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The effects of an experimental approach to writing instruction on monolingual and multilingual pupils in Italian primary schools

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ABSTRACT

EN This article reports on the results of an action-research project in Italian primary schools. Its main principles are formative evaluation, a process orientation to writing, cooperative learning, and an inclusive approach that does not separate pupils according to their linguistic or writing skills. Pupils aged eight to eleven years old participated in the study in seven experimental (N = 106) and seven control classes (N = 118). Their texts were examined both holistically, through scales of communicative effectiveness, and by means of analytical measurements. The comparison of monolingual and multilingual pupils in both experimental and control classes shows a number of similarities in terms of textual competence, as well as a few differences, especially regarding the more linguistic aspects of writing, such as verb tense cohesion. A remarkable result is that students' text quality seems to depend more on their participation to the program than on their monolingual or multilingual status.

Key words: MULTILINGUAL PUPILS, L1/L2 WRITING, WRITING DEVELOPMENT, WRITING INSTRUCTION, PRIMARY SCHOOL

ES Este artículo informa los resultados de un proyecto de investigación-acción en escuelas primarias italianas. Sus principios más importantes son la evaluación formativa, una orientación al proceso de escritura, aprendizaje cooperativo y un enfoque inclusivo que no separa a los estudiantes según sus habilidades lingüísticas o de escritura. Los alumnos de entre ocho y once años participaron en el estudio en siete clases experimentales (N = 106) y siete clases control (N = 118). Sus textos se examinaron de manera holística por medio de escalas de efectividad comunicativa y mediciones analíticas. La comparación de alumnos monolingües y multilingües en las clases experimentales y de control muestra un número de similitudes en términos de competencia textual al igual que algunas diferencias, especialmente con respecto a los aspectos más lingüísticos de la escritura, como la cohesión del tiempo verbal. Un resultado notable muestra que participar en el programa tuvo un mayor impacto en la calidad del texto de los estudiantes que sus condiciones iniciales mono- o multilingüe.

Palabras clave: ALUMNOS MULTILINGÜES, ESCRITURA L1/L2, DESARROLLO DE ESCRITURA, INSTRUCCIÓN DE ESCRITURA, ESCUELA PRIMARIA

IT Questo articolo dà conto dei risultati di un progetto di ricerca-azione in scuole primarie italiane. I principi centrali sono la valutazione della formazione, l'orientamento al processo della scrittura, l'apprendimento cooperativo e l'approccio inclusivo che non separa gli/le apprendenti in base alle loro capacità linguistiche o di scrittura. A questo studio hanno partecipato apprendenti di età compresa tra gli 8 e gli 11 anni, in sette classi sperimentali (N = 106) e in sette classi di controllo (N = 118). I loro testi sono stati esaminati sia olisticamente attraverso scale di efficacia comunicativa, sia mediante misurazioni analitiche. Il confronto tra alunni monolingui e multilingui, sia nelle classi sperimentali sia in quelle di controllo, mostra una serie di similarità in termini di competenza testuale e anche alcune differenze, in particolare per quanto riguarda gli aspetti più linguistici della scrittura, come la coesione verbale. Un risultato importante mostra che la partecipazione al programma ha avuto un impatto maggiore sulla qualità del testo degli/delle apprendenti rispetto alle loro condizioni iniziali di monolingui o multilingui.

Parole chiave: APPRENDENTI MULTILINGUI, SCRITTURA L1/L2, SVILUPPO DELLA SCRITTURA, INSEGNAMENTO DELLA SCRITTURA, SCUOLA PRIMARIA

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1. Introduction

In the field of teacher education, literacy and second language acquisition (SLA) are often kept separate. In teaching practice too, actions aimed at improving writing skills and actions stimulating second (or additional) language acquisition are at times seen as complementary, but substantially distinct, based on different theoretical and methodological assumptions and approaches. This article reports the results of an action-research teacher-training project intended to help bridge these gaps, by adopting an approach to the teaching of writing that involves all students, regardless of whether they are using their first, second, or additional language. More specifically, the context of the study was a teacher-training initiative *Osservare l'interlingua* whose aim was to promote effective language education, with special emphasis on writing, at elementary and middle school levels.

Writing is a complex activity, involving several sub-skills (e.g., sorting through one's memory of the events/facts, organizing them, selecting appropriate language resources), which may be more or less developed in different people. This complexity is greater in multilingual speakers with variable control of different linguistic codes and their sub-domains, which in turn may be more or less implicated in written communication. Teachers need to be able to take apart and carefully analyze all these factors, in order to allow for them in their daily practices. In most cases, these daily practices should be directed at the whole class, rather than specific sub-groups made up of monolingual or multilingual students, or first or second language learners, with higher or lower writing skills. This article reports on a program that attempts to meet these objectives, and whose effectiveness will be assessed using a quasi-experimental research design.

Before proceeding with the exposition, some terminological clarification is in order. The term *second language* (or *L2*) has been repeatedly called into question in recent years. Firstly, in many cases the language at stake is not the *second* a person is acquiring, but often a third, fourth, or further language. This is why *additional language acquisition* has been proposed as a more correct replacement for second language acquisition, and *LX* as a more general term than L2 (Dewaele, 2017). As a consequence, many so-called *bilinguals* should actually be called *multilingual speakers*. This term *multilingual* also overcomes the limits of expressions such as *non-native speaker* or *L2 learner*, which imply some sort of deficit with respect to an idealized native speaker who is treated as the necessary benchmark of language performance (Cook, 1999). Secondly, the simple L1/L2 dichotomy does not apply to other groups of learners, such as so-called heritage speakers, i.e., children of immigrants who are either monolingual or dominant in the language of the family in early childhood, but progressively develop a balanced bilingualism or eventually become dominant in the majority language (Montrul, 2016).

This article adopts solely the distinction between monolingual and multilingual students (except when citing research that explicitly refers to "L2 acquisition" and "bilingualism"). This categorisation seems relatively descriptive and neutral: it does not require one to draw the problematic line between first and second language acquisition, or between native and non-native speakers, and it does not assume any deficit view of language learning and use, but rather describes a person's linguistic repertoire as being composed of one or more codes employed in everyday communication.[1]

2. Writing development and instruction: an overview

2.1. Writing in L1 and LX

The practices of L1 and LX writing have frequently been compared, both in terms of processes (i.e., the cognitive activities employed when writing) and in terms of products (the texts). Analysing the interaction of four cognitive activities implied in writing (reading the assignment, planning, generating ideas, and formulating), van Weijen (2009) concludes that the distribution of each activity is similar in both L1 and L2 writing. These results confirm many previous studies (Cumming, Rebuffot & Ledwell, 1989; Uzawa, 1996; for a review: Cumming, 2001). However, a consistent number of differences between L1 and LX cognitive activities have also been highlighted in text planning and revision, and in writing fluency (Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Hall, 1990; Stevenson, Schoonen, & de Glopper, 2006; van Waes & Leijten, 2015). This overall empirical evidence (e.g., Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2006; Silva, 1993) tends to converge into a general agreement that writing processes in L1 and LX are similar, even if "L2 composing is more constrained, more difficult, and less

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[1] The *multilingual* category does not include those children who only know a smattering of a foreign language taught at school in addition to their first language.

effective" (Silva, 1993, p. 668), mainly because LX writers need to concentrate on language forms as well as on content.

Contrasting conclusions have also been drawn from research which compares the linguistic properties of texts produced by L1 and LX writers. For example, Silva (1993) claims that L2 writers' texts contain fewer words, while Cameron and Besser (2004) point out that text length does not differ significantly, even if L2 writers tend to make lesser use of adverbials, which in turn reduces the amount of information they provide about the story (e.g., in terms of time, place and manner of the events).

Some research has also highlighted that LX writers employ a restricted repertoire of features (especially conjunctions and demonstrative pronouns) to give cohesion to their texts (Hinkel, 2001; see also: Oi, 1984 and Reid, 1988, both cited in Silva, 1993). However, less is known about how L1 and LX writers manage reference to entities, that is, which linguistic and discourse features they use to make the characters of their stories identifiable by the reader. While it has been claimed that L1 children learn to systematically use appropriate referent introductions from seven years onwards (Hickmann, 1995), little or no research has been conducted, to the best of our knowledge, on the developmental patterns of young LX writers, and one of the aims of the present article is to start filling this gap. Hendriks's (1998) study, comparing the written productions of adult LX learners with those of L1 children, may in fact be more informative in terms of the impact of age—rather than "native" status—on cohesion skills and/or preferences.

2.2. Research-based writing instruction

A considerable body of research has accumulated on the effectiveness of instruction on writing quality (e.g., Graham, Harris, & Santangelo, 2015; Rietdijk, Janssen, van Weijen, van den Bergh, & Rijlaarsdam, 2017), and meta-analyses are also available (e.g., Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016), some of which specifically focus on primary school children (Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, & Harris, 2012; Koster, Tribushinina, de Jong, & van den Bergh, 2015). These last authors identified a number of instructional practices that have systematically produced positive results with younger learners. These include:

- Teaching writing strategies for planning, drafting, or revising one's text, e.g., teaching pupils to organize ideas in writing plans and to use/upgrade the plan when writing (Tracy, Reid, & Graham, 2009).
- Assigning specific goals before and during the writing process, like asking students to add information about a specific fact/character, to divide the text into paragraphs, or, as Ferretti, Lewis, and Andrews-Weckerly (2009) have shown, to follow some given prompts when organising their argumentative discourse.
- Promoting group work and peer collaboration, as pupils plan, draft, and revise their text; see, for example, Brakel Olson (1990) about peer-to-peer support in revision.
- Teaching text structure explicitly, e.g., how narrative texts work in terms of story constituents and event sequences (Fitzgerald & Teasley, 1986).
- Providing teacher and peer-to-peer feedback during and after writing (e.g., Schunk & Swartz, 1993).

Not surprisingly, these research-based best practices in L1 writing instruction are also often mentioned in relation to LX writing. For example, Olson, Scarcella, and Matuchniak (2013) suggest that, in order to limit the effect of LX writers' *cognitive constraints*, educators should focus on the teaching of strategies which help students set intermediate goals and thus manage the complexity of the writing process. Moreover, LX collaborative writing and peer-to-peer feedback are often advocated (Storch, 2013), as well as genre pedagogy (Hyland, 2007).

However, research to date on the (differential) effects of pedagogical interventions on monolingual and multilingual pupils' writing remains scant. This is one of the motivations behind this study, whose pedagogical approach largely draws on the works briefly reviewed in this section.

3. The study
3.1. Research questions

The following research questions were formulated in order to investigate the outcomes of an inclusive writing program on monolingual and multilingual learners:

- RQ1. In a primary school context, what are the effects on the whole class of a long-term pedagogical intervention based on the process approach to writing, formative assessment, and cooperative learning?
- RQ2. If there are any effects, do they differ for monolingual and multilingual pupils?
- RQ3. What are the differences between monolingual and multilingual pupils in control classes as regards writing skills?

3.2. The project

The project *Osservare l'interlingua*, promoted by the Reggio Emilia municipality together with the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia (interlingua.comune.re.it; Pallotti, 2010, 2017a, 2017b; Pallotti & Rosi, 2017) started in Reggio Emilia (Italy) in 2007. It involves 12 elementary and 3 middle schools, 28 teachers and 35 classes, for a total of about 650 pupils aged between 6 and 14 (Grades 1 to 8). While, at the beginning, it was meant to address issues of LX Italian learning, today it is directed toward all the pupils in class, with an inclusive approach involving monolingual and multilingual students with varying proficiency levels.

The project is both a teacher training and action-research initiative, with teachers actively involved in several ways. Its main tenet is that effective teaching practices should be grounded in the careful observation of students' needs, competences, and learning strategies. Thus, teachers are first of all trained to conduct systematic analyses of their pupils' oral and written productions, in line with the interlanguage approach (Pallotti, 2017b; Selinker, 1972). This is a kind of formative assessment that aims to overcome the traditional stance of "hunting for errors" and to allow teachers to developing the activities that best suit the needs of their class. It also promotes the learners' autonomy, since they are not seen as passive recipients of knowledge that has been elaborated elsewhere, but rather as active creators of their own learning. This orientation, and the ability to analyze children's texts accordingly, takes some time to develop. It begins with pre-service training for some of the younger teachers, while others often acknowledge that it took them some years to get used to looking at pupils' productions in positive terms through recognizing their strategies and developments, rather than just spotting errors. This is why text-analysis sessions are periodically held (about once a year) as part of the teachers' permanent training; in these sessions, more and less experienced participants assist each other in building their formative analytic skills.

Teachers also actively take part in planning pedagogical actions. At the beginning of each school year, the texts produced by pupils are analysed by the group of teachers and researchers. Considering the properties of the texts and thus the needs of each class, the group of teachers defines a common theme (e.g., narrative, expository, descriptive texts) to be pursued by all participants in their classes and they agree on common core activities. Then, each teacher introduces the due adaptations according to age and overall proficiency level of their pupils, receiving guidance from the researchers. The group of teachers and university researchers meets approximately every two months throughout the entire school year, so that planned activities can be monitored, discussed, and possibly revised.

The project as a whole promotes a process approach to teaching writing (e.g., White & Arndt, 1991), according to which teaching activities guide the pupils to experience and progressively acquire the stages implied in text production: generating and organizing ideas, writing the initial draft, revising, and editing. Most of these activities are carried out in a cooperative manner, in small and large groups (following Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Storch, 2013), and, in line with socio-cultural approaches, they encourage the semiotic mediation of thought by making the writing process more concrete through the use of artefacts such as boxes, envelopes, paper strips, and posters (following Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006). Feedback, too, is primarily provided by the students, as the program particularly encourages peer-to-peer response, both within the members of the group and among groups (following Andrade & Evans, 2013). In line with the interlanguage approach, this feedback is not summative (no grades are assigned, by either teachers or students), but formative, as it focuses on pupils' strengths and weaknesses, analyses their strategies, and suggests ways of developing their skills.

Teachers are actively involved in data collection, too, which is usually carried out at the beginning and end of every school year, in relatively controlled and standardized conditions (that are nonetheless absolutely natural for a classroom setting—no laboratory experiments, in other words), so as to allow for comparisons over time and across pupils and classes. This data is kept by schools as a portfolio of pupils' linguistic development over the years, qualitatively analyzed by the teachers, and also used by researchers

(and some pre-service-training students as part of their master's thesis) for subsequent quantitative analyses, such as the kind reported in this article.

3.3. The pedagogical intervention (experimental classes)

In the course of the 2013-2014 school year, when data collection for this study took place, the pedagogical intervention carried out in most classes was aimed at developing the pupils' writing skills as applied to narrative texts.

Although the seven classes had slightly different needs and were thus engaged with partially diverse tasks, all of them were involved in the following core activities:[2]

1) Students wrote individual texts after watching, twice, a video clip of a few minutes taken from *Modern Times* by Charlie Chaplin. This served to collect baseline data to assess students' progress over the school year and to fine-tune teaching activities based on their competences and needs.
2) In groups, the students viewed the initial video clip again, identified the main sequences of the story (primary information units), and labelled them with short descriptions written on paper envelopes or cardboard boxes.
3) The groups watched the video once more and gathered additional information about characters, actions, etc. (secondary information units), which they noted on paper strips to be placed in the envelopes/boxes.
4) In their groups, pupils glued the strips on big sheets of paper, deciding on the order to best convey the story of the video clip. This procedure led to the text outline. Since a main objective of the program was to promote a better organization of texts, special emphasis was placed on the need to cluster similar strips of information together, in order to facilitate the following segmentation of the text into paragraphs.
5) The groups produced the first versions of their texts, based on the video clip they had worked on in the first four steps.
6) The texts were then circulated among groups, who had been previously instructed on how to make a peer-to-peer revision based on explicit and shared criteria (e.g., clarity, lexical choices, spelling). It is worth noting that a number of aspects of writing, such as verb tense cohesion and punctuation, were addressed within this phase merely by asking pupils to take them into consideration in the reviewing process. These topics did not receive significant attention within the other activities.
7) Each group reviewed their own text, taking into account the comments of the other groups. They then rewrote it, after having to decide which suggestions for improvement they wanted to accept.
8) Teachers guided a class debriefing on the experience and stimulated meta-cognitive reflections on how to produce good narrative texts.
9) At the end of the school year, teachers used an additional video stimulus taken from *World of Comedy* by Harold Lloyd to collect a second round of individual texts. This video was different from the first one, in order to assess the transferability of skills across tasks, although the two inputs had some similar characteristics (e.g., number of main characters, plot complexity, duration) and were administered in identical conditions.

In terms of White & Arndt's (1991) process approach to writing, Steps 2 and 3 correspond to the stages of *Generating ideas* and *Focusing*; Step 4 corresponds to *Text Structuring*, and step 5 to *Drafting*. The processes of *Evaluating* and *Re-viewing* were covered in Steps 6 and 7.

The activities above were just a part of the experimental classes' syllabus, accounting for approximately two hours a week of class time over the entire school year. The project involved all classes, from Grades 1 to 5. Obviously, activities for the first two grades were simplified and involved much less writing, but they still followed the general orientation of engaging with different phases of the writing process one by one. Given that the data discussed in the following pages come from Grades 3-5, no further details on the first two grade levels are offered here: for more information about the teaching phases and

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[2] All texts are translated from Italian. Originals are available on the author's website: http://www.gabrielepallotti.it. Concerning translations, when the morpho-syntactic and orthographic mistakes made by the pupils did not have any straightforward equivalent in English, similar types of errors were introduced in order to give a better sense of the overall writing quality.

methods and the variations introduced in different classes and age levels, see Pallotti (2017a, 2017b), Pallotti & Rosi (2017) and the project website (interlingua.comune.re.it).

3.4. Data collection

To evaluate the effectiveness of the training program, individual texts were collected in seven experimental and seven control classes, Grades 3-5 (ages 8-11), at the beginning and end of the school year. Most experimental classes had been participating in the project since Grade 1, so that at the time of data collection they had already been performing these types of activities for two, three, or four years. Pupils in control classes at the beginning and end of the school year wrote their texts under exactly the same conditions as their peers in the experimental classes (i.e., They watched the two video clips by Chaplin and Lloyd twice) and were given the same generic assignment (i.e., Describe the video to a teacher who has not seen it), with no directions about text planning and writing and no time limit to accomplish the task. Control classes followed a rather regular language education curriculum (for Italy), in which writing activities mainly consisted in composing short essays or narrative texts, training in orthography and grammar, or answering comprehension questions after reading. Little or no attention was devoted to individual phases of the writing process, no artefacts were used as semiotic mediators for higher-order cognitive functions like text planning and revision, and most writing activities had no real communicative intent but were conceived as exercises to be assessed by teachers, who were the only feedback providers.

Although great care was taken to ensure that control classes paralleled experimental classes as much as possible, the correspondence was not perfect, as is often the case with quasi-experimental studies. Control classes came from the same schools or areas of the city as the experimental ones and they had a comparable number of pupils per class. However, their demographic composition differed from multilingual classes, as shown in Table 1. Experimental classes had more multilingual children, over one third of whom were not born in Italy and had spent an average of just two years in the country. Control classes had fewer multilingual pupils, less than one fifth of them were not born in Italy and the average length of residence in Italy for these children was longer than in experimental classes.

Table 1
Group composition

	Control	Experimental
Sample size	118	106
% multilingual pupils in entire class	24%	36%
% multilingual pupils not born in Italy among all multilingual pupils	18%	38%
Mean period of residency in Italy for multilingual pupils born abroad	3.6 yrs	2.1 yrs

A second difference concerns the scores at the beginning of the school year, which, for several dimensions discussed in this article, were higher in experimental classes. While this may be seen as unfortunate from a strictly scientific point of view, from a pedagogical perspective this difference is quite positive, since it seems to indicate that classes taking part in the experimental program from first grade gradually accrue an advantage that sets them apart from those not involved in the program. This assumption is substantiated by the fact that, for most measurements, the initial gap between experimental and control classes was lower in the third grade and higher in the fourth and fifth grades—that is, the gap grew larger in parallel to a longer participation in the project. Furthermore, the experimental group's higher scores at the beginning of the school year cannot be ascribed to the fact that these pupils came from privileged socio-cultural environments; on the contrary, most experimental classes were located in somewhat disadvantaged areas of the city.

Given this difference in initial scores, this article focuses on final results only, as a way of comparing the program's effects accrued after three, four, or five years. In other words, it seems more appropriate to assess the cumulative effects of the experimental program (which began in first grade for all experimental classes), rather than discussing the gains obtained by the pupils from the beginning to the end of just one school year.

3.5. Data analysis

Handwritten texts were first transcribed and assigned arbitrary codes that did not allow raters and coders to know whether they came from experimental or control classes, or whether they were the work of monolingual or multilingual students, to avoid any possible bias in the procedures requiring a qualitative evaluation. Pupils diagnosed with cognitive or linguistic impairment, or who did not attend the initial or final data collection sessions, were excluded from the analysis, which was thus based on 106 participants in experimental classes and 118 in control classes. Finally, scripts were examined both holistically and by means of analytic measurements.

Holistic examination was carried out using scales to rate overall communicative effectiveness. In particular, functional adequacy was rated with three scales slightly adapted from Kuiken and Vedder (2017), while a scale taken from the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001) was used for assessing text coherence and cohesion. The scales are reported in Appendix A. In order to assess inter-rater reliability, 10% of the scripts were rated on the four scales by two independent researchers, who showed a substantial level of agreement: the average Intraclass correlation coefficient (two-way mixed effects model) was .85. A series of features was then considered for the analytical measurement of text properties, covering the dimensions outlined below.

3.5.1. Content

This dimension was assessed by looking at text length, measured by the number of words produced and by counting the number of primary and secondary idea units. Similar to other studies (e.g., Boscolo, Arfé, & Quarisa, 2007), these were agreed upon by the whole research team, who produced a list of five main information units, representing the story's key sequences, and 43 secondary units, representing specific events in the story plot.

3.5.2. Text organization

This dimension refers to the pupils' ability to effectively divide and organize their text into thematic and syntactic blocks. It is evaluated firstly by counting the number of paragraphs, and their correlated measure, the number of words per paragraph. Paragraphing is normally not taught in Italian schools, so that pupils often end up writing texts in just one single long block. Our pedagogic intervention explicitly focused on this skill, because it was considered closely related to planning the text in several thematic units.

At a different level of textual organization, the comma serves to divide syntactic units, and its appropriate use is rarely taught in Italian schools, where it is often simplistically explained as a way of marking pauses and intonation or to separate items in a list. Pupils are introduced to this punctuation mark between Grades 2 and 3 and they soon start using it, initially in a few prototypical contexts, such as lists. Gradually, its usage is expanded to express more sophisticated meanings, like differentiating levels of text organization or signalling discourse structure, but this comes with a higher risk of making mistakes, which persist throughout middle and high school with pupils rarely being completely aware of their nature (Solarino, 2009). Thus, a higher number of commas may be taken as an indicator of pupils' willingness to experiment with this important but challenging and often misunderstood punctuation mark. However, a greater use of the comma should not be automatically interpreted as an indicator of better text quality. This is why the proportion of inappropriate commas to all commas used was measured, too. Omissions were intentionally not counted, since establishing when a comma is "missing" is often a matter of discretion. Another indicator of a good command of punctuation is the ratio of inappropriate uses of the period. However, the number of periods per 100 words was not considered to be a clearly interpretable measure: on the one hand, it may signal a desirable feature, that is a higher degree of text segmentation and avoidance of run-on sentences; on the other, it may imply a very paratactic style, with lots of simple, telegraphic sentences, which do not necessarily contribute to text quality.

3.5.3. Reference to entities

Managing reference to entities in discourse is a notoriously difficult task for young learners, and sometimes for adult speakers and writers as well (Giuliano, 2007; Hendriks, 1998; Hickmann, 1995). An entity can be *introduced*, upon its first mention, and then *maintained* in the following clauses. This referential chain can be interrupted with the introduction of new entities, but the original entity can be later on *reintroduced* in the text. In the following Fictive Text (1), introductions are indicated by (I), maintenances by

(M), and reintroductions by (R). Coding and analysis were conducted on animate entities only, as they are a key element in plot progression and thus play a central role in narrative texts.

Fictive Text (1)
___

There was a boy(I) who went to the park. He(M) was very shy and Ø(M) had very few friends. An old man(I) came to the park and Ø(M) took out a worn-out kite. He(M) looked a bit lonesome, too. The boy(R) asked him(M) if they(M) could play together

Normally, entities are introduced by lexical noun phrases with indefinite determiners (*a boy, an old man*), they are maintained by pronouns or zero anaphora (*he, Ø, him*) and are re-introduced by lexical noun phrases with definite determiners (*the boy*). A common feature of young children's speech and writing is that entities are often introduced with definite determiners, so that, in the example above, the first sentence could have been something like, *The boy went to the park*. These introductions may be called inappropriate, as they indicate that their author improperly assumes the referent is accessible to the hearer/reader. However, although they may sound childish or slightly egocentric, they do not compromise communication and the meaning remains clear. In this article, however, these phenomena will not be discussed (for further discussion on this aspect, see Pallotti, Borghetti, & Rosi, in preparation).

What will be focused on here are ambiguous references that prevent the receiver from correctly interpreting their meaning. If the text above had begun, *He went to the park*, this would have been counted as an ambiguous introduction. Likewise, if the last sentence had been, *He asked him if they could play together,* it would have been impossible to establish who was asking whom. Only by knowing the intended meaning (which is possible, for instance, when pupils are retelling a film or a picture story) can one score the first *he* as an ambiguous reintroduction and the immediately following *him* in this sentence as an ambiguous maintenance.

3.5.4. Verb tense cohesion

Another common feature of young children's language is the frequent shifting of verb tenses in the same narrative (Kersten, 2009), as in sentences like: *Then he starts skating and she went to bed.* A verb shift is defined as a change of verb tense that is not justified for textual reasons, such as the move from the description of background states to the narration of events in the plot, or from indirect to direct speech. The operational definition of all these categories was set out in a detailed coding manual, which provided specific examples for each phenomenon, including possible counterexamples and borderline cases.

As regards the statistical procedures employed in the analysis, given that the study was a quasi-experimental investigation of intact classes and that initial levels were not homogenous for several dimensions, Welch t-tests for independent samples were employed to compare the averages of experimental and control classes at the end of the school year. According to Fagerland and Sandvik (2009), this test is best suited for samples like ours, which consist in about 100 cases, normally distributed or moderately skewed, with similar but not identical variances. For holistic assessment data, whose distributions were substantially normal, t-tests without Welch correction were used, since they are more appropriate for Likert-like data, with many tied ranks (de Winter & Dodou, 2010).

4. Results

This section reports on the main results regarding program effectiveness at the end of the school year. Tables include the mean and standard deviation, the 95% confidence interval for the estimation of the difference between the means of experimental and control classes, Cohen's *d* effect size, calculated as the ratio between the difference between means and the standard deviation of the control group, and the t-test's two-tailed *p* values. Results will be reported firstly for entire classes, then for monolingual and multilingual sub-groups.

4.1. Holistic assessment

At the end of the school year, text assessment through rating scales showed very positive results for the experimental classes as a whole. Their compositions were perceived as being richer in terms of content and more coherent and cohesive, both considering Kuiken and Vedder's (2017) scale and for the Common

European Framework scale (Council of Europe, 2001) with rather large effect sizes of between 0.61 and 0.78. They were also more comprehensible, with a smaller but still statistically significant difference ($d = 0.36$).

This trend is also confirmed for multilingual pupils, who wrote more complete, coherent, and cohesive texts than their control peers, although differences were less marked (d between 0.39 and 0.53) and even smaller when compared to monolingual students in control classes (d between 0.02 and 0.18). Multilingual pupils in experimental classes scored slightly lower ($M = 3.24$) than multilingual and monolingual peers ($M = 3.41$) in control classes only with regards to text comprehensibility however the difference is not significant. Monolingual pupils in experimental classes largely outperformed their monolingual peers in control classes in all dimensions. These overall results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Overview of results from holistic assessment

	Control Group Mean (SD)	Experimental Group Mean (SD)	95% CI of the difference between means	Cohen's *d*	*p*
Content (1-6)	3.39 (1.13)	4.09 (1.06)	0.39 - 0.99	0.61	< .0001
Monolingual pupils	3.46 (1.19)	4.32 (1.07)	0.50 - 1.22	0.72	< .0001
Multilingual pupils	3.19 (0.92)	3.68 (1.08)	−0.99 - 0.01	0.53	(ns)
Comprehensibility (1-6)	3.53 (0.93)	3.86 (1.01)	0.07 - 0.60	0.36	< .0001
Monolingual pupils	3.56 (0.95)	4.21 (0.87)	0.36 - 0.94	0.68	< .0001
Multilingual pupils	3.41 (0.89)	3.24 (0.98)	−0.30 - 0.64	-0.18	ns
Coherence-Cohesion KV (1-6)	2.89 (0.81)	3.47 (1.04)	0.33 - 0.82	0.72	< .0001
Monolingual pupils	2.95 (0.82)	3.74 (0.92)	0.50 - 1.07	0.96	< .0001
Multilingual pupils	2.65 (0.73)	2.97 (1.01)	−0.74 - 0.13	0.42	ns
Coherence-Cohesion CEF (1-8)	3.25 (1.32)	4.27 (1.40)	0.66 - 1.39	0.78	< .0001
Monolingual pupils	3.33 (1.31)	4.71 (1.25)	0.97 - 1.79	1.05	< .0001
Multilingual pupils	2.96 (1.34)	3.49 (1.39)	−1.21 - 0.17	0.39	ns

Note. KV = rating scale by Kuiken and Vedder (2017); CEF = rating scale of the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001, 2017).

