

# Metalinguistic Awareness: Recomposing Cognitive, Linguistic and Cultural Conflicts

Studies in Honor of Maria Antonietta Pinto

edited by

Oreste Floquet and Sergio Melogno



Collana Materiali e documenti 108



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*edited by*  
*Oreste Floquet and Sergio Melogno*



SAPIENZA  
UNIVERSITÀ EDITRICE  
2024

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**Sapienza Università Editrice**  
Piazzale Aldo Moro 5 – 00185 Roma

[www.editricesapienza.it](http://www.editricesapienza.it)  
[editrice.sapienza@uniroma1.it](mailto:editrice.sapienza@uniroma1.it)

Iscrizione Registro Operatori Comunicazione n. 11420  
*Registry of Communication Workers registration n. 11420*

ISBN 978-88-9377-311-9

DOI 10.13133/9788893773119

Pubblicato nel mese di aprile 2024 | *Published in April 2024*



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## Foreword

As co-editors of this Festschrift in honor of Maria Antonietta Pinto, whom we knew as our mentor years ago, and with whom we intensely collaborated, we invited scholars from different disciplines, including linguistics, applied linguistics, developmental and educational psycholinguistics. The plurality of these contributions is itself indicative of the attractive power of M. A. Pinto's work, which was first built on philosophy in the late 60s at Sapienza University of Rome, then moved towards developmental cognitive psychology at the University of Geneva, in the last decade of Piaget's life, and further explored developmental psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and educational psychology when she went back to Rome in 1975. This shift toward language disciplines, although psychologically-based, was related to her intense collaboration with one of the most authoritative figures in these fields, Renzo Titone, which lasted from the mid 70s to the beginning of the third millennium.

This diversified profile has its roots in a series of significant experiences at certain historical moments in Italy and abroad, starting from her bilingual education in the French Lycée of Rome from the very beginning of primary to the end of high school. The systematic practice of two languages, associated with two cultural programs to follow in parallel, undoubtedly offered privileged conditions to develop rich encyclopedic knowledge and critical thinking, but it was at the same time the starting point of a series of cognitive, linguistic and cultural conflicts. These eventually became overt at university time, when M. A. Pinto enrolled in philosophy, which was the only possible background, together with medicine, to further specialize in psychology at a time when a degree in psychology did not yet exist. The interesting thing about the conflicts M. A. Pinto reports is that these were not linguistic in a technical sense, as Italian was her native language, but had to do with the *linguistic usages* requested by the study of philosophy in Italy, which was – and still is – based on a totally different pedagogical system compared to the French one. While in Italy philosophy is taught through its own historical development, itself in relation to the historical development of other domains, such as arts or literature, and it is assessed mainly orally, in France the pedagogical objective is to educate minds to philosophical thinking, and it is assessed through students' written dissertations. There is, thus, a double opposition: one between a diachronic and a synchronic approach, and the other between oral and written linguistic abilities. The first is fundamentally cultural and related to the dominant philosophical traditions in Italy and France; the second has to do with students' thinking style, with evident repercussions on the type of cognitive and linguistic abilities encouraged and praised in one system or in the other.

Thus, the idea of conflict as something that derives from historical and cultural traditions, which reflect on the priorities each educational system establishes, which in turn tend to forge different thinking styles, was something that M. A. Pinto experienced quite early and at a personal level. This multidimensional experience triggered her curiosity toward a whole range of

social sciences: psychology in the forefront but also linguistics, semiotics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and education. The plurality of these interests gave her approach toward bilingualism a broader perspective than the strictly linguistic study of the relationship between two languages.

Without denying the value of the graduation obtained at the Faculty of Philosophy in Rome in 1970, however solid and interesting, the primary objective was to graduate in a scientifically-based Faculty of Psychology. Thanks to a scholarship, M. A. Pinto could enroll at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences in Geneva in 1971, the « temple » of Piaget's epistemology and psychology. Those years in Geneva, in that particular decade, were exceptionally fruitful thanks to the high level of her professors, Piaget first and foremost, who was still alive. At the same time, the Genevan experience gave her a unique opportunity also to attend courses of semiotics, linguistics and psycholinguistics with two among the most outstanding professors in those fields at that time, Luis Prieto and Hermine Sinclair de-Zwart. This additional formation in language sciences proved to be of great help when M. A. Pinto returned to Rome as a researcher in 1975, once graduated in Geneva, in the newly created Institute of Psychology, at Sapienza University.

However, having to re-adjust to an ideologically turbulent country in the mid-70s, in an Institute of Psychology that was just taking its initial steps, posed new conflicts and thus new challenges. But, in the meantime, M. A. Pinto had assimilated Piaget's lesson about equilibration processes, as outlined in the last 1975 model, which posits three types of mental regulations to cope with cognitive perturbations, and recurrently appear at different developmental stages. Although disappointed by the reductive way in which Piagetian theory was divulged in the courses of developmental psychology, at a time when Piaget's figure was systematically opposed to that of Vygotsky, she framed those contrasts as forms of socio-cultural conflicts, likely to be recomposed by drawing on the dialectical inspiration of Piagetian theory itself.

During the 70s, two social psychologists of Piagetian school, Wilhem Doise and Gabriel Mugny (1981), created an experimental paradigm to recompose cognitive conflicts between children of different operational levels which increased their awareness and stimulated more advanced solutions. At the beginning of the 80s, this socio-cognitive construct had been welcomed in Italy as something that was likely to shorten the distance between Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories because it introduced a social mediation between the individual mind and the cognitive problem at hand. Actually, Doise and Mugny never denied that their paradigm, however new, was a powerful activator of equilibration dynamics, in the purest Piagetian spirit.

The challenge, for M. A. Pinto, consisted in trying to transfer the construct of cognitive conflict, viewed in light of equilibration processes, to various aspects of language processing. The first studies addressed a very special form of bilingualism in Italy, often unrecognized, namely Italian-vernacular. Actually, there was a consistent group of Italian linguists and sociolinguists who showed interest, at that time, in this type of bilingualism but they treated it from a linguistic and/or educational perspective, while M. A. Pinto faced it from a psychological perspective. In a first round of studies, she focused on the conflicts that children, parents and teachers showed in their attitudes toward Italian and vernacular, and on the psycholinguistic strategies children devised to face their technical conflicts when they wrote in Italian having vernacular as their first language. Some years later, the focus on conflict addressed deeper psychological and cognitive aspects by asking Italian-vernacular bilingual children to write texts in both languages on the same topic. The research was unprecedented and clearly showed that each language conveyed contrasting and complementary worldviews about the same content. Moreover, the features of these contrasts were very similar to those which sociolinguist Basil Bernstein (1971, 1973, 1975) attributed to what he called « elaborated » and « restricted » codes. These are two opposed psychological orientations which can exist also in the same language, which, in Bernstein's case, was British English. Actually, the critical analysis of Bernstein's theory of sociolinguistic codes the way the author had developed it during

the 70s, had been the object of an entire book by M. A. Pinto, in 1980. Once more, in that theoretical essay, issues were treated on cultural, psychological, cognitive and linguistic grounds.

But the most important opportunity to elaborate a specific construct of language processing based on the idea of recomposition of conflicts via equilibration mechanisms came when Renzo Titone launched a project on metalinguistic awareness, by the mid 80s. This project set out to create instruments to measure metalinguistic awareness at different age levels, validate them on Italian monolingual populations, using them in bi/plurilingual or second-language learning contexts and translate them into other languages. All these objectives have been gradually achieved during the last thirty-five years, as the list of the publications at the end of this volume shows. The culminating point of this endeavour has been the lifelong learning European project called « MATEL (acronym for *Metalinguistic Awareness Tests in European Languages*, [www.pintomatel.com](http://www.pintomatel.com)) from 2013 to 2015. M. A. Pinto has been the conceptor and principal investigator of this project, supported by the prestigious participation of some of the contributors to the present Festschrift. Since then, several translations of the metalinguistic tests, the famous « TAMs » (It: *Test di abilità metalinguistiche*) or MATs in the English acronym (*Metalinguistic Ability Tests*), have been spontaneously implemented in languages that had not been foreseen at the beginning ([www.pintomatel.com/follow-ups](http://www.pintomatel.com/follow-ups)), and used in studies as predictors of variables also unforeseen by the initial project.

Moreover, and this involves our personal scientific production, the construct of these tests has inspired part of our work as academics, although from different backgrounds and faculties. In a few words, as a Professor of French linguistics, Oreste Floquet (Sapienza University) studied some typical phenomena of French language by adopting the reflective methodology of the TAMs, where participants are requested to *reason* on language, and not just to show more or less developed and correct knowledge of grammar. They may do this at varying degrees of elaborateness, following the typical graduality of equilibration processes. As a Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neurosciences and Developmental Neuropsychology (« Niccolò Cusano » Telematic University of Rome), Sergio Melogno devised two tests of metaphor comprehension for children from 4 to 6 and from 9 to 14. The construct of these tests is based on the idea that, to fully understand a metaphor, one has to recompose the conflict created by the semantic dissonance between the two terms that compose the metaphor. This recomposition, in turn, can be implemented at different levels of elaborateness, each representing a step in equilibration.

In sum, the idea of conflict as an activator of processes that lead to higher forms of awareness has been recurrent and very productive in M. A. Pinto's work, and, we may say, also helpful to develop her own awareness of the socio-cultural conflicts she had to recompose at given moments and in given contexts. As a complex pathway such as the one we sketched has had several turning points, each preceded by personal feelings and overcome with personal resources, we thought, as co-editors, that the most credible witness of those experiences was the addressee of this Festschrift herself.

Therefore, we decided to elicit the thoughts that accompanied the most significant moments of her itinerary in the interview that will follow, and to entitle it: « Metalinguistic awareness: recomposing cognitive, linguistic and cultural conflicts ».

Rome, December, 2023

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PART I

METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS:  
RECOMPOSING COGNITIVE, LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL CONFLICTS  
AN INTERVIEW TO MARIA ANTONIETTA PINTO



# Metalinguistic Awareness: Recomposing Cognitive, Linguistic and Cultural Conflicts<sup>1</sup>

## An interview to Maria Antonietta Pinto

*Oreste Floquet – Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, Sapienza University of Rome*

*Sergio Melogno – Faculty of Psychology, « Niccolò Cusano » Telematic University of Rome;  
Faculty of Medicine and Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome*

**O.F., S.M.** As co-editors of this Festschrift, we would like to hear from your personal voice what were the most significant steps of the scientific itinerary that led you to the current phase.

**M.A.P.** It will be a pleasure to respond to such questions, and I wish to thank you for this privileged opportunity. When I look back at the research interests I pursued in the last four decades, I realize that the most part of the topics I covered, and the academic initiatives I undertook, have been largely inspired by my life experience during the schooling period, from primary to high school. If I say « from primary » it is because this has been the starting point of the attitude I developed toward languages and the educational systems that teach them. It all began at the age of six, when I was suddenly enrolled in the French Lycée of Rome, the « Lycée Chateaubriand », after one year of primary school in an Italian school. The idea came from my mother who used to say that in her first school days, in Sicily, where she was born, she had to ask the teacher how to say in Italian things she only knew in Sicilian, which was the first language learnt and used at home by all children, even in cultivated families. She then converted the « discovery » of Italian, of which she perfectly grasped the breadth as a national language, into a platform to explore other national languages, such as French, English and German which she started to study eagerly. Her curiosity toward languages, including dialects, each with its own worldview and sociolinguistic features, and her admiration toward them as human artifacts certainly contributed to shaping my own sensitivity toward languages. I may say that this sensitivity then became constitutive of my type of intelligence, which I would define as « linguistic-verbal », in Howard Gardner's (1983) terms.

Back to my childhood, as I was the last of four children, and the other three were already advanced in their Italian curriculum when my mother wished to enroll us all at Chateaubriand, I remained the only one who could reasonably start a totally new itinerary. This experience transformed me into what is technically called an « early consecutive Italian-French bilingual » (Hamers, Blanc, 1989, 2000). So I started to speak, think, sing, write, read and make calculations in French for half a day, and switched to Italian for about the same linguistic usages during the other half. This took place in a native Italian family in the Italian-speaking context of Rome. This itinerary through the French curriculum went on for twelve years until the Baccalauréat, along educational lines rigidly established by the French Ministry of Education in regards to curriculum options, subject contents, methods, handbooks, assessment systems, and with rigorously native French teachers. However, if native Italians

<sup>1</sup> This interview has been implemented in several steps, given the length of the period it refers to. To do justice to the precision and complexity of the concepts evoked, we transcribed the whole interview and gave M.A. Pinto the possibility to review it, which explains the formal accuracy of the language used.

wished to have their Baccalauréat acknowledged by Italian universities, they had to attend classes of Italian literature with native Italian teachers, based, in principle, on the official programs, handbooks and assessment criteria of the corresponding grades in Italian schools. In practice, Italian students who wished to enter Italian and/or francophone universities had to take an exam also in Italian literature in addition to all the other subjects of the French Baccalauréat. To sum up, the type of Italian-French bilingualism those students constructed through a twelve year-curriculum met all the requirements of a strongly structured educational project. In technical terms, this educational project required to develop in each of the two languages, and to a high degree, those abilities Jim Cummins (1979) calls C.A.L.P. (acronym for *Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency*), and, at the same time, to acquire as much as possible of the historical, geographical and literary knowledge pertaining to both French and Italian culture.

**O.F., S.M.** From your description, you were in the most favorable conditions to develop those advanced metacognitive abilities the literature reports as typical of bilinguals (Bialystok, 2001; Pinto, El Euch, 2015), and which later became the object of your own research during the last thirty years (Pinto, 1993; Pinto et al., 2002; Pinto et al., 2004; Pinto, Iliceto, 2003; Pinto, 2013, to quote but a few). Did you perceive those potentialities and your overall privileged condition at that time?

**M.A.P.** Honestly, I was too focused on achievement to be aware of those potentialities the way I studied them later. However, I perceived other aspects of a privileged condition, such as being enrolled in a school that oriented us toward critical thinking in all disciplines, made us know students from various nationalities or with an international background, guaranteed secular teaching for students of any religion or from totally agnostic or atheist families, while offering classes of religious instruction based on parents' choice. Since first grade, when I saw some classmates going outside the classroom during the religion hour – something which could never have happened in my previous confessional school – I had an immediate taste of that « laïcité » French people stress so proudly. As a student in psychology, many years later, I would learn that this kind of experience is a powerful example of Piagetian « decentering » applied to cultural values. What was also appreciable is that the school was able to ensure a nationally-certified transmission of French culture, with nationally-based standards of achievement, while respecting, at the same time, the exigency of Italian students to be acquainted with the literature of their country, and praise its value.

**O.F., S.M.** Your tone seems very appreciative. But was everything successful and harmonious?

**M.A.P.** Regarding achievement, yes, it has been quite successful since first grade although I didn't know a single word of French. Having already assimilated the basic mechanisms of reading, writing and arithmetics in my Italian first class, I had overcome what Cummins (1979) calls the « first threshold » in bilingual development that is, an age-appropriate knowledge in at least one of the two languages, in this case, my native one. Retrospectively, it is also interesting to observe the intelligent graduality with which our vocabulary was expanded every day and applied to new concepts, something I had to rediscover much later when I studied foreign language methodologies for children. That said, the curriculum was more loaded and demanding for the Italian-French bilingual students than for monolingual French-speaking students but the challenge was fascinating precisely because it constantly drew on two linguistic systems, which activated those attentional processes Bialystok (2001) invokes as the major triggering factor of metalinguistic processing. That was visible especially for those who studied Latin and Greek, with or without some modern language (there were many curricular options, for instance, Greek, Latin and one modern language, or Latin and two modern languages etc.). In practice, as bilinguals, we never approached a less known language just through our native language only. As genially pointed out by Peal and Lambert in their 1962

historical study, in our inner language we always resorted to the mental representations related to our L1 and/or L2, more or less consciously, to access a third, a fourth, or a fifth one. I clearly remember that even a preliminary knowledge of Latin, combined with my knowledge of Italian orthography, increased my control over French orthography, which is notoriously difficult and poses serious problems to French monolinguals until their last school years. Interestingly, those early insights into the metalinguistic grounds of French orthographic control recently inspired a series of studies on French-speaking samples, in France and Africa with one of you (Floquet, Pinto, 2019; Boutin et al., 2022).

**O.F., S.M.** But the obstacles and challenges you describe could possibly also bring about potential conflicts.

**M.A.P.** For sure, on linguistic grounds, there were always potential or real conflicts between Italian and French usages, and these were revealed by typical reciprocal interferences. Yet, errors and interferences were mostly considered as physiological phenomena in the process of attaining balanced bilingualism, and, furthermore, they were technically controllable. But the most significant conflicts were subtler and deeper, and came from a certain dissonance between the intellectual and behavioral values conveyed by the educational systems in France and Italy, which, in turn, tended to shape typical thinking styles, in Robert J. Sternberg's (1997) terms.

This is where the cultural dimension of bilingualism comes to the fore, especially when those cultural values are intentionally and methodically transmitted by educational institutions. When I first read Hamers and Blanc's (1989, 2000) book on bilingualism, where six basic definition criteria are presented, among which cultural identification, I found this point illuminating. Languages are not just neutral instruments of thought and communication; they also convey worldviews, aesthetic, moral or religious values toward which a bilingual has *feelings*, and with which he/she may more or less identify. As Hamers and Blanc put forward (*supra*), a bilingual might technically master his/her own two languages but feel identified only with one of the underlying cultures, and not necessarily the one that matches his/her native language. This is a case the authors term « bilingualism *without* biculturalism » but there are also more harmonious cases where bilingualism goes hand in hand *with* biculturalism, as well as there are cases where a balanced mastery of the two languages is not accompanied by any identification or special feeling toward the values associated to each language, a condition Hamers and Blanc call « cultural anomie ». Between these three possibilities, the bilingual person may also have more nuanced positions: feelings may also be ambivalent and not only univocal, and this ambivalence, in turn, can be modulated by personal and historical changes over the lifespan.

Interestingly, these variable associations between bilingualism and biculturalism inspired the research project of a PhD thesis I supervised and later published in a book entitled « *Bilingual and bicultural? A study on the perception of Italian language and culture by teachers of Italian in Argentina* » (Bracone, Pinto, 2014). The question mark at the end of the title precisely stresses that the bilingualism/biculturalism relationship can vary on a continuum, from totally harmonious to discordant in different ways and to a different extent, depending on the historical phases of an individual.

**O.F., S.M.** You were hinting at cultural conflicts you could already perceive when you were still at school. Could you say more about your feelings?

**M.A.P.** Cultural conflicts did not really arise within the school context because there was reciprocal respect between French and Italian teachers. For instance, we were encouraged to read books of both Italian and French literature. Rather, I started experiencing some dissonance in the outer community, due to the inevitable comparisons with Italian monolingual peers who, at that time, were often enrolled in confessional schools with Humanities curricula based on ancient Greek, Latin, history of philosophy, art history, history, and Italian

literature. I also received some Catholic education but it was not compulsory; I was also enrolled in a Humanities curriculum, where I studied ancient Greek, Latin, philosophy, French literature, history and geography, all subjects being taught in French, in addition to Italian literature taught in Italian. Yet, the thinking style the French educational system tended to shape in order to introduce students to those subjects did differ from the thinking style the Italian educational system, as far as I could see, tended to encourage in order to introduce students to the same subjects. Those differences in the very orientation to knowledge, therefore *not in language per se* but in the *use of language* to think, learn, memorize, interact with professors, and undergo various forms of assessment, were bound to become manifest at university time, when I started my curriculum in philosophy at Sapienza-Rome.

**O.F., S.M.** Can you give us some examples?

**M.A.P.** As I said, a salient and pervasive factor was the conception of what is relevant in language, especially at written level, because in nearly all subjects the assessment was based on written testing, to the exception of sports, drawing or some other form of visual art. Therefore, particular attention was placed on how to forge written abilities according to the content area and the type of question posed. This was true for history, geography, biology, foreign languages, as well as for literature dissertation and even philosophy dissertation. Of course, translations from ancient Greek or Latin into French had also to be written, and problems of maths, physics or chemistry had to be solved on paper. In all cases, the most praised values were structure (« Un texte bien structuré »; eng. « A well-structured text »), punctual and relevant analysis (« Une question bien analysée »: eng. « A well-analyzed question »), coherence (« Un texte cohérent; « A coherent text »). Even a one-page answer to a history or geography or biology question was more or less appreciated according to these criteria, in addition, of course, to exactitude in content.

The emphasis on structural, analytical and coherent aspects of writing was intimately linked to a declared orientation toward *qualitative aspects* in learning, often supported by Montaigne's citation: « Mieux vaut une tête bien faite qu'une tête bien pleine » (eng. « Rather a well-made than a well-filled head »), we have been repeated countless times, but also based on a general Cartesian spirit, where reasoning (Descartes' *cogito*) is foundational to the very knowing process. Thus, the cognitive values we learnt to be relevant were solidly grounded on distinctive French philosophical traditions. In modern terms, these values could be framed as typical of some of the thinking styles described by Robert J. Sternberg (1997), a sort of blend of what the author calls « hierarchical », « analytical » and « legislative » styles. On strictly linguistic terms, it is also significant that what the school presented as the ideal written composition met the requirements of two pillars of textual linguistics, *cohesion and consistency*, as outlined by de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), long before this branch of linguistics came into existence.

Assessment in the Italian schools, instead, from what I could see from my Italian friends and relatives in those years, was mainly based on oral testing, to the exception of Italian dissertation, translations from ancient Greek or Latin, and scientific problems. But even in these subjects there could be an oral, individual, sometimes sudden test, which students had to be ready to receive while standing in front of their classmates. This modality visibly encourages all the typical aspects of orality in language processing, where modulation of tone, volume and pacing, sociolinguistic register, balance between what Bialystok (1986, 2021) calls « analysis » and « control », posture, gaze and gestures are all significant, and would never appear on paper. More in depth, furthermore, this type of testing on the spot stimulates a particular *attitude toward knowledge* which leaves little room for reflectiveness and personal argumentation because this would require much more time and above all, more *cognitive risk-taking*. This is not to devalue oral skills, whose immediate impact, sensory richness (eyes, ears, posture, all involved), pragmatic implications, and flexibility make them irreplaceable for both learning and teaching. On personal grounds, I became increasingly aware of the relevance

of those aspects as I improved my performance at oral exams as a student, and, later on, when I started giving courses as a professor or making presentations in foreign languages. However, when it comes to analyzing complex concepts at a meta-level, writing is undoubtedly a more powerful instrument than oral thinking. It offers time to define and refine ideas, weigh strengths and weaknesses of arguments, and compose a text organically. In addition, as the Latins used to say, « Scripta manent » (« writings remain »). Writing leaves objective tracks, verifiable at any moment, and likely to be criticized or praised by external readers. On the one hand, you take more cognitive risks, you are more responsible for what you choose to say, which may provoke anxiety but, on the other, you are the author of something that remains.

I think it's significant that in Italy, at university level, not only when I was a student in the late 60s but also when I became a professor at the Faculty of Psychology, oral assessment was largely prevailing while written testing was limited to multiple-choice tasks or statistical exercises. Even brilliant students were totally disoriented when they had to compose written reports on practical experiences, and even more when they had to compose their master's thesis. Structuring a written composition in an orderly, consequential and cohesive way was apparently an unknown intellectual practice to them.

**O.F., S.M.** You mentioned the philosophy dissertation, a task that just doesn't exist in the Italian educational system, and about which, if we remember well, you wrote something in your book on Basil Bernstein's sociolinguistic codes (Pinto, 1980, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1990). Do you confirm your views about this issue after more than forty years?

**M.A.P.** This question is quite in agreement with what I just outlined about the psychological implications of different types of assessment. Generally speaking, I do confirm what I wrote at that time but I would add two more constructs I came to know afterward, which help clarifying my position: once more, the construct of thinking style, in Sternberg's terms (1997) as « a people's preference for processing information and undertaking tasks », and the construct of « agency », defined by A. Bandura as « the power to originate action » (Bandura, 2001: 3).

But let's start with facts. In France, at high school level, the study of philosophy takes place in the last year, therefore the year of the Baccalauréat, when students are about seventeen. The pedagogical objective is to sensitize students toward classical philosophical concepts of theoretical and moral philosophy, such as consciousness, free will, otherness, aesthetics and ethics etc., and develop the ability to analyze and discuss these concepts critically. To this end, the philosophy teacher provides information about the positions held by some major philosophers and thinkers on these topics in the course of history. However, the focus is *not on the historical period per se* nor on the organic character of a given theory but on *the position of this or that philosopher on that particular topic*.

There is a periodical assessment through a « dissertation » during the year, and at the end of the year, at Baccalauréat time. Being a completely new task, that requires handling unknown and heterogeneous references spanning from Plato to the most modern philosophers, students are trained to meet this requirement. Since the first weeks of the year, the teacher explains how to start a dissertation by formulating the general issue and the major implications at stake, how to confront theses and antitheses represented by distinct thinkers, and how to propose a reasonable conclusion and possible prospects. The stress is placed on the capability to analyze concepts, grasp their interconnectedness, organize strengths and weaknesses of arguments in order to reach an organic, plausible composition. Historical knowledge is required, and the statements attributable to this or that philosopher must be correctly reported but the final product appears a sort of a virtual, *nearly synchronic* dialogue between philosophers across centuries.

My purpose here is not to express a personal judgement about the pedagogical validity of this method but rather to consider a series of underlying assumptions about the mindset

of the students who go through this educational system. First of all, students *are deemed able* to cope with such a demanding task as the philosophy dissertation even at a relatively early age (about 17), which means that the educational institution is *confident in high-level cognitive and language capabilities*. Secondly, *students are allowed* to express their personal position when handling philosophical arguments, which means that *cognitive risk-taking is possible* and even praised. Thirdly, they must organize their dissertation consistently and consequentially, which demands respect for clarity and therefore *high self-regulation*. Students are the authors of their own thoughts and are discouraged from replicating any already formulated theory but, at the same time, they are also discouraged from producing excessively free and unstructured texts.

An educational system that relies on the above psychological characteristics tends to promote a strong sense of what Bandura calls « agency » (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2001), and also an interesting mixture of what Sternberg (1997) calls « legislative » and « hierarchical» thinking styles. Agency is outlined by Bandura (1986, 1997, 2001) as « the ability of people to regulate and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior through the influence of existing self-beliefs » (Code, 2020). As for the legislative style, its core characteristic is a marked tendency to elaborate original projects rather than following preconceived ideas while the hierarchical style can be identified by a tendency toward systematic and consequential organization of ideas. As Sternberg analyzes school tasks as more or less based on this or that thinking style, it is conceivable to consider the way we were assessed in philosophy in the French system in light of the above constructs.

**O.F., S.M.** The Italian system of teaching of philosophy seems totally different.

**M.A.P.** For sure. Ideally, the Italian and the French systems could be complementary, although, to my knowledge, no attempt has been made so far to harmonize them in a concrete educational project. Philosophy, in Italy, like every other subject in humanities, is taught *through history* from its origins to nowadays. This means that high school students must study the whole historical itinerary from the first Greek thinkers to modern philosophers, and this takes place in the last three years in the « classic » as well as the « scientific » option (*Liceo classico/Liceo scientifico*) until the « Maturità » (the final exam at the end of high school). It is significant that, in the same years, they study general history from ancient to modern times, art history from the most ancient expressions to contemporary art, and Italian literature from the earliest documents to current writers, in addition to history of Greek and Latin literature. In this respect, the Italian educational system is unique among all the European countries for at least two reasons. First, because it is particularly loaded in terms of the *quantity of contents to learn*. For instance, the existence of art history as a subject on its own, and taught in such a comprehensive way, only exists in the Italian curriculum, something I consider with admiration. Secondly, because this educational system strongly relies on the idea that history is *a conceptual category on its own*, the major key to interpret any human enterprise. Thus, historical knowledge, be it in philosophy, visual or musical arts or literature is not a set of contents to memorize but a *form of intelligence* of all human realities. You don't just assimilate punctual dates, events and single historical figures but rather concepts such as « historical reasoning », « historical context », « historical spirit » which allows to trace back the values, beliefs, and material possibilities within which human actions acquire significance. This type of significance is therefore *diachronically-based*. We may say that this marked stress on the role of history in every discipline of the curriculum is a clear reflection of Italian idealism, in particular of Benedetto Croce's historicism, whose influence on Italian culture has been pervasive until very recently.

Back to the specific teaching of philosophy, another aspect must be added that has relevance for the nature of the cognitive processes this type of teaching stimulates in students. When presenting the theory of a given philosopher, the teacher generally illustrates all the relevant components of that theory but also the interconnectedness between its parts, and

their inner consistency. A case in point is represented by the three Kant's « Critiques » (*« Critique of Pure reason », « Critique of Practical reason », and « Critique of Judgment »*), each quite complex in itself, and linked to the others by further complex relationships. Historical contextualization and organic character of philosophical theories are central values in this modality of teaching. As a consequence, students are expected, in turn, to enter into the complexities of both the historical context and the inner consistency of theories, and illustrate them as faithfully and coherently as possible.

Therefore, the Italian conception of how to teach philosophy is also very demanding at cognitive and linguistic level, since it requires students to assimilate a wide range of abstract and sophisticated terminologies from age sixteen to eighteen. We mustn't forget that, in philosopher Gentile's reform of Education, the « Liceo Classico », the humanities curriculum *par excellence*, was aimed at highly-cultivated social classes. Viewed in terms of Sternberg's (1997) thinking styles, such learning would elicit three possible styles: the « executive », the « hierarchical », and the « global ». The executive is defined by a tendency to conform to and implement already conceived ideas rather than constructing personal reasoning. Actually, as students are never requested to speculate about theories, their focus is rather on philosophical *knowledge* than on philosophical *reasoning*. Yet, to do so, their thoughts must be highly structured, which meets the characteristics of a hierarchical style, and, lastly, the emphasis placed on the organic character of theories matches the characteristics of a global style, where the priority is given to major ideas and wholeness.

I wish to make it clear that all the above considerations about the distinctive features of the French and the Italian educational system concerning the teaching of philosophy are drawn on my personal experience during the mid-60, although, as far as I know, for the most part they could also apply to the current situation. In any case, my analyses are based on the comparisons I could make with Italian friends and relatives about the respective teaching materials and, above all, the respective assessment modalities, which were strikingly different. In turn, those differences can be easily traced back to explicit declarations of the respective Ministries of Education about the pedagogical values to promote, themselves a reflection of political choices. What is more recent in my comments, and might be seen as more subjective, is the attempt at interpreting those experiences in light of modern psychological constructs such as thinking styles and agency.

**O.F., S.M.** Are there other experiences during the school period that you felt as critical in shaping your bilingual/bicultural identity?

**M.A.P.** I would like to say a few things about the psychological impact that the religion classes had on me. First of all, as the Lycée was, by tradition, public and secular, religion classes addressed only those students whose families wished to offer their children some religious instruction, in our case, the Catholic one. Therefore, as I said, in the religion hour many students went out to study elsewhere in the school, a practice in total contrast with the obligations established by Italian schools, even the non-confessional ones, where religion classes were mandatory for all students, believers or not. We had just one hour a week of « Instruction religieuse » (Religious instruction) from first grade to Baccalauréat, which evolved from basic catechism and some milestones of the history of the Church toward more profound issues such as faith and ethics, faith and spirituality, faith and science etc., and commented reading of the Gospels. While the learning of catechism was subject to written assessment until junior high school, later on there was no assessment.

Beyond persisting perplexities about the dogmatic aspects of Catholicism, my overall memory of this teaching experience is that it was fundamentally respectful of our minds, compatible with scientific curiosity, not obsessed by punishment, affliction and control as it so frequently happens in confessional institutions. I remember one citation, in particular, « Un saint triste est un triste saint » (*« A sad saint is a sorry saint »*), attributed to St Francis de Sales often repeated over the years by different religion teachers, and duly presented as an

expression of Christian gratitude toward life and God. Joyfulness *as an ethical choice*, and not as a supposedly « natural » personality trait. In the last school years the experience was very stimulating at a philosophical level. We had the privilege of hearing about such outstanding representatives of Catholic spiritualism as Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain, Simone Weil, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, in addition to Catholic writers such as Charles Péguy and François Mauriac. This doesn't mean that, at sixteen or seventeen, we read Mounier's « Le Personnalisme » (Mounier 1949, eng. *Personalism*, 1989) or Maritain's *Humanisme intégral* (1936, eng. *Integral Humanism*, 1969) or Weil's « La pesanteur et la grâce » (1940, eng. *Gravity and Grace*, 1952), or Teilhard de Chardin's « Le phénomène humain » (1955, eng. *The Human Phenomenon*, 1999) but we at least knew that a progressive, thought-provoking type of Catholicism could exist. We learnt, for instance, that Simone Weil involved herself as a worker in factories and fields, and that there existed a whole movement of worker priests in the world. We also learnt that Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit, paleontologist, geologist and theologian, who dared to reconsider evolutionism in a spiritualist perspective, was considered « the forbidden Jesuit », and his theses repeatedly condemned by the Holy See. And I think it significant that four popes, from Paul VI already in 1966 until Pope Francis in 2015, and, in-between, Pope John II and Benedict XVI, rehabilitated Teilhard de Chardin's work as « inspiring » for both theologians and scientists. The very fact to let us know about works that were so innovative within the Catholic Church seems to me an evidence that intellectual risk-taking was considered as a value, even in the religious area and on religious grounds.

**O.F., S.M.** You just said this experience has been a privilege. But how did this privilege affect your standing toward the two languages/cultures you were raised in?

**M.A.P.** Privileges are often double-edged swords. In this case, being raised within two cultural traditions, one of which you feel as more progressive and favorable to your own growth although it doesn't match your native one, causes you some emotional and cognitive dissonance. Back to the previous point, for example, I couldn't help noticing that in the same country where the notion of « laïcité » was created as a form of respect for universal values such as freedom, equality and fraternity beyond any type of confession, there were such daring Catholic thinkers. I knew that French Catholicism was far from being so diffusely enlightened in France, and also that French people were far from being all progressive. However, to see how distant were the political, scientific, and even the religious climates in two neighboring countries, France and Italy, *in the same decades* between the two world wars, caused me a sort of moral wound.

**O.F., S.M.** How was your experience as a university student?

**M.A.P.** I must point out that, when I was eighteen, my professional objective was to become a psychologist or a psychoanalyst. Since there hasn't been any faculty of psychology until 1971 in Rome, and only after graduation you could train as a future psychoanalyst in private associations, I chose to enroll in philosophy as a preliminary step to become a professional psychologist or psychoanalyst. The philosophy curriculum at Sapienza before 68, i.e. during my first two years of attendance, had a strong historicist and literary orientation because a graduate in philosophy was supposed to become later a high school teacher of history and philosophy, those two subjects being inseparable in both the « Liceo Classico » and the « Liceo scientifico ». In addition to specific exams of philosophy, namely, theoretical philosophy, moral philosophy and history of philosophy, we had general history exams, i.e. Roman history, Middle Ages history, modern and contemporary history, and also two very consistent exams of literature, i.e., Latin literature history and Italian literature history. All these were mandatory. Social sciences were marginally present: pedagogy, general psychology, developmental psychology, sociology, anthropology, and with lighter programs.

Coming from the French Lycée, with the pedagogical characteristics I outlined before, the first years were devoted to fill the gaps I had in all the above historical subjects, which helped

me to catch up with the cultural requisites my Italian peers already possessed in those areas. This required memorizing a considerable amount of encyclopedic knowledge in a relatively short lapse of time. Practically, I had to transform myself into a « tête bien pleine », contrary to the preferential French orientation toward a « tête bien faite ». However, I was aware that all that knowledge was useful to complete « the Italian side » of my cultural background, and could thus contribute to harmonizing my two cultures. What was much harder to accept was to switch to a type of study abilities, thinking and relational style that was profoundly dissonant with the educational values I had assimilated until then. While my written abilities proved useless until the final thesis, at the end of the fourth year, the type of oral abilities required for all types of exams were indispensable from the start.

The unpleasant impression I had after each exam, irrespective of the good marks I got, was that my reasoning abilities regressed instead of being fueled by new acquisitions, and, in parallel, my perplexities toward the assessment system increased. First, because there was a clear disparity between the amount of notions requested to evaluate competence, and the limited time to assess it suitably – one hour of oral interrogation as a maximum – which made the whole exam session quite heavy for the professors themselves. Secondly, because face-to-face interactions between students and professors in the exam introduced a series of subtle, nonverbal factors that distorted the evaluation process. When, in recent years, I taught Educational measurement at the Faculty of Psychology these phenomena were pointed out by the specialists in the field as typical flaws of the evaluation process.

Again, Gardner's (1985) concept of multiple intelligence or Sternberg's (1997) concept of thinking style can be of help. Both authors point to the fact that when the cognitive requirements of an educational institution do not match the type of intelligence or thinking style developed by students, they might believe they lack general intelligence instead of *a particular form of intelligence*, and thus feel unfit and give up. It was not my case because I accepted the challenge. This attitude was probably facilitated by those psychological traits of cognitive flexibility and acceptance of challenges that seem characteristic of balanced bilinguals (Reynolds, 1991).

**O.F., S.M.** If you had to describe the positive aspects of your experience as a student at Sapienza, what would you say?

**M.A.P.** For sure, the years of my philosophy degree at Sapienza, from 1966 to 1970 taught me many things, and not only on quantitative grounds. One very positive thing I am pleased to acknowledge is that we read the *original writings* of the authors we studied, and not someone else's synthesis, however accurate that could be. This was true for Italian or Latin literature as well as for philosophy and even for social sciences. You could be asked to comment on any of the 12 Cantos of one of the three volumes of Dante's Divine Comedy, or on any of the 12 books of Virgil's Aeneid, and pronounced, if possible, with the right metric accent. Likewise, in a philosophy exam you could be asked to comment on a part of Kant's Critique of Moral Reason, or on any given Plato's dialogue or on a part of some Benedetto Croce's book. That was a hard mental discipline since, to acquire such readiness and fluency in responding on the spot you had to study each piece quite in depth and it was advisable to *prepare the oral presentation of the appropriate responses* in advance.

A somewhat lighter task was to study the original writings of social scientists such as Jean Piaget, Sigmund Freud, Margaret Mead, Claude Lévy-Strauss or Max Weber. In addition, since I happened to read those writings in coincidence with the 68 movement, the revolutionary potential of those theories was in tune with the cultural revolution promoted by the 68 movement itself.

Let me also mention, among the positive things of my degree, the experience of the final thesis, which I developed on a psychoanalytical topic: « Human significance of sense of guilt in Sigmund Freud's and Melanie Klein's theories ». At last, a written performance where I could retrieve my typical « legislative » and « hierarchical » styles (Sternberg, 1997), choos-

ing my argumentative structure freely and combining the relevant examples originally. For the first time, that was implemented in my native language, at a much larger scale than the philosophy dissertation.

**O.F., S.M.** Given the negative positions generally assumed by historicist philosophers toward the conceptual status of social sciences, didn't this create a conflict in your mind?

**M.A.P.** Yes, it did, and profoundly so. As I said, the historicist imprint was very marked in all philosophy courses under the persisting influence of Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, despite clear differences in the political orientation of the professors teaching in those courses, such as Gabriele Giannantoni, a Marxist, or Guido Calogero, a liberal socialist. Croce's books were always present in the exam programs of their courses. For instance, I happened to study for three different exams « La storia come pensiero e come azione » (Croce, 1938; eng. « *History as the story of liberty* » 1941). Much has been written about the radical devaluation neo-idealists philosophers Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile made of the whole field of mathematics, physics, modern logic, and natural sciences, all supposedly based on « pseudo-concepts ». This diminishment necessarily also affected younger sciences, such as psychology, sociology and anthropology, inasmuch as these claimed to adopt classifications and methods borrowed from natural sciences. I also remember in Guido Calogero's works (1960) similar reductive statements about social sciences, although differently phrased.

For someone who, like me, had started studying philosophy as a possible foundation of scientific psychology this view was disconcerting and unacceptable. It cut at its roots the very existence of a discipline that, in other countries, had already created its own scientific status and methodologies, and found its applications in society. It was not by chance that the foundation of psychology degrees in Italy has been extremely delayed compared to other European countries, and psychology curricula were not available until the early 70s. Moreover, having already studied some writings of major authors like Piaget, Vygotsky or Freud and a whole range of psychoanalytic authors, I became impatient to make this knowledge more systematic and ordered.

The time had come to find some place where to graduate in psychology at the highest possible level. Once graduated in philosophy with a thesis on psychoanalysis, I obtained a scholarship to enroll at the Faculté de Psychologie et de Sciences de l'Éducation (FPSE; *Faculty of Education Sciences and Psychology*), the « temple » of Piaget's developmental cognitive theory and genetic epistemology.

**O.F., S.M.** That must have been another significant turning point, wasn't it?

**M.A.P.** By all means. I must say that, despite my interest in psychoanalysis which had first captured my attention, I was also attracted by Piaget's developmental theory after studying his books « Psychologie de l'intelligence » (1<sup>st</sup> French edition, 1947, eng. *The Psychology of Intelligence*, 1960) and « La représentation du monde chez l'enfant », 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 1923; eng. *The Child's conception of the world*, 1929). I found Piaget's foundation of logic upon action, once this becomes interiorized and reversible, illuminating and convincingly grounded on both developmental facts and structural models. I was also fascinated by the idea of a fundamental continuity between biology and thought, and, within human development, between the earliest forms of intelligence of the newborn and the most sophisticated forms of the cultivated adult.

That said, the curriculum in Geneva included from the very beginning subjects such as mathematics, formal logic, neurophysiology and neuropsychology, statistics, methodology, which were completely novel to me. All these were assessed on a written basis, and mostly with exercises. In addition, we had the « Diagnostic opératoire » (tentatively translatable as « Operational diagnostic »), a sort of « Genevan specialty », which meant that you were taught how to administer the so-called Piagetian tasks from pre-operational to formal operational stage, i.e., from about 6 year-old children to adolescents. Small groups of students

were periodically taken by assistant professors to schools where participants of different ages voluntarily came to receive those tasks out of their classrooms. As students, we first learnt how to take notes on our assistant's questions and child's responses, and then started conducting the interview ourselves. This training on the operational tasks was very instructive at two levels: methodological and conceptual. Methodological, because you could easily verify to what extent those tasks differed from classical intelligence tests. First, reasoning is explored by using very common materials, such as glasses, water, plasticine balls, cardboard squares, circles, rounds, matches of scaled length etc., the participant was encouraged to handle. Secondly, and this is perhaps the most distinctive feature, the participant is asked to say *what he/she thinks* about the problem at hand, and here we have the famous « *Et toi, qu'est-ce que tu penses?* » (« And you, what do you think about it? »), not only at the beginning of the task but also at any moment of doubt about this or that possible solution. In this framework, thus, the child is at the same time *deemed able to think on his/her own*, even at a very young age, and *responsible for his/her thoughts*. As a consequence, the *justification* of the response is as important as the adequacy of the response itself to determine a given operational level, to the point that *the different quality of those justifications determines a gradation of the level attributed to the performance*. In intelligence tests, what exclusively counts is a yes/no or a right/wrong response, and all the underlying reasoning, which, in some cases, may even be totally wrong or simply missing, is completely ignored.

**O.F., S.M.** This undoubtedly reflects the spirit of the Piagetian « clinical method » (Piaget, 1966; Ducret, 2004). What is striking is that the very language you are using right now, with that stress upon the elicitation of reasoning and the quality of the justifications sounds very similar to the language you yourself have used to create the TAMs (*Test di Abilità Metalinguistiche*: eng. MATs: *Metalinguistic Ability Tests*).

**M.A.P.** The Piagetian inspiration of these TAMs/MATs is not a mystery, as it also appears through an explicit reference to Piaget's equilibration model (1975) in the coding system.

**O.F., S.M.** You were saying before that this first impact with the Piagetian tasks was useful also on conceptual grounds. Do you mean that it helped understanding the theory?

**M.A.P.** Precisely. Being able to witness the qualitative changes that took place so evidently in participants of different ages coping with the same tasks, or with more complex ones, made us realize that those concepts we studied in books were grounded on facts we could verify ourselves. We could see, for example, the reality of « *centration* » and « *décentration* » (*centration and decentration*) in the very behavior of the child in front of us, as manifested by eye gaze, hand moves, and type of arguments. We could sometimes attest to children's cognitive fragility or, on the contrary, their resistance toward perceptual changes in the patterns presented, or toward the counter-arguments proposed by the examiner. Other times, we could follow a gradual construction of the correct view of the problem with a spontaneous recapitulation of all the logical relations involved. It was as if equilibration processes, with their tripartition into alfa, beta and gamma regulations (Piaget, 1975) were embodied in individual personalities under our eyes. Besides, as we know, Piaget himself (1947) criticized the method he used in his first studies on children's representations as being solely based on verbal dialogue because this masks a deeper layer of logical reasoning, which best appears when children are given the possibility to act on objects.

Actually, this continuous interplay between highly abstract theories and meticulous observation facts is something that characterized Piaget's *modus operandi* during his all life, and was related to his multifaceted profile as a philosopher, naturalist scientist, developmental psychologist and epistemologist. Someone who doesn't know this author and reads for the first time « *La naissance de l'intelligence chez l'enfant* » (Piaget, 1936; eng. « *The origins of intelligence in children* », 1952) cannot help being struck by the place Piaget devotes to the debate between various theories of biological adaptation, themselves viewed as the ideal foundation

of theories of intelligence. More importantly, this debate is presented as a framework *before* the description of the various sub-stages of sensorimotor development in the introduction, and then extensively recapitulated at the end of the volume. In-between, the reader is led through lists of extremely detailed and concrete observations of the behaviors of the three Piaget's children, each one accurately numbered (Obs 63, 64...119, 120...150 etc.) at different sub-stages of their sensorimotor development. The fascinating thing is that, while we learn about Jacqueline's or Laurent's or Julianne's (the names of Piaget's children) improvements of their sensorimotor schemes by which they apparently come to objectify space, time and build the permanence of objects, we are simultaneously confronted with such giants of philosophy and psychology as Hume, Kant, Lamarck, Koehler, Claparède, Wallon, Brunschwig etc., each considered as a possible key to interpret the unfolding of those behaviors.

