for both learning and being, allowing adults with a migratory background to navigate their new environments with greater confidence and as whole individuals.

3. Arts-based methodologies in language education

Another field that is gaining more attention in language education is that of arts-based methodologies and multimodality to redefine the boundaries of how learners acquire, process, and perform languages (Bradley, 2025; Burke & Field, 2023; Hirsu, Zacharias, & Futro, 2021; Kalaya & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019, 2024; Lytra et al., 2022; Moore et al., 2020),

This represents a shift toward a recognition of the learner as a whole person engaging with the world through diverse sensory channels (New London Group, 1996). In fact, by positioning meaning-making as a fundamentally multimodal, embodied, and creative process, arts-based approaches acknowledge that communication is rarely just about words. Instead, learners navigate a rich tapestry of semiotic repertoires that include the visual, gestural, performative, and digital dimensions. When a student engages with paintings (Anderson, 2022; Fazzi, 2025; Futro, 2022), drama (Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2019; Tavares & Benediktsson, 2024), drawings (Carbonara, 2023; Chik, 2018; Melo-Pfeifer & Chick, 2020; Niemelä, 2025), (digital) collage (Prada, 2022; Prasad, 2018; Romero, 2023), digital storytelling (Anderson & Macleroy, 2016; Chung & Macleroy, 2022; Fazzi, 2022), or photos (Honeyford, 2014; Tavares, 2025), they are not merely practicing a language, they are inhabiting it. Such embodied engagement transforms the classroom into a vibrant space of relations. Consequently, teachers are ethically prompted to navigate classroom assemblages by attuning to affective forces and leveraging disruptions to develop inventive, relational pedagogies that foster learners' transformative becoming (Waterhouse, 2022, p. 282).

To better understand this integration, we can look to the framework proposed by Bradley and Harvey (2019), who conceptualise creative inquiry in applied linguistics through three distinct lenses: research "with the arts," "into the arts," and "through the arts." While each dimension offers unique value, the following discussion focuses primarily on the third, exploring how the arts serve as a vital tool to enrich the educational environment. Specifically, I will examine how the "through the arts" approach manifests in two transformative contexts: language learning within the museum space and through the strategic use of multimodal artifacts to foster deeper linguistic, cultural, affective, and civic resonance.

3.1 Language learning at the museum

Recent scholarship in educational linguistics suggests that museum spaces, when paired with intentional pedagogical design, serve as powerful catalysts for L2 acquisition (Fazzi, 2025). By shifting learning from the traditional classroom into these multisensory, non-formal environments, educators can provide a unique context that yields significant benefits.

A primary benefit identified in the literature is the significant impact on vocabulary consolidation. Research by Labadi (2018) across various museums in Denmark and the United Kingdom demonstrated that students recalled new vocabulary more effectively when learned in situ compared to traditional classroom settings. This "situated learning" allows words to be anchored to physical objects and visual stimuli. Similarly, Ruanglertbutr (2016) explored how students in Australia used English L2 to engage with artwork. The study found that they did not just learn object labels but they began experimenting with sophisticated literary devices, such as alliteration and similes, to describe the intrinsic properties of the art. This suggests that the museum environment encourages a more creative, nuanced use of the target language.

Beyond grammar and vocabulary, museums offer a unique venue for overcoming the limitations of monocultural teaching. Parra and Di Fabio (2015) argue that museum-based linguistic activities push teachers and students to engage in critical intercultural reflection. When discussing museum objects, students do not just examine the target culture; they are forced to confront their own cultural biases and beliefs (Berhó & Defferding, 2005). In Scotland, Clarke (2013) found that museums could become vital social spaces for adult learners. In these spaces, they engage in the construction and reconstruction of the self, building confidence as L2 speakers while navigating their new social landscape. Research in Canada by Cloutier, Ibrahim, and Pratt (2016) mirrors this, suggesting that English L2 activities in museums allow for the emergence of subversive identities.

Recent work by Fazzi and Meneghetti (2024) synthesises these benefits through two case studies: one involving adults learning Italian L2 and another involving Italian high school students learning English. Their findings categorise the impact into four distinct domains:

- *Linguistic Domain*. There is a marked improvement in socio-pragmatic competence (using language appropriately in specific contexts) and metalinguistic reflection. Students expanded their vocabulary specifically through interaction with multimodal stimuli.
- *Affective Domain*. Students reported feeling freer to communicate. The focus on objects reduced the anxiety often associated with "getting it right" in a classroom. This led to increased confidence, particularly among learners with lower proficiency levels.

- *Cognitive Domain*. Learners were able to bridge the gap between formal schooling and informal experience, linking new museum-acquired knowledge to their own life histories.
- *Intercultural Domain*. The discussion of physical artifacts stimulated a "deep dive" into cultural nuances, fostering a more sophisticated intercultural awareness.

In this research field, specific studies on translanguaging pedagogy, spanning different contexts and participants, are also emerging. Lehman, Phillips and Williams (2018) demonstrated that by supporting students' literacy skills in multiple languages and encouraging their use in public spaces, educators can significantly increase students' pride in their plural identities. As Cárdenas Curiel, McHolme, and Lundeen (2023) show, using art objects as mediators for translanguaging practices is highly effective. Their study of bilingual primary art lessons reveals that this approach not only fosters cross-linguistic awareness but also helps students develop a sense of identity and positionality, ultimately empowering them to challenge linguistic inequality. Furthermore, Deroo (2022) highlights the value of community-university partnerships in helping future teachers move beyond discrete language systems toward an awareness of multilingual and multimodal resources as part of their communicative repertoires. Engaging with museum objects allows these pre-service teachers to negotiate meaning and empathise with the challenges multilingual students face in traditional school settings. This creative and identity-affirming potential is also observed at the university level. Arshavkaya (2021) found that allowing ESL students to use their languages when writing about their own interpretations of museum art objects helped them connect different cultural perspectives and express meanings that might otherwise remain hidden.

This shift toward valuing translanguaging extends into specialised fields through the Multi-STEM project led by Moraru and Chisari (2025), which promotes the participation of plurilingual children in STEM through the creation of multilingual object labels and exhibitions. While this project notes challenges such as varying literacy levels and initial mismatches in student expectations, it underscores the museum's role in inclusive education.

Ultimately, as Meneghetti (2024) concludes regarding adult education, these museum-based activities span personal, socio-relational, civic, and linguistic dimensions, contributing to self-expression, socialisation, and civic awareness while specifically yielding positive impacts on lexical learning and interactional competence.

3.2. Creating multimodal and multilingual compositions

Multilingual multimodal compositions represent an innovative pedagogical shift in language education, integrating diverse expressive modes (including written text, visual imagery, and sound) to reflect the dynamic, multifaceted nature of communication (New London Group, 1996). Rather than treating language as a static set of rules, this approach encourages students to combine their full linguistic repertoires with diverse modes (e.g., drawing, photo, video, or digital design) to describe concepts, narrate personal experiences, and express complex emotions. This process enhances the construction of plural identities (Cummins et al., 2015; Cummins & Early, 2011; Hafner, 2015) and allows students to reposition themselves through transcultural perspectives (Honeyford, 2014; Omerbašić, 2015). By leveraging their existing linguistic repertoire to create content, learners develop deeper metalinguistic awareness and a more meaningful connection to the curriculum (DeJaynes, 2015; Jiang & Luk, 2016).

Furthermore, these compositions serve as effective resources for language teaching by offering a flexible, engaging response to the linguistic and cultural challenges of modern society. By integrating diversity and creativity, they foster the development of linguistically competent and culturally aware individuals. This impact is often amplified when students share their products online, an action that frequently strengthens student motivation (De Los Ríos, 2018; Meneghetti & Fazzi, 2025).

At its core, multilingual multimodal artifact making involves pedagogical designs where learners produce tangible or digital artifacts (such as poems, linguistic portraits, identity texts, or digital stories) by strategically combining multiple languages and modes. In this framing, artifacts are not merely "products" but critical sites of interaction, identity negotiation, assessment evidence, and social inclusion. This is particularly salient for adults with a migratory background who find themselves navigating integration regimes that frequently prioritise monolingual, standardised competencies (García, 2017; Minuz et al., 2020; Pennycook, 2021; Waterhouse, 2021). Such multilingual multimodal approaches conceptualise learners' repertoires as

fluid and hybrid, calling for pedagogies that deliberately mobilise all available resources to promote learning and social justice (Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2024).

While empirical research involving (young) adults with a migratory background is still emerging, several studies highlight the potential of these compositions within a translanguaging stance. Many of these explorations begin with visual arts, such as the collage activities analysed by Bradley and Atkinson (2020). Their work demonstrates how creative methods facilitate a *translanguaging space* (Li, 2018), that is, a fluid environment where participants mobilise their full communicative repertoires to make their voices visible in the linguistic landscape. Similarly, Burgess and Rowsell (2020) found that refugee students in Canada used collage to narrate their resettlement stories, allowing them to invest emotionally in the language learning process through personal creativity rather than scripted lessons. This use of visual narrative is echoed by Melo-Pfeifer and Fidalgo Schmidt (2019), who observed that drawings served as a "multimodal voice" for students lacking a common language, enabling them to sidestep linguistic barriers and envision their futures within the host society.

The impact of these practices extends into performative and narrative modes. Brownlie (2021) investigated a creative writing group for Congolese refugee women, finding that translanguaging practices and public performances significantly enhanced participants' agency and transformed their marginalised social positions. This sense of agency is further supported by Pöyhönen et al. (2020), who utilised collaborative photography with unaccompanied minors in Finland to explore belonging and life trajectories. Their findings emphasise that creative practices open pathways to lived experiences.

Identity affirmation through artifact creation is also central to the Greek case study by Kyrligkitsi and Mouti (2023), where language portraits and identity texts allowed adults with a migratory background to render their plurilingual profiles visible, serving as tools for needs analysis and dialogic classroom work. This shift in perspective, that is, viewing them as creative agents rather than deficient learners, is a hallmark of the pluriliteracies program in Barcelona described by Albuquerque and Moore (2024). In this project, secondary students and adult new citizens collaboratively crafted multilingual poems, using "co-artistry" to expand opportunities for language learning and identity work.

Finally, transitioning into digital media, Meneghetti and Fazzi (2025) demonstrate that student-generated podcasts inspired by museum artworks can foster critical language awareness, cooperation, and agency, pointing to the transformative potential of this tool.

Collectively, these studies suggest that multimodal composing offers a powerful means for adult learners to reclaim their agency and integrate their complex linguistic and cultural identities into their learning process.

4. The study context: the *Io vado al museo* project[2]

Born from a collaboration between the Ca' Foscari University of Venice's MILE (Museums and Innovation in Language Education) research group and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection[3], one of the most important museums of European and American art of the twentieth century in Italy, this project reimagines the museum as more than a space for aesthetic appreciation. Instead, it serves as a laboratory for linguistic and social negotiation. By synthesising museum-based methodologies (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994) with a translanguaging framework (García et al., 2017), the study utilises direct observation of works of art to foster the co-construction of meaning. The following core objectives define the project:

- *Promote translanguaging strategies in language education*: To valorise the collective linguistic repertoire of the group, encouraging students to identify similarities and differences between languages and cultures while developing cross-linguistic flexibility and metalinguistic strategies.
- *Foster shared knowledge*: To draw upon and build collective funds of knowledge encompassing museum content and "language-making" through collaborative interpretation and meaning co-creation.

[2] Link to the "Io vado al museo" project's web page: https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/learn/programs-for-accessibility-and-inclusion/i-go-to-the-museum/.
[3] Link to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection's website: https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/.

- *Empower migratory backgrounds*: To increase the engagement of individuals with migratory backgrounds by promoting their personal agency and affirming their unique identities within the educational space.
- *Enact a transformative vision*: To encourage both schools and museums to adopt a perspective where all languages hold equal value, involving participants in a process that transforms their relationship within linguistic and cultural hierarchies.

4.1. The pedagogical framework

The framework utilised in the project (Meneghetti 2024, adapted from Fazzi 2020) is structured around three distinct pedagogical phases: the pre-visit at school, the visit to the museum, and the post-visit session held back at school.

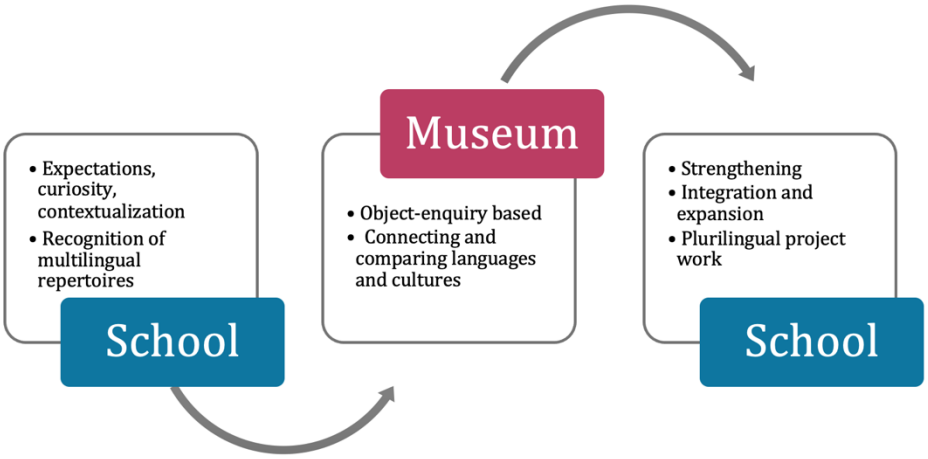

Figure 1. Framework for the project (Meneghetti 2024, adapted from Fazzi 2020)

In the following sections, I will describe the objectives of the three phases, while describing the specific activities of the workshop entitled "Simboli" (Symbols) that was attended by the participants of this study. The overarching objective of this workshop is to utilise the discovery of original museum artworks and cultural artifacts (such as tarot or card decks) to explore how symbols assume diverse and shifting meanings based on the viewer's unique perspective. This process serves as a powerful exercise in art mediation, where the visual encounter becomes a catalyst for plurilingual and intercultural negotiation. By encouraging students to draw upon their full linguistic and cultural repertoires, the framework stimulates the collaborative construction of new meanings, transforming the museum experience into a site of active democratic participation.

4.1.1. The pre-visit at school: a first approach to translanguaging pedagogy and art mediation

This initial phase is conducted within the school environment and is designed as a co-facilitated experience involving both museum educators and classroom teachers. By transitioning from the museum galleries to the classroom, educators decentre the traditional museum space to meet students in a familiar setting, which facilitates rapport-building and group cohesion.

The objectives of this initial phase are multifaceted and fundamentally essential for the success of the overall project. This stage is strategically designed to establish a collaborative bridge between the museum staff and the classroom, fostering an inclusive atmosphere where students can align their expectations with the project's broader goals. Central to this preparation is the intent to activate students' prior knowledge through inductive art mediation strategies, which serve to bridge the gap between their lived linguistic realities and the artistic themes they will encounter in the museum.

Furthermore, the pre-visit acts as a crucial methodological scaffold, ensuring that the subsequent museum workshop is not a fragmented experience but a continuation of a coherent pedagogical journey. By identifying and documenting the collective linguistic repertoire of the group in situ, the facilitators create a "safe space" where translanguaging is positioned as the primary tool for negotiating artistic meaning.

Ultimately, these objectives aim to transform the classroom into a preparatory 'contact zone', ensuring that students are empowered to engage with the collection through both a critical aesthetic lens and the full breadth of their personal linguistic resources.

The pedagogical activities implemented during this session are strategically designed to move from the initial phase of art mediation toward more complex translanguaging practices, utilising the visual encounter with the artwork as a semiotic bridge to activate and negotiate the participants' diverse linguistic repertoires. These activities include:

- An introductory multilingual collaborative session focused on the term "museum" and other thematic keywords to establish a shared conceptual framework.
- An interpretative exercise centred on Victor Brauner's painting, *The Surrealist*. Students engage in a comparative study between the painting and its semiotic inspiration ("The Magician" card from the Tarot of Marseilles) to understand the artist's use of symbolic self-representation.
- A revised version of the language portrait (Bush 2012), adapted to incorporate the artistic elements of Brauner's painting that was introduced during the previous activity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Revisited language portrait

The multimodal artifacts generated during this phase remained displayed on the classroom walls. This intentional modification of the schoolscape (Gorter 2018) serves to provide permanent visibility to the plurality of linguistic repertoires within the group, reinforcing the value of the students' identities beyond the duration of the workshop. By transforming the physical environment of the school into a space that reflects their diverse backgrounds, the project ensures that the linguistic validation initiated during the pre-visit becomes an enduring element of their educational experience.

Ultimately, this phase establishes the necessary critical and emotional foundation for students to enter the museum not as outsiders, but as authorised co-interpreters of the collection.

4.1.2. The visit at the museum: the 'Simboli' workshop

The "Simboli" workshop, conducted at the museum, is a ninety-minute pedagogical intervention designed to provide participants with an expansive view of the museum rooms through the focused analysis of four core works of art. The workshop is structured around a set of macro-objectives designed to harmonise the diverse facets of the project, ranging from art historical content to translanguaging practices. These objectives are categorised into three primary domains, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1
Pedagogical macro-objectives of the "simboli" workshop

Objectives	Pedagogical Goals
Content-Based Objectives	Equipping students with interpretive strategies to engage with both figurative and abstract art. Facilitating the construction of personal interpretations (museum content). Introducing foundational art historical data, including artist intent, technique, and intertextual connections.
Linguistic Objectives	Introducing and implementing target lexis tailored to the group's proficiency level, focused on specific thematic clusters (e.g., words to talk about symbol or about emotions). Utilizing linguistic structures to facilitate the description of persons, settings, and affective states. Developing fluency in the "microlanguage" of art (e.g., painting, sculpture, painter, etc.).
Translanguaging objectives	Valorising collective linguistic repertoires. Identifying cross-linguistic similarities and differences at the lexical and structural levels. Eliciting recurrent semantic elements across diverse languages. Producing collaborative, multilingual short texts.

Building upon the framework of museum education as a participatory experience (Hooper-Greenhill 1994), the workshop encourages continuous, active observation. This is achieved through activities that leverage the students' linguistic-cultural backgrounds as assets rather than barriers. Table 2 provides a detailed description of the art mediation and multimodal activities centred on the specific core works of art.

Table 2
Overview of museum-based multimodal and translanguaging activities

Work of Art	Description of the activity
The Surrealist[4] Victor Brauner 1947	Associated Stimulus: The magician (Tarot of Marseilles) Participants are presented with suit aces from Italian or Marseille tarot decks. They are tasked with identifying corresponding symbols within the artwork (e.g., swords, cups, coins, batons). This comparative analysis between the painting and the cards facilitates an intercultural discussion on symbolic meanings. The activity concludes with the collaborative creation of an alternative multilingual title for the paintings.
Landscape with Red Spots, No. 2[5] Vasily Kandinsky 1913	Associated Stimulus: The bridge (Hanafuda – Japanese deck) The educator facilitates a visual analysis of the Japanese card to elicit the concept of a "bridge". Participants provide the corresponding term in their respective L1s and discuss the diverse symbolic connotations of "the bridge" in their cultures. Learners then analyse the painting to identify Kandinsky's representation of a bridge, followed by a mediated discussion based on student-led hypotheses.
Maiastra[6] Costantin Brancusi CA. 1912	Associated Stimulus: The Bird (Loteria Mexicana deck) Following the introduction of the 'Bird' stimulus from the Lotería Mexicana deck, participants are prompted to identify the specific work of art within the gallery that, from their perspective, symbolises a bird. After a mediated observation of the sculpture, students engage in the collaborative construction of a multilingual poster. Each participant selects a lexical item from their linguistic repertoire that encapsulates the symbolic essence of the bird, subsequently articulating their cultural and personal motivations during the concluding plenary session.
The Moon Woman[7] Jackson Pollock 1942	Associated Cards: The moon + The sun (Tarot of Marseilles) Participants isolate the moon symbol on the tarot card before identifying its presence in the painting. The mediation focuses on the title and the traditional gendered associations of the moon. The educator introduces the Rebis (alchemical marriage) as a representation of the union of solar (masculine) and lunar (feminine) principles. In small groups, students redesign a "symbol-free" Rebis by selecting new icons for man and woman, documenting their choices and meanings through multilingual annotations.

[4] https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/art/works/the-surrealist/
[5] https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/art/works/landscape-with-red-spots-no-2/
[6] https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/art/works/maiastra/
[7] https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/en/art/works/the-moon-woman/

By utilising diverse cultural stimuli, such as the Tarot, Hanafuda, and Lotería decks, as semiotic bridges, the project's pedagogy empowers students to articulate complex and abstract aesthetic interpretations while simultaneously validating their diverse linguistic and cultural identities. This phase of direct interaction with the museum is foundational for the subsequent post-visit stage.

4.1.3. The post-visit at school: creating a virtual museum on izi.TRAVEL

The post-visit phase serves as a critical synthesis of the entire pedagogical pathway, designed to integrate and expand upon the insights that emerged during the previous sessions at school and the museum. In this final stage, the focus shifts from the mediation of existing artworks toward the collaborative production of original creative responses, allowing students to crystallise their personal interpretations while actively valorising their collective plural repertoires. By producing a tangible final product, students are encouraged to mobilise both their newly acquired art-historical knowledge and their diverse linguistic resources to achieve an authentic communicative purpose.

This phase aims at fostering inclusive participation through group work and facilitating a dialogue that extends beyond the classroom, engaging the broader school community and, where possible, an extra-scholastic audience. The primary outcome of this session was the creation of their own museum hosted on izi.TRAVEL, a platform that enables the development of multimedia audio guides or virtual museums. One of the most unique aspects of izi.TRAVEL is that it is an open platform. This means that anyone can publish and use the platform at no cost, as most tours are free to stream and the basic creation tools require no subscription. Furthermore, it can be used by schools and universities as a tool for students to create their own digital storytelling projects (Compagnoni, 2022; Fazzi, 2021, 2022; Spaliviero, 2022).

The post-visit phase was structured as a series of five distinct meetings, each lasting approximately ninety minutes, designed to guide students through a specific developmental sequence that bridged artistic creation with digital storytelling. This process allowed participants to gain familiarity with the digital platform while deeply engaging with the creative synthesis of their museum experience.

Phase 1. Artistic Creation. Working in pairs or small groups (3/4 people), students designed their personal cards inspired by the symbolic themes encountered at the museum. Participants were granted the agency to select individual symbols or synthesise multiple icons to represent their perspectives. This phase concluded with a plenary session where students shared their artifacts, fostering a collective dialogue on the shifting meanings attributed to diverse symbols. In this phase, a total of seven cards were produced, one for each couple/group.

Phase 2. Multilingual Composition. Following an initial introduction to the izi.TRAVEL platform, students began drafting the multilingual texts intended to serve as descriptive digital captions for their original artworks. A structured storyboard was provided to provide essential methodological scaffolding for this complex task. This tool featured a series of guiding questions, prompting participants to reflect deeply on the specific meaning of their symbols, their cultural relevance in their countries of origin, and the personal motivations that guided their artistic choices. Throughout this composition phase, the pedagogical focus transitioned directly from art mediation toward translanguaging practices. This process culminated in the preparation of a final text that integrated Italian L2 and the diverse languages spoken within the group, transforming the descriptive caption into a collaborative multilingual text.

Phase 3. Audio Production. During this stage, the focus shifted from written composition to oral expression as students utilised their mobile devices to record the audio components of their guides within the school environment. This phase was characterised by a high degree of collaboration, functioning as a communal effort where participants provided mutual support. Technical and linguistic assistance was provided by peers, classroom teachers, and the researcher to ensure the quality and clarity of their narrations.

Phase 4. Digital Curation. Participants downloaded the application and created personal accounts to facilitate the direct upload of their texts and audio files. During this phase, the students collectively decided on the titles for their digital collections (*Arte della Fortuna* and *I Simboli della Vita*) through a democratic process of brainstorming and voting.

Phase 5. Implementation. The project culminated on the final day of the school term with the official public launch of the virtual museum, successfully transitioning the students' work from a private classroom activity to a globally accessible digital resource. By doing so, these multilingual multimodal artifacts stand as a testament to the students' role as active cultural producers, successfully bridging the gap between museum-based aesthetic observation and creative expression.

Figure 3 shows three screenshots of the virtual museum to give an idea of what the final product looks like, using the app izi.TRAVEL[8].

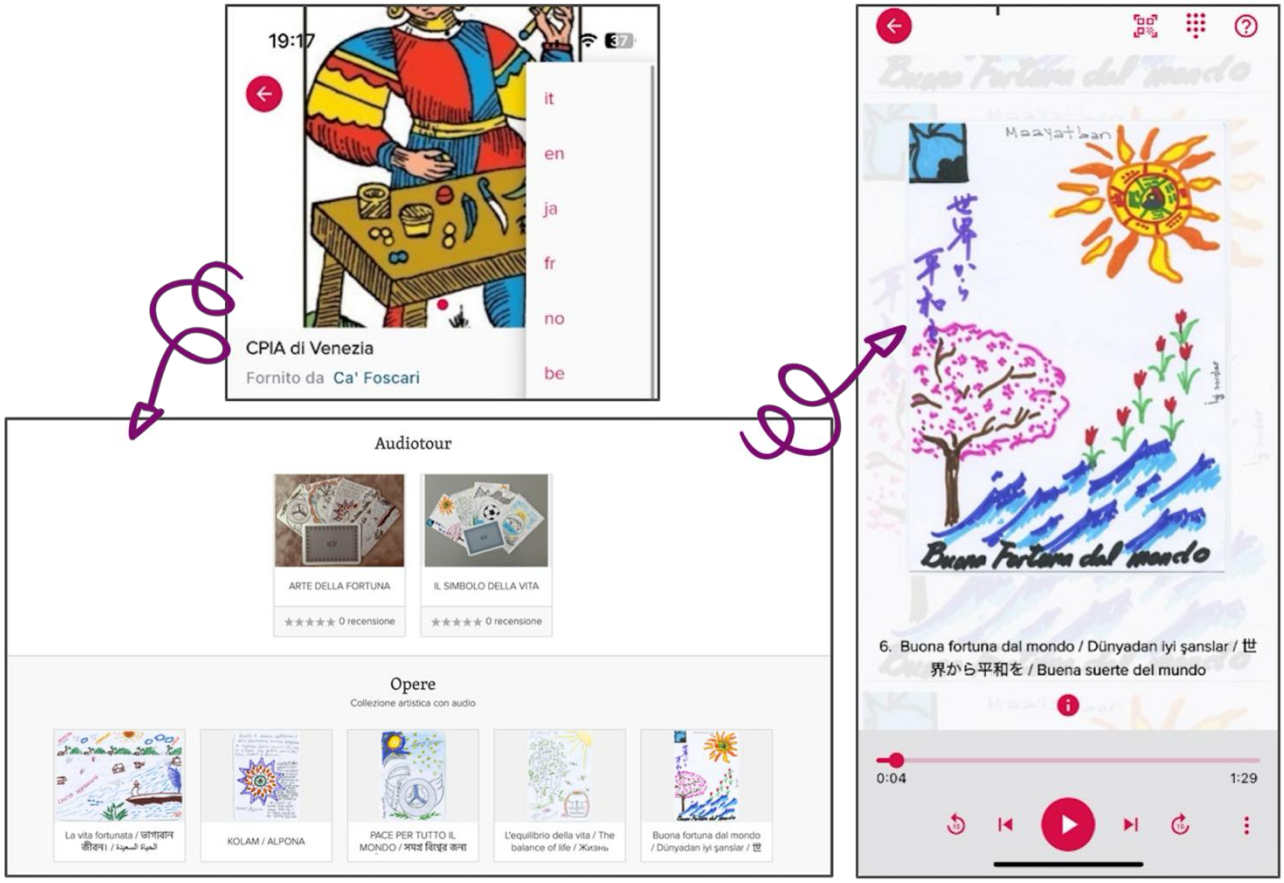

Figure 3. Screenshots for the virtual museum on izi.TRAVEL

5. The study

Building upon the project's theoretical and pedagogical framework, this study investigates the potential inherent in establishing arts-based plurilingual Italian L2 programs that bridge formal school settings (specifically, a school for adult education) and non-formal museum environments. The study aims to evaluate the project's influence on the school's educational practices and explore its transformative effects. At its core, the study addresses a single primary question regarding the project's impact on the students' learning process, specifically seeking to highlight the most significantly affected aspects.

5.1. Methodology

The perspective guiding this research is fundamentally transformative in nature. In accordance with Mertens (2009), this worldview is defined by several key traits that prioritise social equity and the deconstruction of systemic barriers:

- Central importance is placed on the lives and experiences of traditionally marginalised groups. Within this framework, it is essential that the investigation not be limited to the participants' lives but also extends to how oppression is structured and reproduced. As Mertens (2015, 70) notes, "studying oppressed people's lives also includes studying the oppressors' means of dominance."

[8] The virtual museum can be visited at this link, https://izi.travel/it/dd3f-cpia-di-venezia/it. For a better experience, we recommend downloading the app from the link and searching for 'CPIA DI Venezia'.

- The study analyses how and why injustices are reflected in asymmetric power relations.
- The approach examines how research findings can be explicitly linked to subsequent social and political actions.
- A transformative theory is elaborated to develop the research approach, allowing for a focused analysis of the beliefs influencing a program's progress or the root causes of specific problems.

Research situated within this perspective is strictly connected to power and social justice, which are inextricably intertwined with political questions and the objective of proposing programs for social change (Mertens. 2007). In the context of this study, this involves the integration of both educational and political elements, positioning social justice as a cardinal principle in the teaching of Italian L2.

Among the available qualitative designs, critical ethnography was selected for its capacity to provide an approach that is context-linked, participatory, and interpretive. This design allows for the surfacing of multiple perspectives while maintaining a critical stance on the pedagogical practices used with adults. As Talmy (2012, p. 1) states, a critical ethnographer must maintain "a critically reflexive stance toward the relationships between researcher, the researched, and knowledge production, representation, and dissemination," acknowledging the complex interactions between social structures and human agency. By adopting this design, the study seeks to document the 'transformative process' within the project, where the validation of diverse linguistic repertoires and creative meaning-making serves as a catalyst for broader social participation and fosters a more democratic 'contact zone' for new citizens.

5.2. Participants

The study involved a heterogeneous group of 22 adult students with a migratory background enrolled in the project at the CPIA (Provincial Centre for Adult Education) of Venice. The participants were divided in two different classes, one attending in the morning and the other in the afternoon, according to their personal study or work commitments. Both groups were at the same language proficiency level, that is A2, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

As detailed in Table 3, the sample was predominantly female (73%) and exhibited a wide age range, spanning from 18 to 56 years. The group was characterised by significant linguistic and cultural diversity, with participants from 14 different countries. This diverse composition provided a rich environment for observing translanguaging practices and the mobilisation of varied cultural repertoires throughout the project.

Table 3
Socio-demographic profile of the student participants

Group (CEFR Level)	No. + Gender	Age	Nationality	Collective repertoire
Group 1 (A2) Afternoon [St 1-11]	11 (6 F + 5 M)	18 - 54	Afghanistan (1), Bangladesh (5), Morocco (1), Sri Lanka (1), Ukraine (3).	Standard Arabic, Darija (Moroccan variety of Arabic), French, Bangla, English, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Urdu, Hindi, Farsi, Sinhalese, Romanian.
Group 2 (A2+) Morning [St 12-22]	11 (10 F + 1 M)	21 - 56	Belarus (1), Canada, (1), Cameroon (1), Honduras (1), Japan (2), Philippines (1), Norway (1), Russia (1), Turkey (1), Ukraine (1).	Ukrainian, Russian, Tagalog, English, French, Japanese, Chinese, Norwegian, Turkish, Spanish, Belarusian.
Total	**22 (16 F + 6 M)**	**18-56**	**14 Nationalities**	**20 Languages**

It is important to note that the participants' attendance during the project was irregular, primarily due to personal or professional commitments. Consequently, the number of students participating in individual sessions of the project is lower than the total cohort. Specifically, 13 participants were present at the pre-visit, 15 at the visit, and 21 at the post-visit.

The study also involved two teachers who were responsible for the two different classes. Both voluntarily agreed to take part in the research. These educators had experience with the project with cohorts

before those included in the current study; however, their participation involved different pathways and activities than those delineated in the various phases of this project. Furthermore, one teacher (Teacher 2) had been involved in the production of a promotional video created by the museum to disseminate the objectives, methodology, and actions undertaken within the project. Aside from this specific experience, neither of the two participating teachers had previously been involved in initiatives aimed at promoting Italian as a second language (L2) through a translanguaging lens. Detailed information regarding their professional backgrounds is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Teachers' profile

Teacher	Class	Educational Background	Professional experience	Experience at Cpia	Subject
Teacher 1 [T1]	Liv. A2	Diploma magistrale (Teaching Diploma)	> 20 years	5 years	Italiano L2
Teacher 2 [T2]	Liv. A2+	Degree in Humanities/Literature (Laurea in Lettere)	15-20 years	10 years	Italiano L2

5.3. Researcher's role and positionality

I occupied an internal position within the project, underpinned by a long-standing collaboration with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection that began in 2018. This sustained engagement has facilitated the development of specialised expertise in cultural mediation within museum contexts, which complements the focus of my research on translanguaging pedagogy and language education across diverse formal and non-formal settings. Within the *Io vado al museo* project, this role was highly participatory, since I was directly involved in the co-creation of pedagogical activities and worked in close consultation with both museum staff and classroom teachers.

Throughout the implementation phase, I worked alongside museum educators to facilitate sessions, maintaining a transparent dual role as both an educator and a researcher. This duality, encompassing both the active execution of the activities and the systematic collection of data, was explicitly communicated to the students at the outset and consistently reaffirmed throughout the project.

Within the transformative paradigm adopted for this project, my internal position allowed for a reflexive approach that bridged the gap between theory and practice by ensuring that I was deeply embedded in the realities of the participants' contexts.

5.4. Data collection

During the research, data were collected using various types of instruments for qualitative research: interviews (with the teachers and in focus groups with the students) and materials (artifacts). While the materials were collected throughout the study, the interviews were conducted at the end of the project.

5.4.1. Students' focus groups

The primary objective of the focus groups was to gain a deeper understanding of the students' opinions, attitudes, and expectations, providing insight into the group's collective perceptions regarding the activities and strategies that were implemented both in the classroom and at the museum. Special attention was paid to the perceived impact the project had on their learning paths, outlining the aspects that were particularly significant for their educational development and broader personal growth.

The discussion guide was adapted and simplified starting from the framework proposed by Baldry (2005). To accommodate the participants' diverse profiles, characterized by low linguistic proficiency in Italian, heterogeneous educational backgrounds, and varied personal experiences, the questions were designed to be clear, accessible, and engaging. Furthermore, conversational aids such as multilingual keyword sheets and emoticons were employed to facilitate peer-to-peer and group discussion (Richards, 2003). Final open-ended questions allowed students to contribute additional reflections and insights relevant to their perspectives.

To further engage participants in a context characterized by linguistic asymmetry (Ganassin & Holmes, 2013), I adopted a flexible multilingual approach during the focus groups. This strategy leveraged the competencies and strategies naturally present within the research context, creating spaces where the diverse linguistic repertoires of all participants—including my own—could find expression. For instance, I utilised

simplified language when posing questions and frequently paraphrased or reformulated participants' responses when the meaning was unclear or not shared by the entire group. Moreover, I made every effort to utilise the following linguistic resources available within the group:

- When necessary, students freely assumed the role of mediators, not only supporting their peers and the researcher in achieving more fluid communication but also fostering a climate of "linguistic hospitality" (Phipps 2012). This allowed for a form of translation that respected the linguistic practices and choices of all participants.
- As a plurilingual individual, I utilised my own full linguistic repertoire to facilitate and mediate communication within the group.
- Throughout the focus groups, participants were invited to freely use Google Translate or other familiar applications to better express complex ideas and ensure their verbal contributions accurately reflected their thoughts.

The four focus groups (two for each class) took place in May 2025, at the end of the project. Each session was audio-recorded using two devices, with durations ranging from 16 to 55 minutes (totalling 2 hours and 26 minutes) and involving 3 to 5 participants per group. Out of 22 students, a total of 16 participated in the focus group (4 were absent and 2 declined). The timeframe was deemed sustainable, balancing the class schedules with the need to maintain focus among students who were less proficient in Italian or unfamiliar with this type of research methodology. Finally, to foster an informal and inclusive atmosphere, each session began with a discussion of conversational ground rules, emphasising the freedom to use translators, online resources, peer support, or assistance from the researcher.

5.4.2. Teachers' interview

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the participating teachers to complement the data gathered from students. This format was selected because of its exploratory nature, allowing the researchers to follow a pre-defined set of questions while providing the interviewees with the flexibility to elaborate on emerging themes. The interview protocol was adapted from Dörnyei (2007) and built upon both theoretical literature and preliminary reflections from field notes and student focus groups.

The interviews consisted of an opening prompt, six core content questions, and a concluding remark to allow for final reflections. The discussions primarily focused on:

- Strengths and weaknesses of the project across personal, relational, civic, and linguistic dimensions.
- The perceived impact of the project on the students' overall learning processes.

To foster a collaborative and comfortable atmosphere, a joint interview with the two teachers was carried out. This approach encouraged shared reflection and allowed the participants to discuss the specific group dynamics unique to their diverse students. The session took place in early June 2025, after the virtual museum was published online, and was audio recorded.

5.4.3. Students' multimodal artifacts

In addition to the verbal data, the study incorporated the collection and analysis of multimodal artifacts produced by the students during the various phases of the project. These artifacts served as a non-verbal record of the students' learning trajectories. Following the principles of social semiotics (Halliday 1978; Hodge & Kress 1988; Kress 2010), these products were treated as 'meaning-making resources' that allowed students to express complex conceptual understandings that might have been constrained by their developing proficiency in the target language.

The collection process was longitudinal, capturing artifacts both from the initial pre-visit activities and the post-visit stage. During the pre-visit 13 linguistic silhouettes were collected (5 for the first group and 8 for the second one), while the post-visit yielded 7 cards (3 for the first group and 4 for the second one). Each card was paired with a descriptive script in all the languages spoken by the group. These scripts functioned as an 'artwork caption', reflecting deeply on the specific meaning of symbols, their cultural relevance in the students' countries of origin, and the personal motivations behind their artistic choices.

These artifacts provided a vital form of data triangulation, offering a tangible counterpoint to the retrospective accounts provided in the students' focus groups and teachers' interview and ensuring a more holistic understanding of the participants' engagement with the project.

5.5. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using an integrated qualitative approach to synthesise findings from interviews, focus groups, and multimodal artifacts. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure data fidelity. The resulting textual corpus and visual materials were managed and coded using MAXQDA 24 software.

The analysis of the transcripts followed the principles of thematic analysis (Creswell & Creswell 2018). The process involved two main stages: initial coding to identify emergent themes, and second-level coding to organise these codes into broader conceptual categories aligned with the research question (Dörnyei 2007). Specifically, I read through the data to get a collective sense of the project experience, then I coded using emerging codes that were later grouped into four main themes. To provide an overview of the main codes and of the subcodes I created throughout the analysis, a snapshot of the final codebook is presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Snapshot of codebook with main codes/ subcodes and operational definition

Main codes	Subcodes	Operational Definition
1. Linguistic Dimension	1.1 Interactional competence 1.2 Vocabulary acquisition	Focus on 'willingness to communicate' and the use of specialised language (e.g. language of art) or less traditional vocabulary topics in the language classroom
2. Personal/Affective Dimension	2.1 Expressing complex emotions 2.2 Subjective externalisation 2.3 Connection with the past 2.4 Identity negotiation 2.5 Emotional scaffolding	Identifying moments where participants share subjective feelings/emotions, personal history or their role in the new life
3. Social Dimension	3.1 Socialisation 3.2 Interaction/Connections 3.3 Knowledge exchange/Intercultural dialogue 3.4 Sharing understanding	Instances of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, collaborative meaning-making and cohesive group identity.
4. Civic/Democratic Dimension	4.1 Active cultural engagement 4.2 Contributing to city's narration	Instances where claiming "ownership" of the city or act as active contributors to local cultural narration

The students' multimodal artifacts were also analysed through the lens of social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006), focusing on the interplay between visual semiotic resources (such as symbols and colours) and the accompanying textual captions.

Finally, findings from all data sources were triangulated to ensure interpretative validity and to provide a holistic understanding of the participants' engagement and learning trajectories.