4.2. Content

We now turn to analytical measures of text quality. The texts produced in experimental classes are much longer than those of control classes, with an average of 243.84 words versus 177.93; they also contain more secondary information units (22.56 vs. 17.81) and thus provide a more detailed and rich content, with considerable effect sizes (0.83 and 0.78, respectively). The difference is smaller, but still statistically significant, as regards main idea units (4.79 vs 4.60), since most pupils, in both experimental and control classes, were able to mention all or almost all of them.

The trends identified at the entire-class level are also confirmed by multilingual pupils in experimental classes, who write longer texts than multilingual students in the control group. Interestingly, their productions are just slightly shorter than those of their monolingual peers in experimental classes, and considerably longer than the texts written by monolingual pupils in the control group.

This greater text length reflects the number of primary and secondary information units. The number of units is higher among the multilingual students in the experimental group than in both monolingual and multilingual controls. Similar to the results discussed in the previous section, the pupils in the experimental groups who demonstrate the greatest advantage over their counterparts in the control groups are the monolingual students (see Table 3).

Table 3
Content (analytic measures)

	Control Group Mean (SD)	Experimental Group Mean (SD)	95% CI of the difference between means	Cohen's *d*	*p*
Words	177.93 (79.12)	243.84 (96.67)	41.82 - 90.00	0.83	< .0001
Monolingual pupils	170.09 (69.04)	258.95 (97.00)	61.03 - 116.70	1.29	< .0001
Multilingual pupils	203.19 (102.83)	216.89 (96.76)	−64.60 - 37.19	*0.13*	ns
Main idea units (0-5)	4.60 (0.65)	4.79 (0.41)	0.04 - 0.34	0.29	< .05
Monolingual pupils	4.61 (0.64)	4.82 (0.46)	0.034 - 0.38	0.33	< .05
Multilingual pupils	4.56 (0.70)	4.73 (0.51)	−0.49 - 0.14	0.25	ns
Secondary idea units (0-43)	17.81 (6.12)	22.56 (6.13)	3.06 - 6.45	0.78	< .0001
Monolingual pupils	17.41 (5.81)	23.30 (6.34)	3.91 - 7.86	1.01	< .0001
Multilingual pupils	19.07(7.00)	21.24 (6.68)	−5.65 - 1.32	*0.31*	ns

4.3. Text organization

Students in experimental classes started new paragraphs more frequently than those in control classes, with an average of 5.32 paragraphs per text versus 2.39. As a result, the mean number of words per paragraph was lower: 74.82 as opposed to 116.89. These differences are statistically significant with medium-to-high effect sizes (see Table 3).

Pupils in experimental classes used the comma more frequently (3.63/100 words vs. 2.34/100 words), while their use of periods is virtually identical to that of control classes (3.50 vs. 3.63/100 words), meaning that their sentences were about the same length.

Inappropriate commas, e.g. those separating a verb from its necessary arguments, were also scored. In spite of their more frequent use of the comma, which implies taking more risks (and probably committing fewer errors of omission, which however were not scored because of the limited reliability of this analytic category), pupils in experimental classes made slightly fewer errors than those of control classes (13.38% vs. 15.73% of all commas), and significantly fewer errors regarding the period (1.44% vs. 5.14%).

Multilingual pupils, once again, have a substantially similar profile to that of the monolingual students in each group. Those in experimental classes start about twice as many new paragraphs as monolingual and multilingual pupils in control classes. As a result, their paragraphs are on average shorter (70.58 words per paragraph). Like their monolingual peers in the experimental group, they use commas more frequently than multilingual and monolingual students in control classes: 2.63 commas/100 words vs. 2.03 and 2.44, respectively. These commas are on average more correct than those produced by the monolingual control pupils (15.18% vs. 17.35% of incorrect commas), but slightly less so than those used by the multilingual control pupils (9.67% of incorrect commas), perhaps because the latter subgroup used this punctuation mark the least.

Table 4 below reports an overview of results for each feature. Also, texts in Extract (1) exemplify two different phenomena related to paragraphing and use of punctuation in a third-grade pupil belonging to the experimental group.[3]

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[3] All texts are translated from Italian. Originals are available on the author's website: www.gabrielepallotti.it. Concerning translations, when the morpho-syntactic and orthographic mistakes made by the pupils did not have any straightforward equivalent in English, similar types of errors were introduced in order to give a better sense of the overall writing quality.

Table 4
Text organization

	Control Group Mean (SD)	Experimental Group Mean (SD)	95% CI of the difference between means	Cohen's *d*	*p*
Paragraphs	2.39 (2.00)	5.32 (3.28)	−3.68 - −2.19	1.47	< .0001
Monolingual pupils	2.36 (1.99)	5.70 (3.41)	−2.41 - −4.27	1.68	< .0001
Multilingual pupils	2.48 (2.06)	4.65 (3.10)	0.87 - 3.46	1.05	< 0.005
Words/paragraph	116.89 (81.57)	74.82 (80.21)	−20.36 - −63.78	−0.52	< .0001
Monolingual pupils	115.96 (83.24)	77.20 (89.64)	−10.68 - −66.85	−0.47	< .001
Multilingual pupils	119.90 (77.37)	70.58 (61.60)	13.12 - 85.52	−0.64	< 0.01
Commas/100 words	2.34 (2.22)	3.63 (2.31)	−1.93 - −0.65	0.58	< .005
Monolingual pupils	2.44 (2.25)	4.19 (2.55)	0.97 - 2.53	0.78	< .0001
Multilingual pupils	2.03 (2.15)	2.63 (2.12)	−1.68 - 0.48	0.28	ns
% inappropriate commas	15.73 (22.77)	13.38 (16.03)	−3.54 - 8.13	−0.10	ns
Monolingual pupils	17.35 (24.39)	12.55 (16.14)	−0.02 - 0.12	−0.20	ns
Multilingual pupils	9.67 (14.22)	15.18 (16.51)	−14.66 - 3.59	0.38	ns
% inappropriate periods	5.14 (15.64)	1.44 (4.87	0.60 - 6.78	−0.24	< .05
Monolingual pupils	5.88 (17.04)	0.96 (2.83)	−1.17 - −9.69	−0.29	< .05
Multilingual pupils	2.60 (9.26)	2.28 (6.79)	−4.03 - 4.69	−3.48	ns

Extract (1) *Text organization at the beginning and at the end of the school year, pupil 3OL60*

3OL60, October

First Charlot shows a ticket to a man after that the man welcoms him Charlot then Charlot walks around with a man after that Charlot takes a lady by the hand and takes her into the warehouse after that they put on roller skates then they start skating after that Charlot blindfolds himself and starts to rolerskate then it looks like Charlot is falling down from the upper floor after that Charlot shows a bed to the lady then Charlot moves around a bit on his rollerskates then Charlot closes the girl in the warehouse after that 3 gentlemen look for Charlo who in the meantime is in a totally different place

3OL60, May

At first Harry gets on a steam train then a girl climbs in with a hat and a Pomeranian dog.

The girl droped the Pomeranian dog and they left without him but Harry took it with a cane and gave it to its owner named Giulia, she was very happy to get back her Pomeranian dog, and told him thank you very much.

At some point they entered a tunnel and everyone started looking for the dog.

Harry found it and gave it to Giulia once again, s/he was really really happy to have it back, and then Giulia covered it with a blanket of hers/his.

While both paraphrasing and punctuation marks are absent in the first text, at the end of the school year the child organizes contents in thematic blocks and experiments with the use of punctuation, even though her command of commas is not fully developed (see the last two instances).

4.4. Reference to entities

At the end of the school year, the texts written in the experimental classes were also clearer than the texts written in the control classes in terms of reference to entities. In fact, the introduction, maintenance, and reintroduction of referents were less ambiguous, that is, they allowed the reader to correctly identify the entity to which they refer more often. This difference was not very substantial as regards introductions and maintenances, but reached statistical significance for reintroductions ($p < 0.05$).

As for multilingual pupils, the picture is slightly more complex. Their reintroductions were generally less ambiguous than those of both monolingual and multilingual students in control classes, with a fairly noticeable, though not statistically significant, difference (6.37% vs. 8.42% and 9.36%, respectively). Their introductions were less ambiguous than those of monolingual pupils in the control group (1.79% vs. 2.39%), but significantly more so than those made by multilingual peers in the control classes, who did not produce a single ambiguous introduction. A similar situation can be seen for maintenances: here, too, multilingual pupils in experimental classes produced fewer ambiguities than monolingual students in the control group (5.66% vs. 5.84%), but slightly more than multilingual peers (5.50%). Especially in this last case, however, differences are quite small and never reach statistical significance (Table 5). Some examples of ambiguous introductions, maintenances, and reintroductions taken from both experimental and control classes are shown in Extract (2), (3), and (4).

Table 5
Reference to entities

	Control Group Mean (SD)	Experimental Group Mean (SD)	95% CI of the difference between mean	Cohen's *d*	*p*
% Ambiguous introductions	1.83 (6.49)	1.27 (3.47)	−0.86 - 1.99	−0.09	ns
Monolingual pupils	2.39 (7.35)	0.98 (3.47)	−0.36 - 3.19	−0.19	ns
Multilingual pupils	0.00	1.79 (4.69)	0.23 - 3.33	n/a	<0.05
% Ambiguous maintenances	5.76 (9.22)	5.34 (5.70)	−1.70 - 2.47	−0.05	ns
Monolingual pupils	5.84 (9.33)	5.16 (5.64)	−1.80 - 3.03	−0.07	ns
Multilingual pupils	5.50 (.04)	5.66 (6.80)	−4.37 - 4.10	0.02	ns
% Ambiguous reintroductions	8.64 (9.70)	5.68 (6.85)	−0.71 - −5.28	−0.31	< .05
Monolingual pupils	8.42 (9.31)	5.29 (6.89)	−0.56 - −5.75	−0.34	< .05
Multilingual pupils	9.36 (11.05)	6.37 (8.04)	−2.01 - −8.05	−0.27	ns

Extract (2). *Example of ambiguous references to entities*

Ambiguous introduction	**4VM19_October**
	[...] when he came down with the elevator <u>the men</u> [new entity] hide from Charlot.

Extract (3). *Example of ambiguous references to entities*

Ambiguous maintenance	**3EP05_May**
	[...] then the ledy looked at the clock and tooked the bag where the dog was then <u>Ø</u> [= she/he/it?] <u>begun to bark</u> and the ledy opened the bag and faund the dog but not her handkerchiefs [...]

Extract (4). *Example of ambiguous references to entities*

Ambiguous reintroduction	**5ARR03_May**
	[...] Harry saw the ticket controller arrive so he took his suitcase, which was the woman's he began to take out all the clothes, then he put the dog in and put it back when the ticket controller passed <u>Ø</u> [= he/it?] <u>started barking</u> so the ticket controller became suspcious, Harry, began to bark to create

4.5. Verb tense cohesion

The one aspect in which experimental classes performed more poorly than the controls is verb tense cohesion, where unjustified tense changes, here labelled "tense shifts," were more common: 2.43/100 words vs. 1.58/100 words. Extract (5) reports an example from the experimental group.

Extract (5). *Tense shifts in a fourth grader, experimental group*

4GC43_May
Harry a man has to take a train and he <u>saw</u> a lady and <u>lets</u> her pass first. The lady start talking to the ticket controller and Harry came in quickly. The lady's little dog <u>has jumped off</u> the train and she wanted to get it back. Harry <u>picked up</u> a can and <u>catches</u> the little dog and <u>hid</u> it in his jacket. [...]

It is worth noting that the text this extract comes from is of average length (248 words), is quite rich in terms of primary and secondary information units (5 and 29, respectively), and presents a good quantity of cohesive devices (28 connectives). This means that verb tense cohesion may still pose problems, even when overall text quality is satisfactory.

The difference seen between experimental and control classes as a whole remains basically the same when multilingual and monolingual pupils are analyzed separately: multilingual students in experimental classes produce a higher proportion of tense shifts (3.91/100 words) than multilingual (2.63) and monolingual (1.26) peers in the control group; monolingual pupils in experimental classes, with their 1.59 shifts per 100 words, perform better than multilingual and slightly worse than monolingual controls. It should be noted that, in both experimental and control classes, this phenomenon is more apparent in multilingual than in monolingual pupils. Tense shifts are, in fact, more closely related to linguistic competence in a narrow sense, that is, to grammatical control rather than to the more communicative aspects of writing ability. This finding resonates with a number of studies which have reported that LX writers have less control over verb forms compared to L1 peers, both during compulsory education (Cameron & Besser, 2004) and at the university (Hinkel, 2004).

5. Discussion and conclusion

As discussed above, this program was proposed to the whole class, without dividing monolingual and multilingual pupils. The underlying principle is that everybody benefits from good quality language education and that promoting peer-to-peer interaction through group work gives better results than having pupils follow separate tracks.

Although there was no separation of learners in terms of teaching, it is legitimate to discuss the program's effects on the two sub-groups of monolingual and multilingual students. Not many results at this level are statistically significant, both because the sub-samples were not very large and because in several cases differences were not very pronounced. Thus, this brief discussion will not aim at reaching broad generalizations, rather it will attempt to stimulate reflection on the relationships between multilingualism and language education in today's Italian classrooms, which are possibly applicable to other contexts as well. The study's main findings, based on the research questions formulated in section 3.1, can be summarized as follows.

RQ1. In a primary school context, what are the effects on whole classes participating in a long-term pedagogical intervention based on the process approach to writing, formative assessment, and cooperative learning? The effects on whole classes are largely positive. Their pupils outperform those of control classes on all dimensions assessed with both analytic and holistic measures, the sole exception being verb tense shifts. This result is thus in line with previous research (reviewed in section 2.2) showing the effectiveness of instructional practices like teaching students strategies for planning, drafting, and revising their texts, promoting peer collaboration, and providing constructive and specific feedback.

RQ2. If there are any effects, do they differ for monolingual and multilingual pupils? In experimental classes, monolingual children achieve better results than their multilingual peers with regard to all aspects of writing with one exception, the word per paragraph ratio. It should be noted, though, that experimental classes hosted a higher number of multilingual students who were not born in Italy and who had resided in the country for a shorter period of time; hence, their relatively poorer performance might be due to language learning per se, as many of these children were true additional language learners, whose Italian was still developing.

Despite this initial disadvantage, the program's effects were equally beneficial for both monolingual and multilingual students. In particular, multilingual children in the experimental group outperformed both monolingual and multilingual students in control classes on the vast majority of dimensions, with just a few exceptions. One of these is tense shifts, which were consistently more frequent in experimental classes (with the sole exception of monolingual pupils in experimental classes performing better than multilingual controls); this shows that tense shifts may be more directly related to language proficiency than to other dimensions. Another aspect that may be related to language proficiency is text comprehensibility, which is lower in experimental multilingual pupils when compared to both monolingual and multilingual control students. Finally, multilingual control children outperform experimental (both monolingual and multilingual) peers as regards appropriate use of the comma and ambiguous introductions.

RQ3. What are the differences, as regards writing skills, between monolingual and multilingual pupils in control classes, that is, with no experimental treatment? In control classes, multilingual and monolingual children's performances seem to be rather balanced. Monolingual pupils achieve consistently better scores in holistic assessment and, as regards analytic measures, tense shifts, their use of commas, and they have a lower rate of ambiguous reintroductions. Multilingual students, on the other hand, write longer texts with more secondary information units, with fewer problems in the use of periods and commas, and with fewer ambiguous introductions and maintenances.

The tentative conclusions that can be drawn from the study are that, at least in this sample, participation in the experimental program seems to have had a larger impact on writing performance than monolingual/multilingual status. Multilingual children in experimental classes contribute as much as their monolingual peers to the good results obtained by the class as a whole, and outperform both monolingual and multilingual pupils in control classes in most dimensions, especially those related to broader "cognitive-academic" (Cummins, 1986) aspects. Linguistic proficiency, however, does play a role, especially for those who have had a shorter immersion in the new language, as was the case for several multilingual children in experimental classes.

In the context investigated here, our general conclusion is that students' writing skills are impacted by both intrinsic factors, such as the length of exposure to the target language, and extrinsic factors, such as the type of pedagogical intervention. This study can be taken as evidence that a good language curriculum has more weight in a student's academic success than his or her status as an L1 or LX learner.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A

RATING SCALES FOR HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT

Content: Is the number of information units provided in the text adequate and relevant?

1) The number of ideas is *not at all adequate* and insufficient and the ideas are unrelated to each other.
2) The number of ideas is *scarcely adequate* and the ideas lack consistency.
3) The number of ideas is *somewhat adequate*, even though they are not very consistent.
4) The number of ideas is *adequate* and they are sufficiently consistent.
5) The number of ideas is *very adequate* and they are very consistent to each other.
6) The number of ideas is *absolutely adequate* and they look very consistent to each other.

Comprehensibility: How much effort is required to understand text purpose and ideas?

1) The text is *not at all comprehensible*. Ideas and purposes are unclearly stated and the efforts of the reader to understand it are ineffective.
2) The text is *scarcely comprehensible*, its purposes are not clearly stated and the reader struggles to understand the ideas of the writer. The reader has to guess most of the ideas and purposes.
3) The text is *somewhat comprehensible*, some sentences are hard to understand on a first reading. A second reading helps clarify text purposes and the ideas conveyed, but some doubts persist.
4) The text is *comprehensible*. Only a few sentences are unclear but are understood, without too much effort, after a second reading.
5) The text is *easily comprehensible* and reads smoothly. Comprehensibility is not an issue.
6) The text is *very easily comprehensible* and highly readable. The ideas and the purpose are clearly stated.

Coherence and cohesion, 1: Is the text coherent and cohesive (e.g. cohesive devices, strategies)?

1) The text is *not at all coherent*. Unrelated progressions and coherence breaks are very common. The writer does not use any anaphoric device (pronouns, sentences with a clearly interpretable null subject). The text is not at all cohesive, connectives are hardly ever used, and ideas are unrelated.
2) The text is *scarcely coherent*. The writer often uses unrelated progressions; when coherence is achieved, it is often done through repetitions. Few anaphoric devices and some coherence breaks. The text is not very cohesive: ideas are not well linked by connectives, which are rarely used.
3) The text is *somewhat coherent*. Unrelated progressions and/or repetitions are frequent. More than two sentences in a row can have the same subject, even when the subject is understood. Some anaphoric devices are used. There can be few coherence breaks. The text is somewhat cohesive: some connectives are used, but they are mostly conjunctions.
4) The text is *coherent*. Unrelated progressions are somewhat rare, but the writer sometimes relies on unnecessary repetitions to achieve coherence. A sufficient number of anaphoric devices is used. There may be some coherence breaks. The text is cohesive. The writer makes good use of connectives, sometimes not limiting this to conjunctions.
5) The text is *very coherent*: when the writer introduces a new topic, it is usually done by using connectives or connective phrases. Repetitions are very infrequent. Anaphoric devices are numerous. There are no coherence breaks. The text is very cohesive and ideas are well linked by adverbial and/or verbal connectives.
6) The writer ensures *extreme coherence* by integrating new ideas in the text with connectives or connective phrases. Anaphoric devices are used regularly. There are few incidences of unrelated progressions and no coherence breaks. The structure of the text is extremely cohesive, thanks to a skilful use of connectives (especially linking chunks, verbal constructions, and adverbials), often used to describe relationships between ideas.

Adapted from Kuiken & Vedder 2017

Coherence and cohesion, 2

1) Can link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like 'and' or 'then'.
2) Can link groups of words with simple connectors like 'and', 'but', and 'because'.
3) Can use the most frequently occurring connectors to link simple sentences in order to tell a story or describe something as a simple list of points.
4) Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.
5) Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some 'jumpiness' in a long contribution.
6) Can use a variety of linking words efficiently to clearly mark the relationships between ideas.
7) Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices.
8) Can create coherent and cohesive text making full and appropriate use of a variety of organizational patterns and a wide range of cohesive devices.

(Council of Europe, 2001, par. 5.2.3.1)

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Building literacies in secondary school history:
The specific contribution of academic writing support

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ABSTRACT

EN This paper considers the specific role and effect of academic writing support in a secondary school Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) context. After discussing the potential place for academic writing support in the ongoing process of fostering disciplinary literacy, we report on an experimental study in which 45 Spanish secondary school students received a short academic writing module as part of their history course. The descriptions/explanations written in their post-tests were generally found to be more complete, with more explicit discourse markers and with better textual organization than the pre-tests. We discuss the implications of this for students' progress towards disciplinary literacy.

Key words: CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL), BILINGUAL EDUCATION, DISCIPLINARY LITERACY, L2 WRITING, COGNITIVE DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS.

ES Este estudio considera el papel específico y el efecto del apoyo a la escritura académica en un contexto AICLE de escuela secundaria. Después de analizar el lugar potencial que el apoyo a la escritura académica podría tener en el proceso continuo de promoción de la literacidad disciplinar, se presentan los resultados de un estudio experimental en el que 45 estudiantes españoles de la escuela secundaria recibieron un breve módulo de escritura académica como parte de su curso de historia. Las descripciones / explicaciones escritas en sus post-tests se consideraron generalmente más completas, con marcadores de discurso más explícitos y con una mejor organización textual que las pre-tests. Finalmente, se discuten las implicaciones de estos resultados para el desarrollo de la literacidad disciplinar por parte de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: APRENDIZAJE INTEGRADO DE CONTENIDO Y LENGUA EXTRANJERA (AICLE) EDUCACIÓN BILINGÜE, LITERACIDAD DISCIPLINAR, ESCRITURA EN LA L2, FUNCIONES COGNITIVAS DEL DISCURSO.

IT Questo articolo esamina il ruolo specifico del sostegno alla scrittura accademica e il suo effetto in un contesto CLIL della scuola secondaria. Dopo aver discusso il posto che potenzialmente potrebbe occupare il sostegno alla scrittura accademica all'interno del continuo processo di promozione dell'alfabetizzazione disciplinare, riportiamo uno studio sperimentale in cui 45 studenti spagnoli di scuola secondaria hanno seguito un breve modulo di scrittura accademica come parte del loro corso di storia. Le descrizioni / spiegazioni scritte nei loro post-test sono risultate generalmente più complete, con marcatori di discorso più espliciti e con una migliore organizzazione testuale rispetto ai pre-test. Ne discutiamo, quindi, gli effetti sul progresso degli studenti nel processo di alfabetizzazione disciplinare.

Parole chiave: APPRENDIMENTO INTEGRATO DI LINGUA E CONTENUTO (CLIL), ISTRUZIONE BILINGUE, ALFABETIZZAZIONE DISCIPLINARE, SCRITTURA IN L2, FUNZIONI COGNITIVE DEL DISCORSO

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1. Introduction

One of the most significant developments in European education over the last twenty years has been the vast increase in the teaching of school subjects in English, even in European countries where there is no historical connection with the English-speaking world (Pérez Cañado, 2018a). The teaching of curricular contents through the medium of English in these contexts has been mainly understood through the paradigm of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Marsh, Pérez Cañado, & Ráez Padilla, 2015). CLIL is related to other models of content teaching through English, with some differences (Ball, Kelly, & Clegg, 2015). For example, CLIL overlaps somewhat with English Medium Instruction (EMI) but differs in that CLIL opens up the issue of explicit language learning, positing this as being in some sense integrated with content learning in the course design and delivery. CLIL can also be usefully compared with immersion models (Cenoz, Genesee, & Gorter, 2014). It is generally understood to differ from other models in that it is not full time and is not conceptualized as purely acquisition-driven, however it provides scope for language support within content courses (Ball et al., 2015). In fact, in current European school contexts, content courses in English are not only designed to integrate some language support but are also usually combined with conventional language courses graded by level.

The rapid spread of CLIL has meant that our understanding of the paradigm itself has developed alongside its expanding practice. As might be expected with a new phenomenon, much of the research to date has been concerned with tracking students' results in terms of language gains and countering predictions that content would be lost (Lasagabaster & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2010; Perez Cañado, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Rumlich, 2016). The generally positive outcomes reported mean that CLIL research is now entering a consolidation phase in which different pedagogical approaches within CLIL can be evaluated and good practices identified. In particular, there is currently growing awareness of the need to provide better content-related literacy support for students who enter secondary school with language competences around the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B1 level but who still find the general academic and disciplinary language used in CLIL courses challenging (Meyer, 2015; Whittaker, Llinares, & McCabe, 2011).

2. Developing literacies in CLIL

The goal of CLIL courses is to empower students to use English across "the whole range of the language which shapes educational knowledge" (Llinares, Morton, & Whittaker, 2012, p. 8). It goes without saying that literacy skills play an important role in this. In this section, we briefly examine some different approaches to CLIL literacy beyond basic general language skills and explain how these appear to be interrelated.

2.1. CALP and academic literacies

Literacy covers a fundamental set of competences at all levels of education, since it encompasses the ability to understand and communicate knowledge, arguments and feelings through semiotic systems, particularly written language. Within bilingual education and CLIL, the issue of developing literacies was originally approached using the notion of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1979), which brings together the cognitive and language competences needed as students progress through schooling. These competences contrast with the Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) that are usually acquired first in immersion situations in primary school. The CALP approach thus places its main emphasis on the language needed to advance through education in English from the later years of primary school onwards, thinking in particular of the linguistic competencies required to express more complex concepts, as well as general features of academic register. At school levels, academic writing pedagogy has been greatly influenced by the concepts of register and genre (Martin & Rose, 2005). The aims, if not the methodology, of such literacy pedagogies can be compared with those of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at higher levels, since the main focus is on general academic language, and on the common needs that arise across the whole curriculum. In broad terms, these approaches centre on the specific language skills required by academic contexts, notably mastery of formal written English style and familiarity with academic genres and conventions (Hyland, 2006; Jordan, 2010; Menken, 2013).

2.2. Moving towards disciplinary literacies

The constructs of CALP and academic literacies assume one academic language proficiency that is valid across content areas. However, as students advance from primary school to secondary school, it

becomes increasingly evident that other approaches must factor into the complexity of learning to communicate in different disciplines. Just as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in higher education is often complemented by English for Specific Purposes (ESP) support, which helps students acquire more focused discipline-specific literacy skills, the CALP approach is now being understood as a starting point from which more specific types of support can foster literacy skills needed in different curricular areas (Meyer, 2015). Renewed interest is now also being focused on issues such as content area literacies and disciplinary literacies, which address the need for a subject-specific approach to acquisition of language competences.

One important issue in this is the distinction made by some experts (Shanahan, 2012) between content area literacies and disciplinary literacies. To begin with the more straightforward concept, content area literacy is understood as the ability to understand and use the language associated with a specialized field, which involves familiarity with vocabulary and genres in a general sense. It does not, however, necessarily imply deep conceptual understanding (Shanahan, 2012). The more complex concept of disciplinary literacy refers to the ability to use "the knowledge and abilities possessed by those who create, communicate and use knowledge within the disciplines" (Shanahan, 2012, p. 8). Disciplinary literacy thus ultimately approximates proficiency in "the unique uses and implications of literacy within the various disciplines" (Shanahan, 2012, p. 8), which relies on deep content knowledge with a strong cognitive underpinning. Fully functional disciplinary literacy is thus distinguished from content area literacy in the importance attributed to the conceptual level (i.e., dunderstanding the term Renaissance is different from grasping the full network of associations that might be generated around this term in a history course). At the high school level, then, the long-term aim should be to move towards disciplinary literacy, which entails knowing how to tackle subject-specific tasks in a way that meets disciplinary expectations.