**O.F., S.M.** What was your feeling about this type of contrast?

**M.A.P.** Essentially, it taught me that small units of behavior can be observed through broad categories, and single facts that superficially appear as separated may be significantly interconnected, these two things being core aspects of a psychologist's formation, whatever the school of thought. It also valorized my philosophy background, and this, in turn, gave me an advantage when I studied the conceptual grounds of Piaget's genetic epistemology, the scientific challenge of his whole life. It is well-known that, in « *Sagesse et illusions de la philosophie* » (1965; eng. « *Insight and illusions of philosophy* », 1971), Piaget describes his « deconversion » from philosophy because of excessive subjectivity, lack of verification methodologies, excessive possibility to be influenced by ideologies, unjustified claim of superiority toward empirically-based disciplines. But, at the same time, Piaget acknowledges each discipline has its own role. Philosophy has the merit of *raising* general gnoseological and ethical problems. Epistemology is in the position to *delimit* the boundaries of these problems and handle their contents with specialized methodologies. Psycho-genetic studies, on their side, conducted with *experimental methods* on different cognitive domains, such as perception, image, language, classifications, seriations, number, temporal and spatial relations, geometric concepts, causal relations, physical concepts etc., offer a privileged way to access the very formation of cognitive structures, and thus give a modern response to both philosophical and scientific questions.

The scope of this epistemological project explains why, in every developmental study on single cognitive domains, the introduction always delimits the specific theoretical problem at stake, the positions of past authors on the issue, and the current possible hypotheses. For instance, in the introduction to « *La genèse du nombre chez l'enfant* » (Piaget, Zseminska, 1941; eng. « *The Child's conception of number* », 1965) the authors explain that the challenge was to contrast both Henri Poincaré's and Bertrand Russell's positions about the nature of number. The claim is that children's responses to number conservation tasks reveal the underlying operations of classification and seriation that are essential for them to arrive at a well-grounded concept of number, and for the researcher to grasp the essence of number.

The same year, in « *Le développement des quantités physiques chez l'enfant* » (1941; eng. *The Child's construction of quantities* », 1974), Piaget and Inhelder deepen the study of conservation capabilities by focusing on continuous quantities. What emerges once more is that, to attain that type of conservation, a set of operations based on classifications and seriations is also needed. Classifications and seriations, in turn, will be the specific focus of *La genèse des structures logiques élémentaires: classifications et sériations* (1959; eng. *The early growth of logic in child: classification and seriation* 1964). Piaget and Inhelder crown the 1941 work on number by showing that the pathway to attain a full operational level in number conservation goes in parallel with the pathway to attain a full operational level in classifications and seriations, and the ages of attainment of each are very close. Hence, the idea that the essence of number relies on a *synthesis between classes and series*, which explains its being simultaneously cardinal and ordinal.

**O.F., S.M.** Were you entirely convinced by the validity of these studies?

**M.A.P.** Actually, at that time, I had the typical enthusiasm of the neophyte who had just come from a philosophical background in search for a psychological formation, and I couldn't help finding Piaget's own itinerary from philosophy to genetic epistemology and psychology extremely fascinating. For instance, in the above studies, beyond any possible criticism, you cannot ignore 1) the unusual conceptual breadth of the research questions; 2) the originality of the methodology devised to address them; 3) the authenticity and richness of the developmental data elicited. After Piaget's death, in 1980, a storm of criticisms fell upon his theory both on developmental and epistemological aspects, especially during the 80s and the 90s. I myself, in a 1986 publication, expressed a critique about his position on language development.

However, all in all, the 70s were golden years for both the FPSE and the Centre d'Épistémologie Génétique (*Center for Genetic Epistemology*). I consider I have been exceptionally lucky to have had such important professors when I was enrolled there from the end of 1971 to the end of 1975. Although Piaget had just retired when I arrived in Geneva, I had the privilege to have Bärbel Inhelder, one his most important co-authors, as the main professor for developmental psychology together with Jacques Vonèche; Hermine Sinclair de Zwart as a professor of psycholinguistics, a discipline that had recently come to light in the U.S.A.; Guy Cellérier as a professor of epistemology; Henri Wermus as a professor of logic; Alberto Munari, as a professor of educational psychology; Vinh Bang, as a professor of methodology. I could establish a cordial relationship with my professor of social psychology, Willhem Doise, the pioneer of what had to become the « Genevan school of social psychology ». As a past student in theology in Rome, an experience he later gave up, Doise wished to return to Rome to know in person two psychologists of the Centro Nazionale delle Ricerche (*Center for National Research*), Dr. Marco Cecchini and Dr. Francesco Tonucci, with whom I had collaborated for a research on cooperative learning in Italy. These researchers were later invited to Geneva to present their work in a conference, and that same week they could meet with Jerome Bruner, who was then lecturing at the FPSE. I had the luck to have Gabriel Mugny, who later became an outstanding social psychologist, as Willhem Doise's young assistant, and I was tutored by him in the very first experiments on the famous « socio-cognitive conflicts » in children of different operational levels. Similarly, I had the luck to have Jean-Paul Bronckart as Sinclair de Zwart's young assistant, already a promising psycholinguist. It was him, besides, who read and praised my critique to Piaget on language development some years later. All these professors were also actively engaged as researchers in the Center for Genetic Epistemology.

Probably, what contributed to this effervescence was the awareness that the 70s were likely to be the last years of Piaget's activity. This might also explain why, in those years, there has been a shift from full structuralism, which Piaget had systematically pursued for decades since the 40s, to a functionalist approach to general epistemological themes. The titles of the last works clearly reflect that shift: « *La prise de conscience* » (1974; eng. « *The grasp of consciousness: action and concept in the young child* », 1976), « *Le possible et le nécessaire* » (1981; eng. « *Possibility and necessity* », 1987), « *L'abstraction réfléchissante* » (1977; eng. « *Studies in reflective abstraction* », 2001), « *L'équilibration des structures cognitives: problème central du développement* » (1975; eng. « *The equilibration of cognitive structures: the central problem of cognitive development* », 1985), « *Réussir et comprendre* » (1974; eng. « *Success and understanding* », 1978), among others.

**O.F., S.M.** Exceptional encounters in an exceptional decade, then.

**M.A.P.** For sure. Yet, I have to say that what impacted more in depth on my way of thinking as a future researcher is that *special linkage between the structural and the diachronic dimension* that characterized Piaget's project of genetic epistemology, a linkage made possible by a central functional concept, that of equilibration. Structural, in both a methodological and a psychological sense because, on the one hand, we need to define the formal characteristics of the object of our investigation, and psychological, on the other, because we make the world intelligible through mental operations, which are structurally connected to one another. Dia-

chronic, again in two senses, first as synonymous of « genetic », according to the typical Genevan sense of this adjective to designate the cognitive development of individuals or of groups of individuals (*which we nowadays would call « developmental »*), and secondly as synonymous of historical, to designate the development of ideas during large historical periods.

In this framework, structuralism, which is generally conceived as synchronic, and Lévy-Strauss' anthropology is a case in point, as underlined by Piaget in « *Le structuralisme* » (1968; eng. « *Structuralism* », 1970), becomes applicable to both individual's cognitive growth and historical development of scientific discoveries. At the same time, history cannot be invoked as a monolithic, self-explanatory and untouchable concept, as posited by neo-idealistic historicism. Rather, the history of scientific thought can be seen as the product of human minds, which are thinking minds from the earliest adaptive behaviors of the newborn to the historical phase of the most sophisticated discoveries of the scientist. Rephrased in modern terms, this means restoring *full agency to the human mind*. Regarding the transition from a given structural level at a given developmental stage to more complex structural levels, for Piaget this is ensured by equilibration, the functional concept he has been constantly elaborating for about thirty years (Maurice, Montangero, 1992). But to follow this elegant argumentation in its most vibrant form, the reader cannot go without « *Les méthodes en épistémologie* » a chapter of « *Logique et connaissance scientifique* », 1967: 62-132; eng. « *Methods in epistemology* », in « *Logic and scientific knowledge* », unpublished in English) we had to study for the exam of genetic epistemology.

Curiously, the last equilibration model was published in 1975, the year I graduated in Geneva, after which I came back to Italy. When I had the opportunity to read it, I was impressed by the conceptualization of the alfa, beta and gamma regulations, which are constitutive of this model and exemplified by typical subjects' reactions at different operational stages. What I found heuristically stimulating was precisely that *transversal and recurrent character* across ages, a feature which, many years later, I tried myself to apply to three TAMs, the tests of metalinguistic abilities from preschool to full adolescence (Pinto, 1999), and also to two metaphor comprehension tests from preschool to early adolescence (Pinto et al., 2006; Pinto et al., 2008).

**O.F., S.M.** You mentioned that you took courses in psycholinguistics. How do you see, retrospectively, that initial interest in a discipline that was relatively peripheric in your curriculum while it later became so characteristic of your academic profile?

**M.A.P.** My interest in psycholinguistics was not only related to my attendance to the FPSE courses. It was also significantly enriched by a parallel attendance at courses of semiotics and general linguistics at the Faculty of Letters in Geneva, given by a renowned Argentinian professor, Luis Prieto. To encounter Luis Prieto at my arrival in Geneva, and being honored by his friendship, as a person and as an intellectual during the whole period of my studies in psychology, has been another exceptionally lucky experience. But this encounter wouldn't have been possible without the mediation of my Italian friend Daniele Gambarara, who, at the beginning of the 70s, was a young PhD student of semiologist Luis Prieto in Geneva and linguist Tullio de Mauro in Rome, and afterward became an outstanding professor of philosophy of language at the University of Calabria. I wish to take advantage of this interview to express all my gratitude to Daniele for his advice on how to exploit my scholarship at best, the same he had obtained the year before me, and above all, for introducing me to the world of linguistics and semiotics.

Thanks to Luis Prieto's courses, I discovered concepts that significantly amplified my view of social sciences, suggesting connections with psychology, philosophy and anthropology much beyond my naïve expectations. Thanks to his typically Argentinian cordiality and spontaneity, I felt reassured as to the « psychological normality » of a university professor, and could accept the perspective to become myself an academic in the future. These human qualities were all the more appreciable if we think of the rigor with which he developed his argumentations, which sometimes looked like theorems. Being Luis Prieto a Spanish-French bilingual, and, as an academic, mainly a French-speaking author, and being myself an Italian-French bilingual,

the language of our exchanges had necessarily to be our common second language, i.e. French. I would like to underline this point in relation to my cultural and linguistic identification, which has been for a long time somewhat uncertain. In those years, I was fully immersed in a French-speaking country that nevertheless was not properly France. I was surrounded by people from the most diverse countries and from all continents, and yet all shared the French language to communicate and think. On the one hand, this situation reinforced my identification to French language, which had permeated all my basic education until it became « the language of the way you approach any question », and, moreover, it enlarged the representation of the cultural breadth of this language in international milieux. On the other hand, sharing everyday activities with so many Latino-American and European Spanish-speaking people together with French-, Portuguese- and Italian-speaking people, gradually created in my mind the idea of a cultural « meta-category » based on Romance languages and other common behavioral characteristics. Therefore, among the benefits of my international experience in Geneva, I would indicate a change in the representation of the boundaries between linguistic and cultural groups, at least those that were closer to mine, suggesting the idea of « cultural macro-entities ». Twenty years later, when I started to collaborate with the « Dante Alighieri » Institutes in Argentina, those enlarged representations helped me to better frame Argentinian culture in relation to Italian culture, which has been so influential on the very history of Argentina.

**O.F., S.M.** But in the end, you decided to come back to your country, didn't you?

**M.A.P.** Yes. During my studies in psychology, I gradually realized that what I liked best was research and teaching. With this idea in mind, I prepared my return to Rome by applying for a 4-year scholarship at Sapienza University of Rome in the newly-created Institute of Psychology. There, I had the luck to collaborate with an eminent professor of educational psychology, Renzo Titone, who was also well known as a psycholinguist, particularly in the field of bilingualism, and an applied linguist, particularly in the field of language teaching.

New challenges, new « cognitive perturbations », and thus new forms of re-equilibration awaited me. The contrast between the atmosphere I could breathe in the FPSE in Geneva and the Institute of Psychology of Rome in the mid-70s was very sharp, something that was easily predictable based on the multiple historical and cultural differences between Switzerland and Italy. Moreover, the decade of the 70s has been, in Italy, one of the most turbulent of the past century from a political point of view. In a few years, we passed from « black » neo-fascist terrorism at the end of the 60s, to « red » terrorism with the Red Brigades at the end of the 70s. In social sciences, this kind of turbulence has inevitable repercussions on researchers' engagement toward a particular school of thought, depending on the extent to which this or that school seems the most appropriate to interpret the historical moment.

In this respect, the Institute of Psychology of Rome was in a special position. First of all, there were two clearly distinct components among the professors. There was a minority of Catholic priests or past priests from the Salesian Pontifical University of Rome, the only faculty in Rome that issued a degree in psychology before the foundation of the secular, state Institute of Psychology. However, being affiliated to the Vatican, by definition a « foreign state », that degree didn't count as an Italian one, hence the transfer of some professors from the Salesian Pontifical University to the official Italian state university. The presence of the Catholic component was associated with the figure of an enlightened Jesuit of vast psychological culture, Ernesto Valentini, who had a pivotal role in the foundation of the Institute of Psychology on modern, scientific grounds (Casagrande, 2021). The majority of professors were secular, often with a clear progressive orientation, some of them being overtly members of the Italian Communist party. It is to be noted that, irrespective of the Catholic or secular status of the professors, the schools of thought that were taught as possible grounds for psychotherapy were quite heterogeneous, ranging from Watzlawick's Pragmatic of Human Communication to different forms of psychoanalytical approaches, Gestalt Psychology, Transactional Psychology, Humanistic Psychology, Cognitive-Behavioral Psychology etc., which gave the curriculum

a rather eclectic character. Generally speaking, the situation in Rome was nearly antithetic to the one I had left in Geneva: surely more pluralistic, due to the way the Institute had been founded, gathering the best scientific resources available at the moment, but also with more profound ideological contrasts, partly due to the political climate of those years in Italy.

In that changed chessboard, I had to create myself a new profile compatible with what the situation offered and also with what *it couldn't offer*. When I first entered Sapienza University as a student in philosophy my French-based formation was challenged by a different philosophical culture. After ten years, when I returned to Sapienza as a researcher in psychology my Piagetian formation was challenged by a different psychological culture.

**O.F., S.M.** What was the place of Piaget's theory at that time in your Institute in Rome ?

**M.A.P.** Actually, I was very disappointed by the way Piaget was treated in developmental psychology courses. At best, he was « respected » as one of the great developmentalists of his century, but the epistemological breadth of his scientific project was completely overlooked, and his theory mainly presented at informative level in handbooks, without requesting the students to read the original version of his writings, except some of the earliest and easiest. With that simplified profile, Piaget's figure was most often polemically opposed to Vygotsky, whose framework was naturally attuned to a consolidated historicist tradition in Italy, but mostly to the Marxist trend that prevailed among intellectuals at that time. Piaget's position on the language-thought relationship was reduced to Vygotsky's critique based on Piaget's works of the 20s while the reformulations of those questions Piaget made on completely different grounds, and in several publications from the 60s onward (Piaget, 1964, 1968, 1972) were ignored, although these publications were available in Italian translation. This is not to say that these more recent arguments were intangible nor that Piaget suddenly acknowledged Vygotsky's arguments, but it was not intellectually honest to ignore sources that were easily consultable.

More importantly, the *particular connection between structures and functions* that makes all the specificity of Piagetian constructivism was substituted by a stereotyped theory of the stages of cognitive development. I remember when the students, at the exams, mechanically repeated the general features of each stage, and seemed unable to understand how the formalization of a given structure could match the behaviors of the corresponding stage, and even less the mysterious processes accounting for the transition from one stage to another.

Fortunately, at the Institute of Psychology of the University of Padua, founded the same year as the Institute in Rome (Casagrande, 2021), Piaget's theory was considered in a profoundly different way, due to the influence of Prof. Guido Petter who had translated and diffused Piaget's works in Italy years before (Petter, 1960), and then became an eminent professor of developmental psychology. A whole line of Piaget-inspired studies started at the University of Padua, which revised theoretical and methodological aspects of the theory (Vianello, 1998; Berti, Bombi, 2005; 2008; 2018; Gobbo, Morra, 1997; Morra et al., 2008). Most probably, my Genevan degree in psychology would have been more valued in Padua than it has been in Rome, but the choice of the city was conditioned by personal problems.

**O.F., S.M.** How were the beginnings with Renzo Titone?

**M.A.P.** I must say that my encounter with Renzo Titone has been, for some aspects, « strange » and at the same time very promising since the beginning, in 1975. Strange, for at least two reasons. First of all, when I first met him, he was teaching educational psychology, which only partially matched his competencies that, for the most part, revolved around language sciences, based on a solid formation in the U.S.A. At the beginning of the 70s, Titone was already internationally known as a specialist of psycholinguistics, psychology of bilingualism and language teaching, disciplines he had divulged in Italy. Therefore, it was important for him that he could be supported by researchers with some competence in linguistic disciplines, which were absent in our psychology curriculum. As for myself, being unable to fully exploit my Piagetian formation for the reasons I explained above, collaborating with

Renzo Titone became an exceptional opportunity to retrieve the knowledge I had acquired in psycholinguistics, linguistics and semiotics in Geneva, and, more in depth, to retrieve my own early bilingualism, amplified by the more recent international experience in Switzerland.

The encounter was strange also for ideological reasons. Renzo Titone was a past Salesian priest, then secularized and with a moderately progressive political orientation while I was, in those 70s, a lay person with a more definite progressive orientation, although not on Marxist grounds but rather on what I would call « a Christian sensitivity ». But in these differences, which were reciprocally respected, lies all the value of a collaboration that lasted more than 25 years, in spite of partial scientific disagreement at some point. I owe Renzo Titone things that have been invaluable to my development, starting with his esteem, openly expressed in relevant occasions, in addition to all the opportunities he offered me to make my work internationally known. Retrospectively, I think that our scientific commitment was based on a common passion for something constitutive of psycholinguistics, that is, the very connection between language and psychological processes. It is not by chance that we developed and diffused our project on metalinguistic awareness so convincingly, often presenting jointly in different countries and for such a long time, and eventually co-founded the *Rivista di Psicolinguistica Applicata/Journal of Applied Psycholinguistics* in 2001.

**O.F., S.M.** What were your initial interests?

**M.A.P.** To create a new research framework attuned to the Italian context of that period I tried to harmonize my knowledge about cognitive development and psycholinguistics with ideas and data drawn from sociolinguistics, both Italian and international. On the one hand, Italian sociolinguistics (De Mauro, 1963, 1983; Berruto, 1974, 1987) offered an extremely diversified picture of the varieties spoken in the country, with regional varieties of Italian as well as regional varieties of vernacular, and a series of intermediate formations such as the « Italiano popolare » (eng. « *Popular Italian* »; Cortelazzo, 1972), defined as the « Italian imperfectly learnt by vernacular-speaking people » (Cortelazzo, 1972: 11). The display of these varieties, especially at the two extremes of standard Italian, on the one hand, and local vernacular, on the other, created widespread situations of bilingualism that captured my attention for their psychological implications in terms of thought processes and cultural identity.

But also international sociolinguistics addressed language varieties, although defined on different grounds, and adopting a clearer political and/or educational position. The 60s and the 70s were the years of the debates between the representatives of the « deficit » and the « difference theory ». The former interpreted linguistic differences related to social class along a vertical axis, in terms of handicap or privilege, while the latter viewed these differences along a horizontal axis, as simple diversities with no value judgment. British sociologist Basil Bernstein (1958, 1966, 1979, 1971, 1972) was considered an emblem of the deficit theory as opposed to William Labov (1973), regarded as an emblem of the difference theory (Dittmar, 1973). Also in those debates there were consistent cognitive and cultural issues at stake which were of interest to psychologists and not only to sociologists or educationalists.

To complete the picture, it must be said that there was great effervescence in Italian academic linguistic milieux, not only focused on theoretical debates but also on political commitment to create a new sensitivity toward the role of language in education. It was the explosion of the « Educazione linguistica democratica » movement (translatable into English as: *Democratic Linguistic Education* ) with its famous « Ten principles » (« 10 Tesi dell'Educazione linguistica democratica », GISCEL, 1976). This was a sort of decalogue of theoretical and educational principles aimed at reconsidering the teaching of Italian language on innovative grounds, especially addressing the needs of disadvantaged social classes. We can consider linguist Tullio de Mauro as a case in point of this special connection between theoretical passion for highly abstract issues of philosophy of language, and political passion for the diffusion of educational linguistic principles throughout the peninsula.

Back to my initial research activity in Italy, starting from 1976 and for approximately a decade, I was working on the following topics:

1. Italian-vernacular bilingualism in a psychological perspective
2. Basil Bernstein's sociolinguistic codes in a psychological perspective
3. cognitive development in relation to social class
4. language development in a neo-Piagetian perspective

**O.F., S.M.** What were the psychological aspects you addressed in your studies on Italian-vernacular bilingualism?

**M.A.P.** First of all, we must clarify why, when language contact is between national language and vernacular, we may talk of bilingualism and not simply of diglossia (Ferguson, 1959). Vernacular is clearly in a « low » and complementary position versus national language, which represents the « high » pole based on social prestige, codification, presence of written production as a vehicle of any content area and formal instruction. In bilingualism, instead, the two languages are on an equal footing for all these parameters. To understand the possible association between bilingualism and diglossia we must recall Fishman's (1972) schema where this association exists in communities where there is a widespread practice of both the high and the low variety, the former being the vehicle of school teaching and media while the latter is the vehicle of familiar, psychologically and anthropologically significant usages. In Italy, this situation regards practically all regions where Italian and vernacular are known and practiced every day (Mioni, 1975), and this explains why so many Italian linguists and sociolinguists during the 70s and the 80s (Sobrero, 1972; Albano Leoni, 1980; Bazzanella, 1980; Tosi, 1981; Freddi, 1983; Zuanelli Sonino, 1981, 1983; Balboni, Luise, 1994; Gensini, Vedovelli, 1983) showed a vivid interest in the language *continuum* between Italian and vernacular, and pointed to the possibility to exploit this natural type of bilingualism in education.

That said, my first studies addressed the psycholinguistic strategies, the social perception and the overall attitudes with which children start to learn Italian in diglossic-bilingual regions. The very first study was conducted in Manfredonia (Pinto, Tranasi, 1980), a medium-size city of Apulia region, and it was then extended to comparable cities in other regions, namely Abruzzi, Basilicata, Latium and Sardinia (Pinto, Migaleddu, 1989), with the same experimental design. In each context, we recruited two classes of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders (from 60 to 70 pupils in the whole, depending on the context), gender balanced, of low socioeconomic status, having learnt local vernacular as a first language at home, and then Italian at school. The tasks were an oral questionnaire and two written compositions, one on a free subject, and the other on a fixed subject. The questionnaire focused on three aspects: a) frequency and contexts of personal and parents' vernacular use; b) personal ease and feelings related to the use of Italian and vernacular; c) perceived social judgment of vernacular versus Italian. This questionnaire, with some variants, was also administered to parents and teachers.

In all types of texts and at all ages, children's texts showed recurrent trends that were interpretable in terms of *strategies to cope with conflicts between Italian and vernacular*. Interestingly, those strategies were transversal to all language areas, from lexis to morphology and syntax, and were identifiable in the following way: the child either resorted to a vernacular loan, lexical or morphological or syntactic, which was a form of total elusion of the conflict, or found some form of compromise between Italian and vernacular. In this case, he/she would fluctuate between oversimplification and undue redundancy, which reveals a more complex form of elusion, probably due to insufficient knowledge of the meaning of the morphological, lexical and syntactic options at hand. It is worth mentioning that part of these strategies, namely oversimplification and undue redundancy, can be found also in the so-called « Popular Italian » based on Cortelazzo's (1972) studies on adults' production, again deriving from a conflict between Italian and vernacular, and even in the early stages of L1 acquisition. The interpretation I proposed highlights the researcher's psycholinguistic point of view which is *to trace back the cognitive source of the incorrectness*. Far from being contradic-

tory to the role of the teacher, it can contribute to sharpen his/her awareness of the pupils' way of processing Italian on the basis of their first language, which is vernacular.

The conflictual aspect that emerged from the analysis of text production was confirmed by the responses to the questionnaire, where children gave clear signs of linguistic insecurity when speaking and writing in Italian, and also of self-depreciation when speaking in vernacular. Some even declared that, to learn the contents of the lessons they heard at school in Italian, *they would mentally « translate » them into vernacular*, and then rephrase them in Italian anew. Some also said that Italian was nearly as extraneous as English but, at the same time, their parents and themselves used to consider it as more « noble » than vernacular, and worth being duly learnt. These results, on both psycholinguistic and socio-affective side, were strikingly similar in other regions with samples matched by age, sociocultural and linguistic characteristics. Potentially, they could offer teachers a great opportunity to transform language conflicts into cognitive resources by organizing systematic metalinguistic analyses of both differences and similarities between Italian and vernacular. Curiously, at the end of the 80s, this idea was taken over by a student who graduated with me, Mrs. Umbertina Pilotti, formerly an English teacher, who created a trilingual syllabus for primary school classes in a village of the Aosta Valley (Pinto, Pilotti, 1992). Every day children started their classes in Valdôtain (the local vernacular), then moved to Italian and afterwards to English. Lastly, on Saturdays, the teacher orchestrated children's metalinguistic observations on similarities and differences between the sentences they had heard in the three languages. Needless to say, when these children were later tested on metalinguistic abilities, with the TAM-1 and the TAM-2, they outperformed the controls of the same village who were enrolled in standard Italian schools.

**O.F., S.M.** Thus, from the starting phases of your research, the idea of conflict and resolution of conflict via metalinguistic analysis has been quite inspiring.

**M.A.P.** Exactly. At the beginning of the 80s, I took a further step in that direction when I tried to dig more in depth into the psychological attitude children developed toward Italian and vernacular. I had just published my book on Basil Bernstein's codes (Pinto, 1980), and had the exceptional chance to discuss personally with the author about my critiques of his theory. I must recall that a sociolinguistic code, in Bernstein's meaning (1971, 1973), is founded on two interconnected psychological dimensions: *a relational and a cognitive*. As such, a code characterizes educational styles in the family, at school and in society at large, and, as a consequence, it tends to shape the thinking and relational style of the recipients of those educational patterns. Codes manifest themselves through typical linguistic forms, and this explains the presence of the adjective « linguistic » in the compound « sociolinguistic », although the meaning of this compound sensibly differs from the usual usage in sociolinguistics, normally focused on descriptions of language usages in relation to social classes. According to Basil Bernstein, a sociolinguistic code is generated by a way of conceiving and practicing interindividual relationships, which can vary from distinct to fused. An « elaborated » code is generated by a representation of individuals as being distinct and separate from one another, which is generally the case in middle class milieux. A « restricted » code, instead, is generated by a representation of individuals as more fused, which is often favored by material living conditions in working class milieux. The separateness/fusion distinction explains the need, or lack of need, of making communication more or less explicit. Communication between individuals who represent themselves as separate requires to base on general principles and explicit references, the primary ingredients of an « elaborated code ». Communication between individuals who represent themselves as fused can be limited to implicit references grounded on the here and now, the primary ingredients of the « restricted code ».

**O.F., S.M.** And how did you connect the elaborated-restricted distinction to the Italian-vernacular relationship?

**M.A.P.** Part of the inspiration came from the idea that some cases of early bilingualism can be conflictual, and are likely to create a cleavage between the emotional and cognitive representations related to each of the bilingual child's languages. For instance, the case of the bilingual child described by Lacanian psychoanalyst Jean Paul Bauer (1979) goes precisely in that direction. Language can become, in the course of one's life, an object of affective investment beyond its instrumental value, and also something that can be subject to moral permission under certain circumstances. Hence, the idea that Italian and vernacular could be felt by children in diglossic-bilingual contexts as symbols of two opposite psychological worldviews, an opposition that could be made even more manifest if vernacular, normally confined to purely oral usages, was allowed to be put on paper on an equal footing with Italian, the language of the school by excellence. This was particularly daring because, for children of that age, and furthermore in a formal context such as school, there was no experience at all of vernacular writing, starting from the technical issue of how to transfer vernacular phonology into graphemes. In practice, I hypothesized that if children were explicitly allowed to express the same content in Italian and in vernacular in written form, they would treat this content differently, and these differences would be similar to those that oppose an elaborated to a restricted code, in Bernstein's sense.

A pilot study was conducted on a primary school class in a village near Rome having sociolinguistic characteristics similar to those of the research in Manfredonia (see above). Children were asked to write on the same topic once in Italian and once in vernacular, with 5 topics about local and 5 about general culture, alternating the order of content and the order of language. Since this first exploration, it clearly appeared that each language was associated to a specific modality of treatment of contents, which could be viewed as a sort of *bipolar psychological stance*: subject- and proximity-centered or, conversely, object- and distance-centered. These polarities, called *S* (subjective) and *O* (objective), were exemplified by a set of semantic categories, and the total units of these categories were computed in relation to information richness. Interferences from Italian to vernacular and *vice versa*, and syntactic complexity were also computed. The results inspired a second round of experimentation in three more regions: Apulia, Calabria, Sicily (Pinto, 1986, 1987), this time adding socio-economic differences as a third factor. In the whole, there were three main factors that could account for semantic variation in content treatment: 1) Type of language (Italian *versus* vernacular); 2) type of content (local *versus* general culture); 3) socio-economic status (low *versus* high, based on parents' study and professional level). The results showed that type of language and type of content were the two prominent factors that significantly oriented text production toward the subject-proximity pole (vernacular and local culture) or toward the object-distance pole (Italian and general culture). Unexpectedly, socio-economic status didn't yield significant semantic differences in this study. We may think, therefore, that, whatever their socio-economic status, children *felt vernacular* as the preferential language to express subjectivity and proximity just as they *felt Italian* as the preferential language to express objectivity and distance. Thus, the combined role of language and content in semantic orientation sensibly modulates the straight relationship between language and social class. What comes to the fore is *an anthropological dimension* inextricably linked to that special type of bilingualism represented by Italian-vernacular bilingualism.

In this vein, I would add another unexpected result which should make teachers reflect upon the creative potentialities and the ear for language of their vernacular-speaking pupils. When we asked children to write in vernacular we implicitly challenged their capabilities to find acceptable matchings between vernacular phonemes and graphemes, which they couldn't have learnt anywhere before that experience. The surprising result has been that, in all samples, children were able to find those matchings, and, at the same time, to write the corresponding Italian words correctly. This means that, on the one hand, they had assimilated the standard phoneme-grapheme correspondence taught in Italian, and, on the other, they applied that system to vernacular spelling with no hesitation at all. What is notewor-

thy is that many consonant groups they created in vernacular simply do not exist in Italian spelling, and yet the rendering in vernacular spelling is quite plausible. Let's consider the following examples:

« tnm » (Apulian) « teniamo » (Italian) « we have » (Eng)  
 « vnm » (« ) « veniamo » (« ) « we come » (« )  
 « highiu » (Calabria) « figlio »(«) « son »(« )

The semantic and the graphemic side of these results induced me, once again, to underscore the relevance of bringing to light children's implicit representations of the two languages they handle on a daily basis, Italian and vernacular. These representations, in turn, give teachers the best platform to organize systematic metalinguistic analyses on the resources offered by these languages at all levels, including spelling.

**O.F., S.M.** Back to Bernstein, how would you define your critical approach with respect to other researchers' critiques?

**M.A.P.** I would say that I approached Bernstein's sociolinguistic codes with a psychologist's perspective and not with a linguist's or a classical sociolinguist's perspective, as it has been the case with the most famous critiques we know. My reaction was triggered by the multiple references Bernstein made to factors and constructs which are unequivocally psychological. For instance, in one of his early writings (1958) Bernstein claims that the restricted code might arrest the cognitive growth of the working class child at the concrete operational stage due to the intrinsic limitations of this code. Now, first of all, in this kind of statement, language is not only viewed in a sociological perspective but analyzed in its cognitive potentiality, in turn defined by a typical Piagetian construct, the concrete operational stage. When Bernstein argues that social classes reproduce themselves by interiorizing different types of sociolinguistic codes, he explicitly cites Luria's and Vygotsky's idea that thought develops from the interiorization of language. Again, a sociological model resorts to a psychological construct, in this case drawn from the cultural-historical school. When Bernstein describes parents' educational styles as more or less oriented toward the child's autonomous or heteronomous development, the focus is on psychological dimensions. The interesting thing, which makes Bernstein's position atypical and more original compared to the sociolinguists of his times, is that particular combination of sociological and psychological constructs to build an overall model of social class reproduction. What fascinated me, and at the same time provoked my critiques when I came across his writings in the mid 70s, is the multidimensional character of Bernstein's sociolinguistic codes, which makes his figure irreducible to a « deficit hypothesis » representative, as claimed by sociolinguist Dittmar (1973).

**O.F., S.M.** The critiques you addressed in your book on Bernstein were extensive and quite precise. Would you maintain them at the moment?

**M.A.P.** The book first appeared in 1980, which means that the sources I could consult covered up to the late 70s. At that time, Bernstein had been phrasing and re-phrasing his definitions of elaborated and restricted codes for about twenty years, starting by punctual linguistic indicators (1958) then moving toward those general relational and cognitive characteristics (1971, 1973; Adlam, 1977), I outlined above. This constant evolution of the definitions of the sociolinguistic codes in a more and more abstract direction has been a distinctive feature of his work until the essence of the codes was eventually defined in *semiotic*, rather than linguistic terms. At the beginning of the 80s, the basic « elaborated/restricted » dichotomy was entirely substituted by another dichotomy, « classification and framing », the former referring to categories of meanings and the latter to the organization of sequences of meanings, with explicit reference to the Saussurean paradigmatic/syntagmatic distinction. In 1981, in a seminal article, entitled « Codes, Modalities and the Process of Cultural Reproduction », Bernstein stated that « *The codes of social classes and their modalities are specific semiotic (sic !) grammars that regulate the acquisition, reproduction and legitimization of the fundamental rules of*

*exclusion, inclusion and appropriation from which and through which contents are selectively created, located and reciprocally opposed »* (Bernstein, 1981: 354). While classification and framing were initially applied only to education (Bernstein, 1971) they later assumed a pervasive character that became applicable to family, cultural and religious communities, education and work, and always in the attempt at creating a model of cultural reproduction.

Back to the sources at my disposal in the second half of the 70s, which offered me a more concrete and circumscribed picture, these suggested three types of critiques. The first addressed two claims concerning the educational behaviors of social classes: A) The claim that middle class parents, and mothers in particular, were particularly respectful of their children's individuality and autonomous thinking; B) that the « elaborated code » could be defined as such on the basis of the association between context-independence and explicitness. That's why I entitled the paragraph expressing this critique « Which middle class culture and which elaborated language? »

My argument was that Bernstein's account of middle class educational values was much too optimistic and could only reflect a part of an enlightened « bourgeoisie » without taking into account profound cultural differences between the British social stratification and other European traditions. As for the association between context-independence and explicitness, we may have fairly elaborated codes expressing abstract principles with a sophisticated terminology, thus highly context-independent, and yet lacking explicit references, particularly those regarding the agency of single individuals. This typically happens, for instance, in conservative families where rules are explained on tautological grounds, behaviors are supposedly caused by static factors such as « nature », « temperament », gender, age or, in more modern terms by « complexities », and events by such superordinate factors as « luck », « misfortune », « historical moment », and again, by the passe-partout expression « complexities ». Reworded in the psychological terms of attribution theories (Weiner, 1986, 2010), all the factors which devalue the search for causes as pointless can be invoked as « explanations » of behaviors, and be perfectly compatible with elaborated languages. This is often the case in sophisticated intellectual milieux, and is far from promoting that critical thinking and awareness Bernstein attributes to the middle class.

Interestingly, in Italy, the reactions to Bernstein's work came essentially from linguists and sociolinguists (Francescato, 1974; Berruto, 1974; Berretta, 1977; Bazzanella, 1980; Zuanelli-Sonino, 1981, De Mauro, 1983, among others) who limited their comments to the straightforward correlation between language and social classes without considering the psychological dimensions underlying Bernstein's codes. Generally speaking, the matching between the elaborated-restricted dichotomy and the middle class-working class dichotomy seemed perfectly in tune with the ideas put forward by Don Lorenzo Milani (1967), a revolutionary priest who stressed the pivotal role of language both as a social divide and a turning point in the education of the poorest. Since Don Milani, in turn, was taken as one of the foundationl figures of the « democratic » language education movement, Bernstein's work was considered as an inspiring source by all the linguists involved in that movement. However, on scientific grounds, Bernstein's codes were read in typical sociolinguistic terms, either as possible « registers » (Berruto, 1974) or as expressions of pragmatic competence (Zuanelli-Sonino, 1981).

**O.F., S.M.** You said you had the opportunity to illustrate your critiques to Bernstein in person. How did he take it?

**M.A.P.** I must say he has been incredibly kind and gave me five appointments to present my book in all its parts. Actually, he acknowledged that « I had taken the trouble to read him », as he said, and that I didn't confuse his work with the « deficit theory », which he considered very negatively. In addition, having a comprehensive view of the international literature in his field, he listened with curiosity to certain Italian sociological and ideological specificities I had mentioned in my book, which surely differed from the British context.

**O.F., S.M.** And how about the other critiques?

**M.A.P.** A second critique was on the cognitive implications of the codes, and their supposed causal effect on cognitive growth, as, for example, in the abovementioned citation where Bernstein (1958) claimed that a restricted code, being generated by a limited spatial and temporal perspective, may prevent the working class child from attaining abstract forms of reasoning such as the formal operational stage. On the other hand, throughout Bernstein's writings, the basic theoretical reference for the language-thought relationship is the cultural-historical school, not the Piagetian one. Now this difference has relevant consequences on the methodological tools by which you verify that relationship. In addition, in some comparative studies (Bernstein, 1962, 1964; Brandis, Bernstein, 1974) between middle class and working class children and adolescents Bernstein used verbal and nonverbal IQ tests, which rely on further, heterogeneous constructs.

Here, my objection was essentially based on theoretical and methodological consistency issues. If the researcher addresses operational stages then the methodology must be based on operational tasks, where language, on the other hand, may be very concise and, in addition, discursively shared with the examiner. Moreover, gradual construction of reasoning is also taken into account to evaluate the quality of processes. But if the researcher addresses the constructs of single subtests of IQ tests, verbal, nonverbal, numeric, perceptual etc., the administration is more schematic, individual and often silent, so that no feedback is available on how the responses are linguistically mediated, if ever. It is therefore problematic to infer the impact of more or less developed language abilities on cognitive performance.

In a research I carried out between 1983 and 1984, on second graders living in a disadvantaged district of Rome (Picone, Pinto, 1986) compared to middle class controls, both methodologies, Piagetian and psychometric, were applied, in full awareness of the differences between the respective constructs and the picture of cognitive and language abilities these instruments can offer. The range of instruments was very wide: 14 Piagetian tasks, 3 IQ tests (Raven's Progressive Matrices 1947, WISC, Goodenough-Harris « Drawing a Man Test »), a psychomotricity test and a reading test. The essential results showed that in nearly all measures, except the Raven's Matrices, a nonverbal test, and the psychomotricity test, also nonverbal, and a few operational tasks, those disadvantaged children were under the expected age norms. However, after three years, at the end of primary, they had caught up their delay (Picone et al., 1989), which suggests that the essence of the initial problems lied at a deep educational level before entering primary school, were more relevant than single language abilities, and could be remediated by appropriate education in the course of the primary cycle.

**O.F., S.M.** A part of your book also addressed some technical linguistic issues, didn't it?

**M.A.P.** Let's say that these technical issues are the « other side of the coin » of a theory that has relevant merits, such as theoretical courage, originality and depth, on the one hand, but also excessive schematism and probably also excessive independence from pre-existing categories in disciplines close to Bernstein's field. In Sternberg's (1997) terms, this author might be viewed as a bright case of « legislative » thinking style, but originality has its psychological costs, as we know!

Bernstein's pathway through his own definitions and redefinitions of codes during four decades has increasingly amplified his distance from concepts that represent the very architecture of sociolinguistics: *diastratic* varieties (related to social group variability), *diaphasic* varieties (related to communicative setting variability), *diatopic* varieties (related to geographic variability), and *diachronic* varieties (related to historical variability (Flydal, 1951; Berruto, 1974; Coseriu, 1981). Each of these varieties may intersect the others and give rise to a range of further categories. In turn, each of these categories can potentially call upon the elaborated-restricted or even the classification-framing dichotomy, and it would be intriguing to see what kind of communicative scenario all those combinations would create. Questions

like these come to the fore particularly in contexts that have great sociolinguistic variation, as in Italy for instance, which explains why this part of my book analyzed the relationship between Bernstein's changing definitions of codes, on the one hand, and some salient sociolinguistic phenomena in our country, on the other. My argument, here, addressed how Bernstein's definitions lent themselves to misunderstanding in relation to well-established sociolinguistic terminology.

**O.F., S.M.** In the final pages of the book you point to metalinguistic awareness as an ability that would enable individuals to understand why and how a given variety is appropriate to a given context or task. The idea of metalinguistic awareness on which you have been working for decades was already present in your work, wasn't it?

**M.A.P.** Actually, two sources inspired my interest in metalinguistic awareness, a sociolinguistic and a psycholinguistic one. The sociolinguistic source of inspiration came from Bernstein himself, who argued that a crucial difference between the working class and the middle class child is that the former, although of comparable potential intelligence, doesn't attain the same level of metalinguistic awareness than the latter, and this impoverishes the intellectual means by which he can fight against inequalities. Conversely, well-developed metalinguistic awareness is bound to offer middle class children powerful tools to reflect about the very foundations of the social class they belong to, and the means with which they can maintain their status.

The other source came from my previous background as a student in developmental psycholinguistics, and this is where I first came across the concept of metalinguistic awareness. In 1979, I published three studies on language comprehension and production involving metalinguistic abilities, namely metaphor comprehension, denomination of unreal objects, and definition of word. I had read the experimental studies (Asch, Nerlove, 1960; Glucksberg, Krauss, 1966; Papandropoulou, Sinclair, 1974) that inspired my investigation as a student in Geneva, and I replicated them on Italian children from 4 to 10 when I came back to Italy as a researcher. The novelty was that I attempted to interpret the similarities that emerged in the results of each study in light of Piaget's grasp of consciousness model (1974). This model posits that consciousness doesn't arise solely from subject nor solely from object, but at the crossroads between the periphery of human subject's action and the outer world. « *Grasp of consciousness begins at the periphery (goals and results) moving towards the central region of the action when it seeks to reach the action's inner mechanism: recognition of the means used, reasons for its choice or for its modifications during the experience, etc.* » (Piaget 1974: 198). As the human subject starts to access the outer world by acting upon it, he would progressively realize by which actions he does so, and, by the same token, he would start abstracting the objective properties of this portion of the outer world. This is a conceptual schema Piaget has recurrently used to account for the supposed parallel development of logico-mathematical operations and physical knowledge, using « reflecting abstraction » in the former case, and « simple abstraction » (Piaget, 1977) in the latter.

Transposed to language, this subject-object involvement in the development of metalinguistic awareness means that young children do not at first realize the distinction between their own subjectivity as speakers, on the one hand, and the objective properties of the words they use, on the other, and also the outer world to which these words refer. The early signs of this distinction generally manifest after the first two years of primary school and become more and more precise by the end of primary, with growing awareness of the difference between the intention to say, and the objective characteristics of words, made out of sounds and letters. Interestingly, in 1984 I had the pleasant surprise to see that two authoritative Piagetian researchers, Claire-Élise Bonnet and Joëlle Tamine-Gardes, also based their conception of metalinguistic development on Piaget's grasp of consciousness model, and applied it to a consistent empirical study on children from 2 to 6 years. It is not by chance that some

years later (Pinto, 1995, 1999), I adopted Bonnet and Tamine-Gardes' threshold criteria to evaluate the first significant metalinguistic expressions in young children.

However, although my work on metalinguistic awareness has been conducted basically from a psycholinguistic point of view, I didn't forget Bernstein's lesson concerning the social implications of this concept. Recurrently, in my later elaborations (Pinto, 1999; Pinto, El Euch, 2015; Couceiro Figueira, Pinto 2018), I underlined the civic significance of metalinguistic abilities, which become unsuspectedly crucial in a multitude of common occasions, for instance when we must interpret written instructions on how to prepare documents of social relevance, how to get registered in a website, how to express a political vote, how to analyze the speeches of our politicians etc.

**O.F., S.M.** How did the turn toward metalinguistic awareness take place?

**M.A.P.** The turn was partly driven by some external events. For example, in 1982, Renzo Titone started teaching educational psycholinguistics, the same year in which he founded the *International Society of Applied Psycholinguistics* in a conference in Milan, where he underlined the conceptual difference between « *Applied Psycholinguistics* » and « *Applied Linguistics* », the former having a definite psychological imprint. I was included among the members together with my colleague Traute Taeschner, who had to become famous for her studies on early bilingualism (Taeschner, 1983) and then for her « *Hocus and Lotus* » method for early second language teaching (Taeschner, 1986). Those new memberships gave our team in Rome a more definite psycholinguistic identity.

In 1986, at the end of what I would call « my early scientific phase », in coincidence with the publication of the study on cognitive development and social class differences I commented above (Picone, Pinto, 1986), Titone obtained a grant for a long-term research project on metalinguistic awareness. This project was unique in Italy at that time, and pursued various objectives: 1) creating instruments to assess the development of metalinguistic abilities from preschool to adult age (which became the various TAMs); 2) validating the tests on Italian monolinguals; 3) translating the tests into the most widespread European languages (French, Spanish, English, German); 4) using the tests in bi/plurilingual contexts, in Italy and abroad in relation with monolingual controls.

A new exciting phase began, which required me to explore a vast range of theoretical issues, starting from the very definition of metalinguistic awareness, and then addressing the factors explaining its emergence and further growth, its relationships with metacognitive development, literacy, bilingualism and second language learning.

At a time when the Internet didn't exist, all that bibliography had to be on paper, and I remember the heaps of articles and books Renzo Titone brought back from the University of Toronto where he used to give courses annually. His first contribution to the project was to translate into Italian the four metalinguistic tasks used by David H. Hakes (1980) to study metalinguistic development in children from 4 to 8, namely *Comprehension*, *Synonymy*, *Acceptability* and *Phonemic Segmentation*. Hakes' work represented the first systematic study on children of the above age range conducted with a clear cognitive and metacognitive orientation. After reviewing exploratory studies carried out by other researchers with various metalinguistic tasks (Hakes, 1980; Tunmer et al., 1984), Hakes identified interesting common trends that made him think of a sort of « metacognitive turn » by the age of about 6/7. The author noticed, for instance, that by that age children analyzed more actively the relevant features of the metalinguistic tasks at hand compared to younger children, in a way similar to what had emerged with nonverbal metacognitive tasks. Hakes also made interesting parallels between the requirements of some metalinguistic tasks, such as *Synonymy*, for example, and conservation tasks. In both cases, he argued, one has to detect the identity of something, verbal meaning or material substance, on the one hand, and changes in form, on the other, syntactic structure transformations or transformations of the materials in a conservation task. Based on these cognitive insights, Hakes administered the above four metalinguistic tasks together

with a battery of Piagetian conservation tasks to 100 children from 4 to 8, and observed a parallel growth of metalinguistic abilities and operational thought. The author interpreted this result as the expression of a superordinate metacognitive factor in development.