6. Results

This section presents the findings of this study, organised according to a thematic structure (Creswell & Creswell 2018). This organisational choice reflects the outcomes of the thematic analysis conducted on the data, ensuring that the results are presented coherently and systematically. Specifically, the analysis revealed a complex interplay of factors which have been categorised into four primary dimensions: linguistic, personal/affective, social, and civic/democratic. Each of these dimensions represents a core theme that emerged during the coding process and serves to illuminate the participants' experiences within the educational context. In the sub-sections that follow, each dimension is explored in detail, supported by representative excerpts and analytical commentary to provide a comprehensive overview of the phenomena under investigation, as well as descriptions of relevant aspects of students' multimodal artifacts.

To facilitate the interpretation of the data excerpts, the following labels were employed in the transcription of the focus groups and teacher interviews: 'St' designates students, 'T' represents teachers, and 'R' refers to the researcher. Furthermore, individual students and teachers are identified by numerical codes (e.g., St1, T2) to maintain anonymity while allowing for the tracking of specific participant contributions. Also, I used pseudonyms when participants referred to other students or teachers within the excerpts. Finally, to preserve the authenticity of the participants' voices and provide visibility to the linguistic choices made by students during the focus groups, all excerpts are reported in their original form (Andrews et al. 2020). These are accompanied by English translations to ensure greater intelligibility for the reader.

6.1. Linguistic dimension

According to the perceptions of both students and teachers, the project appears to have had a significant impact on L2 learning, particularly regarding interactional competence and the acquisition of new vocabulary. This development is characterised by a transition from a traditional "focus on form" to a "focus on meaning". The arts-based approach and the specific setting encouraged students to speak without becoming overly fixated on formal correctness, effectively leveraging their "willingness to communicate".

The following exchange illustrates this shift from textbook-driven constraints to a more communicative orientation, driven by the need to share their ideas and emotions.

Excerpt 1, FG 3

St18: Mi piace perché, non so, it moves the focus.	***St18***: I like it because, I don't know, it moves the focus.
R: Ha cambiato il focus?	***R***: Did it change the focus?
St18: Sì, ha cambiato il focus da regole, da libro, da parlare perfetto, è cambiato il focus.	***St18***: Yes, it shifted the focus away from rules, from the textbook, from speaking perfectly; the focus has changed.
[…]	[…]
St15: Voi dovete studiare, voi dovete sapere le regole tutte.	***St15***: You have to study, you have to know all the rules.
St18: È molto, è molto, yeah, helpful, yes.	***St18***: It's very, very, yeah, helpful, yes.
T: Ok. Provo a dire una cosa e mi dite se è vero o no. Quindi l'idea è che in questa attività l'importante era parlare e non parlare correttamente, giusto?	***T***: Okay. I'll try to say something, and you tell me if it's true or not. So, the idea is that in this activity, the important thing was to speak, rather than to speak correctly, right?
St21: Sì.	***St21***: Yes.
T: Quindi per voi era più importante dire la vostra idea, dire la vostra emozione.	***T***: So, for you, it was more important to express your ideas, to express your emotions.
St18: Comunicare, sì sì.	***St18:*** To communicate, yes, yes.

The teacher's reflections in Excerpt 2 deepen this understanding by highlighting two pivotal structural aspects of the project that diverged from typical classroom dynamics. First, the presence of external figures, specifically the museum educators, heightened the stakes of oral production, as students had to explain concepts to individuals outside their immediate peer group and teaching staff. Second, the nature of the task itself was pivotal; the activity integrated both oral and cooperative written production centred on a topic that was not pre-given. This created an "information gap" because the specific subject matter was not shared among all participants (students, teachers, educators, and researcher), forcing students to use the language strategically to manage and convey unfamiliar information.

Excerpt 2, Teachers' Interview

T2: Per quanto riguarda l'apprendimento linguistico, a parte appunto la produzione orale che era importante ed era importante questa produzione orale anche davanti all'operatore del museo quindi non era solo tra di loro ma spiegare al resto della classe, spiegare all'operatore del museo ma anche la produzione scritta cooperativa era interessante. Anche perché l'argomento non era un argomento dato, era un argomento che noi [gli insegnanti e gli educatori] non conoscevamo e che loro dovevano riuscire a far capire.	**T2:** Regarding linguistic learning, apart from oral production, which was important, especially given that they had to speak in front of the museum educator, not just among themselves, to explain things to the rest of the class and the museum staff, the cooperative written production was also interesting. This was particularly because the topic was not a pre-given one; it was a subject we [the teachers and the educators] were unfamiliar with, and which they had to manage to make us understand.

A similar perspective emerges from the words of another student, who notes that the complexity of writing and sharing their ideas with classmates demanded deep reflection on the meanings they intended to

convey. Since Italian was the only common language available, the student felt that navigating this challenging interaction significantly enhanced their learning process.

Excerpt 3, FG 2

St8: Perché quando devono scrivere qualcosa, noi devono pensare tanto che cosa posso usare, cosa significa, perché ho scelto questa cosa… in questo tempo io ho parlato con la mia compagna. Anche io non ho capito la sua parola, lui non ha capito la mia parola, per quello noi usato la lingua italiana.	**St8:** Because when we have to write something, we have to think a lot about what I can use, what it means, why I chose this thing... during this time I talked with my classmate. I didn't understand her word, he didn't understand my word, and because of that we used the Italian language.

Beyond interactional competence, this perceived new focus also impacted the acquisition of domain-specific vocabulary. As evidenced in Excerpt 4, students perceived a tangible increase in their lexicon due to the specific need to seek out new words while expressing themselves in the museum setting.

Excerpt 4, FG 3

St12: Per me, tutto il tempo in classe, io penso futuro, passato prossimo, infinitivo, altre cose. Durante studiare. Ma in museo, cercando nuove parole. Perché quando studio, penso solo con regole. In museo, cercando nuove parole. **R:** E queste nuove parole, Emilia, adesso le ricordi? Ti ricordi le nuove parole? **St12:** Non tutti, ma poco poco, sì. **R:** Quindi secondo te, Emilia, il tuo vocabolario in italiano è cresciuto? È diventato più grande? **St12:** È cresciuto perché questo evento, sì.	**St12:** For me, during the whole time in class, I think about the future tense, the present perfect, the infinitive, and other things. While studying. But in the museum, I was looking for new words. Because when I study, I only think in terms of rules. In the museum, I was looking for new words. **R:** And these new words, Emilia, do you remember them now? Do you remember the new words? **St12:** Not all of them, but bit by bit, yes. **R:** So, in your opinion, Emilia, has your Italian vocabulary grown? Has it become larger? **St12:** It has grown because of this event, yes.

Finally, teachers noted that this lexical enrichment occurred naturally through the description of artworks rather than through traditional lessons on standardised topics like work or restaurants. By engaging with paintings, students encountered and retained specific terms (such as “symbol,” “magic wand,” or “magician”), which, while not typical of everyday language, became a permanent part of their linguistic repertoire and the language-learning process itself.

Excerpt 5, Teachers’ Interview

T1: C'è anche tutta la parte di arricchimento del lessico perché non fai la classica lezione per imparare le parole che riguardano che ne so il ristorante piuttosto che il lavoro, ma con la descrizione di un quadro emergono un sacco di parole, che sicuramente adesso rimangono fissate perché “simbolo”, “bacchetta magica”, “mago”, tutte queste cose qui magari non le useranno nel linguaggio quotidiano, però sono cose che comunque adesso fanno parte del loro apprendimento, insomma della lingua.	**T1:** There is also the aspect of lexical enrichment because you are not doing a traditional lesson to learn words related to, I don’t know, a restaurant or work; instead, through the description of a painting, a great deal of vocabulary emerges. These words surely remain fixed in their minds now, because "symbol", "magic wand", "magician", all these things, they might not use in everyday language, they are now part of their learning, and ultimately, of the language itself.

6.2. Personal and affective dimension

As regards the personal and affective dimension, data appear to confirm that the project had a profound impact on the participants’ capacity for self-expression. This was achieved through the strategic use of their diverse linguistic repertoires and the opportunity to employ alternative, multimodal forms of communication to ensure they were understood.

In the first excerpt, a student explains how the freedom to use their own languages in the classroom and at the museum allowed them to express complex emotions that they felt were only expressible through their first language (L1).

Excerpt 6, FG 3

St21: Noi possiamo lasciare qualcosa del nostro cuore in questo museo, in questo progetto e per me utilizzare tutte le lingue che tu conosci e che tu parli è molto importante. Non solo 'Ok studente, noi parlare italiano e tu o voi dovete parlare solo l'italiano e praticare'. Ma noi abbiamo emozioni e emozioni è difficile esplicare solo nel una lingua. Perché la prima parola che io dico, io dico nel mio madrelingua, penso.	**St21:** We can leave something of our hearts in this museum, in this project, and for me, using all the languages that you know and speak is very important. Not just: 'Ok student, we speak Italian and you or all of you must speak only Italian and practice.' But we have emotions, and it is difficult to explain emotions in only one language. Because the first word I say, I say in my mother tongue, I think.

In the following excerpt, another student goes further, describing a sense of surprise at the group's collective ability to externalise their inner worlds. This process of "bringing out from inside" allowed participants to identify with one another and feel comfortable with sharing intimate aspects of their identities.

Excerpt 7, FG 4

St20: Y esto podría ser como una expresión para mí interesante, sorprendida. Sorprendida de lo que pudimos expresar, que lo sacamos de adentro. En mi caso, el caso de ella de hablar de su país y sacar esa parte de su identidad. […]Y yo pude sacar parte de mi identidad. Entonces, me sorprendí porque de lo que pudimos expresar todos, que sacamos algo de adentro y que nos identificó y nos hizo sentir cómodas compartiendo parte de su identidad.	**St20:** And this could be, for me, an interesting, surprising expression. Surprised by what we were able to express, what we brought out from inside. In my case, and in her case, talking about her country and bringing out that part of her identity. [...] And I was able to bring out part of my identity. So, I was surprised because of what we were all able to express—that we brought something out from within that identified us and made us feel comfortable sharing part of our identity.

Furthermore, the activities seemed to bridge the gap between the participants' current lives and their pasts, enabling them to rediscover parts of themselves and describe their previous lives, passions, and activities. This autobiographical connection served as a powerful motivator for engagement during the activities both in class and at the museum.

Excerpt 8, FG 1

St5: Mi piaciuto perché dieci anni fa prima I used to paint. **R:** Quindi tu dipingevi? **St5:** Sì, dieci anni fa sì, adesso no. […] When I was doing the painting I was ricordando questo.	**St5:** I liked it because ten years ago I used to paint. **R:** So, you used to paint? **St5:** Yes, ten years ago I did, but not now. [...] When I was doing the painting, I was remembering this.

These personal narratives were also facilitated using specific pedagogical tools, such as the language portrait, which were modified from the framework proposed by Busch (2012). As noted by one of the teachers, these visual representations of the linguistic repertoires, combined with the placement of symbolic objects on a table, allowed students to visualise their linguistic repertoires while providing a semiotic bridge to describe their desires, aspirations, and the roles they envision for themselves in their new lives.

Excerpt 9, Teachers' Interview

T1: Quando hanno messo sul banco dei simboli, lì andavano proprio a parlare di sé. Parlare dei propri desideri, per esempio penso ai ragazzi un po' più giovani che parlavano di ciò che vorrebbero diventare nel futuro. […] Quindi sì sono andati un pochettino più a fondo su quelli che sono i propri desideri, le proprie aspirazioni, le proprie passioni.	**T1:** When they placed the symbols on the desk, they really started talking about themselves. Talking about their own desires—for example, I'm thinking of the younger students who spoke about what they would like to become in the future. [...] So yes, they went a bit deeper into what their own desires, their own aspirations, and their own passions are.

While the silhouettes and symbols generally facilitated the expression of positive life aspects, the project also seemed to provide a safe space for the expression of trauma and negative experiences. A significant case involved a Ukrainian refugee student who used the activity to share the painful reality of her displacement due to the war. In her work, she utilised the colour black as a pervasive symbol for her home, her country, and her lack of hope for the future, as stated in Excerpt 10, which provides the transcription of the description of

her silhouette during the pre-visit activity. Figure 3, on the other hand, displays the actual silhouette described by the student.

Excerpt 10, Audio recording, pre-visit

St12: Mia arte non è felice. Voi volete vedere?	**St12:** My art is not happy. Do you want to see?
T2: Sì. Anche perché da qua io vedo che è in bianco e nero e questo è molto interessante.	**T2:** Yes. Also, because from here I can see that it is in black and white, and this is very interesting.
St12: Questo è simbolo per mio paese. Questa è la mia casa… nera. Questi sono i miei fiori vicino alla mia casa… neri. Queste montagne quando io viaggio in mio paese… nero. Il sole… nero. In mia testa zero, in mio cuore zero. in mio tavolo zero, in mio occhi c'è zero… non vedo futuro per mia terra perché è guerra.	**St12:** This is a symbol for my country. This is my house... black. These are my flowers near my house... black. These mountains when I travel in my country... black. The sun... black. In my head zero, in my heart zero. On my table zero, in my eyes there is zero... I see no future for my land because there is war.
T2: Per questo hai scelto il nero?	**T2:** Is that why you chose black?
St12: Sì.	**St12:** Yes.

Figure 4. below, on the other hand, displays the actual silhouette described by the student.

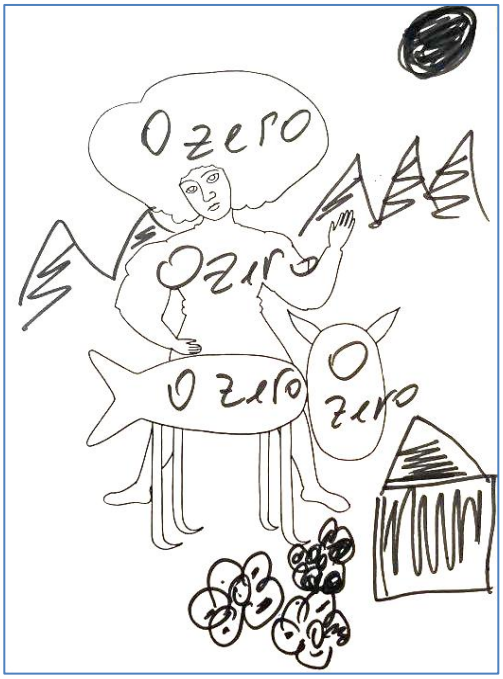

Figure 4. Language portrait drawn by the Ukrainian student

As the teacher observed, the student's powerful expression of negativity was not a sign of disengagement; rather, she became more consistently present and involved precisely because the project allowed for such authentic, albeit painful, personal involvement. Although she could have "bluffed" or approached the task in a thousand different ways, her choice actually fulfilled a deep need to express her own narrative and tell her story. This need likely matured at that exact moment, providing her with the necessary outlet to finally let her thoughts and feelings come out. By choosing to satisfy this internal requirement for self-expression, she established a profoundly intimate connection with the project. Ultimately, according to the teacher's words, this personal bond is why she remained committed and cared so deeply about the project whenever she was present.

Excerpt 11, Teachers' Interview

T2: Alla fine lei questa carta la poteva disegnare in mille modi, cioè poteva bluffare e fare altro, quindi probabilmente questa scelta rispondeva a un'esigenza di narrarsi, di raccontarsi e quindi una volta fatto questo ha creato anche una relazione intima con questo progetto per cui lo ha sentito forse suo e ha continuato a venire. Quando c'era, ci teneva e quindi io penso sì nel momento in cui è una scelta risponde a un'esigenza e quindi forse poi questo crea anche un legame proprio perché probabilmente per lei era giunto il momento di buttare fuori questa cosa… e poi ha stabilito un legame con il progetto.	**T2:** In the end, she could have drawn this card in a thousand different ways, she could have bluffed or done something else, so this choice probably met a need to express herself, to tell her own story. Once she did that, she also created an intimate relationship with this project, which is why she perhaps felt it was hers and continued to show up. When she was there, she cared about it; so I think that when a choice meets a need, it perhaps creates a personal bond because it was likely the right time for her to let this thing out... and then she established a connection with the project.

Finally, the analysis of the multimodal artifacts created by the students during the post-visit phase, specifically the "cards" they created for the virtual museum, provides further insight into the personal dimensions and subjectivities they chose to foreground during the project. These artifacts serve as semiotic evidence of the students' ability to synthesise their cultural backgrounds with the themes encountered at the museum. As illustrated in the table below, the themes emerging from these works range from the comparison of traditions and cultural traits to the expression of universal values and reflections on what constitutes a sustainable and meaningful life.

Table 5
Specific themes and symbolic meanings attributed by the students to their artefacts

Title of the artifact	Core Theme & Symbolic Expression
La vita fortunata / ভাগ্যবান জীবন। / السعيدة الحياة	Represents a collective desire for a calm, stress-free existence, utilizing symbols as a direct expression of this aspiration.
Kolam / Alpona	Highlights symbols of good fortune that act as a common thread among the group; despite their diverse origins, participants identified these traditional patterns as shared cultural bridges.
Pace per tutto il mondo / সমগ্র বিশ্বের জন্য শান্তি / جهان تمام برای صلح / мир для всього світу	Focuses on the universal longing for peace and victory. Students selected symbols that they perceived as having a global resonance, transcending individual borders.
L'equilibrio della vita / The balance of life / Жизнь / Équilibre de la vie	Explores the description of fundamental life values. This work stemmed from both the etymological meaning of the students' own names and specific symbols rooted in their heritage.
Buona fortuna dal mondo / Dünyadan iyi şanslar / 世界から平和を / Buena suerte del mundo	Positions symbols as culture anchors, reflecting how specific objects can transport traditional meanings across different geographic and social contexts.
Il mondo con le imperfezioni è bello / Неідэальны свет выдатны / Hiraya manawari	Explores the description of fundamental life values. Symbols are used here to express shared perspectives about how people could approach life.
Sol og neige / Soleil et sno	Employs symbols to describe and compare the characteristics and traditions of two distinct countries.

In conclusion, these artifacts demonstrate that the experience did not merely provide new vocabulary but rather a visual vocabulary through which students could negotiate their identities and beliefs. By externalising their desires and values through symbols, the participants transformed the task into a profound exercise for personal expression and shared reflection.

6.3. Social dimension

The social dimension emerged as a primary outcome, characterised by a significant shift from individual isolation to a cohesive group identity. Participants consistently identified the opportunity to learn about and connect with their peers as the most rewarding aspect of the program.

The first significant finding concerns the fundamental change in how students perceive their daily interactions. In Excerpt 12, participants describe a shift from a state of mere physical presence to active social

engagement. Student 5 (Masud) reflects on his initial six months at the school as a period where no greetings were exchanged, and silence was the norm. The project appears to have broken this cycle, facilitating a transition where everyone in class is friends with each other. The recognition of the term "socialisation" indicates a conscious awareness among students that one of the values of this project lies in its ability to foster interpersonal bonds.

Excerpt 12, FG 1

St5: Perché adesso in classe sono tutti amici. Noi parliamo... we talk to each other. **R:** Ok, quindi Masud dice che dopo questa attività voi parlate di più. **St3:** Sì, sì. Lui ha ragione. **R:** Sei d'accordo?Anche tu adesso parli di più con i tuoi compagni? **St3:** Sì, sì, sì. **St 5:** Ok. I primi sei mesi, quando io sono arrivato per scuola, ho finito la classe e dopo vado via. Non c'è 'ciao', niente. Adesso, quando ho visto lei fuori 'Ciao, come stai tu?' Adesso, amici, è questa socializ... social… **R:** È una parola difficile in italiano. socializzazione. **St5:** Sì, socializzazione. […] **St5:** Ok, E questo è molto importante per questo programma.	**St5:** Because now everyone in class is friends. We talk... we talk to each other. **R:** Ok, so Masud says that after this activity you all talk more. **St3:** Yes, yes. He is right. **R:** Do you agree? Do you also talk more with your classmates now? **St3:** Yes, yes, yes. **St5:** Ok. During the first six months when I arrived at school, I would finish class and then just leave. There was no 'hello,' nothing. Now, when I see her outside, it's 'Hi, how are you?' Now, friends, it's this socializ... social... **R:** It is a difficult word in Italian. Socialization. **St5:** Yes, socialization. [...] **St5:** Ok, and this is very important for this program.

As socialisation increased, there was a perceived improvement in the students' emotional well-being and sense of security within the learning environment. Initially, the unfamiliarity of the environment caused a sense of "fastidio" (discomfort or awkwardness), leading to hesitation when asked to participate. However, as the project fostered a deeper knowledge of one another, this anxiety was replaced by confidence. The metaphor of the class becoming "like a family" suggests that the social dimension of the project provided a "safe place" that mitigated the stress that can be associated with L2 learning for adult learners.

Excerpt 13, FG 1

St3: Lui voleva dire che quando era prima fatto in classe, lui sempre fastidio quando insegnante chiede qualcosa, quando lui vuole rispondere qualcosa lui fastidioso perché lui non conosce nessuno. Però adesso lui conosce tutti e non fa fastidio più. **R:** Quindi adesso in classe siete più tranquilli? Siete più con... **St5:** Confidenti, sì! **St2:** Per me è come la famiglia adesso.	**St3:** He wanted to say that before, in class, he always felt bothered (or awkward) when the teacher asked something. When he wanted to answer something, he felt bothered because he didn't know anyone. But now he knows everyone and doesn't feel bothered anymore. **R:** So now you are calmer in class? You are more con... **St5:** Confident, yes! **St2:** For me, it is like a family now.

The students' perceptions are validated by the observations of the teachers. In Excerpt 14, a teacher reflects on how the specific pedagogical tools used during the project served as catalysts for interaction. The teacher notes that these activities drew out students who were traditionally silent or socially withdrawn. By providing a shared task and a physical focal point (the card), the project created different dynamics that allowed for connections to form between individuals who previously had no social contact.

Excerpt 14, Teachers' Interview

T2: Secondo me questo è stato uno spunto interessante perché li ha coinvolti e ricordo quando erano tutti in piedi davanti alla carta per cercare i simboli per poi agganciarsi, ho sentito parlare delle persone che in genere non parlano, non interagiscono ed è stato veramente interessante.	**T2:** In my opinion, this was an interesting starting point because it involved them; I remember when they were all standing in front of the map to look for symbols to then connect with. I heard people talking who generally do not speak or interact, and it was truly interesting.

The social dimension was deepened by the intercultural nature of the exchanges. The project did not just encourage talking; it encouraged learning from others. As St21 reports, the activities facilitated

connections that transcended prior social boundaries. By sharing topics related to their respective cultures, students like Mila (St21) and Camille were able to bridge the gap between being strangers and becoming partners. This suggests that the project's success in socialisation was intrinsically linked to its ability to foster genuine intercultural dialogue.

Excerpt 15, FG 3

St21: E anche, per esempio, la mia coppia, Camille, non ho parlato con Camille molto prima. Ma quando noi facciamo questo progetto insieme, noi parliamo del mio paese, del Filippine. Noi abbiamo the chance… la possibilità di studiare qualcosa del nostro paese e anche della persona con cui tu studi in classe. E per me è molto interessante. Molto importante.	**St21:** And also, for example, with my partner, Camille, I didn't talk to Camille much before. But when we do this project together, we talk about my country, about the Philippines. We have the chance... the possibility to study something about our own country and also about the person you study with in class. And for me, it is very interesting. Very important.

The project also helped students realise that cultural differences do not preclude personal commonalities. Excerpt 16 highlights a student's reflection on the intercultural exchange. The student expresses that, while it is stimulating to hear from those who think differently, the collaborative process ultimately revealed a common ground. This dynamic allowed participants to understand that, despite having diverse origins that may initially lead to divergent visions, it is possible to find shared values.

Excerpt 16, FG 3

St15: Perché ho lavorato con un'altra persona e questa persona straniera è per me molto interessante sentire, capire e sapere altre persone che non pensano come io, per esempio. Ma alla fine la ragazza con cui lavoravo io, lei pensa uguale come io. E lei piace anche le cose che piacciono a me.	**St15:** Because I worked with another person, and as a foreigner, it is very interesting for me to hear, understand, and know other people who do not think like I do, for example. But in the end, the girl I was working with, she thinks the same as I do. And she also likes the things that I like.
R: Ok, quindi avete trovato dei punti comuni anche se siete due persone diverse, differenti.	**R:** Ok, so you found a common ground even though you are two different, distinct people.
St15: Sì sì.	**St15:** Yes, yes.

To conclude, the social dimension of the project seemed to act as a transformative force within the classroom. By moving beyond a purely academic focus, the program addressed the fundamental human need for connection and belonging. From the initial breaking of silence to the discovery of common ground, the project fostered an environment where students felt secure, confident, and socially integrated.

6.4. Civic and democratic dimension

Beyond fostering interpersonal relationships, the project also seemed to facilitate a significant expansion into the civic-democratic dimension. By moving the learning process outside the traditional classroom and into the city's cultural heritage sites, the program encouraged adult learners to open up to new possibilities while living in the new city and recognise their own cultural backgrounds as valuable contributions to the democratic life of their new home, transitioning from passive observers to active participants.

The first step toward civic engagement involved breaking the physical and symbolic barriers that often isolate new citizens from the host city's cultural life. As shown in Excerpt 17, the project provided students with the opportunity to visit cultural institutions that had previously felt inaccessible. For many, this was not merely a "new" experience but a restoration of a lost identity. During the first focus group, one student (St5) reflects on how he frequently went to museums in his home country yet had spent two years in Italy without entering a single cultural space due to a lack of time or access. By facilitating this visit, the project entitled students to enjoy and participate in the city's heritage.

Excerpt 17, FG 1

St5: Quando io andato in museum that one was beautiful becuase that is a new place for us. […] Quindi è questa nuova esperienza per noi. Perché mi piace il museo. Mi piace library. Ma qua I didn't have time to go anywhere. Quando io andata in museo perché mi piace in mio paese… Io sempre andato in museum. E qua in due anni non c'è	**St5:** When I went to the museum, that was beautiful because it is a new place for us. [...] So it is this new experience for us. Because I like the museum. I like the library. But here, I didn't have time to go anywhere. When I went to the museum [it was] because I like it in my country... I always went to the museum. And here, in two

niente… I didn't go anywhere. Quindi è questa nuova esperienza per me. I think per tutti also. This is a new experience for noi.	years, there has been nothing... I didn't go anywhere. So this is a new experience for me. I think for everyone else too. This is a new experience for us.

The democratic dimension was further realised through the creation of the virtual museum, an activity that allowed students to exercise their agency by contributing to the city's narrative. Students began to see themselves as part of a "mix of cultures" that enriches the local environment. Rather than just learning about Venetian culture, they felt they were developing and carrying on the culture through their own contributions. St21's observation that their work on the app has a small impact on the city marks a crucial democratic shift: the student is no longer just a guest in Venice, but a producer of cultural content whose voice carries weight in the public sphere.

Excerpt 18, FG 3

St21: Secondo me noi abitiamo a Venezia e piccolo… impact? **R:** Un piccolo impatto. **St21:** In questo posto c'è cultura e tradizione. Venezia è un mix di culture. E noi siamo insieme un mix di culture. Penso che è molto importante to develop e continuare la cultura. E questo [RIFERENDOSI AL MUSEO VIRTUALE] è un po' di nostra cultura. **T:** Quindi tu Mila ti senti di avere un impatto sulla città, su Venezia? **St21:** Sì, sì, sì. Perché io posso vedere sull'app izi.TRAVEL Mila, Venezia, quadro, sì.	**St21:** In my opinion, we live in Venice and it's small... impact? **R:** A small impact. **St21:** In this place, there is culture and tradition. Venice is a mix of cultures. And together, we are a mix of cultures. I think it is very important to develop and continue the culture. And this [referring to the virtual museum] is a bit of our culture. **T:** So you, Mila, do you feel like you have an impact on the city, on Venice? **St21:** Yes, yes, yes. Because I can see on the izi.TRAVEL app Mila, Venice, painting, yes.

This idea is further extended in the final excerpt, as students discuss the project's potential to inspire a shared spirit of communal contribution towards other future newcomers.

Excerpt 19, FG 3

St15: Perché secondo me noi siamo già una parte di questa città di Venezia, come ha detto Mila. Abitiamo qua. […] Quando al museo [virtulae] visiteranno altre persone è importante che queste persone dicano magari 'Interessante questo progetto, abitano a Venezia, magari anch'io posso abitare qua. **R:** Quindi secondo te può essere anche un'ispirazione per altre persone. **St21:** Per altri studenti per esempio l'anno prossimo sì, altro livello A2.	**St15:** Because in my opinion, we are already a part of this city of Venice, as Mila said. We live here. [...] When other people visit the [virtual] museum, it's important that they might say, 'This project is interesting, they live in Venice, maybe I can live here too.' **R:** So in your opinion, it can also be an inspiration for other people. **St21:** For other students next year, for example, yes, [for] another A2 level.

The findings within the civic-democratic dimension suggest that this project did more than teach a language: it fostered a sense of political and cultural belonging. By facilitating access to cultural spaces and providing tools for creative production, the program empowered these adult learners to move to the centre of civic life.

7. Discussion

The ethnographic data collected during the project provides a comprehensive lens through which to evaluate the impact of arts-based and translanguaging pedagogy on adults with a migratory background. By analysing the students' experiences across socio-relational, personal/affective, civic/democratic, and linguistic dimensions, this study confirms that shifting the educational setting from the traditional classroom fundamentally alters the learning paradigm. It moves L2 acquisition from a strictly functional, vocational exercise toward a holistic process of identity negotiation and social justice, treating learners as whole persons (Kramsch 2006; Morrice 2017).

7.1. Building cohesion beyond the classroom: the socio-relational transformation

The socio-relational dimension emerged as the most widely discussed aspect among the participants, underscoring the shift from a purely academic focus to one that addresses the fundamental human need for connection and belonging. In a traditional classroom, learners are often constrained by formal, text-based instruction that frequently limits peer-to-peer interaction to artificial activities or highly structured exercises. In contrast, the collaboration between the school and the museum facilitated a more organic form of socialisation. By presenting museum objects as tangible focal points and encouraging students to draw upon their full linguistic repertoires, the project created a platform for reciprocal knowledge sharing. This environment allowed learners to not only learn "about the other" but, more importantly, to learn "from the other," fostering a deep sense of group belonging.

These findings strongly corroborate Waterhouse's (2021) assertion that integrating arts-based activities into adult L2 courses significantly heightens engagement and builds community cohesion beyond the physical walls of the classroom. While Cárdenas Curiel (2023) observed similar socialisation benefits in bilingual primary schools, this project demonstrates that such outcomes are equally vital for adult learners navigating the complexities of the new society.

Furthermore, the project actualised Vlachou's (2017) vision of cultural spaces as "non-threatening arenas" that promote mutual understanding. This transformation of the learning environment into a "safe space" had a direct and positive impact on student well-being, as advocated by Dryden et al. (2021). By moving away from the high pressure of "speaking perfectly", students entered a space where they felt secure and confident in their communicative attempts.

This dimension is also intrinsically linked to the fostering of genuine intercultural dialogue. As students engaged with art and artifacts, the objects acted as neutral mediators that invited diverse perspectives, allowing for a horizontal exchange between peers of different backgrounds. By recognising the linguistic and cultural diversity present within their own group, as advocated by Beacco et al. (2008), the participants moved from being strangers to being members of a plural community.

7.2. Expressing plural identities: the personal and affective shift

The findings concerning the personal and affective dimension highlight how museum-based and arts-based learning facilitates a profound negotiation of identity, allowing participants to move beyond the restrictive label of "language learner". By engaging with museum artifacts through a translanguaging lens, students felt a renewed sense of empowerment and agency, as they were encouraged to use their entire linguistic repertoire to express complex internal states. This approach directly supports Kramsch's (2006, 251) vision of these learners as "whole persons" whose "hearts, bodies, and minds" are deeply intertwined with their "memories, fantasies, and identities". Such validation is not merely a psychological comfort; it is a pedagogical necessity that supports the preservation of cultural identity and facilitates a more effective, low-anxiety literacy process in the L2 (García, 2017).

Within this "safe space", these persons were able to build a vital bridge between their past and present lives. Artifacts acted as a tool through which participants could externalise their desires, values, and beliefs. This process of sharing identities often involved the evocation of intense and sometimes even painful emotions, such as memories of war or the trauma of displacement. By acknowledging all their experiences, the project moved beyond the survival lexicon typical of vocational L2 programs and gave the students the chance to feel more engaged in their learning process.

The inclusion of these emotional narratives, facilitated by the multimodal nature of the museum and arts-based activities, allowed students to reclaim their humanity in the host society. The artifacts they produced demonstrate that the experience did not merely provide new vocabulary, but rather a "visual vocabulary" through which students could negotiate their identities and beliefs.

7.3. Claiming the "third space": the civic and democratic imperative

The transition from the classroom to the city significantly expanded the civic and democratic dimension of the learning experience. Leaving the school allowed students to familiarise themselves with the territory and confront social realities they might otherwise have perceived as inaccessible. The museum, understood as a public space, became a resource for connecting with the new community and helped learners reimagine their roles as active citizens (Insulander & Öhman, 2021). This spatial transition seems to have

helped them reason on their role as active citizens, since they were able to discover new ways of living in the city, often in line with what happened in their home countries.

The democratic dimension was further realised through the co-creation of a virtual museum on the Izi.TRAVEL platform. This activity allowed students to exercise their agency by contributing directly to the city's narrative. Rather than simply learning about Venetian culture as passive observers, they felt they were developing and continuing that culture through their own contributions. This marks a crucial democratic shift: the student is no longer just a "guest" in the city, but a producer of cultural content whose voice carries weight in the public sphere. Furthermore, there was a visible transition from individual belonging to a sense of civic responsibility toward others. Participants expressed a desire for their work to serve as an inspiration for those arriving after them, imagining that their virtual museum might help future residents think, "Maybe I too can live here". By sharing their artifacts online, the project reached a broader community, ensuring that student-produced knowledge travelled from the classroom to the world (Meneghetti & Fazzi, 2025), as clearly emphasised in the framework of García et al. (2017).

7.4. From form to meaningful interactions: the linguistic dimension

From a strictly linguistic perspective, the project significantly impacted two core aspects of L2 learning: vocabulary and interactional competence. Students reported that the activities allowed them to acquire new vocabulary related both to the specific artistic content and the museum context, also anticipating lexical areas that would be covered later in the classroom. These findings align with previous research both on museum-based language education (Clarke, 2013; Fazzi, 2025; Fazzi & Meneghetti, 2021; Labadi, 2018; Ruanglertbutr, 2016) and on translanguaging pedagogy (Beiler & Dewilde, 2023; Choi & Nayer, 2017; Park & Valdez, 2018).

This development is characterised by a transition from a traditional "focus on form" to a "focus on meaning". The arts-based approach and the unique setting encouraged students to speak without becoming fixated on formal correctness, effectively leveraging their "willingness to communicate" (MacIntyre et al. 2001, in Ellis, 2015, p. 51). As Labadi (2018, p. 71) suggests, museum collections are unique because their meanings are not fixed but remain open to interpretation and negotiation, allowing each participant to bring their own cultural background and prior knowledge to the dialogue. In this project, the power of the museum's objects was amplified by the creation and sharing of students' multimodal multilingual artifacts.

Two aspects of the project seemed to be pivotal in this linguistic shift. First, the presence of external figures (museum educators) heightened the stakes of oral production, as students had to explain concepts to individuals outside their immediate peer group. Second, the nature of the task created a genuine information gap: because the specific museum subject matter was not pre-shared among all participants, students were forced to use the language strategically to manage and convey unfamiliar information to their teachers and peers. This authentic need for communication successfully bypassed the textbook-driven constraints that can smother oral production in formal settings.

8. Conclusions

The project provides compelling empirical evidence that adults with a migratory background language education must evolve beyond the vocational paradigms that often dominate the field. While current practices still prioritise L2 acquisition solely for labour market entry, at least in our context, this study demonstrates that treating language merely as a tool for survival risks ignoring complex identities and democratic potential. This represents a shift away from a conception of language as merely words toward a more nuanced vision. This perspective encompasses human factors (such as social relationships and emotions,) practical factors, (such as multilingual practices and iterative activities), and environmental factors, including physical objects and artifacts and their availability across time and space (Pennycook, 2023).

As advocated by Kalaja and Melo-Pfeifer (2024), there is a clear need to challenge logocentric conceptions of communicative repertoires by interconnecting multilingualism with multisensorial, spatial, bodily, and semiotic dimensions. In doing so, arts-based language learning becomes a powerful tool for social justice and advocacy.

Moreover, the new stance discussed in this article requires a fundamental reframing of the "students with a migratory background". Following Morrice (2017), we must reject stable versions of culture and recognise that identities are not fixed but continuously shaped by individual histories of migration. In contrast, the museum-based and arts-based approaches intertwined with translanguaging pedagogy, allowing us to

focus on how and where these learners develop a genuine sense of belonging and fitting in within their new host community.

To ensure this within the *Io vado al museo* project, robust collaboration between the various participating institutions was paramount. This required creating dedicated opportunities for cross-sectoral dialogue to establish a rigorous alignment of pedagogical goals and expectations. Furthermore, professional development was a critical prerequisite; it was essential to provide prior training for museum educators on linguistic facilitation and the specific needs of L2 learners. Ideally, museum staff and language teachers should undergo joint training sessions focused on translanguaging strategies across formal and non-formal contexts to create a cohesive and supportive environment for the participants.

Nevertheless, practitioners must account for the fact that these interventions are inherently time-consuming. To ensure sustainability, the project must be harmonised within the broader instructional design of the language course, rather than being treated as an isolated or extracurricular activity. Practical transferability also hinges on digital access—specifically, the ability to use personal devices in the classroom and the management of digital accounts. Consequently, teachers must be specifically trained to navigate these technical and logistical dimensions to prevent them from becoming barriers to engagement.

To conclude, transcending the classroom walls is not merely a spatial shift, but a pedagogical imperative. By embracing plurilingual multimodal co-creation within the broader cultural landscape of the city, we offer new citizens an educational experience that honours their past, validates their present, and empowers their future as active, plural citizens, while simultaneously offering a novel and effective approach to mastering the L2.

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

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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

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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; Pattemore & 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 Engine[1] (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.

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The role of laughter and gender identity in the construction of humor

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ABSTRACT

EN Humor and laughter are intertwined pragmatic phenomena that play a central role in conversational interaction. In colloquial Spanish, laughter is not merely a reaction to humor but a resource for negotiating social relations and performing identities, including gender identity. This article examines how different types of laughter contribute to affiliative or disaffiliative dynamics in humorous utterances, and how these dynamics participate in the construction of gendered identities. Drawing on conversational data from the Val.Es.Co. 2.0 and Briz & Val.Es.Co. corpora (2002), in which laughter is explicitly annotated, we analyze a set of representative examples illustrating how men and women deploy laughter differently as a conversational strategy. The findings reveal patterns: while affiliative laughter predominates in both genders, disaffiliative laughter is more frequently used among male speakers as a means of challenging or mocking interlocutors, whereas female speakers tend to avoid direct attacks on present participants. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of how laughter indexes stance, alignment, and gendered identity work in everyday conversation.

Key words: LAUGHTER, HUMOR, GENDER, IDENTITY, CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS, PRAGMATICS.

ES El humor y la risa son fenómenos pragmáticos interrelacionados que desempeñan un papel central en la interacción conversacional. En el español coloquial, la risa no constituye únicamente una reacción ante el humor, sino también un recurso para negociar las relaciones sociales y construir identidades, incluida la identidad de género. Este artículo examina cómo distintos tipos de risa contribuyen a dinámicas afiliativas o desafiliativas en los enunciados humorísticos y cómo dichas dinámicas participan en la construcción de identidades de género. A partir de datos conversacionales procedentes del Corpus Val.Es.Co. 2.0 y de Briz y Val.Es.Co. (2002), en los que la risa aparece explícitamente anotada, se analiza un conjunto de ejemplos representativos que ilustran cómo hombres y mujeres emplean la risa como estrategia conversacional. Los resultados revelan patrones diferenciados: aunque la risa afiliativa predomina en ambos géneros, la risa desafiliativa se utiliza con mayor frecuencia entre los hablantes masculinos como estrategia para ridiculizar a los interlocutores, mientras que las hablantes femeninas tienden a evitar ataques directos hacia los participantes presentes. Estos hallazgos contribuyen a una comprensión más profunda de cómo la risa sirve para identificar procesos humorísticos de construcción identitaria en la conversación cotidiana.