2.3. The key role of cognitive discourse functions

One particular focus that can help us to conceptualise the content area literacy skills needed in particular content areas and how these might engage with the long-term goals of disciplinary literacy, centres on discourse functions. Discourse functions in pragmatics are built on the notion of the speech act as verbal action that reflects cognitive processes: prototypical communicative actions that people take when dealing with knowledge. This concept has been found both interesting and useful when adapted to CLIL because it constitutes a nexus between the two main issues in CLIL, namely content learning and language reception/production (Coetzee-Lachmann, 2009; Zydatiß, 2005). In a further development of this idea, Dalton-Puffer (2013) formulated the notion of the Cognitive Discourse Function (CDF), which explicitly builds a connection with the underlying cognitive competence (as formulated, say, in Bloom's taxonomy). Moreover, aside from encapsulating cognitive and content learning in linguistic structures, CDFs also offer a bridge between the building blocks of language (lexicogrammar) and complex language-based structures (genres) (Lorenzo & Dalton-Puffer, 2016). Previous work in this area has shed light on the use of CDFs in secondary school history (Lorenzo, 2017), providing detailed qualitative analysis of the seven CDFs identified by Dalton-Puffer (2013) (*classify, define, describe, evaluate, explain, explore* and *report*) as they are materialised in student writing and illustrating their importance in conveying disciplinary learning.

One example suffices to illustrate why CDFs are promising for the study of CLIL. In many school subjects, such as biology or geography, it is important for students to understand classification systems (e.g., of plants, animals, climates, etc.). To do this, they need to remember the important points to be observed (e.g., the number of leaves, type of skeleton, etc.) and to apply that knowledge, using the thinking skills of *compare* and *classify*. Although comparing and classifying are generally considered to be lower order thinking skills (Krathwohl, 2002), they represent an important rung on the ladder of learning. They are closely linked together: *compare* can be viewed as a necessary stage on the way to *classify*, or as a sub-function of it, since it involves identifying similarities and differences which can then be used for classification purposes. Content area literacy is needed (e.g., the names of the different elements in the system and the terms used for classifying them), of course. But it can also be argued that to negotiate the lexical and cognitive demands of the classifying process, and to explain this process using academic discourse, a productive combination of linguistic and conceptual elements is required. Mastery of the cognitive discourse function *classify* involves managing concepts (classification systems), and technical vocabulary (names of specific climatic features or parts of the organism), but also general language structures (i.e., comparatives) and general academic English competences related to choices in register and ways of organising discourse. We can speculate that all of this together amounts to the acquisition of incipient disciplinary literacy competences.

Conversely, if we choose to approach the same question from a negative perspective, we can see that inadequate academic language skills almost certainly impede the production of appropriate CDFs (Breeze & Dafouz, 2017) and hinder the development of disciplinary literacy. One only needs to think of the problems caused when students lack the suitable academic literacy skills to use structures such as nominalisations, which are essential to convey complex information succinctly in historical or scientific contexts (Nashaat Soby, 2019; Whittaker et al., 2011).

2.4. An integrated model of literacy development

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, we can see that the learning outcomes for our students involve at least four levels of language competence, which can be summarised as follows:

- General English language competences.
- Academic writing proficiency (use of formal register, clarity and concision, and logical ordering of information).
- Content area literacy skills (appropriate terminology, familiarity with important genres, and initiation into CDFs).
- Disciplinary literacy skills (satisfactory integration of cognitive structures and their linguistic execution in CDFs, full conceptual grasp of concepts and ability to express these using appropriate terminology and register, fully appropriate use of genre, and development of a discipline-appropriate voice).

In this sense, general language skills constitute the most basic component, and these can be enhanced when academic writing proficiency is reinforced. This academic literacy probably encompasses much of what Coyle (2005) describes under the heading of language for learning (discussion skills, language for presenting in public or writing academic texts). At the same time, content area literacy (reflecting aspects of Coyle's (2005) language of learning) can be built up, which lays the foundations on which disciplinary literacy can ultimately be constructed. This aspect is particularly important in CLIL contexts, because without the content area language skills (terminology, familiarisation with functions and genres in disciplinary contexts), little progress is likely to be made in attaining higher disciplinary competences. Moreover, there is a large area of overlap between content area literacy and academic literacy, which probably includes many aspects of strategic competence in reading and writing (Ruiz de Zarobe & Zenotz, 2014). Finally, through the confluence of development in cognitive skills, content knowledge, and language competence, students will come to acquire full disciplinary literacy (Polias, 2015; Shanahan, 2012). In Coyle's (2005) terms, academic literacy and content area literacy come together in CLIL settings to push the ongoing development of disciplinary language through learning, which can be understood as incipient disciplinary literacy.

However, if we are teaching in secondary school, it may be useful to remember that the full attainment of this goal may lie several years ahead. Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of the way these four aspects of language can be visualised (other non-linguistic aspects, such as content knowledge and cognitive skills, are obviously developing at the same time as literacy and in close association with it, and these ultimately contribute to full disciplinary literacy as well). The arrows are used to indicate progression, showing the order in which the different aspects of literacy are usually acquired, with academic literacy and content area literacy developing concurrently, preparing the basis for mature disciplinary literacy. It should be noted, however, that as in so many educational situations, the areas of overlap may be considerable, and many aspects of disciplinary literacy are already present in incipient form as aspects of academic literacy and content area literacy.
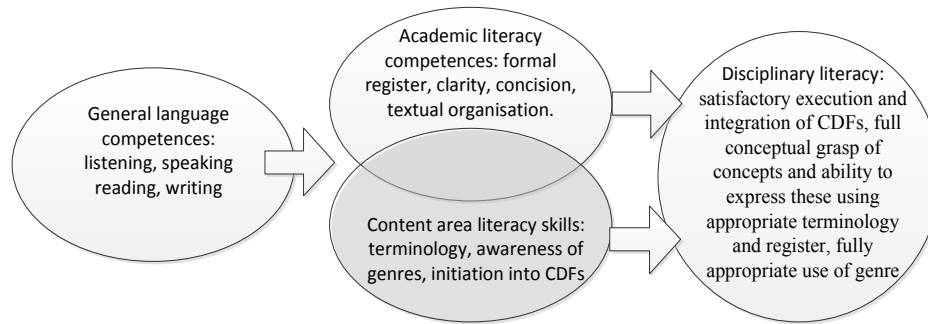
Figure 1. Integrated model of literacy development.

One of the advantages of visualising the development of disciplinary literacy in this way is that it suggests a possible integration of the students' ongoing academic literacy development with their content area literacy skills. This points once more to the usefulness of the kind of general academic language support fostered by the CALP/academic literacy approach; it can serve as an important basis for the development of higher skills that is perfectly compatible with specific content area skills. This is important, because it gives space to the explicit teaching of academic language within the CLIL curriculum. This could be fully integrated into content courses, as the intersecting area suggests, in order to facilitate the productive transfer of literacy skills.

Figure 1 also brings out the key role of CDFs as a bridge between content area literacy and full disciplinary literacy. In our view, one way of measuring students' literacy progress is by investigating the use of CDFs in their writing. Our hypothesis is that greater awareness of certain features of academic writing, especially paragraph organisation and use of discourse markers, will help students to become more proficient writers in their discipline, and also to produce the target CDFs in a more appropriate manner.

3. Empirical study

3.1. Rationale

Given the importance of general academic English competences, and the overlapping nature of academic literacy and content area literacy, pedagogical intervention in this area would seem to be a priority. It is therefore surprising that few studies deal explicitly with the efficacy of academic writing support for CLIL students. Most of the published studies focusing on students' written production in secondary school CLIL subjects take a strictly descriptive acquisition-driven approach (Llinares et al., 2012; Lorenzo, 2017; Lorenzo & Dalton-Puffer, 2016). In the present paper, our intention is to contribute to the development of CLIL pedagogy by testing, in one specific CLIL context, whether a focus on academic writing skills enhances students' content area literacy by helping them to produce the appropriate CDFs.

3.2. Objectives

This paper centres on the impact of a short academic writing module taught within a CLIL history course on the students' production of two related CDFs, namely *describe* and *explain*, in an exam context, comparing students' writing before and after the module. It addresses the following research questions:

- Does explicit academic writing instruction help students to display their disciplinary learning to better effect?
- Does explicit academic writing instruction improve students' use of the CDFs *describe* and *explain*?

3.3. Contextualisation

This paper uses data obtained in an experimental study involving 45 14- and 15-year-old students in a Spanish secondary school. All of them were studying history in English with the same teacher, for three hours per week, for the entire year, in two different groups. The school has a long history of CLIL, with many content courses taught in English throughout the primary and secondary curriculum. During this particular year, in addition to the three hours of history taught in English, the students were also taking a B2-level English course for three hours a week.

During the year, in addition to covering major events and trends in the 13th-16th centuries, the course included various aspects of technological development during the Renaissance and early modern period. As part of their December exam, at the end of the first term of their CLIL history course, the history teacher asked the students to describe and explain two of the inventions devised by Leonardo da Vinci. These answers constitute the pre-test for this study. Analysis of the results from this exam prompted the design of a practitioner research project (unpublished) to improve the students' academic writing in the context of history. This took the form of a writing module taught over two weeks, designed to support essay writing in general, and to raise awareness of the interactional and interactive aspects of academic writing. Both groups (45 students) took the writing module as part of their history course. Part of the exam at the end of the second term (March) asked the students to describe and explain Gutenberg's printing press. This was used as the post-test for this study (see Table 1).

Table 1
Study design

Action	Purpose	Schedule
First term exam	Pre-test	December 2016
Writing module	Intervention	February 2017
Second term exam	Post-test	March 2017

All 45 students completed both tasks under test conditions and were present for most of the sessions of the writing module. Students who did not fulfil these conditions were excluded from the sample.

3.4. Pre- and post-test

The pre- and post-test formed part of the first and second term exams, respectively. In both cases, the students had to perform under test conditions, and were not permitted to use course books, dictionaries or other reference materials. The questions were designed using the principles and vocabulary outlined by Biggs and Tang (2011). The prompts were thus carefully formulated so that their wording would prompt responses that would operationalise *describe* and *explain*, following the principles of constructive alignment. The prompts were also judged by the course teacher to be of a similar level of difficulty, since both required a description/ explanation of a mechanical device with several components. Although the printing press is mechanically more complex, the intrinsic idea and basic function did not prove difficult for students to understand. The pre-test prompt considered for this study was: *Describe Leonardo da Vinci's fantastic invention the giant crossbow. How does it work?* The post-test question was: *Describe Gutenberg's printing press. How did it work?*

3.5. Writing module

A six-hour writing module was designed to raise students' awareness of the forms and functions of academic writing in English. The module centred on the general features of academic writing and on analysing the writing prompt in order to provide an appropriate answer. Further, the module included instruction and practice on how to organise paragraphs with a view to communicating with a reader and displaying knowledge (Llinares et al., 2012, p. 257). A genre-based pedagogical approach was adopted, following the principle of presenting a genre or part-genre (i.e. the paragraph), analysing it, modelling it with the whole class to compose a paragraph jointly on the board, then setting exercises to provide controlled practice at organising information and linking that information together with discourse markers (Breeze, 2012; Martin & Rose, 2005). Relevant genre features covered by the module included topic sentences, linking words (temporal and argumentative organisers) and apposite use of examples (Ball et al., 2015, pp. 160-172). The main content areas of the module are set out in Table 2. The module was designed in this way with the aim of providing useful general practice with academic writing tasks within the history course, which might help students perform better across a range of different question types.

It is important to note that the CDFs *describe* and *explain* were not an explicit focus within the writing module. However, the students taking the writing module did devote time to analysing exam questions containing these, and other, prompts, and to discussing how they would organise their answers to such questions in paragraphs. This design means that any improvement found in the post-tests could be attributed

to the students' improved writing skills and their greater awareness of the need to respond to the prompt clearly, rather than to a very specific focus on the language and cognitive skills needed to *describe* and *explain.*

Table 2.
Contents of academic writing module

Academic writing instruction	Literacy practice
Formal register	Text correction exercise
Paragraph structure (topic sentences, paragraph organisation)	Paragraph writing practice
Discourse organisers (temporal organisers, argumentative organisers)	Practice with discourse organisers
	Practice at organising information
Use of examples	Practice at providing and integrating examples
Awareness of CDFs	Analysis of exam questions, identification of key words

4. Analysis of pre- and post-test

In order to analyse the pre- and post-tests, it is important to look in more detail at what is needed to perform the CDFs *describe* and *explain* successfully. According to Krathwohl's revised version of Bloom's taxonomy (2002, p. 215), describing is a lower order skill related to recalling (remembering), and is generally related to factual knowledge. Explaining is slightly higher on the scale, as it requires a basis of understanding and calls for the application of some conceptual knowledge. In terms of content, the most important aspect of the description/explanation is whether or not it includes the key aspects of the invention. This genre thus bears a strong resemblance to the explanations required in the science or geography curriculum discussed by Llinares et al. (2011, pp. 120-132). Previous analyses of *describe* have shown that depending on the type of entity involved, there are fairly tight disciplinary requirements as to what has to be described (Davies, 1997; Flowerdew, 2001, p. 96), with the required inclusion of a certain minimum number of aspects. If the entity to be described is a process or invention, this usually requires more complex explanatory elements, which implies a greater ability to convey the relationship between different components. Explanations are often causal, but they may also be sequential or factorial (Llinares et al., 2012, p. 121). An important point in all this, however, is to note that description and explanation are closely interconnected, and the learners' ability to produce satisfactory writing often hinges on their capacity to integrate both *describe* and *explain* in their answers (Breeze & Dafouz, 2017).

In what follows, the quantitative data bring out differences between the pre- and post-test in terms of inclusion of key points and clarity of expression, as indicated by quantitative measures: use of topic sentences, use of linking words. The qualitative analysis focuses on some representative examples in order to illustrate the developments in the students' performance of the target CDFs *describe* and *explain*.

4.1. Quantitative data

In the case of the two inventions to be described/explained here, after consultation of course material and discussion with the teacher, the following four essential elements were identified, shown here with the CDF that best reflects their nature (see Appendix A for examples of how the elements were coded):

– Purpose *explain*
– Key parts *describe*
– Material *describe*
– How it works *explain*

The criteria used to judge inclusion were broad, in that we counted any attempt at describing how the invention worked, or any mention of at least two of the key parts (for key parts) or the material they were made of (for material). The students' answers were read, and the presence or absence of each of the four elements identified by two researchers working independently, in cases of discrepancy, a consensus score was given. Figure 2 shows in simply quantitative terms how many students included these four elements of *describe* and *explain* in their pre-test and post-test descriptions, and how many included only 3, 2, 1 or 0.
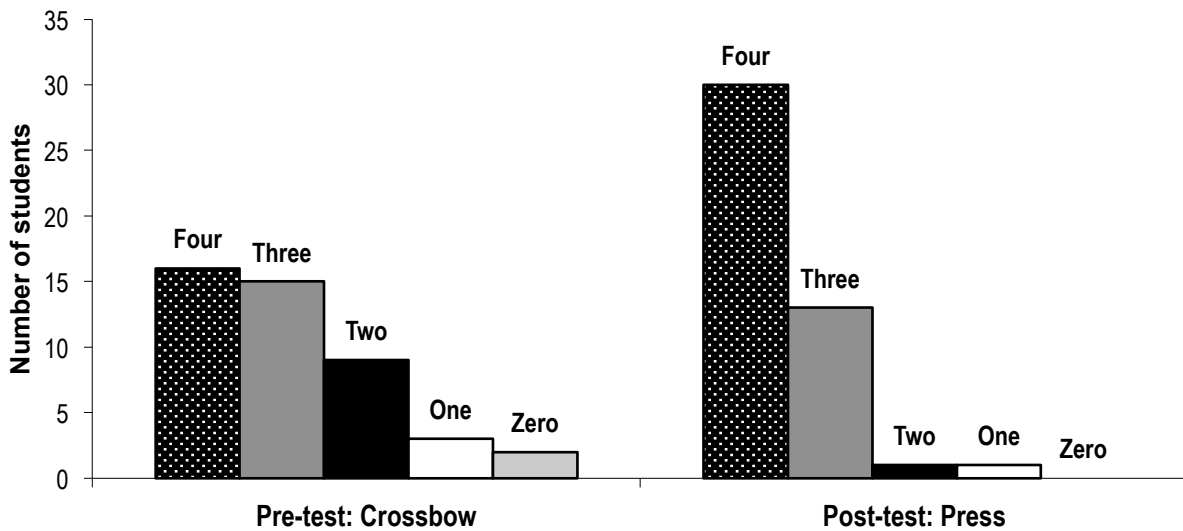
Figure 2. Number of key elements included in descriptions: pre-test and post-test (N=45)

Figure 2 shows a considerable increase in the number of students who included all four elements in the post-test (16 in the pre-test and 29 in the post-test), and thus completed the task successfully, with a corresponding decrease in the number of students who included two, one, or none. The results from a contingency table (Chi square test) comparing students in the pre- and post-test who included all elements with those who did not include all elements were significant at χ^2 (2, N = 45) = 8.7154, p < .01.

As Figure 3 shows, many more students (30 as opposed to 5) introduced their description with a topic sentence in the post-test. The difference between the number of descriptions introduced by a topic sentence in the pre-test and the post-test was significant at χ^2 (2, N = 45) = 29.2208, p < .01 using the Chi square test.
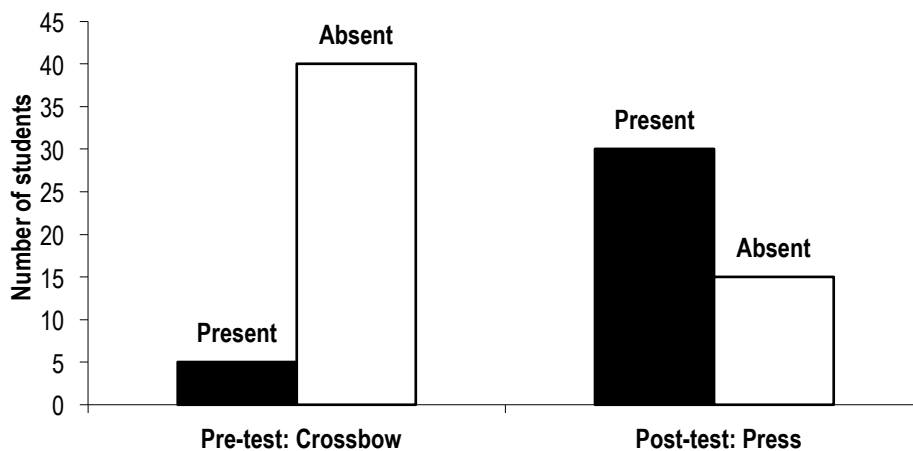
Figure 3. Number of descriptions with presence of topic sentence: pre-test and post-test (N=45)

Both the pre-test and the post-test required students to order the stages of a simple process to explain how an invention worked. This could be accomplished without linking words, but answers that included linking words were generally clearer. Figure 4 illustrates the use of linking words in the pre-test and post-test. Many more were used in the post-test, presumably as a direct result of the academic writing module, where students had learned the importance of ordering information clearly and practiced using

discourse markers. Moreover, the students' increased awareness of the need to understand the prompt and provide a full answer probably accounted for the greater effort made in the post-test. This will be illustrated by the examples in the next section (qualitative data), i.e., examples 3, 4, 5 and 6.
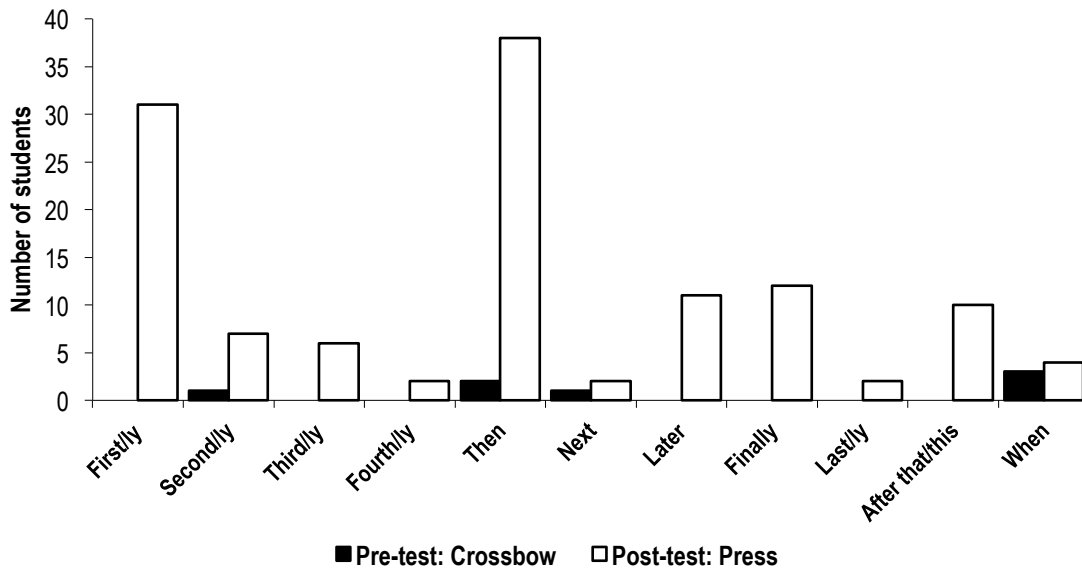
Figure 4. Use of linking words in pre- and post-test: sequencers

A different picture emerges from the use of other types of linking word, as we can see from Figure 5. Students in the pre-test tended to favour *also* as a vague way of connecting one part of a description to another. The use of more exact linkers in the post-test meant that *also* was not needed. *ut* also appeared more in the pre-test, which is probably an artefact of the task itself: this invention itself had a double purpose, and it was the explanation for this that tended to motivate the use of *but* as in the example: "it was a military instrument but Leonardo made it to intimidate not to kill people". On the other hand, *so* and *because* appeared more in the post-test, which suggests that the students were trying harder to establish explicit causal relations.
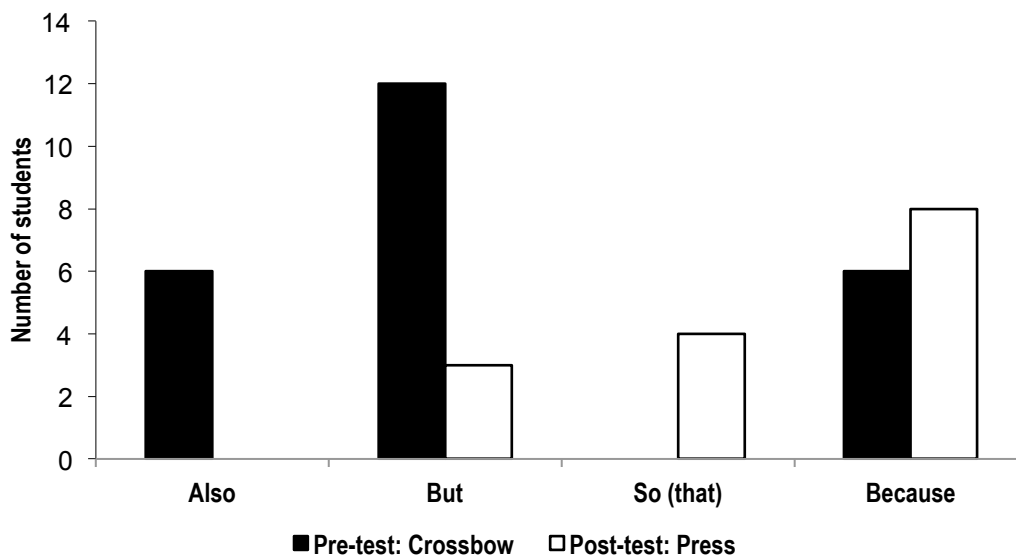
Figure 5. Use of linking words in pre- and post-test: additive, contrastive, causal.

Overall, the quantitative data suggest that the students' answers in the post-test were more complete and contained more of the organisational features characteristic of academic writing. However, the mere presence of linking words is not in itself proof that the answers were actually better. In the next section, we will undertake a qualitative exploration of the answers to see whether the ostensible increase in organising strategies helped students to perform the appropriate CDFs and to display their historical knowledge to greater effect.

4.2. Qualitative data

The first point that should be made is that around 50% of students in the pre-test were capable of using some appropriate CDFs (*describe* and *explain*) without any discourse markers and without an academic paragraph structure. Consider the following example from the pre-test:

1) Giant crossbow. It was designed for pure intimidation for the war. The giant crossbow intimidates because it was enormous (27 yards). Designed to fire large stones or possibly flaming. For the mobility the giant crossbow have 6 wheels, 3 on each side. It was made out of thin wood for flexibility and of a rope (for throw the stones). It work like this: you put the giant crossbow on the direction you want to throw it. Next you put the stone in the rope and you throw it. (A17)

This description is adequate, in that it reports the essential parts (three wheels on each side, the rope, the stones), stating what they are made of where relevant (thin wood for flexibility). Importantly, it includes an explanation of the purpose (intimidation), and it also explains the functioning in a rudimentary way (you put the stone in the rope and you throw it). With regard to language, the student uses accurate technical vocabulary, including some features that can be identified as academic, such as nominalisations (intimidation, flexibility, mobility), and passive voice (was designed, was made out of). On the negative side, we can observe that the student's description is poorly organised, since it would be more logical to begin with a physical description of the whole and the parts, and then move on to explain how it worked, and what its real intended function was. It is also marred by language inaccuracies (sentence fragments, missing third-person -*s*, confusion of *to/for*), and by a relapse into informal register with overuse of *you* when describing the functioning of the machine. An example from the post-test serves to illustrate some of the typical gains made in this group.

2) Firstly I'm going to explain how the Gutenberg's printing press worked in the Renaissance. First, you have to put ink into two balls made up of skin of deer and hair of horse. Once you have done that, you put the balls with ink in the metal, where are all the words. That means that the metal is with ink. Later you put a paper in the side of the words and with pressure, you press. The words of the metal will pass the ink to the paper. (…) Therefore it was faster to copy the books without mistakes. (A5)

Although the language of (2) is not markedly more accurate than the language of (1), the description provided is much easier to follow and more logically organised. The use of temporal connectors (first, once, later) and logical connectors (that means that, therefore) enhances the readability of the text considerably. Excerpt 2) is representative of the way an increased number of sequencers and logical connectors was used in this sample (see graphs 2 and 3 above). Arguably, these improvements could perhaps be dismissed as superficial, but in fact, as these extracts illustrate, the rise in explicit signposting accompanies better overall organisation and greater attention to the communication of meaning.

Viewed on an individual level, the sample of texts gathered here included some notable examples of improvement. Texts 3) and 4) were composed by the same student in the pre- and post-test.

3) The giant crossbow is used for intimidate the enemy, to attack and defend. It throw arrows to enemies and for damage. (B 25)

4) First, how did Gutenberg's printing press worked? To start, you had to cover some goose skin and horse hair balls with ink and then apply the ink to the metal letters that had been put in order before. Next you had to put the paper in the frame and the frame, over the metal

letters. Then you put all this in the press and pressed down. Finally, you pulled out the paper with the text perfectly printed. (B 25)

This student still has persistent grammatical inaccuracies. However, whereas 3) is a rather sketchy performance which fulfils two of the requirements minimally (purpose and parts) but fails to take up the opportunity for a physical/mechanical description/explanation, 4) represents a serious attempt to give a detailed description and explanation of the press and its functioning. Strong points here are the introductory sentence, the use of exact vocabulary (goose skin and horse hair balls, metal letters, frame), and the use of temporal organisers (to start, and then, before, next, then, finally). Although the use of "you" is not strictly speaking in appropriate academic register, here it provides a stable interpersonal framework for the explanation, adding to its clarity.

One more example of a single student's improvement is illustrative, showing the importance of sequencing connectors in facilitating understanding.

5)   The giant crossbow is a weapon to attack to long distance objectives. A soldier pull back the rope, they put the giant arrow, they put their hands and the giant crossbow shoot. (A7)

6)   For the first point I will explain how the printing press works. You put the letters in a table. Then you put ink into the letters with ink balls. Then you press a paper and the letter will be printed. This helped a lot to the Renaissance Society because the books will be available easier and the letters or announcements also. (A7)

Although both texts contain a clear sequence of actions within their explanations, the second one (6) is easier to understand because of the sequential markers (then), which are an improvement on the list separated by commas in (5) and evidence improvement in the student's achievement of the CDF *explain*. The topic sentence (For the first point I will explain how the printing press works) also facilitates understanding. As we have seen from the quantitative results, a large proportion of the descriptions in the post-tests had topic sentences, a result which can be ascribed directly to the contents of the academic writing module. Again, critics might dismiss this change as cosmetic, but the inclusion of a topic sentence probably has a positive impact on the reader, since it lessens the cognitive effort required to understand the text and contributes to "displaying" the student's knowledge effectively (Llinares et al., 2012, p. 257). We could speculate that it may well also help the novice writer to focus on what he/she is going to achieve in the text.