While I appreciated the breadth of the experimental plan and the novelty of the hypotheses, I was very surprised by the way children's responses were elicited or, actually, the way they were not elicited. In some cases, children spontaneously gave a justification of their response (for example, when they had to say if Sentence A meant the same as Sentence B, or if a given sentence was acceptable or not) while in some other they were just content with an overall yes/or no, or right/or wrong response or weren't simply able to respond. Now those spontaneous justifications reveal a core aspect of metalinguistic processing, *namely the need to ground a response on some structural or semantic basis*. Justifications do not simply reflect the knowledge of a linguistic rule or convention *but rather the need for consistency*, what Piaget would call « le sentiment de nécessité » (« feeling of necessity ») applied to metalinguistic analysis. If children as young as 7 or 8 feel the need to justify their responses irrespective of the adult's request they are giving the adult access to *a deeper layer of their representation of language*. As a consequence, the adult should feel obliged to stop and reflect on the following: 1) that « deeper layer » changes the cognitive status of the first, global yes/or no, or right/or wrong response since this type of response might hide the most disparate representations of the issue at hand, from totally irrelevant to approximately relevant or exhaustively relevant; 2) *that deeper representation should be investigated as a level on its own* in terms of coping strategies with some language conflict, and not just in a binary way, right-or-wrong.

**O.F., S.M.** That sounds very much like the L/ML distinction in the TAMs, doesn't it?

**M.A.P.** That's exactly the point. First of all, it's easy to see that the reaction I described above was clearly inspired by my Piagetian background. As I said before, when you follow the children's reactions to the questions posed by a Piagetian task you realize that the way they justify their position is the authentic object of investigation, and also the most reliable ground to assign a given operational level. Therefore, the examiner should always distinguish between the first children's statements and the underlying reasoning they might develop just after.

Practically, I tried to transfer this view to the assessment of the four metalinguistic tasks used by Hakes in his research (*Comprehension, Synonymy, Acceptability and Phonemic Segmentation*), to which two more tasks were added, created by Titone (*Ambiguity* and *Grammatical Function*). I proposed to introduce a systematic pair of questions for each item. The first question was the same as in the original task, and was called *Linguistic (L)* because it requires to retrieve some basic linguistic rules and conventions and calls for an intuitive and implicit form of awareness, technically denominated « epilinguistic ». (Culioli, 1990). The second question comes just after, and I proposed to call it *Metalinguistic (ML)* because it requires *to justify* the previous response, and this activates explicit and focused awareness. Since the L questions are clearly posed in a dichotomic way (yes/no; acceptable/unacceptable etc.) the rationale to evaluate the corresponding L responses is also dichotomic, and therefore the score is 0/1. The responses to the ML questions, instead, can vary according to the qualitative levels of the argumentation, which can range from completely absent to partially relevant up to relevant and exhaustive.

And here comes the second innovation, based on another Piagetian source, namely the three types of mental regulations described by Piaget in his last equilibration model (Piaget, 1975). We must remember that, for Piaget, cognitive problems arise when a given equilibrium is perturbed and there is a conflict between data, either in the outer world or in the mind. Regulations can be thought of as forms of strategies to cope with those conflicts, and can be more or less adaptive and far-reaching. « Alpha » regulations represent the most elementary form to cope with a conflict: subjects simply ignore it because they lack the schema to assimilate the very nature of the problem. The « beta » regulations acknowledge the conflict

but cope with it only partially by means of local and successive accommodations to a pre-existing schema. The « gamma » regulations, instead, recompose the elements of the conflict in such a way that every piece finds its place in an overall, self-consistent representation. We can assume that exhaustiveness and checking for consistency are the distinctive features of the gamma regulations.

While the L/ML distinction relied on a terminology that was familiar to linguists and psycholinguists, the transposition of the equilibration pattern into metalinguistic processing was a total novelty, and thus required a further conceptual passage. To this end, I tried to see if the distinctive features of metalinguistic awareness as defined by linguists (Jakobson, 1963; Benveniste, 1974), and developmental psycholinguists in the second half of the 80s (Cazden, 1976; Hakes, 1980; Papandropoulou, Sinclair, 1974; Tunmer et al., 1984; Bonnet, Tamine Gardes, 1984; Bialystok, 1986), in terms of reflectiveness, objectivation of language by using language itself etc., couldn't be seen as the end-products of more profound cognitive processes. Bialystok, for instance, in a seminal article of 1986, redefined metalinguistic awareness by means of two components: analysis and control, specified as distinct types of cognitive processes.

My personal attempt was related to the cognitive status of the justification responses at the TAM-2. My claim was that these responses could be viewed as forms of *recomposition of conflicts between linguistic elements* (meanings, forms, syntactic order, spelling etc.), that are constitutive of metalinguistic tasks. For example, to justify why two sentences with a different syntactic order convey the same meaning, one must overcome a conflict between form, meaning and position of the linguistic units, and this may be implemented at different levels, from ignoring the conflict to recomposing it only partially or recomposing it in a completely consistent way. Likewise, when it comes to justifying why a given sentence is semantically unacceptable, one must overcome the conflict between semantic features that are reciprocally incompatible, and here, again, the task can be implemented more or less exhaustively and consistently.

Back to assessment issues, the first pilot studies with the TAM-2 showed that it was possible to transfer the mental regulation tripartition into a coherent coding system of the ML responses. The alpha regulations were recognizable by various forms of ignorance of the issue at hand, and were expressed by blanks or « I don't know » responses (scoring: 0); the beta regulations were recognizable by incipient detection of some semantic or grammatical or syntactic unit, which were nevertheless insufficient to justify the previous L response (scoring: 1); lastly, the gamma regulations were recognizable by punctual detection of relevant linguistic units and consistent recomposition of their roles in a sentence (scoring: 2).

**O.F., S.M.** So far you are referring to this TAM with a number: TAM-2, but actually the first publication of the test (Pinto, Titone, 1989), just called it « TAM », without any numbering. Why did the denomination change?

**M.A.P.** Because immediately after that publication I started working on a metalinguistic test for a younger age range, 4 to 6, with totally different tasks, and this test was then denominated TAM-1 (Pinto, 1995, 1999; Pinto, Candilera, 2000) which explains why the initial « TAM » was later numbered as TAM-2. I forgot to say that the addition of the ML questions, being more complex than the L questions, shifted the target age range upwards and addressed children and preadolescents from 9 to 14 years-old. At the beginning of the 90s I also started working on a metalinguistic test for high school and university students, which was to become the TAM-3 (Pinto, 1995, 1999).

**O.F., S.M.** A quite intense production!

**M.A.P.** Very much so, and there were many reasons for this. First of all, as I said, Titone's project on metalinguistic awareness had to comply with the objective of creating metalinguistic tests from preschool to high school age. In 1989, the first outcomes were published in

a special issue of the *Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata* (Titone, 1989), the journal founded and edited by Titone. Among these, the study by Ricciardelli, Rump, Proske, presented the results obtained with 5- and 6-year-old children using a battery of 10 metalinguistic tasks, and showed that a single factor could account for a large part of the common variance. That contribution would become the major inspiration for the development of the 7 tasks of the TAM-1, although with a substantial change in the assessment criteria. Actually, with children in the transition phase from preschool to the beginning of primary, the idea that a metalinguistic task intrinsically poses a cognitive conflict was even more evident than with children at the end of primary or at junior high school. Although the TAM-1's tasks were utterly different from those of the TAM-2 and there was no request of justification, the responses clearly revealed that children were coping with some conflict. This process appeared particularly in what we called « compromise responses » where children partially fulfilled the directions but in such a way as to *preserve the plausibility* of the item. Interestingly, this is precisely what matches the criteria of a beta regulation, where a given semantic or grammatical or syntactic conflict is faced only locally (at a given point of the sentence without considering the other points). Therefore, the three types of cognitive regulations we detected in the ML responses to the TAM-2 tasks appeared also in the responses to the TAM-1 tasks, and therefore were adopted as assessment criteria also in this test.

But there was also another motivation to explore the characteristics of the early stages of metalinguistic development. In 1989, the *Institut Européen pour le Développement des Potentielles de tous les Enfants* (French acronym: IEDPE; eng. *European Institute for the Development of the Potentialities of all Children*) was founded in Paris. It was as a non-profit scientific society whose objectives were to fight against illiteracy, school failure and social exclusion. Titone and I were proposed to become the founding members of the Early Literacy and Early Language Learning sections, where metalinguistic development issues were evidently relevant. From 1989 until 1996 I gave my contribution to those groups participating to conferences in France (Paris, 1989, 1994) and Spain (Huesca, 1990; Barcelona, 1992).

**O.F., S.M.** And how about the use of these instruments in bilingual or second language learning contexts, as foreseen by the project?

**M.A.P.** Actually, as soon as the TAM-1 and the TAM-2 had been piloted on monolinguals by the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s, a series of early bilingual or early second language learning contexts were found, often upon proposal of researchers close to Titone or students graduating with me. Based on the extensive literature available at that time, which showed the metalinguistic benefits of early bilingualism and even of limited second language experiences (Ben Zeev, 1977; Cummins, 1976; Bialystok, 2001), I conducted several studies using the TAM-1 and the TAM-2.

In this circumstance, I will only mention two cases in point, each having had a pioneering character in spite of the huge socio-cultural differences of the contexts in which the studies were conducted. On the one hand, the intensive French and English courses implemented with preschool children, based on the « Bonjour Valentine/Good-morning Valentine » method, created by a specialist of French language and literature, Prof. Orsola Tarantino-Fraternali (1983). The conception of the method was at the same time original and attentively structured, based on the strongest points of early bilingual education, as described by Titone (1972). There was a series of playful activities addressing the spontaneous interests of very young children, a detailed planning of the interplay between body and second language (« Naming what you are doing and doing what you are naming »), graduality and daily practice. But the originality of the experiment was amplified by the socio-cultural characteristics of the context in which it was implemented, a village near Avellino, a small city of Campania, with children from low socio-economic status families, having vernacular as first language and very poor Italian. Despite those socio-linguistic conditions, when the children who participated to second language classes were tested with the Italian TAM-1 they outper-

formed the controls, matched by age, area of residence and socio-economic status. The result was confirmed several times over the years, irrespective of the foreign language taught. This suggests that even in diglossic contexts, children who were basically vernacular-speaking and with poor competence in Italian, could benefit from early second language learning. Far from being detrimental to Italian, which was their national language, learning a second language enhanced their awareness of the structural features of Italian to a greater extent than a standard Italian curriculum.

The other experience I wish to describe was the first of a long series of studies implemented in international schools in Rome between 1992 and 1998 with children we can define as « privileged bilinguals ». We had at first the opportunity to enter the German school of Rome, where the vehicular language of the curriculum is German since kindergarten to high school, based on German official programs and assessment system, and limited teaching of Italian for children having Italian-speaking parents. We administered the Italian TAM-1 to early German-Italian bilinguals enrolled in grade one together with the Colored Progressive Matrices, a nonverbal intelligence test, and compared their performance to Italian monolingual controls matched by age, school grade, socio-cultural status, and programs of Italian language. The results showed significant bilinguals' superiority in many of the tasks of the TAM-1 and substantial balance in others while there were no differences in nonverbal intelligence. In 1992 and 1994 we administered the TAM-2 to 5<sup>th</sup> graders again with the Progressive Matrices, in this case for older children (PM38), and compared their performance to that of Italian monolinguals matched by the same criteria as in the previous study. This time bilinguals' superiority was impressive and confirmed over the years, with different cohorts of children. What was mostly striking was the extent of the effect *on the ML responses*, those that better express the metalinguistic construct of the test. In other words, those young bilinguals not only outperformed their monolingual peers in the L responses in an Italian test – which is already noteworthy since Italian monolinguals received much more hours of Italian than their bilingual homologues – but gave also more elaborate justifications *in Italian!*

Limited bilinguals' superiority at the beginning of primary, as assessed with the TAM-1, and much more evident bilinguals' superiority at the end of primary, as assessed with the TAM-2, were attested in all our studies in the international schools of Rome, namely the German, the French, the Swiss and a British school (Pinto, 1999). This trend, which emerged irrespective of the type of bilingualism investigated (with Italian-German; Italian-French and Italian-English children) is perfectly interpretable in light of Cummins' threshold hypothesis and BICS/CALP distinction (1979), outlined above. In their first school year, children acquire literacy skills using two different spelling systems, and then gradually build their CALP in two languages. This complex learning process does not immediately reflect in superior metalinguistic awareness with respect to monolingual controls; however, after five years this systematic mental exercise in two languages proves to be highly beneficial at metalinguistic level even in the language less practiced at school, Italian in this case.

**O.F., S.M.** How were those results presented in Italy and abroad?

**M.A.P.** Thanks to Titone's international contacts and our membership in scientific societies such as ISAPL (*International Society of Applied Psycholinguistics*) and AILA (*Association internationale de Linguistique Appliquée*) and IEDPE (*Institut Européen pour le Développement des Potentialités de tous les Enfants*), we had many opportunities to present the metalinguistic tests and the major results of our research on the metalinguistic benefits related to bilingual and/or second language learning. We started with Spain (Huelva) and Canada (Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal) in 1993. Then, as in 1994 the third metalinguistic test, the TAM-3 was completed, I had the honor to give an overall presentation of the three TAMs, showing continuities and discontinuities of the constructs, at the prestigious O.I.S.E. (*Ontario Institute for Studies in Education*) in Toronto, in front of Jim Cummins, a giant in the field of bilingualism.

The visit had been mediated by Prof. Marcel Danesi, University of Toronto, with whom I had organized the Festschrift in honor of Renzo Titone the year before (Pinto, Danesi, 1993).

Further to those visits in Spain and Canada, Titone and I were proposed to have the tests translated into Spanish and English to use them in research on monolingual or bi/plurilingual Spanish-speaking and English-speaking contexts. When we were later invited to Argentina (1997) to present our research at the University of Buenos Aires, and the « Dante Alighieri » Institute in Rosario, and Chile at the Italian Institute of Culture of Santiago, we found that a translation of the TAMs into Spanish had already been started by some teachers of the « Dante Alighieri ». The same year, David Lasagabaster, now a renowned professor at Vitoria Gasteiz (University of the Basque Country), showed in his PhD thesis (Lasagabaster, 1997) that metalinguistic awareness increased as a function of the intensity of a trilingual curriculum based on Basque, Spanish and English. To measure metalinguistic awareness the author used some items of the TAM-2 translated into Spanish. Two other Basque researchers, Jasone Cenoz and Josu Perales (2002) showed that adults' metalinguistic awareness in Spanish L1, as measured with selected items of the TAM-2 and TAM-3 translated into Spanish, were the best predictors of success in learning Basque as a second language.

Finally, in 1999, I published a comprehensive book on metalinguistic awareness with an introduction on the theoretical issues involved in the definition of the concept, the current perspectives on developmental factors and a detailed description of the three TAMs. The same year, the English translation of this book, by Francesca Trusso (Sapienza University of Rome), was also published (Pinto et al. 1999), and in 2000 we had the Spanish translation by Lola Gonzales Gíl (University of Sevilla; Pinto et al., 2000). Both translations, especially the English one, had a crucial role in the diffusion of the tests at international level, and opened up the possibility to measure the impact of bi/trilingualism on metalinguistic awareness in at least three languages.

**O.F., S.M.** Thus, the book presented all three tests together. How did you reconcile continuities and discontinuities in the development of metalinguistic awareness across ages?

**M.A.P.** Once more, my Piagetian background inspired me some basic ideas, in particular the linkage between a *structural* approach, in this case to language structures, a *functional* approach, to detect the equilibration processes that regulate levels of metalinguistic awareness, and a *developmental* approach to outline the qualitative changes in metalinguistic processing related to cognitive and cultural growth.

But let's start by the beginning. When I read through the literature on metalinguistic development, for instance the classical Tunmer et al. (1984) or Gombert's (1990) reviews I was impressed by the total lack of studies on preadolescents or adolescents, as if the essential issues were limited to the take-off phase of metalinguistic development, leaving completely unexplained the gap between that early period and the adult phase. Probably, the implicit assumption was that any further development of metalinguistic awareness was due to the formal teaching of metalinguistic terminology or to metalinguistic practice at school. Actually, I didn't share either the idea that the central issues in metalinguistic development are reducible to the early stages nor that further metalinguistic growth is attributable to teaching practices only. This lack of studies on adolescents was all the more surprising in all those authors who stressed the *metacognitive grounds of metalinguistic abilities*, relying on Piagetian categories such as decentering, reversibility, concrete operational stage etc., as in Hakes's (1980) case, or on executive function such as attentional strategies, inhibition, working memory, planning etc., like in Tunmer et al.'s (1984) case. If we assume that metacognitive development is the major factor that accounts for the transformation of basic language abilities into metalinguistic abilities, then we must follow the further evolution of metacognition into more abstract and interconnected forms with age. In the logical-mathematical area, for instance, we know that there is an evolution from concrete to formal operations and this is correlated to a more complex network of executive functions.

Back to the metalinguistic area, a first, significant step takes place in that transitional phase between preschool and the beginning of primary school, as pointed out by Bonnet and Tamine Gardes (1984) in their fine-grained observational study. The TAM-1 (Pinto, Candilera, 2000; Melogno et al., 2022) has been conceived precisely to address this first turn, and we can see that children as young as 5 or 6 can cope with basic language principles such as form/content distinction, discrete nature of linguistic units, word order, combinatorial character of language, each embedded in a given task. *But this is just the first step of a type of processing which is bound to be challenged by metalinguistic issues of a much more sophisticated nature all life-long.* The very existence of items as those of the TAM-2, with a more diversified vocabulary, more articulated relationships between sentences, and more demanding questions than in the TAM-1 proves that the test addresses a *more advanced metalinguistic mind* than the 4- or 5- or 6 year-old child. This superior metalinguistic maturity is due at the same time to the growth of general cognitive processes (attention, working memory, inhibition, planning, inferential reasoning etc.), and the expansion of linguistic and encyclopedic knowledge. For this reason, the TAM-2 can hardly be considered for preschool children or children having just started primary school. In turn, the vocabulary and the structures of the tasks of the TAM-3 are far more sophisticated than the tasks of the TAM-2. Again, to be able to cope with these tasks presupposes a further consolidation of the above cognitive processes, especially inferential reasoning, and a further enlargement of linguistic and encyclopedic culture. This is the reason why a 10 year-old or even a 13 year-old child who gives good responses to the TAM-2 would nevertheless be at pains with the TAM-3.

**O.F., S.M.** Overall, if you had to list in a few keywords the distinct features of the construct of metalinguistic awareness that underlies the three TAMs, what would you say?

**M.A.P.** If I may use composite neologisms, I would say: multiphasic-developmental, multicomponent-structured, and equilibration-based metacognitive.

**O.F., S.M.** Maybe it's better you explain each of these neologisms.

**M.A.P.** I'll try not to be too repetitive:

- Metalinguistic awareness is a *developmental phenomenon that doesn't come to light once and for all* under the influence of just one metacognitive turn at a more or less early age, depending on the criteria used by this or that school of thought. Rather, MLA has a trajectory of increasing complexity from its embryonic manifestations at preschool age up to the end of the school period, and even much later in specialized disciplines like linguistics and semiotics. At the same time, as the object of MLA is language, and language is a collective product we use in our everyday life as citizens, advanced MLA addresses a series of cultural and diachronic aspects of language. This is what appears in some items of Figurative language in the TAM-3, as, for instance, in the item « Home sapiens ». A student once said, « Behind this advertisement, there is a clear allusion to the well-known expression « homo sapiens », which belongs to *our historical collective awareness....* »

- Metalinguistic awareness is a *multicomponent, structured phenomenon*, whose structure is based on the architecture of its object, which is language. This explains why MLA components can be identified as the *meta-level of each area of language*: meta-phonological, meta-semantic, meta-grammatical, meta-morphological, meta-pragmatic, meta-orthographic awareness. This means also that to measure a given metalinguistic ability, the corresponding task must be defined in its structural components to see to what extent subjects are able to perceive each of these components.

- Metalinguistic awareness is a *metacognitive phenomenon triggered by various forms of conflicts between linguistic units, and solved by recomposing those conflicts*. Conflicts may regard form, oral and/or graphic, meaning, position, order (e.g.: a polysemic word that modifies the whole meaning of a sentence; two sentences conveying the same meaning with a different syntactic order etc.). Thus, a good response to a metalinguistic issue often takes the form of

an argumentation to recompose the conflicts in question, and *metalinguistic awareness may be considered as the end-product of this recomposition*. This is perhaps the point where continuities and discontinuities between the three TAMs mostly appear: conflicts are recognizable in each item of each TAM just as the three types of regulations are recognizable in the responses to each TAM. But, of course, the complexity of the conflicts and the complexity of the solutions to recompose them increase as a function of the age targeted by each test.

**O.F., S.M.** The publication of the three TAMs in Italian, English and Spanish at the end of the 90s more or less coincided with Titone's retirement. How did these changes impact on your scientific commitments?

**M.A.P.** After Titone's retirement, I had more scientific responsibilities than before. First of all, in 2000 we co-founded the *Rivista di Psicolinguistica Applicata/Journal of Applied Psycholinguistics*, which was welcomed as a total novelty in Italy, although there already existed a similar journal, the *Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata*, founded by Titone himself in 1969, which continued under a different editorship. To be the editor-in-chief of an international journal was rewarding as well as challenging.

For sure, it did mark a new phase in the relationships with the colleagues of my institution, i.e. the Department of Developmental and Socialization Processes (Sapienza University of Rome), and in general with all the scholars interested in psycholinguistics from different perspectives throughout the country, including the researchers of the prestigious Institute of Science and Cognition Technology of the National Center for Research (Istc-CNR). As a result, nearly every year in the first decade of the journal's life there has been a special issue edited or co-edited by some member of my Department, either from the educational area (Ferreiro, Pascucci (eds.) (2003), *On written language and with written language. Adults' and children's reflections*) or from the social area (Fasulo, Galatolo, 2004), *The contribution of conversation analysis*; (Pinto, Fatigante, 2007), *Conversation, Reading and Writing: Studies in a Cultural Perspective*) or from the developmental area (Pinto et al., 2010), *The development of internal state talk: cognitive, emotional and interpersonal aspects*). In other years, the journal gave voice to several deafness studies and special issues on bimodal bilingualism, involving scholars from the abovementioned Istc-CNR (Pinto, Volterra, 2008), *Sign languages /Spoken languages bilingualism: educational and psycholinguistic issues*; (Pinto, Fontana, 2011), *Insights into sign language interpreting: sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and educational issues*; (Pinto, Rinaldi, 2016), *Metalinguistic awareness and Bimodal Bilingualism: Studies on Deaf and Hearing Subjects*.

In the second and the third decade of the journal's life there were also special issues edited by developmental psycholinguists (Pinto et al., 2012; Pinto, D'Amico, 2013; Pinto, D'Amico, 2014; Rinaldi, Sparaci, 2022) and applied linguists (Plastina, 2018; Bonvino, 2019; Roccaforte, 2020; Zahonero, Petroni, 2021), all from various universities of the country, and with international participation.

These diverse sources greatly enriched my scientific life. The special issues, in particular, from conception to monitoring and diffusion, gave me the opportunity to know schools of thought and methodologies I had only heard of. Therefore, I feel profoundly indebted to each of the colleagues with whom I had the pleasure to collaborate in these occasions. They sharpened my sensitivity toward the cultural, social, developmental and even clinical implications of psycholinguistics.

**O.F., S.M.** The starting steps of the *Rivista di Psicolinguistica Applicata/ Journal of Applied Psycholinguistics* also coincided with your promotion to Associate Professor. How did this change of academic status affect your teaching?

**M.A.P.** Yes, in 2001 I became Associate Professor of developmental and educational psychology at the Faculty of Psychology in Rome, which I taught until my recent retirement in 2020. Just a few years before I had started giving classes of educational psychology and educational psycholinguistics at the « Dante Alighieri » Institute of Rosario (Argentina), where I

had been once lecturing with Titone. There, I reached an official agreement to give classes on different topics of those disciplines every year, and plan classes of other disciplines given by my colleagues in Rome. In 2004 that agreement was to be transformed into a Master program to train future Argentinian teachers of Italian. The « Argentinian experience », if I may call it this way, lasted ten years from 1998 to 2008, with courses and lectures in various « Dante Alighieri » Institutes and Italian Institutes of culture in Argentina, and generated research at various level. In the « Dante Alighieri » of Rosario, a first study (Pafumi, 2005) was conducted with Spanish-Italian bilingual preadolescents of the school, using both the Italian TAM-2 and the Spanish THAM-2, and a test of metaphor comprehension, later published as TCM (Pinto et al., 2006). In 2007 (Pafumi et al., 2007), another study was carried out with adolescents in the same context using a paraphrase task in Spanish and Italian version. In a different vein, but always addressing the particular type of Italian-Spanish bilingualism that develops in Argentina, we studied how teachers of Italian in Argentina, some born in Argentina and some coming from Italy, perceive and value the structures of Italian language (Bracone, Pinto 2014).

**O.F., S.M.** And what were the further developments of the TAMs?

**M.A.P.** There were many strands of research related to the TAMs: validations, research on bilingualism, research on predictive validity, translations into other languages.

Starting from validation studies, the TAM-1 was validated in 2000 (Pinto, Candalera, 2000), the TAM-2 in 2003 (Pinto et al., 2003) and the TAM-3 in 2007 (Pinto, Iliceto, 2007). These tests were extensively used by my students of educational psychology in Rome as part of their training or their Master thesis. However, the far-reaching objective was to pave the way to the validation of other linguistic versions of the TAMs, which would allow for more consistent comparisons of metalinguistic abilities in different languages, and at different ages. This had to be implemented by means of the European Longlife Learning Project called « MATEL » (acronym for « Metalinguistic Awareness Tests in European Languages ») in the years 2013-2015, once the French translation was available by the beginning of 2012, and then published in 2015 (Pinto, El Euch, 2015).

Regarding studies on bilingualism, the existence of the translated versions of the TAMs opened up new possibilities to make complex research designs comparing bilinguals' and monolinguals' metalinguistic performance. We started with two studies on Italian-English bilingual students in Rome, who could take either the TAM-3 or the MAT-3, at their choice, compared to both Italian and English monolingual controls, the former tested in Italy with the TAM-3, and the latter tested in UK with the MAT-3 (Pinto et al., 2002; Pinto et al., 2004). In both studies, *irrespective of the linguistic version chosen by the bilinguals, and irrespective of the kind of monolingualism, bilinguals always outperformed the monolingual controls*.

I then tried a similar type of design with Italian-English preschoolers in an Italian kindergarten in London (Codemo et al., 2007) who took either the Italian TAM-1 or the English MAT-1 on a random basis, compared to English monolinguals who, due to their monolingual condition, could only be tested with the English MAT-1. Bilinguals' metalinguistic superiority over the English monolinguals appeared particularly impressive in this case, although there was a difference also within the bilingual group in favor of those who had taken the English MAT-1 compared to those who had taken the Italian TAM-1. But even considering the lowest performance within the Italian-English bilingual group, this was still significantly higher than the performance of the English monolingual group.

As soon as the French translation of the TAMs was available, I applied a slightly more complex design to the Italian-French bilingual preschoolers of the Lycée Chateaubriand in Rome. Here, we selected a sample of 5 year-old bilinguals subdivided into simultaneous and consecutive. In each group, half of the children received either the Italian TAM-1 or the French THAM-1 on a random basis. The bilingual group, taken as a whole, was compared to two monolingual controls, an Italian-speaking one tested in Rome with the Italian TAM-1

and a French-speaking one, tested in Paris with the French THAM-1, all the children being matched by age, nonverbal intelligence, gender balance, socio-economic and cultural status. Once more, the overall comparison between the whole group of bilinguals and the whole group of monolinguals showed a very significant superiority of the former over the latter. There were also minor differences within the bilingual group between simultaneous versus consecutive in favor of the former, and in children tested with the TAM-1 versus those tested with the THAM-1 in favor of the former but these gaps were very limited compared to the big gap separating all the bilinguals from all the monolinguals. The similarities between these two studies, each conducted with socially privileged children, monolingual controls included, and their significance at such a young age have been discussed in Pinto, El Euch (2017).

Very similar trends were also highlighted at university level on a larger scale than in the 2002 and 2004 studies described above. We used the Italian TAM-3, the French THAM-3, and the English MAT-3 in two bilingual groups, Italian-French and Italian-English, compared to Italian monolinguals tested in Italy with the TAM-3, French monolinguals tested in France with the THAM-3 and English monolinguals tested in UK with the MAT-3 (Pinto, 2013). The expectation of bilinguals' metalinguistic superiority over all the monolingual controls was again fully confirmed, beyond comparable good level of nonverbal intelligence, gender balance, comparable achievement in university studies and comparable involvement in intellectual jobs in all groups.

**O.F., S.M.** Those results obtained with different linguistic versions of the same test, and with different types of comparisons, suggest that you are measuring metalinguistic processes as such, beyond the specific features of this or that language.

**M.A.P.** That was exactly one of the main advantages of having more linguistic versions of the same test.

**O.F., S.M.** But you conducted studies also in particular contexts in Italy, using only the Italian TAM-2, didn't you?

**M.A.P.** Yes. For what concerns educational experiments with foreign or minority languages and their beneficial effects upon metalinguistic abilities, I conducted various studies in the years 2000-2005, leading to similar results. For instance, in 2001, with Renato Corsetti, a famous Esperantist, we published an article (Pinto, Corsetti, 2001) on the metalinguistic benefits of limited learning experience of Esperanto in a junior high school class. Esperanto, as it is known, is a planned language that was conceived by its creator, Ludwick Zamenhof (1905), to fulfill a universalistic communicative scope based on a totally regular grammar. Although these characteristics could be unattractive for preadolescents of low socio-economic status, who formed the experimental group, those pupils gave significantly better responses at the Italian TAM-2 than the control group who had followed a traditional Italian curriculum. Just as with the Italian-German, Italian-French and Italian-English bilingual children tested in the international schools in Rome, the main difference with respect to controls lay in the ML responses, *thus in the most demanding part of the TAM-2*. A similar situation also occurred in Sicily (Occhipinti, unpublished Master thesis, reported in Pinto, 2013) with experimental Latin classes at junior high school level, before the canonical starting age of the study of Latin for those pupils who will choose the Classical curriculum. Here, again, the language chosen for the experiment had two characteristics that normally have little appeal for such young students: highly structured grammar and reduced everyday use; in the case of Latin, practically no use at all. In spite of these characteristics, and of very limited time of exposure (one hour a week for one school year), the experimental students outperformed the controls on Italian metalinguistic awareness, as assessed by the TAM-2, especially in the ML responses, and in addition, also in a meta-cognitive questionnaire on Mathematics.

Another unusual case took place in a small center in Sardinia (Seddaiu, unpublished Master thesis, reported in Pinto, 2013). There, one group of eighth graders had followed classes of Sardinian language – a heritage language associated to a rich cultural tradition – since the beginning of primary, added to all the other school subjects. A second group, of the same age, had received just two years of Sardinian classes while a third group, also of the same age, had had no formal teaching of Sardinian at all. All the participants were matched by age, socio-economic status, nonverbal intelligence and school programs related to the grade they were enrolled in. The performance on the TAM-2 significantly varied as a function of the duration of attendance to Sardinian classes: the longest, the best, as clearly shown at post hoc Duncan test. At each step of the experience of the Sardinian classes (0 years, 2 years, 8 years), there was a significant increase in metalinguistic performance in Italian, as assessed by the TAM-2.

What is worth noting in the experimental designs of all these studies is that the dependent variable we addressed was not linguistic competence in the language that was taught in this or that experience, but the *indirect result of the contact between Italian, on the one hand, and the language that was taught*, on the other, Esperanto or Latin or Sardinian, or any other different language. The assumption was that this contact, however limited in time, was likely to trigger a series of contrastive observations between Italian and the language that was being taught. These observations are metalinguistic in nature for the very fact that *you are forced to reflect about the structural features of the language you are learning in relation to your native one*, although the levels of consciousness may be extremely variable.

**O.F., S.M.** And what about the relationship between Italian-vernacular bilingualism and metalinguistic awareness?

**M.A.P.** That has been a distinct object of investigation, approximately in the same years, and on a much larger scale. As I said before, this type of bilingualism had long fascinated me, and this fascination is probably a cultural legacy of my mother's experience with Italian, Sicilian and European national languages. After my studies in the 80s (see above), where I investigated attitudes, cognitive strategies, and representations related to Italian and vernacular, I wished to explore the metalinguistic side of the question in children who were more or less competent in their vernacular. I assumed that the ability *to speak in vernacular and understand it* is likely to stimulate a deeper awareness of Italian than the simple ability to understand vernacular, even if competence in vernacular is only oral. This production-comprehension competence in vernacular may be found in all the regions of Italy where vernacular is still vital. When this is associated with the knowledge of Italian, which is mandatory at school, it creates a sort of « balanced Italian-vernacular bilingualism » which is cognitively more soliciting than when vernacular is only understood but not produced.

With these ideas in mind, I conducted a study (Pinto, Iliceto, 2003) in four southern regions of Italy (Campania, South Latium, Abruzzi, Calabria) where comprehension-production in the local vernacular could be realistically found at least in some part of the population. On these grounds, in each region the same experimental design was implemented with 200 fifth graders subdivided into 100 « balanced » Italian-vernacular bilinguals (with comprehension and production of vernacular associated to age-adequate knowledge of Italian) and 100 « unbalanced » Italian-vernacular bilinguals (with only comprehension of vernacular associated to age-adequate knowledge of Italian). As it could be assumed that the knowledge of vernacular was more frequent in children of low socio-economic status (LSE), we ensured that also children of high socio-economic status (HSE) had some knowledge of vernacular at both comprehension and production level in order to distinguish between the socio-economic status factor and the bilingualism factor. Thus, among the « balanced » bilinguals, half of the participants were of LSE and the other half were of HSE, and the same symmetry was created among the « unbalanced ». Lastly, as we believed in the metalinguistic potentialities implicit in contrastive observations between languages, an experimental factor was added, consisting of a limited translation task from vernacular to Italian which was administered on a random

basis to half of the participants. In the whole, then, there were three factors that could possibly influence metalinguistic awareness in Italian, as assessed by the TAM-2: 1) *bilingualism*: balanced versus non-balanced 2) *socio-economic status*: high versus low; 3) *translation experience*: present versus absent. All the participants were matched by age, nonverbal intelligence, absence of cognitive or neurological disorders, age-adequate school performance, attendance to state schools in the same city. The surprising result was that, while at the beginning of the year bilingualism was the only significant factor that accounted for differences in the TAM-2 in favor of the balanced children, *irrespective of their socio-economic status*, at the end of the year, the translation factor was also positively influential on metalinguistic performance, and again socio-economic status was not significant, although HSE children performed better than their LSE counterparts.

If we think that the type of bilingualism we investigated is practically ignored at official level, to the exception of an elite of linguists and sociolinguists in Italy, that no intentional Italian-vernacular contrastive analysis had been implemented at school in the contexts we investigated, and that the effects appeared even in HLE children, the results appear all the more eloquent. *Italian-vernacular bilingualism, in its balanced form with comprehension associated with production, proves to be a factor that enhances rather than hinders metalinguistic awareness in Italian*. Once more, I think that this type of potentiality should be exploited as a precious resource by teachers of Italian language.

**O.F., S.M.** You also mentioned some studies on the predictivity of the TAMs.

**M.A.P.** Yes, and I must say that all these studies were conducted upon other researchers' initiative, and each revealed a different type of predictivity.

The first of these studies was conducted by the two Spanish researchers I mentioned in the Basque country, Cenoz, Perales (2002), who used items of the Spanish THAM-2 and THAM-3 to measure metalinguistic awareness in the first language of learners, and then as predictors of success in learning Basque. In 2008, a graduate in Psychology, Dr. Donatella Fulgenzi, found that a given score of the Italian TAM-2 was a critical value that could discriminate between children with or without school anxiety, as measured by a specific test. This suggested that, below a given level of metalinguistic awareness, children felt the school milieu as hostile to them. As the TAM-2 proved to be predictive of school anxiety Dr Fulgenzi created an experimental program to enhance metalinguistic awareness in fifth graders with poor metalinguistic scores on the TAM-2. At post-test, when these experimental children had improved their performance on the TAM-2, their anxiety decreased, as shown in a joint publication (Pinto, Fulgenzi, 2014). In 2012, a team of researchers of the University of Granada, Fernando De Haro and colleagues (2012) conducted a large-scale study using the whole Spanish THAM-2 with Spanish-speaking 12 year-old children, and showed that it was a good predictor of text composition in Spanish. In more recent times, a Danish researcher, Stine Marie Spellerberg, published a large-scale study (2016) where metalinguistic awareness, as measured by the Danish version of the TAM-2, proved to be a predictor of school achievement not only in reading but also in Mathematics. Lastly, a Turkish researcher, Dr. Ferhat Dolas, working at the University of Innsbruck under Prof. Ulrike Jessner's supervision, an authority in the field of metalinguistic awareness, showed that the Turkish version of the MAT-2 (Dolas, 2021) was a predictor of language aptitude.

**O.F., S.M.** From these studies it emerges that there have been several translations of the TAMs into other languages.

**M.A.P.** The translations of the Italian book on metalinguistic awareness (Pinto, 1999) into Spanish and English (Pinto et al., 1999, Pinto et al., 2000) generated other initiatives of translation, especially on the basis of the English book. In 2008, I received an email from a Chinese researcher who wished to translate some items of the English MAT-2 into Mandarin Chinese for her PhD thesis. When I asked her where she had learnt about the existence of

those tests she told me that it had been in Ulrike Jessner's book on metalinguistic awareness (Jessner, 2006), a very influential publication on the topic. When I read through the chapters addressing the definitions of the construct and the assessment tools, I noticed several detailed citations from my book of 1999, and the three TAMs were presented as the most complete instruments to assess metalinguistic awareness. In 2009, Prof S. El Euch, applied linguist at Québec-à Trois-Rivières University (Canada) asked for permission to translate the entire English book into French, and my favorable reply marked the beginning of a new collaboration, and a new stage in my participation to international research on metalinguistic awareness. As I became a member of the Canadian Association for Applied Linguistics/Association Canadienne de Linguistique Appliquée (CAAL/ACLA) in 2009, I started attending the annual conferences of the association. There I presented different aspects of my research with the TAMs and took advantage on my stays in Canada to supervise the translation of the book into French, which was finally published in 2015. All these experiences at the turn of 2010 suggested that there could be a broad community of researchers making use of the three TAMs in several languages, at least in Europe. In addition, the tests already translated could be validated, which would allow for suitable comparisons across different linguistic contexts.

**O.F., S.M.** You mean this has been the starting point of the MATEL project?

**M.A.P.** Precisely. In 2013, I applied for a European Lifelong Learning Project involving the researchers who had actively worked with the TAMs in Europe, in addition to Prof. El Euch, in Canada. The project was called MATEL, acronym for *Metalinguistic Awareness Tests in European Languages* and lasted from 2013 to 2015. The objectives were: 1) to translate the Italian TAM-2 and the TAM-3 into German (Prof. U. Jessner's team, University of Innsbruck), 2) validate the already existing Spanish THAM-2 and THAM-3 (Prof. M.P. Nuñez Delgado's team, University of Seville; Prof. D. Lasagabaster's team, University of the Basque country), and the already existing French THAM-3 (Prof. S. El Euch's team, University of Québec-à Trois-Rivières); 3) to produce videos showing the interactive and didactic use of the Spanish THAM-2 and THAM-3, the French THAM-3, and the Italian TAM-2 and TAM-3, and other teaching materials in all the languages of the project (Spanish, French, German, Italian). These materials were meant to show how the concept of metalinguistic awareness can be employed in classroom activities in distinct subjects: mathematics, history, geography, social sciences. The documentation of the project step by step, with its official presentations, material products such as the handbooks of the validated tests and all the teaching materials is now available in the following website: [www.pintomatel.com](http://www.pintomatel.com). From the end of the project in 2015, the website is updated yearly, adding every new product or news directly connected to the objectives of MATEL.

Interestingly, from 2015 onward, there have been further translations of the TAMs upon other researchers' initiative: the abovementioned TAM-2 into Danish by S.M. Spellerberg, from Aarhus University-Denmark (2016), the TAM-2 into Russian by Serena Veggetti, from Sapienza University of Rome – Italy ([www.pintomatel.com/follow-ups](http://www.pintomatel.com/follow-ups)) in 2016; the TAM-3 into Farsi by two Iranian researchers, Shahrzad Saif and Mohammad Rahimi, working at Laval University and UQAM (Québec, and Montreal, respectively, Canada ([www.pintomatel.com/follow-ups](http://www.pintomatel.com/follow-ups))); the whole Italian book on metalinguistic awareness into European Portuguese by A.P. Couceiro Figueira from the University of Coimbra – Portugal (Couceiro Figueira, Pinto, 2018), and the TAM-2 into Turkish by F. Dolas, from the University of Innsbruck (Dolas, 2021).

**O.F., S.M.** But your research on metalinguistic awareness wasn't limited to the TAMs.

**M.A.P.** Actually, there have been other forms and other tools to assess it but the common origin is an interest for the concept of awareness, due to theoretical and methodological reasons. Theoretical, based on my philosophical background, later revitalized by all the studies on metacognition from the 70s onward. Methodological, based on the Piagetian idea

I evoked when I explained why I added the justification questions in Hakes' metalinguistic tasks and thereby transformed the cognitive status of the test. Simply put, if you wish to grasp the authentic cognitive level of a given subject on a given task you cannot avoid exploring the way he/she *reasons* on the problem posed by that task, which means exploring the *type of arguments* the subject deems relevant to ground his/her responses. In this circumstance, I will focus on two strands of research I inaugurated in the first decade of 2000: awareness of nonverbal intelligence reasoning in relation to metalinguistic awareness, and metaphor comprehension as a special subarea of metalinguistic abilities.

Starting from nonverbal intelligence, as assessed by an emblematic test such as the Raven's Progressive Matrices (Raven et al., 1998), and the PM38 in particular, I wondered how people reason to find the requested solution, as the test requires increasingly complex principles of proportionality to choose a figure that meets all the relevant criteria to fill the blank that appears in a particular pattern. In spite of the figural nature of the patterns that compose the test, and in spite of the silent way in which one is requested to operate, it is very likely that there is some form of inner language that codifies aspects of the issue to solve, especially in case of doubt in the most complex items.

My research questions were: 1) how does one ensure that his/her own solution is the appropriate one? 2) How can the researcher be sure that what appears to be the right solution is *reliably appropriate*, in the sense that it is appropriately grounded? I will quote what I wrote more than ten years ago (Pinto et al., 2011: 39) « ...behind a good nonverbal solution to the matrices there may be any type of reasoning, from the most intuitive or even false, to a perfectly focused one. Similarly, behind an error there may be a simple « lazy » reasoning or a partially plausible thought or even a much more elaborate but inconsistent thought ». To bring to light the inner processing underlying the choice of the supposed right solution, I tried something very similar to what I had done with the TAMs. On the one hand, I respected the canonical request to select the figure one deems to be the right one among the range of possible figures, and assessed the solution according to the canonical scoring procedure. Then I requested to justify the chosen solution verbally. To assess these justifications, I created two scales: one for the appropriate solutions (C.ARG.S: Correct Argumentative Responses Solutions), grading from tautological responses, very similar to the tautological responses of the TAMs (« *it is this figure because it fits well, it's the right one, etc....* »), to responses that consider increasingly complex and relevant criteria, and one for the incorrect responses (I.ARG.S.: Incorrect Argumentative Responses Solutions). These also graded from tautological to increasingly complex explanations, that were all the more interesting in that they *showed the potentialities of reasoning* that could have led to the appropriate solution if they had considered all the relevant criteria at the time. This fine-grained graduality, both in the correct and in the incorrect argumentations, is probably the most revealing part of the exploration, the one which could be best exploited by teachers of scientific subjects.

**O.F., S.M.** And how was this methodology implemented in research?

**M.A.P.** I conducted two studies, one at high school and another at university level (Di Santo et al., 2007, and Pinto et al., 2012, respectively), each time addressing two main factors: gender and curriculum. Metalinguistic awareness was also considered by means of the TAM-3 to see the possible correlations between metacognitive awareness and metalinguistic awareness. The main results were that each factor influenced the performance. High school students from science curricula outperformed those from humanities in both the PM38 canonical score and the C.ARG.S, but not in the I.ARG.S, which was relatively predictable, but the interesting novelty concerned female students' performance: no difference with respect to male students as for the PM38 canonical score but significant better females' performance in the two argumentation scales, C.ARG.S and I.ARG.S. Reverting the outcomes of studies that report a systematic female inferiority in the PM38 from adolescence onward (Lynn, Irving, 2004), in my research female students outperformed their male counterpart when *the*

*conceptual level of the argumentation* was taken into account. Female superiority in argumentation was also attested in metalinguistic awareness, as measured by all of the TAM-3 scores. All the argumentative scores of the PM38 and the TAM-3 were highly correlated, which suggests a tight relationship between metacognitive awareness and metalinguistic awareness based on common argumentative abilities. Interestingly, a similar pattern appeared also with university students (Pinto et al., 2011), equally subdivided into science and humanities curricula, and male and female participants. When we compared science to humanities students on the canonical PM38 score, the former outperformed the latter but the reverse was true with the argumentative scores C.ARGS and I.ARGS. Likewise, when we compared male to female students, males outperformed females for the canonical PM38 score but females outperformed their male counterparts in the argumentative scores C.ARGS and I.ARGS., irrespective of the curriculum. Again, strong correlations were found between the two argumentative scores of the PM38, C.ARGS and I.ARGS, on the one hand, and the TAM-3 total ML and total test scores, on the other, confirming the tight linkage between argumentative abilities on both sides, metacognitive and metalinguistic.