Palabras clave: RISA, HUMOR, GÉNERO, IDENTIDAD, ANÁLISIS CONVERSACIONAL, PRAGMÁTICA.

IT L'umorismo e la risata sono due fenomeni pragmatici interconnessi che giocano un ruolo centrale nell'interazione conversazionale. Nello spagnolo colloquiale, la risata non è solamente una reazione all'umorismo, bensì rappresenta una risorsa per la negoziazione delle relazioni sociali e le dinamiche di disaffiliazione nelle espressioni umoristiche e come queste partecipano nella costruzione delle identità di genere. Attingendo dai dati conversazionali del Corpus Val.Es.Co e Briz & Val.Es.Co (2002), in cui viene preso nota esplicitamente della risata, analizziamo una serie di esempi rappresentativi che illustrano come gli uomini e le donne facciano uso della risata in maniera differente come strategia conversazionale. I risultati mostrano dei pattern: mentre la risata affiliativa predomina in entrambi i generi, la risata disaffiliativa è utilizzata più frequentemente dall'interlocutore uomo come uno strumento a fronte di una controparte più provocatoria o sarcastica. Le donne, invece, tendono ad evitare di attaccare direttamente i partecipanti in loro presenza. Questi risultati contribuiscono ad una comprensione più profonda di come la risata possa indicare atteggiamento, schieramento e manifestazione di identità di genere nella conversazione di tutti i giorni.

Parole chiave: RISATA, UMORISMO, GENERE, IDENTITÀ, ANALISI CONVERSAZIONALE, PRAGMATICA.

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1. Introduction

This study aims to analyze laughter as a pragmatic phenomenon in conversational utterances containing humor. Our objective is to investigate not only the presence of laughter, but also the diverse functions it performs in interaction. In this paper, we distinguish two interactional orientations of laughter within humorous sequences: affiliative and disaffiliative. Affiliative laughter displays alignment with the ongoing humorous frame and contributes to solidarity (e.g., co-constructing the joke, sustaining a playful mode, or mitigating potentially face-threatening content). Disaffiliative laughter displays disalignment or distance with respect to a prior humorous move and/or indexes a stance that challenges the prior speaker's positioning (e.g., laughter that accompanies teasing, ridicule, or overt distancing). Importantly, disalignment with a humorous attempt is not necessarily "disaffiliative" or "attacking": participants may resist or close down humor simply by withholding laughter, producing minimal uptake, or explicitly invoking a social norm. For this reason, we treat "attack" as a possible interactional outcome in some disaffiliative sequences (when laughter contributes to a face-threatening action), not as a defining criterion of the category itself. Our classification is therefore sequential: it is established through participants' next actions (continuation of the humorous frame, repair, topic shift, rejection, escalation), rather than through the origin of humor (speaker vs listener) or laughter alone. The distributional analysis of these types of laughter shows that they are not random but embedded within broader conversational strategies that reflect how identity is performed in talk. Affiliative laughter typically appears when speakers seek to strengthen in-group solidarity, co-construct a humorous frame, or reinforce agreement and solidarity . Conversely, disaffiliative laughter emerges when interlocutors position themselves against the humorous proposition, either by mocking the speaker, challenging their authority, or distancing themselves from the joke. Both uses of laughter highlight the complex role of humor in shaping interpersonal dynamics, but they also reveal recurrent tendencies linked to gendered patterns of communication. Therefore, the research objectives are the following:

- To analyze laughter as a pragmatic phenomenon in humorous utterances in colloquial Spanish.
- To differentiate the functions of affiliative and disaffiliative laughter in interaction.
- To examine the relationship between the use of laughter and the construction of gender identity in conversational contexts.

To achieve these objectives, we present the following research questions:

- How is laughter used to reinforce or challenge interaction in humorous utterances?
- What differences can be observed in the use of laughter between male and female speakers?
- In what ways does laughter contribute to the construction and negotiation of gender identity in conversation?
- Are there recurrent patterns in the distribution of laughter that can be linked to communication strategies specific to each gender?

The paper is therefore organized into four main sections. Section 2 explains what we understand as verbal humor in Spanish, drawing on pragmatic and discourse-analytic traditions. Section 3 focuses on laughter as a pragmatic phenomenon that distinguishes humorous utterances. Section 4 explores whether laughter highlights traits that define gender identity, bringing together findings from both corpora. Finally, Section 5 presents the analysis of selected examples, which allow us to draw conclusions about the broader relationship between laughter, humor, and gender identity.

2. Theoretical framework: laughter as a marker of verbal humor

2.1 Laughter and humor

To address verbal humor in naturally occurring talk, we adopt an interactional perspective in which participants co-construct a humorous frame through sequential practices. Importantly, the elements that guide recipients' interpretation are better described as contextualization cues rather than as jab/punch lines: Attardo explicitly distinguishes "contextualization cues" from the humor itself (Attardo, 2020, p. 236–237). In this study, we do not operationalize jab/punch lines as analytic categories; instead, we focus on how laughter (when annotated in the corpora) participates in the sequential negotiation of affiliation and disaffiliation within humorous sequences. Attardo calls these lines "jab lines" (2001, p. 82) if the elements appear within the plot,

and "punchlines" if they occur at the end. Semantically, they are the same elements, but their textual position and pragmatic function differ. Thus, if they appear in the middle of the conversation they serve as jab lines to make humor, while if they appear at the end they are used as a humorous punchline.

Regarding the phenomenon of laughter, several authors have expressed their opinion on the subject. Archakis and Tsakona (2005, p. 46) argue that laughter is a perlocutionary effect triggered by humor, and that there must be a prerequisite, the opposition of scripts, for it to exist. From our point of view, this prerequisite may not appear in ironic-humorous utterances. In ironic contexts, the inversion of certain conversational principles leads to different types of irony. Thus, in cases in which the Principle of Informativeness (I), which proposes providing sufficient information, or the Principle of Manner (M), which recommends avoiding ambiguous expressions, is inverted, the irony becomes non-prototypical, since it is inferred by the multiplicity of referents, in the former, or by the appearance of marked expressions, in the latter (Ruiz and Padilla, 2009). In this way, the utterance conveys a figurative meaning due to the inversion of conversational principles.

Raclaw and Ford (2017) justify laughter as a resource that is used while the listener evaluates a humorous utterance. Partington (2006) states that laughter is a conversational resource used to achieve specific goals, such as building identity, arguing, threatening someone's image, or self-promotion. For her part, Clift (2016) studies the relationship between laughter and humor based on an audiovisual corpus, where the listener's response may indicate agreement or disagreement with the speaker. This idea is closely related to the classification we propose in Alvarado and Cortés (2017), where laughter is seen as a reactive action that shows either support or rejection of a speaker's discursive act. Hence, laughter can be affiliative when supporting the speaker or disaffiliative or attacking when it expresses discomfort or indignation.

Laughter frequently co-occurs with humorous talk. In interaction, laughter is better understood as a multimodal resource through which participants display stance, manage alignment, and organize next actions. For methodological purposes, we use the corpus tag [laughter] to retrieve candidate excerpts; however, whether a sequence is treated as humorous is established sequentially, through participants' uptake (e.g., continuation of a playful frame, repair, explicit rejection, or topic shift), rather than inferred from laughter alone. Notwithstanding, we adopt the ideas of Norrick (2003) about laughter, since he considers it to be the most appropriate explicit sign to support a humor-based corpus like ours, alongside other events like applause (Cortés 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). Poyatos (1994, p. 91) presents a complex view of laughter, describing it as:

> a series of audible oral or nasal airflow movements, usually irregular, above all exhaled, with variations in muscular tension, rhythm and phonic characteristics, accompanied by variable corporal and facial behaviors and possible chemical, dermal and thermal reactions, simultaneous to verbal language or alternating with it or independent, that expresses positive or negative feelings with respect to oneself, to others, to events or to the environment.

This definition already speaks of positive or negative effects that we will link to what we call affiliative or disaffiliative laughter.

Before turning to the analysis, we briefly locate laughter within the successive phases through which a humorous utterance is produced and taken up until it becomes recognizable as humor (cf. Alvarado, 2014). This step is crucial for identifying the point at which the humorous frame is established and for linking that moment to the interactional resource(s) deployed by the speaker. This idea of phase recognition has been dealt with by Hay (2001, p. 67) and, later, by Attardo (2001, p. 166). For these authors, these phases are recognition, understanding, appreciation and agreement, and are closely related to the ability to understand humor and the execution of humor.

Recognition of the utterance in humorous terms is the initial phase in which the interlocutors must see the humor. In this initial phase of humor recognition is the interlocutor's ability to observe that humor is present in an utterance.

The next phase is that of understanding, which is closely related to the previous one, since the listener has previously recognized the humorous utterance and, in this phase, has also understood it.

In the appreciation phase, we move on to the stage of humor performance, since the interlocutors can share the humorous intention of the speaker because they have recognized, understood and appreciated it as such. At this stage, it is decided whether shared humor occurs or, on the contrary, failed humor appears. It is also here that the laughter shows the intention of the listener because, if it appears, the humor will be continued, while if it does not appear, it will be failed humor, either because it has not been understood or because it is not shared.

The last phase through which a humorous utterance passes is the agreement that both listener and speaker can show in producing and interpreting humor. In this phase of humor performance, the interlocutors have decided to continue it in the conversation, as shown by explicit laughter.

In Alvarado (2014), we proposed a figure to illustrate the phases through which a humorous utterance passes in our corpus, to which we have added jab lines, punchlines and laughter to show at what stage they appear (see Figure 1).

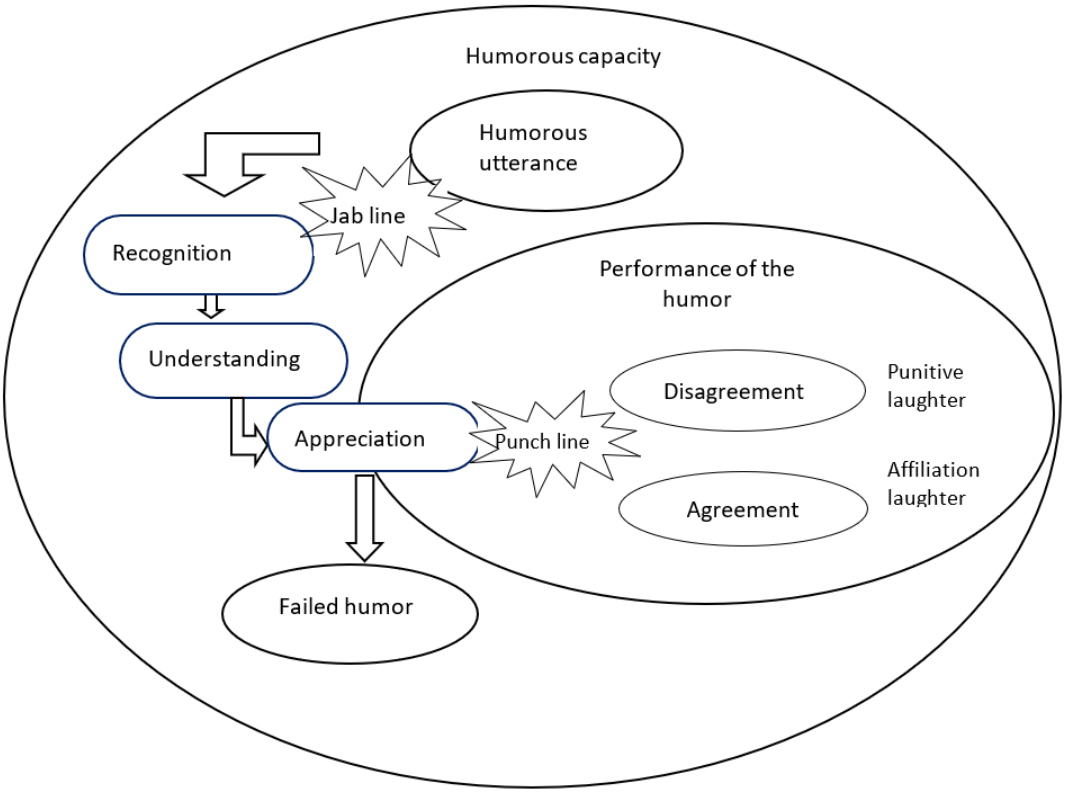

Figure 1. New Adaptation of the Phases of a Humorous Utterance (Alvarado).

As we observed, laughter is found in the performance of humor and in the appreciation and agreement phases. This happens because laughter is a reactive action (Abarca Vázquez et al., 2024) with which the interlocutor manifests sometimes in favor and sometimes against a discursive action by the speaker. Thus, we can distinguish between two types of laughter: *affiliative laughter*, when it is emitted as a reaction to an utterance made by the speaker, or it can be *disaffiliative or attack laughter* when the reaction causes discomfort or indignation in the interlocutor (Alvarado, 2017). We can say that, in the former case, the listener laughs *with* what is said by someone, while in the latter case he laughs *at* (mocks) someone; both actions are always done to elevate or devalue what is said by the speaker. The association of laughter as a reaction to humor acts in two completely opposite ways: on the one hand, it is a manifestation that strengthens bonds with the speaker; and, on the other hand, it is a direct attack on the speaker's public image. Both intentions appear in our corpus of colloquial conservations.

2.2 Gender and humor

The relationship between gender and humor has been studied by researchers for more than 30 years. The superiority of men over women reflected the reality of the time, as seen in the work of R. Lakoff (1975), inspired by Jespersen (1922), Labov (1972) and Trudgill (1972), among others, as we see before. The sociocultural context surrounding them marked the prevailing belief that women did not understand humor and therefore had no sense of humor (Lakoff 1975, p. 56). Lakoff (1975) reports it critically as a social stereotype, using hyperbolic framing (Lakoff, 1975, p. 80). We therefore treat such claims as gender ideologies

about language and humor, not as empirical descriptions. Thanks to the evolution of society in terms of equality, this premise has changed, since, as we will see in the corpus, women are not only capable of understanding jokes, but they make them in the same way as men and even use different conversational strategies that identify and define them. This is due to the fact that women are now fully integrated into the workforce and have adopted norms that were once associated only with male discourse (direct language, jokes, interruptions, etc.).

Thus, theories about women and humor have evolved, such as the one proposed by Suderland and Litosseliti (2002), which develops gender identity in the analysis of discourse and in the construction of social roles characterized by social status. Crawford (2003, p. 1425) states that humor in women has three main functions, since it serves to gain the respect of the audience; it is educational, in that it deals with sensitive issues in a more amusing way; and, perhaps the most important, to empower women against the macho discourse of men.

Similarly, Kotthoff (2006, p. 21) shows the convergence between gender and humor, according to sociocultural level. She states that women with low sociocultural status use humor like men, while men with high sociocultural status create humor like women. Other researchers, such as Mills (2005, p. 276), Bell (2009, p. 158) and Melchiori et al. (2025) assert that some humorous utterances can directly influence the interlocutor's image, for example, if they are used to interrupt the conversation, since this fact can alter the behavior expected by the speaker. Therefore, in order to create continuous humor (sequences co-constructed across multiple turns, where participants jointly maintain a playful frame), it is necessary to empathize with our interlocutor and anticipate their reaction to the humorous utterance. According to this idea, the greater the familiarity and closeness between interlocutors, the more likely humor will succeed in conversation, because if they are in a relaxed setting, they feel safer both producing and receiving humor, as seen in our corpus. In this way, a gender identity is created based on the procedures used in male and female conversations, which will serve to characterize them and establish differences in their use.

Furthermore, recent research emphasizes the performative dimension of humor in gender construction. Humor is not merely a reflection of social roles but an active tool in negotiating, resisting, or reinforcing these roles. For instance, women's use of ironic or playful laughter can serve as a form of social positioning, signaling competence, wit, or solidarity within the conversational group. Men, conversely, may use humor strategically to assert dominance or social authority, though they also adapt their strategies depending on context and audience. This aligns with theories of pragmatics that consider humor a conversational strategy influenced by both personal identity and social norms.

Corpus-based studies (Glenn, 2009, Glenn & Holt, 2013, Hanks & Egbert, 2022, among others) reveal that humor functions differently depending on the type of laughter employed. Affiliative laughter, for example, tends to create bonds, reduce tension, and indicate agreement or empathy, whereas disaffiliative laughter can signal criticism, social judgment, or subtle aggression. Importantly, these patterns are not uniformly distributed across genders: women are more likely to deploy affiliative laughter to foster inclusion, while men may more frequently employ laughter in a competitive or challenging way.

Ultimately, the intersection of gender, humor, and conversation demonstrates that humor is a dynamic, context-sensitive phenomenon. It simultaneously reflects social conventions and allows interlocutors to negotiate identity, power, and relationships. By analyzing conversational corpora, researchers can trace how these strategies vary according to gender, providing insights into both the pragmatics of humor and the evolving role of women and men in contemporary social interaction.

3. Methodology

To achieve these aims, our study draws from Corpus Val.Es.Co. 2.0, which consists of 46 naturally occurring conversations and provides a rich sample of colloquial Spanish. This corpus explicitly marks instances of laughter and, crucially, allows researchers to track its distribution across turns and phases of interaction. From this material, we identified 921 occurrences of laughter. We first retrieved all annotated laughter events in the dataset (n = 921). Because our analysis requires close sequential inspection, we then defined an analytic subset of laughter tokens by applying replicable inclusion criteria: (i) the laughter token occurs to show humor, (ii) the surrounding turns provide sufficient context to identify the target of the humor, and (iii) the excerpt contains clear cues for tracking the negotiation of affiliation/disaffiliation. Applying these criteria yielded 60 laughter occurrences, which constitute the dataset examined in detail. These 60 occurrences were selected because they contain affiliative or disaffiliative laughter within humorous sequences produced by both male and female speakers.

For the purposes of the present paper, we validated the selection because laughter occurs together with other humorous elements and we analyzed six statistically representative examples to test our initial hypothesis: that humorous utterances exploit laughter as a pragmatic resource serving different communicative purposes. These examples illustrate, in our analysis, the dual role of laughter as affiliative support and as a tool of attack.

This work builds on previous studies, particularly Alvarado (2014, 2016, 2021) and Khaylina and Alvarado (2023), where we analyzed the dynamics of sustained and failed humor in both male and female speakers. Those studies showed that humor unfolds in phases, and that irony and humor function as communicative strategies primarily serving the speaker. In the present contribution, however, we narrow our focus to verbal humor and to the explicit markers that enable researchers to reliably identify it in conversational corpora. Among such markers, laughter stands out as a crucial signal: it not only reveals the perception of humor by participants but also demonstrates how humor can be mobilized either to attack or to affiliate within the conversational group.

Ultimately, our hypothesis is that laughter, beyond being a spontaneous reaction, constitutes a strategic resource in interaction. By examining how laughter patterns across different speakers and contexts, we argue that it plays a significant role in the construction of gender identity. In this way, laughter becomes a window into broader social processes, showing how men and women use humor not merely to entertain but to negotiate power, solidarity, and identity within everyday talk.

4. Analysis

As we are concerned here with the study of laughter in colloquial conversations, we will focus only on the utterances in which it is recorded and marked as such in the corpus.

In example (1), there are 2 interlocutors who talk about the play that one of them had performed in with other classmates who are not present in the conversation, in which they had to sing:

(1) 261 E: § yes/// uhh/// (( )) the one who plays the groom, that's actually his voice//Xavi's too, his voice is real//
262 J: yes/ Xavi's really//
263 E: º((what else))/
264 J: I was already getting suspicious/ wow, Nando singing (( ))/
265 E: the day they handed out the singing roles, I wasn't there/ otherwise/ just imagine!// (( )) §
266 J: § he says→/ let's see/ okay Ernesto/ start singing!// and you're like→/ damn!/ I only sing in the shower! (LAUGHTER)/ oh man, stop/ so funny dude/ when he said something like→/ I'm going to become a nun↑ (( ))/ and everyone goes → he's crazy! he's crazy!// [so funny/ dude!]
267 E: [no way!] *(LAUGHTER)*§
268 J: § I can just see you doing that↑ I started cracking up↑ it's just one of our dumb jokes// [from Pamesa]

261 E: § sí/// eeh/// (( )) el que hace de novio ese sí que es su voz// Xavi también es su voz//
262 J: sí/ el de Xavi si quee¯//
263 E: º((qué máas))º/
264 J: a mí ya me estrañab-/ uuyy Nando cantando (( ))/
265 E: el día que repartieron los papeles/ para cantar yo no estaba/ si noo/ imagínate↑// (( )) §
266 J: §dice→/ a ver/ tú Ernesto/ ¡a cantar!// y tú→/ ¡hostiaaa!/ ¡si yo sólo canto en la duchaa! (RISAS)/ ¡ay! calla/ qué risa/ nano/ cuando salió→ no se qué/ cuando dice→/ me voy a meter monja↑ (( ))/ y todos→ ¡está locoo! ¡está locoo!// [¡qué risa/ nano!]
267 E: [¡alaa!] (RISAS)§268 J: § te veo- te veo haciendo eso↑ me empecé a descojonar↑ es que es una parida nuestra// [del Pamesa]
(Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 14, Interventions 260-268)

In (1), J's utterance reproduces, in direct speech, the words of an absent person at the moment he is asked to sing in the play and he responds *I only sing in the shower.* This utterance, followed by *I'm going to become a nun*, triggers laughter based on a humorous situation, because E empathizes with the story J is telling and builds on the humor, as seen in, *I started cracking up*. In this case, the humor is recognized and continued

by both E and J, and the laughter is affiliative among the members of the conversational group, since a humorous utterance has been made about a situation known to both and the image of neither is attacked.

In (2), three interlocutors discuss the anxious behavior of some students at the university when taking notes:

(2) 2 C: § of course! I'm going to take notes
3 N: so generous
4 J: when it comes to analyzing the space↑ [aside]
5 C: [when it comes to] [(LAUGHTER)]
6 N: [(LAUGHTER)] more slowly please (LAUGHTER) that's like when– when you go to uni and → haven't you noticed– you walk in and the lecturer says hi! good morning! and people start writing things down/ and you're like, what the hell are they writing! hi, good morning'? I mean, come on
7 C: or others get lost in class because the first time I went↑ [(LAUGHTER)]
8 N: [(LAUGHTER)] I usually get lost
9 C: I understood but, did you get anything from that? [(LAUGHTER)]
10 N: [(LAUGHTER)]

2 C: § ¡claro! voy a coger apuntes
3 N: generosa
4 J: a la hora de analizar el espacio↑ [aparte]
5 C: [a la hora] [(RISAS)]
6 N: [(RISAS)] más despacio por favor (RISAS) eso es como cuando- cuando vas a la facultad y→ no os habéis dado cuenta que- que entras y dice el profesor ¡hola! ¡buenos días! y se ponen a copiar/ y prácticamente tú ¡qué coño estarán copiando! hola buenos días porque vamos
7 C: u otros que se p(i)erden en clase porque yo la primera vez que fui↑ [(RISAS)]
8 N: [(RISAS)] yo normalmente siempre me pierdo
9 C: yo entendía pero ¿has pillao algo? [(RISAS)
10 N: [(RISAS)]
(Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 22, Interventions 2-10)

In (2), N's utterance *more slowly please*, which refers to students frantically taking notes in class, works as a jab line to show humor, as we see with the appearance of laughter in all the interlocutors, since humor is created about an everyday situation easily recognizable by all of them. This humorous intervention is continued by all the members of the interaction, who have decided to follow the humorous mode, in order to strengthen bonds with the conversational group. The laughter is, therefore, affiliative.

In (3), three friends are talking about an interesting moment in the motorcycle races they were watching on TV, when they are suddenly interrupted by an advertisement:

(3) 75 D: § he's lost§
76 P: § and he lost time/ did you see/ he was overtaken↑///
77 D*: (LAUGHTER) the director goes/ ah, screw you Lorenzo/ I'm putting on ads↑ [(LAUGHTER)]*
78 P: [(LAUGHTER)]
79 D: [(LAUGHTER)]/// (15?) ///(LAUGHTER)
80 E: ayy↑/// (COUGHING)/// (9?)///(40?)
81 P: (( )) (10?)
82 D: ((motorcyclist's name)) is in seventh
83 E: and/ in moto GP geepee/ Rossi's starting from pole, right?/ I saw it in the practice sessions↑

75 D: § ha perdido§
76 P: §y ha perdido el tiempo/ vees/ si le ha sacaoo↑///
77 D: (RISAS) el realizador dice/ aa vete a la mierda Lorenzo vaa/ voy a poner publicidad↑ [(RISAS)]
78 P: [(RISAS)]
79 D: [(RISAS)]/// (15?) ///(RISAS)
80 E: ayy↑/// (TOSES)/// (9?)///(40?)
81 P: (( )) (10?)

82 D: el ((nombre de motorista)) está séptimo
83 E: y/ en moto GP gepé/ sale Rossi desde la pole ¿noo?/ que lo vi yo en los entrenamientoos↑
(Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 15, Interventions 75-83)

In (3), several interlocutors are commenting on the motorcycle racing when they suddenly put on advertising, and D reproduces, in an imaginary way, the words of the television producer, who is not present in the conversation (*the director goes/ ah, screw you Lorenzo/ I'm putting on ads*), which causes P and E to laugh, because it is an absurd statement to justify what has happened, an interruption in the most interesting moment of the race. In this case, the laughter is also affiliative since humor is created from the situation and continued by all the interlocutors.

In the three cases analyzed, we have noticed that laughter occurs in humorous utterances to show affiliation to the conversational group, since it has been decided to continue the humor without any of the members having their image damaged. Next, we will see humorous utterances in which laughter has other functions, including attacking the image of one of the interlocutors.

In (4), the same speakers from the previous conversation continue talking about motorcycle racing:

(4) 195 P: in Motociclismo, the/ reporters from- the magazines
196 D: they're always looking for- drama and scandals
197 P: ah↑ yeah-// that paddock we were in on Sunday↑ there's a PHOTO of it in Motociclismo// the only thing is, I didn't bring it/ and- and I can see less than a cat in the (( ))/ but // I think we're in it§
198 E: §you have to be in it
199 D: (LAUGHTER) of course↓ of course↓ of course↓ I'm cracking up
200 P: damn↑ exactly↑// plus we had a banner right in front of us, remember?
201 D: but/ what about the grandstand we were watching from?§
202 P: §yeah↑ there's a photo↑//in Motociclismo§
203 D: §of the grandstand?

195 P: el Motociclismo sí que loos/ reporteros dee- de las revistas
196 D: buscan loos- la bronca y las movidas
197 P: ah↑ ee-// el paddo(ck) ese donde estábamos nosotros el domingo↑ viene una FOTO en el Motociclismo// lo que pasa es que no lo he traído/ yy- yy yo me veo menos que un gato en el (( ))/ peroo // creo que estamos por allí§
198 E: §tenéis que estar allí
199 D: (RISAS) claro↓ claro↓ claro↓ me parto
200 P: joder↑ justamente↑// además teníamos una pancarta allí delante ¿te acuerdas?
201 D: peroo/ ¿y de la grada dónde estábamos viendoo?§
202 P: §sí↑ hay una foto↑// en el Motociclismo§
203 D: §¿de la grada?
(Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 15, Interventions 195-203)

In (4), several friends went to watch the motorcycling championship live and, a few days later, they are trying to spot themselves in a photo of the stands featured in a motorcycle magazine. The humorous utterance occurs when E states that *you have to be in it* and D, faced with the impossibility of recognizing anyone in the photo, laughs at P and continues with *of course↓ of course↓ of course↓ I'm cracking up,* ironically, to show that it is impossible to identify anyone. As we see in the conversation, neither E nor P continues with the humorous mode because they feel, to some extent, attacked by D, and they decide to continue with the serious topic. Thus, the laughter here serves the function of attacking the image of a member of the conversation by mocking E's assertion.

In (5), two friends talk about the musical tastes of one of them:

(5) 437 A: [the songs] from the sixties↑// and from the-/ from the– what are they called?/ Los Bravos and all those↑ [I just love them]
438 B: [all that↓ yes]/ and besides↑/ I remember those- those that appear-/ who brought out the last records from the seventies↑
439 A: yeah

440 B: from when→ I was little/ and all that↑
441 A: (LAUGHTER) and all that↓/ dude/ you're not that old/ (LAUGHTER)
442 B: noo/ but it reminds me↑ of when I was six↑/ seven↑/ or five years old→
443 A: so…/ then↑ what else→? like→ music↑/// I also like Elton John/ I also have→ some songs/ George Harrison↑ I like The Beatles too→// well/ a bit of everything↑ §

437 A: [las canciones] de los años sesenta↑// y de loos-/ de los- ¿cómo se llaman?/ Los Bravos y todos estos↑ [es que me encantan]
438 B: [todo aquello↓ sí]/ y además↑/ yo me acuerdo de- de estas que salen-/ que han sacao los últimos discos de los años setenta↑
439 A: síi
440 B: de cuando→ yo era pequeño/ y todo esto↑
441 A: (RISAS) y todo eso↓/ hombre/ tampoco eres tan mayor/ (RISAS)
442 B: noo/ pero me recuerda↑ cuando tenía seis años↑/ siete años↑/ oo cinco años→
443 A: y nada/ luego↑ ¿qué más→? así→ música↑/// me gustan también de Elton John/ también tengo→ algunas canciones/ George Harrison↑ Los Beatles también me gustan→// bueno/ es que de todo↑ §
(Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 1, Interventions 437-443)

In (5), B is reminiscing about the music from the 1960s he listened to when he was little, and A responds with a humorous utterance *and all that↓/ dude/ you're not that old/ (LAUGHTER)*. This utterance contains humor directed at someone present in the conversation, B, who was not trying to be funny and whose image is threatened by A's laughter about his age and musical taste. That is why he decides not to continue the humor and returns to the serious topic, as seen in the subsequent interventions.

In (6), several friends talk about the boy one of the girls likes:

(6) 100 B: = very well↑ I thought you wouldn't remember me↑ I don't know girl↑
101 A: yes, yes that's it yes, I dare but not that, girl, and, you know what [happened? last year]
102 *C: [the one- the one who became] the love of my life [(LAUGHTER)=]*
103 *A: [GO to hell]*
104 C: = (LAUGHTER)§
105 A: § but the thing is last year he was in my group, right? and I wrote to him↑ and for- for Christmas↑ and all that and I wrote to him↑ and he didn't answer↓ and then↑ when he came to Valencia one day he came here to Valencia/ and I told him I said wow! you didn't write back to me and he said nooo it's that I don't like writing I never write to anyone so then I/ well I could write to [him, no problem, but- but I know he might not answer]

100 B: = muy bien↑ pensaba que no te ibas a acordar de mí↑ yo qué sé tía↑
101 A: sí sí eso sí eso sí que me atrevo pero eso no tía y ¿sabes lo que [pasa? que el año pasadoo]
102 *C: [el- el que hizo] de mi vida [(RISAS)=]*
103 *A: [VEte a la mieerda]*
104 C: = (RISAS)§
105 A: § pero es que el año pasado estaba en mi grupo ¿no? y le escribí↑ y por- para navidad↑ y esas cosas y le escribí↑ y no me contestó↓ y luego↑ cuando vino a Valencia vino un día aquí a Valencia/ se lo dije le dije ¡hala! no me has escrito no se que dice noo es que no me gusta escribir no escribo nunca a nadie no se menos entonces mee/ pos si yo podría escribirle a [él perfectamente pero- pero sé que igual no me contestaa]
(Corpus Valesco 2.0, Conversation 20, Interventions 100-105)

In (6), B and C try to convince A to write a letter to the boy she likes, but A is reluctant. However, C simulates A's feelings and laughingly remarks *the, the one who became the love of my life* to mock what A might write about her feelings in the letter. The humorous utterance is understood by the interlocutors, but it is not continued because it undermines A's image, who immediately replies to her friend with the intervention *GO to hell* and brings the conversation back to the serious topic.

In all the examples analyzed so far, laughter is used as a strategy of attack (see 4, 5, and 6) or affiliation

within the conversational group (see 1, 2, and 3), depending on whether the interlocutor agrees or disagrees with the humorous mode utterance. Next, we will show how all this relates to gender identity.

Since the focus of this study is on laughter in conversations of both genders, we will concentrate only on utterances where laughter is documented in the corpus. So, we will start with the first three examples of humor performed by men.

In example (7), several friends are spending the day in the countryside, talking about the landscape around them and the Coca-Cola bottle cap they have dropped:

(7) D: careful or it'll fall!… damn it! I've dropped it/ well, where do we put this?/ just leave it around here
D: that way it'll stay nice and cool (5")
C: we need to (( )) so that it doesn't fall
A: what could be healthier than lunch among the countryside flies!?
(LAUGHTER)§
B: § [(LAUGHTER)]
D: [(LAUGHTER) and a] sh– (LAUGHTER) and SHIT everywhere
B: (talking about shit/ someone's taking a dump over there)
A: for sure (5")
B: is this a natural park↑ dude?§

D: ¡cuidao a ver si se cae!… ¡coño! esto me cae/ bueno ¿esto dónde
se deja?/ déjalo por ahí
D: así sí que estará fresquito (5")
C: a esto lo hemos de (( )) pa que no se caiga
A: ¿¡qué más sano que una comida entre las moscas del campoo!?
(RISAS)§
B: § [(RISAS)]
D: [(RISAS) y una] mier– (RISAS) y la MIERda que hay
B: (hablando de mierda/ hay alguien cagando ahí)
A: seguro (5")
B: ¿esto es un parque natural↑ nano?§
(Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[H38.A.1.:50-60])

In (7), A's utterance, *what could be healthier than lunch among the countryside flies!?*, about the lunch they are having in the middle of nature, triggers humor through irony. The rhetorical question leads the interlocutor to interpret it as an ironic-humorous utterance, which causes laughter and thus humor. Moreover, the humor is recognized and continued by D, who remarks *and SHIT everywhere*, that serves as the punch line, generating laughter from A, B and D. In this case, the laughter expresses affiliation among the members of the conversational group, since the ironic-humorous utterance is about their shared environment.

In (8), the same group of friends is now talking about a girl who works with D and is not present:

(8) A: and how do you know her↑ the other one↑?
D: stuff that happens/ that you learn from
A: (LAUGHTER)/ so she picked you up off the [street↑ or something↑=]
D: [go to [(( )]]
A: = sometime?§
D: § FF she– she gave me a blowjob (LAUGHTER)/ stuff/ so now the girl from the pub told me we should go one day↓ she'll invite us/
she's told me twice now… [I say pa–]
B: [if she's inviting↑] then yes, but if we've got to pay↑

A: ¿y de qué la conoces↑ a la otra↑?
D: cosas de la vida/ que te enseña
A: (RISAS)/ ¿que te recogió de la [calle↑ o algo↑=]
D: [que (( )]]
A: = alguna vez?§

D: § FF mee– me la chupó (RISAS)/cosas/ pues ya me
ha dicho la del pab a ver si vamos un día↓ que nos invitará/
me lo ha dicho ya dos veces… [digo pues pa–]
B: [si invita↑] síi si hay que pagar↑
(Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[H38.A.1.:103-111])

In (8), A's utterance*: (LAUGHTER)/ so she picked you up off the [street↑ or something↑=]* is an ironic intervention in which a rhetorical question is directed at D, which serves as the humor trigger, as evidenced by the laughter. D responds with a crude remark, indicating disagreement with A's insinuation, which was a direct attack on D's public image. D replies with a humorous punch line before returning to the serious topic (*so now the girl from the pub told me we should go one day↓ she'll invite us/*). In this case, the laughter functions as an attack or punishment between the speakers since D's image has been damaged.

In (9), we continue with the same conversation between friends. Here, they talk about an absent person:

(9) C: § didn't she say she– that she knew you and some–?§
D: §-that- that she knew me– that I was with/ other people
A: [(LAUGHTER)]
B: [(LAUGHTER)]§
D: § I was with two or three [friends]
B: [A fairly [accurate] conclusion]

C: § ¿no dijo que co– que te conocía a ti y a
uun–?§
D: §que– que me conocía a mí que– conmigo iba/ gente
A: [(RISAS)]
B: [(RISAS)]§
D: § que iban dos o tres [amigos]
B: [una conclu]sión bastante [acertada]
(Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[H38.A.1.:163-170])

In (9), D reproduces the words of someone who is not present in the conversation (*that she knew me that I was with other people*), which trigger laughter from A and B because it is an absurd utterance to argue that she knew him. The utterance produces non-prototypical irony and humor, as shown by the laughter of A and B, and B's humorous punch line (*a fairly accurate conclusion*). In this case, the laughter is affiliative, since the humor concerns a person who is not present in the conversation and all the utterances made revolve around the same purpose, affiliation to the conversational group.

In the three cases we have analyzed, we have seen that men have used humor in the conversation either to show affiliation or to attack a group member's image, although such attacks do not rupture the conversational group. Next, we will examine whether women use the same conversational strategies in humorous utterances:

In (10), two women discuss what happened to C, who attended a promotional event with a friend and received a free wallet, and C was also sold an encyclopedia:

(10) C: she went to one of those meetings↑/ she didn't buy any books↑/ and look at this lovely little wallet/
[(LAUGHTER=)]
P: [(LAUGHTER)]
C: =so pretty/ she says [((I was→))=]
P: [this ((for free))]
C: = free/ of course/ it's what they were giving away as a gift§

C: se fue a una reunión d'estas↑/ no compró
ningún libro↑/ y mira qué carterita/ [(RISAS=)]
P: [(RISAS)]
C: = más bonita/ dice [((he sido→))=]

P: [esta ((gratis))]
C: = gratis/ claro/ lo que daban de regalo§
(Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[G.68B.1+G.69A.1.:22-27])

In (10), the ironic utterance occurs when C shows the wallet she was given just for attending (*and look at this lovely little wallet*), where the diminutive serves as an indicator for the listener to interpret the utterance in that way. In fact, P continues the humor and asserts that it was free, to show that it was not necessary to buy an encyclopedia. The laughter appears as an affiliation strategy between the interlocutors, who comment humorously on the situation C describes.

In (11), two women talk about a couple who bought the apartment of one of them and want to renovate it:

(11) M: § I have given them a floor plan/ I gave them the floor plans of my apartment↑/// and now they're thinking of… putting in/ one of those round baths with/// [hydromassage=]
A: [oh wow, how (( ))!]
M: = hydromassage and everything§
A: § that's outrageous! (LAUGHTER)§
M: § yeah, yeah/ (that's the idea)/ yeah (LAUGHTER)

M: § les he dao un plano/ les ha dao unos
planos de mi piso↑/// y ya en las ideas… de hacerse/ esas mm…
baños que hay redondos con/// [hidromasaje=]
A: [¡uuyy qué (( ))!]
M: = hidromasaje y todo§
A: § ¡qué barbaridad! (RISAS)§
M: § sí sí/(esa es la idea)/ sí (RISAS)
(Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[S.65.A.1.:491-498])

In (11), A uses the subjective routine expression *that's outrageous!* to show surprise at the fact that they are going to put in a hydromassage bath, as something unusual. A's utterance serves as a jab line to show irony and humor with respect to what M has said, who is forced by this utterance to ratify what she said previously (*yeah, yeah, that's the idea, yeah*). The laughter shows agreement and affiliation of the conversational group, since they both laugh at a situation external to them.