5. Discussion

The evidence presented in this study illustrates some ways in which general academic writing support may enhance a CLIL course, and to students' content area and disciplinary literacy development. By raising these CLIL students' awareness of the conventions of academic writing, particularly the need for tighter and more explicit textual organisation with better signposting, the academic writing module helped them to achieve enhanced results. Although some students were already able to provide full, organised answers to the question in the pre-test, a significant number of students showed improved performance in the post-test, with answers that were better organised and easier to read. Moreover, their post-test answers contained fewer irrelevancies, and were generally more focused on the task. Interestingly, students elaborated more in the post-test than the pre-test answers. It is not entirely clear why the academic writing module should have helped students produce more complete answers, although this could perhaps be explained by the students' raised awareness of three key issues: the purpose of the task, the need to communicate with their readers, and the importance of displaying the information learned in an ordered manner. For all these reasons, it is fair to say in answer to our first research question that explicit academic writing instruction helped these students to display their disciplinary knowledge to better effect.

Regarding our second research question specifically centring on the production of CDFs, we observe that the CDFs in question (*describe* and *explain*) were achieved more fully in the post-tests. Although some students were able to express their ideas very clearly in the pre-test, producing the relevant CDFs with minimal use of metadiscursive resources, it is clear that their improved organisation and use of appropriate discourse markers enhanced their execution of the CDFs in the post-test.

We must emphasise that CDFs were not a specific focus of this academic writing module, but it is likely that the teacher's insistence on the need to understand the exam prompt and provide a relevant answer

sufficed to prompt a degree of metacognitive awareness and to nudge many of these students in the right direction. The question remains as to whether more explicit metacognitive instruction about the specific components of each CDF would produce better results (Breeze & Dafouz, 2017), but it seems highly likely that this would be the case. Such instruction and practice would help the students to unpack the exam prompts more effectively, in order to be more aware of the linguistic, metalinguistic and cognitive demands of each CDF.

To conclude, building on all of the above, we would like to suggest that by focusing specifically on academic writing skills, this teacher was able to push CLIL in a way that was beneficial for content and language learning. Short academic literacy modules could be provided within the framework of content courses, as was the case here, or taught within the language syllabus for the year in question, depending on the way the curriculum is organised at the school. As seen in Figure 1, both academic and content area literacies have a role to play in students' ongoing development, and there is considerable overlap between them. The crucial point is to ensure that students make a connection between what they learn about writing in their English classes or writing module and the demands placed on them in content courses, so that constructive transfer of skills can take place. Ideally, to foster positive transfer, students could be asked to focus on content subjects within the writing module, and both English teachers and content teachers could collaborate in order to determine the criteria for what students need to write and how the final product should be assessed. As Shanahan points out (2012), many content teachers resist teaching literacy skills because they lack awareness of the role of content area and disciplinary literacy within their own field, or because they feel that teaching literacy is a task for language teachers only. Where this is the case, cooperation with English teachers could help them to become aware of their embedded knowledge and make some aspects of this visible to their students. In this context, a genre-based perspective offers considerable potential, since this approach offers a way of looking at texts that is accessible both to language specialists and content teachers (Flowerdew, 2001). But crucially, as we have noted above, CDFs should provide another central axis around which academic and content literacy support can be organised.

Finally, it is necessary to stress that the present study has some limitations. In particular, the sample size was small (only 45 students), and the texts used as pre- and post-tests were rather short. The study was carried out in only one school, and in one content course with the same highly motivated teacher. Further studies are needed to better ascertain whether CLIL can be substantially enhanced if tailored academic literacy support is provided.

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Appendix A

Coding system
[P] Purpose (explain): should include reference to faster reproduction of books.
[KP] Key parts (describe): should include letters and press.
[M] Material (describe): should include ink.
[HW] How it works (explain): should explain how the ink gets onto the letters, and how pressure is used to print the letters on the paper.

Example 1: Answer containing 4 elements (coding after each element)
Gutenberg's printing press. First you need to prepare the ink [M]. Then you put the ink in a pair of spheres "ink balls" [KP]. When they are fully covered in ink [M] you apply it [HW] in the models [KP]. This models were made by hand in relief [KP] but they were sculpted in mirror [KP], so when the ink touches the paper it prints it good [HW]. After this you pick the paper, a huge one, in the inner part or a top. Then you close the door and you'll introduce in a press machine [KP] which press the ink in the paper [HW], then you open the door and take out the paper, which is typed [HW]. This actually helped a lot in the philosophy because copies were done lots of times faster than they did in the scriptoriums where they did the copies at hand [P]. By this way you saved time and the most important: the copies of very important texts or even music notes [P]. The history was parcialy saved. [P]
Comment: All 4 elements satisfactorily included.

Example 2: Answer containing 3 elements (coding after each element)
Firstly I'm going to describe the printing press, the printing press is all wood [M], you have to pass all the ink [M] to the letters [KP] that you are going to put in your text, then when you pass all the ink to the letters [HW] you put the paper between two ‒ [KP] and then you pull a wood thing [KP] to print the letters to the paper [HW].
Comment: Description of material, key parts and functioning are sufficient, but no mention of purpose.

Example 3: Answer containing 2 elements (coding after each element)
Firstly the Gutenberg's printing is the first printer and one of the most important inventions we had never seen. This inventions makes us knowed a lot of historical events of how people were discovered in that time. But how it works? Good question this fabulous machine works with print and it's a machine that makes that with like balls [KP] and like punching to the paper makes this paper with words [HW].
Comment: Only one key part is described explicitly, and the functioning is indicated a rather impressionistic manner. No reference to material or purpose.

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Six memos for teaching Italian as a foreign language: Creativity, storytelling, and visual imagination in the language classroom*

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ABSTRACT

EN | By combining pedagogical, linguistic, and literary perspectives on creativity, storytelling, and visual imagination with their application in the language classroom, this article proposes storytelling and creative writing techniques in teaching Italian as a foreign language (FL). The main objective of this contribution is to provide some concrete examples on how creative approaches can be incorporated in Italian language courses at different proficiency levels. Therefore, the procedures and the theoretical assumptions of three creative projects involving communicative means such as mimes and gestures, and technological tools such as Twitter and meme generators, will be illustrated in detail and put in relation to linguistic research on creativity.

Key words: FL TEACHING PRACTICES, STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES, CREATIVE WRITING, TECHNOLOGY, ITALIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

ES | Al combinar las perspectivas pedagógicas, lingüísticas y literarias de la creatividad, la narración y la imaginación visual con su aplicación en el aula de lenguas, este artículo propone técnicas de narración y escritura creativa para la enseñanza del italiano como lengua extranjera (LE). El objetivo principal de esta contribución es proporcionar algunos ejemplos concretos de cómo los enfoques creativos pueden incorporarse en los cursos de italiano en diferentes niveles de competencia. Para ello, se ilustrarán en detalle los procedimientos y los supuestos teóricos de tres proyectos creativos que involucran medios comunicativos como mímicas y gestos, y herramientas tecnológicas como Twitter y generadores de memes, y se relacionarán dichos proyectos con las investigaciones lingüísticas sobre la creatividad en una lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: PRÁCTICAS DE ENSEÑANZA DE LE, TÉCNICAS DE NARRACIÓN, ESCRITURA CREATIVA, TECNOLOGÍA, LENGUA Y CULTURA ITALIANA

IT | Combinando prospettive pedagogiche, linguistiche e letterarie sulla creatività, la narrazione e l'immaginazione visiva con la loro applicazione nella classe di lingua, questo articolo propone tecniche di narrazione e scrittura creativa per l'insegnamento dell'italiano come lingua straniera (LS). L'obiettivo principale di questo contributo è fornire alcuni esempi concreti su come gli approcci creativi possano essere incorporati nei corsi di lingua italiana a diversi livelli di competenza. Pertanto, le procedure e i presupposti teorici di tre progetti creativi che coinvolgono mezzi comunicativi come mimi e gesti e strumenti tecnologici come Twitter e generatori di meme, saranno illustrati in dettaglio e messi in relazione alla ricerca linguistica sulla creatività.

Parole chiave: PRATICHE DIDATTICHE IN LINGUA STRANIERA, TECNICHE DI NARRAZIONE, SCRITTURA CREATIVA, TECNOLOGIA, LINGUA E CULTURA ITALIANA

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1. Introduction

This teaching-oriented article provides practical ideas for in-class activities to engage learners in creative language production. Pedagogical, linguistic, and literary perspectives on the relevance of creativity—in contemporary educational systems in general and, more specifically, in language courses—are tackled in depth so as to explore the potential of creative practices for language learning. The next section introduces the value of creativity, drawing on both theoretical and empirical arguments in favor of creative tasks in the language classroom. Subsequently, we illustrate three creative projects implemented at different Italian proficiency levels at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. Each project is described in detail, including the methodological framework underpinning it, the teaching techniques and rationale for each task, and the didactic materials and digital resources employed.

Project 1 is entitled *Story-miming* and focuses on Italian gestures. After an overview of scholarly contributions and teaching resources on this topic, we provide a comprehensive description of an activity involving the creation of a humorous storyline with gestures. Project 2, a *Tweet-storytelling challenge*, requires students to investigate Italian cultural figures and to participate in a creative writing activity on Twitter. Project 3, *Storytelling through iconic images and memes*, is centered on Dante's legacy in Italian popular culture and provides food for thought on how to introduce this pivotal figure to language learners by manipulating iconic images and creating memes.

In addition to illustrating these projects and presenting related resources that may be of interest to both language teachers and scholars, the overarching goal of this article is to contribute to a *creative turn* in FL/L2 teaching practices. As observed by Bell and Pomerantz (2014), in the language classroom more often than not "acts of linguistic creativity, and in particular those that play with form, are either ignored or considered deviant" (p. 32). However, in light of recent developments in FL/L2 research and of the social, technological, and educational changes that contemporary generations have undergone, it is crucial to reiterate the importance of creativity in the language learning context. While there has been a growing scholarly interest in the impact of creativity on second language acquisition, there is still a gap between current theoretical discussions on creativity and their translation into suitable learning materials and daily teaching practices. With the latter in mind, this article ultimately aims to provide concrete examples of creativity-driven tasks to apply in the language classroom, while simultaneously opening up further theoretical and practical discussions on how language teaching strategies can foster students' creative involvement, learning autonomy, and cultural growth.

2. The value of creativity in the context of language learning

In *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, the Charles Eliot Norton Poetry Lectures that Italo Calvino was invited to hold at the University of Harvard and that were published posthumously in 1988, an entire chapter is devoted to the concept of "visibility" in its relation to creative expression. In the incipit to this section, Calvino quotes a notable line from Dante's *Purgatorio* (XVII.25): "Poi piovve dentro a l'alta fantasia (Then rained down into the high fantasy…)" (p. 81). Through this intertextual reference, Calvino emphasizes how the world of fantasy can be poetically conceived as an infinite flux, a locus where, borrowing Dante's image, a constant flow of rain precipitates. He suggests that the ideal vehicle to express the fantastic visions that come to mind is creative writing and, in a broader sense, the creative act. Although he does not explicitly utilize the term *creativity*, it is clear that this concept is deeply entangled with his conception of the imaginative process.

When Calvino wrote about the role of visual imagination in his *Lezioni Americane*, the Italian title of the aforementioned lectures, he was not referring to the microcosm of the language classroom. Yet, many of his reflections constitute an insightful starting point to interrogate the role and reassess the value that creativity and visual imagination play in the twenty-first-century language classroom. Indeed, Calvino explicitly advocates for "some possible pedagogy of the imagination that would accustom us to control our own inner vision without suffocating it" (1988, p. 92). In the 1980s, before the advent of social media and the pervasiveness of cyberspace and technology in our daily lives, the creative power of imagination was already perceived to be under threat as a consequence of the image-overload that inundated contemporary society. As Sartori observed at the turn of the third millennium, today we can irrefutably say that the metamorphosis from *Homo Sapiens* to *Homo Videns*—that is, a shift from a view of human beings as individuals capable to think, reflect, and communicate knowledge, towards a more passive conception marked by a preponderance of vision, conceived as the quintessential characteristic of our society—has fully taken place (1999). The ubiquity of images and technology on a societal level forces us to rethink our traditional approaches to FL/L2 teaching and to ponder the pedagogical decisions that we make as language educators.

As teachers, we constantly have to make choices. Yet, the selection of teaching material and learning tasks is inevitably influenced by external constraints. In an attempt to concisely define the ideal features of a language learning activity, an activity checklist consisting of six features can guide teachers in the selection of activities and materials for language courses. As will be shown, these six criteria are anchored in a holistic combination of multiple approaches to language learning and language pedagogy and aim to provide teachers with general and yet practical principles that may guide the design and delivery of language activities. With these *six memos* in mind, the ideal language learning activity should be:

1) *Communicative*, i.e., it should have a clearly communicative goal and involve students in a variety of interaction patterns, with an emphasis on increasing the learners' communicative competence, that is, their ability "to weave utterances together into narratives, apologies, requests, directions, recipes, sermons, scoldings, jokes, prayers, and all else we do with language" (Finegan, 2004, p. 10);
2) *Relevant* to the syllabus and learning goals as well as to the realistic application of the target language, therefore, emphasizing the social dimension of language learning by bridging the gap between the classroom environment and the "real-world performance" (Atkinson, 2013, p. 594);
3) *Appropriate* to the students' level and profile, bearing in mind all the variables that may influence the learning approach to be put into place, with the ultimate objective "to better harness the positive desire of young students to learn an L2 and maintain this enthusiasm over an extended period of time" (Lasagabaster, 2013, p. 47);
4) *Motivating*, so as to foster students' participation in class and maximize their learning by carefully balancing the creation of an enjoyable atmosphere in class with the necessity to reach pre-established objectives. In Jere Brophy's words, the learning process "should be experienced as meaningful and worthwhile, but it requires sustained goal-oriented efforts to construct understandings" (Brophy, 2004, p. xii);
5) *Cultural*, i.e., it should include pertinent cultural notions, which can help students to expand their intercultural competence. As remarked by Alptekin (2002), "learning a foreign language becomes a kind of enculturation, where one acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers" (p. 58);
6) *Creative*, so as to promote students' creative and critical thinking skills. In the words of Burnard (2011), "the creativity agenda encourages teachers to take risks, be adventurous, and explore creativity themselves" (p. 51).

While classroom tasks frequently meet the first four aforementioned features, it is more challenging to incorporate the final two criteria. From a pedagogical perspective, the language classroom is the perfect context where to explore the true meaning of being creative and critical, precisely because it is through the encounter with another language and culture that students can learn to become more aware of their own selves.

The importance of integrating cultural facets in the language classroom has been at the center of numerous scholarly discussions (Brown, 2000; Byram, 1991; Byram & Esarte-Sarries, 1991; Kramsch, 1998; Moran, 2001; Schulz, 2007; Sercu, 2005). As observed by Celentin and Serragiotto (2015), "[l]a lingua infatti non è uno strumento astratto fatto solo di regole e costruzioni morfosintattiche ma è supportata da una cultura specifica che si manifesta attraverso di essa" (p. 2).[1] In other words, language cannot be separated from the culture, to the point that Agar (1994) coined the neologism *languaculture* to refer to these two inseparable notions in order to reiterate how "actually using a language involves all manner of background knowledge and local information in addition to grammar and vocabulary" (Agar, 2006, p. 2). If language cannot be dissociated from culture, then language learning and cultural learning should be inseparable. However, despite the evident relevance of culture in the FL/L2 context, it is not always easy to integrate simultaneously culture and creativity in the language classroom. The act of crafting a truly cultural and creative dimension in the language learning context requires time, patience, and a deep awareness of the empowering potential of creativity, both in its linguistic and imaginative acceptation, as a critical thinking tool in language courses.

Additionally, in the reality of contemporary education, it is increasingly difficult to break the classroom routine punctuated by exams, quizzes, credits, and grades, so as to envision a space for students' creativity to wander freely. In 1970, Paulo Freire insightfully voiced this concern by bringing to the foreground

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[1] "language, in fact, is not an abstract tool made up solely of morphosyntactic rules and constructions, but is supported by a specific culture that manifests itself through it" (our translation).

the contradiction of an oppressive educational system in which the deficiency of creativity is a consequence of a *banking concept of education*:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. […] But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. (Freire, 2005, p. 72)

More recently, Tan Bee Tin, in a case study on the advantages of divergent tasks—that is, open tasks that are not oriented towards a single solution, therefore, involving a higher degree of negotiation among participants—has commented that "[i]n education, the idea that learning is not only discovery and problem-solving, but also creative, has recently become popular" (Tin, 2003, p. 244). Yet it is still challenging to translate this idea into concrete teaching practices. Indeed, while arguing for the importance of balancing structure and improvisation in teaching strategies, Sawyer (2011) observes that "[t]eachers are rarely allowed to do whatever they want, even in schools committed to constructivist and creative learning" (p. 2). David Berliner, in his forward to Sawyer (2011), goes as far as to define the current state of affairs in business-oriented educational systems as a "creaticide" (Sawyer, p. xiv). This neologism brings us back to the original meaning of the word "creativity" and leads us to reflect on its annihilation: the term derives from the Latin verb *creare*, "to make, bring forth, produce," and it is etymologically related to another Latin verb, *crescere*, to grow (Online Etymology Dictionary). This concept is interlaced with the Greek notion of *poiesis*, which designates the artistic power of making, creating, composing. However, an exhaustive definition of creativity is difficult to achieve: as Albert (2013) observes, the term is at least four-fold and can refer simultaneously to "the *processes* involved in creativity, the *person* and the personality traits that are in the background, the properties of the creative *product*, and the *pressures* or characteristics of the environment" (p. 144).

Creativity is relevant for language learning for a multiplicity of reasons. The relationship between the concept of creativity and the process of second language acquisition (SLA) is complex and varied. To fully understand it, it is necessary to resort to a multidisciplinary approach that has its roots in applied linguistics, neuroscience, psychology, and pedagogy. Drawing from Roman Jakobson's functions of language, Balboni (2008) associates the *poetic-imaginative function* to the "mondo fantastico," the world of fantasy (p. 79). He remarks that this function takes place "quando si usa la lingua per produrre particolari effetti ritmici, suggestioni musicali, associazioni metaforiche ecc., oppure per creare situazioni e mondi immaginari. Sono propri di questa funzione tutti i generi 'letterari,' dalla fiaba al poema epico" (Balboni, 2008, p. 84).[2] The *poetic-imaginative function* is therefore related to an inventive employment of language in order to create imaginary stories through literary and non-literary means. As a multi-dimensional concept, creativity has multiple resonances if applied to the language classroom, since it can refer simultaneously to the above-mentioned imaginative and artistic ability of human beings as well as to the linguistic skill of creating new utterances (Chomsky 1966, 2002, 2006; D'Agostino, 1984; La Licata, 2012).

Creativity thus involves students' linguistic output and encompasses primarily, although not solely, the productive skills, speaking and writing. Indeed, from a neuroscientific pedagogical perspective, research shows that "students will absorb new material much more readily and meaningfully if they are given opportunities to *do* something with it" (Danesi, 2003, p. 50). However, as Danesi points out, it is essential to combine the left-brain analytical mode with the right-brain experiential mode as a guiding principle in inductive language learning strategies. In other words, analytical and rational tasks should not entirely be put aside by more creative and explorative ones: on the contrary, effective classroom strategies should aim to merge the two modes, especially when new language input is proposed. In an empirical study on language creativity in poetry writing tasks, Tin (2011) investigated the correlation between language play and language development. By creating a dialogue between linguistic perspectives on creativity (Cook, 2000) and approaches that see creativity as a process (Finke, 1996) and as a product (Boden, 2001), Tin demonstrated the "emergence of complex language" through creative tasks that include "formal constraints," i.e., constraints that encourage "form-focus attention" (p. 219). Therefore, creative tasks, while allowing for a higher degree of freedom in

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[2] "when language is used to produce particular rhythmic effects, musical suggestions, metaphorical associations etc., or to create imaginary worlds and situations. All the 'literary' genres, from the fairy tale to the epic, belong to this function" (our translation).

comparison to analytical tasks, can be even more beneficial if they also provide learners with opportunities to focus and reflect on form, so as to expand simultaneously their creative *and* linguistic competences.

Creative speaking and writing activities, especially if proposed as collaborative tasks, can also foster the learners' "integrative motivation" (Krashen, 1981, p. 26; Stevick, 1976, p. 113), that is, their desire to be part of the FL/L2 communicative world, which can lower in turn their affective filter. It has been acknowledged that motivation constitutes the springboard for the language learning process. The spark of creativity can also nurture the students' intrinsic motivation (Brophy, 2004; Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 2000), which arises from one's own self, feeds students' curiosity, and leads them to be active protagonists of their learning. It is, therefore, essential to leave room for "self-creation of media and texts" in order to encourage a "liberatory learning" (Shor, 1980, p. 108). In the language classroom, liberatory experiences and language play are deeply interlaced: as remarked by Bell and Pomerantz, "some L2 users may find it liberating to play with their L2, finding license to be creative in ways they are not normally able or allowed to do in their L1" (2016, p. 42). Furthermore, the employment of a creative approach to language teaching is not a one-way process: in addition to impacting students, it can influence teachers themselves, as they are pushed to explore new ways to teach the stock formulas that books often propose to explain specific language items. In other words, in a truly creative classroom environment, the teacher has the opportunity to test more all-involving approaches, in an osmotic creative process that mutually involves both teachers and students.

Following a brief review of the pedagogical use of creative storytelling, the remainder of this article will describe three such educational projects that focus on developing the students' creativity, storytelling skills, and visual imagination.

3. Creative storytelling in the language classroom

Both traditional and digital storytelling strategies can be employed as successful tools to enhance language learning. This view is central to Palmer, Harshbarger and Koch's (2001) definition of storytelling as a "rich interactive process that facilitates imagination, creative thinking, language abilities and cooperative learning" (p. 199). Similarly, Reinders (2011) observed that "stories combine different aspects of learning pedagogy, including: student engagement, reflection for deep learning, technology integration, and project-based learning" (p. 1). In particular, literary fiction, along with other non-fictional storytelling genres, fosters the pleasure of knowledge, a pleasure which is intertwined with the emergence of an emotive sphere. Due to the subjective dimension of the FL/L2 learning process, the manipulation and creation of narratives by language learners also becomes a vehicle through which students can explore and vocalize their personal ideas and thoughts through activities that are more apt to engage them in a creative and less predictable usage of the language they are learning. In the words of Gianrenzo Clivio and Marcel Danesi,

> A narrative is a text that is constructed to describe in sequence a perceived causal and interconnected sequence of events involving characters in time and space. The narrative may be purely fact-based, as in a newspaper report or a psychoanalytic session, or fictional, as in a novel, comic strip, film, for instance. (2000, p. 172)

Creative storytelling tasks in the L2 classroom can therefore involve literary, digital, and audio-visual texts that can be appropriated and reworked in a multiplicity of ways. To this end, the texts act as cues from which to elicit the student's total involvement and creative participation. As stated by Kalaja (2015) in a study on beliefs, agency, and identity construction in language teaching and learning, "[a]mong other turns, applied linguistics, or language learning and teaching has been undergoing a narrative turn" (p. 124). Although Kalaja in this instance refers to narrative as a method to investigate the students' beliefs about their own learning, language teachers can resort to narrative not only as a research tool but also as an effective in-class teaching technique. Indeed, narrative is quintessentially a means to encounter another culture. In a study on a didactic project involving migrant learners, a group of L2 Italian teachers observed how

> Ogni narrazione, orale o scritta, per il fatto che presuppone la partecipazione di un pubblico, uditore o lettore, permette a ciascun soggetto narrante di incontrare l'altro. In quest'incontro, nell'ascolto reciproco e nello scambio comunicativo, avviene inevitabilmente una negoziazione di significati, in cui tutti i soggetti coinvolti contemporaneamente affermano e ridefiniscono la propria identità. (Fiorentino et al., 2015, p. 55)[3]

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[3] "Any narrative, written or oral, presupposes the participation of an audience, as auditors or as readers, and therefore allows the narrating subjects to meet each other. In this encounter, in this mutual listening and communicative exchange, a negotiation of meanings inevitably takes place, by means of which all the subjects simultaneously involved affirm and redefine their own identity" (our translation).

As a consequence, narrative-oriented learning tasks can encourage students to explore their own identity as FL/L2 speakers and to do so by performing, interacting, and negotiating meaning with their peers in the target language. However, a narrative approach can naturally be challenging for some students, who may feel reluctant to get exposed to unconventional creative activities in the foreign language. Nonetheless, if mindfully planned, storytelling tasks can actually contribute to build the learners' self-confidence and encourage their collaborative interaction.

4. Three creative storytelling projects

The three storytelling projects presented in this article aimed to encourage creative and critical thinking skills in the language classroom. With this objective in mind, each project included a "pre-task planning" phase which helped learners in the construction and development of their narratives in oral, written, and audio-visual forms. Indeed, research on the impact of planning on SLA (Ellis, 1987; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Ortega, 1999; Robinson, 1995) demonstrated that "giving learners the opportunity to plan a narrative before they speak it (i.e., pre-task planning) resulted in significant gains in both fluency [...] and complexity" (Ellis & Yuan, 2004).

These projects then employed alternative storytelling techniques, including non-verbal communicative means such as mimes and gestures, and incorporated an array of technological tools, such as social networks, storytelling platforms, and meme generators. Although each project occurred through different media and textual forms, they all involved the narration of a story. The following sections revolve around these activities and their related teaching techniques:

- Project 1 – Beginner Level: Story-miming
- Project 2 – Elementary Level: Tweet-storytelling challenge
- Project 3 – Intermediate Level: Storytelling through iconic images and memes

Before delving into each project, it is worth noting that the target language (Italian) was used in all the core stages of the activities presented. Students became accustomed to understanding instructions in Italian from the very beginning. The teacher's monitoring and the usage of concrete examples in the initial stages of each activity (i.e., the video in Project 1 and samples of story-chains and memes in Project 2 and 3) helped students to comprehend the tasks not only verbally but also visually. However, in the pre-task planning phase, students drew on their L1, in order to set the bases for the main activity. The cooperative dimension of these projects encouraged mutual support among students in implementing the tasks collaboratively.

4.1 Project 1: Story-miming

The first project focused on Italian non-verbal language and involved a class of beginners (Level A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR]). The emphasis on non-verbal communication allowed for an integration of Italian culture-specific traits in the learning tasks. The use of gestures in everyday life in Italy is undoubtedly one of the most widespread stereotypes embedded in the notion of *Italianness*. Parodies and comedy sketches of Italians caught gesticulating abound across the world and across the media. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that Italian FL/L2 teachers frequently incorporate this element in the classroom as a cultural curiosity that arouses interest and amusement in language learners. This cultural facet lends itself to humorous interpretations that more or less realistically mirror a conventional pragmatic habit in Italian. However, gestures are relevant and worth teaching not merely because they constitute an enjoyable cultural trait but also because they have a clear illocutionary intent and a close relation to discourse structure (Kendon, 1995, p. 247). Gestures "participate in the construction of the utterance's meaning" (Kendon, 2000, p. 60): not only do they play an important role in linguistic exchanges but they can also add layers of meaning to the communicative act (McNeill, 1992). Indeed, Kendon and McNeill draw attention to the manner in which gestures can perform a variety of functions, in that they can simultaneously complement a description, provide visual exemplifications, and frequently embed linguistic expressions with further non-verbal nuances as well as with a more precise and circumscribed significance.