**O.F.** This time, as a linguist, I would like to pose a question myself to both of you, Sergio and Maria Antonietta, as I know you are the authors of two tests of metaphor comprehension for children. How could you apply this argumentation-based methodology to such a fuzzy semantic domain as figurative language, and moreover to developing minds?

**M.A.P.** If I may reply on behalf of both Sergio and me, I would say that the first assumption to adopt is that children are thinking minds whose epistemic curiosity often addresses words, in form and meaning. This is not to say that they *know* meanings but that they often *reason and make hypotheses about them*. When Emilia Ferreiro and Ana Teberosky (1979) investigated children's representations of how the writing system works they were not interested in what children already knew about writing or in the prerequisites for learning to write. They applied a Piagetian methodology that believes in children as « epistemic subjects » able to search for consistency even when the object of knowledge is a cultural object (Ferreiro, 2019). Thus, it is not inappropriate to ask children what they think about the meaning of some « strange » usages such as metaphors, provided that the words contained in these metaphors evoke things or events they know by experience. This is the case of the so-called « sensory » metaphors, as in the example « The moon is a light bulb », an item of the Junior Metaphor Comprehension Test for children from 4 to 6 (Pinto et al., 2008). Secondly, the other relevant point is the *cognitive status* the adult attributes to the child in the directions of a metaphor comprehension task. We always asked children *what they thought a given metaphor meant, in their opinion*, and after a familiarization item presented as a game, jointly conducted. Thirdly, with metaphors we must give up the idea of a univocal « truth » and convert the concept of truth into the concepts of « plausibility » and « interpretation ». We therefore must look for *plausible interpretations*, grounded on the reconstruction of the features that can explain semantic commonalities and differences in the meanings evoked by a given metaphor.

**S.M.** I would like to add that, when we piloted the task that later became the Junior MCT, all based on sensory metaphors, we obtained a range of responses that perfectly fit into the three-regulation pattern we had just experienced with the TAM-1 for the same age range 4 to 6. The reappearance of responses fitting into that pattern suggested that children felt the metaphorical items as cognitive conflicts between meanings that looked incongruously associated. Actually, if the receiver of the metaphor feels this incongruence the reaction is justified because the author of the metaphor has created this incongruence *on purpose* to provoke surprise and force attention toward the novelty. If we frame metaphor as a form of semantic conflict it is not surprising that, in order to understand it we must recompose this conflict in such a way that every piece finds its place consistently in the whole sentence. Now this requirement meets exactly the criteria of gamma regulations in the equilibration schema we outlined regarding the metalinguistic abilities of the various TAMs. But aside

from this optimal level, which is rare at those early ages, we also found partial analyses of semantic features meeting the criterion of beta regulations, and also various forms of elusion or denial of the conflict, meeting the criterion of the alpha regulations. For instance, children might admit that a given metaphor has an acceptable meaning but based on literal or magic or metonymic interpretations, which are all nice ways to avoid the essentially provocative nature of the metaphor.

It is worthy to note that, when I later proposed a list of metaphors for a possible metaphor comprehension test for children 9 to 14 (the MCT, Pinto et al., 2006), and first analyzed the responses, I found very similar forms of avoidance of the conflict, again by means of literal and metonymical interpretations. The intermediate steps between total avoidance and optimal reconstruction of the conflict were more nuanced than in the Junior MCT but the assessment scale has the same profile in the two tests beyond differences in the complexity of the content and in the target age. Besides, the MCT can be considered as a test that measures a meta-semantic ability closely linked to the metalinguistic abilities of the TAM-2 at the same ages (9-14) just as the Junior MCT is a test that measures a meta-semantic ability closely linked to the metalinguistic abilities of the TAM-1 at the same ages (4-6). Both tests have been validated on Italian-speaking samples showing good psychometric properties, and are published in a Portuguese version as a first step for future validation in that language (Couceiro Figueira et al., 2023a, 2023b).

Last but not least, once validated and thus possessing age norms, these two metaphor comprehension tests have been extensively used in the screening of language abilities in clinical cases, especially in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who are known to have difficulties with figurative language and pragmatic abilities, and also in rare genetic syndromes like Klinefelter syndrome and agenesis of the corpus callosum (Melogno et al., 2012; Melogno et al., 2017a; Melogno et al., 2017b; Melogno et al., 2018; Melogno et al., 2020). More in general, it is of great help to have normative data on typical development, especially if based on finely-graded levels as in the two MCTs, in order to assess the severity and the nature of the gaps that separate atypical from typical itineraries. Furthermore, once these gaps are circumscribed, psychologists can devise trainings to help atypically-developing children to catch up with the typically-developing ones.

**O.F.** Now, I would like to express my own linguist's perspective about all this work on metalinguistic argumentation. When I came across Maria Antonietta's studies on bilingualism and metalinguistic awareness, what impressed me the most was precisely that free exploration of the thoughts people may formulate about language usages, even at preschool time, prior to any grammatical teaching. Now, this goes beyond Chomsky's idea of the speaker/hearer's insights about the acceptability/unacceptability of sentences because these insights are only based on yes-or-no judgments, which is precisely the epilinguistic level the ML questions of the TAMs intend to overcome. Furthermore, language awareness is not limited to grammar and acceptability issues but addresses a wide range of semiotic and semantic issues starting from the basic distinction between signifier and signified, which is still nebulous in preschoolers, as all the studies on that age range have shown so far.

So, what I discovered through the studies with the TAMs we conducted with Maria Antonietta, be it on Italian learners of L2 French or Norwegian monolingual children (Floquet et al., 2019) or on French monolinguals in France or else on French-speaking children in African countries (Floquet, Pinto, 2019; Boutin et al., 2022), was a whole world of « reasoning » on language *which linguists do not even suspect*. To me, on the contrary, it represented a challenge that oriented great part of my recent work on typical phenomena of the French language such as the « liaison » (Celata et al., 2020), the « gerund », reflexive verbs, and others (Floquet, Hanson, 2022) in a language awareness perspective inspired by the TAMs. The types of responses we obtained through the request for commentary or justification should stimulate

linguists to reflect on the theoretical grounds of their own models of language instead of rejecting this reasoning on language as being out of their field.

**O.F., S.M.** If you had to synthesize the long pathway you outlined so far, what would be the key concepts, and at which critical points?

**M.A.P.** As you already noticed, the idea of conflict as an activator of equilibration processes, which, in their most elaborated form (gamma regulations), raise the level of awareness, has been a constant in the itinerary I described. However, it wasn't until I knew this Piagetian schema that I could test its explanatory power in the study of children's language, which culminated in the construction of the metalinguistic tests, and their application in bilingual and/or second language situations. The interesting thing is that this schema sheds light also on how I developed my own awareness of the conflicts I periodically experienced at given historical moments. I wish to clarify that I am not mentioning those conflicts as a reason for complaining but, on the contrary, as opportunities for sharpening cognitive skills and widening the range of intellectual tools at my disposal.

In this vein, I described how the thinking style forged by my French education had to be modified when I entered university in Italy, and this effort, in the end, resulted in more flexible learning and communicative strategies and deeper historical sensitivity. When I started a totally new curriculum in Switzerland, nearly all my cultural background had to be reconsidered again. When I finally entered into the complexity of Piagetian psychology I had the impression of a genial synthesis between structuralism and diachrony, both in individual development and in the history of thinking. Doise and Mugny's socio-constructivism (1981), which I had known as a student in Geneva, also represented a convincing synthesis, in this case between individual equilibration and social mediation. Nevertheless, back to Italy, those syntheses were hardly known until at least the first half of the 80s. What room was there in the Italian academic context of the 70s for my freshly acquired Piagetian psychology? Once more, I had to activate my most elaborated mental regulations to incorporate new data in pre-existing schemes. In this case, the solution consisted in re-employing my previous psycholinguistic knowledge, enriching it with new sociolinguistic information, weighing strengths and weaknesses of contrasting positions about language and social class, and, ultimately, elaborating the construct of metalinguistic development the way I outlined above. The outcomes of this construct, as attested by the metalinguistic tests I created, have been employed in national and international research much beyond my expectations, which makes me consider them as the final accomplishment of my scientific itinerary. Lastly, If I had to synthesize this itinerary in a final sentence, I would say that it consisted in a construction and a *periodical reconstruction of a meta-level* by recomposing each time cognitive, linguistic and cultural conflicts.

I wish to thank you again for this wonderful opportunity, and, by the same token, to thank also all the authors who so generously accepted to participate in this Festschrift. Last, but not least, I wish to thank my husband and my daughter, whose love and esteem have played such a relevant part in the awareness of my work.

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PART II  
AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS



# From Metalinguistic to Multilingual Awareness : Testing Language Awareness in Mono- and Multilinguals<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper focuses on meta- and crosslinguistic awareness as key components of the multilingual system and multilingual competence (Hofer, 2022, 2023; Jessner, 2006, 2008). Starting with a historical perspective of the conceptualization of metalinguistic awareness differences in metalinguistic awareness in learner groups in North and South Tyrol will be presented and finally compared to latest developments in multilingual testing, thereby drawing the attention of the reader to the qualitative differences between metalinguistic and multilingual testing.

**KEYWORDS:** Metalinguistic awareness, m(ultilingualism)factor, metacognition, multicompetence, multilingual assessment.

This contribution pays homage to Maria Antonietta Pinto whose copious scholarly work has enriched our current understanding of metalinguistic awareness and has been an inspiration to our own research.

## I. Introduction

The importance of metalinguistic awareness for language learning and development has been extensively documented in international research. Metalinguistic awareness has been linked to enhanced language processing and improved performance in linguistic and general cognitive tasks (Jessner, Törok, Pellegrini, 2018; Oliveria, Anca, 2009; Pinto et al., 2011). « Better development of metalinguistic and metacognitive processes », it is argued, « helps the child exercise greater control over his cognitive processes and makes them more effective, improving the level of performance of the child in a variety of intellectual and scholastic tasks » (Mohanty, 1994: 92). In support of this, research has found that metalinguistic awareness plays a central role in literacy development (Riehl, 2021: 2) – writing attainment in particular (Chen, Myhill, 2016: 101) –, and in third language acquisition (Jessner, 2019: 221). Moreover, there are specific indications that metalinguistic awareness overlaps with what is generally referred to as language aptitude (Jessner, 2006: 64; Rauch et al., 2011: 405; Singleton, 2014: 562).

Early claims that explicit knowledge about language is of limited or no use to the acquisition process (Gombert, 1992: 62; Young-Scholten, 1999: 8) are today widely dismissed while acknowledgement that awareness of the structural and functional features of language can

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sharpen learners' metalinguistic abilities and increase their understanding of how language works is growing. Pointing to the resulting pedagogical implications, Chen, Myhill (2018: 101) argue that future-oriented curricula will need to acknowledge « the potential for metalinguistic knowledge to support learners in becoming confident and successful users of language ».

In multilingualism research there is substantive interest in *multilingual awareness and skills*, i.e., the mental procedures that underpin learners' ability to consciously access and manipulate language and turn the resources in their multilingual repertoire to good account. This trend is spurred by empirical data which point to metalinguistic and metacognitive functions as critical for the successful activation and transfer of knowledge in the multilingual mind and as facilitative of multilingual learning.

Following this line of research, the present paper concerns itself with meta- and crosslinguistic awareness as key components of the multilingual system and multilingual competence (Jessner, 2006). The paper presents selective findings from studies which explore how children and teenage learners in different sociolinguistic and educational settings perform on measures of meta- and crosslinguistic thinking and agency and how prior experience with languages influences multilingual awareness (henceforth MLA). We start out with a conceptual delineation of the notion of metalinguistic awareness and provide a brief historical sketch of scholarship on the topic. This is followed by the discussion of research into metalinguistic awareness in multilingual learner groups in North and South Tyrol. Next, new approaches to assessing multilingual awareness are presented. The introduction of these innovative test procedures marks an important transition from metalinguistic testing to multilingual testing. Finally, the conclusion provides a summary and outlook.

## II. Defining Metalinguistic Awareness

A plethora of definitions of metalinguistic awareness has been proffered over the years with scholars adopting widely disparate positions regarding their conceptual reality and implementation (cf. Gombert, 1992 for a book-length discussion of the notion) and, it is fair to say, consensus on the matter is still a long way off. Early on Tunmer et al. (1984: 12) defined metalinguistic awareness as:

« the ability to reflect upon and manipulate the structural features of [...] language, treating language [...] as an object of thought, as opposed to simply using the language system to comprehend and produce sentences ».

Similarly, Bialystok (1991: 114) describes metalinguistic awareness as: « the ability to focus attention on language as an object in itself or to think abstractly about language and, consequently, to play with language ». Derived from this is the recognition that metalinguistic awareness allows individuals to have more conscious control over their language, and that it enhances their participation in learning (Chen, Myhill, 2016: 100).

Jessner (2008: 278) states that « the most explicit expression of metalinguistic awareness » is the use of metalanguage – such as elicited through test-takers' metalinguistic comments in the MAT (Metalinguistic Ability Test; Pinto et al., 1999), for instance. Of course, metalanguage does not alone index awareness of structural/functional properties of language, nor does it necessarily determine a speaker's level of proficiency, but it does – as a visible display of what children know about language – afford us a glimpse of how students reflect « on the properties of the systems of language » (Schleppegrell, 2013: 164) and « what goes together to make meaning » (Schleppegrell, 2013: 165). In addition, the study of learners' metalinguistic reports can be useful « for investigating the relative roles of a multilingual's languages in language production » (Jessner, 2005: 66). Further attention to metalinguistic talk might also, as pointed out by Jessner (2005: 66), increase our understanding of individual variation in multilingual acquisition and use.

Interest in the construct of (meta-)linguistic awareness dates back to the late 1800s when early scholarship in Germany and Holland first sparked an LA movement which defined its aim as turning « the youngster into a keen observer and a shrewd judge [of language use by] teaching him how to compare and how to distinguish, [by making him] find things out for himself » in order that he may become an « authoritative controller of his own language use » (van den Bosch, 1903 in van Essen, 2008: 5; square brackets added). Later, in the 1960s an important body of literature on LA came from the United Kingdom where discontent about institutionalized language teaching and learning had been growing for some time. The impact and purview of the British LA movement was such that it presently spawned a new teaching approach which came to be known as *Language in Use*. The aim was to « develop in pupils and students awareness of what language is and how it is used and at the same time, to extend their competence in handling the language » (Doughty et al., 1971 in van Essen, 2008: 8).

Based on the understanding that metalinguistic awareness is a crucial dimension of all language development, MLA – and its cognitive basis – has come to constitute a major research focus for academics studying TLA and multilingualism (see Hofer, Jessner, 2022; Riehl, 2021: 1). With robust empirical evidence to suggest that metalinguistic awareness is enhanced in bilinguals (Bialystok et al., 2014: 189; Kovacevic, 2008 : 112), consensus is growing that competences in several languages will result in higher levels of metalinguistic awareness and abilities (Jessner, 2014: 177) and increased multilingual agency (Hofer, 2017). Bialystok (2011) notes that « individuals who spend their lives engaged in more than one language reveal differences from their monolingual counterparts in both brain organization and cognitive performance » adding that « it is logical to expect that linguistic processing and ability would be different for those who have a unique linguistic experience » (Bialystok, 2011 : 233). Over time, research has not only shown that metalinguistic awareness is heightened in users of more languages but also that it develops earlier in multilinguals than in monolinguals. Multilingual children have been observed to reflect and comment on linguistic properties and functions from an early age, comparing and drawing parallels between the languages in their mind, and they have been found to develop different strategies from less language-experienced children (Grenfell, Harris, 2015: 19). This said, it is difficult to establish with any degree of certainty what precisely the links are between metalinguistic awareness and language proficiency, whether there is a causal relationship, and if so, what the directionality of such a relation is (cf. M-effect as proposed by Jessner, 2013).

### III. Testing Metalinguistic Awareness

As for the research available to date, it is true to say that the field is very much indebted to Italian psychologist Maria Antonietta Pinto (1995). Pinto and her team at Sapienza University of Rome have been decisive in moving the study of metalinguistic abilities forward. Pinto (1999), and then Pinto et al. (1999) proposed the first comprehensive test battery which allowed for a systematic investigation of metalinguistic awareness in different age groups from pre-schoolers to adults. The tests have been employed in various contexts in Europe (Lasagabaster, 2001; Spellerberg, 2015) and America (El Euch, 2010, Woll, 2017) and have provided us with novel insights into the emergence and evolution of metalinguistic thinking and ability. The MAT (Metalinguistic Ability Test) stands out from earlier procedures in as far as the single tests are comprised of several complementary subparts targeted at eliciting testees' analytical capacities in a whole range of tasks in L1. Tasks require abstract understanding of the concept of words in the MAT-1 for instance, apprehension of semantico-grammatical and phonemic properties of language in the case of MAT-2, and a good grasp of denotative and normative use of language and comprehension of figurative-metaphorical

uses in the case of MAT-3. In addition, there is a metalinguistic dimension which taps into test-takers' « ability to discuss explicitly what clues are relevant to the formulation of an answer, and [...] classify them according to categories and general grammatical rules » (Pinto et al., 1999 : 55), together with their familiarity with metalanguage and the specific grammatical terminology. While there can be no doubt that the MAT much more aptly captures metalinguistic awareness and ability than any of the previously deployed devices, the question of how best to operationalise and measure metalinguistic awareness is complex and will require further theoretical consideration. This said, application of the MAT in research in North and South Tyrol has ascertained the usefulness of the test instrument. Hofer (2015) investigated whether Italian L1 learners in bi- and multilingual educational programmes in two Italian primary schools develop higher metalinguistic competences and achieve higher performance levels in L2 and L3 than their counterparts in traditional programmes. The focus of her research was on the impact of early, high-intensity L2 and L3 input on pupils' ( $n=85$ ) development of metalinguistic awareness and skill in their first language, Italian, and on attainment in L2 German and L3 English. An abridged version of the MAT-2 (in Italian) as well as a German and English language test were administered for this purpose. The statistical evaluation of the data showed that the children in the multilingual models performed significantly better on all measures, including the metalinguistic tasks, than their peers in the regular programmes. The findings confirm the metalinguistic advantage assumed for multilinguals as mentioned earlier.

In a more recent study in German-language schools in South Tyrol, Hofer (2023) employed the MKT-2, (Jessner et al. 2015), the German version of the MAT-2. The study is part of a larger research into multilingual competences, strategy use and attitudes in young learners in varyingly multilingual life ecologies. The results for this research are mixed with one of the multilingually educated learner groups (immersed in relatively monolingual out-of-school surroundings) performing very high on the MAT-2, and another multilingually-instructed group (in a highly multilingual out-of-school context) performing below expectations, and no clear overall advantage for the more multilingual cohorts over their more monolingual peers. With this said, group composition for the multilingually instructed children was highly heterogeneous, which makes a comparison with other – predominantly German-monolingual year groups – difficult.

The MAT-3 was designed to measure the metalinguistic abilities of late adolescents (16 years onwards) and adults (Pinto, 1999; Pinto, Iliceto, 2007). Metalinguistic abilities have been gaining in importance in secondary and tertiary education, in the professions and in daily life due to the growing complexity of the requirements in these fields (cf. Jessner et al., 2015 : 8-9). Similarly to the MAT-2, the MAT-3 distinguishes between linguistic and metalinguistic questions and answers. Its three metalinguistic parts focus (a) on the comprehension of qualitative, temporal, morphological, and spatio-temporal relations, (b) on the acceptability of normative uses of language, and (c) on the figurative comprehension of metaphors, advertising slogans and excerpts from poems. Its German version, the MKT-3 (Jessner et al., 2015) was piloted in South Tyrol in two high schools where German is the language of instruction. While participants of this sample ( $n = 44$ ) « performed equally well at the *implicit* level of metalinguistic awareness » (Candilera et al., 2015 : 122) like the Italian normative sample, clearly superior performances were found at the *explicit* metalinguistic level in the much smaller German-speaking sample. Possible reasons could be the school system which

might have enhanced sensitivity to L1 German as well as to the other surrounding languages such as L2 Italian, and other curricular languages such as L3 English. One class additionally also had L4 Spanish or Russian instruction as well as Latin. These students outperformed their peers in several items. Latin instruction was certainly advantageous with items of the MKT-3 which referred to a word of Latin origin or which contained a play on words that used a Latin expression (Jessner, Török, Pellegrini, 2018: 99). Further validation studies with the German MKT-3 should be encouraged in other German-speaking countries in Europe (Germany, Austria, Switzerland).

#### **IV. From Metalinguistic to Multilingual Testing**

More recently, with multilingualism as the propounded new norm, the field has seen a shift in focus from metalinguistic to multilingual awareness as a special awareness of linguistic forms and structures across languages. In comparison to metalinguistic awareness, multilingual awareness extends to several languages and refers to that special multi-lingual resourcefulness which manifests in multilingual learners' efficacy in tackling multi-lingual situations. It includes meta- and crosslinguistic awareness, the former denoting « a speaker's knowledge about linguistic forms and functions in one or several languages », and the latter relating to « knowledge about the links between languages (notably similarities and differences, etymological relationships, etc.) » (Hofer, Jessner, 2022). Multilingual awareness and ability are closely linked to language learning, language management and language maintenance skills.

Research in this young field is still scarce, however (Riehl, 2021). First attempts to study multilingual awareness and skill have been undertaken by members of the DyME research team under Ulrike Jessner (« Leopold Franzens » University-Innsbruck, see below). DyME operates from within a DMM framework and is premised on a dynamic apprehension of MLA as both resulting from multilingualism and at the same time driving multilingual development. The DMM (Herdina, Jessner, 2002) discusses multilingual development within a systems theoretic framework and highlights the advantages that contact with multiple languages can provide. With particular relevance to the present discussion, DMM posits a special metasystem which is the result of a so-called Multilingualism- or M-effect. This system is unique to the multilingual speaker in so far as it is grounded in a multilingual conception of norm rather than on a monolingual standard (Jessner, 2005: 57). Metalinguistic and crosslinguistic awareness are central components of this metasystem and key to learners' multilingual proficiency. An emergent property of multiple psycholinguistic systems in interaction, the metasystem develops in experienced learners as a function of their extensive contact with languages and comes with important changes of quality in language learning and special (meta-)linguistic and (meta-)cognitive skills. Jessner (2005) notes that what these skills have in common is their relatedness to a heightened level of metalinguistic awareness in multilingual learners.

Studies carried out in different multilingual contexts (Allgäuer-Hackl, 2017; Bono, 2011; De Angelis, Jessner, 2012; Hofer, 2015; Lasagabaster, 1997) have furnished reliable data to this effect. Extensive experience with multiple codes, it has been shown, changes individuals' approach to languages, making « structural patterns more noticeable » and hastening « the child's attention to the systematic features of language » (Bialystok, 2004 : 134). In the process, the child develops more refined control mechanisms (Bialystok et al., 2009 : 89) and « more sensitive means for controlling attention to linguistic input » (Bialystok, 1992 : 510).

The understanding is that the joint activation of languages in the mind and the continuous recourse to a (general-purpose) executive control network for language selection and processing cause speakers of two or more languages to develop enhanced control functions (Bialystok, 2011: 229).

Inspired by Pinto's Metalinguistic Abilities Tests (MATs), Hofer, Jessner (2019) designed a multilingual test procedure (the Multilingual Competence Test or MCT) which measures 9-12-year-olds' awareness of linguistic peculiarities in and across nine different languages: German, Italian and English as their curricular languages, and six additional languages including Ladin (the 3<sup>rd</sup> official language in South Tyrol), French, Spanish, Swedish, Dutch and Danish. At the current point of time, the MCT is available in German. Translation into English and Italian is in planning. Tasks are designed to capture two dimensions of multilingual awareness: an applied and a reflective one. The former targets children's capability to carry out concrete multilingual operations, including the identification of grammatical synonymy across languages, crosslingual error detection and correction, target language text production and translation etc.; the latter assesses children's capacity to provide written verbalisations of their metalinguistic cognitions, i.e., an explicit account of their language-related reflections during task completion. It is this specific type of task, which, we should like to underscore, opens up an all-important window onto the metacognitive processes that subserve multilingual functions in young learners and allow for new valuable insights into the workings of the multilingual mind.

The MCT was piloted with a group of German-speaking children in the province of South Tyrol and was subsequently implemented in a study conducted by Hofer (cf. Hofer, Jessner, 2019a; Hofer, 2023). The study looks into the specific nature of multilingual competences as exhibited by pupils ( $n=209$ ) in monolingual rural and multilingual urban areas. It compares 5 learner groups – i.e., 10-year-old primary schoolers in their 5<sup>th</sup> and final year – with different amounts of contact and experience with L2 Italian and L3 English. All the children attended German-speaking schools but not all children were native speakers of German; some had Italian- or heritage-language background or they were growing up in bilingual homes. Three groups were enrolled in regular programmes, 2 groups received multilingual education. The statistical analysis revealed important performance differences between the more multilingually experienced children versus those who live and study in more monolingual surroundings, with the former significantly outdoing the latter on the MCT, thereby supporting earlier work by De Angelis, Jessner (e.g., 2012). The multilingual advantage turned out to be particularly stark for the applied dimension in the MCT, which requires a good level of lexico-structural/grammatical understanding and analytical skill, and the transfer of linguistic knowledge across languages. For a detailed account of the results, the reader is referred to Hofer, 2023). Suffice it to say here that the findings are auspicious and point to enhanced multilingual skill and agency in children who are immersed in multilingual environments, both natural and formal.

In another study investigating trilingual teenage learners' MeLA (metalinguistic awareness), Spechtenhauser (2021) adapted the MAT-2 to the requirements of her special research setting to include tasks in German, Italian and English. Spechtenhauser's participants were enrolled in a German-language lower secondary school. The primary aim of this study was to examine students' metalinguistic awareness in all three curricular languages and to establish how the participants, who after the MeLA testing phases were divided into a LowMeLA, MediumMeLA and HighMeLA group (according to their mean levels of MeLA), decode a novel, unfamiliar language system.

In a very recent Turkish study exploring working memory in gifted language learning, an abridged version of MAT-2 was used to study the relationship between metalinguistic awareness with working memory. The significant relationship which was evidenced between multilingual learning and working memory will certainly lead to more interest in this kind of research (see Dolas et al., 2021).

## V. Conclusion

This paper has traced new trends in metalinguistic testing. From early views of explicit language awareness as hardly conducive to learning, the field of applied linguistics has moved on not only to recognise the potential of metalinguistic awareness for all learning, but to make this concept a central concern of its research. In tune with the multilingual turn which has seen recent scholarship take a keen interest in the operations of the multilingual mind, the focus has again shifted giving currency to multilingual awareness as the special manifestation of metalinguistic understanding in multilinguals. DyME research at Innsbruck University has contributed to this paradigm change – with empirical data and the provision of new innovative test procedures. Concluding, it is hoped that our work will stimulate more much-needed research in the field and that the pioneering work that our jubilarian initiated in the outgoing 20th century may be carried forward in the years to come.

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# « Claudio Abbado assaggiava una pesca? » Consapevolezza metalinguistica nei processi di intercomprendensione spontanea del catalano in studenti italiani<sup>1</sup>

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**TITLE:** « *Did Claudio Abbado taste a peach? » The role of metalinguistic awareness in spontaneous intercomprehension processes of Catalan in Italian-speaking students.*

**ABSTRACT:** This contribution illustrates and discusses the intercomprehension (IC) ability of Italian-speaking university students reading texts in Catalan, elicited through the techniques of transposition of meaning and Think-Aloud Pair Problem Solving (TAPPS), in relation to the level of metalinguistic awareness in their L1, as measured through an adapted version of the Italian « Test di abilità metalinguistiche n. 3 » (TAM-3; Pinto, 1999; eng. MAT-3, Metalinguistic Ability Test n.3). We present data from a pilot study with a small sample aimed at analyzing the relationship between multilingual competence emerging in IC processes, and metalinguistic awareness. Despite the fact that metalinguistic competence plays a central role in FL/L2 learning (Bialystok, 1991, 2001, 2011; Cenoz, Hufeisen, Jessner, 2003; Jessner, 2006), and sometimes a greater role than multilingual knowledge (Spellerberg, 2015), there are rather few contributions in the field of IC focusing on the role of this aspect when reading texts written in languages little or not at all known by the readers. From our analysis, a partial correspondence emerges between the scores obtained in the TAM-3 and the way the informants performed the meaning transposition tasks in L1 and the TAPPS. Most importantly, it is shown that informants at the highest level of the TAM-3 display a strategic behaviour, particularly when it comes to solving comprehension obstacles consisting of words that are considered opaque. The scores obtained by the informants are compared and the profiles of some of them are presented in order to illustrate the main characteristics of each level.

**KEYWORDS:** Metalinguistic awareness, TAM-3, intercomprehension, reading comprehension, plural repertoires, university students.

## I. Intercomprendensione e consapevolezza metalinguistica

La consapevolezza metalinguistica (CML), intesa come «la possibilité que nous avons de nous éléver au-dessus de la langue, de nous en abstraire, de la contempler»<sup>2</sup> in base alla definizione del linguista francese Émile Benveniste (1974: 228-229), ha uno stretto rapporto con l'apprendimento di L2/LS, come dimostrano numerosi studi condotti su soggetti bilingui (Bialystok, 1991, 2001; Cenoz, 2003; Cenoz et al., 2003; Jessner, 2006; Lasagabaster, 2001).

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<sup>2</sup> It: « ...la possibilità che abbiamo di elevarci al di sopra della lingua, di astrarcene, di contemplarla ».

Ad esempio, i parlanti bilingui mostrerebbero una maggiore capacità di controllo dell'attenzione sulla lingua rispetto ai monolingui (Bialystok, 2001).

Nell'ambito della ricerca sull'intercomprensione (IC), definita come la capacità di comprendere lingue mai apprese in precedenza sfruttando le somiglianze tra più lingue presenti nel repertorio degli apprendenti (Meißner, 2003: 31; Beacco et al., 2016: 56), si fa spesso riferimento al rapporto tra CML e IC. Da un lato, infatti, l'IC viene considerata un'attività didattica che può sviluppare la capacità di riflettere sulle lingue e il linguaggio ed avere quindi importanti ricadute sulla CML di chi la pratica. Dall'altro lato, si riconosce che il grado di capacità di riflessione sulla lingua incide positivamente sulla capacità di IC. Ciononostante, le ricerche empiriche sul ruolo della CML nella capacità di IC sono ancora molto scarse (Fioranza, 2019; Iannelli, 2018).

La complessità degli aspetti che intervengono nel processo di comprensione di una L2 non rende facile la ricerca in questo campo. Isolare e analizzare i singoli fattori coinvolti in questo percorso non è un'operazione semplice: le variabili in gioco sono numerose (età, L1, altre L2, motivazione ecc.), la loro interazione è solo parzialmente prevedibile (cfr. teoria della lingua come *complex adaptive system CAS*, Ellis, Larsen-Freeman, 2009), e inoltre differenti strumenti e metodologie di ricerca conducono spesso a risultati non comparabili.

Il presente contributo parte da due presupposti:

1. un buon livello di CML stimola la creazione di strategie di apprendimento e una comprensione più rapida delle caratteristiche strutturali delle lingue sconosciute (Jessner, 2006; Lasagabaster, 2001);
2. il livello di intercomprensione spontanea degli individui è ampiamente variabile.

## II. Metodo

### Obiettivi

Il presente lavoro si inserisce nel progetto di ricerca METIC (Metalinguaggio e Intercomprensione) che, partendo da evidenze empiriche, intende esplorare la relazione tra il livello di consapevolezza metalinguistica e i processi di IC messi in atto da parlanti di varie L1. Per confrontare le due dimensioni, il livello di CML degli informanti viene rilevato attraverso il Test di abilità metalinguistiche n. 3 (TAM-3, Pinto, Iliceto 2007), in una forma adattata della sua versione italiana originaria. I processi di IC sono elicitati attraverso un compito di trasposizione di senso di un testo in una lingua romanza non conosciuta dagli informanti, mentre verbalizzano i loro pensieri in un'attività di *Think-Aloud Pair Problem Solving* (TAPPS). Il database del progetto, ad oggi, è costituito dai risultati del test TAM-3 ottenuti da un gruppo di 140 informanti e da un corpus di 232 trasposizioni di senso in italiano di testi dal portoghese, spagnolo, catalano, francese e romeno, prodotte dagli stessi informanti. Tali trasposizioni sono state trascritte e analizzate secondo un approccio integrato, *corpus-based* e *corpus-driven* (cfr. Tognini Bonelli, 2001), con l'ausilio del sistema di griglie GARS (cfr. fra gli altri, Blanche-Benveniste et al., 1979; Bonvino et al., 2009), annotate con il programma NVivo. La fase di annotazione è ancora in corso.

La natura di questo contributo è esplorativa in quanto presentiamo i risultati preliminari di un'analisi qualitativa, condotta su un sotto-campione di 12 informanti del database che ha svolto il compito in lingua catalana (vedi Appendice). L'obiettivo di questo lavoro è duplice: da una parte, intendiamo esaminare l'efficacia della trasposizione e del TAPPS per osservare e valutare la competenza di IC e delle relative griglie di valutazione del compito di IC<sup>3</sup>; dall'altra, indaghiamo le possibili corrispondenze tra i livelli di CML e quelli di IC.

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<sup>3</sup> La presente analisi è di tipo prevalentemente esplorativo e qualitativo; per gli aspetti quantitativi rimandiamo a Bonvino et al. (in preparazione).

## Partecipanti<sup>4</sup>

Hanno partecipato allo studio 12 studenti (11 femmine; 1 maschio) del Dipartimento di Lingue, Culture e Letterature Straniere dell'Università degli Studi Roma Tre, il cui profilo linguistico è stato ottenuto sulla base della loro biografia linguistica (cfr. Molinié, 2006; Cognigni, 2020; Melo-Pfeifer, Calvo Del Olmo, 2021), basato sulle informazioni riportate nella Tabella 1.

Trattandosi di informazioni autodichiarate, non indichiamo il livello di conoscenza delle lingue seconde ma solo la presenza di tali lingue nel repertorio degli informanti. Nel sottocampione sono stati selezionati solo parlanti di italiano L1. Come si evince dalla tabella, nel gruppo sono presenti due bilingui precoci (TAP21-M3 e TAP21-R1). Tutti gli informanti hanno nel repertorio linguistico almeno un'altra lingua romanza oltre all'italiano e tutti hanno dichiarato di conoscere l'inglese e lo spagnolo, tranne TAP21-R1.

Informante	FR*	ES	PO	IT	Dial. IT. **	EN	DE	RU	Altre lingue	Tot. lingue	Tot. lingue romanze
TAP21-B1	•	•		L1		•				4	3
TAP21-B2	•	•		L1		•	•	•		6	3
TAP21-C1	•	•		L1	•	•				5	3
TAP21-C2	•	•	•	L1		•				5	4
TAP21-D1	•	•		L1		•				4	3
TAP21-D1		•		L1	•	•	•			5	2
TAP21-F1	•	•		L1		•			JA	5	3
TAP21-M1	•	•		L1		•		•		5	3
TAP21-M2	•	•		L1	••	•				6	3
TAP21-M3	•	L1		L1		•	•			5	3
TAP21-P1	•	•		L1	•	•				5	3
TAP21-R1	L1			L1						2	2

**Tabella 1.** Repertorio linguistico degli informanti (\*le sigle per le lingue seguono le norme ISO; \*\* sono segnalati gli informanti che hanno dichiarato di conoscere un dialetto italiano).

## Strumenti e criteri di analisi

### IC e TAPPS

Per valutare la IC, sono stati utilizzati due compiti, fra loro interconnessi:  
a) *IC con trasposizione di senso*; b) *Think-Aloud Pair Problem Solving* (TAPPS).

<sup>4</sup> Desideriamo ringraziare le studentesse e gli studenti dell'Università Roma Tre che hanno partecipato alla sperimentazione. Un ringraziamento speciale va alla dott.ssa Daniela Zini per aver contribuito alla raccolta e alla sistematizzazione dei dati, in particolare delle biografie linguistiche e dei TAM-3. Un doveroso ringraziamento va inoltre al professore Paolo Illiceto per la sua disponibilità nella fase di analisi dei dati relativi al TAM-3.

### a) IC con trasposizione di senso

Il compito di IC riguarda la lettura e comprensione di un testo in catalano, qui riportato in appendice, lingua mai studiata in precedenza dai partecipanti<sup>5</sup>. Il testo è un estratto di articolo di giornale pubblicato on-line e incluso fra i testi di EuRom5 (Bonvino et al., 2011b), costituito da 182 parole, dal titolo « Crema el millor auditori del món ». Nel complesso, il testo risulta molto comprensibile per un parlante italofono, grazie a numerosi elementi lessicali e morfosintattici trasparenti. Il protocollo prevede che ciascun partecipante faccia una *trasposizione di senso in L1* (Bonvino et al., 2011a), cioè una sorta di traduzione all'impronta del testo catalano in italiano. L'obiettivo di questa attività è l'elicitazione e la condivisione, tramite verbalizzazione, dei processi di comprensione.

### b) Il Think-Aloud Pair Problem Solving (TAPPS)

Il *Think-Aloud Pair Problem Solving* (TAPPS) è una tecnica che consiste nell'attività di elicazione del pensiero ad alta voce per svolgere attività di *problem solving* in modo collaborativo (Whimbey, Lochhead, 1986). Attraverso il TAPPS, gli studenti coinvolti hanno il vantaggio di « [...] rehearse the concepts, relate them to existing frameworks, and produce a deeper understanding of the material »<sup>6</sup> (Slavin, 1995). Per il presente studio abbiamo combinato le due tecniche, chiedendo agli studenti di svolgere il TAPPS mentre effettuavano la trasposizione di senso in L1, assumendo, a turno, il ruolo di traduttore e di ascoltatore. Mentre uno studente trasponeva il testo in L1, l'altro studente registrava e sollecitava il traduttore, nel caso questi rimanesse in silenzio. Le trasposizioni di senso sono state trascritte<sup>7</sup> e analizzate secondo i seguenti tre parametri:

- Nuclei informativi (NI): il testo originale è stato suddiviso nelle sue unità informative minime. Le unità risultanti sono sei. Le unità sono state messe in griglia e confrontate con le trascrizioni del sotto-campione. Ad ogni unità trasposta è stato attribuito un punteggio da 0 a 3, di modo che il punteggio massimo accumulato per tutti i nuclei informativi fosse di 18. I risultati ottenuti sono stati suddivisi in tre livelli (inferiore/medio/superiore) in base alla distribuzione effettiva dei punteggi del campione (Tabella 2).
- Gestione delle basi di transfer (BdT): per BdT (Meißner 2004, 2021; Berthele, 2011; Bonvino, Garbarino, 2022) si intendono tutti quegli elementi che presentano un elevato grado di trasparenza, ovvero un alto livello di somiglianza formale e semantica con l'italiano (es. Catalano: *incendi, famosa, mentre* ecc.), e che non dovrebbero rappresentare una difficoltà per un parlante di italiano L1. Il totale delle BdT individuate è di 156 (85% del totale del testo). Per ogni elemento non tradotto è stato sottratto un punto. Dal momento che i punteggi ottenuti rispetto a questo parametro sono risultati piuttosto alti (> 85.53%), è stato deciso di non suddividerli in livelli.

<sup>5</sup> Anche se il compito di IC richiesto agli studenti riguarda la semplice comprensione di un testo scritto, consideriamo che si tratti di IC e non di semplice comprensione, in quanto il testo riguarda una lingua affine mai appresa in precedenza dagli informanti; pertanto i processi messi in atto riguardano prevalentemente il transfer positivo e l'analogia, che sono presenti anche in qualsiasi processo di comprensione di una L2, ma che in IC sono predominanti. Gli informanti non sono in grado di parlare o scrivere nella lingua target; pertanto, la comprensione si inserisce in una modalità di comunicazione in cui gli interlocutori si esprimono nella propria lingua e comprendono la lingua dell'altro, quindi una modalità in IC; vi è inoltre una forte interazione fra il testo e il repertorio linguistico-culturale del soggetto, in quanto, per risolvere il compito, questi ha bisogno di mettere in campo tutte le conoscenze (linguistiche) pregresse (Bonvino, Garbarino, 2022: 86).

<sup>6</sup> It: "...ripassare i concetti, collegarli agli schemi pre-esistenti e produrre una comprensione più profonda del materiale".

<sup>7</sup> Per la trascrizione è stato adottato il sistema jeffersoniano semplificato (Pallotti, 1999).

- Gestione delle parole opache (PO): per parole opache si intendono tutti quegli elementi che presentano un basso grado di trasparenza (es. Catalano: *peça*, It: pezzo; Catalano: *nens*, It: bambini; Catalano: *amb*, It: con; Catalano: *groc*, It: giallo), o che etimologicamente sono collegati ad un elemento lessicale italiano che tuttavia ha un'accezione diversa da quella dell'elemento catalano (es. Catalano: *crema*, It.: brucia). Il totale delle PO individuate nel testo catalano è di 27 (15% del totale del testo). Ad ogni elemento trasposto correttamente in italiano è stato attribuito 1 punto, oppure 0.5 punti se trasposto in modo approssimativo. Anche per questo parametro abbiamo suddiviso i risultati ottenuti in tre livelli (inferiore/medio/superiore) in base alla distribuzione effettiva dei punteggi del campione (Tabella 2).

LIVELLO	MIN./MAX.	NI	PO (%)
Inferiore	Min.	9	19.23
	Max.	11	39.80
Intermedio	Min.	12	39.90
	Max.	14	60.30
Superiore	Min.	15	60.40
	Max.	17	80.80
<b>Totale</b>	Min.	9	0
	Max. (effettivi)	17	80.80
	Max. (potenziali)	18	100

**Tabella 2.** Livello inferiore/intermedio/superiore relativo ai punteggi TAPPS (NI e PO).

I nuclei informativi (NI) restituiscono la misura della comprensione generale del testo e costituiscono il parametro in base al quale abbiamo individuato i livelli. A questo parametro fondamentale abbiamo aggiunto i due parametri relativi alla gestione delle parole trasparenti e delle parole opache per raffinare l'analisi.

### Il TAM-3

Il TAM-3 (Test di abilità metalinguistiche n.3, Pinto, 1999; Pinto, Iliceto, 2007) è un test che misura la capacità di riflettere sulla lingua, sui suoi significati, sulle sue forme grammaticali dai 16 anni circa, in poi<sup>8</sup>, e cioè negli anni che vanno dal liceo fino all'età adulta avanzata. Il test si compone di tre prove metalinguistiche:

- due prove di carattere metasemantico:
  - la prova di « Comprensione », incentrata sugli usi convenzionali del linguaggio che misura la comprensione dei rapporti di significato di tipo qualitativo, temporale, morfologico e spazio-temporale, attraverso 8 item costituiti da coppie di frasi;
  - la prova di « Linguaggio figurato », incentrata sugli usi creativi del linguaggio.
- una prova di carattere metagrammaticale e metasintattico, « Accettabilità », composta da un breve brano tratto da *Il deserto dei Tartari* di Dino Buzzati (1945), all'interno del quale sono stati inseriti 15 errori (corrispondenti a 15 item), prevalentemente di natura grammaticale e sintattica. Al soggetto è richiesto di individuarli, correggerli ed esplicitare il tipo di violazione che ogni errore rappresenta.

<sup>8</sup> Creato in Italia alla fine degli anni Novanta (Pinto, 1999) è stato poi validato su un campione nazionale (Pinto, Iliceto, 2007), nonché tradotto e validato anche in altre lingue, grazie al progetto europeo Longlife Learning MATEL (*Metalinguistic Awareness Tests in European Languages*, 2013-2015), e tradotto in ulteriori lingue anche dopo la fine del progetto ([www.pintomatel.com](http://www.pintomatel.com)).

Ai fini della presente ricerca<sup>9</sup>, sono state somministrate solo la prova di Comprensione, in una versione ridotta, ovvero solo gli item ‘a’ (quindi 4 coppie di frasi, invece delle 8 standard), e la prova di Accettabilità, nella versione completa.

Le prove prevedono due differenti piani di analisi, denominati « linguistico » e « metalinguistico ». Le domande linguistiche (DL) sono collegate a una conoscenza intuitiva delle regole della lingua italiana e prevedono una codifica dicotomica giusto/sbagliato, con punteggio 0/1. Le domande metalinguistiche (DML) sono ritenute tali in quanto richiedono un’analisi esplicita delle prime risposte, sollecitando in tal modo un tipico criterio definitorio della dimensione metalinguistica al suo livello più esigente, e cioè il parlare della lingua utilizzando la lingua medesima. L’argomentazione che il soggetto compie nella sua risposta ML è analizzata in base a criteri di pertinenza ed esaustività (Pinto, 1999) che si possono valutare a tre possibili livelli:

- assenza di analisi (punteggio: 0) tipicamente espressa da affermazioni come ‘non lo so’ o di tipo tautologico (‘perché suona bene’, ‘perché la lingua funziona così’ ecc.)
- analisi parziale: analisi solo di alcuni aspetti rilevanti a livello semantico e/o grammaticale (punteggio: 1)
- risposte pertinenti ed esaustive: molti elementi pertinenti sono analizzati e sintetizzati in maniera coerente ed esaustiva (punteggio: 2).

La distinzione tra domande-risposte L e domande-risposte ML comporta due tipi di punteggi separati (L e ML). Tre punteggi complessivi principali possono essere conteggiati: il totale delle risposte L, il totale delle risposte ML, e il totale dell’intero test TAM-3.

Nella versione qui utilizzata abbiamo i seguenti punteggi massimi potenziali: massimo totale risposte L = 18 (3<sup>10</sup> della prova Comprensione + 15 della prova Accettabilità); massimo totale risposte ML = 38 (8 Comprensione + 30 Accettabilità); massimo totale test = 56. I risultati ottenuti in ciascuna prova e nel test sono stati suddivisi in tre livelli (inferiore/medio/superiore) in base alla distribuzione effettiva dei punteggi del campione<sup>11</sup>, riportata in sintesi nella Tabella 3:

1. livello inferiore: punteggi L: 0-10; punteggi ML: 0-7; totale test: 0-18;
2. livello intermedio: punteggi L: 11-13; punteggi ML: 8-12; totale test: 19-25;
3. livello superiore: punteggi L: 14-18; punteggi ML: 13-23; totale test: 26-39.