In (12), two friends recount a funny anecdote from the youth of one of their mothers:

(12) P: § she was referring to/ and then she told a story (LAUGHTER) about the mother– your mom… she says that→… once, Rosita went who knows where↑ with Pepe↑(2'') and– and they stayed in El Perelló↑… and she says/ girl/ the glass of a door had broken↑… and she says and the old girl said to us/ can you close the door/ I'm cold?§
C: § (LAUGHTER)/ and she didn't know the glass was broken / she didn't know?§
P: § she didn't know§
C: § (LAUGHTER)§
P: § can you close the door/ I'm cold?… but GIRL/ the door is closed… no way it is! §
C: § (LAUGHTER)§
P: § and then she says and then she says/ well/ I'll close it now/ she says/ we pretended to close the door/ (and she says) see? now the cold doesn't come in. [of course=]
C: [(LAUGHTER)]

P: § ella se refería/ y luego contó una historia (RISAS) de la mamá– de tu madre… dice que→… una vez se fue Rosita no sé dónde↑ con Pepe↑(2'') y– y se quedaron allí en El Perelló↑… y dice dice/ tía/ se había roto el cristal de una puerta↑… y dicee y la tía nos decía/ ¿queréis cerrar la puerta/ que tengo frío?§
C: § (RISAS)/ y no sabía que estaba el cristal roto/ quer– ¿no lo sabía?§
P: § no lo sabía§
C: § (RISAS)§
P: § ¿¡queréis cerrar la puerta/ que tengo frío?… pero TÍA/ si está la puerta cerrada… ¡qué va estar cerrada! §

C: § (RISAS)§
P: § y dice bueno/ pues/ahora la cierro/ dice/ hicimos como que cerramos la puerta/ (y dice) ¿tú ves cómo ahora no pasa el frío? [cla(ro)=]
C: [(RISAS)]
(Briz and Val.Es.Co. group 2002: 51[G.68B.1+G.69A.1.:652-669])

In (12), the irony and humor is produced by the description of the situation told by the interlocutors about a person not present in the conversation, who is a relative of one of them, who was cold and thought that a door was open when, in reality, what happened was that the glass was broken. The anecdote is humorous as shown by the different jab lines that appear, the situational irony they describe, and the affiliative laughter that arises. In this case, they also try to create bonds in the conversational group.

Figure 2 shows the data referring to the strategies used in the examples seen in this paper, in which laughter appears, by men and women:

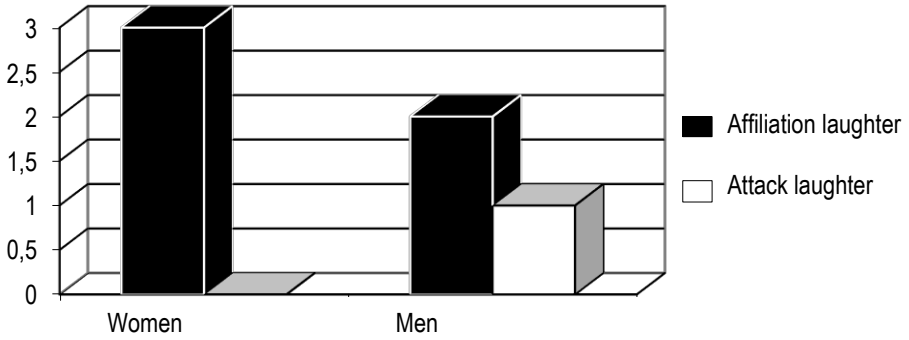

Figure 2. Occurrence of laughter, according to gender.

Among the occurrences of women, we observe that, when humor appears in the conversation, as in (10), (11), and (12), the laughter is affiliative in relation to the conversational group; while in the occurrences of men, as in (7), (8) and (9), the laughter, when it appears, is used to attack or punish the interlocutor. This variation in data between the humorous utterances of men and women, is due to the fact that the conversational strategies used by men are different from those used by women, since the humorous mode is negotiated according to whether or not it affects the interlocutors' image. Women try to strengthen their conversational group without attacking the image of the interlocutor and create humor towards people not present in the conversation or situations; while men, in similar situations, use continuous humorous utterances to strengthen their conversational group based on attacking the public image of one of the participants in the conversational exchange, which makes it difficult for them to continue the humorous mode.

5. Conclusions

From all the examples analyzed in our corpus, we can conclude that laughter is both a marker and an effect of humor and is used as communicative strategies that are at the service of the speaker and the listener and can be used to show attack or affiliation to the conversational group (see Table 1).

Table 1
Types of laughter, according to the origin of the humor

Origin of Humor	Humor Realization	Types of Laughter	Discourse Strategy
Speaker	Agreement	Affiliation.	Strengthening group bonds
Listener	Disagreement	Attack or punishment	Attacking the public image of the speaker

In general, we can see that affiliative laughter reflects agreement on the realization of the humor made in the utterance, since the humor comes from the speaker, and the laughter is understood by the interlocutors

themselves as a strategy of affiliation to the conversational group. This happens because shared experiences are often the target of the jokes, so that they avoid damaging their public image.

However, when attack laughter occurs in colloquial conversations, the humor is not shared and the strategy that appears shows disagreement or punishment, since the target of the humor is present in the conversation, so there is a direct attack on the interlocutor, since its intention is to damage their social image.

If we extend these conclusions to gender identity, we have found, in our analysis, that men use laughter to show attack on their interlocutor, and this fact is understood by the interlocutors themselves as a strategy of affiliation to the conversational group. In these cases, the participants present are the target of the jokes, which does not occur in conversations between women, who prefer to avoid such situations that could damage their image. Thus, in the laughter in conversations between women, the strategy used is affiliation, since the target of the humor is normally not present in the conversation, so there is no direct attack on the interlocutor, since their intention is to prevent attacks on their social image.

These results are derived from the corpus analyzed in the present study and should therefore be interpreted as corpus-contingent rather than universally generalizable. It is plausible that analyses conducted on different corpora—varying in interactional settings or participant profiles—would yield partially different patterns and distributions. Accordingly, our findings are best understood as evidence of what occurs in our dataset, not as claims about all conversational data.

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Language education, multilingualism and inclusion: Insights from Italian University Language Centres and students' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

EN The paper outlines the role of Italian University Language Centres (ULCs) in promoting multilingualism, multiculturalism, and inclusive practices in higher education. It presents a mixed-methods study combining corpus-informed and discourse-based analysis of English-language websites of the AICLU (Associazione Italiana Centri Linguistici Universitari) with questionnaire data collected from students enrolled in ESP courses at the University of Calabria. Findings indicate that inclusive practices, particularly those addressing disability, accessibility, and diverse learner needs, are not represented consistently across institutions. Student responses highlight the need for greater interaction, more flexible learning pathways, expanded language offerings, and more visible support systems. The study advocates for a more holistic, inclusive, and student-centred model of language education that integrates multilingual and inclusive values at both institutional and pedagogical levels.

Keywords: INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION, MULTILINGUALISM, STUDENT-CENTRED LANGUAGE EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE CENTRES (ULCS), INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSE, *AICLU - ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA CENTRI LINGUISTICI UNIVERSITARI.

ES El artículo describe el papel de los Centros Lingüísticos Universitarios (CLU) italianos en la promoción del multilingüismo, el multiculturalismo y las prácticas inclusivas en la educación superior. Presenta un estudio de métodos mixtos que combina un análisis basado en corpus de los sitios web en inglés de la AICLU (Associazione Italiana Centri Linguistici Universitari) con datos de un cuestionario al alumnado de cursos de inglés para fines específicos (ESP) de la Universidad de Calabria. Los resultados indican que las prácticas inclusivas, en particular las relacionadas con la discapacidad, la accesibilidad y las diversas necesidades del alumnado, no se aplican de manera uniforme en todas las instituciones. Las respuestas ponen de relieve la necesidad de una mayor interacción, itinerarios de aprendizaje flexibles, una oferta más amplia de cursos de idiomas y sistemas de apoyo más visibles. Se aboga por un modelo de enseñanza más holístico, inclusivo y centrado en el estudiante, que integre los valores multilingües e inclusivos tanto a nivel institucional como pedagógico.

Palabras clave: educación superior inclusiva, multilingüismo, enseñanza de idiomas centrada en el estudiante, centros lingüísticos universitarios (clu), discurso institucional, aiclu - associazione italiana centri linguistici universitari.

IT Il contributo analizza il ruolo dei Centri Linguistici d'Ateneo (CLA) italiani nella promozione del multilinguismo, del multiculturalismo e delle pratiche inclusive nell'ambito dell'istruzione universitaria. Lo studio adotta una metodologia mista che combina l'analisi corpus-informed e discourse-based dei siti web in lingua inglese dell'AICLU (Associazione Italiana Centri Linguistici Universitari) con i dati raccolti tramite un questionario rivolto a studenti iscritti ai corsi di English for Specific Purposes (ESP) dell'Università della Calabria. I risultati evidenziano che le pratiche inclusive, in particolare quelle relative alla disabilità, all'accessibilità e alle diverse esigenze degli apprendenti, non sono rappresentate in modo uniforme. Le risposte degli studenti mettono in luce la necessità di maggiore interazione, di percorsi formativi più flessibili, di un ampliamento dell'offerta linguistica e di sistemi di supporto più visibili ed efficaci. Lo studio suggerisce l'adozione di un modello di educazione linguistica più olistico, inclusivo e centrato sullo studente, capace di integrare i valori del multilinguismo e dell'inclusione a livello sia istituzionale sia pedagogico.

Parole chiave: ISTRUZIONE UNIVERSITARIA INCLUSIVA; MULTILINGUISMO; EDUCAZIONE LINGUISTICA CENTRATA SULLO STUDENTE; CENTRI LINGUISTICI D'ATENEO (CLA); DISCORSO ISTITUZIONALE, *AICLU - ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA CENTRI LINGUISTICI UNIVERSITARI.

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1. Introduction

In a world of increased international mobility, multilingualism has become of paramount significance among academic communities. Recent studies have extensively examined the role of University Language Centres in advancing the internationalisation of Italian universities (Argondizzo et al., 2025). Over the last few decades, the field of higher education has witnessed radical change due to increased globalization, academic mobility, and the development of international collaboration. The role of universities is becoming increasingly transnational, with linguistic and cultural diversity being not an exception but a rule. In this dynamic environment multilingualism is now one of the salient dimensions of higher education, as it defines institutional policy, pedagogical practices and the academic pathways of students. Instead of being limited to the process of learning languages, multilingualism infiltrates the fields of teaching, research, administration, and digital communication, posing critical questions concerning access, equity, and participation. However, the conflict between multilingualism and monolingual standards still exists. On the one hand, universities facilitate internationalisation and diversity; on the other hand, institutional practices usually favour a small number of academic languages, most often English. This tension can be detrimental to students from linguistic minority groups or international students whose language competences are often undervalued. Consequently, in order to attain inclusive higher education, the role of languages in defining access to knowledge, practices of assessment and institutional communication must be critically addressed.

Multilingualism and inclusive education are therefore central institutional priorities, particularly within the European context, where linguistic diversity is recognized as both cultural wealth and a key policy objective. Inclusive higher education becomes a tool of empowerment and a chance for equality that requires institutions to take strategic responsibility in meeting the diverse needs of their students. University Language Centres (ULCs) play a key role within this paradigm. They actively foster intercultural communication, learner autonomy, social inclusion and align with the European Parliament's goals of linguistic diversity in terms of providing equal opportunities and avoiding discrimination.

The present study aims to explore how Language Centre websites, (affiliated with AICLU – Associazione Italiana Centri Linguistici Universitari), address multilingualism, accessibility, and inclusivity, and to evaluate the extent to which linguistic diversity and inclusive measures are prioritized. The first part of the study presents preliminary findings[1] on European Language Centres (EULCs) as multilingual communities of practice. Through the analysis of their websites, the project investigated how academic institutions communicate services and concepts to their users, including international students, administrative staff, academics, and citizens. By analysing the English, Italian, and Spanish versions of EULCs websites, the project investigated the role EULCs play in promoting multilingualism, multiculturalism, and social inclusion. The second part focuses on a reflective study conducted in 2025 at the University of Calabria among university students enrolled in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, exploring their perceptions, experiences, and needs regarding language course offerings and inclusivity. This study proposes a pedagogical and institutional shift that would view multilingualism as an asset and not a challenge. This is crucial in order to align higher education practices with European language policies to ensure that linguistic diversity provides academic success, social inclusion and intercultural communication in an increasingly diverse multicultural society which will have to centre around students' needs.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Multilingualism, plurilingualism, and translanguaging

Before discussing the theoretical framework, it is important to clarify the use of the terms "multilingualism" and "plurilingualism" in this study. Although the distinction between the two concepts is theoretically significant, the present article adopts multilingualism as its primary analytical term when examining the websites of University Language Centres. This choice is deliberate and reflects the terminology that is most commonly used in the institutional discourse under analysis, particularly in the English-language versions of the websites. At the same time, plurilingualism remains an important conceptual reference for understanding language competence at the level of the individual, especially in relation to linguistic repertoires, mobility, and translanguaging practices.

[1] These results were presented as part of the Italian national research project PRIN entitled *European Language Centres as a Multilingual Community of Practice: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Academic, Cultural and Social Growth Conveyed through the Language of Websites*.

Modern conceptualizations of multilingualism do not conceive it as a rigid system of discrete languages, but as a dynamic interaction of linguistic competences which is subject to social factors (CEFR - Companion Volume, 2020). A distinction must nevertheless be made between the concepts of multilingualism and plurilingualism. Multilingualism generally denotes the coexistence of multiple languages within a society or institution, whereas plurilingualism emphasizes the individual's dynamic, interconnected, and flexible repertoire of linguistic resources. Rampton (2019) indicates that the development of such competence is based on lived experiences, as well as contexts in which several languages are used. In this sense, plurilingualism has a close relationship with identity, social participation, and mobility.

Translanguaging theories conceptualise language not as a set of discrete systems, but as a fluid, multisemiotic, and multimodal resource used for cognitive and communicative purposes (Li, 2018). Rather than viewing the individual as using completely separate languages, translanguaging emphasizes dynamic practices that transcend traditional boundaries between named languages, language varieties, and other semiotic systems (Li, 2018). Going beyond traditional code-switching, translanguaging adopts an internal perspective to describe the lived languaging experiences of bilingual and multilingual speakers (Vogel & Garcia, 2017). It is therefore concerned with a much wider range of communicative, educational, and social issues. In academic contexts, translanguaging embraces a transformative pedagogical practice where students are encouraged to fluidly access their full linguistic and semiotic resources to build meaning, negotiate identity, and participate in academic education. By removing rigid boundaries between named languages, this approach allows linguistically diverse students to draw upon their complete repertoires, therefore improving their academic achievements and bridging the gap between their home languages and institutional discourse. As Wei (2018) notes, translanguaging "empowers both the learner and the teacher, transforms the power relations, and focuses the process of teaching and learning on making meaning, enhancing experience, and developing identity" (p. 15). Ultimately, it demonstrates how language users navigate tensions among different signs both within and beyond academic settings and leverage their diverse resources to understand, engage with, and challenge the social world (Wei & Lin, 2019).

2.2. Linguistic diversity

European policy documents explicitly support the principle of linguistic diversity as the key to democratic participation and intercultural interaction (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2022).

Over time, the Bologna Process (1999) has played a central role in promoting mobility and cooperation across national systems, reinforcing the need for multilingual competence within European higher Education Institutions. Alongside structural reforms, European initiatives such as Erasmus+ have significantly increased student and staff mobility, further intensifying linguistic diversity within universities and foregrounding the need for inclusive language policies that support academic integration and success. In this regard, European institutions are willing to find a balance between internationalisation and linguistic diversity (Keeling, 2006).

Although English has become the lingua franca of academia, especially with the growth of English-Medium Instruction (EMI), the EU language policy emphasises the need to safeguard multilingualism and prevent linguistic homogenization. Both the European Parliament and the Council of Europe point out that linguistic diversity is an essential element of democratic participation and social cohesion, as well as equal access to education. Language is not a neutral medium, but rather one of the strongest factors in shaping power relations, inclusion, and institutional belonging. Multilingualism at the European level has been associated with social inclusion, non-discrimination, and equal access to information. In the context of higher education, institutions are required to offer fair opportunities for language learning and cater to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

2.3. Diversity and inclusion in University Language Centres

University Language Centres (ULCs) play a pivotal role in the promotion of language education. Research in the field highlights how ULCs enhance pedagogical innovation, learner autonomy, and the development of intercultural competence (Argondizzo, 2015; Bickerton & Gotti, 1999; Little, 1999, 2000). Language policy, pedagogy, and institutional practise specifically intersect in University Language Centres (ULCs). They gradually broadened their scope in line with the linguistic requirements of internationalised higher education. In fact, ULCs have become strategic agents of institutional multilingualism, promoting academic literacy, intercultural competence and learner autonomy in more than one language. Their work aligns with European aims in regard to lifelong learning, social inclusion and linguistic diversity (Argondizzo,

2015; Bickerton & Gotti, 1999; Ingram, 2001). In addition, ULCs play a greater role in language planning, mediating between global and locally based national and minority language commitments. They also offer linguistic assistance to students and members of staff that participate in mobility programmes or international research projects and meet accessibility requirements, such as those for students with disabilities or special learning needs. In this respect, Language Centres are not just service units, but spaces where multilingualism is practised as a social and educational process.

Recently, inclusion in higher education has become a subject of scholarly interest, especially in the case of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Inclusive education is widely acknowledged as a way to achieve equal opportunities and empowerment, which calls for the removal of structural, communicative, and attitudinal barriers (Al-Hassan, Bani-Hani & Al-Masa'deh, 2023).

2.4. Sign language as a multimodal and inclusive tool

The theoretical foundation of this study incorporates the concepts of inclusion, signing, and socialization. While previous literature on signing (Heslinga & Nevenglosky, 2012) has often focused on elementary educational settings, adapting these principles to higher education requires careful contextualization. In a university classroom, integrating sign language does not mean that a class of mostly non-signers must learn it to the point that it becomes the language of instruction. Instead, the strategic incorporation of basic signs and visual-spatial communication can foster a more supportive learning environment by engaging multiple learning modalities, including visual, spatial, tactile, and kinetic dimensions.

In addition, it is essential to clearly differentiate fully developed sign languages from mere paralinguistic gestures. Sign languages are complete, grammatically complex linguistic systems. Recognizing them as such within the academic linguistic repertoire aligns with the broader goals of translanguaging and plurilingualism. When sign language is recognized as an integral component of a speaker's plurilingual repertoire, it transcends its traditional categorization as merely a compensatory accommodation. Instead, it becomes an active dimension of multimodal translanguaging, enabling individuals to fluidly interconnect spoken, written, and visual-spatial modalities to build meaning and negotiate identity. By rejecting strict boundaries, students are empowered to draw upon a richer, interconnected array of semiotic resources. This integration validates the diverse linguistic backgrounds of all students and bridges communicative gaps between deaf and hearing communities, treating their respective languages as complementary rather than separate. Ultimately, normalizing sign language as part of the classroom's shared translanguaging practices reduces communicative pressure and fosters a highly interactive, inclusive environment where the diverse repertoires of all speakers are dynamically interconnected and equally valued. In terms of inclusive education, sign language implementation in regular classrooms may be thought of as a universal design for learning (UDL) strategy instead of a compensatory intervention (Al-Hassan et al., 2023; Burgstahler, 2015; Moore, Rose, & Meyer, 2002). Rather than focusing on a particular group of students, signing practices help increase access and inclusion of the entire classroom community.

The development of sign language in higher education institutions is embedded in the international human rights systems. Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasizes that reasonable actions should be taken to enable the acquisition of sign language and to support the linguistic identity of the deaf community. In this context, inclusive higher education is understood as an issue of equal opportunity and empowerment and institutions are asked to strategically act on meeting the various needs of their students. In many institutions, inclusion remains framed within legal compliance discourse. Although procedural accommodations (extra exam time, assistive technologies) are essential, they do not automatically transform pedagogical cultures. A more holistic model requires proactive design, flexible learning structures, and recognition of diversity as a resource. Yet the extent to which these commitments are visible in institutional discourse and perceived in educational practice remains underexplored.

2.5. Students' perspectives for an inclusive education

Universities have the power to eliminate barriers to effective communication, enabling individuals with disabilities to fully participate in civil, economic, and social spheres. Institutional websites represent a particularly revealing domain for examining such commitments since they perform both informative and identity-building functions. They specify missions, describe services, and project institutional values. Analysing their language provides insight into how multilingualism and inclusion are discursively constructed and prioritised. Analysing English-language versions of websites is particularly relevant, as these pages often target

international audiences and therefore represent a curated version of institutional identity. At the same time, institutional discourse cannot be fully understood without incorporating student perspectives. Students are not passive recipients of educational provision but active agents whose experiences shape the effectiveness of inclusive initiatives. Prioritizing students' voices is essential for higher education institutions to fulfil their role in fostering environments where inclusion becomes a true cultural legacy.

Moreover, Osborne (2019), and Vickerman and Blundell (2010) argue that effective support systems must consider students' experiences. Therefore, as a questionnaire phase of the study reveals, it is necessary to incorporate students' perspectives into language education to achieve a more inclusive education and meet the Council of Europe's requirements regarding language development, multilingualism, and social inclusion.

2.6. Research questions

This study investigates Italian University Language Centres affiliated with the Associazione Italiana Centri Linguistici Universitari (AICLU). It combines a corpus-informed discourse analysis of English-language websites with questionnaire data collected from students at the University of Calabria. By integrating institutional representation and learner perception, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

1) How are multilingualism and inclusion represented in the English-language websites of Italian University Language Centres?
2) To what extent do these representations foreground accessibility measures?
3) How do students perceive inclusivity within their language education experiences?
4) Where do alignments or mismatches emerge between institutional discourse and student expectations?

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

The present study adopts a mixed-methods design combining a corpus-informed discourse analysis of institutional websites with questionnaire data collected from students. The integration of institutional discourse and student perception allows for triangulation between representation and lived experience. The first phase examines how multilingualism and inclusion are represented in the English-language websites of Italian University Language Centres affiliated with AICLU. The analysis combines corpus tools with qualitative interpretation in order to identify patterns of meaning across institutional texts. More specifically, a targeted keyword approach, rather than a fully corpus-driven procedure, was adopted: selected lexical items associated with the core research themes, such as multilingualism, diversity, and inclusion, were intentionally chosen as representative analytical categories. Their occurrences were identified and calculated using Sketch Engine. In addition to frequency analysis, concordance lines were examined to investigate the contextual use, co-textual patterns, and discursive framing of these terms across the corpus. By identifying recurring lexical patterns, thematic clusters, and discursive choices, the analysis explores the ways in which universities frame and promote their values and identities.

The second phase draws on questionnaire responses from students enrolled in language courses at the University of Calabria in order to investigate their perceptions of language provision, accessibility, and inclusion. The two phases are complementary. Website analysis provides insight into institutional self-representation, while questionnaire data make it possible to compare that discourse with students' reported experiences and expectations.

3.1.1. AICLU Websites data collection

In the first phase, 51 Language Centres affiliated with AICLU were examined. This involved collecting web data from these Language Centres to identify the content sections of the websites, such as about us, news, placement tests, international relations, offered language courses, certification services, and affordances for inclusivity like audio versions of websites or other accessibility options for the visually impaired. The methodology comprised three distinct steps: manual web data collection, automated text collection for corpus compilation, and subsequent textual analysis. Among these, 24 centres provided English-language versions of their websites that were suitable for analysis. The decision to focus on English-language versions was motivated by two factors: (1) English pages typically address international audiences and therefore reflect strategic

institutional positioning; (2) they provide a comparative lens for examining how multilingual and inclusive values are framed in a lingua franca context.

A quantitative approach was used to compare information density and term occurrences. An automated text-collection was carried out to compile a specialised corpus which included 149,454 tokens and 8,799 types. A subsequent qualitative analysis investigated lexical strategies and compared the Italian and English website versions. The objective was not to produce statistical generalisation but to identify discursive patterns and priorities in institutional self-representation.

3.1.2. Questionnaire study

In the second phase, the questionnaire was administered to students enrolled at the University of Calabria, with 181 students participating. Data collection took place in May 2025 during class sessions, and participants completed a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The sample was composed of 73% Bachelor and 27% Master students. The participants belonged to different academic backgrounds, with the largest groups coming from Computer Engineering (46%), followed by Political Science (15%), Electronic Engineering (12%), Public Administration (9%) Media Studies (8%), Primary Education (3%), and 7% was not specified. The questionnaire was organized into five sections: general information, course offerings and accessibility, inclusivity and representation, personal experience and needs, and future perspectives. It combined Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice items, ranking tasks, and open-ended questions. The inclusion of qualitative responses enabled deeper insight into students' lived experiences and perceptions. Quantitative responses were analysed descriptively to identify trends in preferences and perceptions. Open-ended responses were coded thematically using inductive categorisation. Emerging themes were grouped into broader dimensions: interaction and participation, accessibility and infrastructure, multilingual expansion, flexibility and scheduling, cultural and intercultural engagement. This mixed analysis allows both numerical tendencies and nuanced perspectives to inform interpretation.

4. Results

4.1. Website and corpus analysis

Based on the 24 AICLU centres, Figure 1 illustrates differences in information density between the Italian (IT) and English (EN) versions of their websites across key institutional sections. Information density was operationalised through a binary coding procedure based on the presence (yes) or absence (no) of specific informational sections on the websites. The frequency with which each section appeared across Italian and English versions was then compared. The data shows a consistent pattern. In fact, Italian-language versions display substantially greater informational coverage across nearly all sections. The most evident discrepancies emerge in structurally significant areas such as courses, placement tests, international certifications, international relations (e.g., Erasmus), and timetables. These sections, which relate directly to academic organisation and service provision, contain considerably more detailed information in Italian. By contrast, the English-language versions appear more condensed and selective. On the one hand, core institutional identity sections, such as about us sections, are relatively well represented in both languages; on the other, operational and procedural content tends to be abbreviated in English. Dynamic sections, such as news and events, show greater discrepancies, suggesting less alignment in promotional communication. This distribution suggests differentiated audience targeting. Italian versions seem to be oriented towards internal users, such as domestic students and staff, requiring detailed operational information. English versions, conversely, function primarily as international gateways, prioritising visibility and general institutional presentation over procedural depth. From a discourse perspective, the asymmetry in information density may also reflect implicit hierarchies in communicative investment. While multilingualism is institutionally promoted, the reduced depth of English-language content raises questions about the extent to which multilingual accessibility is fully operationalised in digital practice. The findings therefore support the interpretation that multilingual representation, although symbolically foregrounded, may not always translate into equivalent informational accessibility across languages.

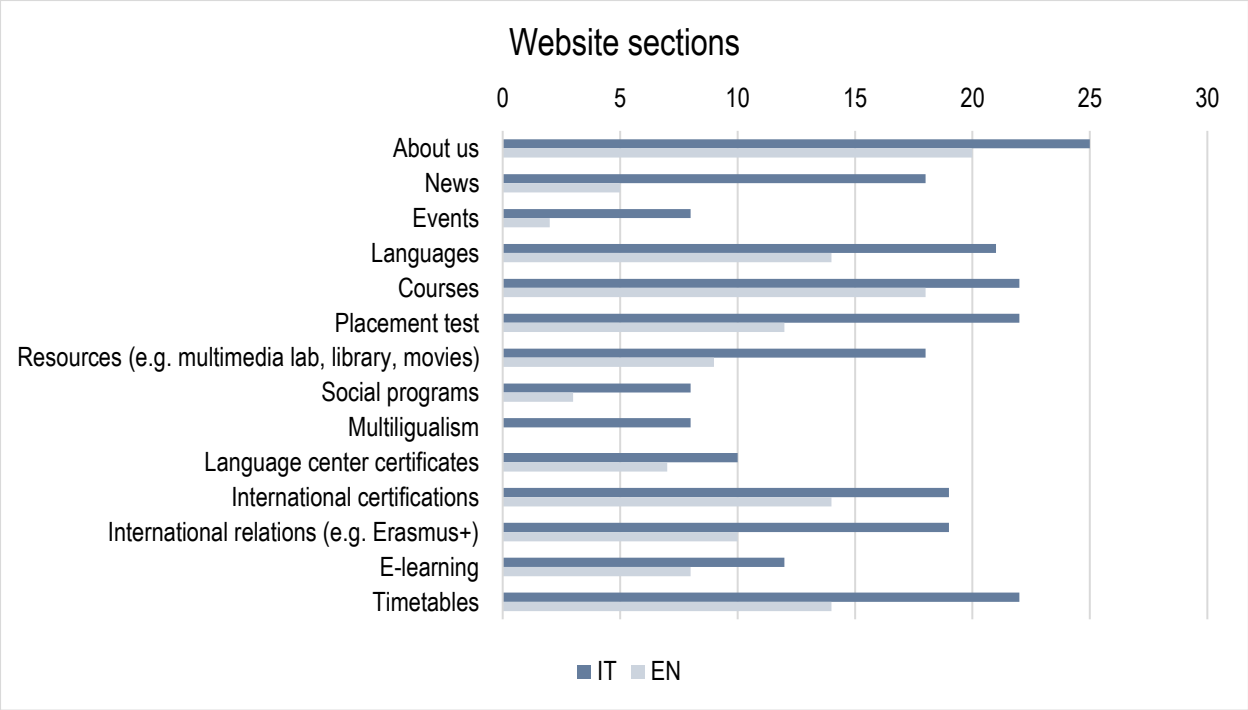

Figure 1. Information density – AICLU (Italian and English versions)

The corpus-informed analysis, based on the English-language corpus compiled from the institutional texts of the 51 Language Centre websites, revealed a significant gap in the terminology related to the project's core values, as shown in Table 1. The keyword analysis was not corpus-driven; rather, it followed a targeted approach in which specific lexical items, such as multilingualism, diversity, and inclusion, were intentionally selected as representative indicators of the study's core research themes. The occurrences of these items were subsequently identified and calculated using Sketch Engine. In addition, concordance lines were examined to analyse the contextual use and discursive framing of the selected terms across the corpus. For instance, the term "multilingualism" is mentioned only four times across three centres, and "diversity" appears only once. Nevertheless, as shown in the examples below, reference to multilingualism is framed as a contribution to European integration, a response to global mobility, a mechanism for intercultural dialogue, and a pathway to recognized qualifications. References to "less widely spoken languages" indicate alignment with European policy objectives aimed at linguistic equity. Some websites explicitly highlight workshops on inter-comprehension across Romance and Germanic languages, positioning Language Centres as innovative and collaborative spaces.

1) The CLA also does workshops on Intercomprehension: multilingual conversations, IC across romance languages, IC across Germanic languages, and IC across both romance and Germanic languages together.

2) The proposed program aims to strengthen communicative skills in Italian, develop soft skills, and promote collaboration in multilingual and multicultural contexts through the completion of a project work: students will be divided into groups, each composed of participants from different languages and cultures.

3) In a multicultural Europe, which is characterized by a wide variety of languages and institutions; it is important to develop recognised qualifications in the language sector.

4) Intercomprehension fosters diversity, multilingualism, respect of difference and well-being.

Table 1
Data-informed analysis

Items	Occurrences	N° LCs
Multilingual	4	2
Multilingualism	4	3
Multicultural	2	2
Plurilingualism	5	3
Diversity	1	1
Disability	33	9
Disabled	5	3

On the other hand, references to disability were more prominent, with 33 occurrences across nine Centres. Moreover, the data shows that Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) is the most frequently mentioned inclusive measure (24%) out of 51 Language Centres, while mentions of hearing disabilities (4%) and visual impairments (4-6%) are very limited. These occurrences are typically embedded within procedural contexts, such as examination accommodations, legal compliance references (e.g., "Law 104/1992") and administrative instructions for requesting support.

Table 2
Accessibility features across 51 Language Centres

Accessibility	AICLU
Accessibility for visual impairment	6%
Age inclusivity	2%
Audio version of website	4%
Autism spectrum disorder	2%
Disability (physical)	**16%**
Emotional support	0
Ethnicity	2%
Facilities	0
Hearing disability	4%
LGBTQI+	4%
Peace	0
SLD (Specific Learning Disorders)	**24%**
Visual impairment	4%
None	**65%**

In addition, the qualitative analysis found that some Centres explicitly state the procedural guidelines that are applied to facilitate inclusion. Qualitative extraction from the corpus shows specific inclusivity procedures. For example, disabled students are expected to inform the centre at least two months before they take an exam to receive supplementary assistance. Support for Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) results in the provision of a 30% extension of their exam time; students with other disabilities may receive a 50% extension and even financial support if their disability has been assessed to be in the range of 66 per cent or above, as shown in the following examples:

5) Candidates with disabilities who require additional aids or time to take the exam must notify the CLA at the time of booking and in any case at least two months before the date of the exam.

6) Financial benefits are provided to participants with disabilities equal to or greater than 66% and/or with disabilities ascertained in accordance with Article 3 of Law 104/1992.

7) Students with disabilities or SLDs Students with disabilities or with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs) must contact SLAM through the InformaStudenti Service in order to receive special arrangements and support for the test (students with disabilities: 50% more extra time; students with SLDs: 30% more extra time).

However, inclusive pedagogy is less visible in the reviewed English-language webpages. Explicit reference to universal design principles, inclusive classroom methodologies, proactive accessibility planning, and representation of diversity in course content appear less frequently. Therefore, while accessibility measures are present, they are framed in terms of student support service and accommodation. Overall, English-language pages tend to emphasise internationalisation and certification more strongly than accessibility measures. This suggests strategic audience targeting: international mobility and language credentials are foregrounded for global visibility, whereas inclusion may be perceived as internally regulated and therefore less prominently showcased.

4.2. Questionnaire administration

The questionnaire results, based on responses from all 181 participants, indicate that 77 respondents had enrolled in at least one language course, with 95% of these students selecting English. This confirms the central role of English within the Language Centre's offerings. Nevertheless, a smaller number of students reported studying other languages, including Italian (6 students), Spanish (3), Japanese (2), Chinese (2), and French (1). Although these figures remain limited compared to English enrolment, they suggest the presence of broader linguistic interests extending beyond dominant language provision. Overall, most respondents rated the clarity of online information as high. However, 19% reported encountering barriers when accessing information or services. Technological barriers were mentioned most frequently (24 references), followed by linguistic barriers (12 references) and physical barriers (8 references). These findings suggest that, despite generally positive evaluations, access challenges persist for a notable proportion of students. As regards representation and inclusion, 52% of respondents felt that courses reflected the diversity of students' backgrounds. Nevertheless, only 39% agreed that teaching materials were inclusive in terms of ethnicity, gender, and nationality, while 55% expressed no clear opinion on this issue. Awareness of disability support services also appeared limited: 41% of students were unsure whether such services were available, and 27% reported having no knowledge of them. Taken together, these results reveal both positive perceptions and significant gaps in visibility and awareness concerning inclusive provisions. However, the questionnaire did not collect information regarding participants' disability status. Therefore, it cannot be established whether this lack of awareness concerned students who might actively require such accommodations or students for whom the information may not have been perceived as immediately relevant.

Similarly, in the qualitative feedback, students report mixed experiences regarding inclusivity. Positive experiences include professors using gender-inclusive language, encouragement of participation in class, and respect for diverse perspectives, as indicated in the following examples:

8) The course encouraged participation from all students and valued diverse perspectives.

9) Perhaps the methods of execution of the activities (technologies available in the lab, tasks accessible to all on the basis of their own needs).

10) I think the element that was inclusive was that the course of Italian was available for everyone who wants to join.

11) The professor was very inclusive in terms of gender inclusivity, starting from the type of language used in class and the topic talked.

12) I'm not sure if there was an elevator in the building where lessons were given. If not, this would certainly be an exclusive element for all people with disabilities or with specific needs.

These responses indicate that inclusion is sometimes realised at the micro-pedagogical level, particularly through teacher practices. However, concerns emerged regarding limited interaction in laboratory sessions, physical accessibility of buildings, and insufficient clarity regarding available support services. Notably, some students expressed uncertainty about the presence of elevators or structural accommodations, suggesting that the presence of accessibility measures was not always clear within the university environment.

Within the multilingual and personal involvement perspectives, the need for increased interaction was a dominant theme across the responses. In general, learners reported feeling moderately prepared for multicultural communication, as reflected in their self-assessment ratings (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Students' readiness for communication in multicultural and international contexts.

However, students requested more speaking skills practice, opportunities to converse with native or international speakers, and smaller, discussion-based formats (examples 9 and 10). Flexibility also emerged as a key demand. Several participants suggested open or modular scheduling, allowing students to choose attendance times according to personal needs (example 11). This reflects a broader shift toward learner-centred expectations, as highlighted in the examples below:

13) Interact more to practise more in speaking.

14) Smaller groups.

15) English lessons should not be scheduled in a specific date/time but would be better if there are open lessons during the week and the student choose when participate based on their needs.

However, their primary motivations for enrolling in a language course were academic requirements (124 responses) and professional development (71 responses), as illustrated in Figure 3.

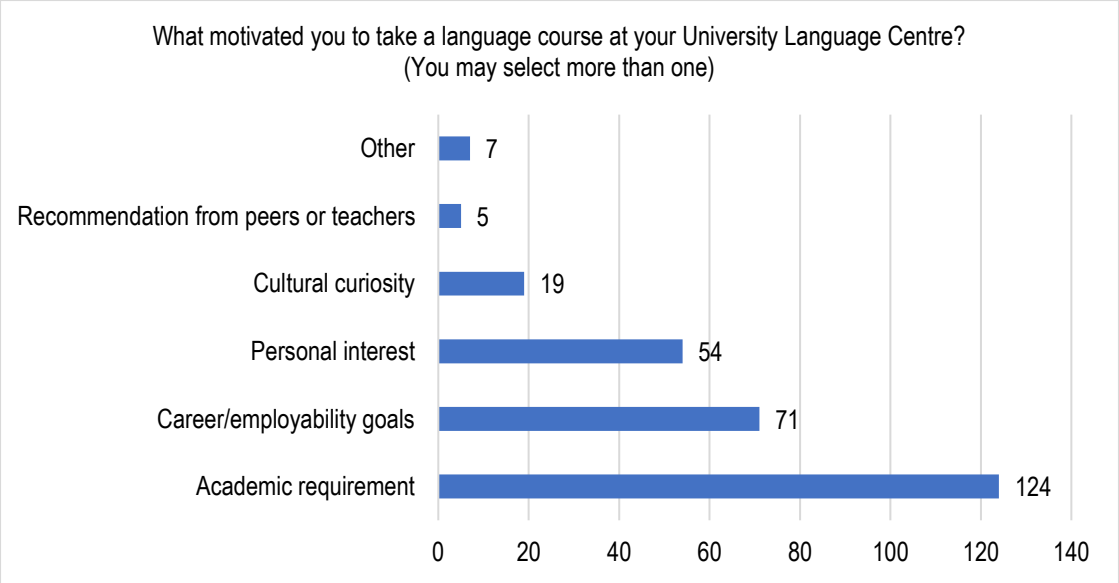

Figure 3. Students' motivation

Nevertheless, in the open-ended questions related to how language education at their university could become more inclusive or better reflect a multicultural society, students suggested increasing the variety of language courses, including less commonly taught languages and offering more courses and materials in different languages, particularly English. In addition, they highlighted the importance of promoting multilingualism through the organization of more multicultural events and meetings with international students, encouraging cultural exchanges and using materials and examples from diverse cultures, including discussions of topics such as cultural identity, migration, and social justice, as shown in the following examples:

16) I think that if the university promotes multilingualism and inclusivity through languages programs, there are many opportunities for students to improve their skills in an international society.

17) Preparing more programs and events for language learning and make it accessible for learners.

18) Language education could be more inclusive by using materials from diverse cultures and encouraging students to share their own backgrounds. This would make the learning environment more reflective of a multicultural society.

19) Less common or minority languages could be included in the curriculum, teacher training on issues related to inclusion and cultural diversity could be increased, and extracurricular activities such as language tandems or intercultural events could be encouraged.

Moreover, students expressed strong interest in expanding the range of languages offered, organising intercultural events, establishing language tandems, and supporting refugees and non-traditional learners. Interestingly, inclusion is framed not solely in terms of disability but as multicultural enrichment. Students view multilingualism and inclusivity as interconnected dimensions of personal and academic growth. In fact, several responses highlighted the importance of translating websites and documents into multiple languages, considering allowing exams to be taken in students' native languages and improving teacher training on inclusion and cultural diversity. This suggests that digital accessibility and linguistic inclusivity are perceived as indicators of institutional openness. Students' emphasis on communication transparency reinforces the importance of website discourse as a site of institutional credibility.

As part of the questionnaire, students were invited to rank a selection of languages (English, Spanish, French, German, Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Portuguese, Japanese, and Italian Sign Language) according to their preference for future study at the university language centre. The ranking results reveal a strong preference for

English as the most desired language of study, with a markedly higher number of first-place rankings compared to all other languages. Spanish emerges as the second most preferred option, receiving the highest number of second-place rankings and maintaining relatively strong positioning across the upper ranks. French and German also show consistent mid-to-high preferences, suggesting sustained interest in major European languages. In the open-ended questions, the vast majority of respondents indicated that no additional languages were desired; however, Spanish and Japanese were the most frequently suggested. In contrast, languages such as Arabic, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, and Italian Sign Language are more frequently positioned in lower-ranking categories, indicating a more limited immediate demand for formal curricular enrollment. However, their distribution across multiple ranking levels points to a notable niche interest rather than complete marginalisation, suggesting that students recognize their value outside of purely instrumental or professional motivations. Overall, the data reflect a predominantly Eurocentric and instrumental orientation in language preferences, with English clearly occupying a dominant position. These findings align with earlier questionnaire results highlighting academic and professional motivations as primary drivers of language course enrolment.