Many of these gestures, including the well-known *mano a borsa* or *purse hand* (Kendon, 1995, p. 250), have made their appearance in various books as early as in 1832 in Andrea De Jorio's *La Mimica degli Antichi Investigata nel Gestire Napoletano* and, more recently, in Munari (1963), Efron (1972), Poggi (1983), and Diadori (1990). The *Dizionario dei Gesti degli Italiani* (Caon, 2010) responded to the intercultural need to understand the semiotic dimension of Italian gestures as well as the idiomatic expressions associated with

them. It provides useful descriptions of gestures, along with physical depictions, verbal and visual explanations, situational contexts, and intercultural misunderstandings that may arise when using specific gestures in countries other than Italy. As recently as 2017, a further contribution to this field took shape in *L'Italiano a Gesti: Attività per lo Sviluppo della Dimensione Non Verbale* (Caon, Giovannini & Meneghetti, 2017), which confirms a growing interest in the field of teaching Italian to foreigners towards gestures as depositary of communicative meaning and markers of cultural identity.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, gestures belong to the sphere of non-verbal codes that effective "social actors in multilingual settings" (Kramsch, 2008, p. 400) need to be able to master in order to interact confidently with other language speakers. Building on complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman, 1997), Kramsch associates the skill of communicating efficiently with Bourdieu's concept of *sens pratique*, which is encapsulated in the all-encompassing *symbolic competence*, that is, "the ability not only to approximate or appropriate for oneself someone else's language, but to shape the very context in which the language is learned and used" (Kramsch, 2008, p. 400). On a pedagogical level, elements such as gestures are intrinsically embedded in the performativity of a language and are therefore pivotal in gaining a deeper understanding of another culture, as they can help students realize the dissimilarities and inconsistencies between their own culture and the new culture they are learning. From this point of view, these paralinguistic elements contribute to accepting the limits—or niches of untranslatability, we might say—in the encounter with another language. In fact, as Balboni and Caon (2014) comment, "non-verbal body language such as gestures, expressions, proximity to speakers" (n.p.) are frequently taken for granted and considered to be universal, when in truth they are actually deeply rooted in specific cultural frameworks and thus need to be taught in the language learning context in order to develop the students' intercultural competence.

An excellent example of how Italian gestures can be introduced and re-used in a story-miming activity is provided by Roberto Tartaglione and Daniela Mancini's video available on the Alma Edizioni website[4]. In this performance, Roberto and Daniela enact a non-verbal sketch by using exclusively gestures. What follows is a description of how this video can be incorporated into an in-class activity that fosters the creative employment of Italian gestures in the language classroom by alternating traditional miming-activities and technology. Each stage is illustrated in detail and different options are given, depending on the class time and technological tools that are available:

1) *Warm-up activity:* Students were asked to match pictures of gestures with their meaning. This initial activity aimed to teach students how to express emotions in Italian (i.e., I am happy, I am angry, I am sad, etc.), and how to accompany these emotions with a specific gesture. To this end, cards with emoticons and gestures were created so as to make the activity more engaging. Each emoticon was printed on yellow paper and was accompanied by a specific gesture. For instance, a piece of paper showed an emoticon with an angry expression accompanied by a picture of the "purse hand" gesture. In pairs, students had to practice the enactment of these emoticons/gestures.

2) *Video task:* Students watched "Il linguaggio dei gesti" by Tartaglione and Mancini, which worked as a template for the subsequent storytelling activity. While watching the video, students worked in pairs in order to guess the topic of the conversation and identify at least three of the previously-taught Italian gestures.

3) *Storyboard task:* The class was divided into small groups. Each group was given a topic card (Figure 1) and a storyboard (Figure 2). The topic card, originally written in Italian but presented here in English, aimed to guide students in the subsequent writing activity by providing them with a context and a set of characters and emotions to enact. Students then had to write the script of a humorous performance in a storyboard template, divided into six sections. For each section, students wrote down and/or drew at least one sentence alongside the gesture that would accompany it. An alternative option for this step could be a comic strip with speech bubbles instead of a storyboard. The same activity could also be set on an online interactive comic-creator platform such as Read Write Think Comic Creator[5], rather than on paper. On this user-friendly website, students can set the name and subtitle of their comic strip, select the template and number of panels, choose the background, protagonists, props, balloons and save their comic strip as a pdf file.

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[4] https://www.almaedizioni.it/it/almatv/grammatica-caffe/il-linguaggio-dei-gesti/

[5] http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/comic/index.html

4) *Final performance:* The storyboard functioned as a script for the final performance. Each group enacted the scene from their script, using exclusively mimes and gestures. The other groups had to guess, in the target language, the context, characters, and emotions of each sketch. One point was awarded for each correct answer and the winning group received a prize. Depending on the availability of technological means, students can alternatively use the platform, Flipgrid[6], to record a video of their performance. Then, through Flipgrid, each group can access the videos of other groups and guess the context, emotions and characters of the classmates' performance.

Topic Card:
1. **Context:** In class
2. **Characters:** Teacher, students
3. **Emotions:** The teacher is angry, the students are bored
4. **Sketch:** The students did not do their homework! Create a script with a dialogue on this sketch and then enact it.
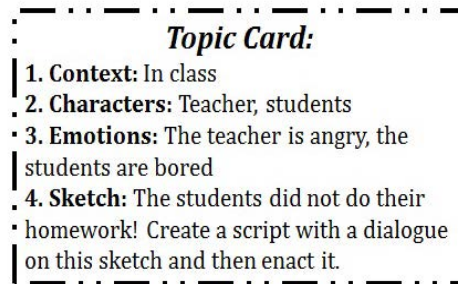
Figure 1. Sample topic card
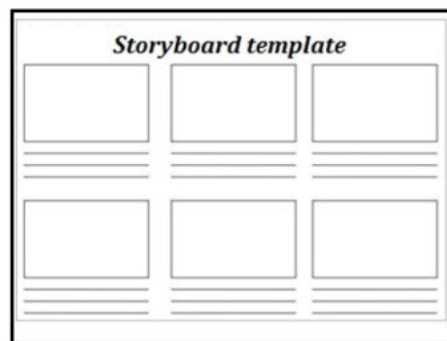
Figure 2. Storyboard template

This guided non-verbal storytelling activity is an example of how both writing and speaking productions can be incorporated effectively into a single lesson with a focus on non-verbal communicative means. By decoding non-verbal acts and then transcoding linguistic acts using kinesthetic storytelling strategies, students simultaneously learned specific Italian gestures and how to express emotions in Italian. Furthermore, the sketches allowed for an integration of humor into the language classroom.

The topic cards used in this activity suggest sample familiar contexts and scenarios that can be easily translated into gestures—and, at a later stage, into words—by complete beginners. Other equally conventional scenarios were provided at this level, such as humorous incidents occurring in the supermarket, at the shopping mall, or at the restaurant. In this case, we intentionally selected common settings and every-day circumstances generally introduced in a beginner course and not requiring complex linguistic output. However, this same activity can be proposed at higher proficiency levels by providing more unfamiliar scenarios that might further stimulate students' creativity and push their linguistic and extra-linguistic skills. For instance, higher-level students may be asked to enact a sketch in a context that demands a more challenging language use, such as an unpredictable circumstance occurring in a museum or at a gas station in Italy, to name a few alternatives. If teachers wish to venture into more unreal settings that may push the students' imagination further, the sketch may even be set on a spaceship or on another planet or in any other imaginative context that may prove useful to trigger the students' involvement. Naturally, the possibilities to adapt each activity are boundless, but they should be aligned with students' profiles and proficiency level, as well as with the learning objectives initially set by the teacher.

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[6] https://info.flipgrid.com/

Overall, this project allowed beginner students not only to strengthen their basic *linguistic repertoire* (Finegan, 2004, p. 540), a term which includes different registers, styles, colloquial expressions and language varieties, but also to broaden their contextual and cultural awareness, in other words, their *communicative repertoire,* which embraces precisely a variety of non-verbal dynamics such as "gesture, dress, posture and even knowledge of communicative routines" (Rymes, 2014, p. 290). In addition, students had the opportunity to plan and devise a sketch collaboratively. Therefore, they resorted to *multimodal resources*, both verbal and non-verbal, along with cooperative learning strategies (Tabensky, 2008). In sum, through this activity, by performing a role as actors on stage, students created their own imaginative storylines, developed their metalinguistic responsiveness, and appropriated the non-verbal cues of the foreign language as their own.

4.2 Project 2: Tweet-storytelling challenge

In the preface to *Grammatica della Fantasia*, Gianni Rodari recounts his reflections on the function of the imagination, the techniques to foster it, and "sul modo di comunicare a tutti quelle tecniche, per esempio di farne uno strumento per l'educazione linguistica (ma non soltanto…) dei bambini" (Rodari, 1980, p. 9).[7] Although Rodari was directing his creative writing strategies to a profile of Italian L1 young learners, his insights can provide imaginative food for thought for FL/L2 Italian teachers as well. By creatively adapting Rodari's techniques to the language classroom, we can craft a teaching approach that truly "pone al suo centro l'apprendente, 'creatore' consapevole del suo stesso apprendere" (Sciarrino, 2013).[8]

Creative writing activities in language courses are frequently assigned as homework because they tend to use up extensive class time (Balboni, 2008, p. 160). However, by modelling a writing task using a platform such as Twitter, teachers can take advantage of the brevity and rapidity embedded in this social network for in-class guided creative writing tasks. The second project, therefore, entailed a storytelling challenge on Twitter and involved students of Italian at an elementary level (Level A2 of the CEFR). This activity shows how teachers can turn social networks such as Twitter into a creative storytelling instrument.

Neither the teacher nor the students need to be expert Twitter users to carry out this task. However, Twitter was introduced in our course as a learning tool from the very beginning of the semester: on a weekly basis, students posted tweets related to the main topic and/or grammar point covered in class. Therefore, by the time this activity was proposed, students were already acquainted with this platform. There are several advantages in using Twitter to launch a storytelling challenge: first of all, as a social network widely used across the world, Twitter is closer to the virtual communicative world of current generations; secondly, Twitter has a rigid length-limit of 280 characters per tweet, and is, therefore, a good resource to teach communicative conciseness and effectiveness. However, should the use of Twitter not be possible, teachers could alternatively employ Storybird[9] and model the following creative writing activity to this platform, where students can create a picture book as a visual support for their story. Maneschi (2017), building on Bruner's (1986; 1990) conception of narrative as a central cultural and human cognitive mode, provides practical advice on how to use this platform in a language activity focused on "visual storytelling" (p. 30).

To provide cultural background for this creative writing task, the activity was linked to a previous project in which students conducted research on illustrious Italian figures. In small groups, students had to briefly brainstorm the information they had gathered on the Italian figure they had formerly researched. They then re-wrote these biographies into fictional stories to be published on Twitter. This creative writing activity was divided into four stages:

1) *Pre-writing task - Brainstorming in groups:* Students received large sheets of paper to jot down ideas and key words, focusing on the main features of the story (i.e., genre, protagonists, setting). They initially had to write a *story map*, which constitutes the first "basis for immediate assessment of students' stories" (Yang & Wu, 2012, p. 340). Since the latest lesson focused on the topic of travelling, this theme was integrated in the writing activity by asking students to include a journey and/or a means of transport in their stories.
2) *Collaborative writing task - Tweet-story:* Each student was assigned a part of the story, which he/she wrote in a tweet (e.g., Tweet 1: beginning and setting; Tweet 2: central story and twist; Tweet 3: resolution and ending). All the tweets were linked logically and thematically, as a story-chain.

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[7] "how the techniques might be disseminated so that everyone could use them, for example, as instruments for the linguistic education of children, but not just for this purpose alone" (translated by Jack Zipes, 1996, p. 3).

[8] "places the learner at its center, as a 'creator' of his/her own learning process" (our translation).

[9] https://storybird.com/

3) *Post-writing task:* Each student was assigned a role. For instance: *proofreader* (who edited the story to ensure it was grammatically correct and coherent); *creative director* (who made sure that the micro-story was original and unique, if necessary by adding a plot twist); *marketing editor* (who chose the images to accompany the story on Twitter). After revising the first draft with the help of the teachers, who acted as facilitators, students published their stories on Twitter.

4) *Peer-correction and oral story-sharing:* Each group read the various stories published on Twitter and carried out a peer-correction activity. These peer-editing strategies reflect an engagement with the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) pedagogy (Zawacki & Rogers, 2012). After this peer-correction stage, each group shared their narratives through a dramatized reading with the rest of the class. At this stage, space was given for a freer speaking production activity. Students were encouraged to resort to their artistic skills and to other resources, such as visual presentations and background music, in order to reproduce their stories in an engaging manner. Here, the Tweet-stories served as basic scripts, but students had the freedom to enact them differently. For instance, they could change the narrator's voice into a dialogue between the main characters of the story. While each group performed their stories, the other groups gave an anonymous mark from 1 to 5, based on the inventiveness of the story and the performance. The winners received an Italian-themed prize.

In our course, all the stories showed an imaginative approach to the biographies of eminent Italian figures. Twitter functioned as a sharing device and the Tweet-stories became screenplays for the subsequent oral performance. These forms of "collaborative fantasy" lend themselves to a higher level of creativity. In Norrick's words,

> The participants in a collaborative fantasy intend to amuse themselves and share high-involvement talk, rather than to engage in a logical exercise. Cleverness and creativity take precedence over consistency and credibility. With no specific remembered events to verbalize, co-tellers are free to develop any sort of plot they can agree on. (2000, p. 132)

The winning story (Figure 3) was written in the fashion of an historical novel. It narrated the life of Michelangelo and his conflict with a rival architect while he was working at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Another story (Figure 4) was a thriller-retelling of Dante's life in modern days.

#ITAL112 #Storytelling challenge: Group 1

#Tweet 1: Questa storia si è svolta nel secolo sedicesimo nella città di Roma. Roma è la più grande città di Italia. Molti artisti lavoravano per il Papa a Roma. Michelangelo era un bravo scultore, ma Papa Giulio II gli ha fatto un torto.

#Tweet 2: Quando Michelangelo stava lavorando alla cupola di San Pietro, un altro architetto Giacomo Della Porta ha convinto il Papa a non pagare Michelangelo. Michelangelo si è arrabbiato e ha lasciato Roma. Il Papa ha capito che lui aveva bisogno di Michelangelo per un altro progetto.

#Tweet 3: Il Papa ha ordinato alla guardia svizzera di riportare Michelangelo a Roma. La risoluzione della storia è stata che il Papa ha deciso di pagare. Michelangelo ha detto a Giacomo che voleva una scusa ufficiale in pubblico.

Figure 3. Winning Tweet-story

#ITAL112 #Storytelling challenge: Group 2

#Tweet 1: Dante amava Beatrice. Quando è cresciuto, Dante ha traslocato in campagna nel bosco. Lui aveva un motorino. Ogni giorno scriveva una poesia per Beatrice.

#Tweet 2: Ma un giorno Dante ha smesso di amarla. Lui è corso via da Beatrice.

#Tweet 3: Beatrice lo ha preso e lo ha ucciso. Lei non è andata in paradiso.
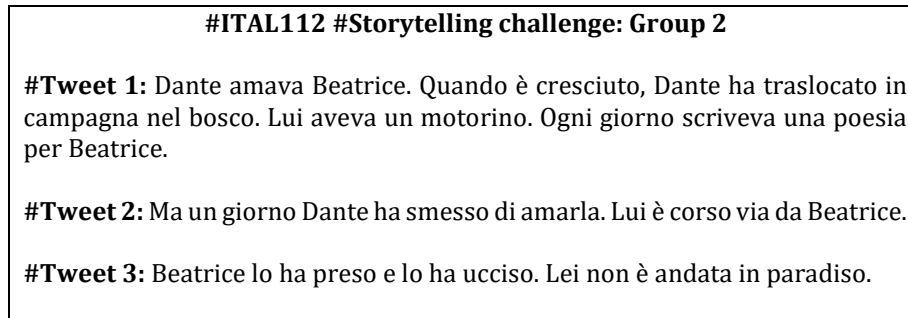

Figure 4. Another Tweet-story

It is interesting to notice that these story-creations frequently gave way to stylistically and linguistically playful associations: for instance, in Dante's tweet-story, students created a rhythmic effect between the final two sentences by making the word "ucciso" rhyme with "paradiso." This parodic retelling of Dante's love for Beatrice acquired an additional ironic twist through this linguistic pun.

4.3 Project 3: Storytelling through iconic images and memes

The third project focused on the use of memes and iconic images for group storytelling and was implemented in an intermediate language course (Level B1 of the CEFR), by exposing students to the captivating imagery of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. This masterpiece has a wide appeal in North American academia and is undoubtedly among the works of Italian literature that are best known to the international audience. The popularity of the *Divine Comedy* is closely linked to an ongoing process of remediation, that is, the process of refashioning and renegotiation through new media that Dante's work has undergone across the centuries, in Italy and abroad. This masterpiece has inspired theatrical performances and *lecturae Dantis* by renowned actors such as Vittorio Gassman and Roberto Benigni. In addition, its visual and filmic adaptations are countless, including Gustave Doré's nineteenth-century illustrations[10] to the *Divine Comedy*, the 1911 silent movie *Inferno*, and the 1995 American thriller *Seven*, as well as the episode of *The Simpsons* featuring Homer's donut Hell (Groening, *The Simpsons*, Treehouse of Horror IV, 1993), *L'Inferno di Topolino* (Fecchio, Monteduro & Freccero, 2016), and Facebook pages such as "Se i Social Network Fossero Sempre Esistiti"[11], which repurpose, once again, playful allusions to Dante's *Inferno* in popular culture. Another example is the website, "Dante Today"[12] (Saiber & Coggeshall, n.d.), a crowdsourced repository for "citings and sightings" of Dante and his work. Showcasing cultural manifestations spanning from pop music to a variety of parodic re-adaptations, this site stands as further evidence of Dante's reception and renegotiation.

The popularity of Dante's *Divine Comedy* as a source of visual imagination and creative refashioning can be very productive in FL/L2 courses, in which instructors face the linguistic and cultural challenge of introducing this masterpiece to language learners. This work can be overwhelming for beginner or even intermediate students, who are likely not linguistically equipped to appreciate fourteenth-century Italian vernacular, both at a literal and allegorical level. However, mediating the encounter with Dante's work through its contemporary legacy can offer a way for language learners to acquire basic literary and cultural competence in the *Divine Comedy*, while participating as content creators in its unfolding process of remediation.

In order to elicit this combined process of cultural acquisition and renegotiation in language students, teachers may find memes particularly useful. A meme is a self-contained story, generally a humorous image or video combined with a written text that is copied, with slight variations, and spread rapidly over the Internet, thus becoming viral. As Shifman (2014) highlights in her study on Internet memes, these digital artefacts are not only shared and propagated but also subjected to an endless process of remaking and remixing. In other words, their *memetic success* depends on "the probability that people will respond creatively" to them (Shifman, 2014, p. 174). Furthermore, memes are culturally significant in that they can be regarded as "reflections of cultural and social collectives" (Shifman, 2014, p. 171). Memes are, therefore, a rich channel of cultural transfer that goes beyond the mere information exchange. For their comedic language, these visual and written texts are less predictable than the language usually featured in textbooks, and they can become a means to engage

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[10] https://archive.org/details/GustaveDoreIllustrationsForTheDivineComedyByDanteAlighieriHQ

[11] https://it-it.facebook.com/seisocialnetwork/

[12] https://research.bowdoin.edu/dante-today/

students in a more complex act of interpretation. Language play and humor challenge learners to face a variety of possible interpretations. By asking students to engage with "ambiguity and polysemy," they offer "prodigious resources for language education and not merely distractions from the serious business of learning" (Bell & Pomerantz, 2014, p. 41).

Having illustrated the significance of memes in popular culture and the benefits of exposing students to language play, we will now move on to describe in detail how we incorporated these elements in an intermediate-level class. The activity focused on enhancing storytelling, writing, and cultural skills through Dante's *Divine Comedy* and was divided into three steps:

1) *Introduction to Dante's* Inferno: Students listened to an excerpt from Vittorio Gassman's *lectura Dantis* of the initial tercets from *Inferno*, Canto 1. We then asked them to interpret the meaning of these lines in small groups. After a collective discussion, we provided an overview of the structure of Dante's *Inferno*. We then distributed a visual map of the Nine Circles of Hell and introduced the first creative writing task. In pairs, students designed their own nine circles, based on their experience as college students. For each circle, they wrote a short title and a description of the punishment, by applying Dante's principle of the *contrappasso*, the idea that the damned souls deserve a retribution that resembles or contrasts the sin they committed on earth.

2) *Group-storytelling task*: In the subsequent phase of the project, students shared the fictional images of their *undergraduate Inferno*, engaging in an activity of group storytelling that strengthened their presentational and vocabulary skills, while allowing them to socialize as a class through the creation of humorous content. There were, for example, several self-ironic representations of Hell: one group confined "undecided" undergraduates to Limbo for their inability to choose a major; another group condemned cheaters to the *Fraud Circle*, where they would retake the same final exam over and over again.

3) *Final creative task:* The final writing activity involved the creation in pairs of Dantesque memes. In this case, the activity was specifically linked to one of the topics students had recently covered in class: the environment. Since contemporary digital culture has often featured memes of the Italian poet in a judgmental attitude, students were asked to elaborate on this comical facet of the *Divine Comedy*'s reception. Each pair designed a meme on Meme Generator[13], in which Dante expressed contempt for non-environmentally friendly behaviors, such as not recycling, wasting energy, or littering (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Samples of Dantesque memes created by the students

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[13] https://imgflip.com/memegenerator

Overall, this activity increased students' knowledge of both Italian culture and its contemporary reuse in a variety of media. They had the chance to experience a meaningful encounter with Italian literature and, as content creators, to participate directly in the inexhaustible legacy of the *Divine Comedy*.

5. Conclusion

The teaching techniques presented in this article allowed students to work collaboratively to create stories in the language they were learning. In evaluating the outcomes of these creative projects, it is worth highlighting that students practiced speaking and writing skills in a communicative way, with a double focus on both fluency and accuracy. A strong emphasis was placed on the relevance of the activities in relation to the course syllabus and its objectives. In the introductory stage of each activity, students were made aware that these projects were meant to provide them with further opportunities to revise topics covered in earlier lessons and to make further progress without the pressure of being formally assessed. As a result, each project was appropriate to the students' learning and tailored to their language level and profile. To make the activities more engaging, learners were encouraged to draw from their artistic and personal interests, which gave scope to a greater intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, a cultural component lay at the core of each task. Finally, a clear creative effort was incorporated in each stage, so as to stimulate the students' active contribution to their learning process. As a result, returning to the "activity checklist" proposed in the introduction, it can be seen how these projects effectively merged the aforementioned six features of the ideal language learning activity. Overall, students participated in tasks that were:

1) *Communicative*: Speaking and writing skills were practiced communicatively and cooperatively through tasks that facilitated group-work.
2) *Relevant*: Each project was clearly linked to the syllabus so as to give students the chance to revise topics and language items previously studied in class and to practice new vocabulary in a meaningful and challenging context.
3) *Appropriate*: All the activities were tailored to the learners' profiles and proficiency levels.
4) *Motivating*: Learners were encouraged to explore their personal interests and express their own ideas while developing their stories, which were as a result more inspiring and motivating.
5) *Cultural*: Students learned new facets of Italian culture (e.g., the meaning and importance of gestures in communicative exchanges; the biographies of Italian prominent historical, artistic, and cultural figures; Dante's legacy in Italian contemporary popular culture).
6) *Creative*: Learners actively sketched and performed storylines based on the above-mentioned topics, therefore putting into practice storytelling and creative writing skills.

In each activity, students had the opportunity to work individually, in pairs, and in groups. At the end of each project, students were invited to reflect on what they had learned and to provide feedback on the projects. Overall, the responses were positive: students appreciated that there was a clear link between the topics they had studied and the activities proposed, which allowed them to revisit and expand the vocabulary and language points they had learned and to increase their proficiency. Some of the less confident students, however, were initially reluctant to engage in these activities. For instance, at the initial stages, a few remarked that they were not able to be creative at all. This perplexed attitude resonates with Bell and Pomerantz's observation that "humor and indeed even serious acts of linguistic creativity always entail some degree of risk" (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016, p.176). However, as Bell and Pomerantz reiterate, this risk can be turned into an opportunity for the students' critical reflection and intercultural growth. To overcome such issues, it is pivotal for the teachers to encourage the students' output and to set a harmonious classroom environment in which everyone feels welcome to interact and express his/her own ideas. In this regard, we noted that once the groups started planning their stories cooperatively under the teacher's monitoring, even the more hesitant students intervened in the group dynamics and contributed to the final product.

As a whole, the stories students created in oral, written, and visual forms showed that their linguistic abilities were pushed towards more original language production. In addition, learners reported that they enjoyed the less predictable features of these lessons, which permitted them to approach language topics in a less controlled manner in comparison to the more conventional in-class tasks generally suggested by the textbook and mostly oriented towards a functional view of language. It can be concluded, therefore, that the six ideal features of a language learning activity—communicative, relevant, appropriate, motivating, cultural, and

creative—were met. Although these projects were tailored for Italian language courses, the same techniques can be adapted to other languages by choosing different cultural, literary, and artistic figures and using these procedures as models. There are, however, some considerations to take into account for teachers who wish to adapt and implement these lessons. Firstly, these activities require careful planning and can be unavoidably time-consuming. Secondly, it is pivotal to provide very specific and detailed instructions and scaffolds for each project. Finally, it is necessary to tailor each creative storytelling activity to the students' linguistic level, as they may feel discouraged if they are asked to produce a story beyond their language abilities.

Beyond the immediate scope of these specific projects, in this article we have advocated for the implementation of a higher degree of creativity in FL/L2 daily teaching practices. Creativity as a teaching/learning mindset can and should be integrated more frequently in the language classroom. The implications of the planning and delivery of creative tasks for language teaching are manifold. Firstly, as emphasized throughout this article, the creation of stories in the language classroom through collaborative storytelling techniques can help students to develop a sense of coherence, to organize their thoughts, and to reflect critically on their ideas in order to communicate more powerfully in the target language. Secondly, creative approaches can go hand-in-hand with an integration of technology in language courses and with an exploitation of authentic didactic materials that can induce a greater exposure to the culture of the target language. Thirdly, as a two-way process, creativity is capable of activating a rebound effect, by establishing a virtuous circle that is beneficial for both teachers and students. In other words, imagination stimulates further imagination: by experimenting with new techniques, students as well as teachers can discover and explore their own creative potential.

Despite the challenges that this *creative turn* may entail—not only as far as concrete teaching practices are concerned but also in terms of syllabus design and material development—the incorporation of creative tasks in language courses is fruitful and rewarding for both learners and teachers. These projects provide just a few concrete examples of how alternative means such as gestures, memes, and social networks can be used to the benefit of language learners. However, if we consider the vast array of media at our disposal, the possibilities for a creative involvement in the language classroom are both endless and worth exploring.

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Usare le parole per gestire situazioni di conflitto alla scuola primaria

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ABSTRACT

IT Questo contributo illustra i risultati di un'indagine esplorativa relativa alle modalità di gestione verbale di situazioni di conflitto da parte di bambini della scuola primaria. L'analisi mira a rilevare come gli allievi monolingui e plurilingui di 7-8 anni gestiscono l'atto di protesta in italiano nell'interazione tra pari. Oltre a descrivere alcuni degli usi pragmatici dei bambini delle classi multilingui coinvolte, l'osservazione sperimentale ha l'obiettivo di offrire indicazioni ai docenti per sviluppare interventi didattici rivolti a questa fascia d'età.

Parole-chiave: PRAGMATICA, PROTESTA, SCUOLA PRIMARIA, RICERCA-AZIONE, ROLE PLAY

EN This contribution presents the results of an exploratory investigation of the ways in which primary school children manage conflict situations through language. The analysis aims to highlight how 7-to-8-year-old monolingual and multilingual students deal with acts of protest in Italian in peer interactions. In addition to describing some of the pragmatic strategies employed by the children in the focal multilingual classes, the experimental observation aims to offer insights for teachers developing educational interventions tailored to this age group.

Key words: PRAGMATICS, PROTEST, PRIMARY SCHOOL, ACTION-RESEARCH, ROLEPLAY

ES Esta contribución ilustra los resultados de una encuesta exploratoria relativa a la gestión de situaciones de conflicto a través de la lengua por parte de niños de escuela primaria. El análisis destacan como los alumnos monolingües y plurilingües de 7-8 años de edad manejan el acto de protesta en italiano en las interacciones entre pares. Además de algunas estrategias pragmáticas usadas por los niños de las clases multilingües que participaron en el estudio, la observación experimentar sirve de base para ofrecer indicaciones a los docentes para desarrollar intervenciones didácticas dirigidas a esta franja de edad.