LIVELLO	MIN./MAX.	L	ML	TEST COMPLETO
Livello inferiore	Min.	0	0	0
	Max.	10	7	18
Livello intermedio	Min.	11	8	19
	Max.	13	12	25
Livello superiore	Min.	14	13	26
	Max.	18	23	39
<b>Totale</b>	Min.	0	0	0
	Max. (effettivi)	18	23	39
	Max. (potenziali)	18	38	56

**Tabella 3.** Livello inferiore/intermedio/superiore relativo alle risposte L, ML ed al test completo.

<sup>9</sup> Per limiti temporali connessi alle circostanze di somministrazione, è stato necessario ridurre gli item della prova di Comprensione. Inoltre, abbiamo ritenuto opportuno escludere la prova di Linguaggio Figurato in quanto meno pertinente rispetto al focus della ricerca e alla tipologia del testo somministrato, ovvero l’abilità di comprensione di un articolo di giornale.

<sup>10</sup> Il punteggio massimo L è 3 e non 4 perché dell’item 1.D.a non si attribuisce valore L, come indicato nel manuale di Pinto, Iliceto (2007: 22-23).

<sup>11</sup> Poiché è stata utilizzata una versione adattata del test (v. nota 7), non è stato possibile confrontare i risultati con quelli ottenuti dal campione normativo (cfr. Pinto, Iliceto, 2007). Il confronto è stato svolto all’interno del nostro campione, osservando i punteggi effettivi registrati. I livelli sono stati definiti considerando la distribuzione dei punteggi in terzili.

Le prove del TAM-3 sono state somministrate in gruppo, rispettando i tempi indicati sul manuale del test (Pinto, Iliceto, 2007).

### III. Risultati

In questa sezione, presentiamo prima i risultati ottenuti prendendo in considerazione l'intero sotto-campione, e analizziamo poi più in dettaglio alcuni casi specifici relativi a quattro informanti che riteniamo particolarmente interessanti per illustrare e discutere la corrispondenza tra TAM-3<sup>12</sup> e attività di IC. Non applichiamo nessuna misura statistica in quanto il campione è ridotto e non corrisponde allo scopo del contributo.

Nella Tabella 4 si può osservare che 5 dei 12 informanti del campione hanno raggiunto il livello superiore nel test TAM-3. In questa tabella è evidente il rapporto positivo tra il livello TAM-3 e IC. In particolare, nella comprensione dei nuclei informativi (NI) 3 dei 5 informanti si collocano al livello superiore (TAP21-B2, TAP21-D1, TAP21-D2), mentre gli altri due si trovano al livello immediatamente inferiore (TAP21-C1, TAP21-C2). Per quanto riguarda invece il parametro PO, è interessante osservare che TAP21-C2 è l'unico informante ad aver ottenuto una percentuale molto bassa (38,46%). Più avanti, descriveremo meglio il profilo di questo informante. La gestione delle BdT di questo gruppo è molto buona: in alcuni casi raggiunge il 100% e comunque non è mai inferiore all'85.53%.

N.	INFORMANTE	TOT TAM-3		TOT NI		TOT PO		TOT BdT
		Pt.	Liv.	Pt.	Liv.	Pt. %	Liv.	Pt. %
1	TAP21-B2	30	sup.	17	sup.	73,08	sup.	98,68
2	TAP21-C1	29	sup.	14	int.	61,54	sup.	85,53
3	TAP21-C2	35	sup.	12	int.	38,46	inf.	93,42
4	TAP21-D1	28	sup.	17	sup.	80,77	sup.	100
5	TAP21-D2	35	sup.	17	sup.	78,85	sup.	100

**Tabella 4.** Risultati Test TAM-3 (livello superiore) e TAPPS a confronto.

Nella Tabella 5 si presentano i punteggi degli informanti che hanno raggiunto il livello intermedio al TAM-3. Contrariamente alla situazione relativa al livello superiore di consapevolezza metalinguistica, in questo caso la corrispondenza fra prestazione al TAM-3 ed il livello di IC non è univoca. Dei 4 informanti, 3 hanno raggiunto il livello inferiore per la comprensione dei nuclei informativi (NI) (TAP21-B1, TAP21-M1, TAP21-M3), mentre l'altro informante (TAP21-M2) si è collocato nel livello intermedio. In ogni caso, nessuno dei 4 informanti si è collocato al livello superiore. Per quanto riguarda la gestione delle parole opache (PO), tutti gli informanti si collocano su una fascia intermedio-bassa (< 55.77%), con uno degli informanti (TAP21-M1) su un livello piuttosto basso (19.23%). Per quanto riguarda invece la gestione delle basi di transfer (BdT), la percentuale è piuttosto elevata (> 78%).

N.	INFORMANTE	TOT. TAM-3		Tor. NI		Tor. PO		Tot. BdT
		Pt.	Liv.	Pt.	Liv.	Pt. %	Liv.	Pt. %
6	TAP21-B1	25	int.	9	inf.	40,38	int.	93,42
7	TAP21-M1	20	int.	9,5	inf.	19,23	inf.	78,95
8	TAP21-M2	25	int.	14	int.	55,77	int.	98,68
9	TAP21-M3	24	int.	10	inf.	36,54	inf.	98,36

**Tabella 5.** Risultati Test TAM-3 (livello intermedio) e TAPP a confronto.

<sup>12</sup> Per ulteriori analisi (es. relative ai punteggi L e ML di ciascuna prova) rimandiamo a Bonvino et al. (in prep.).

Nella Tabella 6 si presentano i punteggi degli informanti che si sono collocati nella fascia inferiore del TAM-3. La corrispondenza non è diretta: dei 3 informanti, 2 si trovano al livello intermedio per il parametro NI, mentre l'altro su quello inferiore. Per il parametro PO, anche in questo caso la percentuale raggiunta dagli informanti risulta essere piuttosto bassa (< 53,85%, mentre la gestione delle BdT risulta essere piuttosto buona (> 91,45%).

N.	INFORMANTE	TOT TAM-3		TOT NI		TOT PO		TOT BdT
		Pt.	Liv.	Pt.	Liv.	Pt. %	Liv.	Pt. %
10	TAP21-F1	14	inf.	13	int.	38,46	inf.	96,71
11	TAP21-P1	18	inf.	12	int.	53,85	int.	96,38
12	TAP21-R1	6	inf.	10	inf.	28,85	inf.	91,45

**Tabella 6.** Risultati Test TAM-3 (livello inferiore) e TAPPS a confronto.

L'analisi condotta mostra una certa corrispondenza tra i punteggi ottenuti nel test TAM-3 e nel compito di IC. Con i dati a nostra disposizione, possiamo ipotizzare che gli informanti che ottengono punteggi alti nel TAM-3 tendano ad ottenere ottimi risultati anche in IC e, correlativamente, con il decrescere dei punteggi nel TAM-3 si tenda a decrescere anche nei punteggi di IC. Questo andamento è facilmente visibile nella Tabella 7, che presenta un confronto fra i punteggi TAM-3 e IC per i parametri NI e PO, evidenziati con tre diverse gradazioni di grigio (il livello superiore è quello più scuro).

N.	INFORMANTE	TAM-3	IC (NI)	IC (PO)
1	TAP21-B2	sup.	sup.	sup.
2	TAP21-D1	sup.	sup.	sup.
3	TAP21-D2	sup.	sup.	sup.
4	TAP21-C1	sup.	int.	sup.
5	TAP21-C2	sup.	int.	inf.
6	TAP21-M2	int.	int.	int.
7	TAP21-B1	int.	inf.	int.
8	TAP21-M3	int.	inf.	inf.
9	TAP21-M1	int.	inf.	inf.
10	TAP21-P1	inf.	int.	int.
11	TAP21-F1	inf.	int.	inf.
12	TAP21-R1	inf.	inf.	inf.

**Tabella 7.** Sintesi dei punteggi di TAM-3 e TAPPS per i parametri NI e PO.

La tendenza non è però confermata dalla totalità dei casi presi in esame. Nella Tabella 7 vediamo che 5 dei 12 informanti (TAP21-B2, TAP21-D1, TAP21-D2, TAP21-M2, TAP21-R1) si collocano sullo stesso livello nel TAM-3, in IC(NI) e IC(PO); 3 informanti (TAP21-C1, TAP21-B1, TAP21-F1) si collocano sullo stesso livello nel TAM-3 e in IC (PO), ma non in IC (NI); 2 si

collocano sullo stesso livello in IC (NI) e IC(PO) ma a un livello diverso in TAM-3 (TAP21-M3, TAP21-M1, TAP21-P1); e, infine, un informante (TAP21-C1) si colloca su tre diversi livelli. Per approfondire meglio i rapporti tra i punteggi dei diversi test ci è parso opportuno analizzare alcuni profili<sup>13</sup> degli informanti in particolare, mettendo a confronto i punteggi del test TAM-3 e del compito di IC (NI) e (PO). Commenteremo un profilo rappresentativo della fascia superiore (TAP21-D2), uno della fascia intermedia (TAP21-M2I) e uno della fascia inferiore (TAP21-R1). Infine, commenteremo il profilo di TAP21-C2, che si colloca sui tre livelli nei tre test e che risulta essere dunque il più problematico in questo sotto-campione.

## TAP21-D2

Sembra esserci una relazione positiva tra i risultati ottenuti dall'informante TAP21-D2 nel TAM3 e il compito di IC<sup>14</sup>. Questo soggetto si colloca al livello superiore al test TAM-3, sia relativamente ai valori L (14 pt.), che ai valori ML (21 pt.).

Per quanto è possibile ricavare dalla trasposizione, il suo livello di IC spontanea risulta elevato. Sa attingere dalle sue conoscenze e fa ampio uso di strategie di lettura, riuscendo a comprendere il testo senza grandi difficoltà. Non traduce parola per parola ma ha sempre il testo come riferimento. Mostra grande facilità ad esplicitare ad alta voce i percorsi che lo portano alla comprensione, che evidenziano un grande ricorso alla riflessione metalinguistica, come illustrato dalla trascrizione riportata nella Tabella 8<sup>15</sup>.

N.	TESTO Originale e trasposto in L1			METATESTO
0	mentre	Claudio Abbado	assajava	una peça
1	mentre	Claudio Abbado	assaggiava	<i>una peça</i>
2				una parte
3			assaggiava	penso che sia
4			provare	cioè
5			fare delle prove	
6				perché dal contesto anche leggendo il testo il punto mi è sembrato assaggiare e quando uno assaggia qualcosa la prova? comunque appunto
7			le prove	
8			<i>una peça</i>	come in inglese
9			<i>a piece</i>	
10			un pezzo	appunto

**Tabella 8.** Griglia con trascrizione della trasposizione in L1 di una porzione del testo catalano (informante TAP21-D2).

<sup>13</sup> I profili si ispirano ai descrittori della competenza dell'intercomprensione elaborati nel progetto EVAL-IC, al quale hanno partecipato gli autori di questo contributo. Tuttavia, i descrittori di EVAL-IC tenevano conto anche dell'ampiezza del repertorio linguistico compreso (valutato su più lingue) mentre qui l'analisi si limita al catalano.

<sup>14</sup> Rimandiamo ad altra sede ulteriori analisi statistiche (descrittive e inferenziali).

<sup>15</sup> La trascrizione è stata inserita in griglia. Nella riga 0 della sezione a sinistra si riporta il testo originale, mentre nelle righe sotto, la trasposizione dell'informante. Nella sezione a destra, il metatesto, cioè la trascrizione del pensiero ad alta voce che affianca il lavoro di comprensione.

Questo informante sfrutta sistematicamente le BdT e sa gestire strategicamente le PO (*amb it.* ‘con’, *assaig* it. ‘prova’, *prop* it. ‘vicino’), ricorrendo a ragionamenti inferenziali<sup>16</sup>. È in grado di sfruttare il proprio repertorio linguistico compiendo inferenze a partire dalle lingue che conosce (*ll'* spagnolo, *piece* in inglese, *chambre* francese). Riesce ad utilizzare le sue pre conoscenze per disambiguare il senso di alcuni elementi (*un incendi* > un incendio > « perché quando sono andato a Barcellona ci sono questi segnali in cui mancava qualche lettera # la tolgo sempre dappertutto # *incendi \*staciò* »; « sono stato a Berlino »). Usa le informazioni contestuali come supporto alla comprensione (assaggiare > provare > fare le prove). Riesce inoltre a compensare le informazioni alternando processi *bottom-up* e processi *top-down* (« sembra strano perché sembra futuro però sta parlando di eventi al passato quindi facciamo finta che sia [passato] »). Sono visibili alcune tracce di approssimazione, anche se non è possibile affermare che sia sempre deliberata (ad es. l’informante utilizza « persone » al posto della parola « bambini », presente nel testo). Si rilevano alcuni casi di transfer negativo dovuto alla somiglianza formale di un aggettivo (CA: *groc*, It: « giallo » viene tradotto con « grosso ») e di una forma preposizionale (Catalano: *al capdavant*, It: « alla guida », viene reso con « davanti »). In rari casi, l’informante omette elementi (*l’emblematic*), ma quando lo fa, l’omissione non inficia gravemente il risultato della trasposizione.

## TAP21-M2

Sembra esserci una relazione positiva tra i risultati ottenuti dall’informante TAP21-M2 nel TAM3 e il compito di IC. Questa informante rappresenta perfettamente la fascia intermedia di entrambi i test. Si colloca al livello intermedio il rapporto tra i punteggi ottenuti dall’informante TAP21-M2 nel TAM-3 e in IC appare diretto e sembra rappresentare perfettamente la fascia intermedia di entrambi i test: superiore al Test TAM-3 per i punteggi L (18 pt.), mentre per i punteggi ML si colloca al livello inferiore (7 pt.). Dalla verbalizzazione, è possibile osservare che TAP21-M2 costruisce il senso globale del testo, riuscendo a cogliere le informazioni essenziali della maggior parte dei nuclei informativi (14/18 pt.) e a sfruttare correttamente la stragrande maggioranza delle BdT (98,68%). In alcuni passaggi, dimostra di avere una comprensione più dettagliata. Ciò è evidente dalla gestione delle PO, che riesce a risolvere, anche se non totalmente (PO: 55,77%).

Il modo in cui questo informante gestisce le PO costituisce precisamente un tratto della sua verbalizzazione. In varie occasioni si lascia fuorviare dalla somiglianza formale delle parole. Si veda l’esempio in Tabella 9, in cui alla riga 4 propone la parola ‘assaggiare’, anche se si rende conto che non è coerente con il contesto.

N.	TESTO Originale e trasposto in L1				METATESTO
0	mentre	Claudio Abbado	assajava	una peça	
1	mentre	Claudio Abbado	assajava	una peça	eh:
2			assajava:		non so a questo punto è
3			suonare		dato che si parla di un auditorio ehm anche se sembra
4			assaggiare		
5				una peça	
					non lo so

**Tabella 9.** Griglia con trascrizione della trasposizione in L1 di una porzione del testo catalano (informante TAP21-M2).

<sup>16</sup> Si vedano anche Berthele (2011) e Bonvino, Garbarino (2022).

La trasposizione procede con frequenti esitazioni, come si vede nella Tabella 9, ma anche nella Tabella 10, in cui l'informante sviluppa due ipotesi senza arrivare a convalidarle: la prima sul significato di « *assajant* » e la seconda sul « *Te Deum de Berlioz* ».

N.	TESTO Originale e trasposto in L1			METATESTO
0	<b>estava</b>	<b>assajant</b>	<b>el Te Deum</b>	<b>de Berlioz</b>
1	stava			ecco di nuovo
2		assajava	il Te Deum	ehm:
3	stava#	dirigendo?		non lo so
4			il Te Deum	quindi questo è
5			una sonata	
6			un concerto	
7				non lo so

**Tabella 10.** Griglia con trascrizione della trasposizione in L1 di una porzione del testo catalano (informante TAP21-M2).

Dalla sua verbalizzazione è possibile, inoltre, osservare il modo in cui elabora le sue ipotesi di comprensione, anche se non sempre l'esito è positivo (per es. « non so cosa possa essere [seu] sembrerebbe un art- # un aggettivo possessivo? però non ## non sembrerebbe in questo caso andarci bene »).

L'informante riesce comunque a costruire il senso globale del testo, nonché alcuni aspetti di dettaglio in passaggi fondamentali, sfruttando le sue risorse personali come potenziale dell'IC (sapere encicopedico, conoscenze linguistiche e culturali). Mobilità con facilità alcune strategie di lettura per la costruzione del senso, e potremmo dire pertanto che il suo livello di IC è intermedio.

## TAP21-R1

Sembra esserci una relazione positiva tra i risultati ottenuti dall'informante TAP21-R1 nel TAM3 e il compito di IC: in entrambe le attività ha ottenuto un punteggio che si colloca nella fascia inferiore. Al Test TAM-3, nei punteggi L ottiene 6 pt., e nei punteggi ML ottiene 0 pt.

Per quanto riguarda il compito di IC, questo soggetto estrae l'informazione in modo letterale, frammentario e approssimativo. Attua alcune strategie di comprensione, soprattutto a livello lessicale. Ciò è evidente soprattutto dal fatto che riesce a comprendere la maggior parte delle BdT (91.45%) e una parte delle informazioni del testo (NI: 10/18), e dal fatto che omette la maggior parte degli elementi opachi (PO: 28%). È proprio questa caratteristica che maggiormente contraddistingue il livello di questo informante. Un esempio significativo di questo aspetto riguarda il verbo catalano « *assajar* » (It: « provare »), che compare tre volte nel testo, cui si aggiunge il sostantivo *assaig* (it. « prova »): in tutti i casi queste parole sono state completamente omesse. L'informante è spesso fuorviato dalla somiglianza formale, come nell'esempio in Tabella 11 in cui traduce il catalano « *aconseguir-ho* » con « accorgersi », senza seguire gli indizi del contesto linguistico immediato.

N.	TESTO Originale e trasposto in L1					METATESTO
0	intentant	controlar	el foc	sense	aconseguir-ho	
1	inte-					
2	tentano	di controllare	il fuoco			uhm
3				senza	accorgersi	

**Tabella 11.** Griglia con trascrizione della trasposizione in L1 di una porzione del testo catalano (informante TAP21-R1).

In sintesi, il profilo di IC spontanea di questo informante si avvicina ad un livello iniziale, in quanto estrae l'informazione in modo letterale, frammentario o approssimativo. Riesce ad attivare conoscenze condivise e attua alcune strategie di comprensione, restando tuttavia soprattutto a livello lessicale senza collegare le informazioni raccolte durante la lettura.

### TAP21-C2

Come accennato sopra, il rapporto tra i punteggi ottenuti da TAP21-C2 nel test TAM-3 e in IC non sono allineati. Questo informante si colloca al livello superiore sia al Test TAM-3, punteggi L (15 pt.) sia nei punteggi ML (20 pt.), mentre in IC ha avuto risultati più scarsi: si colloca nella fascia intermedia (12/18) per NI e inferiore per le PO (38,46%). Come tutti gli altri informanti del campione ha saputo sfruttare la stragrande maggioranza delle BdT (93,42%).

In genere, si può osservare che questo soggetto riesce a costruire il senso globale del testo quando attiva le sue conoscenze encyclopediche e il suo repertorio linguistico facendo riferimento alle lingue che conosce, in particolare lo spagnolo (per es. CA: *nens* « l'ho collegato al *nene* spagnolo »), anche se non sempre l'esito è positivo, come in CA: *ahir*, del quale afferma « mi fa venire in mente 'lì' perché *allí* spagnolo, ma non credo ci entri niente ». Tuttavia, non si sofferma a verificare il suo dubbio e procede senza risolverlo. Questi ed altri episodi analoghi portano questo informante a procedere in maniera frammentaria e approssimativa, dimenticando i legami testuali. Ciononostante, riesce a rielaborare le sue ipotesi considerando il contesto linguistico immediato, come si vede nell'esempio in Tabella 12.

N.	TESTO Originale e trasposto in L1				METATESTO
0	mentre	Claudio Abbado	assajava	una peça	
1	mentre	Claudio Abbado	assajava	una peça	
2			ass-		
3			assaggiava	una pesca?	m::: oddio [...] forse cioè penso che
4				pesca	però no
5				uma peça	[...] non lo so è come boh penso
6				uno spettacolo	credo
7					no una pesca

**Tabella 12.** Griglia con trascrizione della trasposizione in L1 di una porzione del testo catalano (informante TAP21-C2).

Dalla verbalizzazione è possibile affermare che TAP21-C2 mobilita diverse conoscenze linguistiche e culturali e alcune strategie di comprensione, non sempre efficaci, a livello lessicale e sintattico. Le difficoltà dell'informante sono più evidenti nella disambiguazione delle PO sulle quali o abbandona il compito (« [...] poi # l'emblematico edificio # m:: groc seu? m:: vabbè »), oppure non verifica le informazioni ottenute dal basso (*bottom-up*) integrandole con quelle ottenute dall'alto (*top-down*).

Dobbiamo precisare in ultimo che in questo studio non abbiamo considerato il profilo linguistico come una variabile. Infatti, dal momento che tutti gli informanti hanno un profilo composito, non sono emerse differenze importanti. È necessario però far notare che si riscontrano differenze tra alcuni degli informanti che si collocano nella fascia alta dei risultati e quelli della fascia bassa. Nel repertorio di TAP21-B2, che si trova nella fascia alta, sono presenti, oltre a due lingue romanze, anche il tedesco e il russo. Similmente, TAP21-D2, oltre allo spagnolo, studia anche il tedesco. Mentre nel repertorio di TAP21-R1, che si trova nella fascia bassa, sono presenti solo l'italiano e il francese. Analogamente, nel repertorio di TAP21-F1, sempre della fascia bassa, che dal numero di lingue dichiarate sembra avere un repertorio molto ricco, da un'analisi più attenta della sua biografia linguistica emerge che ha studiato solo per un breve periodo di tempo il francese e il giapponese a scuola.

#### IV. Conclusioni

Uno degli obiettivi del presente studio-pilota era quello di verificare il rapporto fra la capacità di intercomprensione (IC) degli informanti e il loro livello di consapevolezza meta-linguistica (CML). Dal confronto fra i risultati ottenuti al TAM-3 ed alle prove IC del nostro campione emerge chiaramente che vi è corrispondenza piena ai livelli estremi, soprattutto ai livelli alti, mentre nella fascia intermedia i risultati sono più complessi e la corrispondenza meno evidente.

Il secondo obiettivo era quello di mettere a prova gli strumenti di osservazione della capacità di IC. Anche se il numero esiguo del campione non permette di svolgere un'analisi statistica delle correlazioni, tuttavia questo studio ci ha consentito di testare i diversi strumenti di analisi e i relativi criteri di valutazione. La trasposizione e il TAPPS si sono rivelati strumenti di agevole impiego, graditi agli studenti, con risultati facilmente accessibili e analizzabili, pur presentando il limite di una grande variabilità legata al comportamento dei diversi partecipanti.

In relazione al testo catalano presentato, si è osservato che questo si presta al compito di trasposizione di significato e che offre molti spunti per mettere alla prova le strategie degli apprendenti. Sarebbe comunque auspicabile condurre lo studio con un testo di maggiore complessità che permetta di osservare più sfumature nell'esecuzione del compito e, quindi, di distinguere livelli di abilità differenziati.

I parametri individuati per l'analisi dettagliata della gestione dell'input catalano – la comprensione dei nuclei informativi (NI), la gestione delle basi di transfer (BdT) e delle parole opache (PO) – fotografano la capacità di comprensione del testo, così come appare nella trasposizione di senso verbalizzata attraverso il TAPPS. Tuttavia, il parametro delle PO appare più rilevante, in quanto mette alla prova il comportamento strategico dell'apprendente orientato al *problem-solving*, il che appare in linea con la CML. Per quanto riguarda, invece, la comprensione di nuclei (NI), questi non sono probabilmente sempre indicativi di un livello. Per quanto riguarda la gestione delle BdT, non sembra essere questo un parametro in grado di discriminare gli informanti meno bravi da quelli più bravi, dal momento che tutti gli informanti del nostro campione hanno raggiunto una percentuale piuttosto elevata.

Il TAM-3, strumento di misurazione della CML già validato scientificamente, si conferma strumento molto utile e predittivo in quanto riesce a fornire informazioni sulle competenze linguistiche e metalinguistiche che influenzano la capacità di comprensione del testo, anche nel contesto di IC. Riteniamo che le osservazioni qui elaborate dovrebbero essere convalidate con l'analisi quantitativa dell'intero database METIC. Inoltre, per com-

prendere meglio quale sia il complesso rapporto tra repertorio linguistico e capacità di IC, è necessario raccogliere dati affidabili sulla biografia linguistica e includere informanti con diverso background linguistico.

Dal punto di vista delle implicazioni glottodidattiche, la consapevolezza metalinguistica può essere stimolata con attività di riflessione esplicita sulla lingua e i suoi usi. Le osservazioni degli studenti dopo aver svolto le attività, in particolare con il TAM-3, vanno in questa direzione, in quanto hanno trovato, in generale, la prova complessa e molto utile.

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## Sitografia

[www.pintomatel.com](http://www.pintomatel.com)

## Appendice. Testo catalano fornito nell'attività TAPPS

### Crema el millor auditori del món.

*Un incendi destrueix la seu de la famosa Filharmònica de Berlín mentre Claudio Abbado assajava una peça amb 400 nens.*

L'emblemàtic edifici groc seu de l'Orquestra Filharmònica de Berlín, situat al cor del Berlín reunificat, prop de la Potsdamer Platz i el Tiergarten, considerat l'auditori amb millor acústica del món, es va incendiar ahir al migdia mentre una sala acollia un concert de cambra i l'altra l'assaig de Claudio Abbado al capdavant de l'Orquestra de Baviera i el cor juvenil.

Sis hores després de l'inici de l'incendi, a les 12.30 hora local, 200 bombers i 30 camions cisterna seguien intentant controlar el foc sense aconseguir-ho i la columna de fum s'alçava uns 30 metres per sobre la ciutat. En el moment en què va començar l'incendi, el prestigiós Claudio Abbado, exdirector titular de la Filharmònica de Berlín, estava assajant el Te Deum de Berlioz, programat per a aquest cap de setmana juntament amb el Concert de piano núm. 4 de Beethoven amb Maurizio Pollini. Músics i públic assistent als assajos, unes 350 persones, van ser evacuats.



# Rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques entre pairs en situation d'interaction orale en espagnol langue étrangère<sup>1</sup>

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**TITLE:** *Peer metalinguistic corrective feedback in oral interaction situations in Spanish as a foreign language (SFL).*

**ABSTRACT:** *In foreign language teaching (FLT), particular attention is given to the development of oral communication skills in learners. Oral communication situations allow the teacher to provide learners with corrective feedback, either orally or in writing. However, the situation becomes more complicated when all learners in the class are engaged in oral interaction simultaneously. It is indeed difficult, if not impossible, for the teacher to provide corrective feedback during the exchanges among learners since she cannot listen to all interactions at once. Without this corrective feedback, learners may not be aware of the phonological, grammatical, or lexical errors they are making. If these errors are not corrected in a timely manner, they can persist, be picked up by peers, and even become fossilized errors. In the latter case, they would be very difficult to correct (Lyster, Saito, and Sato, 2012).*

*In this context, a teacher has implemented a research-action-based didactic intervention with the aim of activating learners' metalinguistic awareness so that they can provide metalinguistic corrective feedback to their peers during oral interaction. This article discusses the problem the teacher wanted to address and the research-action approach that was implemented, drawing upon the concept of metalinguistic awareness, which is the central focus of Maria Antonietta Pinto's work (Pinto, 1999).*

**KEYWORDS:** *Foreign language teaching, metalinguistic awareness, metalinguistic corrective feedback, oral interaction, Spanish as FL.*

## I. Introduction: l'apprentissage de l'espagnol langue étrangère au Québec

Dans une école primaire privée au Québec, l'espagnol est enseigné comme LÉ dès le préscolaire, à l'âge de 4 ans. Dès la première année du primaire, les élèves découvrent comment conjuguer les verbes à la première personne du singulier. En deuxième année, l'accent est mis sur la conjugaison aux trois premières personnes du singulier. En troisième année, l'apprentissage se fait dans son entièreté, soit les trois personnes du singulier et les trois personnes du pluriel. En quatrième année, les élèves retravaillent toutes ces notions afin qu'ils maîtrisent la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif. Or, à cette étape, des erreurs persistent alors qu'elles devraient être moins présentes.

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Le contenu de cet article est extrait de Fréchette (2021).

Il est pertinent de préciser que les élèves apprennent la conjugaison de manière implicite dans le cadre de l'approche communicative. Ils ne s'appuient pas sur des outils spécifiques qui favorisent le développement de la réflexion sur la forme, qui est souvent porteuse de sens. En d'autres termes, ils ne s'appuient pas sur des outils qui favorisent le développement de la conscience métalinguistique (Pinto, El Euch, 2015, 2017). À la quatrième année du primaire, les élèves ne prennent pas le temps de réfléchir avant de conjuguer les verbes. La forme correcte ou incorrecte semble être le fruit du hasard ou une manifestation de la connaissance implicite de la langue (Pinto, El Euch, 2015).

## Les problèmes

L'utilisation intuitive des verbes au présent de l'indicatif lors d'interactions entre pairs a des impacts sur l'apprentissage. Le premier impact est la présence d'erreurs de conjugaison dans les communications des apprenants. En fait, lors d'interactions entre pairs, les élèves peuvent produire ou encore répéter des erreurs de conjugaison sans qu'aucune forme de rétroaction corrective ne soit donnée par l'enseignante de façon individuelle, puisque l'enseignante n'est pas présente pour chaque équipe. Les élèves n'entendent pas la version corrigée ou encore la demande de correction exigée. Ils ne sont pas guidés vers une connaissance explicite de la conjugaison des verbes à l'indicatif présent. Les élèves poursuivent donc leurs échanges avec leurs pairs dans l'objectif d'accomplir la tâche demandée, sans mettre à profit leur conscience métalinguistique, ou sans même contribuer à son développement. Bien souvent, les apprenants intègrent des erreurs qu'ils entendent en croyant que les énoncés produits par leurs camarades sont justes (Lightbown, Spada, 2013).

Le deuxième impact observé en lien avec le problème soulevé est un bris au niveau de la communication (Lyster, Ranta, 1997). Cet impact s'observe de différentes façons. D'abord, placé devant le doute au moment de conjuguer un verbe, et n'ayant pas accès à un soutien immédiat, l'apprenant peut être porté à ne pas s'exprimer. Il peut craindre de se tromper et choisir la voie de l'évitement. Il se désengage donc de son apprentissage. L'apprenant ne met donc pas à profit cette opportunité d'apprentissage dans le contexte d'interaction qui s'offre à lui. Aussi, une conjugaison erronée peut causer des malentendus sur le sujet de l'action, car en espagnol, les pronoms personnels ne sont pas toujours requis lorsqu'un verbe est conjugué. Ainsi, normalement, lorsque la situation le permet, le locuteur, ou encore l'auteur, peut simplement conjuguer un verbe et, selon la terminaison utilisée, l'interlocuteur, ou le lecteur, saura à quelle personne ou à quel pronom personnel le locuteur fait référence. Une conjugaison erronée peut donc mener à un malentendu sur le sujet de l'action (par exemple, *¿Puedes ir al baño?* est différent de *¿Puedo ir al baño?*) (*Est-ce que tu peux aller à la salle de bain ?* est différent de : *Est-ce que je peux aller à la salle de bain ?*).

L'utilisation intuitive des verbes conjugués au présent de l'indicatif lors d'interactions entre pairs a également des impacts sur la pratique enseignante. L'enseignante doit à maintes reprises arrêter les activités qui ont lieu afin de donner des explications supplémentaires à tous les élèves de la classe. Cette rupture dans l'apprentissage en contexte interactif n'est pas optimale puisque les rétroactions de l'enseignante dirigées à tout le groupe ne concernent pas tous les élèves de la classe. Cependant, selon Sato (2013), les apprenants pourraient corriger leurs pairs au moyen de rétroactions correctives puisqu'elles sont très bénéfiques, voire supérieures à celles d'un enseignant.

## Les objectifs

Le domaine des rétroactions correctives en enseignement est très vaste et a longtemps été associé aux enseignants, perçus comme étant les seuls à pouvoir corriger leurs apprenants. Néanmoins, plusieurs chercheurs, dont Sato et Ballinger (2012), se penchent sur d'autres personnes capables de corriger les élèves : les apprenants eux-mêmes. En effet, lors d'interactions

entre pairs, les apprenants sont tout à fait en mesure d'apporter les rétroactions correctives à leurs pairs afin de corriger ou de mettre en doute un élément langagier.

Dans cette perspective, une enseignante d'espagnol a mis en œuvre une intervention qui s'apparente à une recherche-action afin d'atteindre l'objectif général de favoriser une utilisation correcte des verbes au présent de l'indicatif lors d'interactions orales entre pairs. L'enseignante s'est donnée comme objectif spécifique d'examiner l'impact de l'appropriation des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques par les élèves sur l'apprentissage efficace de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif en espagnol, et ce, en situation de pratique dirigée, et en situation communicative.

## **II. Quelques mises au point théoriques**

### **Les rétroactions correctives pour travailler la forme**

Les rétroactions correctives permettent de placer les apprenants dans un contexte d'interaction où ils devront aider leurs pairs à corriger des énoncés incorrects (Sato, Lyster, 2012). Grâce à ces rétroactions correctives, l'attention des apprenants est dirigée vers un élément langagier précis, c'est-à-dire vers la forme (Loewen, Sato, 2018). L'apprenant doit donc se concentrer sur ses énoncés et sur ceux de son coéquipier, car il devra donner à son coéquipier des rétroactions correctives centrées sur la forme. Malheureusement, il n'existe pas encore une liste d'éléments à consulter lorsque vient le temps de créer une tâche qui favorisera l'enseignement centré sur la forme (Loewen, Sato, 2018). L'enseignant peut, toutefois, mettre en place un enseignement centré sur la forme en s'appuyant sur l'approche pédagogique de l'enseignement explicite, et ce, sans perdre de vue ses objectifs pédagogiques et didactiques.

### **L'enseignement explicite**

L'enseignement centré sur la forme et l'enseignement explicite sont deux approches pédagogiques qui partagent le même objectif, qui est l'enseignement d'une notion précise, et qui ont toutes les deux une phase de planification détaillée. Toutefois, les deux approches diffèrent quant à la manière d'enseigner l'élément langagier, le concept ou encore la stratégie choisie.

L'enseignement explicite est une approche qui a fait ses preuves depuis plus de cinquante ans (Gauthier, Bissonnette, Bocquillon, 2019). Rosenshine et Stevens (1986, cit. Gauthier *et al.*, 2019) ont été ceux qui ont souligné son efficacité dans les années 80. Depuis, Steve Bissonnette (Gauthier, Bissonnette, Richard, 2013) se veut le porte-étendard de cette approche pédagogique qui se divise en trois grandes étapes : la préparation, l'interaction avec les élèves et la consolidation.

Lors de la phase de préparation, l'enseignant précise les objectifs d'apprentissage, identifie ce qui est à enseigner et l'organise du plus simple au plus complexe. Ensuite, dans la phase d'interaction, l'enseignant applique ce qu'il a planifié. Il utilise des stratégies générales. Celles-ci sont en lien avec l'ouverture, la conduite et la clôture de la leçon. Pour chacune de ces étapes, l'enseignant doit utiliser des stratégies spécifiques. Lors de l'ouverture, il capte l'attention de ses apprenants, présente l'objectif, explique pour quelle raison il a choisi cet objectif et ensuite active les connaissances antérieures. Lors de la conduite de la leçon, l'enseignant met en œuvre trois stratégies typiques de l'enseignement explicite, qui sont le modelage, la pratique guidée et la pratique autonome. Lors du modelage, l'enseignant donne des exemples et des contre-exemples à ses apprenants. Il explique en détail ce qu'il fait, exactement comme s'il avait un « haut-parleur sur sa pensée » (Gauthier, Bissonnette, Richard, 2013).

Lors de la phase d'interaction avec les élèves, le modèle de l'enseignement explicite prévoit une pratique guidée suivie d'une pratique autonome. Pendant la pratique guidée, les apprenants font des activités en groupe et avec l'enseignant, semblables aux tâches qu'ils ont

utilisées à l'étape du modelage. De plus, l'enseignant interroge les apprenants afin de vérifier leur compréhension. Il veille à ce que les apprenants ne fassent pas d'erreurs lors de leurs pratiques. Pour s'assurer d'un haut niveau de maîtrise de la forme pratiquée, l'enseignant questionne ses apprenants fréquemment, leur donne des rétroactions et des exercices. Au moment de la pratique autonome, l'élève continue sur sa lancée dans le but d'optimiser sa compréhension et de créer des automatismes.

Enfin, lors de la phase de consolidation, l'enseignant prévoit des devoirs et des leçons dans le but de renforcer les apprentissages (Gauthier, Bissonnette, Bocquillon, 2019). Au moment de faire un retour sur les devoirs et les leçons, l'enseignant aura l'opportunité de vérifier si le transfert des apprentissages a bien eu lieu.

Ainsi, comparativement à l'enseignement centré sur la forme, l'enseignement explicite a une structure beaucoup plus détaillée et précise. Les trois étapes de l'enseignement explicite, à savoir la préparation, l'interaction et la consolidation, permettent à l'enseignant de suivre une procédure bien précise. Cette structure est absente dans l'enseignement centré sur la forme. Les chercheurs font plutôt mention de facteurs (p. ex., la familiarité avec la tâche, l'âge des apprenants, l'influence de la L1 etc.) à prendre en considération par l'enseignant lors de la planification de son enseignement (Loewen, Sato, 2018; Spada, Lightbown, 2008). Pour toutes ces raisons, l'enseignement explicite a été choisi pour être mis en œuvre dans une recherche-action menée par Fréchette (2021) et rapportée partiellement dans cet article.

Quant aux rétroactions correctives, elles sont présentes dans les deux approches. Du côté de l'enseignement centré sur la forme, le type de rétroactions et leur fréquence varient selon le type d'enseignement : isolé ou intégré. En enseignement explicite, les rétroactions sont fréquentes, car l'enseignant doit s'assurer qu'aucune erreur ne se glisse dans le processus d'apprentissage.

## La conscience métalinguistique (CML)<sup>2</sup>

Selon El Euch (2010: 17): « la conscience métalinguistique est l'habileté à réfléchir sur la langue et à manipuler ses composantes. La langue est ainsi plus qu'un outil de communication ». Elle permet aux apprenants de découvrir les composantes langagières de la langue pour ainsi mieux la comprendre et mieux l'utiliser.

À ce sujet, El Euch (2010: 18) précise:

« Cette habileté à réfléchir sur la langue nécessite une attention particulière qui permet de passer d'un état presque inconscient à un état de conscience focalisée. Ce sont ces notions d'attention et de conscience qui sont mises en œuvre lors d'exécution de tâches linguistiques et qui permettent aux apprenants de passer du traitement automatique de la langue à un état de traitement contrôlé (Bialystok, 2001). En effet, les apprenants rendent explicites leurs connaissances de la langue en ayant un contrôle sur les tâches qu'ils entreprennent ».

En d'autres termes, les apprenants deviennent conscients des notions qu'ils acquièrent et peuvent ainsi être mieux en contrôle de leurs apprentissages. Par exemple, l'utilisation de la conscience métalinguistique lors de l'apprentissage de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif permettrait aux apprenants de devenir conscients des caractéristiques principales de la conjugaison tels que les groupes du verbe, les pronoms personnels et les terminaisons verbales pour ainsi mieux contrôler la conjugaison.

La conscience métalinguistique (CML) vise donc un apprentissage de haut niveau chez les apprenants. En effet, les apprenants ne se limitent pas à l'analyse des connaissances, ils développent en plus un certain contrôle sur leur apprentissage d'un élément langagier

<sup>2</sup> Pour des contraintes d'espace, nous nous limiterons à la conscience métalinguistique telle que définie par El Euch et Pinto dans leurs différents travaux. Étant donné que leur définition est la plus exhaustive (Jessner, 2006), ce projet adhère à leur cadre théorique.

(Pinto, El Euch, 2017) puisque la CML provoque un arrêt chez l'apprenant pour réfléchir aux éléments morphosyntaxiques, lexicaux, phonologiques et pragmatiques de la langue (Pinto, El Euch, 2015). C'est cette réflexion qui permet aux apprenants de rendre explicites leurs connaissances implicites de la langue. Contrairement aux connaissances explicites, les connaissances implicites sont des connaissances que les apprenants ne peuvent pas nécessairement expliquer. Par exemple, les apprenants peuvent dire si une phrase est incorrecte et peuvent fournir la forme correcte (connaissances implicites) sans être en mesure d'expliquer l'erreur ou la forme correcte fournie. L'apprentissage dit implicite est un processus qui se fait naturellement, sans avoir recours à des opérations conscientes (Pinto, El Euch, 2015). Or, les connaissances explicites sont les connaissances qui permettent à l'apprenant d'expliquer la forme linguistique et de justifier les options possibles. Par exemple, les apprenants peuvent connaître les trois groupes du verbe de la langue espagnole ainsi que les différents temps et formes de conjugaison grâce à un enseignement et des activités explicites. Ils peuvent alors non seulement choisir le bon temps du verbe selon le contexte, mais aussi justifier leur choix d'usage et de forme. Lorsque l'apprentissage est explicite, les apprenants deviennent plus conscients des éléments langagiers et ils sont amenés à formuler et tester des hypothèses pour ainsi obtenir une structure signifiante pour eux (Pinto, El Euch, 2015). La CML permet ainsi de rendre explicites les connaissances implicites. Lorsqu'un enseignant prévoit des activités qui font appel à la CML de ses apprenants, il veille donc à transformer leurs connaissances implicites en connaissances explicites (El Euch, 2010).

La CML est sollicitée dans diverses tâches orales ou écrites qui font appel à la langue comme outil de réalisation de la tâche (p. ex. comprendre des énoncés mathématiques ou des slogans publicitaires ou participer à des jeux de mots). Ces tâches nécessitent des opérations métalinguistiques qui font appel à deux processus : l'analyse et le contrôle (Pinto, El Euch, 2017). D'un côté, l'analyse permet de « régir la représentation des unités et des règles de la langue » (Pinto, El Euch, 2017: 98). Par exemple, l'analyse permet à l'apprenant de détecter une erreur dans une unité de langue ou un élément ambigu dans un texte. De l'autre côté, le contrôle permet d'appliquer le bon traitement à la forme pour ainsi bien comprendre le message ou l'ignorer ou le corriger. Par exemple, lors d'une tâche ayant comme objectif la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif, les apprenants ne se limitent pas à conjuguer des verbes en récitant les terminaisons qu'ils ont apprises par cœur. Ils apprennent plutôt à décontextualiser le fonctionnement de la conjugaison pour ainsi la comprendre et la contrôler en se questionnant sur les groupes de verbes, les pronoms personnels et les terminaisons verbales. Ils deviennent des apprenants actifs.

En fait, la CML a une place de choix dans l'enseignement centré sur la forme et dans l'enseignement explicite, car elle permet d'outiller les apprenants dans la compréhension et dans l'utilisation des éléments langagiers. La CML est au cœur de notre démarche dans le cadre de ce projet, car elle permet de développer l'autonomie des apprenants durant les interactions orales de par la nécessité pour eux de prendre des décisions (Pinto, El Euch, 2015). Le questionnement provoqué par la CML pousse l'apprenant à faire des choix. Mais, il doit d'abord analyser la langue pour repérer des erreurs et les comprendre avant de passer à un niveau supérieur du traitement métalinguistique, à savoir prendre des décisions. Ces décisions sont le résultat du *contrôle* exercé par l'apprenant sur la langue en y apportant les corrections nécessaires tout en spécifiant la règle enfreinte (Pinto, El Euch, 2015).

## **Les rétroactions correctives entre pairs**

Les rétroactions correctives entre pairs sont supérieures à celles données par les enseignants (Sippel, Jackson, 2015) étant donné le fait que les apprenants sont plus engagés avec leurs pairs dans des contextes d'interaction qu'avec leur enseignant. Le fait qu'ils soient entre eux leur permet une plus grande liberté, un certain confort comparativement à lorsqu'ils se retrouvent avec l'enseignant (Nassaji, 2013). Ils parlent plus librement et se sentent moins intimidés au

moment de discuter et de poser des questions. De plus, les rétroactions correctives entre pairs dans des contextes d'interaction permettent non seulement aux apprenants de recevoir des rétroactions correctives, mais également d'en donner à un pair, ce qui s'avère bénéfique (Sippel, Jackson, 2015). En fait, les apprenants gagnent encore plus en donnant des rétroactions correctives plutôt qu'en les recevant (Lundstrom, Baker, cit. Sippel, Jackson, 2015). Enfin, les rétroactions correctives entre pairs favorisent le développement de la L2 parce que les apprenants se corrigeont plus entre eux qu'avec le professeur, et ont donc accès à plus de rétroactions correctives et à plus d'output (Sato, 2018).

Afin d'optimiser l'apport des rétroactions correctives entre pairs, il est important de tenir compte de deux critères : le niveau de complexité de la tâche (Anderson, Krathwohl, 2001) et la pratique. Les tâches ne doivent pas être trop exigeantes cognitivement pour que les apprenants soient capables de se concentrer sur la forme tout en traitant le sens (Sato, Lyster, 2012). En fait, lorsque les apprenants donnent des rétroactions correctives dans un contexte où le niveau de difficulté n'est pas trop élevé et que les apprenants sont capables de s'attarder sur la forme, l'aisance à l'oral des apprenants s'améliore (Sato, Lyster, 2012). La pratique contribue aussi à cette aisance en plus de favoriser la précision des apprentissages.

Loin de nuire au bon déroulement d'une conversation, les rétroactions correctives aident à améliorer l'aisance et la rapidité du traitement de l'information chez les apprenants lorsque ces derniers ont des connaissances antérieures suffisantes en lien avec l'élément linguistique ciblé. Dans ce cas, les rétroactions correctives activent ces connaissances dans la mémoire à long terme des apprenants, et mobilisent ces connaissances dans leur mémoire de travail (Sato, Lyster, 2012).

## La rétroaction corrective métalinguistique

Plusieurs chercheurs soulignent les avantages de la rétroaction corrective métalinguistique. Elle est considérée comme étant plus efficace que les *reformulations* (Ellis, Loewen, Erlam, 2006; Lyster, 1998; Lyster, Ranta, 1997; Panova, Lyster, 2002; cit. Nassaji, 2013), car elles permettent à l'apprenant de s'arrêter et de réfléchir à l'erreur linguistique qu'il a commise, et de la corriger (Lyster, Saito, Sato, 2012). Dans une situation d'interaction, la personne qui donne la rétroaction corrective métalinguistique apporte un commentaire qui suscite une réflexion métalinguistique, et ce, sans révéler la forme linguistique correcte (Hernández Méndez, Reyez Cruz, 2012). L'autocorrection est donc le but ultime de la rétroaction corrective métalinguistique.