5. Discussion

The findings reveal a tension in the representation of multilingualism across Italian University Language Centres. At a policy level, multilingualism is widely recognised within European higher education frameworks as a strategic objective associated with mobility, internationalisation, and linguistic diversity (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2022; Keeling, 2006). However, the institutional discourse analysed in this study presents a more complex picture. Although multilingual practices are visible through the provision of English-language webpages and references to international communication, explicit references to multilingualism as a pedagogical or ideological commitment remain relatively limited within the corpus. The low frequency of terms such as multilingualism and plurilingualism suggests that linguistic diversity may be enacted operationally rather than articulated discursively. The integration of corpus findings and student responses highlights both alignment and dissonance between institutional narratives and lived educational realities.

Through the examination of AICLU websites, it appears clear that, despite the role of University Language Centres (ULCs) as hubs for linguistic diversity, their online presence does not reflect the theoretical values of plurilingualism. The limited visibility of multilingual terminology suggests that Language Centres tend to foreground functional and service-oriented communication rather than explicitly articulate broader multilingual ideologies. This result indicates that ULCs tend to make themselves visible by functional content, including course listing and placement tests, but not by clearly promoting an ideology of language diversity. Also, the fact that not all 51 centres have an English version of their websites is rather a serious obstacle to equal access to information among international students and immigrants. Indeed, multilingualism should be framed as a strategic asset associated with mobility, employability, intercultural dialogue, and European integration. The use of terms such as plurilingualism, inter-comprehension, and multicultural Europe positions Language Centres as active contributors to supranational linguistic agendas. The aspirational and future-oriented framing of multilingual initiatives suggests that linguistic diversity is leveraged as part of universities' internationalisation strategies. This interpretation aligns with Keeling (2006), who argues that European higher education institutions increasingly negotiate tensions between internationalisation agendas and commitments to linguistic diversity. Similarly, Argondizzo (2015) highlights the strategic role of University Language Centres in mediating between institutional visibility and multilingual educational objectives. Yet this operational multilingualism appears to coexist with a strong centrality of English. English-language websites function primarily as institutional gateways for international audiences, while broader forms of multilingual diversity receive less explicit attention. This reveals a tension between multilingual accessibility understood as translation and international visibility, and multilingualism understood as a broader commitment to linguistic plurality.

In contrast, references to disability and accessibility exhibit a different discursive pattern. Rather than being integrated into mission statements or pedagogical philosophies, disability-related content is predominantly located in procedural or regulatory sections. The concordance analysis shows that terms such as disability and SLD are strongly collocated with extra time, notification, law, and certification. This suggests that inclusion is framed primarily as compliance with legal frameworks and not as a transformative educational principle. While procedural accommodations are indispensable, their discursive isolation may signal that

inclusion remains peripheral to the core identity of Language Centres. The distinction between procedural accommodation and broader pedagogical inclusion reflects wider debates in inclusive education, particularly between reactive support models and systemic approaches designed to anticipate learner diversity. This finding resonates with scholarship in disability studies (Baglieri, 2017; Meyer et al, 2014; Oliver, 2013), which distinguishes between accommodation-based models and systemic redesign approaches. An accommodation model responds to individual needs within an unchanged structure; a systemic model rethinks educational design to anticipate diversity. The analysed websites appear to reflect the former more than the latter. Importantly, this does not imply the absence of inclusive practices. To some extent, it indicates limited discursive integration of inclusion into institutional identity. In digital self-representation, what is foregrounded communicates priority. The relative marginality of inclusive pedagogy compared to multilingual promotion may inadvertently suggest that inclusion is secondary.

Questionnaire findings revealed a substantial awareness gap concerning support services. Such results suggest that the targeted student population is not being addressed through effective institutional communication strategies, which is why it is necessary to redesign the delivery of inclusive practices. Previous research similarly emphasises that effective support systems depend not only on the provision of accommodations but also on students' awareness and perceptions of accessibility practices (Fuller et al., 2004; Osborne, 2019). It appears that learners perceive inclusion less in terms of formal accommodations and more in terms of interaction, flexibility, and participation. This distinction is important because the present study does not treat multilingualism and disability as equivalent categories, but rather as interconnected dimensions of learner diversity within higher education. While formal accommodations for students with disabilities or specific learning disorders remain essential, inclusion may also be understood more broadly as the capacity of institutions to recognise and respond to diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational needs. In this perspective, multilingualism becomes relevant not only as a language policy objective but also as part of a wider framework of accessibility and participation. This broader understanding of inclusion aligns with socio-cultural perspectives that conceptualise language practices as socially situated and embedded in participation processes (Lantolf, 2006; Li, 2018). Both multilingual and accessibility-oriented practices raise similar questions concerning visibility, access to information, participation, and institutional responsiveness. In this sense, inclusion is perceived as the opportunity to actively participate, the possibility of adapting learning paths, the recognition of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and the creation of socially meaningful learning environments. This interpretation is consistent with studies highlighting the importance of students' lived experiences and participation in shaping inclusive educational environments (Osborne, 2019; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). Importantly, the findings suggest that students may increasingly consider language learning as extending beyond purely academic or instrumental needs and encompassing broader forms of personal and intercultural engagement. High levels of interest in initiatives such as intercultural communication workshops, peer language exchange (Tandem learning), and language support for refugees or asylum seekers indicate that students value opportunities for social interaction and cross-cultural participation alongside formal language learning. Although these findings do not directly demonstrate that learners conceptualise languages as socially embedded repertoires, they suggest that language learning may be understood not solely as the acquisition of isolated competencies but also as a means of engaging with diverse communities and experiences. In this respect, the findings can be considered in relation to Rampton's (2019) conceptualisation of multilingual repertoires as socially situated and biographically shaped. Interestingly, positive accounts of inclusion often refer to individual teachers' practices rather than institutional structures. Gender-inclusive language use, encouragement of diverse perspectives, and participatory classroom dynamics are highlighted at the micro level. This suggests that inclusive practices may be more visible in pedagogical interactions than in institutional discourse.

Based on the questionnaire findings, it may be assumed that a potential pedagogical shift is emerging, as reflected in several recurring patterns identified through the interpretation of students' responses. First, students appeared to express a need for greater interaction and flexibility in language learning. Such expectations reflect broader shifts toward learner-centred and socially interactive approaches to language education, in which autonomy and participation are considered central components of learning (Little, 1999, 2000). Many reported a preference for more open and participatory lessons and highlighted the importance of opportunities for direct language use, rather than relying primarily on passive laboratory-based activities with limited interaction. Second, responses suggested that technological support plays an important role in shaping accessibility and learning experiences. Although some students appreciated the use of inclusive language by lecturers, technological barriers were frequently identified as obstacles to access, indicating a possible need for

more effective and better-integrated digital tools within language learning environments. Third, students' responses appeared to reveal an interest in broadening linguistic opportunities beyond dominant language offerings. Less widely taught and minority languages attracted attention, while peer-led initiatives such as Tandem learning and intercultural workshops seemed to be increasingly valued. The findings suggest that learners' perspectives may play a crucial role in rethinking language education in more equitable and inclusive ways and indicate the need for professionals working within University Language Centres to engage with emerging educational paradigms. Institutions should therefore strengthen efforts related to social inclusion, the reduction of discrimination, and the development of intercultural communication competences. These findings also resonate with Universal Design perspectives, which advocate proactive and flexible educational environments capable of responding to diverse learner profiles rather than relying exclusively on individual accommodations (Moore, Rose, & Meyer, 2002; Burgstahler, 2015). Ultimately, fostering an inclusive academic community requires institutional strategies that respond to learners' needs, particularly for those preparing to work in increasingly multicultural contexts.

Furthermore, the students' emerging interest in Italian Sign Language (LIS), although representing a niche demand compared to dominant languages, reflects a qualitative shift in how linguistic diversity is perceived. Aligning with the theoretical framework of multimodal translanguaging discussed earlier, the recognition of sign language highlights a growing awareness that inclusion is not merely about procedural accommodations for disabilities. Instead, it involves embracing visual-spatial modalities as enriching semiotic resources for the entire academic community. By integrating sign language into their broader multilingual strategies, Language Centres could tangibly demonstrate their commitment to Universal Design for Learning, successfully bridging the gap between passive accommodation and transformative, student-centred pedagogy.

The integration of findings reveals what may be described as a discursive–experiential gap. Institutions discursively prioritise multilingualism as a strategic and symbolic asset. Inclusion, particularly disability-related inclusion, is addressed administratively. Students, however, articulate expectations that extend beyond both domains toward a holistic, student-centred model. This gap does not necessarily indicate institutional failure. To some degree, it reflects transitional dynamics within higher education. Language Centres historically focused on language proficiency and certification. However, contemporary learners increasingly expect language education to be flexible, participatory, socially responsive, technologically integrated, and culturally dynamic. The shift from standardised language instruction to inclusive, student-centred paradigms signals an emerging educational transformation. Language Centres are positioned at the forefront of this shift due to their cross-disciplinary and intercultural functions.

Overall, the findings suggest several implications. Hence, inclusion should be embedded within mission statements and pedagogical descriptions, and not confined to procedural sections. This means that Language Centres could adopt universal design principles, proactively framing diversity as an expected norm rather than an exception requiring adjustment. Furthermore, more attention should be paid to clearer and more accessible communication about available services in order to enhance perceived inclusivity. The future of Language Centres may lie in repositioning themselves not merely as certification providers but as hubs of socially responsive language education to respond to students' demand for minority languages and intercultural activities that broaden linguistic diversity.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how multilingualism and inclusion are represented in the English-language websites of Italian University Language Centres and how these representations align with student perceptions. Through a mixed-methods approach integrating corpus-informed discourse analysis and questionnaire data, the research provides a multidimensional view of institutional positioning and learner experience.

The study concludes that the Italian University Language Centres are at a crossroads between traditional conceptions of language teaching and an increasing demand of socially sensitive, inclusive education. The results of the AICLU website analysis and student survey point to the fact that the digital identity of the institutions and the real requirements of the student population differ significantly. Though theoretically, ULCs are designed to be a means of multilingualism and social-cultural awareness, and the limited number of terms in the corpus such as multilingualism and diversity indicate that these centres are more likely to position themselves as service-oriented rather than ideologically oriented. Moreover, the study reveals that there is a sharp disparity in the awareness of inclusion; students with disabilities and learning disorders may benefit from available support measures, but most students are not aware of them. This highlights the need for higher

education institutions to be strategically responsible when communicating such services, ensuring that students' right to equal access to information is fully achieved.

To this end, students' views are a crucial guide in redesigning language education. They are demanding a transition to more flexible, interactive learning environments with greater emphasis on speaking skills and the incorporation of new technologies. The emerging qualitative interest in Italian Sign Language (LIS) and peer-led programs such as Tandem learning indicates a need to make language education a means of personal multicultural development rather than a mere academic challenge. Although LIS may currently represent a niche demand compared to English or Spanish, its recognition by students emphasizes a broader shift towards valuing multimodality and interconnected linguistic repertoires. In this context, students call for increased interaction, flexible learning structures, expanded language offerings, and greater visibility of support systems. Inclusion, from their perspective, is relational, participatory, and culturally embedded.

To conclude, the study suggests that the future of language education is one which acknowledges the complexity of our globalized world, bridging the gap between institutional mission and the multi-faceted reality of the modern student population. It highlights a discursive–experiential gap between institutional self-representation and learner expectations. Addressing this gap requires integrating inclusive values more centrally into both communication practices and pedagogical design. As higher education becomes increasingly diverse, University Language Centres must navigate evolving demands and reimagine their role within socially responsive educational ecosystems. By foregrounding both institutional discourse and student voices, this research contributes to scholarship on multilingualism, inclusive higher education, and the evolving identity of University Language Centres. Future research may extend this analysis to comparative European contexts or incorporate longitudinal data to examine how discursive shifts translate into structural transformation.

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Motivation and multilingual identity in Maltese adolescents: An investigation through structural equation modelling

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ABSTRACT

EN This study investigates the psychological and contextual factors shaping multilingual identity among Maltese adolescents. Malta is a bilingual nation undergoing rapid linguistic diversification due to significant demographic shifts. Using the L2 Motivational Self System and post-structural theories of identity, the study examines how socio-cognitive beliefs, language attitudes, and instrumental values shape motivation and, ultimately, multilingual identity. Data were collected from 402 secondary school students through a validated online questionnaire. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to assess direct and mediated relationships between latent constructs. It demonstrated a good overall fit and identified motivation as the strongest predictor of multilingual identity, explaining 48% of its variance. Instrumental value beliefs also influenced identity directly, indicating a dual pathway. Small but significant effects were found for classroom multilingual context and gender. Findings highlight the importance of future-oriented motivation and support language policies that integrate practical and humanistic approaches to multilingualism.

Key words: MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY, MOTIVATIONAL SELF SYSTEM, ADOLESCENT MOTIVATION

ES Este estudio analiza los factores psicológicos y contextuales que determinan la identidad multilingüe entre los adolescentes malteses. Malta es un país bilingüe que está experimentando una rápida diversificación lingüística debido a importantes cambios demográficos. A partir del "Sistema Motivacional del Yo en la L2" y de las teorías posestructuralistas de la identidad, el estudio examina cómo las creencias sociocognitivas, las actitudes lingüísticas y los valores instrumentales determinan la motivación y, en última instancia, la identidad multilingüe. Se recopilaron datos de 402 estudiantes de secundaria mediante un cuestionario validado en línea. Se utilizó el *Modelo de Ecuaciones Estructurales* (SEM) para evaluar las relaciones directas y mediadas entre los constructos latentes. El modelo demostró un buen ajuste general e identificó la motivación como el predictor más fuerte de la identidad multilingüe, explicando el 48% de su varianza. Las creencias sobre los valores instrumentales también influyeron directamente en la identidad, lo que indica una doble vía. Se observaron efectos pequeños pero significativos en relación con el contexto multilingüe en el aula y el género. Los resultados ponen de relieve la importancia de la motivación orientada al futuro y respaldan las políticas lingüísticas que integran enfoques prácticos y humanísticos del multilingüismo.

Palabras clave: IDENTIDAD MULTILINGÜE, SISTEMA MOTIVACIONAL DEL YO, MOTIVACIÓN EN LA ADOLESCENCIA

IT Questo studio indaga i fattori psicologici e contestuali che contribuiscono alla costruzione dell'identità multilingue tra gli adolescenti maltesi. Malta è una nazione bilingue che sta attraversando una rapida diversificazione linguistica dovuta a significativi cambiamenti demografici. Basandosi sul modello del *L2 Motivational Self System* e sulle teorie post-strutturaliste dell'identità, lo studio esamina in che modo le credenze socio-cognitive, gli atteggiamenti linguistici e i valori strumentali influenzino la motivazione e l'identità multilingue. I dati sono stati raccolti tramite un questionario online validato, somministrato a 402 studenti della scuola secondaria. Per analizzare le relazioni dirette e mediate tra i costrutti latenti è stato usato lo *Structural Equation Modelling*, SEM. Il modello ha mostrato un buon adattamento complessivo ai dati e ha identificato la motivazione come il più forte predittore dell'identità multilingue, spiegandone il 48% della varianza. Le credenze relative al valore strumentale hanno inoltre influenzato direttamente l'identità, evidenziando l'esistenza di un duplice percorso di influenza. Sono emersi anche effetti modesti ma statisticamente significativi del contesto scolastico multilingue e del genere. I risultati sottolineano l'importanza di una motivazione orientata al futuro e sostengono politiche linguistiche che integrino approcci pratici e umanistici al multilinguismo.

Parole chiave: IDENTITÀ MULTILINGUE, SISTEMA MOTIVAZIONALE DEL SÈ, MOTIVAZIONE NEGLI ADOLESCENTI

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1. Introduction

The interplay among multilingualism, language-learning motivation, and identity has gained increasing prominence in applied linguistics, particularly as learners navigate educational spaces shaped by diverse linguistic and cultural repertoires. Early research on second language motivation and identity was largely situated in monolingual or bilingual contexts, while contemporary multilingual environments require more complex theoretical models that can account for how learners internalise, negotiate, and express their linguistic identities within dynamic social and institutional settings (Fisher, Evans & Forbes, 2025; Henry, 2023). These developments highlight the need for empirical work that integrates psychological, sociocultural, and contextual dimensions of multilingual identity formation.

While multilingualism has characterised smaller bilingual nations for a long time, rapid demographic and educational shifts, such as increased mobility, migration, and diversification of school populations, have further intensified the complexity of learners' linguistic ecologies. For instance, Malta, an officially bilingual country, has experienced significant multilingual diversification in recent years (Panzavecchia, 2024).

In Malta, this shift is now well documented in local educational research. Recent studies show that Maltese classrooms are no longer adequately described as simply bilingual but are increasingly shaped by wider linguistic and cultural diversity (Camenzuli, Lundberg, & Gauci, 2023; Panzavecchia, 2024). Research with Maltese primary educators indicates that teachers generally hold positive views towards multilingualism yet often remain uncertain about how to draw on it pedagogically in absence of clearer guidance, stronger training, and more coherent language policy support (Camenzuli et al., 2023; Panzavecchia, 2024). At the same time, recent work with Maltese adolescents suggests that young people adapt their language use across home, school, and online settings, and tend to view multilingualism more as a practical resource than as an identity issue (Muscat & Panzavecchia, 2025). Taken together, these findings suggest that multilingual identity and motivation in Malta must be understood within a rapidly changing local ecology in which long-standing bilingual traditions now intersect with newer forms of multilingual experience. In these contexts, learners do more than use multiple languages: they construct identities shaped by their linguistic repertoires and the meanings attached to them. Understanding how adolescents navigate such evolving linguistic landscapes is therefore both theoretically significant and timely.

Traditional approaches to second language learning tended to conceptualise motivation and identity through linear cognitive models. These views are increasingly challenged by research emphasising the relational, affective, and sociocultural dimensions of language learning (Dörnyei, 2009; Norton, 2013; Ushioda, 2011). Learners' beliefs, attitudes, and social positioning are now seen as critical mediators of investment and identity construction. Furthermore, identity is negotiated within layered systems of social status, peer interaction, and institutional messaging, all of which influence learners' engagement and sense of self (Ceuleers, 2008; Wang et al., 2021).

Despite conceptual and theoretical advances, quantitative studies that integrate psychological and sociocultural variables in multilingual school settings remain limited. This gap is particularly evident in emerging multilingual contexts such as Malta. The present study contributes to this field by examining how students' socio-cognitive beliefs, language attitudes, peer interaction, and motivation shape the development of multilingual identity in adolescence. By modelling both direct and indirect relationships among these dimensions, the study also offers insights into contextually situated identity processes within multilingual education.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1. Language attitudes and socio-cognitive beliefs

Language attitudes have long been central to motivation research, influencing learners' willingness to engage with particular languages and their associated cultural communities (Ceuleers, 2008; Thompson, 2017). Positive emotional orientations toward a language tend to predict greater persistence and investment, whereas negative attitudes or perceived stigma can obstruct identity alignment and engagement (Dewaele, 2013). In multilingual contexts, attitudes toward different languages within a repertoire carry distinct symbolic and social meanings, shaping how learners position themselves linguistically and which languages they incorporate into their identities.

Socio-cognitive beliefs, such as perceived competence, creativity, and metacognitive efficacy in multilingual settings, further contribute to how learners conceptualise their linguistic potential. Learners who believe that multilingualism enhances cognitive or academic outcomes tend to construct more agentive

multilingual identities (Zareian & Jodaei, 2015). These beliefs are dynamic and evolve through interaction, institutional ideologies, and peer influence. Fisher et al. (2025), for example, argue that classrooms act as "identity laboratories" where learners explore, articulate, and negotiate their linguistic selves.

2.2. Motivation and the L2 motivational self-system

Motivation is widely recognised as a bridge between learners' beliefs, attitudes, and identity trajectories. Early perspectives such as Gardner's socio-educational model (1985) highlighted the role of integrative and instrumental orientations but this framework has been critiqued for its limited attention to identity dynamics and its assumption of stable attitudinal constructs. More recent models emphasise the fluidity of motivation and its alignment with broader identity processes.

Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System reframes motivation in terms of self-guides: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to Self, and the Learning Experience. This model has been influential in theorising the affective and aspirational dimensions of language learning. In multilingual settings, learners often develop multiple language-linked "selves," enabling the conceptualisation of an Ideal Multilingual Self (Henry, 2017; Thompson, 2017; Wang, McConachy & Ushioda, 2021).

Adolescence is a critical period in which these self-guides become more emotionally resonant and behaviourally consequential (Ryan & Deci, 2003). The extent to which school cultures and peer groups affirm or constrain multilingual identities influences the developmental trajectories of motivation. Recent research further highlights the role of perseverance and internalised agency in sustaining the development of multilingual identity (Göksu & Louis, 2025). In contexts where certain languages function as forms of social or economic capital, learners may internalise instrumental value beliefs (IVBs) (i.e., learners' perceptions of the practical and future-oriented utility of language learning) as part of their identity negotiation, as seen in Ceuleers' (2008) study of Brussels adolescents.

2.3. Defining multilingual identity

Multilingual identity refers to a self-concept shaped through one's affective, ideological, and communicative relationships with multiple languages (Block, 2006; Wang et al., 2021). It extends beyond the number of languages a learner knows and encompasses how individuals position themselves within multilingual environments. Fisher et al. (2025) distinguish between linguistic identity (language-specific positioning) and multilingual identity (a holistic identification as a multilingual person).

Psychological perspectives view multilingual identity as the integration of multiple language-linked selves into a coherent identity structure (Erikson, 1968; Oyserman & James, 2011). Sociocultural approaches emphasise identity as being co-constructed through discourse, power dynamics, and participation in communities of practice (Karimi & Mofidi, 2019; Norton, 2013). Within these frameworks, identity is relational, fluid, and continually reshaped through experiences and interaction (Ushioda, 2011).

Identity is not simply acquired through exposure; learners actively negotiate, resist, or transform their multilingual selves (Fisher et al., 2025). Longitudinal perspectives, such as Henry's (2023) narrative-based models of persistence, show how dynamic shifts in learners' imagined multilingual futures impact their motivation. Likewise, multimodal and translanguaging practices create hybrid linguistic spaces that enable flexible identity work (Almashour, 2024). In Malta, for example, translanguaging is deeply embedded in everyday communication and speakers fluidly draw on Maltese, English, and other languages in ways that blur the boundaries between named languages. This linguistic ecology provides a fertile context for examining how multilingual identity is constructed and negotiated.

3. Rationale for the present study

This local body of research is particularly important for the present study, as it demonstrates that multilingualism in Malta is not merely a demographic trend but a lived educational reality. Classroom-based studies show that flexible bilingual and multilingual practices already form part of everyday teaching and learning, even if these practices are not always systematically supported or consistently implemented (Farrugia, 2022; Panzavecchia, 2024; Panzavecchia & Little, 2020). In this context, learners' motivation, language attitudes, and multilingual identities are shaped not only by general socio-cognitive processes, but also by the specific tensions of a system in transition, one in which Maltese–English bilingualism remains historically central, while increasingly diverse linguistic repertoires are becoming more visible in classrooms and peer interaction (Camenzuli, Lundberg, & Gauci, 2023; Muscat & Panzavecchia, 2025).

The present study integrates these theoretical perspectives by modelling the relationships among socio-cognitive beliefs, language attitudes, instrumental values, peer interactions, and motivation in predicting multilingual identity. Using structural equation modelling (SEM), it explores both direct and mediated pathways that influence multilingual identity development in adolescence. This method responds to the need for quantitative research that captures the psychological and sociocultural processes shaping identity within multilingual educational settings. By focusing on Malta's multilingual environment, the study also advances applied linguistics by connecting learners' psychological orientations to their everyday language practices, identity positioning, and participation in linguistically diverse classrooms. The following research questions guide the study:

1) To what extent do motivational, attitudinal, and socio-cognitive variables predict adolescents' multilingual identity?
2) What are the antecedents of Motivation to maintain or develop a multilingual identity?
3) Do contextual factors (e.g., gender, classroom multilingual context) significantly influence multilingual identity?

4. Method

The research questions are tested using a structural equation model that estimates both direct and indirect pathways between constructs. This approach investigates whether instrumental value beliefs, hereafter referred to as IVBs, shape identity. By integrating contextual variables such as peer interaction, classroom multilingualism, and gender, the study advances a multi-theoretical account of adolescent multilingual identity development. It is important to note that the school sector and other demographic variables are examined in detail in a parallel study (Muscat & Panzavecchia, 2025), which focuses on descriptive and group-level analyses. The present study builds on this work by modelling structural relationships between psychological constructs.

5. Participants

This study draws on data from a sample of 402 secondary school students in Malta, aged 10 to 14 years, enrolled in Years 7 to 9. The sample included a relatively balanced gender distribution (approximately 55% female and 45% male) and can be broadly characterised as bilingual or multilingual, reflecting the Maltese linguistic context. Participants were recruited from diverse school sectors, including state, church, and private independent institutions; however, the distribution across sectors was uneven, with church (47%) and independent schools (33.8%) being overrepresented, and state schools underrepresented (19.2%). Participation was voluntary and data were collected through an anonymous online questionnaire administered in school settings with the support of educators. Full descriptive statistics and detailed sample breakdowns are reported in Muscat & Panzavecchia (2025).

The uneven distribution across sectors reflects participation patterns rather than intentional sampling. Consequently, findings related to the school sector should be interpreted with caution, particularly when comparing subgroups. While the school sector represents a potentially meaningful contextual variable, the present study primarily focused on socio-cognitive and motivational predictors of multilingual identity rather than institutional differences. As such, the school sector was not included in the final structural model, and its role in shaping group-level differences is addressed as a consideration for future research.

6. Measures and instrument reliability

Data were collected using a researcher-developed online questionnaire designed to explore students' language backgrounds, everyday language practices (home, school, online), emotional associations with their first and second languages, and perspectives on multilingualism in contemporary education and society (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire included a combination of Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended prompts. Before distribution, the instrument was assessed for face validity by two independent researchers, resulting in minor revisions to two items to enhance clarity and alignment with the study's aims.

Internal consistency of the six-item Likert scale assessing attitudes toward multilingualism was evaluated using *McDonald's Omega (ω),* which does not assume tau-equivalence and is thus more robust than Cronbach's Alpha in this context. The analysis yielded $\omega = 0.72$, indicating acceptable reliability. A Split-Half Reliability test further showed a *Spearman-Brown* corrected coefficient of *0.50*, suggesting moderate internal

consistency. While the latter falls below the conventional *0.70* benchmark, the *Omega* result supports the scale's adequacy for measuring attitudes in this domain.

It is noted that this reliability estimate pertains specifically to the six-item scale with a 5-point response format. Other belief items, such as those related to language and identity or future aspirations, used a 3-point response format and were analysed descriptively. These were not included in the internal consistency analysis. Full methodological details are discussed in a parallel study (Muscat & Panzavecchia, 2025).

7. Analytical procedure

To examine predictors of Multilingual Identity (MI) among Maltese adolescents, we specified and tested a SEM using latent constructs deriving from questionnaire responses. The model was designed to estimate both direct and indirect pathways linking socio-cognitive beliefs, language attitudes, and motivational orientations to multilingual identity.

The measurement model included five latent constructs. Each construct was operationalised using conceptually aligned items from the questionnaire (see Appendix). Specifically, socio-cognitive beliefs (SC) were derived from items assessing perceived cognitive, academic, and social benefits of multilingualism (Q13); language attitudes (L1 and L2) were captured through affective and evaluative orientations toward each language, including feelings of pride, perceived competence, and the importance attributed to using the language, consistent with attitudinal frameworks in second language acquisition (e.g., Gardner, 1985), instrumental value beliefs (IVBs) were measured through items reflecting the perceived academic, social, and future-oriented utility of language learning (Q14); and motivation (MOT) was indicated by items capturing future-oriented aspirations, particularly students' imagined multilingual selves (Q14).

Multilingual identity (MI) was modelled as a latent outcome variable, reflected by two observed indicators capturing (a) the perceived importance of multilingualism and (b) the extent to which students identified themselves as multilingual in their imagined future. This operationalisation aligns with theoretical perspectives that conceptualise identity as both a value-based orientation and a future-oriented self-concept.

7.1. Confirmatory factor analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted before the SEM estimation to validate the latent constructs. Given the ordinal nature of the Likert-scale items and the presence of binary indicators, we employed robust weighted least squares estimation with mean and variance adjustment. This estimation method is recommended for categorical data, as it avoids the unrealistic assumption of normally distributed continuous indicators and provides accurate standard errors and fit indices (Li, 2016). All factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < .001$), with the majority exceeding 0.60. Composite reliability estimates were above 0.80 across all constructs, and discriminant validity was supported by inter-factor correlations below 0.80 and average variance extracted values above 0.50 for the MOT and MI factors.

7.2. Structural model estimation

Following the validation of the measurement model, the structural model was estimated using robust maximum likelihood and full information maximum likelihood to handle missing data. This approach is suitable for non-normal data and incomplete data, and has been shown to yield robust parameter estimates, even in complex models. In cases where sparse response categories in certain binary indicators led to convergence instability, the factor scores from the CFA were used as observed indicators. These adjustments were confirmed through robustness checks using scale composites, which produced comparable parameter estimates.

Two observed covariates, Gender and Classroom Multilingual Context, were included to account for individual and environmental differences. To improve model parsimony and reduce the risk of overfitting, non-significant paths were trimmed from the final specification.

The final SEM demonstrated a very good global fit to the data ($\chi^2(94) = 172.72$, $p < .001$). The Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.999), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.999), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.046, 90% CI [0.035, 0.056]) all exceeded recommended thresholds, indicating strong model–data correspondence. The Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.171) exceeded the conventional cut-off of 0.08. However, SRMR is known to be sensitive to models estimated with categorical indicators and robust estimation methods and may be inflated under such conditions (Maydeu-Olivares, 2017). As such, this index is interpreted with caution, and overall model fit is considered acceptable based on the convergence of multiple fit indices.

7.3. Path coefficients and explained variance

Motivation emerged as the strongest predictor of MI, with a standardised coefficient (β) of 0.60 (p < .001), explaining 48% of the variance in MI (R^2 = 0.48). In turn, Motivation was positively and significantly predicted by:

- Socio-Cognitive Beliefs (β = 0.21, p < .001)
- Second Language Attitudes (β = 0.18, p = .002)
- Instrumental Value Beliefs (β = 0.28, p < .001)
- Frequency of Peer Interaction (β = 0.13, p = .040)

IVBs also demonstrated a direct positive effect on Multilingual Identity (β = 0.16, p = .003), suggesting that pragmatic orientations contribute to identity formation both independently and via motivational self-guides. Among the observed covariates, both Classroom Multilingual Context (β = −0.09, p = .020) and gender (β = −0.08, p = .037) showed small but statistically significant negative associations with Multilingual Identity. Other contextual variables, such as school sector and family language background, were not significant and were therefore excluded from the final model.

The model depicted in Figure 1[1] explained 20% of the variance in Motivation and 48% of the variance in Multilingual Identity. Results were stable across sensitivity analyses using reduced models and alternative indicator formats, confirming the validity of the findings.

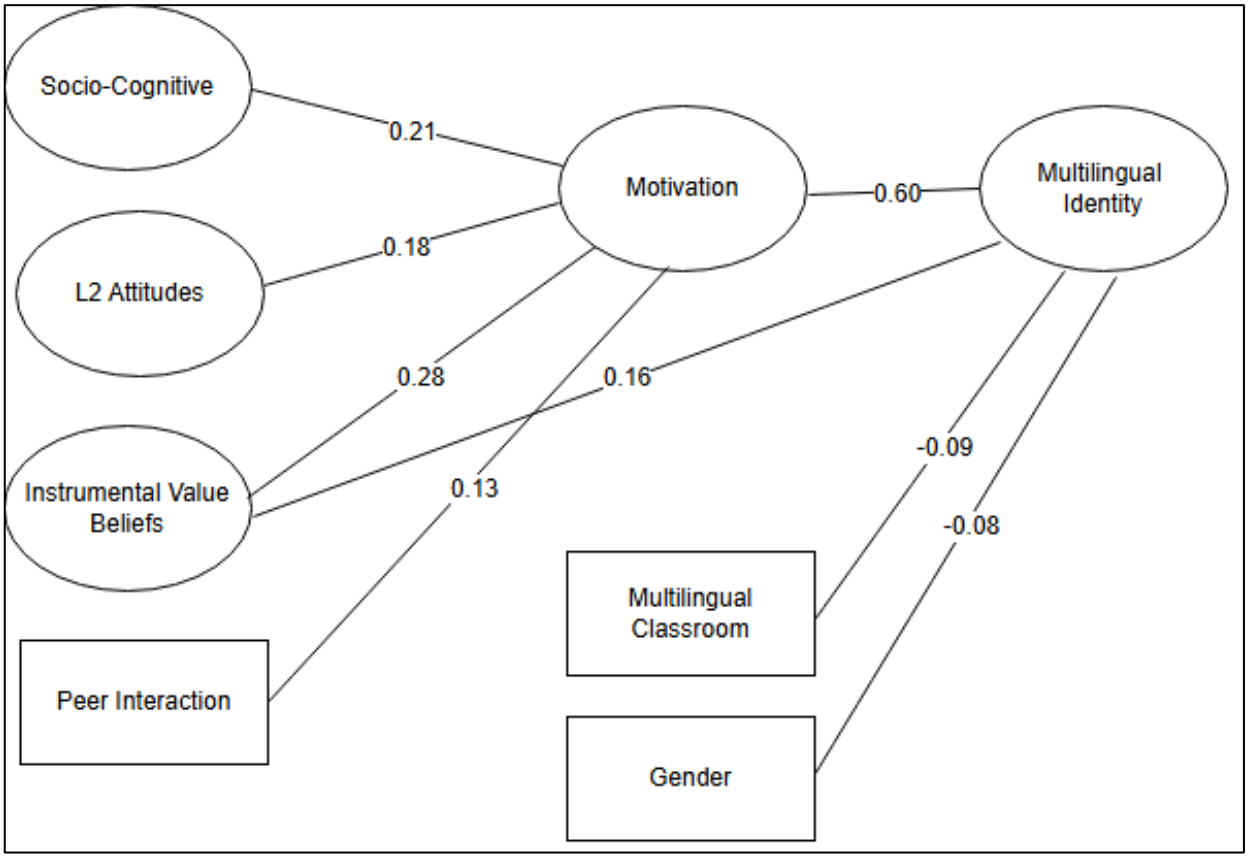

Figure 1. Structural Equation Model for Multilingual Identity

[1] Note: Ellipses represent latent variables estimated through confirmatory factor analysis; rectangles represent observed variables. Lines indicate significant directional paths based on standardised regression coefficients (p < .05). R^2 values reflect the proportion of variance explained in the endogenous latent constructs: Motivation and Multilingual Identity. Model fit : $\chi^2(94) = 172.72$, p < .001; CFI = 0.999; TLI = 0.999; RMSEA = 0.046.

8. Discussion

This study, situated within Malta's evolving multilingual landscape, aimed to explore how psychological factors and educational context together influence the development of multilingual identity among Maltese adolescents. Malta's bilingual yet increasingly multilingual school environment offered an ideal setting to examine the interaction between motivation and identity in youth. Using a structural equation model, we combined motivation, viewed as a multilingual future self-guide, with socio-cognitive beliefs, language attitudes, and IVBs to develop a cohesive framework to predict students' multilingual identities.

8.1. The Central Role of Motivation

As hypothesised, motivation emerged as the most significant predictor of multilingual identity, accounting for nearly half of the variance ($R^2 \approx 0.48$). This supports the core principle of the L2 Motivational Self System: having a clear vision of a future multilingual self is crucial in shaping one's current linguistic identity. In a bilingual educational setting, learners who vividly picture themselves as confident multilingual speakers are more likely to incorporate that vision into their present identity (Thompson, 2017; Wang et al., 2021). Our findings endorse the view that identity is not merely a retrospective outcome of language experiences, but a forward-looking project driven by imaginative agency (Norton, 2013; Ushioda, 2011). Motivation, therefore, acts as a "bridge" that transforms beliefs and attitudes into identity commitments (Zareian & Jodaei, 2015). Even in early adolescence, a well-defined multilingual future self is a vital tool in identity development. Classroom practices that foster students' future self-guides (such as having learners envisage their "multilingual me" through writing or discussion) can strengthen both motivation and identity coherence (Gayton, 2025). For language-minoritised youth in particular, the ability to imagine a successful multilingual self may empower them to navigate mainstream school environments.

It is also important to consider that the construction of an "ideal multilingual self" may not be uniform across all learners. For students from Maltese-English bilingual backgrounds, this future self may involve expanding an already established bilingual repertoire. In contrast, for students from migrant or multilingual family backgrounds, the ideal multilingual self may involve negotiating multiple linguistic identities and navigating different expectations across home and school contexts. These variations suggest that motivational self-guides may function differently depending on learners' linguistic trajectories and social positioning.

In the Maltese context, this relationship can be observed in students' engagement with their linguistic repertoires in everyday school life. For example, students who perceive themselves as multilingual are more likely to actively participate in classroom discussions using both Maltese and English, use multiple languages when completing tasks, or engage more confidently with peers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. These behaviours reflect not only language use but also an emerging identity where multilingualism is normalised and valued as part of the self.

8.2. Differentiated predictors of motivation

All the examined variables of motivation proved to be significant, meaning that socio-cognitive beliefs, second-language attitudes, instrumental values, and peer interaction each had meaningful effects. Among these, IVBs exerted the most significant direct influence on motivation. This suggests that even in a multilingual context, practical orientations, such as perceiving language skills as gateways to educational or career opportunities, remain powerful drivers of student engagement (Ushioda, 2017). Simultaneously, learners' internal assessments of their abilities — in this case, confidence in their multilingual competence and creativity — significantly predicted motivation, indicating that commitment is reinforced not only by external incentives but also by self-efficacy (Zareian & Jodaei, 2015). In situations where students feel uncertain about using multiple languages, strengthening these internal beliefs through positive multilingual experiences could support future identity development.

The influence of language attitudes highlights the importance of cultivating positive dispositions toward all languages in the school setting. Consistent with classical second-language acquisition models (Gardner, 1985; Dewaele, 2013), students with more favourable attitudes toward the L2 showed higher motivation. Notably, our participants incorporated positive attitudes towards both English and other languages into their envisioned futures (Wang et al., 2021). It is important to acknowledge, however, that not all languages in learners' repertoires carry equal social and institutional value. In Malta, English continues to hold significant academic and economic capital, while Maltese remains closely tied to national identity and everyday communication. These dynamics are rooted in Malta's postcolonial linguistic history, in which English has long

functioned as a language of prestige, education, and social mobility, while Maltese has been associated with local identity and cultural belonging (Panzavecchia & Little, 2019). Although these boundaries are increasingly fluid in contemporary multilingual classrooms, such hierarchies continue to shape how learners perceive and value different languages within their repertoires. Other languages, including heritage and migrant languages, may not carry the same level of institutional recognition despite their importance in students' lived experiences. These differences suggest that language attitudes and their contribution to motivation and identity are shaped by underlying power dynamics within the sociolinguistic environment. Even within an increasingly multilingual environment, emotional attachment to the dominant languages continues to guide identity development. This suggests that bilingual education programs should encourage students to value not only high-status languages but also other heritage or foreign languages among their peers. Inclusive language attitudes can feed into stronger motivational visions and, eventually, more robust multilingual identities. Likewise, the significant effect of peer interaction highlights the social dimension of motivation. It supports the view that identity is co-constructed through social engagement and peer affirmation (Fisher et al., 2025). In diverse classrooms, frequent peer communication in multiple languages provides validation and authentic practice, reinforcing students' sense of themselves as multilingual.

These findings can also be interpreted in terms of concrete learning behaviours. For example, students who view multilingualism as beneficial for future academic or career prospects may be more inclined to put effort into language tasks, look for chances to use other languages outside the classroom, or show more persistence when facing linguistic difficulties. Likewise, students with stronger socio-cognitive beliefs might be more willing to experiment with language, including translanguaging practices typical of Maltese classrooms.