Palabras clave: PRÁGMATICA, PROTESTA, ESCUELA PRIMARIA, INVESTIGACIÓN EN ACCIÓN, JUEGOS DE ROLES

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1. Introduzione

       In queste pagine si illustra uno studio esplorativo dedicato al tema della gestione verbale dei conflitti in lingua italiana da parte di bambini monolingui e plurilingui di 7-8 anni d'età. L'atto comunicativo a cui si è fatto principale riferimento è quello della protesta, un atto in cui il destinatario è considerato responsabile direttamente o indirettamente dello stato di cose avvertito come negativo dal parlante. Lo studio fa parte del più ampio progetto di formazione e ricerca-azione *Oggi facciamo pragmatica[1]*, dedicato alla sperimentazione di percorsi di insegnamento della pragmatica alla scuola primaria. Due classi seconde e due classi terze di uno stesso Istituto Comprensivo hanno esplorato l'atto comunicativo della protesta. Con l'obiettivo di realizzare interventi educativi basati su dati empirici, anziché su intuizioni o impressioni riportate dagli insegnanti, la progettazione delle lezioni è stata preceduta da un'osservazione delle modalità di realizzazione dell'atto da parte degli allievi coinvolti. Il presente contributo illustra tale analisi preliminare basata su produzioni semi-spontanee stimolate tramite *role play*. Dopo aver brevemente contestualizzato il progetto e il tema dell'insegnamento della pragmatica a scuola nella classe multilingue (§2), si riportano le caratteristiche principali dell'atto di protesta (§3), si illustrano la metodologia impiegata per lo studio (§4) e i risultati dell'analisi (§5). La descrizione delle strategie impiegate dai bambini nella realizzazione dell'atto è seguita dalla presentazione delle scelte fatte dai docenti nello sviluppare gli interventi didattici in classe (§6). Si conclude con alcune riflessioni finali (§7).

2. La pragmatica a scuola

       Chi lavora a stretto contatto con i docenti di educazione linguistica ha certamente occasione di osservare la frequenza con cui gli insegnanti sottolineano disappunto rispetto alla capacità dei bambini italofoni e non di usare efficacemente la lingua, variando le loro formulazioni sulla base del contesto, dello scopo, del destinatario o del canale comunicativo. Non sempre tali inadeguatezze vengono interpretate come incompetenze su un piano pragmatico o interazionale, più spesso sono lette dal docente come riflesso del carattere personale o generazionale o ancora come caratteristica della comunità di appartenenza (Gass & Selinker, 2008). L'uso di parole poco appropriate o la difficoltà a cogliere gli impliciti di una determinata formulazione linguistica possono facilmente generare fraintendimenti, se non addirittura potenziali conflitti, con evidenti ricadute non solo rispetto al successo scolastico, ma anche alla qualità delle relazioni tra bambini e adulti o tra pari (Bettoni, 2006; Nuzzo & Gauci, 2012).

       In letteratura è ampiamente riconosciuto il fatto che imparare una lingua non significa solo acquisire lessico e grammatica, ma soprattutto sviluppare quella serie di abilità che guidano il parlante nella scelta delle formulazioni linguistiche più adatte alle specifiche situazioni e nell'interpretazione dei significati impliciti delle parole usate (cfr. Bazzanella, 2005; Bettoni, 2006; Nuzzo, 2007). Nonostante ci sia accordo unanime sul ruolo chiave della pragmatica nello sviluppo delle competenze comunicative, la letteratura non offre ad oggi indicazioni per la fascia d'età della scuola primaria rispetto ai percorsi di sviluppo delle competenze pragmatiche in L1 o agli effetti di interventi didattici mirati, lasciando così questi ambiti di indagine ancora inesplorati. Nella scuola italiana poi, con l'espressione "fare italiano" si intende in genere "fare grammatica": la riflessione è dedicata quasi esclusivamente alle regole strutturali e raramente si porta l'attenzione degli allievi sugli usi linguistici (cfr. Leone & Mezzi, 2011; Lo Duca, 2003; Miglietta & Sobrero, 2011; Pallotti, 2009). Anche nell'insegnamento, così come nella vita reale, i due volti della competenza comunicativa, grammatica e pragmatica, dovrebbero invece essere maggiormente integrati, in modo da dare valore didattico alla relazione tra forma e funzione, tra riflessione sul funzionamento di una specifica struttura e riflessione sulle norme che ne guidano la selezione in un determinato contesto (Ferrari, 2016; Ferrari, Nuzzo, & Zanoni, 2016; cfr. MIUR, 2012, p. 30-31; Nuzzo, 2011). Ciò è ancora più rilevante quando si prendono in considerazione le classi multilingui: se per i bambini italofoni è utile avviare una riflessione metalinguistica sul rapporto tra contesto situazionale e scelte linguistiche, per i bambini plurilingui e gli

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[1] Il Progetto *Oggi facciamo pragmatica* promosso e coordinato da Stefania Ferrari è un percorso formativo e di ricerca dedicato al tema dell'apprendimento/insegnamento della pragmatica in L1 e L2 alla scuola primaria. Le sperimentazioni educative sono state realizzate grazie al patrocinio del Multicentro Educativo Modena (M.E.MO.) che lo ha inserito tra le proposte formative per gli anni scolastici 2015-2019. Il Progetto ha generato una varietà di percorsi relativi a diversi atti comunicativi – dal richiedere all'invitare, dalla gestione verbale del conflitto a dare ordini e indicazioni, includendo riflessioni sull'uso del Tu e del Lei, sulle strategie per modulare un atto linguistico o realizzarlo nell'interazione (Ferrari, 2016; Ferrari & Zanini, 2019; Ferrari & Zanoni, 2017; 2018); per la consultazione di una selezione dei materiali proposti nelle sperimentazioni si rimanda al sito Internet www.glottonaute.it.

apprendenti di italiano L2 è ancora più importante avere modo di esplorare la varietà di strumenti che la lingua italiana mette a disposizione del parlante per "fare cose con le parole", anche in relazione alle loro altre lingue. La pragmatica costituisce dunque uno spazio privilegiato per pratiche di didattica inclusiva: percorsi mirati favorirebbero per tutti lo sviluppo di una più raffinata riflessione linguistica, offrendo al contempo occasioni per esercitare efficacemente le competenze d'uso.

Introdurre la pragmatica nelle ore di educazione linguistica significa per i docenti avere innanzitutto accesso a conoscenze teoriche e a strumenti operativi che permettono di strutturare interventi didattici basati su dati empirici e non esclusivamente sulle proprie intuizioni di parlanti nativi (Bettoni, 2006; Boxer, 2003; Cruz, 2015; Lo Castro, 2003; Nuzzo & Gauci, 2012). Purtroppo la mancanza di ricerche dedicate alla descrizione degli usi pragmatici in L1 e in L2 dei bambini della scuola primaria, combinata con l'assenza di materiali didattici di riferimento, mette i docenti desiderosi di integrare la pragmatica nella loro quotidianità scolastica nella complessa condizione di dover essi stessi indagare i costrutti di riferimento e contemporaneamente sviluppare strumenti educativi adeguati. Il percorso di formazione e ricerca-azione *Oggi facciamo pragmatica* nasce con l'intento di iniziare a colmare questa lacuna, fornire agli insegnanti di educazione linguistica alcuni strumenti per esplorare con maggior rigore e consapevolezza l'insegnamento della pragmatica nella classe multilingue e allo stesso tempo offrire alla ricerca dati per ampliare le conoscenze circa le modalità di realizzazione di alcuni atti comunicativi nel parlato dei bambini. Ricercatori e insegnanti lavorano insieme, analizzando le produzioni degli allievi e concordando modalità di intervento didattico, co-conducendo lezioni e favorendo di fatto il costante dialogo tra ricerca teorica e applicazione pratica.

3. La protesta

L'espressione dell'atto di protesta è generata dalla trasgressione compiuta dal destinatario alle norme di comportamento condivise dalla comunità linguistica. Poiché l'interlocutore è considerato responsabile dello stato di cose avvertito come negativo dal parlante, l'atto non si esaurisce con la manifestazione di un giudizio, ma implica anche un tentativo di ottenere una riparazione (Bettoni, 2006; Searle, 1976). La protesta si configura dunque come un atto ad alto rischio, poiché minaccia la faccia sia del parlante che del destinatario (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Levinson, 2017). Nel caso dell'autore della protesta ne viene minacciata la faccia positiva, poiché si trova a dover dimostrare poca sensibilità nei confronti del suo interlocutore. Nel caso del destinatario ne viene minacciata sia la faccia positiva sia la faccia negativa: l'espressione della censura di un comportamento ne incrina l'immagine pubblica, mentre la conseguente imposizione di una riparazione ne limita la libertà d'azione.

La necessità di veicolare la forza illocutiva della protesta al costo sociale minore per entrambi gli interagenti, favorendo un esito positivo dell'azione linguistica, richiede al parlante una buona competenza nell'impiego di strategie utili a ridurre l'impatto negativo sul destinatario (Bettoni, 2006; Caleffi, 2000; O'Discroll, 2017). Chi protesta può scegliere di esprimere entrambe le componenti o solo una delle due, così come può completare la protesta con atti di supporto o modificarne la forza illocutoria con strategie grammaticali, lessicali o discorsive. Più in dettaglio, per l'Espressione del giudizio il parlante può selezionare una modalità più diretta, attribuendo esplicitamente la responsabilità all'interlocutore, o meno diretta, senza un'attribuzione esplicita di responsabilità. Nel mitigare l'atto, il parlante può utilizzare strumenti in grado di attenuare l'impatto sull'interlocutore, selezionando modificatori in contrasto con la forza principale veicolata dall'enunciato, o al contrario impiegare modificatori coerenti con il valore illocutivo, miranti cioè a rafforzare la protesta anziché addolcirla. La selezione degli eventuali atti di supporto contribuisce poi alla realizzazione della protesta fornendo una cornice di preparazione e/o sostegno. La realizzazione dell'atto nell'interazione apre una serie di possibilità ulteriori, legate alla capacità degli interlocutori di co-costruire lo scambio comunicativo (Rubino & Bettoni, 2006). Per esempio, si può iniziare la protesta attraverso la sola Espressione del giudizio, lasciando la possibilità all'interlocutore di avviare la riparazione o di riconoscere la propria colpa e porgere scuse più o meno esplicite. Se ciò non avviene il parlante produrrà la Richiesta di riparazione nei turni successivi. Sulla base della risposta dell'interlocutore, se chi protesta reputa di non aver ottenuto una risoluzione soddisfacente, può decidere di rinunciare, oppure di insistere servendosi delle strategie già utilizzate o impiegandone di nuove (Nuzzo, 2007; Trosborg, 2003). La struttura complessiva dell'atto è in altre parole soggetta a forti variazioni legate alla reazione del destinatario, oltre che alle esigenze, alle intenzioni e alla personalità di chi protesta (Trosborg, 1995).

Avendo la protesta una componente sia direttiva che espressiva, l'intensità della sua imposizione è determinata sia dalla gravità del comportamento negativo attribuito al destinatario, sia dal livello di difficoltà

dell'azione richiesta come riparazione. Questi due fattori sono in stretta relazione poiché maggiore è la gravità dell'atto riprovevole compiuto dal destinatario, più la protesta appare legittimata dalle circostanze; pertanto il parlante è autorizzato a chiedere un gesto riparatore, anche nel caso in cui risulti estremamente gravoso per il destinatario. La variabile di contesto che i parlanti prendono in considerazione nel formulare la richiesta è la possibilità di un gesto in grado di correggere l'evento offensivo, o almeno di attenuarne gli effetti negativi. Se è vero che tutte le proteste sono finalizzate anche all'ottenimento di un gesto riparatore, questo può essere diverso a seconda delle situazioni: se un parlante protesta perché l'amico gli ha rovesciato un po' di succo sulla felpa, l'unica forma di riparazione possibile sono le scuse; se il parlante protesta invece perché il fratello non gli permette di vedere il suo programma preferito in tv, se avrà successo potrà ottenere una modifica immediata della situazione negativa. Se nella valutazione della situazione da parte del parlante vi è la possibilità di una riparazione immediata, chi protesta potrebbe decidere di attenuare l'atto o scegliere uno schema di realizzazione che consenta alla riparazione di verificarsi (Boxer, 2010; Nuzzo, 2007).

3.1. Quando i bambini protestano

La realizzazione dell'atto linguistico di protesta è complesso e richiede competenze linguistiche sofisticate (cfr. Marocchini, 2017; Nuzzo, 2007; Ottaviani & Vedder, 2017). Non a caso dunque nella quotidianità scolastica i docenti rilevano come nelle situazioni in cui, nella relazione tra pari, si assiste alla trasgressione di una norma condivisa o a un comportamento poco accettabile che danneggia uno degli interlocutori, anziché attivare le risorse linguistiche a loro disposizione e negoziare una risoluzione del conflitto, i bambini della scuola primaria finiscono con il litigare, offendere, assumere un atteggiamento aggressivo o rinunciare abbandonando la protesta senza ottenere una riparazione. Vediamo alcuni esempi ricavati da videoregistrazioni realizzate per altri scopi nelle classi del progetto, in cui incidentalmente sono state riprese due particolari situazioni di protesta. I due esempi mettono in luce come le difficoltà nella gestione linguistica dell'atto portino a soluzioni negative per i parlanti.

In (1) B1 ha preso la gomma dell'amico senza chiedere il permesso, B2 avvia la protesta criticando il compagno per il comportamento deplorevole, poi con un gesto poco cortese cerca di riottenere ciò che è suo. Il compagno reagisce con una spinta e B2, sentendosi dalla parte della ragione, chiede l'intervento dell'adulto. Anziché motivare con precisione la richiesta d'aiuto, B2 accusa vagamente B1, senza così riuscire ad ottenere nemmeno l'intervento auspicato. Il risultato finale è infatti un rimprovero per entrambi i bambini.

1) [2]   B2: devi chiedermela
        B2 strappa di mano la gomma a B1, B1 spinge il gomito di B2
        B2: maestra B1 mi disturba
        I: smettetela voi due

Nell'esempio (2), quando B4 prende il posto di B3, il compagno avvia l'atto comunicativo con un'accusa diretta ed esplicita, rafforzata dall'uso del verbo *rubare* anziché *prendere*, mentre B4 reagisce all'accusa con un gesto di totale disinteresse verso la protesta di B3. Il bambino che ha perso il posto, anziché attivare le sue risorse linguistiche per ottenere con le parole una riparazione, abbandona la situazione e va a cercare un altro posto.

2)   B3: mi hai rubato il posto
        B4 alza le spalle e non parla, B3 va a cercare un altro posto

Situazioni simili a quelle appena esemplificate rappresentano uno spazio di intervento per l'insegnamento della pragmatica. Se nell'ambito della L1 la ricerca non ha indagato gli effetti di interventi didattici mirati, in ambito acquisizionale diversi studi condotti con studenti adolescenti o adulti negli ultimi anni hanno dimostrato come invece l'insegnamento della pragmatica sia efficace e necessario (Alcón Soler, 2015; Bardovi-Harlig, 2015; Taguchi, 2015; Tatsuki & Houch, 2010), nonostante rimangano dibattuti i metodi e gli strumenti d'insegnamento (Nuzzo & Gauci, 2012; Roever, 2011). L'intervento non dovrebbe chiaramente andare nella direzione di far andare sempre d'accordo i bambini, bensì permettere loro di usare efficacemente la lingua ed essere liberi di determinare come gestire l'atto del protestare. Da un punto di vista

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[2] Qui e negli esempi successivi B indica *bambino* e I *insegnante*, mentre *#numero* indica eventuali pause e relativa durata (ad esempio #0_2 indica una pausa breve di 0,2 secondi). L'uso di caratteri maiuscoli indica un tono della voce alto.

didattico, gli allievi devono essere dunque accompagnati nello sviluppo degli strumenti necessari per riflettere sulle situazioni comunicative e le relative variabili di contesto, sulle possibili soluzioni, così da collegare questi elementi alle formulazioni linguistiche più adatte. In altre parole i bambini dovrebbero imparare a evitare di essere inutilmente offensivi e maleducati quando non è necessario, o al contrario essere poco incisivi quando la situazione richiede invece un'azione puntuale.

4. Lo studio
4.1. Gli obiettivi e gli informanti
Il presente lavoro tenta di offrire un contributo alla ricerca sull'apprendimento e sull'insegnamento della pragmatica attraverso l'analisi e la descrizione delle modalità di realizzazione dell'atto di protesta da parte di bambini monolingui e plurilingui di 7-8 anni, con l'obiettivo di individuare indicazioni operative per lo sviluppo di materiali didattici mirati. In particolare tre sono le domande alla base dello studio:

1) Come realizzano l'atto comunicativo di protesta bambini di 7-8 anni di età?
2) Quali strategie di mitigazione impiegano?
3) Come preparano il terreno? Con quali atti di supporto?

I 102 bambini coinvolti nella ricerca fanno parte di due classi seconde e due terze di uno stesso Istituto Comprensivo: 86 di loro sono monolingui e 16 plurilingui, tutti scolarizzati in Italia. Poiché il protocollo di elicitazione prevedeva interazioni a coppie stimolate tramite *role play*, metà del campione ha ricoperto il ruolo di chi avviava la protesta, l'altra metà ha risposto all'azione linguistica intrapresa dai compagni. Siccome in questo studio l'analisi si concentra principalmente sulla realizzazione dell'atto, nel descrivere in dettaglio gli informanti ci riferiremo agli allievi che hanno realizzato l'atto comunicativo target, tralasciando le informazioni relative a coloro che rispondevano alla protesta.

Dei 51 allievi considerati, 20 sono femmine e 31 maschi, tutti entrati nei servizi educativi al più tardi a partire dal primo anno di scuola dell'infanzia. 10 bambini sono bi- o plurilingui per la maggior parte di seconda generazione, provenienti da Albania, Marocco e Nigeria. Le informazioni a disposizione non permettono una descrizione precisa del livello di competenza nelle diverse lingue conosciute dai bambini plurilingui, ma solamente una definizione basata sulla provenienza e sul periodo di arrivo in Italia dei genitori. Su 10 bambini plurilingui infatti 7 sono figli di genitori immigrati dopo i 18 anni di età, 2 sono figli di coppie miste, in un caso si tratta di due genitori immigrati dopo i 18 anni di età, nell'altro di un genitore immigrato dopo i 18 anni e un genitore italiano. Un bambino è definibile come *generazione 1.75*, poiché immigrato in Italia all'età di un anno e inserito nel sistema scolastico a due anni circa, con la frequenza dell'ultimo anno di nido (cfr. Rumbaut, 2004). Non sono state invece rese disponibili informazioni sul rendimento scolastico o sul livello di competenza linguistica degli allievi coinvolti nella sperimentazione. Consapevoli di queste limitazioni, cui si aggiunge la scarsa numerosità del campione, l'analisi che si presenta nei prossimi paragrafi ha uno scopo puramente descrittivo e non può dunque essere generalizzata. In particolare non si tenterà di fare confronti definitivi tra bambini monolingui e plurilingui di seconda generazione scolarizzati in Italia. Si citeranno eventuali similitudini o differenze, rimandando a studi ulteriori analisi più dettagliate.

4.2. Il role play come strumento di elicitazione
Il corpus di dati è composto di 51 scambi comunicativi stimolati tramite *role play* a coppie in cui i bambini dovevano interpretare sé stessi in situazioni scolastiche o domestiche. Questo formato di elicitazione è stato scelto perché ritenuto efficace e maggiormente praticabile rispetto all'osservazione naturalistica: pur fornendo infatti l'impulso iniziale alla conversazione, il *role play* non ne stabilisce i modi o i tempi di sviluppo e permette di esaminare l'evolversi dell'atto nell'interazione (cfr. Félix-Brasdefer, 2010; Gass & Mackey, 2007). Poiché comunque non è semplice, con bambini di questa età, stimolare produzioni linguistiche mirate, per favorire una naturale partecipazione degli allievi e una maggiore validità ecologica dei *role play* si è preferito incorporare la raccolta dati all'interno dei percorsi didattici dedicati alla gestione del conflitto verbale. Nella fase di realizzazione delle interazioni tra pari, la lezione è stata co-condotta dal ricercatore e dall'insegnante. Vediamo più in dettaglio come sono state costruite le situazioni stimolo e come sono stati proposti i *role play* agli allievi.

In una fase preliminare, precedente l'osservazione e l'intervento didattico, i bambini sono stati invitati dal docente a riflettere a grande gruppo intorno alla parola *litigio*, così da identificare una serie di situazioni in cui frequentemente entrano in conflitto con i compagni a scuola o con fratelli e sorelle a casa. Le discussioni di classe sono state utilizzate dal ricercatore per creare stimoli sufficientemente realistici e adatti a questa fascia d'età. In particolare le situazioni sono state selezionate così da elicitare atti di protesta tra pari relativi sia a eventi già accaduti, ad esempio un giocattolo preso senza chiedere il permesso, sia a eventi in corso di accadimento, come nel caso del bambino che tenta di copiare il lavoro del compagno, con riferimento sia a danni di natura materiale che morale, ma tutti dipendenti da comportamenti che riguardavano scelte individuali. Le situazioni impiegate sono riportate in appendice.

Definiti gli script per i *role play*, l'insegnante e il ricercatore insieme hanno proceduto con l'osservazione dei bambini, proponendo loro di mettere in scena le situazioni davanti alla classe. Per favorire produzioni il più possibile spontanee sono stati seguiti alcuni accorgimenti. Innanzitutto in classe sono stati allestiti gli scenari che facevano da sfondo alle situazioni: ad esempio, la mensa era rappresentata da un banco apparecchiato, la casa da due sedie affiancate e ricoperte da un foulard così da simulare il divano, mentre la classe da una coppia di banchi vicino alla cattedra. Successivamente il ricercatore presentava gradualmente le consegne per i *role play*. Dopo aver organizzato la classe in coppie e assegnato i ruoli veniva distribuito un cartoncino contente la descrizione della situazione insieme a eventuali *realia* utili per svolgere la scenetta, ad esempio un mazzo di carte o un pacchetto di patatine. Lasciato il tempo per una lettura individuale, il ricercatore leggeva e commentava coppia per coppia le diverse situazioni, così da accertarsi che le istruzioni fossero chiare. Poiché i *role play* venivano svolti uno dopo l'altro in classe, per evitare l'imitazione ogni coppia lavorava su una situazione diversa. Per favorire il silenzio, l'ascolto e l'attenzione della classe, quando non impegnati nei *role play* i bambini avevano il compito di appuntare le parole che sentivano. Durante lo svolgimento dei dialoghi non si ponevano limiti di tempo, la durata di ciascuna interazione era regolata dai parlanti e dipendeva esclusivamente dal tempo necessario al raggiungimento dell'obiettivo conversazionale. Le situazioni non implicavano interazioni con l'adulto, ma nei casi in cui i bambini richiedevano l'intervento del docente, l'insegnante partecipava spontaneamente all'interazione. Le produzioni così stimolate sono state videoregistrate e successivamente trascritte per l'analisi.

4.3. Le categorie di analisi

Per l'analisi delle interazioni si è scelto come unità di riferimento l'atto comunicativo (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Trosborg, 1995) e si è impiegata la tassonomia elaborata da Nuzzo (2007, p. 112-16). *L'atto comunicativo*, rispetto all'atto linguistico, è un'unità più ampia che può essere costituita da un solo atto o da una combinazione di atti, ed eventualmente integrata da atti di supporto che hanno la funzione di sostenere o preparare la protesta, ma che sono appunto interpretabili tenendo conto dell'unità più ampia dell'atto comunicativo, che ne garantisce la coerenza pragmatica. Si ritiene l'atto comunicativo più adatto a descrivere ciò che avviene nella conversazione, poiché permette di tenere conto delle diverse strade più o meno elaborate che scelgono i parlanti.

Si è già visto in §2 come la protesta sia costituita di due componenti. Per la realizzazione della prima, l'*Espressione del giudizio*, il parlante ha a disposizione due macro-strategie: l'Espressione con o senza attribuzione di responsabilità. La prima può essere realizzata con quattro modalità. *Disapprovazione*, *Evidenza di negatività*, *Norma violata* e *Richiesta di spiegazione*; la seconda con tre: *Accusa, Critica e Richiesta di giustificazione*. Per la seconda componente, la *Richiesta di riparazione*, il parlante ha a disposizione almeno sette strategie: *Ordine, Conferma, Ipotesi, Necessità, Obbligo/Divieto, Performativa, Verifica delle condizioni preparatorie*. La Tabella 1 riporta la tassonomia di Nuzzo (2007), accompagnandola con esempi tratti dal corpus. Nei casi in cui una strategia non è stata impiegata dai partecipanti allo studio, l'esempio è inventato e preceduto da un asterisco (*).

Tabella 1
Tassonomia delle proteste (adattata da Nuzzo, 2007, pp. 112-116)

Componenti	Strategie	Esempi
Espressione del giudizio	*Senza attribuzione di responsabilità*	
	Disapprovazione	Ma uffi la mamma aveva detto che toccava a me
	Evidenza di negatività	Però non ci vedo
	Norma violata	Ehi c'ero prima io!
	Richiesta di spiegazione	Perché mi hai preso le carte?
	* Situazione deprecabile	* È difficile giocare così
	Con attribuzione di responsabilità	
	Accusa	Mi hai sporcato tutto Ayoub
	Critica	Ma dovevi chiedere il permesso
	Richiesta di giustificazione	Oh perché mi hai preso le carte?
Richiesta di riparazione	Ordine	Ridammi il mio dinosauro
	* Conferma	* Lasci il mio dinosauro al suo posto?
	* Ipotesi	* Se puoi evitare di usare il mio dinosauro
	* Necessità	* Il dinosauro dovrei usarlo io adesso
	* Obbligo/divieto	* Non devi prendere il mio dinosauro
	* Performativa	* Vorrei chiederti di non usare il mio dinosauro senza prima chiedermelo
	* Verifica delle condizioni preparatorie	* Puoi ridarmi subito il mio dinosauro

Nota. L'asterisco (*) denota strategie non impiegate dai partecipanti ed esempi inventati.

All'osservazione delle componenti con cui i bambini hanno realizzato l'atto si è aggiunta l'analisi delle strategie di modificazione e dell'impiego di atti di supporto. In entrambi i casi si è fatto riferimento a Nuzzo (2007). Rispetto ai modificatori, sono stati conteggiati per macro-tipo: morfosintattici, lessicali e discorsivi. La Tabella 2 riporta la tassonomia di riferimento ed esempi tratti dal corpus. Anche in questo caso, quando una strategia non è stata impiegata dai partecipanti allo studio, l'esempio è inventato e preceduto da un asterisco (*).

Tabella 2
Tassonomia dei modificatori (adattata da Nuzzo 2007, pp. 116-119)

Tipo	Strategie	Esempio
Morfosintattici	Condizionale	Quello **sarebbe** il mio posto
	Imperfetto	Perché non **chiedevi** prima
	* Incassatura	* **Volevo dirti che** questo è il mio posto
	* Modale epistemico	* **Devi** esserti sbagliato
Lessicali	Attenuatori	Stai **un po'** attenta
	* Blanditori	* **Gentilmente** chiedi il permesso la prossima volta
	* Dubitatori	* **Magari** stai più attento col succo
	* Minimizzatori	* **L'unica cosa** stai attento col succo
	Rafforzatori	Mi hai sporcato **tutto**
	* Soggettivizzatori	* **Mi sembra** tu abbia imbrogliato
Discorsivi	Fatismo	**Sai che** hai fatto una mossa scorretta
	* Marche di cortesia	* **Per cortesia** stai attento col succo
	Richiami	Guarda **che** non hai mica fatto una cosa corretta
	* Richiesta di accordo	* Stai attento col succo **no**
	Riempitivo	**Allora** lo vado a dire alla mamma

Nota. L'asterisco (*) denota strategie non impiegate dai partecipanti ed esempi inventati.

L'analisi dell'atto comunicativo ha incluso l'osservazione dell'eventuale impiego di atti di supporto, elementi capaci di fornire una cornice di preparazione o di sostegno all'atto. Le categorie di analisi potevano includere: *Appello, Giustificazione, Preparatore, Rabbonitore* e *Scuse*, così come riportato nella Tabella 3.

Tabella 3
Tassonomia degli atti di supporto (adattata da Nuzzo 2007, pp. 119-120)

Tipo	Esempio
Appello	Ayoub
* Giustificazione	* La mamma mi ha appena comprato il giornalino
* Preparatore	* Volevo dirti una cosa
* Rabbonitore	* Guarda forse ho sbagliato e non ci siamo capiti
* Scuse	* Scusa se te lo dico

Nota. L'asterisco (*) denota strategie non impiegate dai partecipanti ed esempi inventati.

La struttura interattiva dell'atto di protesta può inoltre essere soggetta a variazioni. Ad esempio può accadere che dopo il primo turno prodotto dal parlante, l'interlocutore riconosca la propria colpa, proponga in modo più o meno esplicito delle scuse o una riparazione. In altri casi può invece esservi un rifiuto della responsabilità e chi protesta si trova di fronte alla scelta di abbandonare l'atto o insistere, reimpiegando le strategie già utilizzate o servendosi di nuove modalità (Nuzzo, 2007). Tenendo conto di questa possibile varietà, nell'analisi ci si è concentrati sul primo turno (o sui turni) contenente il nucleo della protesta, dedicando l'attenzione alla struttura dell'atto piuttosto che alla gestione delle sequenze interazionali. La struttura complessiva dell'interazione è stata osservata, quando rilevante, con uno sguardo meno analitico.