Pour que les apprenants parviennent à donner une bonne rétroaction corrective métalinguistique, il faut qu'ils aient déjà des acquis linguistiques qui leur permettraient d'analyser certains éléments linguistiques de manière autonome. Les enseignants doivent donc soutenir les apprenants au moyen d'étayage pour que ces derniers aient les connaissances nécessaires à l'apprentissage d'un élément langagier précis. Sato et Lyster (2012) proposent de faire pratiquer les apprenants à donner et à recevoir des rétroactions correctives. Cette pratique se fait en trois étapes, à savoir la modélisation, la pratique et l'utilisation en contexte. D'abord, une modélisation où les enseignants jouent le rôle des apprenants est nécessaire. Cette modélisation s'échelonne sur trois semaines, à raison de 10 minutes par modélisation. Ensuite, les apprenants doivent pratiquer l'utilisation de la forme cible pendant 20 minutes durant huit semaines. Sato et Lyster (2012) suggèrent une pratique en équipes de trois apprenants ayant chacun un rôle. Plus concrètement, ils proposent les rôles suivants : celui qui parle, celui qui apporte la rétroaction corrective et celui qui observe. Pendant cette pratique, l'attention des apprenants est dirigée exclusivement sur la forme. Enfin, dans l'utilisation en contexte, les apprenants sont invités à utiliser les rétroactions correctives dans un contexte communicatif authentique. À cette étape, l'attention des apprenants est donc portée davantage sur le sens.

Une rétroaction corrective est *métalinguistique* lorsqu'elle favorise le développement de la CML des apprenants, car ceux-ci non seulement corrigeant leurs erreurs (Sippel, Jackson, 2015), mais aussi réfléchissent sur la langue et son fonctionnement (Pinto, El Euch, 2017).

Lorsque les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques se font entre pairs, elles se déroulent en trois temps: 1. Production de la forme linguistique (*output*), 2. Repérage d'erreurs, et 3. Reprise. Dans un premier temps, les apprenants produisent la forme linguistique « *output* ». Il va sans dire que le vocabulaire est une préoccupation constante pour les apprenants. Ils doivent sentir qu'ils connaissent suffisamment de mots afin de pouvoir se lancer dans les productions orales avec leurs pairs. Par conséquent, il est important de bien les outiller au niveau du lexique, car cet élément langagier est la base de tous les apprentissages (Philp, Iwashita, 2013).

Dans un deuxième temps, les apprenants procèdent au repérage d'erreurs linguistiques autant au niveau de leurs propres productions que celles de leurs pairs. Les apprenants doivent percevoir les erreurs s'ils veulent être en mesure d'apporter une rétroaction corrective (Sato, Lyster, 2012). Selon Schmidt (2001, cit. Philp, Iwashita, 2013), le repérage est l'étape qui est la plus reliée à la CML puisque c'est à ce stade que l'apprenant doit être en mesure de s'arrêter et d'amener ses pairs à réfléchir. Afin de pouvoir repérer des éléments linguistiques erronés dans les productions de ses pairs, l'enseignant doit s'assurer que l'apprenant connaît le vocabulaire qu'il devra utiliser et qu'il existe un climat de confiance entre les pairs. Selon Philp et Iwashita (2013), certaines variables peuvent influencer le repérage dont la compétence linguistique, les connaissances antérieures de la structure à atteindre, les différences individuelles et la mémoire de travail. Loewen et Sato (2018) soulignent également le rôle que joue la mémoire de travail dans le repérage et le développement du langage. Étant donné ces contraintes, il faut trouver des stratégies pour former les apprenants au repérage. Cela peut-être, par exemple, à travers le visionnement de vidéos dans lesquelles apparaissent des interactions parsemées de rétroactions correctives. À titre d'exemple, Philp et Iwashita (2013) ont permis aux apprenants de regarder des enregistrements vidéo dans lesquels ils avaient interagi avec leurs pairs. Les apprenants ont alors été en mesure d'expliquer s'ils avaient remarqué des erreurs, de décrire leurs réactions en recevant une rétroaction corrective et d'expliquer la raison pour laquelle ils avaient réagi comme ils l'avaient fait. Loewen et Sato (2018), quant à eux, proposent de susciter des réflexions chez les apprenants afin qu'ils prennent conscience du repérage. Par exemple, ils peuvent garder un journal de bord de façon continue pendant les interactions afin d'y noter les informations recueillies des rétroactions correctives, incluant les corrections proposées.

La troisième étape de la rétroaction corrective métalinguistique entre pairs est la reprise (*uptake*). Les apprenants apportent une rétroaction corrective à leurs pairs. L'objectif est que ces derniers réfléchissent à l'élément langagier et qu'ils corrigeant leurs énoncés. Or, cet exercice n'est pas naturel chez les apprenants et il faut même les pousser afin qu'ils y parviennent (Lyster, Ranta, 1997; cit. Sato, Lyster, 2012). Mais, une fois cet effort fait, des retombées positives ne tardent pas à se faire sentir, telle que l'estime de soi.

En somme, les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques données et reçues entre pairs s'avèrent très bénéfiques pour l'apprentissage d'une L2. Grâce à celles-ci, les apprenants sont appelés à s'arrêter et à réfléchir à un élément langagier précis. « La construction de ces processus réflexifs ne peut qu'être solidaire de processus métacognitifs se manifestant également dans les domaines majeurs du développement cognitif (résolution de problèmes, logique, mathématiques, physique, langage) » (Pinto, El Euch, 2017, p. 97).

Les problèmes observés par l'enseignante d'espagnol dans sa classe de quatrième année et les études démontrant la pertinence des rétroactives correctives entre pairs et l'importance de la CML ont donné lieu à la question de recherche suivante : quel est l'impact de l'appropriation de la pratique de la rétroaction corrective métalinguistique par les pairs sur l'apprentissage de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif ? Pour y répondre, l'enseignante s'est donné comme objectif d'examiner l'impact de l'appropriation des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques par les élèves sur l'apprentissage efficace de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif en espagnol, langue étrangère, et ce, en situation de pratique dirigée, et en situation communicative.

### III. La recherche-action

#### Les participants

Quinze (15) élèves dont neuf (9) filles et six (6) garçons âgés de 9,5 ans en moyenne ont pris part à cette recherche-action. Parmi les garçons, six (6) ont débuté l'apprentissage de l'espagnol au préscolaire 4 ans, deux (2) à la maternelle et un (1) au préscolaire 3 ans. Quant aux filles, six (6) d'entre elles ont débuté au préscolaire 4 ans.

#### Le contexte

L'expérimentation a eu lieu entre la mi-mai et la mi-juin 2020, ce qui correspond à la fin de la troisième étape scolaire des participants. La pandémie COVID-19 a imposé un enseignement en mode hybride avec des élèves en classe et d'autres à la maison. L'application *Zoom* était utilisée pour réunir les élèves pendant quatre heures par jour, une fois par semaine, pour leur apprentissage de l'espagnol. Les élèves avaient aussi des capsules vidéo à visionner et des activités à réaliser à d'autres moments, à raison de deux ou trois fois par semaine.

Avant d'examiner l'impact des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques par les pairs sur l'apprentissage efficace de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif en espagnol, l'enseignante a d'abord enseigné de manière explicite la conjugaison des verbes. Plus précisément, l'enseignement explicite a porté sur le groupe du nom, le groupe du verbe et le temps des verbes à conjuguer. Après avoir vérifié la compréhension de ces différents éléments par les élèves, l'enseignante a enseigné les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques pour que les élèves puissent les utiliser d'abord en contexte de pratique dirigée et, éventuellement, les transférer à un contexte communicatif. Enfin, elle s'est assurée de l'appropriation des élèves des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques avant de pouvoir examiner la mise en œuvre de celles-ci dans les interactions orales entre pairs.

#### Les instruments

Le tableau 1 présente les instruments qui ont servi à mesurer l'appropriation des élèves des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques en contexte de pratique dirigée et en contexte communicatif.

#### Le déroulement

Étant donné que l'étude repose sur des interactions orales, l'enseignante s'est assurée d'avoir des interactions optimales entre les pairs en portant une attention particulière à la formation des équipes (Sato, Ballinger, 2012). L'enseignante a placé les élèves en ateliers de manière à ce qu'ils aient l'opportunité de travailler avec tous les élèves de la classe. Ils ont ainsi pu, à la suite d'une quinzaine d'ateliers, choisir trois personnes avec qui ils aimeraient travailler. Pour les besoins de la recherche, l'enseignante a formé des équipes selon les choix des participants.

Le tableau 2 fait état du déroulement d'une situation d'apprentissage durant laquelle les données ont été recueillies pour répondre aux besoins de cette recherche. Il est à noter que toutes les séances et toutes les interactions ont été vidéo-captées.

OUTIL	DESCRIPTION	VISÉE
<i>Práctica 1</i> <sup>3</sup> (Document 30)	5 items suivis de 2 alternatives courtes (pronome+verbe) sont présentés. Incitation à : 1/ la reconnaissance de la conjugaison correcte parmi les 2 alternatives, 2/ la justification de la réponse.	Travail d'équipe où chaque élève a un rôle : observateur (présente), communicateur (tâche 1), correcteur (tâche 2). Les élèves co-construisent leurs connaissances. La perspective est socioconstructiviste.
<i>Práctica 2</i> (Document 31)	5 pronoms personnels et 5 verbes à l'infinitif sont présentés. Incitation à: 1/ la conjugaison au présent de l'indicatif, 2/ la justification de cette conjugaison.	Mesurer à la fois la connaissance de la conjugaison des verbes (habileté linguistique démontrée par le « communicateur ») et l'habileté métalinguistique (analyse et contrôle démontrés par « le correcteur »).
<i>Práctica 3</i> (Document 32)	5 verbes conjugués sont présentés. Incitation à : 1/ la déduction des pronoms personnels à partir des verbes conjugués, 2/ la justification de cette conjugaison.	
<i>Reflexión acerca de tu primer día de práctica</i> (Document 33)	7 questions d'appréciation des <i>Práctica 1</i> , <i>Práctica 2</i> et <i>Práctica 3</i> (5 questions à choix multiple dont 4 avec des demandes de clarification et 2 questions ouvertes).	Apprécier les rôles joués liés aux habiletés linguistiques (communicateur) et aux habiletés métalinguistiques (correcteur) et faire un bilan.
<i>Práctica 4</i> (Document 34)	3 phrases sont présentées suivies de 3 alternatives. Incitation à: 1/ la reconnaissance des verbes conjugués correctement, en contexte, puis justification de sa réponse, 2/ la confirmation de la réponse ou, au besoin, son infirmation et la justification de la correction apportée.	
<i>Práctica 5</i> (Document 35)	3 pronoms personnels et 3 images d'installation d'une école sont présentés. Incitation à : 1/ la production orale de 3 phrases, incluant des verbes conjugués, au choix de l'élève. Puis, justification de la conjugaison, 2/ la confirmation de la réponse ou, au besoin, son infirmation et la justification de la correction apportée.	Travail d'équipe où chaque élève a un rôle : observateur (présente), communicateur (tâche 1), correcteur (tâche 2). Les élèves co-construisent leurs connaissances. La perspective est socioconstructiviste.
<i>Práctica 6</i> (Document 36)	Une question est posée : « Que fais-tu à l'École Vision? » Incitation à : 1/ la production orale de 3 phrases qui incluent des verbes conjugués au présent pour y répondre. Puis, justification de la conjugaison, 2/ la confirmation de la réponse ou, au besoin, son infirmation et la justification de la correction apportée.	Mesurer à la fois l'habileté linguistique (la connaissance de la conjugaison des verbes) et l'habileté métalinguistique (justification de la conjugaison) chez un même élève (communicateur ou correcteur).
<i>Reflexión acerca de tu segundo día de práctica</i> (Document 37)	7 questions d'appréciation des <i>Práctica 4</i> , <i>Práctica 5</i> et <i>Práctica 6</i> (5 questions à choix multiple avec des demandes de clarification et 2 questions ouvertes).	Apprécier les rôles joués liés aux habiletés linguistiques et aux habiletés métalinguistiques (communicateur et correcteur) et faire un bilan.
<i>Folleto publicitario de vuestra escuela</i> (Document 38)	Création d'un pamphlet publicitaire avec ses pairs en deux temps. D'abord, prise de photos des activités et ensuite, élaboration du plan de travail pour la création finale du pamphlet publicitaire. Les rôles ne sont pas mentionnés dans cette activité.	Vérifier l'impact des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques pratiquées par les élèves entre eux à la suite de l'enseignement explicite de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif sur l'utilisation spontanée de cette forme grammaticale en contexte communicatif.
<i>Reflexión de fin de proyecto</i> (Document 39)	4 questions d'appréciation du projet (de l'expérimentation) (2 questions à choix multiple avec l'échelle de Likert et 2 questions ouvertes).	Faire un bilan des apprentissages et donner des suggestions à l'enseignante pour son enseignement futur de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif.

**Tableau 1.** Instruments ayant servi à mesurer l'appropriation des élèves des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques.

<sup>3</sup> Les activités *Práctica 1*, *Práctica 2*, *Práctica 3*, *Práctica 4*, *Práctica 5* et *Práctica 6* sont des jeux de rôles impliquant trois élèves qui échangent les rôles de communicateur, de correcteur et d'observateur.

DATE	DURÉE	OBJECTIFS ET SOUS-OBJECTIFS	TÂCHE DE L'ENSEIGNANTE	TÂCHE DE L'ÉLÈVE	INSTRUMENTS (OU OUTILS)
4 juin En classe	30 min.	Mise en pratique de rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques en contexte de pratique.	Expliquer la première pratique, remettre le matériel didactique, enregistrer la pratique et guider les apprenants au besoin	L'observateur présente deux verbes conjugués. Le communicateur choisit le verbe bien conjugué.  Le correcteur dit pourquoi le verbe est bien ou mal conjugué.	<i>Práctica 1</i> (Document 30)
	30 min.		Expliquer la deuxième pratique, remettre le matériel didactique, enregistrer la pratique et guider les apprenants au besoin.	L'observateur présente un pronom personnel (carte) et un verbe à l'infinitif (carte) au communicateur. Celui-ci conjugue le verbe. Le correcteur dit pourquoi le verbe est bien ou mal conjugué.	<i>Práctica 2</i> (Document 31)
	30 min.		Expliquer la troisième pratique, remettre le matériel didactique, enregistrer la pratique et guider les apprenants au besoin.	L'observateur présente un verbe conjugué et le communicateur dit quel pronom personnel correspond à la conjugaison. Le correcteur dit pourquoi il est d'accord ou pourquoi il n'est pas d'accord avec le choix du communicateur.	<i>Práctica 3</i> (Document 32)
5 juin Hors classe	10 min.		Expliquer le retour réflexif.	S'arrêter et apprécier la première journée de pratique.	<i>Reflexión acerca de tu primer día de práctica</i> (Document 33)
11 juin En classe	30 min.		Expliquer la première pratique, remettre le matériel didactique, enregistrer la pratique et guider les apprenants au besoin.	L'observateur présente des étiquettes sur lesquelles apparaissent trois phrases. Le communicateur mentionne quelle phrase contient le verbe bien conjugué et explique son choix. Le correcteur indique s'il est d'accord ou non. Le communicateur se corrige au besoin et le correcteur peut l'aider.	<i>Práctica 4</i> (Document 34)
	30 min.		Expliquer la cinquième pratique, remettre le matériel didactique, enregistrer la pratique et guider les apprenants au besoin.	L'observateur présente une carte de pronom personnel et une image représentant un lieu dans l'école. Le communicateur fait une phrase avec les éléments et explique sa conjugaison. Le correcteur indique si la conjugaison est correcte ou non. Le communicateur corrige sa conjugaison si elle est erronée. Le correcteur peut l'aider au besoin.	<i>Práctica 5</i> (Document 35)



DATE	DURÉE	OBJECTIFS ET SOUS-OBJECTIFS	TÂCHE DE L'ENSEIGNANTE	TÂCHE DE L'ÉLÈVE	INSTRUMENTS (OU OUTILS)
	30 min.		Expliquer la sixième pratique, remettre le matériel didactique, enregistrer la pratique et guider les apprenants au besoin.	L'observateur demande au communicateur « Que fais-tu à l'école? » Le communicateur répond à la question et explique sa conjugaison. Le correcteur mentionne si sa conjugaison est erronée ou non et le communicateur doit la corriger. Le correcteur peut apporter son aide au communicateur.	<i>Práctica 6</i> (Document 36)
18 juin En classe	10 min.		Expliquer le retour réflexif.	S'arrêter et apprécier sa deuxième journée de pratique de rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques	<i>Reflexión acerca de tu segundo día de práctica</i> (Document 37)
	60 à 90 min.	Mise en situation d'une activité de rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques en contexte communicatif	Expliquer les trois phases de l'activité de la création d'un pamphlet publicitaire  Étape 1 : Prendre 6 photos d'actions que posent les personnages de leur école Minecraft.  Étape 2 : Compléter le plan en inscrivant le lieu et les personnages, la description de l'action et l'explication de la conjugaison.  Étape 3 : Faire la version finale du pamphlet publicitaire.	Créer un pamphlet publicitaire avec ses pairs en respectant les trois étapes.  Étape 1 : Prendre les photos avec ses pairs.  Étape 2 : Compléter le plan de travail.  Étape 3 : Faire le pamphlet publicitaire.	<i>Folleto publicitario de vuestra escuela</i> (Document 38)
	10 min.	Mise en place d'une situation de réflexion.	Expliquer le retour réflexif.	S'arrêter et apprécier la dernière journée de pratique de rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques.	<i>Reflexión de fin de proyecto</i> (Document 39)

**Tableau 2.** Déroulement de la situation d'apprentissage dans le cadre de laquelle les données ont été recueillies.

## Le traitement et l'analyse des données

La recherche-action s'est appuyée sur des données quantitatives et d'autres qualitatives. Les données quantitatives ont été recueillies lors des activités expérimentales. Quant aux données qualitatives, elles consistent essentiellement dans les retours réflexifs que les apprenants ont complétés à la suite des journées de pratique et à l'activité en contexte communicatif.

Les données quantitatives proviennent des activités d'interaction entre pairs. Elles sont de deux types : linguistiques (L) et métalinguistiques (ML) (Pinto, El Euch, 2015). Ces derniers répondent au souhait de l'enseignante de mesurer le nombre de verbes correctement conjugués au présent de l'indicatif (L) ainsi que la fréquence et la qualité des rétroactions

correctives métalinguistiques (ML) employées par les apprenants autant dans les activités de pratique dirigées que dans l'activité de contexte communicatif spontané.

Afin de voir si l'enseignement explicite a favorisé chez les élèves l'apprentissage efficace de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif et le transfert de cet apprentissage dans des situations d'interaction entre pairs, tous les verbes réguliers conjugués au présent de l'indicatif ont été considérés dans le corpus. Suivant la procédure adoptée dans les travaux de Pinto (1999) pour coder le volet L, une valeur de 0 ou 1 a été attribuée à chaque verbe ; 0 a été attribué à une conjugaison incorrecte et 1 à une conjugaison correcte. Le nombre total des verbes conjugués correctement ou incorrectement, c'est-à-dire la fréquence d'utilisation des verbes, a aussi été notée. Le tableau 3 présente les critères de codage ou d'évaluation utilisés. La fréquence et les valeurs maximales pour chaque activité sont détaillées dans le tableau 4.

Quant aux données de type ML, elles proviennent des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques initiées par les élèves. Le codage de ces données est aussi basé sur les travaux de Pinto (1999). Chaque rétroaction corrective métalinguistique avait une valeur de 0, 1 ou 2 selon le degré d'analyse et de contrôle démontré par l'élève. Le tableau 5 détaille les éléments pris en compte pour l'attribution des valeurs de 0 à 2; 2 étant une valeur attribuée à une rétroaction corrective ML démontrant un niveau d'analyse et de contrôle optimal, 1 démontrant un niveau de développement partiel de cette habileté et 0 référant à l'absence d'une habileté métalinguistique ou à une analyse et un contrôle erronés. Le tableau 6 présente la fréquence et les valeurs maximales des rétroactions correctives ML en contexte de pratique dirigée et en contexte communicatif.

Toutes les données ont été extraites à partir des enregistrements vidéo des séances d'enseignement. Les données codées ont été saisies dans EXCEL. Elles ont été par la suite converties en pourcentage, et traitées au moyen d'analyses descriptives de base. Seulement les moyennes ont été calculées, étant donné la nature de cette recherche et les contraintes d'espace et de temps qui y sont associées.

CRITÈRES	X	0	1
Un verbe régulier bien conjugué			1
Un verbe régulier mal conjugué		0	
Un verbe irrégulier bien conjugué			1
Un verbe irrégulier mal conjugué	X		
Un verbe irrégulier bien conjugué avec une diphtongue mal employée			1
Exemple: <i>Él pode (ella puede), ella tene (ella tiene)</i>			

**Tableau 3.** Les critères d'évaluation/codage de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif lors d'interactions entre pairs.

Bien que cette recherche-action ne comporte pas d'objectif nécessitant une analyse qualitative, il était essentiel pour l'enseignante de recueillir les avis des élèves quant à la pratique de rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques entre pairs. Ce volet de la démarche de l'enseignante est de type *descriptif qualitatif* (Sandelowski, 2010) en ce sens qu'il permet de décrire certains aspects d'une expérience sans se référer à une méthodologie qualitative distincte (Fortin, Gagnon, 2016).

Dans ce cadre, à la suite de la collecte des données quantitatives, l'enseignante a recueilli les réflexions des élèves à l'aide d'un questionnaire, et ce, à deux reprises. Bien que le questionnaire final ait comporté une échelle d'appréciation de type Likert allant de 1 (*Je n'ai pas aimé*) à 5 (*C'est ce que j'ai le plus aimé*), une analyse holistique du contenu a été utilisée pour dégager les aspects positifs et les aspects négatifs de l'expérience qu'ont vécue les élèves à partir de leurs réponses au questionnaire. Les résultats obtenus serviront à mieux comprendre les résultats issus des données quantitatives.

	PD JOUR 1			PD JOUR 2			CONTEXTE COMMUNICATIF	
	Práctica 1	Práctica 2	Práctica 3	Práctica 4	Práctica 5	Práctica 6	Étape 1	Étape 2
(F) Fréquence	5	5	5	2	3	3	Illimité	Illimité
(L) Linguistique	0-1	0-1	0-1	0-1	0-1	0-1	0-1	0-1
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Illimité</b>	<b>Illimité</b>

**Tableau 4.** La fréquence et les valeurs maximales des verbes conjugués au présent de l'indicatif en contexte de pratique dirigée (PD) et en contexte communicatif.

CRITÈRES	VALEURS		
	0	1	2
Faire une réflexion métalinguistique erronée.	X		
Répéter la marche à suivre de la conjugaison sans référence aux éléments linguistiques.	X		
Répéter l'explication métalinguistique d'un pair.	X		
Faire référence à seulement <b>1 ou 2</b> des 3 éléments de la conjugaison demandée :			
- le groupe du verbe			X
- le pronom personnel			
- la terminaison			
Faire référence aux 3 éléments de la conjugaison demandée :			X
- le groupe du verbe			
- le pronom personnel			
- la terminaison			

**Tableau 5.** La grille de codage/évaluation pour les rétroactions correctives ML.

	PD JOUR 1			PD JOUR 2			CONTEXTE COMMUNICATIF	
	Práctica 1	Práctica 2	Práctica 3	Práctica 4	Práctica 5	Práctica 6	Étape 1	Étape 2
(F) Fréquence	5	5	5	2	3	3	Illimité	Illimité
(L) Linguistique	0-1-2	0-1-2	0-1-2	0-1-2	0-1-2	0-1-2	0-1-2	0-1-2
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Illimité</b>	<b>Illimité</b>

**Tableau 6.** La fréquence et les valeurs maximales des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques en contexte de pratique dirigée et en contexte communicatif.

#### IV. Les résultats

Les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques entre pairs ont été au centre même de cette recherche-action. Leur utilisation avait comme but de développer la CML en lien avec la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif afin, d'une part, d'optimiser l'utilisation correcte de la conjugaison en contexte d'interaction, et d'autre part d'ancre cet apprentissage chez les élèves. Les résultats de l'expérimentation ont permis de constater le niveau de mobilisation de la CML chez les élèves alors qu'ils étaient appelés à utiliser des verbes au présent de l'indicatif, d'abord en contexte de pratique dirigée et ensuite en contexte communicatif.

## Les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques en situation de pratique dirigée

Les réponses des élèves aux six activités d’interaction orale en contexte de pratique dirigée (*Práctica 1, Práctica 2, Práctica 3, Práctica 4, Práctica 5, Práctica 6*) ont été analysées d’abord pour faire ressortir le niveau de développement des habiletés linguistiques (L) des élèves, en conjugaison des verbes au présent, puis pour évaluer le niveau de développement des habiletés métalinguistiques (ML) des élèves, c'est-à-dire leurs habiletés d'analyse et de contrôle de la conjugaison au présent de l'indicatif. Utiliser correctement la conjugaison, c'est bien ; mais l'utiliser en sachant exactement pourquoi on l'utilise ainsi est encore mieux pour sa rétention.

Le tableau 7 présente la moyenne des élèves quant à leurs habiletés ML dans les 6 activités. Les résultats montrent que le niveau de développement de la CML des élèves est à presque 60%, variant entre 49% et 66%. Ces résultats suggèrent que les élèves n’ont pas fait preuve d’explications optimales de la conjugaison en situation de pratique dirigée, et ce, même si les notions étaient connues des apprenants, qu’elles aient été explicitement expliquées et que les élèves avaient des outils didactiques sur lesquels ils pouvaient s’appuyer. Ce résultat peut être expliqué par le fait que ce soit la pratique elle-même qui a été évaluée plutôt qu’une évaluation qui viendrait après une pratique suffisante. Le résultat suggère donc une maîtrise en développement.

ACTIVITÉS	OBJECTIFS	N	n	MOYENNE
<i>Práctica 1</i>	Reconnaissance de conjugaisons courtes hors contexte	15	15	60%
<i>Práctica 2</i>	Conjugaison de verbes	15	14	61%
<i>Práctica 3</i>	Déductions des pronoms personnels	15	15	49%
<i>Práctica 4</i>	Reconnaissance de verbes conjugués en contexte	15	15	55%
<i>Práctica 5</i>	Production orale de phrases incluant des verbes conjugués	15	15	66%
<i>Práctica 6</i>	Production orale de phrases	15	9	61%
Moyenne		15	13,83	59%

**Tableau 7.** La maîtrise de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif dans les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques dans le cadre de six activités d’interaction orale en contexte de pratique dirigée.

La Práctica 5 démontre le score le plus élevé parmi les six pratiques. Lors de cette activité, après que l’observateur eut présenté une image d’une installation et un pronom personnel, le communicateur devait produire une phrase décrivant une action posée par une personne dans un lieu précis de l’école. Le communicateur devait d’abord faire appel à sa mémoire pour choisir un verbe et ensuite réfléchir à quel groupe il appartient pour pouvoir le conjuguer avec le pronom personnel proposé. Par la suite, il devait justifier sa conjugaison. La Práctica 5 permettait de constater si la CML de l’apprenant s’active, car celui-ci devait décorriger la conjugaison. Il faisait appel à un processus cognitif interne d’analyse et de contrôle (Pinto, El Euch, 2017). De plus, ce score relativement élevé peut également être expliqué par la familiarité des élèves avec la procédure, car le communicateur consultait intuitivement un outil didactique à sa disposition, soit la *Libreta de conjugación de verbos*. Enfin, lorsque les communicateurs ne parvenaient pas à la bonne conjugaison, les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques apportées par les correcteurs permettaient aux communicateurs de s’autocorriger, ce qui est le but ultime des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques.

Par ailleurs, il est important de préciser que les Práctica 4, Práctica 5 et Práctica 6 ont été créées afin que le communicateur lui-même développe sa CML en justifiant sa propre conjugaison. Il était responsable de son apprentissage, car il devait s’arrêter et réfléchir pour analyser la forme conjuguée qu’il a produite.

La *Práctica 3* révèle le score le moins élevé. Ce résultat pourrait s'expliquer par le fait que les correcteurs, qui devaient justifier la conjugaison des communicateurs, se retrouvaient souvent devant de bonnes conjugaisons. Alors, plusieurs d'entre eux se limitaient à confirmer leur conjugaison et omettaient d'en donner la justification.

Les élèves ont obtenu des scores comparables dans les activités 1, 2 et 6. Dans la *Práctica 1* et la *Práctica 2*, les correcteurs devaient justifier la reconnaissance de conjugaisons courtes hors contexte et devaient également justifier les conjugaisons produites par les communicateurs. Les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques étaient données par les correcteurs. Il était toujours tentant pour ceux-ci de se limiter à simplement approuver la conjugaison lorsque celle-ci était correcte sans donner de justification. Quant à la *Práctica 6*, il est important de noter que deux enregistrements n'ont pas fonctionné et qu'il est donc difficile d'expliquer le résultat obtenu.

### Les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques en situation communicative

Les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques ont été recueillies à deux moments. D'abord, lors d'interaction orales spontanées, lorsque les élèves devaient décider quelles photos et actions ils allaient présenter dans leur pamphlet publicitaire. À ce moment-là, les élèves n'ont donné aucune rétroaction corrective métalinguistique (voir tableau 7). Dans un deuxième temps, elles ont été recueillies lorsque les élèves avaient à compléter un plan écrit qui devait comporter des verbes conjugués accompagnés d'une explication de la conjugaison. Ils ont alors produit quelques rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques. Le tableau 8 montre la fréquence d'utilisation (F) des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques et les valeurs de celles-ci pour les deux étapes de l'activité en contexte communicatif.

Ces résultats doivent être analysés en deux temps, selon les deux étapes de l'activité en contexte communicatif. D'abord, l'objectif de la première étape était de recréer un contexte communicatif spontané en classe. L'enseignante souhaitait voir si les élèves, dans un contexte d'interaction spontanée, allaient s'apporter des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques de manière autonome, sans sollicitation orale ou écrite de sa part.

ACTIVITÉ	OBJECTIFS	F ET ML	N	N	MOYENNE
<i>Folleto publicitario</i>	Étape 1 : Prise de photos	F ML	15 15	14 14	0% 0%
	Étape 2 : Compléter le plan de travail	F ML	15 15	14 14	2,71% 2,72%

**Tableau 8.** Fréquence (F) et valeurs ML des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques dans le cadre d'interaction orale entre pairs en contexte communicatif spontané et sollicité.

Les élèves devaient trouver des photos pour leur pamphlet publicitaire. Les résultats montrent une absence totale de rétroactions correctives. Les élèves ne se sont pas arrêtés pour réfléchir à leurs conjugaisons ou aux conjugaisons de leurs pairs. Pourtant, l'enseignante s'était assurée que la tâche demandée était familière aux élèves (Philp et al., 2010), qu'ils connaissaient bien la procédure des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques (Mackey et al., 2007) et les outils didactiques qui y étaient associés, qu'ils étaient familiers avec leurs pairs, qu'ils étaient autonomes (Sato, Ballinger, 2012) et que la tâche n'était pas trop difficile cognitivement (Sato et al., 2012). Cette activité était tout simplement trop axée sur le sens. Les élèves étaient centrés sur le sens de la tâche et absorbés par un esprit de créativité.

À la deuxième étape de l'activité, les élèves devaient compléter un plan pour leur pamphlet publicitaire. Cette étape correspondait à un contexte communicatif sollicité. L'enseignante a ajouté un outil dans lequel les élèves devaient inscrire leurs conjugaisons et la justifier. Ils

sont parvenus à donner seulement quelques rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques au moment où ils devaient justifier leurs conjugaisons et celles-ci contenaient peu d'éléments repris de la démarche de conjugaison déjà pratiquée. Par exemple, des coéquipiers pouvaient seulement faire référence au pronom personnel sans nécessairement faire allusion au groupe du verbe ou encore à la terminaison verbale.

À partir de ces résultats, il semble que le contexte communicatif sollicité permet de centrer l'enseignement un peu plus sur la forme. La tâche proposée aux élèves joue donc un rôle majeur dans les habiletés qu'ils mobiliseront.

Par ailleurs, en plus de la mémoire, les activités proposées aux élèves sollicitent aussi les fonctions exécutives, car les apprenants doivent prendre en compte à la fois la langue, le sens et eux-mêmes, c'est-à-dire leurs rôles dans la conversation. Quant à l'explication de la conjugaison, elle fait appel à l'habileté métacognitive des apprenants, qui est une habileté de haut niveau. Elle requiert la conscience du contexte linguistique et social (habileté d'analyse), et un contrôle sur la langue pour l'utiliser comme objet d'explication (habileté de contrôle). Le fait que les habiletés linguistiques soient supérieures aux habiletés métalinguistiques est normal et s'explique par des raisons développementales, car les connaissances implicites précèdent toujours les connaissances explicites de la langue (El Euch, 2010).

### **Appréciation des élèves des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques entre pairs**

Les élèves ont été interrogés par rapport aux rôles qu'ils ont le plus aimé jouer entre « observateur », « communicateur » et « correcteur ». Lors de la première journée de pratique dirigée, les apprenants ont manifesté de l'intérêt pour le rôle de correcteur, car il leur permettait de corriger leurs pairs (*Me gusta hacer el corrector porque me gusta corregir los verbos; Me gusta más el corrector por que yo sabe mi verbo y me gusta ayudar a Clara y Sophia*). Pour certains, ce rôle était même amusant. Après la deuxième journée de pratique dirigée, les élèves ont préféré le rôle de communicateur. Durant cette journée, les communicateurs avaient comme tâche de conjuguer les verbes et d'ensuite expliquer leurs conjugaisons. Le rôle de communicateur faisait appel à l'habileté métalinguistique du participant, laquelle était réservée, dans les journées précédentes, au correcteur. Les élèves ont trouvé ce rôle plus difficile, mais ils ont admis spontanément qu'il leur a permis d'apprendre. Par exemple : « *Aprende mucho i el observador no aprende mucho; Me gustó más él comunicador por que ahora él comunicador dice por que; Explica mucho y habla mucho* ».

Les élèves ont également été interrogés quant au rôle qu'ils ont le moins aimé jouer. Sans surprise, leurs réponses ont révélé que le rôle le moins apprécié était celui d'observateur, car il ne leur avait pas permis d'apprendre, qu'il se limitait à la lecture et l'écriture, et qu'il était ennuyant.

En somme, les résultats montrent que les rôles préférés des élèves sont ceux de correcteur et de communicateur. Les raisons évoquées montrent que les élèves ne veulent pas être passifs même si, selon leurs dires, le rôle de communicateur demandait un plus grand effort lors des deuxièmes pratiques dirigées. Ces résultats permettent de conclure que, en général, les élèves apprécient les tâches qui présentent des défis. Les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques entre pairs en est un exemple. Les élèves ont apprécié jouer un rôle important dans leur apprentissage et dans celui de leurs pairs.

Par ailleurs, malgré le fait que les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques n'aient pas été utilisées en contexte communicatif spontané, et qu'elles aient été très peu utilisées en contexte communicatif sollicité, les élèves ont souligné, dans leurs retours réflexifs, qu'ils ont été en mesure de percevoir les erreurs de leurs pairs en contexte de pratique dirigée et qu'ils ont été capables de les corriger. Les élèves ont donc pris conscience d'un certain développement métalinguistique qui s'est opéré en eux durant la recherche-action.

## V. Conclusion

Dans son article, Sato (2013) souligne qu'il est possible de maximiser les apprentissages en outillant les apprenants afin qu'ils puissent apporter des rétroactions correctives lors des interactions entre eux. C'est dans ce but que l'enseignante a sollicité la CML (Pinto, El Euch, 2017) des élèves dans les activités proposées. La recherche-action mise en œuvre par l'enseignante avait pour but d'examiner le rôle des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques entre pairs dans l'apprentissage efficace de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif. Pour favoriser des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques de qualité, l'enseignante a procédé d'abord à l'enseignement explicite de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif en espagnol.

Alors qu'en contexte de pratique dirigée le rôle de l'enseignement explicite se reflétait clairement dans les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques entre pairs, en contexte communicatif spontané et en contexte communicatif sollicité, l'enseignement explicite a été moins concluant. Les rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques étaient plus efficaces lorsque l'élève devait justifier sa propre conjugaison plutôt que celle de ses pairs, car il se trouvait à s'auto-corriger. Il était donc davantage engagé dans son apprentissage, et il l'appréhendait, comme il en a témoigné dans les appréciations de ses apprentissages.

Cette recherche-action a permis à l'enseignante de constater que, grâce à l'apprentissage de l'utilisation de rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques, les apprenants sont plus engagés dans leurs apprentissages. Le pouvoir de rétroaction corrective qui leur est délégué les rend plus conscients de la forme linguistique à acquérir. Ils portent une attention particulière à l'élément langagier sélectionné par l'enseignante. En ayant une mission d'aide et de soutien à l'apprentissage, ils sont en mesure d'accomplir une tâche qui les incite à s'engager davantage dans leurs interactions orales et à maintenir le flux des interactions. De plus, les rétroactions correctives entre pairs ont permis aux apprenants d'être moins dépendants de l'enseignante (Hernández Méndez, Reyes Cruz, 2012) et plus en contrôle de leur production langagière (Lightbown, 2008). En effet, les apprenants s'arrêtent et réfléchissent à leurs énoncés. Ils sont plus conscients de la structure de la langue. Avec le temps et la pratique de rétroaction corrective métalinguistique, ils développeront des réflexes face au fonctionnement de la langue. Ainsi, ils feront de moins en moins d'erreurs au niveau de la conjugaison des verbes au présent de l'indicatif.

Malgré les impacts positifs de l'enseignement explicite et de l'utilisation des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques en interaction orale, cette recherche-action comporte des limites. Bien que l'enseignante ait privilégié l'enseignement des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques entre pairs en trois étapes, tel que proposé par Sato, Lyster (2012), soit la modélisation, la pratique et le contexte communicatif, il n'était pas possible, dû au contexte pandémique de 2020, d'effectuer la modélisation en présence. La modélisation des rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques s'est faite sous forme de capsules vidéo que les élèves devaient regarder hors du contexte régulier de l'enseignement de l'espagnol. Malheureusement, certains élèves n'ont pas vu les vidéos, malgré les nombreux rappels. Il aurait été certainement plus judicieux de faire les modélisations de pratiques de rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques en classe et d'en discuter avec les élèves afin de valider leur compréhension et leur appropriation du processus de rétroaction corrective métalinguistique. Davantage de pratique de rétroactions correctives métalinguistiques sera mise en place dans le cadre d'activités didactiques comparables à celles proposées par Pinto (2015).

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# Conscience métalinguistique et savoirs scolaires : pourquoi certains items du Tham-2 (Pinto, El Euch, 2015) obtiennent-ils de meilleurs scores que d'autres ?<sup>1</sup>

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**TITLE:** *Metalinguistic awareness and academic knowledge: why certain items of the THAM-2 (Pinto, El Euch, 2015) yield better scores than others?*

**ABSTRACT:** *Metalinguistic abilities develop on the basis of several factors. Among these, school has a special role not only because it teaches literacy skills and a specific metalanguage but also because it orients critical reflection about language and the outer world. However, between 9 and 14 years of age, there is a considerable increase in linguistic and metalinguistic capabilities due to biological and social factors, as these involve an extension of social interactions and content acquisitions in and out of the school context. We can therefore wonder how students can access the type of metalinguistic competence required to respond to the THAM-2 items (a French test of metalinguistic abilities for the age range 9-14, Pinto, El Euch, 2015) if this competence is not taught at school. What is the relationship between academic knowledge and metalinguistic capabilities? A first approach to this issue is proposed by analyzing some responses to items of the THAM-2 that are close to school tasks and to others that, conversely, are profoundly extraneous to these tasks. The analysis is based on data recently collected on the THAM-2 in three different French-speaking contexts: Toulouse (France), Niamey (Niger) and Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire).*

**KEYWORDS :** *Metalinguistic awareness, academic knowledge, metalanguage, THAM-2 (Test d'habiletés métalinguistiques, Pinto, El Euch, 2015), French-speaking children.*

## I. Introduction

Dans cette contribution, nous nous intéressons au développement des habiletés métalinguistiques des sujets francophones, telles qu'elles sont mesurées par le THAM-2 – (Test des Habiletés Métalinguistiques n. 2, Pinto, El Euch, 2015), destiné aux sujets de 9 à 14 ans. Plus précisément, nous souhaitons analyser la façon dont ces sujets s'y prennent pour exprimer leurs jugements sur l'acceptabilité et la plausibilité des énoncés qui leur sont proposés.

En effet, si tout sujet locuteur est immédiatement capable « de porter des jugements intuitifs sur la bonne formation des énoncés ou des parties d'énoncés, aussi bien sur leur forme que sur leurs propriétés interprétatives » (Riegel et al., 1994 : 16), la justification de son jugement demande une « prise de conscience » (Piaget, 1974) et le passage d'une reconnaissance automatique à une abstraction réfléchie, une conceptualisation qui s'accompagne de la formulation des éléments qui ont été abstraits :

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« En ce qui concerne la conceptualisation, celle-ci est loin de ne constituer qu'une simple lecture : elle est une reconstruction, et qui introduit des caractères nouveaux sous la forme de liaisons logiques, avec mise en connexion de la compréhension et des extensions, etc. » (Piaget, 1974 : 277)

La fonction métalinguistique est une des premières fonctions attribuées au langage humain : « chaque fois que le destinataire et/ou le destinataire jugent nécessaire de vérifier s'ils utilisent bien le même code, le discours est centré sur le code : il remplit une fonction métalinguistique (Jakobson 1963 : 218). Pour Émile Benveniste, la faculté métalinguistique est à l'origine de la « relation d'interprétance entre un système interprétant et un système interprété » (Benveniste, 1974 : 65), propre au langage humain : « la langue peut, en principe, tout catégoriser et interpréter, y compris elle-même » (Benveniste, 1974 : 62). Au sein de l'activité métalinguistique, Antoine Culoli dégage une « activité métalinguistique non-consciente de tout sujet », qui se distingue de « l'activité métalinguistique délibérée » (Culoli, Desclés, 1982 : 100-101). Il qualifie la première activité, peu ou non-consciente, d'épilinguistique :

« Nous appelons ainsi ces textes qu'un sujet produit lorsque, de façon spontanée ou en réponse à une sollicitation, il commente un texte précédent. Nous parlons de glose et non de paraphrase, afin de réserver ce dernier terme à une activité réglée, donc contrôlée par l'observateur, alors que la glose renvoie à la pratique langagière du sujet énonciateur » (Culoli, 1999 : 74).

Le locuteur acquiert une conscience métalinguistique lorsqu'il est capable de rendre explicite et contrôlable une première « rationalité non-verbale » (Le Normand, 2011 : 95).

La part d'implicite et d'explicite dans l'apprentissage de savoirs comportementaux intéressent particulièrement la recherche actuelle en psycholinguistique et en sciences de l'éducation. Pour Gombert (2018 : 1) :

« [l']apprentissage implicite se manifeste par une adaptation progressive des comportements d'un individu aux caractéristiques de l'environnement avec lequel il interagit. Ceci se produit à l'insu de la personne qui ne prend pas conscience de ces caractéristiques ».

Le fait qu'il n'en prenne pas conscience implique qu'il ne sache pas non plus expliquer les règles qui sous-tendent sa conduite. Dans le cas d'un contenu linguistique, par exemple, même si le locuteur saura spontanément juger celui-ci bon ou mauvais (réponse épilinguistique), il aura des difficultés à expliciter spontanément son choix du fait que ses connaissances des règles demeurent implicites (réponse métalinguistique).

Pour Gombert (2018, contrairement à Gombert, 1990), les capacités épilinguistiques et métalinguistiques restent parallèles, autrement dit les capacités épilinguistiques ne se transforment pas en métalinguistiques par une prise de conscience du locuteur et les capacités métalinguistiques ne deviennent pas conscientes du fait qu'elles se procéduralisent. Par ailleurs, alors que la compétence épilinguistique accompagne la compétence linguistique chez tout locuteur, l'accès au niveau métalinguistique ne se fait pas nécessairement chez tout locuteur.

Les habiletés métalinguistiques se développent grâce à plusieurs facteurs rappelés dans Pinto, El Euch, (2015 : 26-28), parmi lesquels l'école a une grande part, enseignant non seulement l'écriture et un métalangage spécifique mais aussi une réflexion critique sur la langue et sur le monde. Cependant, entre 9 et 14 ans particulièrement, les capacités cognitives, langagières et métalinguistiques s'accroissent considérablement, du fait de l'extension des interactions sociales et des contenus acquis dans et hors du contexte scolaire (Pinto, El Euch, 2015 : 69-70).

On peut alors se demander comment le sujet accède aux savoirs métalinguistiques qu'il sera susceptible d'exprimer dans le THAM-2 s'ils ne lui ont pas été enseignés par l'école. L'absence d'un discours scolaire sur certains faits de langue expliquerait-elle que les scores obtenus pour certains items du THAM-2 soient plus bas que d'autres ? De façon plus générale, nous nous demandons quel est le lien entre savoirs scolaires et capacités métalinguistiques.

Nous proposons une première approche de cette question par l'étude de quelques réponses aux items du THAM 2 proches des tâches scolaires et d'autres qui leur sont foncièrement étrangers. L'étude s'appuie sur des corpus récents de ce test, recueillis à Toulouse, Niamey et Abidjan. Nous examinons tout d'abord les réponses de locuteurs peu scolarisés aux tests Acceptabilité et Ambigüité (2), puis les réponses de locuteurs scolarisés normalement, aux questions du test Acceptabilité mettant en jeu des compétences ressortissant de la grammaire scolaire (3), et à celles qui demandent plutôt de faire un lien entre langue et expérience du monde (4). Nous examinons ensuite les réponses aux questions du test Ambigüité qui mettent en jeu des savoirs linguistiques non enseignés à l'école (5) et nous terminerons la réflexion par une digression hors du THAM-2 (6), en faisant appel à l'analyse de la conscience métaphonologique à propos de la liaison en français (Boutin et al., à paraître). Etant donnée l'hétérogénéité de notre méthodologie, nous traitons à part ces quatre analyses, tout en faisant progresser la réflexion au fil du texte.