8.3. Instrumental value beliefs as a dual pathway to identity

In this study, "pragmatic reasons" and "instrumental motivations" refer to learners' perceptions of language as a resource for achieving tangible outcomes, such as academic success, future employment, and effective participation in a multilingual society.

A noteworthy finding is that IVBs influenced multilingual identity not only indirectly, through motivation, but also directly. In other words, pragmatic reasons for language learning can become internalised into learners' self-concept as part of being multilingual. Rather than remaining external drivers, these instrumental motivations were woven into how students envision and position themselves as language users. This dual pathway suggests that instrumental and identity-related motives are not mutually exclusive. Our results show that in a context like Malta, pragmatic language goals can be integrated into students' identity narratives (Ceuleers, 2008; Block, 2006).

In the Maltese context, such pragmatic reasons are likely to be closely associated with educational success, future employment opportunities, and the ability to navigate a linguistically diverse society. English, in particular, continues to carry significant academic and economic value, while competence in additional languages may be increasingly perceived as advantageous in a context characterised by growing cultural and linguistic diversity. As such, students' instrumental orientations towards language learning are not abstract, but grounded in their everyday experiences of schooling, assessment, and future aspirations.

For educators and policymakers, this implies that emphasising the future practical benefits of bilingualism is compatible with students' identity development. In practical terms, this may involve explicitly linking language learning to real-life trajectories, such as further education, employment, and participation in a multilingual society, thereby making these benefits visible and meaningful to learners. Bilingual curricula that address both the utilitarian and the personal/cultural value of languages can motivate learners while helping them form a positive multilingual self-image. Evidence for this dual-influence pathway provides empirical support to emerging models of multilingualism that include both individual aspirations and identity outcomes (Henry, 2023).

8.4. Contextual influences: gender and classroom diversity

Although individual-level factors predominated, two contextual variables, i.e. gender and the classroom's linguistic diversity, showed small but significant associations with multilingual identity. Female students reported slightly lower multilingual identity scores than male students. While this gap was modest, it may reflect broader sociocultural patterns in the shaping of linguistic confidence, participation, or identity expression during early adolescence. For instance, gendered expectations or differences in classroom participation may influence how comfortably students position themselves as multilingual. Educators should

ensure that girls and boys are equally encouraged in multilingual activities.

Similarly, being in a less linguistically diverse class was associated with slightly lower levels of identity. This finding highlights how the school environment can either support or limit the development of multilingual identity. Classrooms with greater linguistic diversity are likely to provide more frequent models and normalise the use of multiple languages, whereas homogeneous settings may restrict such opportunities. In this sense, linguistic diversity may function not only as a demographic feature but as a pedagogical resource that shapes students' identity trajectories. Accordingly, research suggests that institutional environments with strong multilingual norms encourage students' investment in their identities (Fisher et al., 2025; Weidl & Erling, 2025). For bilingual and multilingual education, these results emphasise an equity issue: even in schools with relatively uniform language backgrounds, fostering an inclusive and linguistically responsive classroom climate can make a difference. Although these effects were small, their consistency suggests that contextual factors may shape the conditions under which multilingual identities are more or less readily expressed.

The significance of classroom multilingual context must also be interpreted in relation to the Maltese policy landscape. The *Language Policy for the Junior Years* explicitly recognises that local classrooms are inherently multilingual and emphasises the importance of acknowledging learners' full linguistic repertoires while supporting their development in both Maltese and English (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2022). It further highlights the need for teachers to adopt flexible bilingual strategies and to engage in ongoing professional development in language pedagogy. Similarly, the *Language Policy for the Early Years in Malta and Gozo* promotes positive attitudes towards Maltese, English, and other languages, and frames bilingual development as a shared responsibility across educational contexts (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2016). These priorities are reinforced by the *National Education Strategy 2024–2030*, which emphasises inclusion, diversity, and responsiveness to increasingly heterogeneous student populations. Within this policy framework, a classroom multilingual context is not simply a background variable, but a structurally embedded feature of the Maltese education system that shapes learners' linguistic experiences and identity formation.

The non-significant effect of family language background also warrants consideration. One possible explanation is that, within the Maltese context, widespread exposure to both Maltese and English across educational and social domains may reduce the relative influence of home language practices on identity formation. While previous research has shown that language use within the family can play an important role in shaping language attitudes (Panzavecchia, 2020; Vella, 2019), this influence may be attenuated in contexts where bilingual exposure is pervasive across multiple domains. Additionally, the increasing normalisation of multilingualism in school environments may mean that identity is shaped more strongly by peer interaction and classroom experiences than by family linguistic background alone. This interpretation aligns with research suggesting that family language does not straightforwardly translate into identity but is instead negotiated in relation to wider social and institutional contexts (Little, 2017). Taken together, this finding suggests that, in contexts characterised by strong institutional bilingualism and growing diversity, school-based experiences may play a more central role in shaping multilingual identity.

9. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the current theory by integrating motivational and identity-based frameworks within a multilingual context. The significant role of future self-guides in predicting identity indicates that models of L2 motivation can be expanded to elucidate identity outcomes in bilingual education (Dörnyei, 2009; Henry, 2017). Simultaneously, our findings highlight that such psychological models must be situated within their social environment. Identity is not merely a consequence of motivation, but a dynamic, co-constructed process shaped through interaction and institutional norms (Norton, 2013; Ushioda, 2011). By connecting individual motivation with peer engagement and classroom diversity, we adopt an ecological perspective on multilingual identity development. Notably, the internalisation of pragmatic values as part of identity (the dual pathway) demonstrates that the boundary between "instrumental" and "integrative" factors is more fluid than traditionally assumed and shaped by context (Ceuleers, 2008; Gardner, 1985). Consistent with calls for multi-dimensional approaches to language learner identities, our work highlights the importance of integrating social-cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. While the model demonstrated a good overall fit and yielded theoretically meaningful relationships, some caution is warranted, as the elevated SRMR value suggests that not all residual relationships among variables may be fully captured, indicating the possibility of additional contributing factors. Future research could incorporate additional dimensions, such as translanguaging practices or narrative trajectories, to further explore how motivation and identity mutually influence each other over time.

10. Implications for practice and policy

The findings of this study have practical implications for educators and policymakers in bilingual and multilingual settings, particularly in understanding how learners' language use, identity positioning, and participation in classroom discourse are shaped by motivational and socio-cognitive factors. Specifically, supporting adolescents' motivation and identity in tandem calls for initiatives at both the classroom and policy levels. Key strategies include:

- Incorporating identity reflection activities such as self-mapping or multilingual portfolios, to help students envision their multilingual futures and connect language learning to their sense of self.
- Offering scaffolded opportunities for students to use multiple languages in meaningful tasks, thus ensuring successful experiences that build confidence.
- Emphasising both the practical benefits of multilingualism and its personal/cultural value. Validating utilitarian and integrative motivations in tandem encourages students to invest in all their languages.
- Encouraging peer collaboration so that students have social support and authentic contexts to practise their languages, affirming their multilingual identity.
- Training teachers to recognise and address identity dynamics in the classroom. Educators should celebrate students' diverse linguistic backgrounds and help them navigate any identity-related challenges.

At the policy level, schools should cultivate an institutional culture that values all languages as integral to student identity. Language policies must avoid framing multilingualism solely as a utilitarian skill, and instead also celebrate it as a source of pride and belonging. Recent research in Malta has highlighted the need for educational policies to keep pace with shifting linguistic demographics and to validate students' multilingual realities (Panzavecchia, 2024). Fostering such an environment, which includes both top-down policy and everyday practice, can ensure that multilingual identity development is supported at every level of schooling.

These findings further suggest that the implementation of Malta's existing language policy framework requires continued attention, particularly in relation to teacher preparation, multilingual classroom realities, and the consistent pedagogical use of learners' full linguistic repertoires (Camenzuli et al., 2023; Panzavecchia, 2024).

11. Limitations and future research

Finally, several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal studies are needed to examine how motivation and identity influence each other over time. Our sample from Malta, where two languages are official, may limit generalisability, as results might differ in environments lacking institutional support for home languages. Comparative research elsewhere could clarify context-specific findings.

Additionally, in the present study, the L2 Attitudes construct captures students' evaluative orientations toward second/additional languages as represented in the questionnaire; however, it does not distinguish between English and other heritage or migrant languages, and this should be considered when interpreting the findings.

The SEM model used in this study omitted emotional and regulatory factors, such as language anxiety, enjoyment, and self-regulation, which could affect the motivation–identity relationship. Future research should incorporate these variables to improve explanatory power. We regarded multilingual identity as a single dimension, but identity is complex; using multidimensional measures or person-centred analyses might better capture its intricacies and how motivation relates to different aspects. Additionally, the uneven distribution of participants across school sectors restricted the inclusion of school type as a variable in the structural model and may limit the generalisability of findings related to institutional contexts.

Another limitation is that the absence of Multi-Group Analysis limits the ability to examine potential differences across school sectors or demographic groups, and future research with more balanced samples should investigate model invariance across contexts. Additionally, the elevated SRMR value indicates that some degree of model misfit cannot be entirely dismissed. Although other fit indices suggested a strong model fit, this should be interpreted with caution, especially given the use of categorical indicators.

Lastly, qualitative and mixed-methods research could provide deeper insights into learners' interpretations of motivation and identity, revealing how peer and teacher interactions shape their sense of self, thereby enriching the understanding of motivation and multilingual identity development.

12. Conclusion

This study examined the psychological and contextual factors underpinning the development of multilingual identity among Maltese adolescents. The findings indicate that motivation is central, both as a driver and as a consideration of how young people view themselves as multilinguals. Motivation, shaped by IVBs, positive language attitudes, and meaningful peer interaction, is the strongest predictor of multilingual identity. These results emphasise the need for educational practices and policies that simultaneously cultivate both students' motivation and their sense of linguistic self.

Promoting multilingual identity requires classroom environments that value all languages, integrate reflective and collaborative learning experiences, and position language learning as both a real-world skill and a personal journey. At a policy level, multilingualism should be portrayed not only as an economic resource, but also as a cultural and emotional asset.

This research aims to provide empirical evidence to a developing field but future studies should employ longitudinal and mixed-method designs to capture the evolution of motivation and identity over time and across contexts. Refining the model to include affective and self-regulatory factors would further improve understanding. Supporting adolescents' multilingual identity ultimately strengthens their engagement, confidence, and sense of identity within an increasingly diverse linguistic landscape.

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Language learning using XR: Gen Z and new acquisitional paradigms[1]

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ABSTRACT

EN This article explores extended reality (XR) technologies' application in language learning, focusing on Generation Z (Gen Z) and its educational needs. This contribution argues that XR technologies offer opportunities for pedagogical exploration in relation to Gen Z's specific learning profiles. Members of Gen Z prefer interactive, technology-driven, and experiential learning environments. XR technologies—including virtual, augmented, and mixed reality—offer immersive and context-rich environments that can support situated language use, learner engagement, and motivation, as well as provide low-stakes conditions for practice that may help mitigate language anxiety. The integration of XR in education raises challenges related to cost, accessibility, digital competence, cognitive load, and ethical considerations. Consequently, the article highlights the opportunity of aligning XR-based language tasks with the specific characteristics, needs, and constraints of Gen Z learners, in the attempt to contribute to a more contextualized and critical understanding of XR's role in language pedagogy.

Keywords: LANGUAGE LEARNING, EXTENDED REALITY, GEN Z, ACQUISITIONAL FRAMEWORKS, DIGITAL NATIVES

ES Este artículo explora la aplicación de las tecnologías de realidad extendida (XR) en el aprendizaje de lenguas, con atención a la Generación Z (Gen Z) y a sus necesidades educativas. El articulo sostiene el potencial de las tecnologías XR para la experimentación didáctica en relación con los perfiles de aprendizaje de la Gen Z. Los miembros de la Gen Z muestran preferencia por entornos de aprendizaje interactivos, mediados por la tecnología y de carácter experiencial. Las tecnologías XR, que incluyen la realidad virtual, aumentada y mixta, proporcionan entornos inmersivos y ricos en contexto que pueden favorecer el uso situado de la lengua, la implicación del estudiante y la motivación, además de ofrecer condiciones de práctica de bajo riesgo que pueden contribuir a mitigar la ansiedad lingüística. La integración de la XR en la educación plantea desafíos vinculados al coste, la accesibilidad, la competencia digital, la carga cognitiva y las consideraciones éticas. El artículo subraya, por tanto, la necesidad de alinear las tareas lingüísticas basadas en XR con las características, necesidades y restricciones del estudiantado de la Gen Z, con el objetivo de contribuir a una comprensión más contextualizada y crítica del papel de la XR en la didáctica de lenguas.

Palabras clave: APRENDIZAJE DE LENGUAS, REALIDAD EXTENDIDA, GENERACIÓN Z, MARCOS ADQUISICIONALES, NATIVOS DIGITALES

IT L'articolo esplora l'uso della realtà estesa (XR) nell'apprendimento linguistico, con riferimento alla Generazione Z (Gen Z) e ai suoi bisogni educativi. Qui si evidenzia il potenziale dell'XR per la sperimentazione didattica in linea con i profili di apprendimento della Gen Z, i cui membri tendono a preferire ambienti di apprendimento interattivi, esperienziali e basati sull'uso delle tecnologie. La XR, che comprende realtà virtuale, aumentata e mista, offre ambienti immersivi e ricchi di elementi contestuali, in grado di supportare l'uso della lingua in contesti autentici e di favorire l'interesse e la motivazione; consente anche la pratica della lingua in un ambiente protetto, contribuendo a ridurre l'ansia linguistica. L'integrazione della XR nell'insegnamento solleva criticità legate a costi, accessibilità, competenze digitali, carico cognitivo e questioni etiche. L'articolo evidenzia, dunque, l'opportunità di allineare le attività linguistiche basate su XR a caratteristiche, bisogni e criticità di apprendenti della Gen Z, con l'obiettivo di contribuire a una comprensione più contestualizzata e critica del loro ruolo nella didattica linguistica.

Parole chiave: APPRENDIMENTO LINGUISTICO, REALTÀ ESTESA (XR), GENERAZIONE Z, MODELLI ACQUISIZIONALI, NATIVI DIGITALI

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1. Introduction

Extended reality (XR) technologies have come to be known as innovative tools for immersive education, particularly in the domain of language learning. The rise of Generation Z (Gen Z) has introduced to universities a cohort of learners with a strong affinity for technology, visual media, and experiential learning environments. This predisposition to interactive digital experiences, to some extent, positions them as suitable candidates for language learning via XR platforms. Consequently, this article seeks to explore the potential of XR technologies to optimize language education for Gen Z. While the benefits of XR are not exclusive to this generational cohort, the way in which this technology can enhance language learning through immersive, context-based environments that simulate real-world language use, may be particularly meaningful in relation to Gen Z, namely the predominant student population in universities at the moment.

While the potential for XR to enhance language education appears promising (Tegoan et al., 2021), and interest in incorporating XR technologies into language teaching has spread globally, research on the use of XR technologies, especially at the university level, remains sparse and is often tied to more functional approaches. Similarly, existing studies have examined XR's effectiveness independently of learner generational profiles, leaving limited discussion of how XR-based language tasks might be pedagogically shaped to address the specific characteristics of contemporary student populations.

As reported by Anesa (2025), XR technologies have been seen as a new and innovative technology, both in theory and in their application, and their spread has opened possibilities for various uses across different disciplinary fields. Indeed, XR technologies can offer unique ways to practice real-world language use, as well as providing contextual learning, and help learners connect more deeply with the languages they are studying. Furthermore, the widespread use of mobile technology and digital devices has significantly contributed to the growth of XR applications, increasing these applications' potential to revolutionize learning approaches (Hockly, 2019; Tegoan et al., 2021).

The potential of these technologies is often underappreciated, particularly in more complex forms of education and training. One of the possible reasons for this is the ambivalence toward these technologies. On the one hand, they are sometimes viewed in techno-utopian terms as revolutionary, all-encompassing solutions. On the other, they are seen as potential threats to various human abilities. This extreme dichotomy often arises from purely functional perspectives on this technology (Anesa, 2025), which can lead to unrealistic expectations and uncertainties. In particular, viewing XR as a cure-all can result in disappointment and disillusionment when this technology fails to meet expectations. Conversely, depicting XR as potentially harmful can hinder its adoption and development, thereby causing resistance to potentially beneficial advancements and preventing a balanced understanding of its practical applications, as well as leading to possible ethical concerns.

Nonetheless, early research has highlighted the positive integration of XR into educational institutions, showing a beneficial synergy for enhancing the experience of learning and teaching languages (Wibowo et al., 2016). Significant improvements in teaching quality, student motivation, and the resolution of learning challenges among students have all been observed as a result of the integration of different forms of XR into language teaching (Tegoan et al., 2021). Such benefits are reported here as pedagogical potentials, not solely generation-specific, whose realization depends on how XR is designed, implemented, and aligned with learners' needs. This is particularly relevant, as one of the key challenges of higher education is dealing with countless students entering university each year and necessitating that teaching methods and tools are continuously updated. In addition, innovation in teaching methods and tools is especially significant for language learning, which remains a critical area for developing essential 21st-century skills, and ensuring that students are well prepared for a globalized job market that requires ever-evolving skills.

In recent years, a new generation of students belonging to the Gen Z cohort has begun filling university classrooms. Accustomed to a globalized world, these young adults have had their motivation and learning habits significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated new strategies from educators to effectively engage them. Mainly, Gen Z students appear to need constant and competent stimulation to stay motivated (e.g., Seemiller & Grace, 2018). Against this backdrop, the relevance of XR lies not in its novelty, but in its capacity to be pedagogically adapted to the affective, cognitive, and experiential conditions of learners shaped by both generational traits and post-pandemic educational experiences. In this context, integrating XR into language learning curricula may enhance performance and improve Gen Z students' educational experience by innovating teaching approaches, increasing motivation, and addressing limits of traditional methods through alignment with this cohort's learning characteristics.

2. Characterization of XR technologies

2.1. Basic features

XR technology provides immersive and interactive experiences by integrating real and virtual environments. This is done at varying degrees through simulated scenarios, interactive role-playing, and virtual interactions. More precisely, the term XR refers to a spectrum of technologies that merge real and virtual environments to create these experiences. Virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mixed reality (MR), are located within this spectrum, offering users varying degrees of immersion and contact with digital content and environments (see O'Shiel, 2020; Skarbez et al., 2021), through the use of different devices (e.g., headsets, mobile phones, and tablets).

The spectrum of XR technologies is to be thought of as a reality–virtuality continuum (Milgram & Kishino, 1994). This continuum ranges from the physical world, in which people interact and engage with their tangible surroundings, to entirely virtual environments in which users are immersed in a completely artificial setting. Thinking in terms of the reality–virtuality continuum helps overcome dichotomic views of these technologies, because it acknowledges that XR can dynamically blend elements of physical and virtual experiences. Due to its complexity, the virtuality–reality continuum should be also understood as multidimensional in nature rather than linear. In this context, various technologies can interact and influence each other, causing their boundaries to become blurred and unstable, and making it difficult to clearly separate the different categories (O'Shiel, 2020; Steinicke & Wolf, 2020).

Within the reality–virtuality continuum, the different XR technologies are positioned as follows: VR, offering a fully immersive digital environment, is located on one end of the spectrum; at the other end, is AR, which adds digital elements to the physical world, and provides additional information or objects; MR occupies the space in-between, by combining aspects of both the real and digital worlds. Specifically, MR can involve scenarios in which digital objects interact with the real world, similar to AR, or where the setting is mainly virtual but includes some real-world components. This is known as augmented virtuality (AV) (Hawkinson, 2023).

While these technologies can have overlapping features and similarities, they are typically defined by their unique attributes (Anesa, 2025). Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics and differences between these technologies, outlining their descriptions, typical examples, devices used, and key features.

Table 1.
Comparison of Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, and Mixed Reality Technologies.

Technology	Description	Examples	Devices Used	Key Features
Augmented Reality	Overlays virtual content onto the physical world in real time.	Marker-based AR: Scanning a photo to trigger an animation. Markerless AR: Using location data to place virtual objects.	Handheld devices (typically), head-mounted displays	Real-time interaction with physical and virtual elements. Marker-based or location-based triggering.
Virtual Reality	Immerses users in a fully synthetic environment by generally excluding the physical world.	Immersive simulations, virtual tours.	Head-mounted displays, visors	Full immersion in an artificial environment. Limited interaction with the physical world. Stereoscopic vision and motion tracking.
Mixed Reality	Combines physical and virtual environments in which interactive objects respond to user inputs (various levels of interactivity).	Interactive virtual objects in real-world settings.	Head-mounted displays, sensors, handheld devices	Various levels of integration of physical and virtual worlds. Interactive elements that respond to user actions.

The table above highlights the distinct characteristics of each XR technology by comparing their functionalities, applications, and tools. Understanding these distinctions is essential for integrating XR effectively into pedagogical approaches and maximizing its benefits for language learning and teaching.

2.2 XR for language learning

In today's globalized job market, language skills have become an indispensable asset. Proficient language skills not only facilitate seamless communication but also play a pivotal role in fostering cross-cultural understanding and collaboration, ensuring that students are equipped to navigate the ongoing process of globalization in their future careers (Chen et al., 2022).

Among the primary challenges in learning a foreign language are obtaining authentic linguistic input and the availability of practical opportunities for language use beyond the classroom (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Consequently, students often lack motivation and cannot find relevant contexts to satisfy their learning needs nor the required professional skills (Alsamadani, 2017). XR technologies can address this challenge by providing environments that interactively simulate real-world language use. This capability has made XR a prominent tool in language teaching, leading to a consistent upward trend in the adoption of these technologies in educational contexts over the past decade (e.g., Garzón et al., 2019).

An increasing number of studies have suggested that VR applications may become valuable tools in foreign language learning (see Alwafi et al., 2022; DeWitt et al., 2022; Mustapha & Abd Karim, 2025). The main contributing factor is this technology's ability to captivate learners' interest, sustain motivation and engagement, and effectively improve communication skills. This has been particularly relevant in the post-pandemic years, as the challenges posed by COVID-19 and adherence to social distancing guidelines have further complicated practicing newly acquired language skills through in-person interactions (Alwafi et al., 2022). In this regard, XR technologies, through the creation and simulation of real-life situations, can effectively bridge the gap between language classrooms and real-world workplaces.

Positive learning outcomes associated with XR applications in language learning have been consistently reported across several literature reviews (e.g., Quintero et al., 2019; Parmaxi & Demetriou, 2020; Saltan & Arslan, 2016). For instance, Parmaxi and Demetriou (2020) have revealed that mobile-based AR is especially effective in supporting vocabulary learning and concluded that AR not only enhances learners' motivation, engagement, and enjoyment but also improves their overall performance in multiple language skills. Similarly, Solak and Cakir (2015) have illustrated the fruitful integration of AR in language learning material design, mainly in terms of increased motivation, content memorization, collaboration, and faster learning.

Looking at these technologies more closely, each can provide valuable contributions to language learning based on their specific affordances. Starting with VR, it allows learners to engage in lifelike conversations by providing fully immersive environments that simulate real-world settings. This entails practicing vocabulary in context and improving pronunciation, but most importantly, navigating cultural and pragmatic dynamics that would otherwise be inaccessible. Furthermore, as revealed by Legault et al. (2019), VR-based language instruction can significantly increase learner motivation and engagement, particularly among younger learners who value interactive experiences. Positive effects of VR have also been noted in relation to language learning anxiety (see Section 3), a common barrier for second-language learners, which appears to decrease when learners practice in low-stakes virtual environments (Martín Monje & Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain, 2022).

As for AR, its applications have been increasingly integrated into language learning thanks to their ability to provide contextualized language practice in real-world environments through the use of overlayed digital content. These applications allow learners to associate new vocabulary with real-world objects, thereby promoting retention and contextual understanding. AR can also gamify language learning, making the experience more engaging for learners who prefer dynamic, interactive environments.

Meanwhile MR, combining the functionalities of both VR and AR, allows digital and physical objects to interact in real time. This has significant potential for language learning, as it creates hybrid environments in which learners can manipulate digital objects while remaining grounded in the real world (Parmaxi & Demetriou, 2020). For instance, MR can simulate scenarios, such as ordering food in a restaurant or navigating a train station, that are complex and language-rich while, at the same time, provide real-time feedback.

However, despite the advantages of XR technologies, their application has often not taken into account the possible pedagogical needs of current students. This shortcoming arises because, as previously mentioned, XR tools are typically evaluated based on their technical capabilities rather than their integration into comprehensive educational approaches. Consequently, the novelty and technical aspects of these technologies are often prioritized over their alignment with effective teaching strategies (Saltan & Arslan, 2016).

At the same time, while these benefits have been observed across learner populations, their pedagogical relevance becomes particularly salient when considered in relation to Gen Z students, since

members of this generation are primarily aged 18–24, representing the largest cohort in universities today. The presence of Gen Z in university classrooms is becoming a defining feature of higher education, requiring teaching methods and tools to align with their characteristics and presenting both opportunities and challenges for educators. In this sense, the effectiveness of XR for language learning is not generation-specific per se, but increasingly dependent on how its affordances are aligned with the expectations, learning habits, and constraints of contemporary students.

3. Meeting Gen Z's learning needs

A generation encompasses individuals born within the same chronological, social, and historical context who often share similar characteristics and behavioral profiles (Twenge, 2017). However, systematically studying generations can be challenging, as generational traits often involve ever-changing features, and while it is possible to trace trends and behaviors, doing so aims to provide insights rather than predictions (Seemiller & Grace, 2018).

Gen Z are individuals who were born between the years 1995 to 2010 (Seemiller & Grace, 2018) or 1997 to 2012 (Barhate & Dirani, 2021; Dimock, 2019). These ranges are traced around significant historical events, such as 9/11, which is considered a key marker dividing those who remember a pre-9/11 world from those who are shaped by its aftermath without a direct memory of the event (Dimock, 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2016, 2018).

Unlike previous generations, Gen Z students have so far been more pragmatic and future-oriented, often prioritizing career readiness and financial stability. As a result, they value practical applications of knowledge and favor learning experiences that integrate technology and foster real-world skills. However, their heavy reliance on digital technologies has led to challenges such as decreased face-to-face communication skills and increased levels of anxiety and loneliness, which are partly due to the pervasive influence of social media (Rue, 2018).

Given the limited empirical studies focused on this generation, particularly in university settings, looking at Gen Z students' key characteristics and preferences could reveal how integrating XR technology into language learning and teaching could effectively improve their learning experiences and meet their educational needs. Specifically, studies on Gen Z's learning habits have identified distinctive characteristics that make this generation particularly well suited for the application of XR in language learning.

Gen Z has been growing up in an era of information overload due to an unprecedented influx of information and data from multiple sources, including social media, online platforms, and digital devices. This, along with their exposure to digital technology earlier in their lives than previous generations, has equipped Gen Z with unique skills in digital literacy and adaptability to rapid technological advancements (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). Gen Z is also more inclined to share personal information if it results in personalized or valuable experiences, which reflects their desire for customized interactions. Furthermore, they place high value on seamless and integrated experiences, seeking engagement that fosters ongoing relationships and continuous interaction with digital platforms (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018). Consequently, exposure to digital technology has likely made Gen Z particularly comfortable using digital tools, allowing for a suitable environment for the application of XR technologies.

This generation has also shown an inclination toward self-directed learning, leading to a preference for online education and independent study, both driven by their sense of autonomy. Additionally, Schwieger and Ladwig (2018) have highlighted recurring traits among Gen Z in this regard, such as self-sufficiency and a preference for self-education. As for the learning preferences of Gen Z, research has revealed a tendency to prefer practical and applied methods of learning to be integrated, if possible, with digital technology. This generation appears to favor applied learning the most because its members seek practical knowledge that they deem more useful for their future careers. As a result, they focus on acquiring real-world skills to develop competence. Therefore, a more hands-on learning approach may prove highly effective, specifically when it involves direct interaction with the subject matter through practical experiences. Similarly, Gen Z students express a preference for learning that is grounded in real-life experiences rather than abstract concepts. They value the opportunity to integrate the external world into their learning environment and view it as a practical laboratory for gaining understanding. This approach resonates with many in this cohort who find that hands-on learning enhances their comprehension and prepares them more effectively for real-world challenges (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). This can be supported by XR-based language tasks, through simulated, practice-oriented scenarios that allow learners to apply linguistic knowledge in context, experiment with communicative strategies, and receive immediate feedback. Indeed, XR specifically situates language use within

realistic professional or everyday settings, possibly bridging the gap between theoretical instruction and practical application.

Furthermore, the learning environment may be viewed as a dynamic field of practice in which Gen Z students can actively engage with the learning material rather than simply passively receiving information. This approach encourages active learning, critical thinking, and collaboration, making the educational experience more interactive and meaningful (Weng & Seemiller, 2024). In this respect, the characteristics of XR, such as its ability to provide immersive and multimodal experiences, are in line with Gen Z's preference for hands-on learning and developing real-life skills while enhancing engagement, motivation, and understanding. Moreover, as language practice is often affected by learning environments that often feel unnatural or artificial, XR provides more immersive and true-to-life contexts (Chen et al., 2022).

In addition to its members' preference for hands-on learning, Gen Z has shown a tendency toward intrapersonal learning, that is, a style of learning in which individuals prefer to learn independently and at their own pace. Although this does not necessarily mean that they do not appreciate the social aspects of collaborating and working with peers, they appear to significantly value personal reflection and self-directed study. Self-directed learning, whereby one can choose when, how, and where to learn, has likely been influenced by the spread of independent educational activities during one's life, such as researching information using different types of technology, using online learning platforms, or accessing various online resources (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). Regarding this, XR environments allow for individualized pacing and autonomous practicing, in which learners can revisit scenarios, repeat interactions, and adjust levels of difficulty according to their own specific needs. Not to mention, such flexibility may foster the learners' autonomy that Gen Z appears to value, including a sense of control over their progress and support self-evaluation.

This shift toward autonomous learning can be further supported by the virtual learning environments (VLEs) of XR. In fact, while some VLEs have been designed to foster learner autonomy, others focus on interactional skills and collaboration. The immersive and hybrid environments of VLEs can provide real-time feedback and dynamic interactions, leading to increased engagement and motivation (Parmaxi & Demetriou, 2020). This can be particularly true of mobile-based applications on smartphones and tablets, which are usually preferred because of their portability, interactivity, context sensitivity, connectivity, access, and individuality (Reinders & Pegrum, 2016), as well as the possibility of avoiding being tied to one location, with physical elements incorporated into their learning environments (Lindgren & Johnson-Glenberg, 2013).

Gen Z's preference for intrapersonal learning can also be linked to growing up in a world of blurred lines between real life and the online environment. As a consequence, they are particularly concerned with their digital image, which apparently affects how they participate in class. In fact, some may feel nervous about speaking in front of peers, fearing mistakes and not being perceived as intelligent. To avoid this, they may prefer staying quiet over taking risks. This fear of vulnerability can impact their self-esteem and discourage them from taking academic risks in front of others (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). This becomes especially significant in language learning, which, alongside a variety of motivational and pedagogical challenges, is particularly affected by foreign language anxiety (see Kaplan-Rakowski & Gruber, 2023). While these drawbacks are relevant, using XR can help address them by providing immersive and interactive environments that foster authentic language practice, while creating realistic, engaging, and accessible learning experiences.

The preference for visual and interactive learning modalities appears to be another characteristic of this cohort, which favors video content, interactive apps, and gamified learning experiences over traditional text-based methods (Twenge, 2017). They are also generally adept at multitasking and exhibit a shorter attention span than previous generations (Common Sense Media, 2021). As a result, learning methods that incorporate dynamic and engaging technological elements—such as those afforded by XR—may be particularly well suited to this demographic, as they align with Gen Z learners' preference for multimodal learning experiences. In line with this, Gen Z students are highly engaged in storytelling and peer experiences, often seeking information through platforms such as YouTube (Schwieger et al., 2018). XR technologies can leverage this by incorporating immersive storytelling and peer-generated content into educational programs.

Personalization is also a key factor in Gen Z's learning preferences. Unlike the one-size-fits-all approach typical of traditional education models, Gen Z thrives in environments that allow for customization and individualized learning paths. This is where XR technologies hold considerable promise as they provide personalized, adaptive learning environments in which users can interact with content at their own pace and according to their unique learning styles (Bacca-Acosta et al., 2014).

Experiential learning (i.e., the process of learning through direct experience) seems to be welcomed by Gen Z (Kolb, 2015). XR technologies can foster this by placing learners into virtual or augmented environments where they can practice skills in real-world contexts. For language learners, this could entail, for instance, stepping into virtual marketplaces to practice conversational exchanges or touring augmented foreign cities to learn cultural and linguistic nuances.

Most importantly, the learning needs of Gen Z students have been changing rapidly, influenced by having at least partially spent their school or university years during the COVID-19 pandemic, which, in turn, has further enhanced the significance of digital technology for flexible teaching and learning (Guppy et al., 2022), in line with Gen Z learners' preference for visual, problem-based, and flexible learning approaches (Frank, 2021). Current research in this regard has evidenced two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, increased levels of anxiety, depression, and vulnerability have been reported, highlighting the psychological costs of prolonged social isolation. On the other, members of Gen Z have still remained open to change and continued to demonstrate positive attitudes toward blending digital and traditional approaches, particularly in relation to communication, learning, and workplace training, reflecting a broader willingness to adapt to evolving technologies (Harari et al., 2023). This ambivalence is further confirmed by a more specific study on e-learning attitudes by Ranieri et al. (2021), which reveals that, although Gen Z learners are socially and digitally skilled, they report a lower affinity for e-learning and lower self-confidence in relation to online education.

The role of the pandemic in shaping both the learning preferences and the vulnerabilities of Gen Z students has been therefore pivotal. It has amplified their reliance on digital technologies while simultaneously exposing emotional and motivational challenges. Recognizing these initially pandemic-driven experiences, as now-structural tendencies of Gen Z's students could be essential for designing XR applications that are pedagogically grounded and responsive to this generation's characteristics and well-being.

3.1. Digital natives or tech-savvy learners?

Having grown up in an era defined by the internet, smartphones, and social media, Gen Z is often labeled as a generation of digital natives. Their interactions with technology are generally considered natural and seamless, with digital platforms playing a central role in communication, entertainment, and education (Prensky, 2001; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). It may also be argued that, unlike previous generations, Gen Z has never actually known a world without constant access to information via digital devices.

However, despite the pervasive role that digital technologies have played in the shaping of Gen Z, this generation's relationship with technology cannot be overgeneralized. Indeed, considerations of this kind must be essential when reflecting on integrating XR into Gen Z's learning environments, since familiarity with digital technologies does not automatically imply competence or confidence in educational contexts. This is particularly relevant, as the effectiveness of XR in language learning should not be assumed solely on the basis of learners' generational familiarity with technology, but rather on their ability to engage thoughtfully with technologically mediated educational environments.

The paradox consists in Gen Z learners being commonly recognized as digital natives while not necessarily demonstrating technological savviness in pedagogical or professional contexts. More specifically, while digitally innate (i.e., they are skilled with technology), and despite often lacking formal education in this area (Buhalis & Karatay, 2022), their digital proficiency and the ability to use everyday digital tools may not necessarily translate into advanced digital literacy. This calls into question their tech-savviness, meaning their ability to effectively use, understand, and adapt to digital tools and technologies. Being tech-savvy includes proficiency in navigating devices, such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, as well as leveraging online platforms for communication, education, and productivity. Therefore, while Gen Z may be highly skilled with technology, many lack the digital literacy needed to be mindful and responsible users of digital media (Hernandez-de-Menendez et al., 2020).

This tension appears to be shaped both by well-documented generational characteristics and by the formative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic years coincided with critical formative stages for many Gen Z individuals, during which technology became a central part of their lives. Remote learning, virtual communication, and reliance on digital platforms for everyday activities created an environment in which technology was not just a tool but a pervasive necessity. While this may have fostered digital fluency, it may also have led to overexposure and overreliance on technology. As a result, in the now post-pandemic years, this generation may be characterized by a more selective engagement with digital tools, particularly when technologies are not perceived as meaningful or purpose-driven. This may have had lasting implications for

Gen Z's interaction with digital technologies, which, while requiring further research, may still be worth considering.

Overall, previous generations have generally recognized the importance of technology in enhancing learning experiences, but Gen Z may view it as less transformative, often taking it for granted (Hernandez-de Menendez et al., 2020). Arguably, this tendency may make them less inclined to put effort into learning and appreciating new technologies. For this reason, the effectiveness of XR-based learning may depend less on the novelty of the technology itself and more on how meaningfully it is integrated into pedagogical practice.

3.2. Pedagogical perspectives

The pedagogical effectiveness of XR in language learning can be understood through the lens of numerous approaches which can effectively support the adoption of these technologies for language learning and for teaching the current generation of university students. Starting with constructivist learning theories, i.e., positing that knowledge is actively constructed through experience and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), they can be supported by XR use of immersive environments in which learners can engage in authentic, meaningful interactions that mirror real-life language use. The principles of situated learning are supported by XR usage as well. According to this perspective, learning in context is fundamental and encouraged (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and in XR environments, learners are generally considered active participants who must use language to navigate and interact within their virtual or augmented worlds.

Another theoretical framework relevant to XR-based language learning is embodied cognition, which suggests that cognition is deeply rooted in the body's interactions with the environment (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). XR allows for embodied learning by integrating physical actions (e.g., moving, pointing, and interacting with objects) with linguistic tasks, thereby creating a multisensory learning experience. Adams et al. (2021) showed that XR-enhanced language learning can lead to greater retention and comprehension, particularly in areas such as spatial vocabulary and prepositional phrases, where learners can physically engage with the language.

XR is also well suited to support communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction and communication as the primary goals of language learning (Richards, 2006). In this sense, XR provides opportunities for learners to engage in authentic dialogs with virtual avatars or other learners in a variety of social contexts, from informal conversations in virtual cafés to formal presentations in simulated business meetings or conferences. Thus, learners are exposed to the cultural and pragmatic aspects of language use, which are difficult to replicate in traditional learning settings (Lin & Lan, 2015).

Motivation and engagement are additional aspects to consider. For Gen Z learners who are accustomed to fast-paced, visually rich digital environments, XR's immersive experiences are specifically expected to be well received. Motivation is a critical factor in language acquisition, and research suggests that learners who are more engaged in the learning process are more likely to persist in their studies and achieve higher levels of proficiency (Dörnyei, 2009). This may be further supported by XR's gamified elements, personalized feedback, and interactive environments, which can help sustain learner motivation by making language practice enjoyable and rewarding.

Together these theoretical perspectives indicate that the use of XR in language learning can be pedagogically grounded. At the same time, the very features that make XR effective from a pedagogical standpoint closely align with the learning preferences and characteristics of Gen Z outlined above, suggesting that XR-based approaches may be particularly well suited for this cohort of learners.

3.2.1. Addressing language anxiety

As previously mentioned, Gen Z has shown to exhibit higher levels of anxiety compared to previous generations. The constant presence of social media in the lives of this generation has significantly contributed to heightened anxiety, particularly regarding how its members are perceived by others. Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok are designed to encourage constant self-presentation and comparison, while perpetual connectivity fosters an environment in which social validation is sought through likes, comments, and follower counts. Moreover, the curated nature of social media amplifies this pressure, as users often compare their own lives to the idealized, filtered versions of others they view on social media. Additionally, the fear of missing out (FOMO), driven by social media's constant updates and portrayals of others' experiences, exacerbates these feelings of exclusion, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Seemiller & Grace, 2018).

Arguably, the heightened level of anxiety in this generation may further aggravate language anxiety as well. Language anxiety is characterized as a unique combination of self-perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and

behaviors specifically associated with classroom language learning. It refers to feelings of stress, nervousness, and worry as well as emotional reactions tied to the challenges of acquiring a second or foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1999). This phenomenon is considered a significant challenge for language learners, as it negatively affects the process of learning a foreign language (Horwitz, 2001). This aspect may, therefore, be particularly relevant for Gen Z learners, for whom fear of social exposure, evaluation, and digital self-presentation may intensify language anxiety, making low-stakes, avatar-mediated XR environments especially pedagogically valuable.