L'analisi delle interazioni è stata realizzata dal ricercatore e verificata da un secondo collega esperto che ha analizzato indipendentemente il corpus. In quattro casi, tutti relativi alla componente Espressione del giudizio e alle due strategie, Richiesta di spiegazione senza attribuzione di responsabilità e Richiesta di giustificazione con attribuzione di responsabilità, si sono rilevate discrepanze nell'analisi, risolte però attraverso la discussione tra i due ricercatori.

5. I risultati
5.1. Come realizzano l'atto di protesta i bambini di 7-8 anni?
Nel corpus i bambini realizzano le proteste basandosi su due macro-strategie: agire fisicamente e agire verbalmente. In 15 interazioni su 51 (29%) gli allievi non compiono verbalmente l'atto ma si limitano a gesti. Ad esempio, nella situazione stimolo in cui un bambino occupa senza diritto il posto del compagno, in alcuni casi il parlante, anziché avviare un atto di protesta verbale, spinge l'interlocutore per prendere la propria sedia, o ancora quando un bambino prende il dinosauro dell'amico senza chiedere il permesso, il parlante risolve la situazione strappandogli il giocattolo di mano. All'azione fisica l'interlocutore reagisce frequentemente con un'interiezione, ad esempio un *hei* o un *oooh*; a volte chi protesta giustifica il gesto con espressioni del tipo *è la mia sedia* o *è mio*, l'interazione termina poi con una lite, un insulto, la richiesta di intervento dell'adulto o più semplicemente si conclude con uno dei due interlocutori che desiste dall'interagire. Le interazioni realizzate con un'azione fisica riguardano in 12 casi bambini monolingui e in tre bambini plurilingui, risultando così un'opzione scelta da entrambi i gruppi. La frequenza con cui i bambini selezionano questa modalità di realizzare i *role play* proposti conferma l'importanza di interventi didattici mirati a favorire nei bambini lo sviluppo delle competenze d'uso necessarie per raggiungere i propri obiettivi per mezzo di strumenti linguistici adeguati

L'analisi che si presenta di seguito è, invece, riferita esclusivamente alle interazioni verbali, così da poter osservare quali strumenti linguistici sanno già usare i bambini di questa fascia di età. Nei 36 dialoghi elicitati lo schema prevalente è quello in cui viene esplicitata la sola componente di Espressione del giudizio, espressa in 26 interazioni, in 10 casi realizzata in combinando due strategie di espressione, per un totale di 36 occorrenze su 26 dialoghi; mentre la Richiesta di riparazione come unico atto viene formulata in cinque interazioni, ed entrambe le componenti compaiono in tre. In altri due casi gli apprendenti realizzano la protesta combinando una Richiesta di riparazione con una Minaccia, *lo vado a dire alla maestra*, o un Insulto, *cattivo*. La Tabella 4 riassume i risultati dell'analisi quantitativa delle due componenti dell'atto.

Tabella 4
Componenti espressiva e direttiva delle proteste

Strategie	Occorrenze
Espressione del giudizio	26 (72%)
Richiesta di riparazione	5 (14%)
Espressione + Richiesta	3 (8%)
Richiesta + altro (minaccia)	2 (6%)
Totale	36 (100%)

Abbiamo visto in §3 come la scelta del parlante di favorire la componente espressiva sia legata a una strategia specifica di negoziazione: offrire l'opportunità all'interlocutore di ammettere la propria responsabilità e proporre o promettere una riparazione. Nei casi in cui ciò non avviene, chi protesta può esplicitare la Richiesta di riparazione nei turni successivi. Anche i bambini nelle loro interazioni riflettono questa strategia, in 22 casi su 26 (85%) l'atto della protesta viene distribuito su diversi turni, con l'introduzione graduale delle sue sotto componenti. Nel primo turno si realizza quella espressiva e se non si riceve una proposta di riparazione, l'atto viene completato nei turni successivi: in 12 casi esplicitando la Richiesta di riparazione, ad esempio *la prossima volta puoi stare più attenta*, mentre in 7 con una controproposta, ad esempio *puoi giocarci un attimo poi me lo ridai*, e infine in 3 casi richiedendo o minacciando l'intervento di un adulto, *se continui lo dico alla maestra*. Questi dati confermano come i bambini a questa età abbiano sviluppato già consapevolezza rispetto alla complessità dell'atto di protesta e dei rischi per la faccia ad esso connessi, dimostrando una buona padronanza delle possibili strategie pragmatiche di negoziazione dell'atto.

Anche nel caso dell'analisi della distribuzione delle componenti espressiva e direttiva dell'atto non si rilevano particolari differenze tra monolingui e plurilingui. Questi ultimi, infatti, riflettono strategie analoghe a quelle dei compagni monolingui: in due casi combinano le due componenti, in tre realizzano l'atto con la sola espressione del giudizio e nei restanti due con una richiesta di riparazione. In tutte e sette le interazioni che coinvolgono allievi multilingui l'atto di protesta viene distribuito su più turni.

5.2. Come gestiscono i bambini i diversi tipi di atti?

La Tabella 5 riporta la distribuzione dei tipi di atti o strategie impiegati per realizzare le due componenti della protesta.

Tabella 5
Proteste, distribuzione degli atti di espressione del giudizio e degli atti di richiesta di elaborazione

Atti	Strategie		Occorrenze
Espressione del giudizio (N=36)[3]	*Senza attribuzione di responsabilità*		
	Disapprovazione		1 (3%)
	Evidenza di negatività		6 (17%)
	Norma violata		3 (8%)
	Richiesta di spiegazione		1 (3%)
		Totale	11 (31%)
	Con attribuzione di responsabilità		
	Accusa		9 (25%)
	Critica		3 (8%)
	Richiesta di giustificazione		13 (36%)
		Totale	25 (69%)
Richiesta di riparazione (N=10)	Ordine		10 (100%)

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[3] Su 26 interazioni realizzate con un'espressione del giudizio, 10 sono costituite dalla combinazione di due strategie di espressione, per un totale di di 36 occorrenze di espressioni del giudizio.

Su 26 interazioni realizzate con un'espressione del giudizio, 10 sono costituite dalla combinazione di due strategie di Espressione, per un totale di 36 occorrenze di Espressione del giudizio. I dati mostrano come i bambini di seconda e terza elementare sappiano già utilizzare quasi tutte le strategie a disposizione del parlante per esprimere il proprio giudizio, pur dimostrando una chiara preferenza per le formulazioni che attribuiscono responsabilità diretta all'interlocutore, essendo Accusa e Richiesta di giustificazione le più frequenti. Rispetto alla componente direttiva, invece, i bambini optano per un'unica strategia: l'Ordine, una modalità anch'essa diretta e impositiva. Le proteste così realizzate risultano tendenzialmente dirette, al limite dell'aggressività e non facilitano nell'interlocutore il riconoscimento della propria responsabilità, una possibile riparazione o una soluzione intermedia. Anche in questo caso non si registrano particolari differenze nelle scelte realizzate da monolingui e plurilingui. Vediamo alcuni esempi tratti dal corpus.

Nell'esempio (3) B1 avvia la protesta per un comportamento scorretto del compagno attribuendogli la responsabilità con una Critica. Di fronte alla mancata risposta dell'amico introduce la Richiesta di riparazione con un Ordine. Il risultato è l'abbandono del gioco da parte del compagno che ha commesso la scorrettezza. In (4), invece, l'accusa esplicita di aver barato, non solo viene negata dall'interlocutore, ma viene ribadita ulteriormente dall'autore della protesta che finisce con interrompere il gioco, anziché ottenere delle scuse o una riparazione.

3)   B1:   guarda che non hai mica fatto una cosa corretta
      B2   non risponde
      B1:   annulliamo il goal
      B2   abbandona il gioco

4)   B3:   ehi #0_2 hai barato
      B4:   no non ho barato
      B3:   sì che hai barato #0_2 adesso non voglio più giocare con te

In (5) il bambino impiega una strategia diversa, iniziando lo scambio comunicativo con una Richiesta di riparazione. Questa viene comunque realizzata con la strategia dell'Ordine, dunque una modalità diretta, che poco predispone l'interlocutore verso una reale riparazione. L'apertura del canale comunicativo attraverso *hei* è anch'essa una modalità diretta, poco cortese, di entrare in contatto con il compagno.

5)   B5:   ehi ridammi il mio dinosauro
      B6:   no
      B5:   ridammelo
      B6:   no
      B5:   maestra #0_4 B6 non mi dà il mio dinosauro

Anche nell'esempio (6), nonostante una maggior elaborazione nella formulazione del nucleo dell'atto, il risultato finale non è quello atteso dall'autore della protesta.

6)   B7:   ma perché mi sei venuto davanti io non ci vedo niente
      B8:   chissene
      B7:   allora lo vado a dire alla maestra #0_3 MAESTRA MAESTRA B2 mi è venuto davanti e io non
             riesco a vedere
      I: ma insomma bimbi #0_2 c'è posto per tutti
      B7:   fa una pernacchia
      B8:   me la paghi
      I: B7 stiamo scherzando?

B7 avvia lo scambio comunicativo esprimendo il suo giudizio negativo rispetto al comportamento del compagno, che si è seduto in modo da non permettergli di vedere correttamente ciò che l'insegnante sta proponendo. Nel farlo combina due strategie: con *ma perché mi sei venuto davanti* attribuisce la responsabilità dello stato negativo delle cose al compagno, richiedendo una giustificazione del suo comportamento, facendo così emergere in modo implicito la propria valutazione negativa, mentre con *io non ci vedo niente* sottolinea la ragione per cui è legittimo valutare negativamente il compagno e quindi

protestare. B7 non richiede espressamente una riparazione, ma lascia la parola al compagno, affidandogli implicitamente il compito di porre rimedio alla situazione deplorevole. Il compagno invece risponde manifestando un esplicito disinteresse rispetto alla situazione. B7 richiede a questo punto l'intervento di un adulto. L'insegnante avvia una proposta di possibile riparazione, facendo notare ai bambini come ci sia posto per entrambi, invitandoli dunque a trovare una soluzione alternativa, ma B7 reagisce offendendo il compagno con una pernacchia e B8 chiude lo scambio con una minaccia. L'insegnante a questo punto redarguisce B7 per la modalità con cui si rivolge al compagno. B7, dunque, non solo non riesce a vedere comodamente, ma finisce con l'essere redarguito dall'insegnante e col litigare con il compagno.

5.3. Quali strategie di mitigazione e atti di supporto impiegano?

L'analisi delle strategie di mitigazione e dell'impiego degli atti di supporto mostra come i bambini tendano a usare poco frequentemente questi strumenti. Solo in 10 interazioni su 36 (28%) infatti l'atto è modificato con uno o più modificatori e in 16 su 36 (44%) accompagnato da un atto di supporto. La Tabella 6 riporta la distribuzione dei modificatori e degli atti di supporto. Per quel che riguarda le scelte degli allievi plurilingui, si noti che in questo caso nelle loro interazioni non compaiono modificatori. Il campione numericamente limitato e la varietà di profili individuali non permette di interpretare questa osservazione: essa potrebbe essere influenzata da fattori individuali non distinguibili dalla variabile mono-plurilingue sulla base delle informazioni in nostro possesso. Il dato sottolinea comunque la difficoltà per i bambini di questa età nel gestire le strategie di mitigazione.

Tabella 6
Proteste, Modificatori e atti di supporto

Strategie	Occorrenze
Modificatori *Discorsivi*	
Riempitivi	4
Fatismi	1
Modificatori *Lessicali*	
Attenuatori	1
Rafforzatori	3
Intensificatori	2
Richiami	1
Modificatori *Morfosintattici*	
Condizionale	1
Imperfetto	1
Atti di supporto - Appello	
Lessicali	4
Interiezioni	12

I dati evidenziano, inoltre, come allo scarso uso di modificatori e atti di supporto si aggiunga un problema di selezione. I modificatori impiegati tendono, infatti, a rafforzare l'Espressione del giudizio, aumentandone la minacciosità: ne è un esempio l'uso significativo di Rafforzatori e Intensificatori, presenti in ben 5 interazioni delle 10 caratterizzate dall'impiego di strumenti di mitigazione. Analogamente, gli atti di supporto sono di un solo tipo, Appello, realizzato in 4 casi con un nome proprio, mentre nei restanti 12 con interiezioni del tipo *hei*, *oh*, *dai*.

Nel complesso, la difficoltà a impiegare strumenti per modificare la forza illocutoria dell'atto, o prepararne il terreno, rafforzano l'effetto di tono brusco, aggressivo e non contestabile, già rilevato in §5.2, senza predisporre positivamente l'interlocutore verso una risoluzione della situazione.

6. L'intervento didattico

L'osservazione empirica descritta nelle pagine precedenti ha orientato i docenti rispetto ai reali bisogni di apprendimento degli allievi coinvolti e ha guidato la progettazione didattica di sperimentazioni dedicate all'atto comunicativo della protesta. Nel caso di allievi di 7-8 anni il docente ha potuto constatare, sulla base di dati empirici, come i bambini avessero già sviluppato diverse competenze rispetto all'atto di protesta: l'intervento didattico non doveva, dunque, essere progettato per insegnare loro a protestare, ma piuttosto mirato ad affinare ulteriormente le loro consapevolezze rispetto alla varietà di strumenti linguistici a disposizione del parlante. In particolare, l'attenzione poteva essere concentrata sulle diverse modalità di realizzazione dell'Espressione del giudizio e della Richiesta di Riparazione, sull'uso di strumenti di mitigazione della forza illocutoria e di atti di supporto. La progettazione didattica ne è risultata così facilitata: la cornice progettuale della ricerca-azione ha offerto una struttura di riferimento entro cui muoversi nell'organizzazione delle fasi di lavoro, mentre l'osservazione empirica ha permesso una più immediata messa a fuoco degli obiettivi da sviluppare nelle singole attività e una più mirata selezione dei materiali-stimolo.

Complessivamente, gli interventi didattici hanno avuto una durata complessiva di 6-8 ore distribuite su 3-4 lezioni, a cui si devono aggiungere le 2-3 ore dedicate all'osservazione iniziale. Le attività hanno seguito un'articolazione in quattro fasi (Osservare, Utilizzare, Riflettere e Fare esperienza) e sono state caratterizzate dall'impiego di varie tecniche. A partire dall'analisi delle proprie produzioni, combinate con alcuni stimoli video autentici, i bambini hanno avuto modo di esplorare gli usi linguistici in contesto, dedurre regolarità e differenze, raccogliere e organizzare secondo criteri i diversi modi per dire una stessa cosa, alternando fasi di riflessione implicita con spiegazioni esplicite. L'analisi meta-pragmatica in contesto è stata, inoltre, rinforzata da attività d'uso, più o meno controllate, in modo da favorire un reimpiego delle forme su cui si è lavorato (Ferrari, 2016). La tabella 8 presenta una visione complessiva degli interventi realizzati nelle quattro classi coinvolte in questo studio.

La prima fase *Osservare* aveva lo scopo di accompagnare i bambini nell'analisi e individuazione di ciò che fanno i parlanti con le parole. Sulla base dell'analisi delle competenze d'uso degli allievi, l'insegnante ha mirato le attività all'identificazione delle due macro-componenti dell'atto: nel caso dell'Espressione del giudizio lo scopo era principalmente un riconoscimento delle strategie già note, nel caso della Richiesta di riparazione, invece, l'obiettivo era portare l'attenzione degli allievi sulla più ampia gamma di strategie a disposizione dei parlanti. L'alternanza tra lavoro a piccoli gruppi e a classe intera favoriva discussioni puntuali, oltre che un maggior coinvolgimento di tutti gli allievi. Le diverse formulazioni emerse sono state condivise dalla classe e raccolte in un cartellone-Tassonomia.

Nella seconda fase *Utilizzare* gli allievi si mettevano nuovamente alla prova in situazioni comunicative e con formati di produzione più o meno controllati: DCT orali, dialoghi da completare con parole o battute mancanti o riformulazioni. Le attività venivano proposte prima individualmente o a coppie, poi condivise a grande gruppo, favorendo così la discussione rispetto alle scelte linguistiche in termini di effetto comunicativo, funzionalità e appropriatezza. Basandosi sull'analisi iniziale dei bisogni, l'insegnante ha avuto modo di focalizzare questa parte del lavoro sulla varietà di possibili formulazioni per esprimere una stessa componente dell'atto comunicativo. Le soluzioni proposte andavano ad ampliare la tassonomia di classe preparata con l'attività 1.

La terza fase *Riflettere* affinava ulteriormente l'attenzione sulla lingua, favorendo la riflessione intorno alle strategie di mitigazione e all'uso degli atti di supporto per preparare e sostenere la protesta. Di nuovo, basandosi sull'analisi iniziale, l'insegnante ha avuto modo di mirare questa parte del lavoro alle strategie di modificazione e agli atti di supporto. La riflessione sulla lingua era basata sul parlato prodotto dai bambini nelle attività precedenti. In particolare si sono scelti dialoghi che avevano portato a esiti diversi o comunque esemplificativi di varie modalità di gestione dell'atto. L'insegnante invitava la classe a trovare, ad esempio, somiglianze e differenze tra due o più interazioni, a identificare parole o espressioni specifiche cogliendone la funzione comunicativa. Infine, proponeva un reimpiego controllato di alcune forme linguistiche portando di nuovo gli allievi a riformulare o completare dialoghi. Questa fase di lavoro poteva prevedere esercizi uguali per tutta la classe o differenziati sulla base dei bisogni di apprendimento o del livello di competenza. Al termine delle attività linguistiche la classe elaborava un elenco di indicazioni utili per realizzare l'atto linguistico, arrivando a ricostruire insieme una sorta di norma d'uso.

La quarta fase *Fare esperienza* stimolava, invece, l'attenzione verso l'osservazione della lingua in contesti comunicativi reali. Ai bambini veniva assegnato il compito di osservare interazioni quotidiane e annotare esempi di dialoghi potenzialmente conflittuali da riproporre all'attenzione dei compagni in classe. Il

materiale raccolto permetteva ulteriori riflessioni e approfondimenti, favorendo sia un collegamento tra riflessione in aula e realtà linguistica, sia una ripresa dei contenuti trattati nel percorso didattico.

Tabella 7
Fasi e attività dell'intervento didattico

Fase	Attività	Focus
Prima dell'intervento didattico		
Condivisione di esperienze (1 ora)	Conversazione di gruppo su esperienze di litigio: cosa vuol dire litigare? Quali sono le situazioni a scuola in cui finisci con il litigare? Cosa fai o dici quando litighi?	Selezionare situazioni stimolo familiari e adatte all'età
Rilevazione (2 ore)	*Role play* a coppie su situazioni stimolo che elicitano atti di protesta	Osservare le modalità di gestione dell'atto comunicativo target
Intervento didattico		
Fase 1 Osservare (2 ore)	Attività a grande gruppo o a coppie basate su alcune trascrizioni dei *role play* svolti dagli studenti e alcuni video autentici. Individuare cosa fanno i parlanti con le parole, collegando lingua e funzioni comunicative. Raccolta delle strategie individuate in una prima tassonomia.	La struttura dell'atto di protesta e le due macro-componenti: Espressione del giudizio e Richiesta di riparazione
Fase 2 Utilizzare (2 ore)	DCT orale a partire da 2-3 delle situazioni impiegate per i *role play*. Elicitazione di possibili variazioni nella formulazione della protesta e arricchimento della tassonomia preparata in precedenza. Dialoghi da completare con parole o battute mancanti. Analisi di un video autentico in cui alcuni bambini protestano per un gioco di carte e richiesta di riformulazione a coppie della situazione cercando di evitare inutili litigi e gestendo a parole la protesta.	La struttura dell'atto di protesta e le possibili formulazioni linguistiche degli atti che lo compongono
Fase 3 Riflettere (2 ore)	A partire dai *role play* della fase 2, selezione delle formulazioni più efficaci e individuazione degli elementi linguistici che hanno orientato la scelta. Confronto di diverse interazioni che si differenziano principalmente nell'uso di mitigatori e presenza di atti di supporto. Reimpiego delle strutture individuate su nuovi esempi (riformulazioni e *cloze* mirati). A grande gruppo definizione di una serie di indicazioni utili per protestare con efficacia: strategie generali, consigli e esempi.	Atti di supporto e modificatori
Fase 4 Fare Esperienza (1 ora)	Osservazione della realtà: raccolta di esempi tratti da interazioni quotidiane a cui si partecipa o si assiste. Registrazione delle parole precise, delle strategie e modalità messe in atto dai parlanti. Riflessioni e approfondimenti.	Ripresa in contesto

7. Conclusione

L'espressione dell'atto di protesta è un'azione linguistica complessa, che richiede competenze sofisticate. L'analisi illustrata in queste pagine ha mostrato come i bambini di 7-8 anni non sempre riescano a esprimere verbalmente questo atto e frequentemente risolvano le situazioni di protesta con azioni fisiche mirate ad auto-riparare il torto subito. Quando impiegano strumenti linguistici tendono comunque a utilizzare un numero limitato di strategie: esprimono il giudizio con attribuzione diretta di responsabilità e raramente accompagnano la protesta con atti di supporto o modificatori. Ne consegue che le proteste, verbali o non, oltre a risultare tendenzialmente aggressive, non facilitano una risoluzione positiva della situazione. L'osservazione analitica delle produzioni evidenzia, inoltre, come nonostante la scarsa efficacia nella gestione dell'atto, i bambini siano consapevoli della complessità della protesta e dei rischi per la faccia di entrambi gli interlocutori. In diverse interazioni, infatti, si osserva la realizzazione di un'importante strategia di

negoziazione: nel primo turno viene esplicitata la sola componente espressiva, rimandando eventualmente la componente direttiva ai turni successivi, così da lasciare spazio all'interlocutore per proporre una riparazione. Purtroppo l'uso di atti come Accusa e Critica non aprono realmente la strada a una riparazione del compagno, e nei rari casi in cui si assiste a una più fine elaborazione della protesta, la difficoltà dell'interlocutore di cogliere le implicazioni delle scelte linguistiche del compagno, tendono comunque a inficiare negativamente il risultato di questo tipo di interazioni.

Un'indagine come quella riportata in queste pagine, per quanto limitata rispetto alla numerosità dei partecipanti e delle interazioni elicitate, ha interessanti ricadute dal punto di vista didattico. L'analisi offre indicazioni precise rispetto ai bisogni di apprendimento dei bambini: gli informanti del corpus non devono infatti imparare a gestire la protesta *tout court*, ma piuttosto affinare le modalità di realizzazione degli atti, ampliare l'uso e la gamma dei modificatori e imparare a gestire con maggior raffinatezza la preparazione dell'atto di protesta nell'interazione. Gli insegnanti possono dunque utilmente sostenere lo sviluppo linguistico e comunicativo dei loro allievi, selezionando opportunamente attività e stimoli linguistici e favorendo una riflessione meta-pragmatica specifica e mirata (Siegel, 2016). Per il suo carattere esplorativo, il presente studio è stato dedicato allo sviluppo di una progettazione didattica basata su dati empirici, rimandando a studi ulteriori l'efficacia di interventi didattici di questo tipo.

Dal punto di vista della ricerca, questo lavoro mette in luce alcuni punti di attenzione che possono essere ulteriormente indagati. Da un lato sarebbe utile osservare in prospettiva longitudinale le variazioni nella realizzazione dell'atto da parte degli allievi monolingui e plurilingui della scuola primaria, dall'altra ampliare il tipo di situazioni comunicative sia rispetto alla familiarità del contesto che dell'interlocutore, così da rilevare con maggior ricchezza di dettagli i bisogni linguistici dei bambini rispetto alla realizzazione di questo atto, complesso, ma chiaramente rilevante da un punto di vista relazionale. Si riconferma la necessità di monitorare con precisione anche gli effetti dell'intervento didattico e delle varie tecniche impiegate durante il percorso sia sulle produzioni dei bambini che sulle capacità di riflettere sulla lingua.

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Appendice A

Che cosa direste in queste situazioni?

A scuola, il temperino
Bambino 1 ha prestato il temperino a bambino 2. Adesso bambino 1 ha bisogno del suo temperino e chiede a bambino 2 di restituirglielo. Bambino 2 non vuole darglielo perché dice di avere ancora bisogno del temperino.

A scuola, qui si imbroglia
Durante l'intervallo bambino 1 e bambino 2 stanno giocando a carte. Bambino 2 guarda la carta prima di pescare e cerca di imbrogliare mettendola sotto al mazzo. Bambino 1 se ne accorge e vuole annullare la partita.

A scuola, le patatine
Durante l'intervallo bambino 1 sta mangiando delle patatine. Bambino 2 prende un bel po' di patatine senza chiedere il permesso al compagno.

A scuola, copiare
Durante la verifica bambino 1 cerca di copiare il compito di bambino 2. A bambino 2 non piace che un compagno si metta a copiare il compito.

A scuola, le mie carte
Durante l'intervallo bambino 1 sta giocando da solo con le carte, bambino 2 vorrebbe giocare e prende le carte dalle mani di bambino 1 senza dire niente.

A scuola, la tuta nuova
Bambino 1 sta facendo merenda con un succo di frutta prima di andare in palestra, bambino 2 passa correndo e fa cadere il succo sporcando la tuta nuova di bambino 1.

In mensa, il mio posto
Bambino 1 prende una sedia per mettersi vicino a bambino 2. Poi bambino 1 si alza un attimo e va a bere. Bambino 3 prende il posto di bambino 1.

In aula video, il mio posto
I bambini guardano un filmato con l'insegnante. Bambino 1 si vuole sedere davanti. Bambino 2 prende il posto di bambino 1. Bambino 1 rivuole il suo posto, perché altrimenti non riesce a vedere bene il film.

A casa, il dinosauro
Bambino 1 ha preso il dinosauro di bambino 2 senza chiedere il permesso. Bambino 1 va da bambino 2 e rivuole il suo dinosauro.

A casa, fallo
Bambino 1 e bambino 2 stanno giocando a calcio. Bambino 1 fa un'azione scorretta per vincere la partita, bambino 2 se ne accorge e vuole annullare il goal.

A casa, cambiare canale
Bambino 1 sta guardando il suo cartone preferito alla televisione, bambino 2 prende il telecomando e cambia canale.

A casa, il mio giornalino
Bambino 1 sta leggendo il suo giornalino preferito, bambino 2 prende il giornalino di bambino 1 e involontariamente strappa una pagina.

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Shively, Rachel (2018). *Learning and using conversational humor in a second language during study abroad*. Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter.

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ABSTRACT

EN | This book review focuses on the monographic volume, *Learning and using conversational humor in a second language during study abroad*, written by Rachel Shively (Illinois State University) and published in 2018 by de Gruyter. The book offers a thorough ethnographic study of L2 Spanish students' use and appropriation of conversational humor and humorous strategies during a semester abroad in Toledo, Spain. Shively also discusses the pedagogical implications of her study and provides practical examples of how humor can be introduced in the L2 classroom.

Key words: CONVERSATIONAL HUMOR, STUDY ABROAD, SPANISH L2, HUMOROUS STRATEGIES

ES | Esta reseña se centra en el volumen monográfico *Learning and using conversational humor in a second language during study abroad*, escrito por Rachel Shively (Illinois State University) y publicado en 2018 por la editorial de Gruyter. Este libro presenta un detallado estudio etnográfico del uso y apropiación de diferentes estrategias humorísticas conversacionales por parte de estudiantes de español como L2 durante un semestre de estudio en el extranjero en Toledo, España. Además, Shively discute las implicaciones pedagógicas de su estudio y ofrece ejemplos prácticos de cómo el humor se puede integrar en un curso de segundas lenguas.

Palabras clave: HUMOR CONVERSACIONAL, PROGRAMAS DE ESTUDIO EN EL EXTRANJERO, ESPAÑOL L2, ESTRATEGIAS HUMORÍSTICAS

IT | Questa recensione riguarda il libro *Learning and using conversational humor in a second language during study abroad*, scritto da Rachel Shively (Illinois State University) e pubblicato nel 2018 dalla casa editrice de Gruyter. Questo libro presenta un dettagliato studio etnografico dell'utilizzo e dell'appropriazione del comico e delle strategie umoristiche da parte di apprendenti di spagnolo come L2 durante un semestre di studio all'estero in Spagna nella città di Toledo. Inoltre, Shively discute le implicazioni pedagogiche del suo studio e offre esempi pratici di come l'umorismo si può integrare in un corso di insegnamento di una seconda lingua.