## II. Les habiletés métalinguistiques des non lecteurs

Dans l'optique d'approcher le développement métalinguistique de l'adolescent en lien avec les apprentissages scolaires, nous avons interrogé oralement des sujets de 13 et 14 ans non lecteurs. Les non lecteurs en français peuvent déchiffrer les mots, mais n'accèdent que difficilement au sens d'un texte écrit, même court, et peuvent difficilement écrire. Ils ne sont pas totalement étrangers à l'écrit puisque certains peuvent connaître une autre langue écrite et que tous vivent dans des sociétés où l'écrit est bien présent. Cependant, leur environnement culturel ne les a pas incités à entrer dans l'écrit, ils n'ont eu qu'un contact sporadique avec l'école, ou n'ont pas éprouvé de motif fonctionnel pour apprendre à lire en début de primaire (Chauveau, Rogovas-Chauveau, 1994). Le taux de la population illettrée en France est aujourd'hui de 7% et elle peut aller jusqu'à plus de 50% dans certains pays.

Les quatre sujets non lecteurs qui ont passé oralement les tests Acceptabilité et Ambigüité du THAM-2 ont 13 et 14 ans et ont été recrutés de façon aléatoire. Les items des tests ont été adaptés de façon à ce qu'ils soient accessibles culturellement et linguistiquement à des locuteurs peu en lien avec le français standard, et nous avons adopté un français oral simplifié durant la passation. Par exemple, dans le test Acceptabilité, le mot *requin* (3.8) a parfois été remplacé par *carpe*, ou *roche* par *caillou*; l'item 3.13) *Un chevaux court joyeusement* a été remplacé par *Un/le chevaux est content de courir*. Les passations se sont faites en 2022 dans un endroit calme, assis devant l'ordinateur où était affiché le test ; les réponses ont été enregistrées avec l'accord du sujet. Chaque test s'est déroulé en une vingtaine de minutes. Nous précisons que les sujets n'étaient pas familiarisés avec ce type d'exercice. En effet, même si tout locuteur possède une certaine habitude de se prononcer sur des mots ou des phrases qu'il entend ou produit (le « code », d'après Jakobson, 1963), seules des tâches de type scolaire présentent systématiquement une suite de phrases isolées dans le but de recueillir l'opinion de l'auditeur. Par ailleurs, le fait même de poser des questions alors que l'interrogateur connaît la réponse, uniquement dans le but d'apprécier la solution donnée, est typiquement une attitude didactique scolaire, même si de telles interactions verbales sont possibles aussi dans d'autres contextes que l'école.

Globalement, les sujets ont donné des réponses similaires à celles des sujets scolarisés en collège. Les réponses épilinguistiques ont été exactes, à part quelques non réponses. Plus que des données quantifiées, nous nous intéressons ici aux types de réponses formulées pour justifier la réponse épilinguistique. Divers types de réponses de niveau métalinguistique peuvent être distingués dans le test Acceptabilité. Certaines font appel à des catégorisations des référents avec leurs implications en termes de propriétés associées, d'autres s'appuient sur des reformulations, d'autres enfin opèrent des quantifications, ou évaluent la nécessité de précisions. Les quatre non lecteurs ont manqué de mots pour opérer des catégorisations tels

que : *humain, non humains, animé, non animé*. Ils ont parfois mobilisé les catégories *objet, adulte* (pour *humain*). Toutefois, ce manque de ressources lexicales n'empêche pas une catégorisation par prototype, avec les mêmes implications en termes de propriétés :

« La corde peut pas jouer avec le chat parce que la corde est genre une table qui ne bouge pas ».

Tout comme chez les collégiens, des réponses évoquant des propriétés sans catégorisation ou généralisation préalable ont été recueillies :

« La poule même n'a pas d'écriture ».

« Le caillou peut pas s'endormir parce que le caillou n'a pas de bouche ni des yeux ni des oreilles ni... »

« La corde peut pas bouger »

« Une carpe nage dans l'eau, pas dans le sable »

La carence de vocabulaire, en l'occurrence *nageoires*, n'est pas un obstacle à la verbalisation du jugement sur l'item 3.8) *Le requin nageait sur le sable* :

« Sur le sable il peut pas bouger ses pieds ou ses trucs ».

Tous les non lecteurs interrogés ont jugé agrammatical 3.2B) *La fille caressait* et ont su, sans métalangage scolaire, convoquer des arguments sémantiques (premiers exemples) et même syntaxiques (derniers exemples) :

« En fait je sais pas c'est quoi la fille va caresser ».

« On sait pas ce que la fille caresse, si on dit la fille caresse le chat... »

« Oui parce que il y a le chien, elle a caressé le chien. Mais si on dit la fille caresse il y a rien, elle caresse quoi ? »

« Le chien ? Il y a plusieurs choses qu'elle peut caresser, on doit chercher quelque chose pour mettre là-dessus ».

Sans métalangage grammatical scolaire, le non lecteur peut aussi différencier la quantification exprimée à travers la morphologie des mots, notamment à propos de l'item 3.9) *Le chat sont en train de ronronner* :

« Parce qu'il est un ils sont pas beaucoup ».

« S'il est seul on peut dire, mais là ils sont beaucoup, on va dire le chat est en train de ronronner ».

Dans le test Ambigüité, on observe aussi des reformulations adéquates, mettant en jeu l'expérience du monde, par exemple à propos des différentes possibilités d'interprétations des synonymes dans 4.1.A) *La feuille était par terre* :

« Une feuille morte / Une feuille qui se déchire dans le cahier ».

« Peut-être le vent a soufflé d'une manière et puis c'est tombé / C'est quelqu'un qui a déchiré la feuille et puis elle l'a laissé tomber ».

Cette première étude, réalisée de façon exploratoire sur un petit nombre d'adolescents non lecteurs, confirme tout d'abord que l'école est nécessaire pour construire un réseau de concepts permettant une réflexion aboutie sur des énoncés dont l'acceptabilité syntaxique ou la plausibilité sémantique est douteuse. Par ailleurs, elle permet de comprendre que tout locuteur

adolescent, même s'il a été peu ou non scolarisé, peut s'exprimer sur des formes linguistiques utilisées par lui-même ou par d'autres, de les remplacer ou reformuler, les glosser, les juger. Le développement de la conscience métalinguistique à l'adolescence semble analogue, quel que soit le niveau de scolarisation. Les sections qui suivent s'appuient sur les réponses au THAM-2 formulées par des collégiens.

### III. La mobilisation des compétences ressortissant de la grammaire scolaire

Parmi les items composants les divers tests du THAM-2, certains mobilisent essentiellement des savoirs scolaires, dans la mesure où les raisonnements complets attendus aux questions d'ordre métalinguistique reposent sur le maniement d'un métalangage, ou du moins de catégories grammaticales enseignées à l'école. Nous avons analysé les réponses à trois de ces items du test Acceptabilité dans lesquels entrent en jeu les notions de genre grammatical (féminin et masculin), de quantification (singulier et pluriel) et d'accord grammatical (entre déterminant et nom et entre sujet et verbe) :

- 3.9) *Le chat sont en train de ronronner.*
- 3.11) *La soupe est mauvais aujourd'hui.*
- 3.13) *Un chevaux galope joyeusement.*

Les corpus de réponses sont issus d'enquêtes à Niamey, Toulouse et Abidjan (Boutin et al., 2022). Les collégiens de Niamey étaient au nombre de 31 et la passation a eu lieu en 2016 sous la direction de Oreste Floquet (Sapienza Université de Rome), ceux de Toulouse étaient au nombre de 60 et la passation a eu lieu en 2017 sous la direction de Maria Antonietta Pinto (Sapienza Université de Rome), ceux d'Abidjan étaient au nombre de 34 et la passation a eu lieu en 2018 sous notre direction.

Concernant l'accord en nombre, l'item 3.9 présentait une absence d'accord entre le sujet et le verbe et l'item 3.13 entre le déterminant et le nom. Rares sont les verbes du français dont la forme orale est différente au singulier et au pluriel, et encore plus rares les noms dont la forme orale est différente au singulier et au pluriel. Au total, 15% des réponses dénotent une absence de perception de la carence d'accord au vu de l'orthographe, 25% une perception de cette carence, mais l'impossibilité de l'expliquer. Parmi les 60% restants de réponses métalinguistiques, les sujets n'ont pas tous recours à la notion scolaire de singulier/pluriel : certains évoquent l'accord comme une règle qui n'a pas été respectée, d'autres utilisent un métalangage non spécialisé dans leur argumentation.

Pour le premier item (3.9), sur 125 sujets, 15 sujets n'ont pas vu de problème, 25 autres n'ont pas su l'expliquer, 49 ont mobilisé les concepts *singulier* et/ou *pluriel*, 18 ont mobilisé uniquement le concept d'accord et 18 les concepts *un*, *seul*, *plusieurs*. Le tableau 1 montre les résultats détaillés par ville et les pourcentages.

ITEM 3.9. (CHAT)	TOULOUSE	NIAMEY	ABIDJAN	TOTAL	%
pas vu	5	6	4	15	12
pas expliqué	9	13	3	25	20
accord	11	1	6	18	14,4
un/seul/plusieurs	9	3	6	18	14,4
singulier/pluriel	26	8	15	49	39,2
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Tableau 1. Détails des réponses à l'item 3.9) : *Le chat sont en train de ronronner.*

Pour le deuxième item (3.13), sur 125 sujets, 22 sujets n'ont pas vu de problème, 35 autres n'ont pas su l'expliquer, 57 ont mobilisé les concepts *singulier* et/ou *pluriel*, 7 le concept d'accord uniquement, 4 les concepts *un*, *seul*, *plusieurs*. Le tableau 2 montre les résultats détaillés par ville et les pourcentages.

ITEM 3.13. « CHEVAUX »	TOULOUSE	NIAMEY	ABIDJAN	TOTAL	%
pas vu	7	15	0	22	17,6
pas expliqué	13	6	16	35	28
accord	5	1	1	7	5,6
un/seul/plusieurs	2	1	1	4	3,2
singulier/pluriel	33	8	16	57	45,6
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Tableau 2. Détails des réponses à l'item 3.13) : *Un chevaux galope joyeusement.*

Au total, pour les 250 réponses aux deux items, 34% des collégiens n'ont pas vu ou pas expliqué les problèmes, 42% manient les notions de singulier et pluriel dans leurs explications, 10% évoquent uniquement l'accord, sans préciser qu'il s'agit d'un accord en nombre ni d'un accord au singulier ou au pluriel, et 9% utilisent les notions *un*, *seul*, *plusieurs*.

Le problème d'accord en genre qui était posé est légèrement différent de celui de l'accord en nombre. Les notions de féminin et masculin sont des notions grammaticales, mais elles existent aussi dans le langage courant et sont difficilement remplaçables par d'autres. Ceci explique sans doute que ces notions sont davantage mobilisées que celles de singulier et pluriel par les collégiens (51,2% au lieu de 42,5%) et que les sujets qui se bornent à évoquer l'absence d'accord sans plus sont supérieurs (16% au lieu de 10%). Un nombre équivalent de sujets ne perçoit pas de problème (15,2% au lieu de 14,8%), mais ceux qui ne donnent pas d'explication sont légèrement inférieurs (17,6% au lieu de 24%). Le tableau 3 montre les résultats détaillés par ville et les pourcentages.

ITEM 3.11. « SOUPE »	TOULOUSE	NIAMEY	ABIDJAN	TOTAL	%
pas vu	8	10	1	19	15,2
pas expliqué	7	7	8	22	17,6
accord	12	2	6	20	16
féminin/masculin	33	12	19	64	51,2
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>

Tableau 3. Détails des réponses à l'item 3.11) : *La soupe est mauvais aujourd'hui.*

On peut observer au fil des réponses des collégiens une certaine diversité dans l'accessibilité aux concepts proprement grammaticaux, qui ne sont que très rarement utilisés hors du contexte scolaire. Les concepts féminin et masculin sont les plus utilisés dans les réponses, appliqués aux mots concernés, parfois avec le concept d'accord. Quand la notion d'accord est utilisée seule, le métalangage scolaire semble être convoqué de façon quasi automatique, sans une réflexion appliquée à la phrase présentée. Les exemples suivants de collégiens de 6<sup>e</sup> de Toulouse illustrent respectivement ces cas :

« Dans la phrase le mot *mauvais* est au masculin alors que c'est la soupe donc c'est au féminin ».

« Car la soupe c'est féminin et on doit accorder *mauvais* ».

[C'est correct] « Parce que *mauvaise* est accordée ».

Les concepts singulier et pluriel sont moins utilisés dans le discours métalinguistique et des mots courants le sont avec la même efficacité, comme l'illustrent, respectivement, les exemples suivants des collégiens de 6<sup>e</sup> d'Abidjan :

[C'est correct] « Car *sont* c'est pluriel alors que c'est *le chat* donc c'est au singulier donc on met *est* ».

[C'est correct] « Car c'est un seul chat qui fait l'action et pas plusieurs ».

D'autres concepts de la grammaire scolaire sont convoqués aussi dans les réponses aux trois items étudiés et d'autres, tels *verbe, déterminant, adjetif, complément d'objet direct* :

« Le verbe et le déterminant sont au singulier ». (Abidjan, 5<sup>e</sup>)

« La soupe est un mot féminin donc l'adjectif qualificatif doit être au féminin ». (Niamey, 6<sup>e</sup>)

[3.2.B] « La fille caressait] Il n'y a pas de COD ». (Toulouse, 6<sup>e</sup>)

Tous ces concepts sont étrangers à des personnes non ou peu scolarisées. Nous n'avons pas un corpus de non lecteurs suffisant pour établir une comparaison, mais le fait que les non lecteurs qui ont perçu les carences d'accord en nombre aient eu recours aux quantificateurs *un, seul, (pas) beaucoup, plusieurs* et non *singulier* et *pluriel* n'a pas toujours entravé leurs habiletés métalinguistiques. En revanche, les catégories du genre grammatical, appliquées en outre à des noms de façon arbitraire puisque leurs référents ne sont pas sexués, ne peuvent être mobilisées par les locuteurs s'ils ne les ont pas acquis à l'école, et aucune autre façon de raisonner sur le genre purement grammatical n'existe. Même si le locuteur francophone acquiert très tôt (avant la parole) des règles d'attribution de genre aux noms ainsi que les processus d'accord (Andriamamonjy, 2000), c'est l'école qui permet aux sujets d'accéder à une certaine conscience métalinguistique du phénomène.

#### **IV. La capacité à faire des liens entre langue et expérience du monde**

Le test Acceptabilité du THAM-2 prévoit un certain nombre de questions qui font appel à la compétence de tout être humain, dès l'enfance, de catégoriser les objets du monde en classes de plus en plus générales ou abstraites, et de leur attribuer des propriétés de classe ou du moins de regrouper des connaissances à propos de ces classes (Piaget, Inhelder, 1966). La pensée abstraite, autrement dit « la représentation mentale et la manipulation d'informations abstraites », qui permet la réflexion et le débat, se développe, dans sa dernière phase, à partir de l'adolescence. Elle opère à travers un « langage de la pensée » en partie indépendant du langage humain, qui « discrétise les concepts et combine ces éléments de façon récursive » (Dehaene, 2020). Le « langage humain [en transmettant] la pensée des autres » interviendrait dans le développement de la pensée comme « une sorte d'échafaudage temporaire » (Dehaene, 2020). Par ailleurs, c'est la fonction référentielle du langage qui rend possible le discours sur le monde, établit la référence à l'extralinguistique, crée la « relation qui unit une expression linguistique au « quelque chose » qu'elle exprime », ce « quelque chose » étant le référent (Kleiber, 1997 : 9).

Notre analyse porte sur les résultats à sept items du test Acceptabilité du THAM-2. Majoritairement, ces items présentent des anomalies dans les « compatibilités lexicales » (Pinto, El Euch, 2015 : 74), majoritairement entre le verbe et l'un de ses arguments. En effet, tout verbe assigne un rôle sémantique à ses arguments et impose une restriction de sélection particulière. Par exemple, la restriction porte sur le caractère animé pour le sujet de *jouer, nager, s'endormir, s'en aller*. D'autres verbes, comme *lire, éternuer*, sont intransitifs ou n'admettent qu'un nombre restreint de compléments, le complément jouant le rôle d'un objet interne « parce que son sens reproduit l'essentiel du procès encodé dans le sémantisme du verbe » (Riegel et al., 1994 : 220). Certains noms, comme *pattes*, présentent une restriction de type non humain dans la sélection de son possesseur, qui a une fonction de complément dans l'item concerné. Les sept items

contreviennent à la sélection syntaxique et/ou à la restriction sémantique requise, dans le but que les sujets s'expriment sur l'incompatibilité des éléments de la combinaison.

Le codage des réponses métalinguistiques prévoit trois possibilités (0, 1, 2). Le codage 0 correspond à l'absence de réponse ou à des réponses redondantes par rapport à l'appréciation épilinguistique donnée auparavant. Le code 1 correspond à la discrimination d'au moins un indice sémantique (une reformulation, une propriété ou une capacité) ou syntaxique pertinent, mais l'argumentation reste partielle. Le code 2 correspond à l'identification de tous indices pertinents pour une analyse exhaustive. Ce score maximal s'obtient, par exemple, en mobilisant deux catégorisations des référents à l'aide de la langue (animé/inanimé ; objet/homme), ou en utilisant le métalangage scolaire et ses catégories grammaticales pour faire des liens entre les termes, ou en envisageant une autre possibilité du réel. Ainsi, le codage 1 vs 2 différencie, pour l'item 3.7.B) *Le chat tomba sur les pattes du docteur* :

« Il ne peut pas tomber sur les pattes du docteur car le docteur n'a pas de pattes ». (Toulouse, 6<sup>e</sup>)

« Parce que le docteur est un être humain et que ce sont seulement les animaux qui ont des pattes. (Abidjan, 4<sup>e</sup>) ».

Par ailleurs, le codage ne prévoit plus de discrimination au-delà d'un minimum requis pour une argumentation complète.

Notre analyse porte sur les résultats des 65 collégiens de Niamey et d'Abidjan, du fait qu'une étude comparée des corpus de Niamey, Toulouse et Abidjan montre que les scores des collégiens d'Abidjan sont supérieurs à ceux des deux autres villes et que ceux de Niamey sont globalement inférieurs à ceux des deux autres villes. Ces deux corpus nous permettent ainsi d'examiner le type d'argument utilisé dans les réponses à un terme et ceux des réponses à deux termes et plus. Nombre de réponses des Abidjanais présentent une argumentation qui fait le tour complet des possibilités du réel et de la langue, à l'aide de bien plus de deux catégorisations. La majorité des réponses des Niaméens fait appel à un seul indice. Cependant, sans nous intéresser ici aux scores, nous avons préféré mener une analyse plus fine des réponses, de façon à examiner le ou les types de connaissances mobilisées, dans le but de comparer plutôt la capacité euristique des items.

À l'item 3.1.B) *La ficelle jouait avec le chat*, les réponses faisant intervenir au moins deux arguments pertinents à cet item sont plus du double des réponses partielles à un seul argument (35 et 14). La catégorisation la plus fréquente est celle opérée sur la ficelle : *objet, jouet, pas un être humain, chose*. La deuxième catégorisation, qui peut suivre la première ou être invoquée seule, porte sur une propriété : *n'a pas d'envie, ne peut pas bouger, jouer, est inerte*. Lorsque le sujet va au-delà, il examine la catégorie des êtres susceptibles de jouer : *être humain, chat, homme, animal*.

À l'item 3.3.B) *Le papa éternuait la voiture*, les réponses faisant intervenir un seul argument sont plus nombreuses que celles à deux arguments et plus (20 et 14). Cependant, les sujets ne pouvant se prononcer sur une telle phrase ont été les plus nombreux (31). Les sujets ont massivement reposé leur argumentation sur une propriété de la voiture : *trop grosse, chose grande, ne peut pas sortir par les narines/ du nez, ne peut pas entrer dans l'organisme pour en sortir*. Ceux qui sont allés au-delà ont pour la plupart exploré les noms compléments possibles après éternuer : *salive, morve*. Ce n'est que rarement qu'ils ont raisonné sur la forme, soit en cherchant une préposition manquante avant *la voiture* (*sur*), soit en précisant que le verbe n'a *pas besoin de complément*.

À l'item 3.4.B) *Le trottoir s'en allait au marché*, les réponses faisant intervenir deux catégorisations et plus étaient supérieures à celles avec une seule catégorisation (31 et 20). Lorsque les sujets n'invoquent qu'un argument, celui-ci porte sur la catégorisation du trottoir : *inanimé, pas vivant, objet, endroit, ou sur sa propriété : inerte, immobile, ne se déplace pas, ne bouge pas, n'a pas de pieds, ne peut pas marcher*. Le plus souvent, les réponses ont présenté à la fois la catégorie et la propriété. Parfois, les sujets ont comparé 3.4.B) avec 3.4.A) *La femme s'en allait au marché*.

À l'item 3.5.B) *Le professeur lisait une poule*, les sujets qui ont élaboré une réponse complète étaient le double de ceux qui n'ont donné qu'une argumentation partielle (30 et 15), les sujets n'ayant pas pu se prononcer sur une telle phrase étant en nombre intermédiaire (20). Les réponses partielles à un argument reposaient le plus souvent sur une catégorisation de la poule : *animal, être vivant, pas un livre, pas un livre*, et rarement sur une de ses propriétés : *n'a pas d'écritures, de mots*. Les réponses exhaustives envisageaient de plus tout ce qui peut être lu (*texte écrit, livre, histoire, notice*).

À l'item 3.6.B) *La roche s'endormait au milieu de la route*, les réponses faisant intervenir deux catégorisations et plus étaient nettement supérieures à celles avec une seule catégorisation (32 et 10). Les réponses à un argument opéraient soit une catégorisation : *pas un être vivant, inanimée, chose, objet*, soit une attribution de propriété : *ne bouge pas, ne dort pas, ne vit pas*. Les réponses les plus complètes détaillaient les prérequis pour dormir (*pas d'yeux, ne respire pas, une roche n'a pas de cerveau pour lui commander de s'endormir*) ou examinaient d'autres possibilités (*on peut la mettre n'importe où, elle peut être partout*).

À l'item 3.7.B) *Le chat tomba sur les pattes du docteur*, les réponses à un ou plus d'un argument étaient en nombre équivalent (25 et 26). Les sujets ayant donné une réponse partielle se bornaient le plus souvent à déclarer que le docteur a des pieds et non des pattes. Les réponses les plus élaborées mettaient en jeu les catégories (*animal, personne, être humain*) et leur attribuaient les mots *pieds, mains, pattes*.

L'item 3.8) *Le requin nageait sur le sable* présente le score le plus élevé de réponses cherchant l'exhaustivité par rapport aux réponses avec un argument minimal (41 et 16). Les réponses à un argument invoquent le plus souvent une propriété du requin (*vit dans l'eau, dans la mer, pas sur terre, meurt hors de l'eau, n'a pas de pieds mais des nageoires*), puis la catégorie (*animal aquatique, poisson*). Certaines des réponses plus élaborées se centrent en plus sur le requin (*il ne sort jamais de l'eau, il ne peut pas respirer hors de l'eau, il perd son souffle, il fera tout pour revenir à l'eau, il meurt s'il sort de l'eau*) ; 18 sujets se détachent du procès concret de 3.8 pour généraliser l'action de nager à tous les agents (*on a besoin d'eau pour nager, c'est dans l'eau seule que nous pouvons nager, nul ne peut nager dans le sable*).

L'analyse des réponses à quelques items du test Acceptabilité du THAM-2 révèle que les sujets étudiés recourent prioritairement à leur expérience du monde et utilisent largement la fonction référentielle du langage, même si, par ailleurs, leur discours à propos des items a tous les traits de démonstrations élaborées. Ces observations rejoignent celles de De Angelis, Floquet (2019 : 89) : à l'adolescence, on sépare encore difficilement le contenu sémantique d'un énoncé de sa forme. Cependant, alors que les items analysés par ces auteurs mettent en jeu la transitivité verbale, ceux que nous avons analysés mettent davantage en jeu la connaissance du monde que la connaissance formelle de la langue, ce qui induit une stratégie de réponse référentielle.

Par ailleurs, une analyse fine des réponses montre une certaine disparité dans les possibilités d'expression de la conscience métalinguistique, dépendant des contenus des items. Il est possible que l'incongruité de certaines combinaisons déconcerte les sujets (3.3.B) et, au contraire, que les sujets soient plus enclins à développer leur discours lorsque le procès décrit se déroule dans le temps avec une certaine mobilité, ce qui facilite l'imagination, et par conséquent la délibération (3.1.B et 3.8).

#### **IV. L'extériorisation des savoirs linguistiques non enseignés à l'école**

Parmi les items du test Ambigüité, trois présentent des constructions adjectivales particulières :

4.2.B) *Jean est facile à attaquer*

4.2.C) *Jean est facile à influencer*

4.2.D) *Jean est prêt à attaquer*

Les questions à chacun de ces items portent sur *Jean* et demandent si lui ou les autres sont attaqués ou influencés. Ces adjectifs font partie d'une troisième classe (avec *capable*, *décidé*, *enclin*, *résolu*, *soucieux*...) et sont dénommés effectifs, du fait qu'ils décrivent la relation du sujet par rapport à la performance d'une action (Léger, 2010). Leur complément infinitif est généralement introduit par la préposition *à*, il décrit une action et non un état ou une propriété. L'école générative, dans son modèle des années 1970-80 (Chomsky, 1987) analyse différemment les adjectifs *facile* et *prêt*. Dans les séquences *Jean est facile à attaquer* et *Jean est facile à influencer*, *Jean* est un sujet purement grammatical mais n'est pas l'argument externe de *être facile*. *Jean* n'est pas *facile* mais ce qui est *facile* c'est *attaquer Jean* ou *influencer Jean* (*Attaquer/influencer Jean est facile*). *Attaquer Jean* est l'argument externe, qui n'est pas agent mais thème. Au contraire, dans la séquence *Jean est prêt à attaquer*, *être prêt* autant que *attaquer* ont un argument externe : *Jean*. Le sujet grammatical du verbe subordonné est vide mais l'argument externe existe : *Jean* s'est préparé et *Jean* va attaquer. L'ancien modèle de la grammaire générative analyse le premier cas d'adjectifs comme des adjectifs « à montée du sujet » (déplacement du complément du verbe subordonné en position de sujet du verbe de la principale), et le deuxième cas d'adjectifs comme des adjectifs « à contrôle » (le sujet vide de l'infinitive est « contrôlé » syntaxiquement et sémantiquement par un argument de la principale, ici le sujet).

La complexité de ces deux constructions empêche absolument qu'elles soient abordées durant le programme scolaire. Il est donc certain que les adolescents qui doivent se prononcer sur les motifs de leur interprétation des trois items en question ne pourront évoquer une règle ou une explication scolaire.

Notre étude porte sur le corpus de réponses au test Ambigüité de 35 collégiens d'Abidjan en 2019, 11 sujets étant scolarisés en 6<sup>e</sup>, 19 en 5<sup>e</sup> et 5 en 4<sup>e</sup>. Tous les sujets ont correctement interprété les trois items (niveau épilinguistique). Les réponses aux questions de niveau métalinguistique sont toujours du même type pour les trois items chez chaque sujet. On ne remarque pas non plus de progression des réponses de la 6<sup>e</sup> à la 4<sup>e</sup>. Uniquement 4 sujets ont tenté des analyses syntaxiques :

- « On remarque que l'action se passe sur Jean ». (4.2.B et C)
- « On montre que Jean est en cours d'action ». (4.2.D)
- « Être facile à attaquer c'est le fait d'être attaqué et de savoir qu'on est facile à attaquer » (2.4.B)
- « Cette phrase veut dire que Jean va attaquer et qu'il est prêt. Donc c'est Jean qui attaque ». (4.2.D).

Deux autres sujets ont donné des explications par rapport au monde (*Les autres attaquent Jean parce qu'il est naïf*), 27 ont donné des réponses redondantes par rapport aux phrases proposées (*la phrase dit que c'est Jean qui attaque*), et 2 n'ont donné aucune réponse.

Cette étude sur un petit nombre de réponses (105) incite à penser qu'en l'absence totale de didactique sur une question complexe de grammaire, des adolescents sont totalement incapables de construire par eux-mêmes des connaissances linguistiques et un certain contrôle des constructions langagières. Le cas de la conscience méta-phonologique à propos de la liaison vient appuyer le lien resserré entre apprentissages scolaires et développement des habiletés métalinguistiques.

## **VI. La conscience méta-phonologique à propos de la liaison**

À propos de la liaison, Celata et al. (2020) montrent l'écart considérable entre les comportements linguistiques totalement prévisibles et les appréciations contingentes des auditeurs-juges de la même communauté linguistique. En effet, les analyses menées dans le cadre du projet PFC – *Phonologie du français contemporain, usages, variétés, structures* (Durand et al.,

2002), ont répertorié sur un très grand nombre d'occurrences (53 561) de liaisons possibles en français les tendances contemporaines concernant les liaisons faites de façon catégorique par les francophones, celles faites de façon variable et celles impossibles (Eychenne et al., 2014). Sont ainsi distinguées les consonnes plus ou moins liaisonnantes (*z > t > n > r > p*), les contextes probables d'après la catégorie grammaticale du Mot 1 et du Mot 2, et d'autres facteurs. Ainsi, la liaison n'est aujourd'hui catégorique qu'entre le déterminant et le nom (*un enfant, des enfants*), entre un pronom et un verbe (*on arrive, vous les aimez*), dans les mots composés (*avant-hier*) et certaines expressions figées (*de temps en temps*) et après la préposition *en* (*en allant*).

Chez les locuteurs natifs du français, la liaison est acquise avant la première alphabétisation, souvent avant même l'entrée au préscolaire (cycle 1). Lors de l'entrée dans l'écrit (cycle 2), la liaison est évoquée par les enseignants au moment où l'élève doit faire le lien entre sa connaissance orale du phénomène et la graphie des mots, de façon à faciliter le transfert entre son usage oral et la lecture et l'écriture. Cependant, aucun enseignement spécifique de la liaison n'est présent dans aucun des programmes des quatre cycles du socle commun de l'enseignement obligatoire (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2020). De ce constat découle l'hypothèse que les locuteurs natifs du français auront des difficultés à s'exprimer sur la liaison (niveau métalinguistique) alors qu'ils ont un comportement régulier correspondant aux habitudes rappelées ci-dessus, et sauront donc détecter les usages concordants ou irréguliers (niveau épilinguistique).

Le THAM-2 ne présente aucune question sur la liaison, mais Celata *et al.* (2020) ont tenté d'approcher les comportements épi et métalinguistiques des sujets adultes concernant ce phénomène du français. Ils ont présenté à un petit échantillon d'étudiants parisiens un texte lu avec des liaisons non réalisées alors qu'elles sont normalement catégoriques, ainsi que des liaisons réalisées alors qu'elles sont normalement impossibles, dans le but de recueillir leurs impressions. Au niveau des réponses épilinguistiques, le pourcentage d'acceptabilité par les auditeurs-juges des liaisons non réalisées de façon atypique, soit 38%, s'oppose à celui des réalisations enregistrées par PFC dans les mêmes contextes, soit 100%. Par ailleurs, pour les liaisons inattestées (0%) qui ont été réalisées dans le texte, le pourcentage de non acceptabilité s'arrête à 53% (Celata et al., 2020 : 73). Les auteurs en concluent que les appréciations des auditeurs-juges ne sont certainement pas dépendantes uniquement des usages. Au niveau des réponses métalinguistiques, les habiletés des auditeurs-juges mises en jeu pour justifier leurs choix sont faibles (28%)<sup>2</sup>, ce qui indique que la capacité qu'ont les locuteurs natifs de motiver explicitement leur perception des faits de liaison, avec ou sans métalangage, est assez peu développée.

Boutin et al. (sous presse) ont continué la même expérience avec des adolescents de plusieurs villes de France et ont recueilli des résultats plus bas que ceux des adultes étudiants (Celata *et al.*, 2020) concernant les deux niveaux, épi et métalinguistique. Toutefois, une progression dans les réponses d'ordre métalinguistique est nette entre la 6<sup>e</sup> et la 3<sup>e</sup> (première et dernière année de collège). Une certaine conscience des usages semble donc apparaître vers 14 ans, mais les sujets font peu de liens entre leurs usages, leurs connaissances implicites des usages de la liaison et leurs connaissances de certains faits grammaticaux enseignés au collège. En effet, rares sont ceux qui évoquent l'appartenance à une classe grammaticale des items lexicaux concernés par la liaison, ou la notion de groupes syntaxiques, en dehors desquels la liaison est impossible. Leur habileté à contrôler et traiter le phénomène s'est difficilement développée ; en dehors de tout discours didactique sur la liaison, peu de liens ont pu être faits avec des savoirs connexes pourtant enseignés.

<sup>2</sup> Ces 28% correspondent à une moyenne des scores d'habiletés métalinguistiques de 5/18. Le score maximal de 18 correspond à 2 points à chacun des 9 items du test. (Voir Pinto, El Euch, 2015, et la présentation de la notation en 4).

## VII. Conclusion

Prenant pour objet de discours le langage, l'acte d'énonciation ou la langue eux-mêmes, la fonction métalinguistique se présente comme un cas particulier de la fonction référentielle du langage, au point que certains analystes se sont demandé si le langage est vraiment capable de référer à autre chose qu'à lui-même, autrement dit à un monde extralinguistique réel (Kleiber, 97). Lorsque le discours métalinguistique porte sur la façon dont la langue réfère au réel, ou plus exactement aux concepts d'un univers sémantique réticulaire et hiérarchisé (Lehmann et al., 2018), la fonction référentielle et la fonction métalinguistique du langage sont étroitement unies. De fait, la plupart des discours métalinguistiques des adolescents qui visent à évaluer l'acceptabilité des énoncés reposent sur leur expérience du monde et sur la vraisemblance d'un procès correspondant à l'énoncé qui leur est soumis.

Lorsqu'il s'agissait de justifier leur jugement d'acceptabilité, les habiletés métalinguistiques des adolescents non lecteurs (2) mettaient en lumière que la conscience métalinguistique se développe en partie sans un lien nécessaire avec les savoirs scolaires. Cependant, lorsqu'il s'agit de faits de langues proprement formels, comme les accords en genre et en nombre (3), l'école est indispensable pour qu'une conscience métalinguistique puisse se former sur la base d'un métalangage et de raisonnements de type scolaires. Pour ces faits, bien ancrés dans la langue et traités très tôt par les locuteurs natifs, qui font en plus l'objet d'enseignements répétitifs tout au long de la scolarité, les adolescents ont peu de difficultés à convoquer leurs savoirs scolaires dans leurs stratégies d'explications métalinguistiques. Si, en plus du métalangage scolaire, des termes communs existent, alors les habiletés métalinguistiques sont riches et variées du fait que les sujets font des liens entre les contenus acquis dans et hors du contexte scolaire.

Indépendamment de la scolarisation, les adolescents et les adultes sont davantage conscients de la façon dont la langue nous aide à catégoriser la réalité (4) que des traits formels de cette langue, même s'ils ont un lien avec le sens (5). En l'absence d'actes didactiques sur des contrastes morphosyntaxiques associés à la sémantique, tels le traitement des compléments d'adjectifs introduits par la préposition *à*, les adolescents sont démunis pour fournir un raisonnement d'ordre métalinguistique. Si, en plus de la carence d'outils didactiques, un phénomène, comme celui de la liaison, n'a qu'un rapport très indirect avec le sens (6), les habiletés épi et métalinguistiques des adolescents comme des jeunes adultes, restent faibles. Les adolescents manquent crucialement d'outils conceptuels pour traiter un phénomène lexico-phonologique comme la liaison.

Somme toute, les habiletés métalinguistiques des sujets francophones, telles qu'elles sont mesurées par le THAM-2, sont très liées à l'éducation scolaire. D'autres études explorent même la relation entre la conscience métalinguistique et les performances scolaires, notamment la performance orthographique (Boutin et al., 2022).

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# Competenza metalinguistica: lezioni dall'insegnamento dell'esperanto a parlanti di inglese e cinese. Idee per un possibile esperimento<sup>1</sup>

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**TITLE:** *Metalinguistic competence: lessons from teaching Esperanto to English and Chinese speakers. Ideas for a possible experiment.*

**ABSTRACT:** *The structure of the international language Esperanto is such as to improve the metalinguistic abilities of those who study it for a certain time. The article talks about this particular structure and the linguistic typology studies carried out to place Esperanto within language families. Subsequently, it makes a detailed description of the experiments carried out during the century of Esperanto's existence on the effects of its teaching on the ability to learn a 3rd language and on the increase of metalinguistic abilities also in the mother tongue. Finally, thinking about the problems of Esperanto students whose mother tongue is English or Chinese, both totally or partially isolating languages, the article proposes a possible experiment feasible in Chinese schools to verify the effects of learning Esperanto and facilitating the study of a third language.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Esperanto, linguistic typology, metalinguistic skills, experiments on the teaching of Esperanto, teaching foreign languages in China.*

## I. Quanto europeo è l'esperanto?

L'iniziatore della lingua internazionale esperanto, Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, era un colto ebreo polacco che parlava abitualmente il polacco, la lingua dell'ambiente in cui viveva, lo yiddish o giudeo-tedesco con la madre, il russo con il padre, ed il tedesco, lingua di cultura del tempo, in Europa orientale, studiata a scuola. Aveva studiato anche il latino, il greco e l'ebraico ed in misura minore conosceva il francese, e durante la vita studiò in diverso grado varie lingue (Boulton, 1962). Inoltre, egli si rivolgeva al pubblico colto del suo tempo, che anche aveva studiato il latino e la grammatica del latino. Quindi, anche se l'esperanto strutturalmente non è una lingua indoeuropea, nella presentazione della lingua al mondo, egli non esitò a basarsi sui concetti grammaticali del latino del suo tempo. Fa quasi tenerezza la seconda regola nella prima grammatica:

« 2. Le **substantif** finit toujours par *o*. Pour former le pluriel on ajoute *j* au singulier. La langue n'a que deux cas: le *nominatif* et *l'accusatif*. Ce dernier se forme du nominatif par l'addition d'un *n*. Les autres cas sont marqués par des prépositions: le *génitif* par *de* (*de*), le *datif* par *al* (*à*), l'*ablatif* par *per* (*par*, *au moyen de*) ou par d'autres prépositions, selon le sens. Ex.: *la patr'o* — le père; *al la patr'o*

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— au père, *de la patr'o* — du père, *la patr'òn* — le père (à l'accusatif, c.-à-d. complément direct), *per la patr'òj* — par les pères ou au moyen des pères, *la patr'òj'n* — les pères (accus. Plur.), *por la patr'o* — pour le père, *kun la patr'o* — avec le père, etc. » (Zamenhof, 1987: 4 – originariamente 1887)

Siamo quasi al livello di quel missionario citato in Cardona (1985) che, per descrivere una lingua americana, affermava che, in quella lingua, i sostantivi non cambiano nei vari casi, ed aggiungeva uno specchietto: nominativo *padre*, genitivo, *padre*. dativo, *padre*. ecc. E quindi cercava di mettere una lingua polisintetica senza declinazioni nel crogiolo della grammatica latina. Tuttavia, contrariamente a quel missionario, sembra che Zamenhof avesse capito quello che stava facendo.

Infatti, scriveva:

« Ho organizzato un completo smembramento delle idee in parole autonome, cosicché tutta la lingua inveceche di parole in diverse forme grammaticali, consiste sempre e soltanto di parole che non cambiano. Se prendete un'opera scritta nella mia lingua, troverete che ogni parola si trova sempre e soltanto in una forma costante, cioè nella forma in cui essa è stampata nel vocabolario. E le diverse forme grammaticali, i rapporti reciproci tra le parole ecc. sono espressi per mezzo dell'unione di parole che non cambiano ». (Zamenhof, 1929: 248 – originariamente 1903)

Ma poiché una tale costruzione linguistica è del tutto estranea per i popoli europei ed abituarsi ad essa sarebbe per loro una cosa difficile, ho adattato questo smembramento della lingua allo spirito delle lingue europee, cosicché se uno impara la mia lingua da una grammatica, non avendo letto in anticipo l'introduzione (che per lo studente è completamente non necessaria), egli nemmeno supporrà che la costruzione di questa lingua sia differente in qualcosa dalla costruzione della sua lingua materna.

Così, ad esempio, l'origine della parola *fratino* [sorella], che in realtà consiste di tre parole: *frato* [fratello], *in* (*virino*) [donna] e *o* [ciò che è, che esiste] e quindi « ciò che è fratello-donna = sorella », la grammatica la chiarisce nella maniera seguente: fratello = *frat*. Ma, dato che ogni sostantivo finisce per *o* conseguentemente *frat'o*, per la formazione del femminile di quell'idea, si aggiunge la parolina *in*, e quindi sorella = *frat'in'o* e gli apostrofi sono indicati perché la grammatica li richiede tra le diverse parti che formano le parole.

In questo modo, lo smembramento della lingua non mette assolutamente in imbarazzo lo studente; egli nemmeno sospetta che quello che egli chiama finale *o*, prefisso o suffisso sia una parola del tutto indipendente, che conserva sempre lo stesso significato, in ogni maniera, sia che essa compaia alla fine o all'inizio di un'altra parola o da sola, e che ogni parola, con lo stesso diritto, possa essere usata come radice di una parola o come una particella grammaticale. E tuttavia il risultato di questa costruzione della lingua è tale, che tutto ciò che voi scrivete nella lingua internazionale, subito e con completa precisione (con una sintetica spiegazione della lingua — o anche senza di essa) lo capirà chiunque, che non solo non abbia studiato prima la grammatica della lingua ma anche che non abbia mai sentito parlare di essa. (*traduzione nostra dell'originale*)

Ovviamente, nel periodo di più di un secolo trascorso dall'uso di questa lingua da parte di una comunità piuttosto larga di parlanti di esperanto sono stati effettuati vari studi per determinare la posizione dell'esperanto nel quadro delle lingue del mondo con risultati sempre convergenti nella sostanza. Ovviamente, tutti concordano su fatto che il vocabolario dell'esperanto sia essenzialmente proveniente dalle lingue europee. D'altro canto, molti sostenitori dell'inglese come lingua franca internazionale, irrazionalmente ed in maniera ipocrita, asseriscono che l'esperanto non è adatto come lingua franca mondiale a causa del lessico europeo, quasi che il lessico dell'inglese venisse da lingue extra-europee.

Zamenhof, d'altro canto, a parte le sue molteplici conoscenze linguistiche, tra cui l'ebraico, che potrebbe avergli suggerito delle soluzioni grammaticali originali, aveva una grande intuizione, il che, alla fine, lo ha portato alla costruzione di una lingua assolutamente originale, che unisce ad un lessico europeo un sistema grammaticale delle lingue agglutinanti, molto

presenti in Asia, dal turco al giapponese. E gli studi di linguisti che si sono succeduti lo confermano. Ad esempio, Wells (1989: 27):

« *Ekzemploj de aglutina lingvo estas la turka, la japana, la zulua kaj – kiel konate – la Internacia Lingvo Esperanto* [Esempi di lingua agglutinante sono il turco, il giapponese, lo zulu e – come è noto – l'esperanto] »

e, dopo una lunga analisi, conclude (Wells, 1989: 37):

« *Ĝi estas lingvo: a – ekstreme aglutina; b – milde sinteza; c – sen pluralomorfeco; – kun nur unu paradigma dedeklinacio kaj konjugacio* [è una lingua: a – estremamente agglutinante; b – debolmente sintetica; c – senza variazione dei morfemi; d – con un solo paradigma di declinazione e coniugazione] ».

Anche Gledhill (1998: 21) aggiunge, da parte sua:

« *The obligatory signaling of grammatical word class for lexical items in Esperanto is more akin to some Amerindian and African languages where classifiers and other particles are used for this function* ».

[la segnalazione obbligatoria della classe grammaticale delle forme lessicali in esperanto è più simile ad alcune lingue indiane d'America ed africane, nelle quali classificatori ed altre particelle sono usate per questa funzione].

Alle stesse conclusioni arriva Parkvall (2010), dell'Università di Stoccolma, nella sua ricerca pubblicata con il titolo: *How European is Esperanto? A typological study*, che si basa sul *World Atlas of Language Structures*, basato su comparazioni nel quadro dell'Atlante mondiale delle strutture linguistiche. L'Atlante mondiale delle strutture linguistiche, il cui acronimo è WALS, è la più vasta base di dati linguistici delle lingue umane mai compilato, con i suoi 142 capitoli, ognuno dei quali tratta uno specifico fenomeno linguistico. Poiché non tutte le lingue sono descritte completamente, alla fine il confronto con l'esperanto è stato possibile solo con 180 lingue.

I risultati dello studio, in sintesi, sono che nel 44,3% dei fenomeni linguistici esaminati le lingue hanno la stessa soluzione dell'esperanto; in altre parole, si comportano come l'esperanto in 61 dei 137 fenomeni esaminati, e cioè tutte le lingue esaminate hanno tra un terzo e due terzi delle strutture simili all'esperanto. E l'autore conclude:

« *We could interpret this as meaning that Esperanto is a slightly European language, but considerably less so than the European languages themselves.* [Possiamo interpretare questo come significato del fatto che l'esperanto è leggermente una lingua europea ma meno europea delle lingue europee stesse] ».

## **II. Ma, in pratica, che significa questo per parlanti inglesi e cinesi?**

Com'è noto in ambiente esperantista, uno dei maggiori programmi di insegnamento in rete di questi ultimi anni è stato il programma statunitense *Duolingo*, ed io stesso mi sono trovato ad insegnare in presenza l'esperanto ad un pubblico anglofono a Londra. In entrambi i casi [studenti americani o britannici] il programma ha rivelato problemi identici. Infatti, l'inglese, come comunemente si afferma nei trattati di tipologia linguistica, è una lingua con poche inflessioni e con una importanza dell'ordine delle parole notevolissima (Grandi, 2014; Lehmann, 1979).

La prima conseguenza è che uno studente americano di esperanto che seguiva il metodo *Duolinguo* chiedeva nella pagina *Facebook* del gruppo di studenti di esperanto: « Ho capito che tutti i sostantivi finiscono per o, ma che cosa è un sostantivo? »

Zamenhof, probabilmente, sarebbe caduto dalla sedia di fronte ad una tale domanda. Che potesse esistere un giovane, che aveva fatto un normale corso di studi e che ignorasse la differenza tra sostantivo ed aggettivo, era un fatto che, nel 1887 in Polonia, non poteva

esistere. Allo stesso modo reagivano i miei studenti a Londra, per cui la finale delle parole non era una cosa degna di attenzione; del resto, in inglese, l'accento è in genere sulla prima sillaba, che è quella importante in parole che tendono sempre più ad essere monosillabiche.