Research by Nurkhamidah (2020) has revealed that although Gen Z students can access language materials through various online platforms, such as games, films, and videos, they still experience significant anxiety in listening activities. Meanwhile, their high levels of FOMO may affect their focus and confidence during academic tasks. Therefore, it may appear that language anxiety is prevalent among Gen Z students. A way to effectively address this challenge could involve leveraging XR technology to create more supportive and engaging learning environments for this cohort.

Although practicing speaking skills is a crucial aspect of language learning, many learners experience anxiety when speaking in a foreign language, particularly in public. XR can help reduce language anxiety by providing a low-stakes environment in which users can practice language without fear of being judged or making mistakes in front of their peers. It is often stated that VR, in particular, allows learners to engage in conversations with virtual characters, giving them the confidence to practice and refine their language skills before transitioning to real-world interactions.

That being said, these benefits in terms of language anxiety should not draw attention away from the potential discomfort and stress that immersive technologies may also induce. A specific body of research has documented these technologies' risk of cybersickness (e.g., Al Khalifah et al., 2025; Guo et al., 2025; Hasibuan et al., 2025). Initially used to describe side effects from use of virtual environments (McCauley & Sharkey, 1992), it indicates form of motion-related discomfort experienced during or after exposure to these environments. Among the technologies encompassed by XR, VR has been found to be particularly associated with higher levels of cybersickness, with common symptoms including dizziness, nausea, disorientation, visual fatigue, headaches, and, in some cases, heightened anxiety (Rebenitsch & Owen, 2016; Simón-Vicente et al., 2024). These effects are primarily attributed to sensory conflicts, namely, mismatches between visual motion cues and vestibular or proprioceptive feedback, as well as individual differences in user susceptibility (Saredakis et al., 2020).

Adding to this, the introduction of a new technological tool in a learning environment may itself be a source of discomfort, which can be further aggravated by initial unfamiliarity with head-mounted displays or interactive virtual environments. This may be particularly true for beginner users or individuals displaying less tech-savvy or even technophobic attitudes. In these cases, the risk of increasing both cognitive and affective load may be even greater. A further contributing factor concerns the duration of exposure, as discomfort has been shown to be more likely during longer sessions or when users are exposed to artificial locomotion (Rebenitsch & Owen, 2016; Weech et al., 2019).

3.2.2. Challenges and limitations

Challenges regarding XR typically concern its use in educational contexts more broadly, but with the adoption of XR in language education, these acquire particular relevance when considered in relation to the characteristics of the current student population. Indeed, these challenges are not merely technical or institutional but are closely connected to the above-mentioned characteristics of the learner population (e.g., uneven digital literacy, heightened sensitivity to anxiety, and post-pandemic technology fatigue) and directly shape how XR-based language tasks may be perceived.

One of the primary barriers to the widespread adoption of XR in language education is accessibility. High-quality XR hardware, such as VR headsets and MR devices, remains expensive and out of reach for many educational institutions and learners. In addition, cost constraints may directly affect the feasibility of implementing immersive speaking, pronunciation, or interaction tasks, as these frequently need dedicated hardware as well as software infrastructure (e.g., text-to-speech services, licenses, cloud services, recording storage). Mobile-based and browser-based XR applications provide a more affordable alternative in this regard. These can effectively support language-specific activities including pronunciation training and contextualized vocabulary practice without requiring expensive equipment (Martín-Monje & Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain, 2022).

As mentioned earlier, another challenge in this regard is the level of digital literacy required to effectively use XR technologies for both learners and teachers. While Gen Z is generally considered digitally innate, learners do not all possess the same level of proficiency with XR hardware and software. Not to mention, learners' ability to navigate virtual environments may significantly influence learning outcomes such as vocabulary acquisition, self-efficacy, and sustained participation (Chen et al., 2022). Educators, on their part, need training to successfully integrate XR technologies into their teaching practices while providing training and support to ensure that learners can navigate XR tools effectively and focus on learning gains rather than overcoming technical difficulties.

Another challenging aspect concerns the cognitive load brought on by XR technology. Some scholars state that technologies of this kind allow for a decrease in cognitive overload, while others note that because XR environments are highly immersive and multisensory, they can lead to cognitive overload if not properly managed. Cognitive overload occurs when the demands of a learning task exceed the learner's processing capacity, leading to reduced comprehension and retention (Sweller, 2010). To avoid this, language learning tasks in XR environments must be carefully designed to balance immersion with clarity and focus, ensuring that learners are not overwhelmed by the complexity of the virtual environment. Nonetheless, cognitive load is a critical factor to consider in the application of XR technologies for language learning, as it directly impacts the effectiveness of instructional design. According to Cognitive Load Theory, learning involves the interaction of working memory and long-term memory, with cognitive processes linked to working memory playing a central role (Chandler & Sweller, 1991; Moreno, 2004; Sweller et al., 2011). Excessive cognitive load can hinder information processing, perception, and learning (Beddow, 2018; Chandler & Sweller, 1991). Therefore, to minimize unnecessary cognitive load and support effective learning, instructional design must be implemented (Sweller et al., 2011). This means, for instance, that language learning materials should be designed to avoid overloading working memory (Sweller, 2014). Indeed, properly designed XR applications can manage cognitive load by breaking down complex information into smaller, digestible segments, enabling learners to process content more effectively (Buchner et al., 2022; Elford et al., 2022). However, poorly designed XR tools risk increasing extraneous cognitive load, which can overwhelm learners and hinder their ability to focus on essential learning tasks.

As with any emerging technology, XR also presents psychological and ethical concerns that must be addressed. Currently, the psychological effects of prolonged immersion in virtual environments are not yet fully understood, but the potential ethical concerns have already started to emerge. For example, the use of AI-powered avatars raises concerns, as their synthetic voices may encode a "default" accent or register as implicitly "professional," risking the reinforcement of linguistic or accent bias. Data privacy issues may also be considered, as XR environments frequently involve the recording and processing of learners' voices, error patterns, and overall performance data. The cloud-based storage or processing of such data, therefore, raises issues of consent, transparency, data retention, and trust (e.g., Miao et al., 2021; Porayska-Pomsta et al., 2023). These concerns have direct implications for the design and implementation of XR-based language learning applications. In particular, they may require the disclosure of synthetic or recorded speech, the provision of opt-out alternatives, the minimization of stored voice data, the avoidance of native-speaker norm defaults, and the inclusion of diverse accents and communicative roles.

4. Conclusion

This article has attempted to bridge the pedagogical benefits of XR for language education with the learning needs of Gen Z, given that its members represent most of the current university student population. The main assumption behind this has been that the specific affordances of XR are well aligned with Gen Z's learning preferences and could effectively harness the characteristics of this generation.

Current research has documented positive outcomes associated with the integration of XR in educational settings, including improvements in student motivation and teaching effectiveness (Tegoan et al., 2021). In language learning contexts, these outcomes are linked to XR's capacity to provide immersive, contextualized, and interactive environments that support authentic language use and help address challenges such as limited exposure to real-world communication and language anxiety. While XR remains pedagogically beneficial for language learning more broadly, its immersive and flexible environments appear particularly suitable for Gen Z learners, who tend to prefer hands-on, experiential, visual, and self-directed forms of learning. Specifically, XR can support meaningful language use and personalized engagement by aligning with Gen Z's familiarity with digital environments and inclination toward practice-oriented learning. In this way, integrating XR into language curricula may enhance learner motivation while aligning with students' learning

habits and technological comfort, making language learning more dynamic, effective, and relevant to their future careers. Consequently, the design and implementation of XR-based language tasks could be positively affected by considering the peculiarities of this generation, maintaining pedagogical value in a careful and context-sensitive integration of XR in contemporary university settings.

Nonetheless the arguments reported here do not claim a generation-exclusive effect. Rather, it is suggested that the pedagogical affordances of XR are particularly well aligned with the characteristics and learning conditions of Gen Z. From this perspective, pairing XR with Gen Z is not a claim of exclusivity, but an attempt to examine how existing XR affordances may be pedagogically and more meaningfully leveraged for this specific cohort. Moreover, this potential alignment is not intended to serve as a cure-all, as important tensions related to tech-savviness, language anxiety, and post-pandemic educational experiences still remain. Additionally, recognizing issues related to accessibility, cost, cognitive load, learner well-being, and ethics is essential for the effective adoption of emerging technologies such as XR in educational contexts.

Furthermore, while generational research provides valuable insights into common traits within cohorts that can be matched to potential applications of XR, the limitations inherent in both generational research and technological determinism should not be overlooked. Generational research often faces challenges related to overgeneralization since the characteristics and behaviors observed in Gen Z may not uniformly represent the entire cohort due to its diversity. Additionally, the temporal and contextual factors of this study's findings may evolve rapidly with the ongoing technological and socioeconomic changes. Regarding technological determinism, an overemphasis on technology can obscure the impact of the social, cultural, and pedagogical factors that interact with it. The assumption that XR technologies have a uniform impact across all learners and settings may overlook the varied outcomes resulting from different implementations and user experiences. Initial excitement surrounding new technologies can lead to inflated expectations and potential disillusionment if the actual effectiveness does not meet the projected outcomes.

Regarding future applications of XR in language learning, a key potential lies in its integration with artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies. Indeed, AI can provide real-time feedback on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage, allowing for more personalized and adaptive learning experiences (e.g., Hirzle et al., 2023). Similarly, machine learning algorithms can analyze learner data to identify patterns and predict areas where learners may struggle, offering targeted interventions to support language acquisition.

In addition, while much of the current research on XR focuses on individual learning, the potential for collaborative and social learning in XR environments is vast and often underinvestigated. In this respect, future research should explore how these social XR environments can be leveraged to promote communicative competence and intercultural understanding in language learners.

Cross-disciplinary applications also represent key opportunities for the development of new paradigms for the use of XR in language learning since the interdisciplinary nature of XR allows for cross-curricular integration. For example, learners can practice language skills while exploring virtual environments related to history, science, or art, thereby enriching their language learning experience with knowledge from other fields. This cross-disciplinary approach aligns with Gen Z's preference for learning experiences that are relevant to real-world applications and problem-solving.

Finally, research on Gen Z is still in its early stages, and it will continue to be challenged by the fact that it deals with an ongoing phenomenon. Meanwhile, the study of the applications of XR for language teaching at the university level is still underway. Therefore, the trends and behaviors identified should be viewed as general tendencies rather than as definitive patterns applicable to every individual within this generation (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). While adopting a generational perspective can provide insights into the potential applications of XR in language learning, it is not designed to predict specific trends or behaviors. Instead, it serves as a lens for better understanding the ongoing development and potential of XR technologies in language teaching, with the aim of informing future research in this field.

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Review: Pennisi, Giulia Adriana (2025). *English for legal studies*. Carocci

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Book review

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ABSTRACT

EN Giulia Pennisi's *English for Legal Studies* (2025) provides a clear state of the art of legal English by openly acknowledging that it requires specialized levels of expertise, consideration of interactions and sound working knowledge of differing contexts. This has represented a challenge for teachers and curriculum designers and led to traditional textbook structures that try to encompass the most immediate overall needs of teachers and students by focusing on the most standardized and general aspects and genres of legal English. The present textbook pushes against such an approach and adopts an innovative stance by purposefully inserting legal English into its diverse historical-geographical context and exploring the real communicative functions that are carried out by its unique lexico-grammatical forms. This enables teachers and learners to understand the effect that language has on the law and appreciate the ways in which linguistics can be used in legal academic research and practice.

Key words: LEGAL ENGLISH, ESP (ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES), COMMON LAW, PLAIN LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

ES *English for Legal Studies*, de Giulia Pennisi (2025), ofrece una panorámica clara del estado del arte del inglés jurídico al reconocer abiertamente que este requiere niveles especializados de competencia, una atención rigurosa a las interacciones comunicativas y un conocimiento sólido de los distintos contextos de uso. Esta complejidad ha supuesto un desafío para el profesorado y para el diseño curricular, y ha dado lugar a estructuras tradicionales de manuales que tratan de abarcar las necesidades más inmediatas y generales de docentes y estudiantes, mediante la focalización en los aspectos y géneros más estandarizados del inglés jurídico. El presente manual se aparta de dicho enfoque y adopta una postura innovadora al insertar deliberadamente el inglés jurídico en su diverso contexto histórico y geográfico, y al explorar las funciones comunicativas reales que desempeñan sus formas léxico-gramaticales específicas. Este planteamiento permite al profesorado y al estudiantado comprender el efecto que el lenguaje ejerce sobre el derecho y apreciar las formas en las que la lingüística puede aplicarse tanto en la investigación jurídica académica como en la práctica profesional.

Palabras clave: INGLÉS JURÍDICO, INGLÉS PARA FINES ESPECÍFICOS, COMMON LAW, MOVIMIENTO DEL LENGUAJE CLARO

IT Il volume *English for Legal Studies* di Giulia Pennisi (2025) presenta un chiaro stato dell'arte dell'inglese giuridico, partendo dal presupposto che richiede livelli specialistici di competenza, attenzione alle dinamiche interazionali e solida conoscenza operativa dei diversi contesti d'uso. Tale complessità ha finora rappresentato una sfida per docenti e progettisti curriculari e ha portato alla diffusione di strutture manualistiche tradizionali che cercano di rispondere ai bisogni più immediati di docenti e studenti concentrandosi sugli aspetti e sui generi più standardizzati e generali dell'inglese giuridico. Il presente manuale si discosta consapevolmente da questo approccio e adotta una prospettiva innovativa, inserendo l'inglese giuridico nei suoi molteplici contesti storico-geografici ed esplorando le reali funzioni comunicative svolte dalle sue peculiari forme lessico-grammaticali. Ciò consente a docenti e apprendenti di comprendere l'impatto che il linguaggio esercita sul diritto e di apprezzare le modalità attraverso cui la linguistica può essere impiegata nella ricerca e nella pratica accademica in ambito giuridico.

Parole chiave: INGLESE GIURIDICO, INGLESE PER SCOPI SPECIFICI, COMMON LAW, MOVIMENTO PER IL LINGUAGGIO CHIARO

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English for Legal Studies (2025) is the latest publication of Carocci's ongoing series of books on English Linguistics for Academicians and Professionals (ELAP), edited by Laura Pinnavaia and Annalisa Zanola. The volume, in accordance with the book series' main objective, is addressed to students, scholars and professionals who intend to learn or teach fundamental notions and competences in legal English. The textbook starts by acknowledging that legal English is essentially multifaceted. This complexity stems from the diversity of registers and contexts in which it is used, since everyday interactions involve speakers with different levels of competence and needs. This leads to challenges when planning university courses, as they are increasingly expected to provide learners on differing levels of expertise with the necessary tools to communicate in contingent academic and professional situations. Such courses must work within significant time and space constraints while being as comprehensive as possible to enable students to cognitively and linguistically navigate very specific legal documents. The legal textbooks that are currently available generally attempt to respond to these overall requirements by presenting legal English in its most standardized and unified form, and therefore with no or very little reference to the surrounding context.

Giulia Pennisi's study contributes to the debate by adopting an unconventional approach that reflects the wording of the title "English for Legal Studies", rather than "Legal English" or "English for/in Law". The volume connects the complexity of legal English with that of the legal *forma mentis*. By doing so, the textbook is free to explore such complexity in various dimensions corresponding to the broad sections in which the volume is divided. All the volumes of this series on ELAP are structured in a similar manner, with possible adjustments or additions in the titles of the chapters and number of subsections, to make them homogenous and more user-friendly for students, professionals, teachers and academics. Accordingly, Pennisi's textbook presents an "Introduction", followed by Chapter 1 on "The framework" to provide an overview of the context, and Chapter 2 on "The critical thinking area" regarding the main areas and issues of interest for the specific English at hand. Chapter 3 focuses on "Analysis and examples" to translate and explain the study's observations through detailed texts and examples and is followed by a final "Conclusions" section to reflect on main findings, limitations and potential future research. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 all present a "Concluding remarks" subchapter to reiterate and consolidate the main points of the chapters for readers' convenience.

The "Introduction" of the volume starts from a reflection on the proper use of language in law and legal professional's consequent responsibility to communicate and behave so as to promote laymen's positive attitude towards the law. It then explains one of the main reasons for the complexity of legal English and driving the author's context-driven approach. The current legal language, and more precisely its unique terminology and style, has remained frozen in the form that was established at the beginning of the 19th century. It therefore contains multiple obscure elements that create a compound effect that only versed experts can decode and render understandable to non-experts. Since legal language has always mirrored the reality it governs, Giulia Pennisi sustains that the solution does not lie in attempting to simplify it, but rather in employing legal instruments to predict what could happen in the real world and align its language accordingly. Mastering legal English requires English native and non-native speakers alike to have a good working knowledge of English applied to legal cases and legal contexts, coupled with awareness of its lexico-grammatical features and their communicative functions and goals. Teachers and curriculum designers of legal English courses must therefore unite law and linguistics, cognitively difficult as this may be, in order to ultimately train academics and practitioners in applying and expressing legal thinking in practice.

After this thoughtful "Introduction", the textbook continues with the diachronic-oriented "The framework" section outlining the parallel historic development of legal reasoning and legal English. Starting from reference to the attempted Plain Language Movement of 1979, Chapter 1 embarks on a detailed *excursus* into the two main phases (from the 5th century to 1050, and from 1050 to the 1900s) and three related subphases for each phase of the development of legal English. This division is based on key contacts between different cultures and languages and is fundamental in explaining the persistent presence of Anglo-Saxon Latin, and French and resulting binomials in legal English. The chapter then focuses on the sources of legal English, i.e. customary law, common law and statutory law, equity and delegated legislation and the rule of law, in terms of the evolution, function and role in the current juridical system. The connection between the law and its English is further strengthened by the adoption of English as a *lingua franca*, and later as the language of international political and legal institutions and commerce. The author then extends her analysis to international perspectives and legal systems by locating and describing five types of law (common law, civil law, customary law, religious law, mixed law system, international law) to provide an overview of the state of legal English in the countries and legal systems in which it is still in force. The chapter also describes the parallel development of research on English language in specific, represented by the discipline of LSP (Language for

Specific Purposes), and how it has detected and investigated the main complicating lexico-grammatical features of legal English and their sources. These features have shaped the style of legal English and are still influenced in turn by professional forms and conservatism, so the addressees of the textbook can understand how legal practice frames and is framed by its disciplinary discourse.

In the aptly named "The critical thinking area: English-speaking jurisdictions" section represented by Chapter 2, the study shifts to the synchronic analysis of English-speaking jurisdictions, and especially those in place in the United Kingdom and United States. By doing so, learners and practitioners learn more about the underlying diversity in geographic and social context that explain the possible complications that may arise upon understanding and using legal English across multiple nations. More specifically, the chapter presents the main authorities, divisions of legislative, executive and judicial powers, and names and functions of the main professional figures in the UK and US. This is clearly carried out with the textbook's audience in mind, and therefore without assuming any previous knowledge or experience on its part. Therefore, the study provides clear definitions and distinctions and openly addresses cases of often (mis)used terms related to overlapping professional figures, processes and exceptional situations.

Chapter 3, which deals with "Analysis and Examples: legal texts", represents the "practical section" of the textbook, with a focus on legal English's most distinctive and puzzling linguistic and discursive features. Scholars and practitioners can now consolidate the knowledge of the previous chapters and verify how this is translated into real contexts and documents. The many guided examples that are provided here are of the utmost importance in view of understanding and using similar forms in the future across various legal genres so that they may be mastered through extensive direct experience and practice. Since the textbook's audience is composed of readers who may not be acquainted with English language studies, the first part of the chapter is on "Legal genre(s) and register(s)" and provides definitions of fundamental concepts such as Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), genre and register to enable learners, teachers and readers from the legal field to become aware of their presence and influence in their line of study and work. Moreover, the decision to start from genres and registers sets the stage from a broader perspective by providing information on the text's overall structure and purpose. The analysis then narrows its focus to legal text types, using Durant and Leung's (2006) three main types of legal text, i.e. legislative, private law and procedural, as a reference. Legal text types are determined by their communicative function and mirror the rules and conventions of the legal systems in which they are implemented. The study takes the multitude and complexity of legal text types into account and offers students and professionals in law and/or LSP a "legal text categorisation" framework adapted from Soriano Barabino (2020). The framework is divided into specific steps and accompanied by an illustrative table that associates Soriano Barabino's seven broad categories with detailed information on their text producers and genre/language. The author then applies this approach to last wills and employment contracts to demonstrate how it can assist in the analysis of legal texts.

The second part of Chapter 3 shifts its attention to "Vocabulary in context(s)" and therefore the lexico-grammatical features and breaks them into vocabulary in context(s) and grammar. Although legal vocabulary is characterized by highly specialized and/or technical meaning, the need for the provisions in which they are used to be inclusive, precise and clear resulted in the undeniable complexity of legal language. This paradox is further demonstrated with a list of consolidated linguistic habits and formulas and examples that are well-known to those studying and practicing law and its language. The use of borrowings and loanwords is dealt with separately for two reasons: it is connected to the development of the legal system and its underlying legal reasoning, and it often explains the presence of foreign words, archaic expressions and words deriving from non-legal semantic fields. The grammar of legal English reflects and expresses the law's adversarial nature through long sentence structure and multiple main and subordinate clauses. The study therefore focuses on the most characterizing syntactic and morphological aspects and provides clear definitions in consideration of the addressees' level of knowledge. More specifically, it starts from basic sentence structure and types of clauses and then deals with verb tenses and forms as "strategic markers" of structure and purpose. These deeper levels of language also feature and are shaped by archaic forms that, while cumbersome, continue to be used due to the specific legal functions that they perform. Such uses of language are passed on to legal practitioners as they gain experience. The textbook stands out because it not only accompanies these explanations with detailed examples and analyses. but it also highlights the underlying logical-interpretative reasons and the implicit legal and communicative effects that are often only intuited by students and practitioners. The chapter concludes by pointing out that law and language students dealing with legal English must not limit themselves to passively acquiring these formulas. Rather, they are encouraged to expand their

training and language-communication skills by understanding the linguistic semantic values and social pragmatic settings in and through which their professional language is employed.

The final "Conclusions" of the volume outlines the author's reflections and suggestions on possible directions for future research, teaching and materials in the field of legal English. It reiterates the need for teachers, learners and practitioners to approach different levels of specialized expertise, consider a greater variety of interactions, and build a sound working knowledge of differing contexts. This requires the practitioner's focus to move from language to law, and not the contrary, as in more traditional textbooks on legal English. Doing so enables the learner to glean the law's use and reasoning from the texts they encounter by using language as an essential starting tool, and not a mere filter, to navigate the surrounding environment. Giulia Pennisi's study concludes by highlighting three main takeaways for its readers. The first openly admits issues connected to the complexity of legal English and the increasingly demanding linguistic needs of law schools and legal practices. Although the Plain Language Movement has responded to this challenge by simplifying the language of the law through Justice Michael Kirby's (2009) "ten commandments for plain language in law" and managed to extend the context to non-experts, this is still not enough. The second point is that legal texts are an "expression of agreement" and therefore convey an individual choice or decision of body, while legal language is a means of producing legal effects. The third and final point is that lexico-grammatical features and communicative functions and goals must be integrated in the legal scholar and practitioner's learning and training to better align the spirit underlying legal reasoning with its form.

The volume completes ongoing research in the field by drawing on extensive literature on law and language to probe and reveal knowledge gaps resulting from other textbooks' excessively general or specific focus. A further strong point of the textbook is that it supports English language teachers and self-taught learners who may not be acquainted with legal terminology with useful references and materials. The latter consist in a clear glossary of legal terms and a bibliography of suggested readings, dictionaries and glossaries and websites. These allow readers of different linguistic and disciplinary backgrounds to become acquainted with the study's main concepts and with other reliable sources should they decide to further pursue their learning and development.

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Review: Frabotta, Simona (2025). *L'analisi del materiale didattico di italiano L2/LS in prospettiva di genere*. Dykinson.

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Book review

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ABSTRACT

EN This review examines Simona Frabotta's book, *L'analisi del materiale didattico di italiano L2/LS in prospettiva di genere*, a significant contribution to foreign language teaching research bridging the gap between gender theory and the practical analysis of teaching materials. The volume provides a systematic framework for identifying and addressing gender stereotypes, androcentric models, and exclusionary content in Italian L2/FL textbooks. By exploring the interplay of linguistic forms, iconographic resources, and cultural narratives, Frabotta offers educators and researchers concrete analytical tools to foster a more inclusive and critically informed approach to language education. Ultimately, the book serves as a vital resource for promoting gender awareness and responsible practice in the development and selection of pedagogical materials.

Keywords: GENDER PERSPECTIVE, L2/FL ITALIAN TEACHING MATERIALS, LANGUAGE AND GENDER, INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH, INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY.

ES Esta reseña examina la obra de Simona Frabotta, *L'analisi del materiale didattico di italiano L2/LS in prospettiva di genere*, una contribución significativa a la investigación en la didáctica de lenguas extranjeras que tiende un puente entre la teoría de género y el análisis aplicado de materiales didácticos. El volumen proporciona un marco sistemático para la identificación y el tratamiento de estereotipos de género, modelos androcéntricos y contenidos excluyentes en manuales de italiano como L2/LE. A través del análisis de la interacción entre formas lingüísticas, recursos iconográficos y narrativas culturales, Frabotta ofrece a docentes e investigadores herramientas analíticas concretas que favorecen un enfoque más inclusivo y críticamente fundamentado en la enseñanza de lenguas. En última instancia, la obra constituye un recurso esencial para promover la conciencia de género y una práctica responsable en el diseño y la selección de materiales pedagógicos.

Palabras clave: PERSPECTIVA DE GÉNERO, MATERIALES DIDÁCTICOS PARA EL ITALIANO COMO L2/LE, LENGUA Y GÉNERO, ENFOQUE INTERSECCIONAL, DIDÁCTICA INCLUSIVA.

IT Questa recensione prende in esame il libro di Simona Frabotta, *L'analisi del materiale didattico di italiano L2/LS in prospettiva di genere*, un contributo significativo alla ricerca in didattica delle lingue straniere che colma il divario tra la teoria di genere e l'analisi pratica dei materiali didattici in commercio. Il volume fornisce un quadro teorico sistematico e strumenti pratici per identificare e affrontare gli stereotipi di genere, i modelli androcentrici e i contenuti esclusivi presenti nei libri di testo di italiano L2/LS. Esplorando l'interazione tra forme linguistiche, risorse iconografiche e narrazioni culturali, Frabotta offre a educatori e ricercatori risorse analitiche concrete per promuovere un approccio più inclusivo e criticamente informato all'educazione linguistica. In definitiva, il libro costituisce una risorsa fondamentale per promuovere la consapevolezza di genere e una pratica responsabile sia nello sviluppo, sia nella selezione dei materiali didattici.

Parole chiave: PROSPETTIVA DI GENERE, MATERIALI DIDATTICI PER L'ITALIANO L2/LS, LINGUA E GENERE, APPROCCIO INTERSEZIONALE, DIDATTICA INCLUSIVA.

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1. Introduction

This review discusses Simona Frabotta's book *L'analisi del materiale didattico di italiano L2/LS in prospettiva di genere* ['The analysis of Italian L2/LS teaching materials from a gender perspective'] from the standpoint of a linguist and teacher of L2/FL Italian whose research interests include various features of commercially available teaching materials for foreign language teaching. The volume is a significant contribution to language teaching research, as it effectively links gender theory with the concrete analysis of existing teaching materials. Frabotta emphasizes the non-neutrality of language, images, and cultural content in textbooks, showing their impact on students' identity, motivation, and classroom dynamics. In this review special emphasis is placed on the pedagogical significance of Frabotta's book, which provides teachers with analytical tools to critically mediate sexist or exclusionary content while turning it into opportunities for reflection. Overall, the volume represents a useful resource for the inclusive and critically informed teaching of L2/FL Italian. This is all the more relevant when we consider that, as Frabotta states, "although research on sexism in Italian L2/LS teaching materials is growing, it is still an emerging field" (Frabotta 2025, p. 16).

Language teaching materials play a crucial role not only in the development of language skills, but also in the formation of cultural representations and social values. Until recently, gender issues have often occupied a marginal place in the analysis of Italian L2/FL textbooks. Simona Frabotta's book fills this gap by offering a systematic analysis of these teaching resources from a theoretical perspective that combines gender studies, sociolinguistics, and foreign language teaching. The book highlights how language, iconographic resources, and cultural content in textbooks can reproduce stereotypes and androcentric models under the guise of neutrality. The volume has a twofold purpose: to provide teachers and researchers with a clear theoretical framework on gender-related notions and to offer tools for the critical analysis of linguistic forms, visual representations, and cultural narratives in Italian L2/FL textbooks. From my point of view, the strength of this book is that it brings together theory and practice, promoting a reflective and inclusive approach to teaching Italian as a second/foreign language. Frabotta does a much-needed job by placing gender awareness at the center of responsible and up-to-date language education. The target audience for this volume includes authors and publishers of language textbooks; teachers of Italian as a second/foreign language; researchers in the field of foreign language teaching and gender studies.

The first chapter, "Principi teorici e metodologici per la costruzione di una prospettiva di genere [Theoretical and methodological principles for establishing a gender perspective]", lays the theoretical foundations of the book, defining "gender" and how this concept should be considered within language education. Frabotta takes us through the history of Western thought, showing how the differences between men and women have been interpreted in biological and hierarchical terms for centuries. From the thinking of Plato and Aristotle, who placed masculinity as a model of rationality and perfection, we arrive at the turning point of Simone de Beauvoir, who famously stated that "On ne naît pas femme, on le devient" (1949: 283), thus highlighting the constructed, rather than natural, nature of gender identity. The modern concept of gender was then established within the fields of Women's Studies and Gender Studies, thanks to scholars such as G. Rubin, who coined the notion of "sex/gender system" (1986), and J. W. Scott, who showed how sexual difference is socially organized (1986). Gender is therefore not a fixed category, but a dynamic, cultural, and relational construct that affects roles, behaviors, and self-perception. Frabotta then illustrates some key concepts useful for analyzing foreign language textbooks: gender identity (pp. 23–24) and expression (p. 24), gender roles (p. 24), sexual orientation (p. 25), androcentrism (pp. 25–26), sexism (pp. 26–27), and patriarchy (p. 27). All these notions create a theoretical framework that can be applied to the analysis of teaching materials. Frabotta pays special attention to gender stereotypes (pp. 27–33), which, while apparently making reality easier to understand, ultimately reduce and constrain it, promoting prejudices and inequalities. Stereotypes are formed during childhood—through games, stories, color choices, and family models—and are reinforced by school, the media, and institutions. As a result, masculinity is often associated with authority, action, and the public sphere, while femininity remains linked to emotionality, care, and domesticity. Frabotta shows how textbooks contribute to maintaining these representations by presenting images and texts that reproduce static social models. This leads to the need for critical and conscious analysis, capable of recognizing the educational (but also ideological) potential of textbooks. The author then introduces the intersectional perspective (pp. 33-38), according to which gender should not be analyzed in isolation, but in relation to other variables—such as ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, or ability—which, when combined, produce complex forms of discrimination. Only an intersectional view, the author emphasizes, allows us to read reality in a truly inclusive way (pp. 37–38). In the recurrent 'Strumenti' ('Tools') section (pp. 38–41), Frabotta presents a range of

analytical tools to identify sexism in teaching materials. The author outlines recurring strategies through which gender bias operates in textbooks, such as,

1) the omission or underrepresentation of women and other social groups,
2) the stereotypical assignment of roles – with women often relegated to subordinate roles or positions traditionally associated with the private sphere,
3) the derogatory attitude towards certain individuals, who are often the target of jokes, insults, or offensive comments of a misogynistic, racist, or ableist nature, and
4) the fragmentation or marginalization of gender-related content (e.g., "special" boxes or side sections).

These mechanisms do not act in isolation but intersect to construct partial and hierarchical worldviews that reinforce traditional gender roles and limit the diversity of social identities represented in educational discourse. In the last section of the chapter ("Raccomandazioni istituzionali e iniziative editoriali" ['Institutional recommendations and publishing initiatives']; pp. 41–50), Frabotta reviews the main institutional and editorial responses to gender inequality in education. Drawing on feminist pedagogy, the subsection outlines national and international initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in textbooks, including the 1979 UNESCO guidelines[1] (ONU, 1979), the Beijing Conference (ONU, 1995), and the international *Polite* Project (AIE, 1999). Special emphasis is placed on A. Sabatini's pioneering work on sexist language in Italian, drawing on her *Raccomandazioni per un uso non sessista della lingua italiana* (1986), which highlighted the androcentric structure of Italian and introduced the concept of grammatical asymmetries. Overall, in chapter 1 Frabotta argues that textbooks are not neutral mirrors of society, but powerful cultural tools that can either reproduce or challenge gender hierarchies, emphasizing the responsibility of publishers, institutions, and educators to promote inclusive and non-discriminatory materials.

The second chapter, "La lingua italiana ['The Italian language']", addresses the relationship between language and gender, showing how the Italian language reflects and reproduces sexist inequalities: borrowing Irigaray's words (1991), Frabotta sustains that language is never neutral (p. 51). Starting from the aforementioned pioneering work of A. Sabatini (1986), the author describes the grammatical and semantic asymmetries that characterize the Italian linguistic system. Among the former are the use of the masculine as an over-extended gender (the so called 'maschile sovraesteso' or 'generico') and resistance to the adoption of professional feminine forms (such as "sindaca" or 'ministra'); among the latter are the semantic differences that certain pairs of terms take on depending on gender (e.g. "uomo leggero" vs. "donna leggera", p. 62). Far from being neutral, language acts as an ideological tool and contributes to the construction of thought. The author points out how linguistic sexism, even when unintentional, limits the representation of women and non-binary identities, influencing the perception of learners. Frabotta examines the main proposals for a more inclusive language that have been advanced so far: among them, the double use of genders ("compagni e compagne", "compagni/e", "compagni.e", pp. 67-68); a strategy called *degendering,* which consists of adopting terms and linguistic expressions that ensure gender neutrality or leave gender unspecified ("il gruppo", "la comunità studentesca" etc.); syntactic rephrasing, which allows for the avoidance of explicit references to the identity of the person performing the action (i.e., "il testo va letto" instead of "gli studenti devono leggere il testo"); and the adoption of graphic symbols such as the asterisk or the schwa, which aim to overcome the rigidity of binarism (pp. 67–71). While acknowledging that the issue is far from resolved, the author highlights its educational and symbolic value. This is followed by a review of studies on linguistic sexism in L2/FL Italian textbooks (pp. 73–81), which reveal the persistence of discriminatory forms, ranging from the prevalence of male figures in dialogues and examples, to the limited presence of female roles in high-level professions, ending with the invisibility of gender minorities. The chapter closes with the 'Strumenti' section of the chapter (pp. 82–90), which again offers tools for the linguistic analysis of textbooks[2] (observation grids, guiding questions, etc.) and references to institutional guidelines (such as the recommendations of the Italian Department of

[1] "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", New York, December 18, 1979; available at the following link: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women

[2] 1. La distribuzione di agentivi maschili e femminili; 2. La visibilità delle donne nei ruoli lavorativi; 3. Rompere con gli stereotipi anche nella lingua; 4. Evitare strategie inadeguate di femminilizzazione; 5. Nominare al femminile; 6. La regola del femminile dei sostantivi professionali; 7. Integrare strategie di visibilità o neutralizzazione del genere; 8. Attenzione alle dissimmetrie semantiche; 9. Caratteristiche personali non discriminanti; 10. Nuove forme di inclusività.

Education, University and Research, MIUR[3], or the *Accademia della Crusca*). The aim is to provide teachers with concrete criteria for a more informed and inclusive choice of materials.

Chapter 3, "Le immagini ['Illustrations/Pictures']", frames images as powerful semiotic and pedagogical tools and not just neutral decorative elements. Images actively participate in meaning-making and play a crucial role in socialization processes, including gender socialization. In language textbooks, visual elements contribute to constructing learners' representations of society, identities, and social roles. Because images are often processed more immediately and less critically than texts, they can naturalize stereotypes and inequalities more effectively, thus reinforcing implicit norms about gender, bodies, professions, and behaviors. In my opinion, the core of the chapter is section 3.3 (pp. 97–107), where Frabotta examines quantitative and qualitative gender imbalances in textbook imagery. Women tend to be underrepresented or confined to specific domains (domestic, relational, care-related), while men are more frequently associated with public, professional, scientific, or authoritative roles. The imbalance also concerns age, visibility, and activity: male figures are more often portrayed as active agents, whereas female characters are depicted as passive, supportive, or secondary. These visual patterns contribute to legitimizing gender hierarchies and limiting learners' own imagination regarding possible social roles. Part of the chapter is dedicated to the link between images, bodies, and identity. The female body, in particular, is often the subject of stereotyping or invisibilization: on the one hand, it is often hypersexualized, and on the other, it is marginalized or relegated to a secondary role. There is also a lack of representations of elderly bodies, disabled bodies, bodies that do not conform to aesthetic standards, as well as queer or non-binary subjects. Again, in the 'Strumenti' section (pp. 108–112), Frabotta offers practical resources for iconographic analysis[4]: who is represented, in what roles, how often, and in what kind of interactions. She also suggests considering color choices, spatial arrangement (for instance, the author points out that men are frequently shown in open, dynamic public spaces, while women are more often represented in closed, private spaces; p. 110), and the relationship between text and picture. The chapter closes with a list of resources and best practices for fair and pluralistic visual representation, such as inclusive publishing projects, archives of stereotype-free images, and international guidelines for gender-sensitive visual communication.

The last chapter, "Cultura e attualità ['Culture and current affairs']", addresses the presence (or absence) of women in the cultural and current affairs ('attualità') sections of L2/FL Italian textbooks. Frabotta observes that, despite the pivotal role of culture in foreign language teaching, women are often marginalized in sections devoted to society, history, or literature. In fact, culture-related sections continue to favor male figures—writers, scientists, artists, politicians—while women appear in secondary or stereotypical roles: in Frabotta's words, "female artists, creators and illustrious women have often been absent from events, places and even materials and documents that establish cultural value and pass it on to posterity[5]" (p. 118). The research referred to by the author highlights the existence of a clear gap in representation as a result of a long androcentric tradition that has excluded women from the spheres of cultural production and memory. Specific attention is paid to the media, which often presents female role models focused primarily on physical appearance and caregiving, rather than competence or autonomy. In pedagogical materials (pp. 125–131), this translates into texts, dialogues, and articles that reinforce oversimplified views of social reality. The findings show that women's visibility remains quantitatively and qualitatively limited. Female figures are often treated as exceptions or confined to specific, traditionally feminized domains. When women do appear, they are frequently framed as a separate category, rather than integrated into a general cultural narrative on equal terms with men. Their works are less likely to be framed as central to the Italian literary tradition, thus reinforcing the idea of a male-centered literary canon. Again, this selective visibility limits learners' exposure to diverse voices and perpetuates a partial and distorted image of Italian cultural heritage. Frabotta provides an analysis of the cultural models and "canons" found in textbooks, highlighting the importance of featuring prominent female figures, Italian writers and artists, as well as marginalized and migrant voices that enrich Italian culture today. As in the previous chapters, the "Strumenti" section (pp. 132–138) provides a set of

[3] Acronym standing for *Ministero dell'istruzione, dell'università e della ricerca* ('Department of Education, Universities, and Research).

[4] 1. La presenza e il riconoscimento; 2. La questione dell'identità; 3. Il modello corporale; 4. I ruoli di genere; 5. Rompere con le gerarchie; 6. La rappresentazione della famiglia; 7. L'ambientazione spaziale; 8. Le associazioni tra i generi e simboli.

[5] "le artiste, le creatrici e le donne illustri sono state spesso assenti dagli eventi, dai luoghi e anche dai materiali e documenti che sanciscono il valore culturale e lo trasmettono alla posterità".

analytical indicators[6] designed to help teachers and material developers critically evaluate cultural content in textbooks from a gender perspective. These indicators include questions about the presence of women in positions of prestige, references to women as experts, the treatment of data broken down by gender, and the inclusion of topics relevant to women's rights and gender issues. The tools aim to translate theoretical awareness into practical criteria for analyzing and reviewing teaching materials.