Parole chiave: IL COMICO NELLA CONVERSAZIONE, PROGRAMMI DI STUDI ALL'ESTERO, SPAGNOLO L2, STRATEGIE UMORISTICHE

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In the book, *Learning and Using Conversational Humor in a Second Language during Study Abroad* discusses L2 learners' acquisition of humor in a study abroad context from a pragmatics framework. Shively provides us with a thorough ethnographic study of L2 Spanish students' use and appropriation of conversational humor and humorous strategies during their semester abroad in Toledo, Spain. The book also presents an extensive overview of the underpinnings of the varied functions of humor, the different approaches to its study, and the wide-ranging meanings that humor conveys for students and people in general. In addition, it summarizes the most relevant studies in this area. Furthermore, the author's examination of how L2 students of Spanish use humor in their linguistic interactions in Toledo is done within a solid theoretical framework. It is a remarkable resource not only for researchers, but also for those teaching an L2, particularly Spanish, as it offers ways in which to incorporate humor in the classroom.

The book is structured in an organized and principled way in six chapters. The first one serves as a general introduction to humor studies in different settings and, particularly, in relation to those which examine humorous use and its acquisition in the L2 classroom and/or study abroad programs. The author positions her study within the framework of language socialization, which stems from Ochs' 1991 work. Shively emphasizes that this theory assumes that to be socialized to and learn an L2 means to acquire the competence to become a member of a community. More specifically, she indicates that "[a] basic tenet of language socialization theory is that socialization occurs throughout the lifespan, as individuals enter into new settings and rely on more knowledgeable people to acquire interactional practices." (p. 23). The author's objective in drawing on language socialization theory is to explore the kinds of humor L2 students encounter and how they use this linguistic strategy themselves in interactions during their study abroad program to provide "insight into L2 pragmatics, generally, and L2 pragmatics in study abroad specifically" (p. 25).

In Chapter two, the author provides details about the study, including its length (11 weeks), characteristics of the Toledo Institute in Spain where the study took place, characteristics of the participants, and the types of data collected. The participants were six students from a University in the Midwest in the USA who were studying Spanish. Their proficiency, as measured by an in-house exam from the Toledo Institute, ranged from an intermediate to an advanced-low level. Shively specifies that she collected both discourse and metalinguistic data. The discourse data stemmed from the recordings that students made of spontaneous conversations with host family members as well as with native Spanish speaker peers. This yielded 23 hours of usable data employed for the analysis. To make sure data from different stages of the 11-weeK program could be compared and to detect any developments, students recorded at different times according to a schedule the author provided to them. Shively explored how frequently humor was used, its success or failure, if students initiated or supported humor, the types of humor topics and targets, the resources employed, and functions it served. In the second set of data, the author collected metalinguistic information using student's journal entries and interviews with students and their host family about students' performance in Spanish along with field notes.

In the third chapter, the author summarizes the types of data she encountered, providing examples and organizing the discussion in relation to the frequency of use, its success and failure, the target of the jokes, the type of humor (teasing, irony, exaggeration, revoicing, playing with language structures, self-repetition, contextualization cues), the topics of humor (United States or Spain cultural reference, personal/daily life, learning L2, traveling), its initiation, and the functions served (amusement, affiliation, discourse functions). To guide readers, there are tables with summaries of information in a visual form. In these tables, one can see that there are commonalities and differences in the linguistic behavior of students. For example, we observe that students tend to tease their peers more often than a member of their host families. There were also only two students who employed deadpan humor. Also, contrary to what some may think, most of students' humorous attempts in the L2 were successful.

The center of the book is found in Chapter four where the humor productions of four students are presented in a detailed manner. The students selected were those who had made adjustments to their L2 humor strategies over the course of their semester abroad. Since two of them did not, their production was disregarded. The comprehensive coverage of the types of humor used by these students underscores the presentation of theory earlier in the book. In some examples where it was difficult to ascertain the students' and/or the interlocutors' intentions, the author mentions this ambiguity. As Shively employed different methods, the author was able to triangulate and find insightful details on how humor production is closely related to socialization. It also shows how students' emotional comfort level with their interlocutors could promote or inhibit their humor display. The triangulation is one of the reasons why this study is so unique and insightful. By the end of this chapter, one can observe that humor production is an important factor for

students' identity construction. It is also evident from the analysis that interlocutors' reactions to students' Spanish can impact students' desire to use humor in conversations and be daring with it.

The analysis of the humor by the host families and same age peers as well as their perception about the students' Spanish, and their evolution is presented in Chapter five. Here we realize that, sometimes, there is a mismatch between what students see and what they perceive. The rate and kind of humor used by interlocutors varies by participant. For example, host families teased students more than their peers. However, the author notes that, most of the time, both host family members and same age peers "designed their humor to be comprehensible to students as L2 learners" (p. 233). It was also observed that when interlocutors responded to the participants' humor, it was mostly to its content and not its form.

The conclusions of the study, the pedagogical implications, limitations, and the future research ideas are included in Chapter six. An important pedagogical suggestion that stems from the data is that instructors should raise awareness of the use of humor in the L2 to empower students in their use of this strategy which has key personal and social functions. Shively further emphasizes the fact that "teachers would do well to avoid basing instruction only on their own intuitions or anecdotes, [and] rather use published studies of humor and gather samples of authentic instances of humor" (p. 253). While this study was well planned and executed, Shively is aware that a longer longitudinal study would better inform on the processes taking place in students' L2 adjustments in relation to humor use. She also indicated that it would have been better to have videotaped the conversations to "capture multimodal aspects of humor" (p. 255). Data was recorded by the students, so in the future it should be obtained in more naturalistic settings. Overall, Shively's book is very well designed, insightful, and thorough. This study about the acquisition of humor in an L2, particularly in Spanish, is an essential reading for those who do research in humor and L2 pragmatics. In conclusion, this book is an excellent resource for those interested in the use and acquisition of L2 humor, researchers or teachers alike, as its academic discussion is accessible to the layperson.

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ABSTRACT

ES La importancia que se le ha otorgado a las diferentes destrezas lingüísticas ha variado en función del enfoque metodológico predominante en cada época. En particular la comprensión lectora pasó de ser el centro de atención en modelos clásicos a ser poco tratada en otros más modernos. Esta reseña analiza la monografía de Victoria Rodrigo, que ha compilado un panorama completo y prolijo de todo conocimiento que cualquier persona dedicada a la docencia, investigación o creación de materiales didácticos debería poseer sobre la comprensión lectora, prestando particular atención a la enseñanza del español como segunda lengua o lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: COMPRENSIÓN LECTORA, DESTREZAS LINGÜÍSTICAS, DISEÑO DE ACTIVIDADES, ESPAÑOL COMO SEGUNDA LENGUA O LENGUA EXTRANJERA

EN The importance granted to different language skills has varied according to the predominant methodological focus of the time. Reading comprehension has gone from being the center of attention in classical models to being barely addressed in more modern ones. This review analyzes a monograph by Victoria Rodrigo, who has compiled an exhaustive and detailed panorama of all of the knowledge that anyone interested in teaching, researching, or creating learning materials should know about reading comprehension, paying particular attention to the teaching of Spanish as a second or foreign language.

Key words: READING COMPREHENSION, LANGUAGE SKILLS, ACTIVITY DESIGN, SPANISH AS A SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE

IT L'importanza assegnata alle diverse abilità linguistiche è cambiata in funzione dell'approccio metodologico predominante nei vari periodi. La comprensione della lettura è passata da essere al centro dell'attenzione nei modelli classici a essere poco trattata in quelli più moderni. Questa recensione analizza la monografia di Victoria Rodrigo, che, prestando particolare attenzione all'insegnamento dello spagnolo come lingua seconda o straniera, delinea uno scenario completo e preciso di tutte quelle conoscenze sulla comprensione della lettura che dovrebbero essere appannaggio di chiunque si dedichi all'insegnamento, alla ricerca o alla creazione di materiali didattici.

Parole chiave: COMPRENSIONE SCRITTA, ABILITÀ LINGUISTICHE, PROGETTAZIONE DI ATTIVITÀ, SPAGNOLO COME SECONDA LINGUA O LINGUA STRANIERA

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Desde que Hymes (1971) cuestionara la centralidad de la competencia gramatical, la perspectiva sobre lo que implica la capacidad de comunicación en una lengua extranjera ha variado fuertemente. De hecho, cuando se concibe la competencia comunicativa como una capacidad de usar la lengua no solo bien formada desde un punto de vista estructural, sino adecuada sociolingüística, pragmática, social, cultural y discursivamente, la perspectiva de la importancia de las distintas destrezas implicadas en el proceso de la comunicación ha tomado un cariz diferente. En la época estructuralista la comprensión lectora, como explican Richards y Rodgers (2003), era el principal objetivo para aprender lenguas extranjeras, ya que el fin era acercarse a la literatura clásica o desarrollarse intelectualmente. De ese modo se prestaba poca o nula atención sistemática al habla, la selección de léxico no estaba basada en su frecuencia o utilidad y se fomentaba la memorización. Como reacción a esta predominancia de lo escrito frente a lo oral surgieron a lo largo del siglo XX numerosos enfoques que procuraban compensar ese desajuste. Así, la comprensión lectora y en particular la lectura de la literatura se estigmatizó como algo residual, por ejemplo, en el método audiolingüístico.

No obstante, ese cambio de paradigma que ocurrió en los años 70 sobre la concepción de lo que supone conocer una lengua conllevó una nueva descripción y reflexión teórica sobre la competencia comunicativa como algo más complejo que dominar la forma y llevó a los lingüistas a establecer una categorización de cuándo se activa el uso de ésta. Así, tradicionalmente se han distinguido las destrezas productivas (hablar y escribir) y las receptivas (leer y escuchar). Aunque actualmente se añade una perspectiva nueva a ellas: su dimensión interactiva e interpretativa que también las tienen. Cada una de estas destrezas incluye a su vez otras microdestrezas implicadas para codificar o descodificar los mensajes y, además, también se reconoce la importancia del conocimiento del mundo con el fin de interpretarlos.

Victoria Rodrigo trata en este libro todos esos aspectos mencionados que entraña el proceso de decodificación del texto escrito a lo largo de doce capítulos que abarcan desde los tipos de lectura y textos, pasando por estudios empíricos sobre el impacto de su práctica en el aula, hasta su importancia para el desarrollo de la competencia léxico-semántica o su evaluación, por poner algunos ejemplos, con especial atención a la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera (en adelante, ELE) y a las investigaciones y trabajos hechos sobre ella.

En cuanto a la macroestructura de la obra es necesario señalar que la presencia de un índice breve y uno detallado facilita enormemente la búsqueda de información concreta. Al mismo fin sirve el índice final de autores y conceptos clave citados. Otro punto fuerte de la organización del trabajo es que también se ofrece un breve glosario de términos técnicos que ayuda a ampliar el público meta de este libro. En la misma línea se sitúan el capítulo inicial de conceptos preliminares y las actividades insertas a lo largo de estos y cuyo solucionario se encuentra al final también. Junto con esta disposición acertada, el estilo formal y académico, pero a la vez cercano y fácil de seguir acerca el libro a un público potencial de expertos en lingüística aplicada, pero también de investigadores en formación, estudiantes de máster y doctorado, diseñadores de materiales, y al profesorado de español como lengua extranjera que desee continuar su formación.

Esta ambición, acertada y cumplida, de ser accesible a todos los públicos también es la que parece llevar a la autora a dividir cada capítulo en los siguientes apartados: *Objetivos del capítulo*, unas reflexiones previas, el cuerpo del capítulo en sí, un apartado denominado *Aplicación de la teoría a la práctica*, otro de *Consideraciones pedagógicas*, un apartado de *Preguntas y discusión* y, finalmente, recomendaciones de lecturas complementarias. Como se puede deducir esta distribución logra acercar el cuerpo fuertemente teórico de cada capítulo a cuestiones más aplicadas y a pie de aula de interés para los docentes a través de los apartados *De la teoría a la práctica* y *Consideraciones pedagógicas*. De especial relevancia para los investigadores en formación y estudiantes de másteres serán los relacionados con las preguntas de reflexión y debate. Por ello, esta monografía puede ser perfectamente empleada como lectura obligatoria o de clase en másteres de ELE. Otras estrategias que persiguen esa accesibilidad son la gran cantidad de figuras y tablas explicativas o de resumen, así como unos bocadillos o cuadros llamados *Recuerda* que compilan en un par de frases los contenidos más relevantes.

En cuanto a la microestructura cabe señalar que la progresión temática de los capítulos es adecuada y facilita, de hecho, el formarse un completo panorama de los aspectos teóricos y didácticos que implica la enseñanza de la comprensión lectora. Así, en el capítulo previo de conceptos preliminares se traza una breve reflexión sobre la importancia de esta destreza y cómo se ha articulado en dos modelos de currículos para la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras: el *Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas* (MCER, Consejo de Europa, 2002) y el que propone el *American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages* (ACFTL, 2012). Se hace una revisión sobre las referencias y consideraciones que se marcan en torno a la comprensión lectora y

se describen los niveles establecidos. Por supuesto, ambos modelos curriculares suponen una guía para la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras más allá de las fronteras de las instituciones que los han articulado, pero teniendo en cuenta que en particular el libro hace referencia al ELE, quizás hubiera sido interesante también poder glosar el referente a otras latitudes como el trabajo del Ministerio de Educación, Cultura, Deportes, Ciencia y Tecnología de Japón (MEXT, 2011), sobre todo teniendo en cuenta la adaptación que de esas pautas de enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras ha realizado el Grupo de Investigación de Didáctica del Español (GIDE) en su modelo de contenidos (2016). Para finalizar, se añaden una serie de precauciones terminológicas muy adecuadas teniendo en cuenta que el libro puede ser leído tanto por expertos, como por legos en la materia a quienes quizás algunos conceptos puedan resultar confusos.

El primer capítulo, *El proceso de lectura*, abre el libro con un repaso a los enfoques que se han tomado como referencia: desde el *bottom-up* al *top-down* para presentarnos el modelo más moderno que entiende la lectura como un proceso interactivo conocido como la teoría de los esquemas cognitivos porque, como señalan De Santiago Guervós y Fernández González (2017), "todo ello completa buena parte de los ingredientes que debe tener presente el profesor cuando se plantea una tarea de comprensión lectora para aprendices de una L2" (p. 461). Así, Rodrigo dibuja un panorama explicativo sobre los esquemas lingüísticos, formales y de contenido que se activan cuando se produce una tarea de comprensión lectora, así como explica la importancia del contexto, el conocimiento cultural y la familiaridad con el tema para que se logre la decodificación. Es particularmente reseñable el apartado que dedica la autora a la necesidad de activar los esquemas apropiados para la comprensión y muy interesantes los ejemplos que aporta porque harán al docente y al diseñador de materiales comprender la importancia de la contextualización mediante la proporción de suficientes pistas.

A continuación, se dispone un capítulo sobre la mecánica de la lectura y se describe las características de un lector eficaz. Este tiene un carácter eminentemente teórico y presenta los mecanismos cognitivos que se producen mientras se realiza la lectura. Las explicaciones sobre las nuevas metodologías de investigación sobre el movimiento ocular (*eye-tracking*) serán de particular interés para investigadores sobre este tema. Se explica muy claramente conceptos clave como sacada, fijación, punto de fijación y área de visión, así como el concepto de regresión en la lectura que está fuertemente vinculado con la capacidad para leer rápidamente o no. Esta velocidad es una de las características que se le adjudican a una persona con una buena comprensión lectora, así como que domine la mecánica de la lectura, que lea en bloques, que realice fijaciones de corta duración, etc. Rodrigo resume en una frase muy acertada todas ellas y es que "un buen lector es aquel que lee rápidamente sin detrimento de la comprensión" (p. 47). Esta matización es fundamental porque en muchas ocasiones se ha puesto por encima de cualquier otra característica la velocidad y como recogen De Vega, Cuetos, Domínguez y Estévez (1999, p. 657), hay estudios que señalan que los lectores lentos hacen "pausas más inteligentes" y que recuerdan mejor, por eso su análisis de manera aislada es parcial y debe incluir otros aspectos como la eficiencia memoria/tiempo. Desde el punto de vista didáctico este capítulo es especialmente relevante por la explicación de los contextos en que la lectura en voz alta y la lectura silenciosa son aptas y por la reflexión sobre la selección del tamaño de los textos y su formato.

De las consideraciones teóricas sobre el procesamiento cognitivo presentado en el capítulo dos, emana la necesidad de abordar en el tercero cuestiones sobre cómo se realiza ese procesamiento, pero ya en una segunda lengua. Así, se presenta la *Teoría compensatoria de la lectura en L2* que considera que el nivel de alfabetización en la L1, así como el conocimiento de la L2 (umbral lingüístico) y los factores idiosincráticos del lector pueden explicar cómo se produce la comprensión lectora. Rodrigo, a continuación, reflexiona sobre el papel de la memoria y explica su rol fundamental para que la lectura se produzca con éxito. Como explica Wen (2016), la memoria de trabajo, y en particular la ejecutiva, tiene una alta correlación con las tareas de amplitud lectora. A su vez, también se dedica una reflexión a la capacidad cognitiva limitada y se baraja la teoría de que la memoria a corto plazo solo puede analizar de cuatro a siete unidades de información a la vez (p. 55). No obstante, quizás aquí hubiera sido interesante haber hecho una puntualización con respecto a otros factores que influyen en ello para atender las variables individuales que condicionan el aprendizaje de una LE, pensando especialmente en niños, por ejemplo, ya que como señala Téllez (2005), algunas investigaciones "evidencian cambios en los límites de la memoria operativa con la edad" (p. 69). De hecho, para niños de entre tres y diez años el límite se mueve entre tres y seis dígitos y con adultos con una media de edad de 22.5 años se sitúa alrededor de 7.6 palabras. Este aspecto habría que tenerlo en cuenta a la hora de diseñar actividades de lectura de ELE para niños. Más adelante en este capítulo, Rodrigo ya se adentra en los beneficios lingüísticos que reporta la lectura para el aprendizaje de una LE. Entre ellos destaca numerosos

estudios llevados a cabo sobre los beneficios de la lectura extensiva con una conclusión clara de que esta favorece el aprendizaje.

El Capítulo cuatro se centra en las estrategias que desarrollan los buenos lectores, cosa que es muy relevante para los docentes con el fin de entrenar estas estrategias en el aula y para los creadores de materiales y manuales para promoverlas en los enunciados de las actividades. En particular, analiza las estrategias metacognitivas, cognitivas y socioafectivas. En este caso es muy interesante la Tabla 4.1. (p. 72) porque se presenta una síntesis muy clara y, como dijimos al comienzo, estas ayudan a entender y visualizar mucho mejor los conceptos. Se adentra, posteriormente, en consejos prácticos para el diseño de las actividades de comprensión lectora dividiendo las etapas de la lectura en relación con las estrategias lectoras que deben movilizarse en cada una de ellas. Al final de este capítulo se ofrece un cuestionario de evaluación de uso de estrategias que es muy útil para llevar al aula si el profesorado se está planteando implementar un proyecto de lectura extensiva o para mejorar su conocimiento sobre cómo funciona su alumnado y mejorar cómo plantea las tareas en clase.

La importancia del léxico para la comprensión lectora se aborda en el Capítulo 5. En concreto se discute el papel del aprendizaje incidental y del instruccional. Aunque está claro que la enseñanza directa no puede ser la única forma de enseñar, la simple exposición al input tampoco garantiza un aprendizaje porque la cantidad de caudal necesario para ello no suele darse en contextos de enseñanza de LE. Así se presenta la relevancia de teorías del procesamiento como la de Barcroft (2015) y el método IBI. Después de presentar los diferentes marcos conceptuales, Rodrigo se adentra en la cuestión central y es cómo enseñar vocabulario a través de la lectura. Aquí la autora hace una reflexión profunda sobre diferentes técnicas como el uso del contexto y la inferencia, la determinación de las palabras clave y el nivel del texto. Como señala Rodrigo (p. 102), es necesario que el profesorado disponga de "criterios claros al seleccionar el vocabulario de lectura que trabajará en clase" y que para ello el nivel de los alumnos y el propósito del curso son decisivos. En este punto cabe traer a colación los trabajos de Hidalgo Gallardo (2017a, 2017b) sobre el uso de la disponibilidad léxica como herramienta para determinar el vocabulario de trabajo porque "con los resultados, podemos adaptar el contenido léxico a sus características y necesidades" (p. 59). Todo ello deviene de la necesidad de determinar cuál es el vocabulario clave del nivel, ya que el *Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes* (Instituto Cervantes, 2006) no es exhaustivo y, además, podemos añadir, está obsoleto, ya que no recoge más que una muestra de un léxico general que, por ello mismo, no atiende a las variables individuales —sociales, culturales y afectivas— que pueden dibujar diferentes panoramas de necesidad de vocabulario. Se reflexiona en este apartado sobre la utilidad de los cognados y es que, como señalan Duñabeitia, Borragán y Casaponsa (2017), "los estudios realizados con cognados han encontrado insistentemente un efecto facilitador que muestra menos tiempo de reacción y menos número de errores en múltiples tareas lingüísticas" (p. 110). Sin desdeñar el poder del trabajo con ellos, no es menos cierto que no todo el léxico es abordable de este modo, ya que en función de la distancia lingüística entre la L1 y la L2/LE esta condicionará su grado de potencial uso pedagógico. Asimismo, se presenta en este capítulo diferentes tipos de actividades para presentar el vocabulario y trabajarlo durante y después de la actividad. Se dedica un apartado, el sexto, al uso del diccionario en el aula. Si bien es cierto que su empleo constante interfiere en la tarea y en la comprensión, el desarrollo de técnicas de enseñanza de vocabulario a través de diccionarios ha tenido especial atención en ELE. Especial mención merecen los trabajos de Sala Caja (2004, 2015) y Nomdedeu Rull (2009, 2011).

El Capítulo seis se centra en qué tipos de texto se pueden llevar al aula y las formas de leer que desarrollan los lectores siguiendo los guiones de las diferentes tipologías discursivas que se presentan en los manuales. Como avanzábamos al comienzo, los textos literarios han pasado por diversas etapas de aceptación al albur de los cambios metodológicos. No obstante, Rodrigo aboga por su integración con una reflexión previa bien fundada. Se explica su utilidad y se mantiene que lo fundamental es encontrar aquellos que mejor se ajusten a nuestros alumnos. Sin embargo, cabe hacer precisar que Rodrigo reflexiona sobre la utilidad del cómic y de la novela gráfica como buenos atractores del interés siempre que se escojan evitando textos con expresiones idiomáticas demasiado coloquiales. Aquí cabría discrepar de esta apreciación en tono generalista porque esa presentación contextualizada de expresiones coloquiales son el contexto adecuado precisamente para enseñarlas; es más, de ese modo se contribuye al desarrollo de las diferentes variedades diastráticas que en muchas ocasiones quedan fuera de las aulas hurtando así el desarrollo de una competencia sociolingüística completa al alumnado. De hecho, este género ha atraído mucho la atención de los docentes probablemente por los factores afectivos que moviliza, así como su flexibilidad y por el apoyo que el soporte visual ofrece como complemento para ayudar a la comprensión lectora (véanse los trabajos de Díaz Trivín, 2008; García Martínez, 2013; Suárez Vega, 2014; con respecto al uso del teatro y la enseñanza de ELE, véase De Agreda,

2016). En este mismo capítulo también se analizan las tipologías textuales más frecuentes y se ofrece una reflexión sobre los diferentes tipos de lectura (extensiva, intensiva, rápida y global y rápida y selectiva) explicando para qué tipo de actividades es más útil cada una de ellas (p. 124). De nuevo una tabla, la 6.1, servirá de gran ayuda para creadores de materiales.

El séptimo capítulo se centra en el debate sobre el uso de materiales auténticos o no en el aula, con el eterno debate sobre qué es autenticidad como punto de inicio. Se analizan las ventajas y desventajas de la utilización de textos originales, pero es muy interesante la introducción del concepto de Van Lier (apud) sobre el término "pedagógicamente auténtico" (p. 136). Por otra parte, el trabajo que Rodrigo ha realizado sobre las lecturas graduadas en ELE y que se presenta en este capítulo es preciso y detallado demostrando así, que su interés es innegable.

El octavo capítulo de este libro se emplea para reflexionar sobre los resultados positivos de los programas de lectura extensiva y sobre cómo se pueden llevar a cabo. Se presenta una descripción contextual e institucional muy prolija que ayudará a docentes y personas a cargo de jefaturas de estudios y diseños curriculares de centro a plantearse cómo implementar estos en sus centros.

El capítulo noveno será de especial interés para docentes y creadores de materiales porque se mete de lleno en el diseño de actividades y de tareas y explica cómo trabajar con un texto. Explica detalladamente las etapas de preparación, lectura y la postlectura. No obstante, no solo da pautas generales, sino que se dan consejos sobre cómo trabajar con diferentes tipos textuales como con novelas. Además, se presenta una tabla (la 9.1, p. 196), muy útil que sirve como guía de diseño de actividades de comprensión lectora.

La parte didáctica del diseño debe corresponderse con los propósitos evaluadores, si los hubiere, por ello el capítulo décimo se centra en la evaluación de la comprensión lectora. Es muy clara la presentación de las diferentes modalidades que se pueden llevar a cabo y cómo elaborarlas al dar consejos prácticos sobre la extensión de los ítems, los tipos de respuestas y su sintaxis, etc. Analiza, asimismo, la fiabilidad, la validez y la viabilidad de las pruebas, cuestión que no es menor porque en muchas ocasiones se pide a los docentes que diseñen actividades de comprensión para exámenes sin ofrecer la suficiente garantía de calidad. Este capítulo es fundamental para desarrollar una buena enseñanza instruccional de esta destreza.

Es de especial valor que Rodrigo haya dedicado un capítulo, el once, a la importancia de los factores afectivos porque tradicionalmente se han soslayado en muchos trabajos académicos. En él se reflexiona sobre los factores que promueven o interfieren en la lectura, así como sobre cómo desarrollar actitudes positivas hacia la lectura. Es este caso la autora se centra en la parte positiva, la motivación. Para completar el panorama que se presenta en el libro, recomendamos la lectura de los siguientes trabajos sobre comprensión lectora y ELE como los de Tapiador Hernández y Fonseca Mora (2015), Fernández Corbacho (2018), Legaz Torregrosa (2018), Alejaldre Biel y Álvarez Ramos (2018) y Foncubierta Muriel y Fonseca Mora (2018). Por otra parte, aunque se menciona, no se presta demasiada atención al lado oscuro del proceso motivacional: la desmotivación. Este fenómeno ha sido apenas estudiado en ELE (pero véase Méndez Santos, 2019) y otras lenguas como el japonés como LE, aunque sí ha sido ampliamente trabajado en inglés. De hecho, son destacables los trabajos de Takase (2003), Ullah y Fatema (2013) y Reza Ahmadi (2017) sobre la desmotivación en programas extensivos de lectura o en asignaturas de lectura que podrían haber sido citados.

El último capítulo del libro se dedica a nuevos hábitos de lectura: la lectura digital y los recursos en línea. Retomando aquí la cuestión de la tipología textual, conviene entender que la mayoría de los textos cotidianos a los que están expuestos los aprendices son digitales y, en particular, redes sociales, ya ni siquiera blogs o foros. Esto debe tener un reflejo didáctico claro, aunque no excluyente por supuesto, en la creación de materiales. En esa línea apuntan manuales de nueva planta como Genial (EnClaveELE).

Si hubiera que señalar algún tema que se echa en falta o que podría haberse tratado con más detalle son los factores socioculturales, pensando especialmente en la enseñanza de español como LE para inmigrantes y sus necesidades particulares que van desde la alfabetización en ocasiones, hasta el hecho de que en muchas ocasiones los textos elegidos no suscitan el interés y producen una alteridad con respecto a ellos. También quizás se podría haber dedicado algún apartado a las personas con necesidades especiales o dificultades de lectura, sobre todo por saber cómo poder ayudarles o diseñar actividades específicas.

En suma, esta obra de Rodrigo sobre la comprensión lectora en el aula de español como L2/LE se constituye por derecho propio en una obra de referencia y de lectura obligada en másteres y cursos de formación para profesorado porque su estructura clara y bien dispuesta, así como su impecable fundamentación teórica y su estilo cercano, lo hacen accesible a todos los públicos.

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