Simona Frabotta's book is an original and much needed resource for us teachers of L2/FL Italian. In my opinion, the book stands out as an authoritative reference in the field of studies on L2/FL Italian thanks to its solid theoretical framework and clear exposition. In the four chapters that make up the volume, the author outlines a coherent approach from the theoretical framework (chapter 1) to its linguistic (chapter 2), visual (chapter 3), and cultural (chapter 4) applications. The aim is to train teachers, authors and publishers to critically look at teaching materials, recognizing that every linguistic, iconographic, and cultural choice is not neutral but contributes to shaping a particular worldview. The book's primary strength resides in its ability to translate the gender perspective into concrete analytical tools that can be applied to the linguistic, iconographic, and cultural content of any textbook. Particularly noteworthy is the emphasis placed on intersectionality and the active role of teachers as critical mediators of teaching materials. The significance of Frabotta's proposal is all the greater, in that it acts as an incentive for publishers and authors of L2/FL Italian textbooks to be more mindful and sensitive to the complexity of Italian society. They should, in fact, strive to portray it as realistically as possible, not least with regard to gender issues. On a critical level, the almost exclusive focus on traditional textbooks may appear biased, given the growing importance of digital and multimodal resources in language teaching (and beyond). Furthermore, adopting the proposed perspective requires the acquisition of skills and sensibilities that not all educational contexts guarantee. On a minor note, the book could have benefited from a final proofread to weed out the few – yet avoidable – typos that the reader comes across. Overall, however, the volume offers a high-profile contribution that will hopefully have an impact on both research and teaching practices.

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[6] 1. La presenza femminile; 2. Uno sguardo trasversale; 3. La dimensione storica; 4. La varietà nei settori culturali; 5. La caratterizzazione di uomini e donne; 6. Il riconoscimento dei contributi femminili; 7. La prospettiva inclusiva; 8. La considerazione della letteratura femminile; 9. L'autorialità femminile e plurale; 10. La presenza delle donne in ambiti di prestigio; 11. Narraciones di genere nei testi di attualità; 12. Il trattamento delle questioni di genere.

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Book review

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ABSTRACT

ES La presente reseña adopta una perspectiva analítica y valorativa para presentar *The Routledge Handbook of Multiliteracies for Spanish Language Teaching*, destacando que se trata de una obra llamada a ser una referencia en la didáctica del español L2. Se subraya su propuesta de reconfigurar los marcos tradicionales de enseñanza mediante el enfoque de las multiliteracidades y la multimodalidad, y se enfatiza el equilibrio entre fundamentos teóricos, diseño curricular y aplicación pedagógica a lo largo de sus cuatro secciones. Desde una mirada crítica pero en general positiva, la reseña concluye que el volumen ofrece una contribución fundamental para la investigación y la docencia.

Palabras clave: MULTILITERACIDADES, ENSEÑANZA DE ESPAÑOL COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

EN This review adopts an analytical and evaluative perspective to present *The Routledge Handbook of Multiliteracies for Spanish Language Teaching* as a key reference in Spanish L2 pedagogy. It highlights the book's aim to reconfigure traditional teaching frameworks through the lens of multiliteracies and multimodality, stressing the balance between theoretical foundations, curricular design, and pedagogical practice across the volume's four sections. Overall, the review offers a largely positive assessment, presenting the handbook as an important contribution for researchers and language educators.

Key words: MULTILITERACIES, SPANISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

IT La presente recensione adotta una prospettiva analitica e valutativa per presentare il *Routledge Handbook of Multiliteracies for Spanish Language Teaching* come punto di riferimento fondamentale per la pedagogia dello spagnolo L2. Sottolinea infatti l'intento del libro di riconfigurare le caratteristiche dell'insegnamento tradizionale attraverso la lente delle alfabetizzazioni molteplici e della multimodalità, soffermandosi sull'equilibrio tra fondamenti teorici, progettazione curricolare e pratica pedagogica lungo tutte le quattro sezioni del volume. Nel complesso, la recensione fornisce una valutazione ampiamente positiva, presentando il manuale come un contributo importante per ricercatori e insegnanti di lingua.

Parole chiave: ALFABETIZZAZIONI MOLTEPLICI, INSEGNAMENTO DELLA LINGUA SPAGNOLA

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El presente volumen, editado por Elisa Gironzetti y Manel Lacorte, se inscribe en el campo de la lingüística aplicada y la didáctica del español como segunda lengua (L2) y como lengua de herencia y, sin duda, constituye un manual de referencia tanto por su carácter ambicioso como por estar sustentado en una sólida base conceptual y metodológica. Es destacable la conjunción de nada menos que sesenta y dos autores a través de treinta capítulos, firmado cada uno de ellos por dos o tres especialistas en la materia en cuestión, expertos procedentes de contextos académicos y geográficos diversos, lo cual confiere a la obra una perspectiva internacional, plural y representativa de lo que podemos considerar las tendencias y transformaciones actuales en el ámbito de la educación lingüística y la didáctica de las lenguas. Como punto de partida, señalaremos que el volumen propone una reconfiguración profunda de los marcos teóricos, curriculares y pedagógicos que histórica y tradicionalmente han orientado la enseñanza (y también el aprendizaje) del español. De este modo, a través de sus cuatro secciones (Fundamentos teóricos interdisciplinares, Fundamentos curriculares, Pedagogía para las multiliteracidades, Multiliteracidades en contextos de enseñanza), *The Routledge Handbook of Multiliteracies for Spanish Language Teaching*, lejos de ofrecer una mera compilación temática, se articula como una propuesta coherente, sistemática y avanzada, que de forma explícita sitúa la multimodalidad, las multiliteracidades y la interdisciplinariedad en el centro de una reflexión profunda que se prefigura como candente acerca del aprendizaje y la enseñanza del español, con vistas a una reconfiguración de lo que esta debe ser hoy en día.

En el capítulo introductorio, los editores especifican el objetivo fundamental del volumen: tender un puente entre una realidad ya asentada, es decir, la tradición pedagógica de la enseñanza del español L2, y los desarrollos más recientes en multimodalidad, estudios de literacidad y ciencias sociales, poniendo el foco en la relación de estas disciplinas con la enseñanza del español. Este modo de articular el manual se apoya en una crítica explícita al verbocentrismo que tradicionalmente ha caracterizado gran parte de la didáctica de las lenguas, a saber, la visión linguocéntrica de la comunicación y de la enseñanza de idiomas, lo cual es posible encontrar incluso dentro de enfoques comunicativos que, si bien paulatinamente han ido encaminándose hacia un uso funcional del lenguaje, mantienen aún la centralidad casi exclusiva de lo verbal.

Frente a ello, el presente *Handbook* editado por Routledge adopta como propia a lo largo de sus páginas una concepción ampliada del 'significado', entendiendo los textos, *lato sensu*, como ensamblajes multimodales con un irrenunciable anclaje social, cultural e histórico que no puede pasar inobservado. Los editores del volumen colocan en primer plano la reflexión terminológica en torno al uso del término *multiliteracidades* (que quizás pueda resultar ciertamente oscuro incluso a quienes se dedican a la enseñanza de idiomas), frente a otras opciones posibles como la más transparente *alfabetizaciones múltiples* o al mero término *multiliteracidad*, en singular. Tal discusión no constituye una cuestión secundaria, sino que revela una toma de postura epistemológica consciente, que subraya tanto la pluralidad disciplinar implicada en los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje como la necesidad de integrar dichas perspectivas en una propuesta pedagógica unitaria y coherente, como se comprobará en los distintos capítulos que componen el libro. De este modo, el manual se presenta explícitamente "diseñado como obra de consulta con pautas teóricas, metodológicas y pedagógicas para investigar y llevar al aula de español L2 la pedagogía para las multiliteracidades" (p. 8). Los editores señalan justamente que, si bien ya existían obras de este tipo, era evidente la falta de una centrada en la lengua española, de modo que el presente libro viene necesariamente a colmar un vacío que ya no es tal.

La estructura del volumen en cuatro grandes secciones responde a una lógica cuidadosamente diseñada que guía al lector desde los fundamentos teóricos hasta la aplicación en contextos específicos de enseñanza. Por su parte, cada uno de los treinta capítulos mantiene de forma paralela una estructura semejante, compuesta de una introducción a modo de resumen, una primera sección donde se analizan los aspectos históricos y teóricos del tema tratado, una segunda sección que toca los aspectos metodológicos y una tercera parte donde se profundiza en los aspectos pedagógicos, con la propuesta de pautas y recomendaciones para docentes de L2, así como de actividades prácticas de gran utilidad, incluso distinguiendo en algunos capítulos entre actividades para adultos y para niños. Cada capítulo se cierra con una doble recapitulación bibliográfica: por una parte, una sucinta bibliografía comentada de un puñado de obras de cabecera y, a continuación, las referencias bibliográficas mencionadas en el capítulo, que se revelan siempre exhaustivas y actualizadas.

La primera parte, "Fundamentos teóricos interdisciplinares", constituye el punto de partida conceptual para todo el volumen. Así, en el primer capítulo, a cargo de los editores, se establece un sólido andamiaje para comprender en qué consiste la pedagogía enfocada hacia las multiliteracidades. Los capítulos sobre semiótica social (Isabel Alonso-Belmonte y Megan Strom) y multimodalidad (Mercedes Querol-Julián y Vicent Beltrán-Palanques) introducen de manera clara los principios básicos de estos dos campos y sus metodologías de investigación, subrayando su relevancia para analizar la creación de significado mediante

recursos semióticos diversos y para repensar el estatuto del lenguaje en la educación lingüística. Sentadas tales bases, esta primera parte continúa con una serie de contribuciones sobre retórica y géneros textuales (Vicent Salvador Liern y Jorge Martí-Contreras), sociolingüística (Whitney Chappell y M. Sidury Christiansen), pragmática intercultural (Lucía Cantamutto y Raquel Hidalgo Downing), pedagogía crítica (Joan Aznar Bertolín y Encarna Atienza Cerezo) y lingüística sistémico-funcional (Estela I. Moyano y Margarita Vidal Lizama), que amplían el marco teórico hacia dimensiones discursivas, ideológicas y sociosemióticas del uso del lenguaje y su aplicación a la enseñanza de idiomas. El diálogo que se establece entre todas estas disciplinas y su aplicabilidad a la didáctica de las lenguas refuerza una visión del lenguaje como práctica social claramente ubicada en unas coordenadas precisas y, por otra parte, legitima la incorporación sistemática de recursos no verbales en la enseñanza del español como L2.

A este respecto, cabe destacar que esta primera sección no se limita a presentar marcos teóricos, todos ellos ya bien consolidados en la tradición lingüística, sino que los reinterpreta desde una perspectiva pedagógica explícita. Como ya hemos señalado, no solo se describen conceptos, sino que se vinculan con implicaciones concretas –y, creemos, utilísimas– no solo para el aula, sino también para la formación docente y la investigación aplicada. De ese modo, esta primera sección funciona como base conceptual accesible y relevante para lectores procedentes de distintos campos de la lingüística aplicada y para docentes de lengua española L2 de cualquier nivel de la enseñanza.

La segunda parte, "Fundamentos curriculares", traslada los principios teóricos expuestos en la primera sección del libro al diseño de programas, cursos e incluso políticas educativas, con un carácter reivindicativo que subraya la convicción de los autores respecto a la aplicabilidad del marco conceptual que presenta el libro. Los capítulos dedicados al diseño curricular en conjunción con las multiliteracidades (Mandy R. Menke y Kate Paesani) y a los marcos curriculares e institucionales (Francis John Troyan, Lauren Miranda y Manel Lacorte) ofrecen herramientas conceptuales y metodológicas claras para articular la pedagogía en función de las multiliteracidades, con modelos de diseño retrospectivo, enfoques de integración de lengua y contenidos, y estándares de competencia lingüística. Resulta especialmente relevante la manera en que se demuestra que las multiliteracidades no deben constituir un enfoque marginal o alternativo, sino un marco tangible capaz de dialogar con exigencias institucionales diversas, incluidas las derivadas de sistemas de evaluación estandarizada y de acreditación.

En los siguientes capítulos de la sección se aborda una revisión crítica de nociones pedagógicas clásicas como el andamiaje multimodal (Elisa Gironzetti y Flavia Belpoliti), los entornos de aprendizaje y la tecnología educativa (Alfonso Vargas-Franco y Karen López-Gil), la evaluación dinámica (Próspero N. García y Susana Madinabeitia Manso) y los nuevos roles de docentes y estudiantes (Félix Villalba Martínez y José Aldemar Álvarez Valencia), nociones todas ellas reinterpretadas desde una perspectiva multimodal y sociocultural. En este sentido, se cuestionan concepciones instrumentales de la tecnología y se propone su integración en la enseñanza entendiendo la multimedialidad como un entorno semiótico capaz de configurar prácticas de significado, identidades y relaciones de poder. Por último, cierra esta segunda sección un capítulo dedicado al translenguar (Josh Prada y Sílvia Melo-Pfeifer), donde se ahonda en el potencial transformador de este concepto, cuestionando concepciones normativas y monolingües en la enseñanza de L2 y promoviendo pedagogías que reconozcan la fluidez, la hibridez y la dimensión política del multilingüismo en los contextos educativos contemporáneos a los que el profesorado necesariamente se deberá enfrentar.

La tercera parte del libro, "Pedagogía para las multiliteracidades", desciende aún más concretamente al nivel del aula y por sí solo constituye, con sus nueve capítulos, uno de los núcleos más ricos, extensos y propositivos del volumen. A lo largo de esta sección se muestra cómo, desde una pedagogía para las multiliteracidades que no pierde rigor lingüístico ni profundidad conceptual, pueden abordarse los contenidos tradicionalmente centrales en la enseñanza de L2, a saber, la integración de destrezas (Gloria Patricia Marciales Vivas y Nancy Agray-Vargas), los aspectos lingüísticos y gramaticales (Lucía Natale y María Cristina Castro Azuara), la literatura (Agustín Reyes-Torres y María Estela Brisk) y la comunicación oral (María Sampedro Mella y Lluís Payrató). Se demuestra que la incorporación sistemática de la multimodalidad permite contextualizar estos contenidos, dotarlos de sentido sociocultural y vincularlos a prácticas comunicativas auténticas y relevantes para los aprendientes. La atención a literacidades específicas –visual (María Luisa Parra Velasco y María de los Dolores Cabrero Rodríguez-Jalón), digital (Boris Vazquez-Calvo y Germán Canale), audiovisual (Luis Guerra y Giovanna Mapelli) y espacial (Alexandre Bataller Català y Francisco Martínez Ibarra), en este último caso dando cabida también al paisaje lingüístico– amplía el repertorio de competencias que es esperable desarrollar en los estudiantes de español como L2 y refleja con fidelidad las prácticas comunicativas contemporáneas que no pueden dejarse de lado. Asimismo, esta sección destaca por la inclusión

de enfoques que recuperan la corporeidad y los artefactos culturales (Eduardo Negueruela-Azarola, Isabel Torrubia-Gortari y Francisco Meizoso), en otras palabras, la materialidad del lenguaje. Se aborda, pues, una dimensión etnográfica que enriquece la comprensión de la comunicación interpersonal y del aprendizaje. Los ejemplos didácticos, las secuencias de actividades y el análisis de textos multimodales proporcionados a lo largo de estos capítulos facilitan la transferencia a contextos reales de enseñanza, reafirman su aplicabilidad y convierten esta parte del volumen en un recurso especialmente valioso para docentes en formación o ya en ejercicio.

La cuarta y última parte, "Multiliteracidades en contextos de enseñanza", pone de relieve la flexibilidad, la adaptabilidad y el potencial inclusivo del enfoque propuesto a lo largo del volumen. Los distintos capítulos, centrados respectivamente en la educación secundaria (Lina M. Reznicek-Parrado, Janet Eckerson y Carolina Bustamante), hablantes de herencia (Diego Pascual y Cabo y Elena Foulis), migrantes (Adil Moustaoui Srhir, Gabriela Prego Vázquez y Luz Zas Varela), comunidades indígenas (Lorena Córdova-Hernández, Jorge Valtierra Zamudio y Mario E. López Gopar), campos profesionales (Glenn Martínez) y formación de profesores (Yvonne Gavela-Ramos y Silvia Aguinaga-Echeverría), muestran cómo la pedagogía para las multiliteracidades puede responder a realidades educativas diversas y, en muchos casos, marcadas por claras desigualdades estructurales, por ideologías lingüísticas consideradas normativas y por modelos deficitarios de aprendizaje, casos todos ellos cada vez más presentes en las aulas. Se revela especialmente relevante el enfoque crítico con que se analizan prácticas grafocéntricas y sustractivas de bilingüismo, proponiendo alternativas pedagógicas basadas en el reconocimiento de repertorios semióticos plurales y de identidades complejas, unidas a prácticas culturales donde se evidencie y valorice la autorrepresentación y la apropiación en hablantes de lenguas indígenas, por ejemplo.

Por último, el volumen incluye un utilísimo índice temático que facilita la búsqueda al lector interesado en una cuestión concreta.

Uno de los puntos fuertes del volumen es el equilibrio que se ha logrado entre teoría, investigación y práctica, pues, como ya hemos señalado, cada capítulo combina una revisión conceptual rigurosa con orientaciones metodológicas, propuestas didácticas y una completa bibliografía actualizada, con vistas a facilitar no solo la aplicación práctica en el aula, sino también el desarrollo de nuevas líneas de investigación, siempre abiertas. La diversidad de autores, que en ningún caso supone una fragmentación dentro del volumen, contribuye a reforzar su coherencia interna; ello se consigue gracias al hilo conductor en que, al mismo tiempo, se fundamenta el libro desde un punto de vista teórico: la multimodalidad y las multiliteracidades como principios rectores en la enseñanza de español L2. Igualmente, la amplitud geográfica de los contextos abordados en los distintos capítulos, especialmente en la cuarta parte del volumen, evita generalizaciones excesivas y favorece una presentación y comprensión de la enseñanza del español como lengua global en un mundo multiconectado y plural.

Ha de señalarse que la densidad conceptual de algunos capítulos exige hasta cierto punto un lector con una mínima familiaridad previa respecto a los marcos teóricos de la lingüística aplicada contemporánea. Con todo, esta exigencia en ningún caso se convierte en obstáculo insalvable, dado que resulta coherente con la naturaleza del volumen, ideado como obra de referencia destinada principalmente a un público que se dedica a la investigación y a la formación de docentes y profesionales del ámbito de la enseñanza de lenguas, más concretamente de la lengua española. En definitiva, la claridad expositiva general, así como la organización sistemática del contenido, la pulcra organización interna de los capítulos y la recurrencia de ejemplos prácticos reducen a la mínima expresión esa posible dificultad, amén de ampliar el potencial impacto del volumen.

En conjunto, *The Routledge Handbook of Multiliteracies for Spanish Language Teaching: multimodalidad e interdiciplinariedad* resulta ser una contribución fundamental al estudio y a la práctica de la enseñanza del español como L2 y como lengua de herencia. Desde un punto de vista téorico y metodológico, el volumen sintetiza de manera rigurosa el estado actual de la investigación en multiliteracidades aplicada al español y, al mismo tiempo, traza direcciones claras para el desarrollo futuro de este campo de investigación. Por otro lado, se expone un amplio conjunto de técnicas de enseñanza, apoyadas en muestras de lengua multimodales y acompañadas de un nutrido repertorio de diseño de actividades, así como de pautas metodológicas. La apuesta del libro por una enseñanza centrada en textos multimodales, prácticas sociales, conciencia crítica y creación de significado intenta estimular la reflexión entre investigadores y docentes y supone una invitación a revisar los marcos epistemológicos y pedagógicos del ámbito. De este modo, el volumen está llamado a convertirse en una obra de referencia con perspectiva de futuro en el panorama actual de la investigación y la práctica de la enseñanza del español en nuestros días.

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Review: Ward, Martin, Eugeni, Carlo, & Walker, Callum (Eds.) 2025. Teaching translation. Context, modes and technology. Routledge.

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BOOK REVIEW
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ABSTRACT

EN This review is about the volume *Teaching Translation. Context, Modes and Technology*, edited by Martin Ward, Carlo Eugeni, and Callum Walker, which offers a timely snapshot of how translator and interpreter education is being rethought in the wake of COVID-19 and rapid technological change. The volume's main strengths lie in its explicit effort to bridge academic curricula and professional realities, in its portfolio of concrete interventions that can be adapted locally, and in the space it gives to trainees' experiences and emotions. At the same time, the collection is and strongly anchored in European and Australian contexts, with less attention to Global South settings or structural questions of professional precarity beyond a handful of chapters. Overall, it will be of particular interest to translator trainers, programme coordinators, and researchers seeking research-informed but practical ways of integrating technology, collaboration, and critical reflection into translator education.

Key words: TRANSLATOR EDUCATION, TRANSLATION PEDAGOGY, TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LEARNING, PROJECT-BASED LEARNING, PROFESSIONALISATION

ES Esta reseña analiza el volumen *Teaching Translation. Context, Modes and Technology*, editado por Martin Ward, Carlo Eugeni y Callum Walker, que ofrece una panorámica actualizada de cómo la formación de profesionales de la traducción y la interpretación se está replanteando a raíz de la COVID-19 y de los rápidos cambios tecnológicos. Entre los principales puntos fuertes de la obra destacan su esfuerzo explícito por tender puentes entre los programas académicos y la realidad profesional, la amplia variedad de propuestas prácticas susceptibles de adaptarse a distintos contextos locales y la atención que presta a las experiencias y emociones de los traductores en formación. Al mismo tiempo, la obra está fuertemente anclada en los contextos europeos y australianos, prestando menor atención a los países del Sur Global y a las cuestiones estructurales relacionadas con la precariedad profesional, abordadas únicamente en un número limitado de capítulos. En conjunto, el volumen resultará de especial interés para quienes forman a traductores, coordinan programas de estudio e investigan sobre la manera de integrar la tecnología, la colaboración y la reflexión crítica en la formación de traductores.

Palabras clave: FORMACIÓN DE TRADUCTORES, DIDÁCTICA DE LA TRADUCCIÓN, APRENDIZAJE APOYADO POR LA TECNOLOGÍA, APRENDIZAJE BASADO EN PROYECTOS, PROFESIONALIZACIÓN

IT Questa recensione prende in esame il *volume Teaching Translation. Context, Modes and Technology*, a cura di Martin Ward, Carlo Eugeni e Callum Walker, che offre una fotografia quadro aggiornato di come la formazione di traduttori e interpreti venga ripensata dopo il COVID-19 e alla luce dei rapidi cambiamenti tecnologici. Tra i punti di forza del volume c'è l'esplicito tentativo di colmare il divario tra percorsi universitari e realtà professionali, illustrando molti interventi concreti adattabili ai diversi contesti locali e dedicando attenzione alle esperienze e alla dimensione emotiva dei traduttori in formazione. Al tempo stesso, il volume è ancorato ai contesti europei e australiani, con minore attenzione ai Paesi del Sud globale e alle questioni strutturali della precarietà professionale, affrontate soltanto in un numero limitato di contributi. Nel complesso, il volume risulta di particolare interesse per i formatori di traduttori, i coordinatori di programmi di studio e i ricercatori alla ricerca di approcci, fondati sulla ricerca ma al tempo stesso applicabili nella pratica, per integrare tecnologie, collaborazione e riflessione critica nella formazione alla traduzione.

Parole chiave: FORMAZIONE DEI TRADUTTORI, DIDATTICA DELLA TRADUZIONE, APPRENDIMENTO SUPPORTATO DALLA TECNOLOGIA, APPRENDIMENTO BASATO SU PROGETTI, PROFESSIONALIZZAZIONE

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1. Introduction

The book, emerging from the 2022 APTIS conference, is organised into three parts: the relationship between the classroom and the professional world; collaborative, project-based pedagogies; and trainees' own voices on new modes of training. The chapters cover blind spots in Translation and Interpreting (henceforth T&I) training (Gambier), financial literacy and rate-setting (Walker & Lambert), service-learning with migrants (Belenguer Cortés), race and ethics in the classroom (Freeth), the use of computer-assisted revision tools (Musacchio & Quinci), project-based and simulated professional environments (Chen et al.; Guidarelli et al.; Penet; Ward & Tobias), and students' perceptions of pandemic-induced online teaching and international mobility (Calvo-Ferrer; Hao).

In what follows, I offer a structured overview of the volume and a series of critical reflections that accompany the discussion of each chapter. My aim is to situate the authors' contributions within ongoing debates in translator education, highlighting where the volume advances current pedagogical thinking and where further empirical grounding or clarification might be beneficial.

2. Framing the volume

In the introduction, Martin Ward sets out the intellectual and institutional context for the volume. He underlines how T&I training has been reshaped not only by technological developments (MT, AI, online platforms) but also by wider transformations in higher education, with the COVID-19 pandemic acting as a catalyst rather than a temporary disruption. The rapid shift to online and hybrid teaching forced trainers to experiment with new models, accelerating discussions that were already under way about how to balance traditional, text-centred pedagogy with more professionally-oriented and digitally-mediated approaches. Ward links the volume directly to the 2022 *APTIS* conference, *Translation and Interpreting Pedagogy in a Post-pandemic World*, which brought together over a hundred trainers. The book is presented as both a continuation of those conversations and a resource for colleagues seeking "insights and adaptable pedagogical approaches" that might be implemented under very different constraints.

The introduction succeeds in situating the book historically and thematically, and in signalling the editors' intention not to propose a single blueprint but to offer a series of situated experiments. One could argue, however, that the framing remains largely Euro- and Anglophone-centred: while Ward acknowledges unequal access to technology and global disparities, these do not fully carry through into the selection of relevant case studies, which are overwhelmingly based in Europe and Australia. A more explicit comparison vis-à-vis non-European training contexts would have strengthened the opening.

3. Blind spots and the "inside/outside" of the classroom (Part I)

Chapter 2, "Blind spots in the training of translators and interpreters" by Yves Gambier , provides a critical backdrop for the rest of the volume. He traces the move from content-oriented curricula to competence-based designs, increasingly shaped by professionalisation discourse, technology providers, and online learning platforms. His central warning is that if training is reduced to mastery of specific tools, it risks becoming a form of "formatting" that produces quickly obsolescent operators rather than critically minded professionals. Gambier's historical reminder that early MT and AI were driven by military and intelligence interests, rather than neutral innovation, is particularly valuable at a time when university programmes are under pressure to align with university industry partners. By asking who funds current MT and AI research, and to what ends, he invites trainers to embed critical reflection on technology into curricula, rather than treating tools as neutral add-ons. He also discusses the diversification of translation practices and labels, i.e. localisation, transcreation, crowdsourcing, fan translation, and the resulting instability of professional identities and status signals. His critique of Translation Studies itself, as both "indisciplined" and embedded in neoliberal university structures, extends the notion of "blind spots" to research practices and ethics. The chapter's strength lies in this wide, historically informed sweep and in its insistence on linking technology, power, and pedagogy. At the same time, the breadth comes at a cost: concrete, classroom-level implications are sketched only in general terms, leaving readers to translate these insights into specific teaching interventions. Some trainers may find this macro-level critique slightly detached from their day-to-day curricular decisions, although it clearly sets the tone for the volume's more applied contributions.

From this broad vantage point, in Chapter 3, "Show me the money", Callum Walker and Joseph Lambert narrow the focus to one specific "blind spot": money, rates, and financial sustainability. Their chapter

begins from the contrast between translators' repeated reports of low pay and the often-cited growth of the language services industry. They argue that translator trainers inevitably shape norms and expectations around remuneration and ambition, whether they acknowledge it or not, and that failing to explicitly address financial topics effectively leaves students to absorb "poverty cults" and fatalistic attitudes about low rates. Their review of 31 Master's programmes in the UK and Ireland shows that explicit treatment of rates, pricing, or remuneration is rare and usually confined to a few lectures within broader "professional skills" modules. Students instead rely on fragmented advice from guest speakers, online forums, and association surveys, which tends to produce a vague sense of "standard" per-word rates rather than a critical engagement with pricing models, market segmentation, or risk. Walker and Lambert's concrete suggestions, such as embedding rate-setting scenarios in industry skills modules, addressing pricing in technology courses when discussing MT and TM discounts, integrating financial literacy in simulated bureaus and case studies, are one of the volume's most immediately applicable contributions. The main limitation here is scope: the analysis is based on UK and Irish programmes and on English-language markets, which raises questions about how well these findings translate to other regions or to language pairs with very different economic structures. Nonetheless, the underlying argument that "teaching money" should be part of professional competence, not an optional extra, has clear resonance beyond the contexts studied.

In Luz Belenguer Cortés's Chapter 4 on French–Spanish service-learning, "From the classroom to the lab: data extraction, analysis, and discussion", the "outside" world enters the classroom via MIGPRO, a pilot project in collaboration with the Red Cross in Castellón. Undergraduate French students produce glossaries and Spanish-as-a-second-language materials to support French-speaking migrants' everyday communication. Survey data suggest that MIGPRO enhances motivation and awareness of real communicative needs, and the fact that all students chose to complete both possible assignments hints at a high level of engagement. However, the study remains small-scale and heavily context-bound, and its exploratory nature is openly acknowledged. A more systematic comparison with "traditional" coursework or more detailed evidence on the quality and uptake of the students' materials in the migrant community would have allowed for stronger claims. Even so, the chapter makes a persuasive case for the value of service-learning in bridging the academic–professional divide, provided that institutional structures (timetabling, assessment, partnerships) can support such initiatives.

Peter J. Freeth's Chapter 5 on race and ethics, "Back to the classroom: conclusions, main applications, and cost-benefit", takes the case of the Dutch translation of Amanda Gorman's poem as a lens through which to examine how issues of representation and structural inequality can be addressed in the classroom. Freeth carefully reconstructs the original Dutch debate, led by Black spoken-word artists and activists, around the choice of a white, acclaimed author as translator, and contrasts it with the way international media reframed the story as a more generic "who may translate whom?" controversy, often casting white translators as victims of "cancel culture". He then describes how he integrated this case into a German–English literary translation class, pairing it with a text by a Black German author to open up discussion of race, representation, and ethics grounded in students' own translation decisions. The self-reflexive discussion of his positionality as a white British lecturer in a largely white UK institution, and of the risks of relying on a single high-profile case, is one of the chapter's key strengths. He also raises important practical questions: how to avoid over-burdening students of colour, how to move beyond English-language media accounts by engaging with Dutch-language sources (with MT support if needed), and how to integrate race-related topics across curricula rather than relegating them to isolated sessions. At the same time, the focus on the Gorman controversy, while understandable given its prominence, may inadvertently reinforce the centrality of Anglophone media logics that the chapter itself critiques. Readers working in other linguistic and racialised contexts might have appreciated a broader set of examples or a more explicit discussion of how to adapt this kind of pedagogy when such headline controversies are absent or less visible.

Finally in Chapter 6, "Assessing terminology and phraseology in specialized translation pedagogy using TranslationQ", Maria Teresa Musacchio and Carla Quinci explore the use of *TranslationQ*, a computer-assisted revision (CAR) tool with a "revision memory" function, in specialised English–Italian translation teaching. Working with astronomy texts in a first-year MA Specialized Translation course, they use the tool's error-annotated segments to investigate how students handle terminology and phraseology. Their analysis shows that a relatively small set of source terms and collocations attracts a high concentration of errors, often due to overreliance on calques, insufficient domain knowledge, and limited use of corpus-based resources. The chapter is methodologically careful: it explains in detail how the revision memory is populated, how error categories were adapted from T&I industry standards to an educational setting, and how data were extracted

and interpreted at the level of cohorts and individual source items. It convincingly demonstrates that a tool originally designed for industry can be repurposed to generate an "error corpus" that supports diagnosis and targeted teaching. The drawbacks are also acknowledged: building a useful revision memory is labour-intensive and the current tool architecture makes some kinds of filtering cumbersome. Since the analysis discusses a case study is tied to a single institution, language pair, and domain, other aspects can affect the use of CAR. For instance,for programmes with fewer resources or different technological ecosystems, the barrier to entry may be high. Nonetheless, as a proof of concept for CAR-supported pedagogy in specialised translation, the chapter is one of the volume's more substantial empirical contributions.

4. Collaborative pedagogies and simulations (Part II)

Part II turns to collaborative, project-based approaches. In Chapter 7, "Evaluating project-based learning in translation classrooms: a case study", Xijinyan Chen *et al.* present a quasi-experimental, mixed-methods study of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in an online two-week workshop where Chinese students translate authentic school documents for a US district. The workshop combines group translation, rotating roles (translator, editor, project manager, client), synchronous sessions on professional skills, and interviews with end-users (parents, teachers). Pre- and post-workshop questionnaires, drawing on established problem-solving and teamwork scales, show statistically significant gains in students' self-reported problem-solving and teamwork awareness. Qualitative reflections reveal a shift away from reliance on MT and single dictionaries towards more systematic research strategies, and an increased appreciation of translation as collaborative, client-facing work. The authors are commendably transparent about limitations: absence of a control group, small and self-selected sample, short duration, and substantial workload for instructors (up to twelve hours a day during the workshop), as well as a relatively high drop-out rate. The chapter thus presents the workshop as a promising but resource-intensive model that needs careful adaptation if it is to be sustainable in regular curricula.

In Chapter 8, "Newcastle Calls", by Barbara Guidarelli, D. Carole Moore and Cristina Peligra, project-based learning is anchored in subtitling and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Italian language and translation students conduct video interviews with Italian-speaking experts and then, in extracurricular workshops, produce bilingual subtitles using Aegisub. A Film Studies student edits the final documentaries. Over three iterations, the project is refined: subtitling training is recorded, workshop structures adjusted, and the number and composition of student teams tweaked. Student feedback indicates that participants valued gaining concrete subtitling experience, working with professional software, and being paid for their work under real deadlines. The project is also credited with helping to "fill the gap" between a one-year MA and the experience expected by employers, and has already influenced programme design at Newcastle by justifying the introduction of subtitling in BA assessment and planned MA training. Here too, one element that may constrain the generalizability of the findings is that participation is voluntary and limited to small groups, and the project relies on specific institutional resources (technical support, funding for student pay, access to suitable interviewees). The cross-disciplinary collaboration with Film Studies is mediated rather than fully integrated, with lecturers acting as intermediaries between subtitlers and editor. Nevertheless, the chapter offers a realistic and inspiring example of how professional simulations can be designed incrementally, with feedback loops built in.

JC Penet's Chapter 9, "Coaching in translator education", adds an affective and emotional dimension to collaborative pedagogy. Taking Simulated Translation Bureaus (STBs) as a starting point, the author argues that such "authentic" learning environments can generate intense stress and negative emotions, which, if left unaddressed, risk undermining engagement and well-being. Drawing on Trait Emotional Intelligence theory, Penet tests whether group coaching sessions can support students in recognising and managing emotions during STBs. Quantitatively, the results are modest: small matched samples across two universities and one STB cycle do not yield statistically significant gains in stress management, self-motivation, or global trait EI (emotional intelligence), though there are indications of increased empathy among the coached group and decreased empathy among the uncoached group. Qualitative data from focus groups suggest that the intervention did not reduce stress as such, but fostered a heightened awareness of one's own and others' emotional states, with students reporting more empathetic interpretations of conflicts and a greater willingness to consider peers' pressure. The chapter's main contribution, then, is less about demonstrating measurable EI gains and more about foregrounding the need to treat emotions and empathy as legitimate components of translator's competence. One might wish for a larger-scale follow-up study, but as an initial

exploration and a set of practical ideas (e.g. "silent coaching" tools, values-based exercises) it complements the more task-focused contributions in this section.

Returning to cross-border collaboration, in Chapter 10, "New prospects for international telecollaboration in translation training", Martin Ward and Shani Tobias examine an international telecollaborative activity between MA-level Japanese–English translation classes at Leeds and Monash. Mixed groups translate a popular science text and prepare a joint presentation, working synchronously via Zoom and asynchronously via shared platforms, under significant time-zone constraints and with uneven experience levels between cohorts. Pre-activity interviews show that students anticipate challenges around time zones, knowledge gaps, and differing workflows, but also hope to build teamwork, communication, and revision skills. Post-activity interviews and survey data indicate that these expectations are largely met: students report gains in adaptability, project management, peer learning (especially for the less experienced Leeds cohort), and intercultural awareness. The authors use these findings to argue that international telecollaboration remains underused in translator training, despite its resonance with current professional realities. They also highlight the importance of explicit scaffolding (discussing likely challenges, clarifying expectations, guiding tool use) to prevent telecollaboration from becoming an overwhelming burden. While the case is compelling, it is worth noting that the study involves a relatively small cohort, a specific language pair, and partner institutions with existing links; scaling such telecollaborations more widely would require substantial coordination and sustained institutional commitment.

5. Trainee perspectives on pandemic-era learning and mobility (Part III)

The final part of the book foregrounds students' perceptions of pandemic-era teaching. José Ramón Calvo-Ferrer's Chapter 11, "How Covid-19 reshaped perceptions of translator training", presents an exploratory survey of 92 Translation and Interpreting undergraduates at the University of Alicante, examining how the forced switch to online teaching during COVID-19 reshaped their views on teaching methodologies. Quantitative results show that face-to-face teaching remains both the preferred and, for many, the "best" mode for translation training, associated with immediacy, interaction, and collaborative dynamics. At the same time, nearly half of respondents rate blended learning as the most effective approach, acknowledging the pedagogical potential of combining in-person and online sessions. Factor analysis identifies five clusters of perceptions, with "perceptions of online tuition and its impact on learning" emerging as the strongest predictor of both preferred and ideal methodologies: students with more positive online experiences are more open to non-traditional models and more inclined to view translation as a solitary activity, whereas those whose appreciation for face-to-face teaching increased during the pandemic are less likely to favour online or blended formats. The study is clearly presented and methodologically solid for an exploratory design (reliability checks, factor and regression analyses). A few contextual constraints also emerge: a single institution, reliance on self-report, and lack of complementary qualitative data beyond the questionnaire. Nonetheless, it offers a useful grounded picture of how COVID-19 has recalibrated, rather than revolutionised, students' expectations: face-to-face teaching retains primacy, but blended approaches have gained legitimacy.

In the closing chapter, "Studying translation abroad", Yu Hao addresses a related but distinct issue: why did Chinese students choose to study translation and interpreting at an Australian university during and after the pandemic, and how did online vs. on-campus study affect their experience? Using a bilingual Qualtrics survey with 62 students and recent graduates, the study applies a push–pull framework to twenty motivational items grouped into push factors (home-country conditions), pull factors (host-country/institution attractions), and translation-specific factors. Results show that pull factors are dominant. High-quality education, institutional prestige, the desire to travel and "see the world", to socialise with people from diverse backgrounds, and to gain overseas career opportunities all rank higher than push factors such as job-search difficulties or dissatisfaction with the home country's "social atmosphere". Discipline-specific motives (a strong prior commitment to translation as a profession) rank lowest, although a substantial minority of respondents do express a desire to become translators or interpreters. Hao's chapter is theoretically well-anchored in migration and higher-education research and offers one of the more fine-grained looks at international translation students' motivations and trajectories. Again, the focus on a single programme and on Chinese students limits generalisability, but the analysis raises broader questions about how translator-training programmes should respond to heterogeneous motivations and career aspirations, rather than assuming a homogeneous cohort of future full-time translators.

6. Audience and overall appraisal

This book will be especially useful to translator trainers, programme directors, and curriculum designers in higher education, particularly those working in MA-level T&I programmes. The volume offers a mix of conceptual critique (Gambier), reflective praxis (Freeth, Penet), and empirically grounded interventions (Musacchio & Quinci; Chen et al.; Guidarelli et al.; Ward & Tobias; Calvo-Ferrer; Hao), all written in a style accessible to practitioners who may not consider themselves primarily researchers. The collection's main strengths lie in:

- its explicit engagement with long-neglected topics such as money, rates, and financial sustainability;
- its sustained attention to students' emotional experiences and voices;
- and the detailed, "warts-and-all" descriptions of collaborative and project-based initiatives that readers can realistically adapt rather than idealise.

However, the volume is also uneven: some chapters are tightly theorised and methodologically robust, while others remain more anecdotal or descriptive; geographical coverage is narrow, with little representation of training contexts beyond Europe, Australia, and Chinese outbound mobility; and structural issues such as precarity, platformisation, and the political economy of language service work are touched upon in a few contributions but not developed across the collection.

Despite these considerations, the book succeeds in its core aim, that is, to offer a rich repertoire of practices and critical reflections that can help align translator education with contemporary professional realities without 'surrendering' to a purely instrumental or tool-driven model. Its most compelling message is that teaching translation in the 2020s requires not only updated technologies and collaborative formats, but also honest conversations about money, sustained engagement with ethics and race, and an acknowledgement of the diverse motivations and emotional lives of students.

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