Zamenhof certamente non poteva prevedere che, accanto alla deriva dell'inglese verso le lingue isolanti, si sarebbe smesso di insegnare la grammatica nelle scuole inglesi. Uno studio in proposito (Hudson e Walmsley, 2005: 593), lapidariamente espone la situazione:

*« In the first half of the twentieth century, English grammar disappeared from the curriculum of most schools in England [Nella prima metà del ventesimo secolo la grammatica dell'inglese spariva dal piano di studi della maggior parte delle scuole in Inghilterra] »*

Anche se recentemente è stata reintrodotta, la grammatica non è più quella classica, ma punta piuttosto a mettere gli studenti in grado di comporre testi comprensibili in inglese standard. Si può quindi capire lo stupore degli studenti davanti al fenomeno dell'esperanto, in cui, alla semplice parola *love* corrisponde *amo, ama, ame, ami* e la difficoltà di capire la domanda. In « *Post office* » e « *I post a letter* », quale dei due è un verbo? Ma, ovviamente, la consapevolezza metalinguistica di queste distinzioni è cruciale per tradurre *pošta oficejo* e *Mi enpoštigas leteron* [rispettivamente « ufficio postale » e « imposto una lettera »]. Nel caso di studenti italiani, il problema normalmente non si pone in quanto gli italiani sono abituati a considerare le finali, che in italiano sono portatrici di significati altri rispetto all'esperanto, ma pur sempre importanti. Precisamente uguali sono le reazioni dei miei « studentoj » in rete dell'Asia Orientale, che sono parlanti di esperanto parzialmente esperti, che si preparano per l'esame di livello B2 secondo le richieste del CEFR, cioè del Quadro comune europeo di riferimento per la conoscenza delle lingue, sul quale si basano gli esami di esperanto.

Cinesi, tailandesi e vietnamiti sono tutti parlanti di lingue isolanti e addirittura vietnamiti ed indonesiani parlano lingue con zero marche morfologiche e soltanto quelli che hanno studiato l'inglese o altre lingue europee hanno idea della distinzione tra verbi e sostantivi. In questa situazione, diventa problematico per loro, come per i parlanti di inglese, distinguere tra *dankon!*, *mi dankas vin*, *mi danke akceptas*, [grazie!, ti ringrazio, accetto con gratitudine] ecc.

Spiegazioni verbali da parte dell'insegnante cercano di colmare la mancanza di consapevolezza metalinguistica che possa aiutare a navigare in un sistema linguistico fondato su altre premesse, in cui le somiglianze con le lingue isolanti si riducono alla immutabilità dei morfemi di base, e cioè le radici del lessico dell'esperanto. Queste somiglianze sono state anch'esse esaminate in Piron (1977).

Un altro problema, sia per parlanti di inglese che per cinesi, vietnamiti e tailandesi, è accettare la libertà dell'ordine degli elementi nella frase, libertà connessa con le finali e con le marche grammaticali del soggetto e dell'oggetto. Anche se tale libertà non è assoluta, essa esiste ed esistono molti studi a riguardo (Oostendorp, 1991, 2008; Wells, 1978; Kaloscay, Warinighien, 1985). Benché Oostendorp (1991:11) caratterizzi l'esperanto come una lingua configurazionale, in confronto con l'inglese ed il francese esso permette un ordine molto libero dei componenti della frase, come spesso discusso (ad esempio Wells, 1978; Kaloscay, Warinighien 1985). E in uno studio pratico sulle frasi prodotte da esperantisti di vari paesi (Nagata, Corsetti, 2005: 5 e seguenti) si trovano frasi come queste:

*« la knabon punos lia majstro », »la straton ĉe la angulo transiras viro », « ūs la vendejon lasis virino »,  
« vojon transiras inĝeniero », « ovovendiston oni vidas », »sin salutas feliĉa virino », « en la magazeno  
diversajn varojn proponas la vendisto ».*

Zamenhof, ovviamente, non aveva preso affatto in considerazione un ordine rigido della frase, anzi lo aveva escluso per non impedire la diffusione della sua lingua in aree linguistiche in cui l'ordine è il più vario (verbo alla fine in giapponese, all'inizio in arabo, al secondo posto in tedesco ecc.).

### III. Studi sull'efficacia dello studio dell'esperanto per il miglioramento delle abilità metalinguistiche

Ricerche sugli effetti dello studio dell'esperanto ai fini dell'incremento delle competenze metalinguistiche cominciarono già all'inizio del secolo scorso, anche se il concetto di consapevolezza metalinguistica, nella forma attuale, era ancora di là da venire. Le ricerche parlavano dell'incremento della capacità di studiare altre lingue successivamente allo studio dell'esperanto. Il temine più usato era quello di « propedeuticità ». Il primo articolo conosciuto su questo argomento è del 1908, e con metodo molto empirico dimostrava che in alcune classi scolastiche di Varsavia lo studio dell'esperanto facilitava lo studio successivo del francese e del latino (Grabowski, 1908). Numerosi altri esperimenti vennero condotti negli anni '20 del secolo scorso, di cui il più celebre fu quello del famoso psicologo dell'educazione americano Edward Thorndike (Thorndike, 1933), in cui però si esaminava prevalentemente la facilità di apprendimento dell'esperanto rispetto alle lingue naturali.

Gli esperimenti continuarono in due direzioni: a) misurare la facilità di apprendimento dell'esperanto in rapporto alle altre lingue; b) misurare gli effetti di facilitazione ad imparare altre lingue successivamente, il che indirettamente ci dice, in linea di massima, qualcosa sull'aumento della consapevolezza metalinguistica, la quale si riflette nel processo di apprendimento. In questo secondo campo, l'esperimento scientificamente più rigoroso sembra essere quello descritto in Halloran (1952) dell'università di Sheffield, Inghilterra, a partire dal 1947. Furono prese quattro classi che iniziavano allora la *grammar school*, più o meno corrispondente al nostro liceo. Secondo test somministrati all'inizio dell'anno, due classi erano formate da ragazzi con un quoziente intellettivo alto e due classi da studenti con un quoziente intellettuale più basso. La due classi sperimentali, una con quoziente alto ed una con quoziente basso, studiarono l'esperanto nel primo anno ed il francese nei tre anni successivi, mentre la classi di controllo partirono subito con lo studio del francese per 4 anni. Alla fine dei quattro anni, furono somministrati 11 test diversi di conoscenza del francese ed i risultati dal rapporto di Halloran (Halloran, 1952: 204) furono i seguenti:

1. In the case of the less intelligent pupils, those who had devoted the first years' language study to Esperanto did better in Esperanto (as measured by 11 different kinds of Tests), at the end of four years, without spending any extra time on French in the three years.
2. This superiority was even more marked in the case of the less intelligent pupils, who were, in addition, deficient in verbal behaviour.
3. The more intelligent pupils did better if they had begun straight away with French.
4. Those who started with Esperanto had a better « recognition » knowledge of French.
5. Those who started with French acquired a better active command of the language.

I primi due risultati sono molto interessanti, e peraltro sono congrui con osservazioni sulla consapevolezza metalinguistica in ricerche su bambini svantaggiati italiani e parlanti il dialetto Pinto (1980, 1986). Durante il secolo scorso, furono effettuati numerosi altri esperimenti. In uno di essi (Pinto, Corsetti, 2001) condotto in una scuola della periferia di Roma, due gruppi di alunni di una scuola media presero parte ad un esperimento che mirava a valutare l'effetto dell'apprendimento dell'esperanto sulle loro abilità metalinguistiche. Il gruppo che aveva seguito un corso di esperanto per un intero anno scolastico ebbe risultati migliori in un test di abilità metalinguistiche, il TAM-2 (Pinto, 1999) rispetto al gruppo di controllo. Pertanto, i risultati dell'esperimento confermarono le ipotesi e cioè che l'insegnamento dell'esperanto avrebbe avuto un'influenza positiva sulle abilità metalinguistiche degli alunni. I risultati dei test mostreranno chiaramente che, all'inizio dell'anno scolastico, entrambi i gruppi erano allo stesso livello sia per quanto riguardava le risposte cosiddette « linguistiche » (L), sia per quanto riguardava le risposte « metalinguistiche » (ML) del test, più esigenti delle prime in quanto richiedono di giustificare le precedenti risposte linguistiche.

Un altro esperimento all'inizio di questo secolo fu fatto in Inghilterra, con lo scopo precipuo di misurare l'incremento delle abilità metalinguistiche in bambini di lingua inglese (Roehr, 2012) e (Roehr-Brackin, Tellier, 2018). Il progetto fu condotto dalla Amanda Barton e Joanna Bragg dell'Università di Manchester in cinque fasi, tra il 2006 ed il 2011. Lo scopo del progetto era la valutazione dell'efficacia e del successo del progetto *Springboard to Languages* che era stato introdotto in un piccolo numero di scuole in Inghilterra ed il cui scopo specifico (Roehr-Brackin, Tellier, 2018) era quello di sviluppare la consapevolezza metalinguistica – e, per estensione, le capacità di apprendimento di una lingua straniera – dei bambini di scuola elementare.

Il progetto durò cinque anni, ma il metodo di insegnamento dell'esperanto, unito alla giovane età dei bambini e ad una molteplicità di scopi, tra cui le relazioni tra le scuole inglesi e scuole straniere allo scopo di far acquisire anche una abilità di valutazione della diversità culturale, portarono a risultati non significativi relativamente alle abilità metalinguistiche, misurati attraverso un insieme di studi di casi. Dalle parole di Roehr (2012: 109):

« They looked at classroom research which compared the effects of learning Esperanto with the effects of learning other languages. Esperanto was found to be easier to learn than French for the learners in the study, and appeared to have had a levelling effect which compensated for individual differences between children. It did not compensate for low language learning aptitude, however, and did not result in a greater development of language awareness, nor did it contribute to greater success for children when they learned another language afterwards ».

In traduzione italiana: « [I ricercatori] hanno guardato alle ricerche fatte nelle classi, che mettevano a confronto gli effetti dell'apprendimento dell'esperanto con gli effetti dell'apprendimento di altre lingue. L'esperanto risultava più facile da imparare del francese per gli alunni nell'esperimento e sembrava aver avuto un effetto di livellamento, che aveva compensato differenze individuali tra i bambini, Esso, tuttavia, non aveva compensato le differenze nell'attitudine ad imparare una lingua, e non aveva raggiunto l'effetto di un maggior sviluppo della consapevolezza metalinguistica, né aveva contribuito ad un maggior successo dei bambini nell'imparare un'altra lingua successivamente ».

Dobbiamo infine parlare dell'esperimento guidato dalla università di Paderborn in Germania negli anni 1980, molto noto in ambiente esperantista (Frank, 1980, 1983, 1992) i cui effetti, tuttavia, si limitano a confermare la facilitazione nell'apprendere lingue successive, in questo caso l'inglese, per studenti delle scuole tedesche nella regione Niedersachsen. Tuttavia, sia i criteri di composizione delle classi sperimentali, che i criteri di misurazione dei risultati lasciano qualche dubbio sulla scientificità dell'esperimento. In particolare, sembra dubbio il vantaggio che l'apprendimento della struttura dell'esperanto possa portare a studenti germanofoni, considerando che tra L1 e L3 vi sono più affinità che tra queste e la L2 esperanto.

Il tema dell'affinità tra L1, lingua materna dello studente, L2, esperanto, ed L3, lingua da apprendere successivamente, non è affrontato da Frank negli studi sull'esperimento di Paderborn, ed è anche poco toccato nella letteratura su questo tema, a parte le chiare dichiarazioni di Smideliusz (1995, 1997). Tuttavia, esso è l'argomento principale del paragrafo successivo, in cui viene affrontato il problema della diversità fra esperanto L2, rispetto ad inglese e cinese L1, diversità che, a sua volta, solleva la questione di quali abilità metalinguistiche vengano sviluppate dall'apprendimento dell'esperanto.

#### **IV. Una possibile linea di indagine con parlanti cinesi ed inglesi**

Nel citato articolo di Pinto, Corsetti (2001: 82) gli autori osservavano circa vent'anni fa, parlando di possibili ricerche future:

« L'altra direzione di ricerca si concentrerebbe su soggetti che parlano lingue con caratteristiche strutturali completamente differenti da quelle dell'italiano. Sarebbe estremamente interessante avere dati metalinguistici su bambini o adolescenti con lingue materne che abbiano perso quasi

completamente le marche morfologiche tipiche delle lingue indoeuropee (come l'inglese o il persiano) o che siano parlanti di lingue isolanti (malese, vietnamita, cinese), ed in particolare sarebbe interessante vedere se, anche in tali situazioni, si possano riscontrare ricadute metalinguistiche positive sulla lingua materna da un corso di esperanto. Dati di questo tipo confermerebbero (o minerebbero) la pretesa universalità dell'esperanto, e dall'altro, continuerebbero ad alimentare il grande dibattito sul funzionamento della lingua nel cervello dei parlanti, di cui le abilità metalinguistiche sono uno degli aspetti più rilevanti ».

Si trattava evidentemente di un auspicio profetico, poiché oggi siamo in grado di pensare ad un esperimento proprio con parlanti di tali lingue.

## Direzione di un possibile esperimento

Le esperienze maturate nel corso del tempo, insegnando a studenti di madre lingua inglese e cinesi, porterebbero ad escludere *a priori* ricadute metalinguistiche positive sulla lingua materna mentre sono ipotizzabili ricadute positive relativamente al successivo apprendimento di lingue straniere. In effetti, quasi tutti gli esperimenti effettuati in passato, lungamente affrontati nel secondo paragrafo, riguardano l'apprendimento del francese da parte di studenti di madrelingua inglese, tranne gli esperimenti dell'università di Paderborn, sui cui risultati, comunque, sono state espresse chiare riserve.

Del resto, nell'attuale letteratura psicolinguistica, quando si parla di *linguistic awareness*, si tratta molto spesso di un tipo di abilità metalinguistiche non correlate alla morfologia o ad altri elementi grammaticali ma principalmente alla soluzione di problemi di ambiguità della frase e quindi alla comprensione dei significati, che dipendono più dal contesto che da aspetti grammaticali o morfologici. Si usano, ad esempio, indovinelli ed altre forme di ambiguità (Zipke, 2008: 129):

« Riddles are the perfect medium for learning how to manipulate language for many reasons, including students' familiarity with them and motivation for reading them. Here's how riddles can be used in the classroom to stimulate student's linguistic awareness ».

Siamo quindi in un campo in cui le nostre consuete misurazioni di abilità metalinguistiche non possono essere comparate con i risultati di altri esperimenti. Questo è chiaro anche dalla poca rilevanza dei risultati dell'esperimento in scuole inglesi, descritto in Roehr (2012). Una situazione simile si ha per parlanti di cinese sia da studi effettuati in Occidente (Sihui Ke, Feng Xiao, 2015) e (Zhang, Koda, 2021), che da comunicazioni personali di pedagogisti cinesi. L'esperimento dovrebbe quindi esaminare gli effetti della consapevolezza metalinguistica acquisita attraverso l'esperanto sullo studio successivo di un'altra lingua straniera.

## Possibile organizzazione dell'esperimento

Considerando il fatto che in Inghilterra l'insegnamento delle lingue straniere è sempre più aleatorio (Long et al., 1920), mentre in Cina esso è insegnato in molte università e scuole elementari e medie, sembra più facile pensare ad un esperimento in Cina, dove l'insegnamento delle lingue straniere comincia nelle province economicamente più avanzate, fin dalla terza elementare, e in scuole in cui è disponibile un insegnante adatto, mentre nelle province meno sviluppate l'insegnamento della lingua straniera comincia ad 11 anni, cioè in corrispondenza dell'inizio della scuola media in Italia, proseguendo fino all'inizio dell'università. Le lingue insegnabili, sempre secondo la disponibilità degli insegnanti, sono l'inglese, il francese, il russo, lo spagnolo ed anche l'esperanto. Altre lingue sono insegnate in situazioni particolari, ad esempio, il coreano nel territorio abitato da una minoranza di lingua coreana ecc. Da colloqui con il professor Zhang Changsheng della Università Tecnica di Jiangsu, che è contemporaneamente presidente dell'associazione esperantista di Changzhou, in questo

quadro di insegnamento dell'esperanto e di lingue straniere in Cina è emersa la possibilità di replicare in Cina, con ragazzi delle scuole medie (10-11 anni), l'esperimento di Halloran (1952) dell'università di Sheffield, Inghilterra, descritto qui sopra. A seconda della disponibilità di insegnanti, l'esperimento potrebbe riguardare sicuramente l'inglese, ma forse anche il francese, per cui gli effetti dovrebbero essere prevedibilmente maggiori.

Un altro possibile esperimento, molto più difficile da organizzare relativamente alla disponibilità di classi sperimentali e di classi di controllo, potrebbe essere quello relativo agli effetti metalinguistici dello studio dell'esperanto quando la lingua da imparare fosse una lingua agglutinante come il coreano o il giapponese, lingue Oggetto-Verbo OV (Matthews, 2014), con un ordine delle parole nella frase molto diverso dal cinese, ma in qualche misura riscontrabile in esperanto, in cui le frasi passive tendono ad avere l'ordine oggetto-verbo, anche se tale ordine è riscontrabile anche nelle frasi attive.

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# Plurilingual classes: challenges and effects of practices to foster plurilingualism at school<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *Cultural and linguistic diversity are nowadays a prominent characteristic of schools in most European countries. However, monolingualism is mostly the norm, and even in multilingual countries schools follow a monolingual policy. Thanks to strong empirical evidence bilingualism should no longer be considered a problem or an obstacle to (majority) language learning and academic success. In addition, teachers who are able to implement intercultural and plurilingual pedagogical approaches, doing so without negative bias towards ethnic minority students, offer students the best possibilities of academic success, and social and identity integration. In the present article we review the literature about bilingual development, the sociocultural aspects of ethnically diverse classrooms and discuss the possibility of implementing plurilingual practices at school and the benefits students might derive from these.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Plurilingual practices, Bilingualism, Classroom interactions, Bilingual education, Translanguaging.*

## I. Introduction

Cultural and linguistic diversity are nowadays a prominent characteristic of schools in most European countries, due to migration flows. However, monolingualism is mostly the norm, and even in multilingual countries (e.g., Belgium, Luxemburg, Switzerland) schools follow a monolingual policy, banning or discouraging language uses that do not correspond with the national language or the school's denominational one. A certain amount of bilingual language use may be observed in foreign language classes where the national language can be used to support the learning of the foreign language with explanations or translations. However, such language practices translate into social and cultural policies by which the identities, values and knowledge of students with an ethnic minority background are weak and inferior, being depleted of their complexity and richness.

To date, in Italian schools there are 865.388 foreign students, 10.3% of the total (MIUR, 2022). Primary school is the sector that absorbs the largest number of students with non-Italian citizenship (MIUR, 2022), and the further we go in educational level the more likely it is that foreign students will be late or drop out of school. According to data published by the Italian Ministry of Education in 2022, and referring to the 2020/2021 academic year, nearly

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26,9% of foreign students are late (compared to 8.9% of Italians). An alarming consequence of school delay is undoubtedly school dropout. The European indicator « *Early Leaving from Education and Training* » (ELET) shows that pupils with non-Italian citizenship are at the highest risk of dropping out with 35.4% in 2020, compared to a national average of 13.1% (MIUR, 2022). The regularity of schooling is a key indicator of integration, and while in some cases the causes can be traced back to the placement of foreign students in classes lower than their age, failures or non-admissions, a strong role is played by the teachers these students encounter, and the teaching practices they choose to use (Vorauer et al., 2009). It is clear from these data that it is impossible to continue with a monolingual approach.

In the present paper we discuss the possibility of implementing plurilingual practices at school and the benefits that students might derive from them, whether with a minority or majority ethnic background.

## **II. Growing up learning more than one language: which factors play a role?**

According to the « Inhibitory Control Model » (Green, 1998), when bilinguals use only one language, both known languages are activated in the brain. The first studies on bilingualism supported the hypothesis that bilingual children had lower mental abilities than monolinguals because the knowledge of several languages would generate mental confusion with deleterious consequences on every cognitive aspect (Hakuta, 1986). Contrary to past hypotheses, the lifelong practice bilinguals receive from managing two languages seems to lead to a cognitive benefit, and bilingualism adds no further cost to children's achievement regardless of their initial levels of language and cognitive ability (Bialystok, 2016). Indeed, children can learn two languages simultaneously as they develop two separate grammatical, lexical, and phonological systems (Hoff, Core, 2015). Some caution should be adopted with bilingual children with language deficits who might need support in each language (Fibla et al., 2022). Despite that, if children with specific learning difficulties receive adequate support and are immersed in an inclusive environment, they can become successful multilingual language users (for a review, Kormos, 2017). According to Grosjean (1985), bilingualism is not only the sum of two monolingualisms, and learning multiple languages should not be considered as an additive process (de Zarobe, de Zarobe, 2015). Furthermore, bilingual skills in a dominant language are not equivalent to monolingual proficiency in the same language (Hoff, Core, 2015). For example, bilinguals are likely to develop context-specific vocabulary depending on their use of each language (Rhys, Thomas, 2013). Due to migration phenomena and policies adopted by some countries (e.g., European Strategy for Multilingualism), exposure to more than two languages is increasing. Bilingual education brings academic and cognitive benefits, such as metalinguistic awareness (Adesope et al., 2010), better language learning strategies and communication ability, especially in typologically-related languages (Anastassiou et al., 2017). Moreover, it allows the simultaneous development of language and literacy skills in the majority and the minority language (Bialystok, 2016). According to the specific principle in multiple language learning, multilingualism is moderated by several factors (Quinteros Baumgart, Billick, 2018). Specifically, the development rates in each language depend on the quantity and quality of input (Hoff, Core, 2015). Some factors that seem to influence language development include exposure to a rich vocabulary, complex and varied syntax, decontextualized speech (Hoff, Core, 2015), and code-switching (i.e., using two or more languages within the same sentence or conversation). Code-switching is associated with better parental language ability, and is a linguistic resource that can improve language development in children (Fibla et al., 2022). Furthermore, bilingual experience in the early years (Fibla et al., 2022) and input from native speakers (Hoff, Core, 2015) are critical for bilingual language development. The environment also plays a crucial role (e.g., Hoff,

Core, 2015). Bilinguals may have different experiences in the two languages and develop different proficiency patterns (de Zarobe, de Zarobe, 2015). For example, children growing up in highly bilingual societies receive more consistent exposure and become more proficient in the majority language (Fibla et al., 2022). Moreover, children may prefer to use the language they know better and progress faster in that language (Hoff, Core, 2015). Therefore, promoting environments that allow people to receive sufficient high-quality experience in each language is necessary. Immigrant parents should not be discouraged from speaking their native language to their children (Hoff, Core, 2015). Indeed, native language learning also has a social impact by determining social inclusion for immigrant children and positive personality adjustment in youth (Quinteros Baumgart, Billick, 2018). Furthermore, good literacy at home contributes to the development of reading comprehension skills similar to those of monolinguals (Peets et al., 2022). However, it is necessary to identify at an early stage some family characteristics that may slow down language development (e.g., poverty and/or limited language engagement) to intervene and limit the negative consequences of such conditions (Quinteros Baumgart, Billick, 2018). Moreover, the effects of bilingualism on cognitive functions depend on the context in which communicative exchanges occur (« Adaptive Control Hypothesis », Green, Abutalebi, 2013). Indeed, it determines whether the available languages may cooperate or compete. According to Bialystok (2011), during a conversation, bilinguals must rely on the context and require constant access to the information contained in their working memory. Furthermore, they need to select the appropriate language for the specific communicative situation (inhibiting the other language) and monitor what happens during the interaction (cognitive flexibility). Knowledge of two languages positively affects learning a third language (Hirosh, Degani, 2018) and positively impacts future success in the foreign language classroom (Anastassiou et al., 2017). Indeed, studies have shown that multilingual learners use different strategies than monolingual learners (Anastassiou et al., 2017). Several models for acquiring a third or subsequent language have been formulated. According to the « Cumulative Enhancement Model » (Flynn et al., 2004), both previously acquired languages are available for transfer at any point in the process of L3/Ln acquisition. Language learning is cumulative, but the transfer only occurs if the languages enhance subsequent language acquisition. Instead, according to the « Typological Primacy Model » (Rothman, 2011), known languages are compared with the new language to identify the one with the highest degree of typological and structural proximity to be used as a reference model during learning.

### **III. Sociocultural perspective: the inevitable role of stereotypes and prejudices and their consequences on ethnic minority students' academic path**

Plurilingual classes inevitably means cultural diversity. Two macro-approaches to diversity can be identified: multiculturalism and egalitarianism. The former emphasizes intergroup differences, and values them as enriching (Hachfeld et al., 2011; Hahn et al., 2010). This would involve considering the special characteristics of ethnic minority students, emphasizing their culture-related specificities, and adapting teaching practices to the cross-cultural differences present in the school context. The second approach, egalitarianism or also referred to as « colorblindness », implies that those who interact with people with an ethnic-cultural background different from their own, look beyond ethnicity treating them in a precisely, egalitarian manner. This approach, when applied to a school context, results in an underestimation of ethnic differences, on the one hand, and, on the other, it causes teachers to focus on finding common ground by emphasizing similarities between students with different cultural backgrounds. Despite the fact that both approaches are a manifestation of positive attitudes toward minority ethnic students (Hachfeld et al., 2011; Hahn et al., 2010, 2014), it has been found that adopting egalitarian teaching practices causes one to develop a biased orientation

in interacting with the others (Vorauer et al., 2009), which can lead to the formation of implicit negative attitudes (Correll et al., 2002). On the other hand, these two approaches are influenced by teachers' stereotypical beliefs toward multiculturalism (Passiatore et al., 2016, 2019), and their ethnic bias. When teachers exhibit high explicit negative bias, they are less willing to adapt their instructional practices to the multicultural context, and less likely to promote mutual respect among students of different ethnicities (Kumar, Hamer, 2012). In contrast, adopting multicultural practices in the classroom would reflect a greater focus on interethnic interactions (Vorauer et al., 2009), greater empathy and a stronger perception and acceptance of cultural differences (Wolsko et al., 2000). Therefore, it is clear why, in the study of teaching multilingualism practices, it is important to also consider the social aspects derived from the teachers' stereotypes and prejudices toward ethnic minority groups, who usually speak another language than the majority language in the classroom.

The teachers' ethnic bias has numerous effects on the academic path of students (Costa et al., 2021). Whether students are aware of it or not, teachers are part of a community that defines their cultural identity, shapes their beliefs and attitudes (Rogoff, 2003), and guides their behavior. The cultural beliefs of teachers can influence their interactions with students, among whom they can make a distinction according to cultural dimensions such as ethnicity, social class, religion and language (Passiatore et al., 2016). Their attitudes and beliefs may affect the way they interact with ethnic minority students, the teaching practices they use, and the grades they assign (Costa et al. 2022).

In the school context, teachers are required to be as objective as possible when evaluating and comparing the academic performance of their students. This makes them especially careful in trying to evaluate as much as possible free of stereotypes. However, since all individuals hold stereotypes, there is a possibility that these will be activated regardless. In addition, teachers find themselves in workplace situations where they are asked to handle multiple tasks simultaneously (Santavirta et al., 2007) and respond promptly to situational demands (Doyle, 2006). At times, these conditions do not allow teachers to engage in controlled and reflective processes, leaving the way clear for the automatic and unconscious activation of attitudes and stereotypes, with the risk of unintentionally influencing their evaluations of students, their teaching practices, and their own behaviors (Glock, 2016; Glock et al., 2013; Kleen, Glock, 2018).

Implicit negative attitudes by teachers have been found to be predictive of their classroom behaviors and judgments about students (Costa, Pirchio, 2022; Glock, Böhmer, 2018; Kumar et al., 2015; van den Bergh et al., 2010). These are also likely to be reflected in student performance. Several studies have shown how teachers' implicit attitudes are correlated with differences in achievement between groups of students, making it clear that teachers' negative biases may predict the academic achievement of ethnic minority students (Chin et al., 2020; Costa, Pirchio, 2022; Peterson et al., 2016; van den Bergh et al., 2010).

The behavior of teachers who present negative implicit ethnic attitudes results in choosing teaching practices that do not promote mutual respect, disregard different cultures, and are also less likely to manage interethnic conflicts (Kumar et al., 2015). In a Dutch study by van den Bergh et al. (2010), the authors examined attitudes toward students of Turkish and Moroccan origin, as they are the least integrated ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, and experience educational disadvantage. In this study, students' performance on standardized tests was predicted by teachers' implicit attitudes. Ethnic minority students in classes where teachers had more negative implicit attitudes performed worse on achievement tests than ethnic minority students in classes where teachers' implicit attitudes were more positive (van den Bergh et al., 2010).

However, it must also be acknowledged that, in some cases, negative attitudes toward the ethnic group might overlap with positive biases toward language learners. In one study, Harrison and Lakin (2018) evaluated the implicit attitudes of preservice teachers toward students who were learning English (« English learners ») vs. native speakers (« mainstream »),

without referring to the students' ethnicity. The results showed that the attitudes of preservice teachers toward « English learners » students were positive. In this case, ethnicity was inferred from native/non-native English speaker status, and teachers may have implicitly valued the willingness to learn rather than ethnic background. Conversely, when students' ethnicity is explicitly referred to through pictures or names, in such cases teachers' negative bias toward ethnic minority students clearly emerges (Costa et al., 2021; Pit-ten Cate, Glock, 2019).

Studies have found that teachers have different academic expectations for students of different ethnic groups. Teachers may form biased expectations based on the students' personal characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnicity (Costa et al., 2022; de Boer et al., 2010; Rubie-Davies, 2008; Timmermans et al., 2015), and tend to judge ethnic minority students as less proficient in the majority language of the country in which they are located (Costa, Pirchio, 2022; Glock, Krolak-Schwerdt, 2013; Spietsma, 2013).

The importance of teachers' expectations in facilitating students' learning has long been recognized (Rubie-Davies, 2008). Studies by Rubie-Davies (2007, 2010) have pointed out that teachers reflect their own distorted expectations in their teaching practices. Teachers who have low expectations of their students provide them with a poor level of teaching, decreasing the students' opportunity to learn. Research has confirmed that learning opportunities improve for students when teachers have high expectations of them (Rubie-Davies, 2015; Timmermans et al., 2018). When teaching is not tailored to the student's actual needs but is based on the teacher's mistakenly assumed needs based on his or her stereotypical expectations, the choice of material, the difficulty of the task, the instruction provided, and the feedback may not be appropriate to the students' level. Teaching based on stereotypes related to social and ethnic groups might increase the academic gap between majority and minority ethnic students, and educational inequalities (Costa, 2022; Hornstra et al., 2010; Ready, Chu, 2015; Rubie-Davies, 2015; van den Bergh et al., 2010). Teachers' stereotypes and prejudices, therefore, impact not only on their classroom behavior, but on students' academic achievement, and may influence students' choices of future paths and careers (de Boer et al., 2010; Ready, Wright, 2011; Rubie-Davies, 2007, 2008, 2010).

#### **IV. Plurilingual educational practices: the role of teachers' and school's factors**

Language development occurs through the individual's involvement in sociocultural dynamics. Taking the language development from an ecological perspective, two noteworthy factors are the environmental microsystems' characteristics and the macro-structural aspects of the contexts in which children are involved.

According to the socio-interactional theoretical paradigm, interaction actively promotes language development in children. More specifically, interactions with someone more mature are crucial, and have a scaffolding function in the social interaction with the child. Within educational settings, these take the form of teacher-child communication and daily classroom activities (Kultti, 2013). This is in line with recent results showing that, although age is an important factor in language learning, early exposure is not a sufficient condition to acquire a second language (Schwartz, Gorbatt, 2017).

In bilingual development, society's attitudes toward bilingualism in general, and toward children's specific bilingualism, also play a key role. Attitudes, values, and norms result in language policies and educational practices which, in turn, have an impact on children's opportunity to be involved in interactions occurring in a particular language or on the legitimacy that the productions in that language will assume within different living environments (Boyd, Ottesjö, 2016). For example, the pursuit of the ideal of a homogeneous State and the resulting threat of linguistic diversity fostered by migration flows often leads to teaching practices that discourage bilingualism. Instead, when languages other than the dominant

one find a place in the school setting, it is because they are attributed a status of prestige (Van Der Wildt et al., 2017a). Teachers sometimes manifest common-sense beliefs that multilingualism in languages considered to be of low prestige may harm pupils' development and compromise their academic success (Van Der Wildt et al., 2017a). Also, the assumption that bilingual children's lexical and grammatical skills evolve in two separate language systems, rather than adjacent and integrated, is determinant for adopting programs based on monolingual premises (Yussof, Sun, 2020). Multilingual programs can be implemented in several ways. In societal bilingualism settings, *two-way immersion programs* have been established to achieve a linguistically and culturally balanced school environment by promoting the use of both the majority and minority languages. However, such a structured environment does not in itself guarantee the achievement of equal proficiency in the two languages. In fact, the dominance of the majority language often affects progress in the minority language because the need to use it to communicate is not sensed (Schwarz et al., 2022). In high-immigration settings, the language separation belief persists among teachers, notwithstanding the evidence of the support that the learners' mother tongue provides to the second language learning process (Jordens et al., 2018; Schwarz et al., 2022).

Official school policies are not prescriptively exercised by teachers through the instructional practices in their classrooms. Rather, they are actively responsible for choosing the strategies best suited to their students' needs. By not adhering to the school's official language policy, the agentive role of teachers becomes explicit when, for example, they modify their teaching methods to facilitate the students understanding, or for affective reasons, in particular when children seem to be struggling (Misfad, Vella, 2018). Agency in teachers is not only an individual capability but may also depend on external factors. The absence of agency in some teachers may reflect the need to safeguard their position within the school. Another constraint results from the lack of systematic directions to interpret school curriculum guidelines. Moreover, teachers not only have to follow rigid and standardized curricula, especially those working at primary education level, but they also have to devote a considerable amount of time and effort to prepare children to achieve the expected level of performance. As a result, opportunities for critical review of the externally imposed practices and policies are sacrificed on the altar of assessment (Misfad, Vella, 2018). Students also display different reactions to the official policies that permeate the school environment, from behaviors that express ideological affiliation to small signs of resistance (i.e., persisting in using one's L1) to completely disinvesting in the learning process (Martin-Jones, 2013).

The application of a sociocultural perspective to support educators working with children from linguistically diverse backgrounds through interaction is an ongoing project (Schwartz, Gorbatt, 2017). In this regard, a reference for educators could be the use of instructional conversations, small-group interactions between educators and children at an equal level of participation that offer children a model of expressive behavior, and give them the opportunity to practice language while obtaining direct feedback from their interlocutor. While preschool educators tend to use verbal directives, instructional conversations require teachers to have a degree of flexibility as well as the partial relinquishment of conversational control. Moreover, educators need assistance creating classroom contexts that promote contribution by multilingual children. Well-crafted coaching should emphasize building conversations that use children's entire communicative repertoire, including gestures, other than their native language (Brook Chapman de Sousa, 2017). The literature on language development stresses the importance of responsivity. Building on children's communicative attempts by repeating, extending their speech, or verbalizing their actions, encourages their participation. Modeling language use results in an increment of children's conversational turns (Brook Chapman de Sousa, 2017). Peers who have achieved a higher level of proficiency can also play the role of L2 expert, modeling for less skilled children the proper use of language (Schwartz, Gorbatt, 2017). Ritual repetitions of teacher-led activities, such as singing, also seems to indicate that imitation is a starting point for L2 acquisition, at least in the early stages of learning. The level

of children's participation is diverse and ranges from simple observation to gestures and communicative acts, where this can be understood in terms of Vygotskij's Zone of Proximal Development (Kultti, 2013). With emergent bilingual children, teachers attempt to make the input comprehensible in the early stages of L2 acquisition through linguistic and paralinguistic strategies, including slower-formulated speech as well as clear, simplified and repetitive utterances that are highly contextualized, resorting to gestures and visual reinforcement of both concrete and abstract concepts (Gort, Pontier, 2013). Another aspect to consider is the use of translation. Teachers may make an explicit request for L2 use or handle the children's request for direct translation into their L1. As the L2 acquisition journey progresses, educators tend not to give in to children's requests or, as an alternative, choose which words they believe should be translated into L1, such as abstract words, choosing not to translate those that have become familiar (Schwartz, Gorbatt, 2017). In the case of two-way immersion programs, educators assigned to teach L1 and L2 must be prepared for co-teaching sessions. They need mutual trust and cooperative skills in implementing strategies, for example in the decision to avoid using mutual translation and also in providing elaborations and expansions of the colleague's message in their designated language (Schwartz, Gorbatt, 2017).

The literature shows the presence of a gap between language ideologies and language practices used daily by teachers in the classroom (Yussof, Sun, 2020). Indeed, educators may express beliefs that embrace a monolingual policy but resort to teaching practices that reflect flexible bilingualism (Van Der Wildt et al., 2017b). An example is the use of code-switching in contexts where there is a policy of language immersion or separation, since it is a linguistic practice that refers to alternating between languages within a single communicative episode (Boyd, Ottesjö, 2016; Yussof, Sun, 2020). Such gaps can elicit feelings of guilt and undermine the self-efficacy of teachers, potentially affecting educational outcomes. Within educational settings, code-switching is frequently motivated by the need to ensure students' understanding or to give instructions; it is also not uncommon to use it as affective support or for classroom management. Some scholars argue that code-switching occurs not only as an instructional strategy, but may also manifest as a natural linguistic habit (Yussof, Sun, 2020). There are no universal guidelines indicating the appropriate degree to which code-switching should be used, but its use may depend on different considerations about bilingual minds. In line with the linguistic differentiation hypothesis, teachers reluctant to use code-switching believe that the two languages evolve in two different linguistic systems in the brain and recommend the total exclusion of inputs in L1 to avoid the risk of linguistic interference or the excessive dependence on L1. The advocates of code-switching support Cummins' developmental interdependence hypothesis, according to which the development of L2 is connected to and dependent on the development of L1 skills, with the consequent possibility of beneficial transfers between the two languages (Yussof, Sun, 2020).

In recent years, researchers seem to share the hypothesis that bilingualism does not reside in separate skills for each language, but in a multicompetence that functions for the two different languages in one's repertoire which are stored in a composite system (Gort, Pontier, 2013). This belief, coupled with numerous studies reporting the use of the mother tongue as a cognitive resource for performing L2 tasks – i.e., solving scientific and mathematical tasks (Jordens et al., 2018) – is leading to a growing desire in educational contexts to reconsider the role of hybrid multilingual practices. Teachers can enable pupils to draw on their bilingualism based on the idea that using multiple languages can be a valuable strength for them (Van Der Wildt et al., 2017b). However, even in contexts where there is a policy of language separation, it is possible to give rise to a flexible and dynamic bilingual context. This can occur when different languages are distributed by teachers (implementing an OPOL interactional structure) rather than being distributed throughout the school day by day schedule. When two teachers (one for L1 and the other for L2) are present in group activities, the « one teacher/one language » approach means that both languages will be used simultaneously throughout the day (Gort, Pontier, 2013).

An interesting approach to plurilingualism in the classroom is represented by the practice of translanguaging (Vogel, García, 2017). The term can refer both to a theoretical perspective on multilingualism – that in language use the speakers select the features of their communicative messages from one unitary repertoire including all the languages (named or not) and other semiotic tools – and to a pedagogical approach using and promoting diverse and dynamic language practices for students' learning. The pedagogical practices of translanguaging imply to abandon language policies constraining the speakers to use, at any given moment, a specific part of their semiotic repertoire, and considering all the symbolic tools of the speakers useful to serve the task of making and sharing meaning. From the behavioral point of view, what can be observed in a translanguaging activity is the implementation of code-mixing and code-switching practices, where the choice of the codes and languages responds to strategic communication aims, and fulfills social and identity construction actions. The communicative dynamics created in translanguaging practices can be implemented in any type of classroom, but has been often tested in foreign language classes and is especially useful in the presence of students with diverse cultural backgrounds and heterogeneous language skills. In fact, when language learning is at stake teachers may find it useful to refer to the language the students already know in order to give instruction, to translate difficult or new contents or to propose metalinguistic reflections (Karlsson et al., 2019; Rosiers, 2020; Ting, Jintang, 2022). In classrooms with students with a minority background and with weaker skills in the majority language, this pedagogical practice, implemented by the teacher or initiated by the students, may have the effect of creating a more comfortable social and communicative environment (Ting, Jintang, 2022), building trust and empowering the students in the minority groups (Carbonara, Scibetta, 2022; Duarte, 2019), and increasing their engagement with the teaching contents (Karlsson et al. 2019; Kirsch, 2018; Ollerhead, 2019). Promoting translanguaging in classroom interaction supports the development of the students' (and the teachers') multilingual repertoire, multilingual competence and multilingual identity (Kirsch, 2018). It might be acknowledged that the implementation of a translanguaging practice in the classroom poses a challenge for the school system and actors. In fact, by demanding to go beyond the traditional boundaries separating language from other semiotic means (gestures, pictures, music etc.), and separating any named language from the other languages, translanguaging challenges the language ideology classically advocated where language use should be monolingual, and where a hierarchy of codes and languages is explicitly or implicitly active in any moment (Rosiers, 2020). The necessity to go beyond language regimes, boundaries and hierarchies may challenge the teacher's social and professional identity, especially in schools and countries where these language regime, boundaries and hierarchy are strong, and makes translanguaging a revolutionary practice. Language ideologies reflect social and cultural ideologies, and reinforce them. The choice to give priority or exclusivity to a specific language over the others means weakening the voice of minority language students and undermining their values, knowledge and identity (Vogel, García, 2017). Transforming the language practices and semiotic systems may transform the sociopolitical structure (García, Wei, 2014).

## V. Conclusion

Cultural diversity and plurilingualism nowadays qualify the school environment in Europe especially in those regions and cities that are the destination of immigration flows. Despite this increasing diversity of the school population (sometimes also characterizing the teachers' group), school curricula and practices are still fundamentally monocultural and monolingual. In part, the lack of resources in terms of multilingual teachers, materials and effective multilingual practices may explain this choice, even if an ideological component – attributing a greater importance to the majority language and culture – should not be underestimated.

We have discussed how teachers' attitudes and expectations, which influence their classroom behaviors, may have an impact on the students' academic achievement and social integration. Several studies found that this impact was negative for the students in minority groups. Language is an important source of social categorization, and language use is a means students have to communicate with others, to have access to culture and knowledge, and also to develop and share their identities. For these reasons language competence and language learning are central issues in the school context, especially for students with ethnic minority backgrounds.

Psycholinguistic and cognitive studies have explored bilingual development and functioning, showing similarities in the way children acquire one or two languages but also the specificities in language competence, language use and cognitive functioning of bilinguals. We know that bilinguals are not only the sum of two monolinguals and that bilingual skills in a dominant language are not equivalent to monolingual proficiency in the same language. This means that bilingual pupils in strictly monolingual classrooms may experience a disadvantage and that their diverse knowledge and rich experience might not be valued.

School is intended to promote students' learning and the development of their talents and competences, and schools with multicultural and plurilingual classrooms should be able to valorize the cultural and semiotic richness of their students instead of flattening them by means of a monocultural and monolingual educational policy. In this respect, the results of studies analyzing the classroom interactions we have discussed seem encouraging, showing that plurilingual practices not only do not harm the socio-relational dynamics of the students and their majority language learning, but promote the students' engagement in the learning activities, foster collaboration and support metalinguistic competence. It must be acknowledged that such practices require dedicated open-minded teachers with specific multilingual pedagogical skills and academic language policies favoring the valorization of diversity. Following this path, schools will be inclusive places where students can not only learn to master cultural contents and tools but also develop integrated identities together with feelings of belonging to the community.

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# Apprentissage de la L2 et des mathématiques par des élèves à profil bi-plurilingue en contexte bilingue<sup>1</sup>

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TITLE: *L2 and mathematics learning by students with a bi-plurilingual profile in a bilingual context.*

ABSTRACT: *This paper addresses the issue of plurilingual students in bilingual classes, a problem which has been little explored so far. Based on data previously collected for a PhD thesis (Jenny, 2021), we focused on some specific points in response to the following research question: can plurilingual students benefit from the same bilingual teaching resources as their « monolingual » peers? To this end, we considered some independent variables such as the linguistic profile and the results obtained by 202 students (age range: 10-12 years old) enrolled in an immersive program on L2 and mathematics tests. In parallel with this quantitative approach, we also analyzed the interviews with the teachers working in this context (a French-German bilingual school in Biel/Bienne, Switzerland), which gave us a qualitative view of the issues at hand, oriented toward practices and representations in relation with plurilingualism. The results showed, on the one hand, that students' linguistic profile has no significant impact on the development of their competences in L2 and mathematics in this bilingual context, and, on the other, that teachers scarcely took into account the plurilingual resources of their students in their teaching practice.*

KEYWORDS: *L2 Learning, Mathematics learning, bi/plurilingual students, bilingual context, qualitative versus quantitative analysis.*

## I. Introduction

L'enseignement bilingue est reconnu comme une manière efficace d'apprendre des langues et de nombreuses études ont été menées à ce sujet depuis les années 1960. Les questions de recherche les plus souvent posées dans ce domaine sont celles de l'apprentissage de la L1, de la L2 ou des autres disciplines ou encore celle des élèves présentant des difficultés d'apprentissage. On considère aujourd'hui que les élèves poursuivant des cursus bilingues peuvent développer des compétences de L1 proches (voire supérieures) à celles d'élèves effectuant leur scolarité dans des classes monolingues. Par ailleurs, les compétences en L2 sont généralement mieux développées chez les élèves issus des cursus bilingues que chez les élèves de classes régulières, en particulier les compétences réceptives (écoute et lecture). Une question reste néanmoins ouverte : est-ce que les élèves plurilingues (issus de la migration) profitent de dispositifs d'enseignement bilingue autant que leurs pairs « monolingues » ?

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Sur la base de données récoltées dans le cadre d'un travail doctoral (Jenny, 2021) nous avons tenté de répondre à cette question en utilisant une méthodologie mixte. Une première partie (quantitative) fournit une comparaison des résultats obtenus par des élèves de 10-12 ans scolarisés dans une école bilingue, selon leur profil langagier (monolingue ou plurilingue). Une deuxième partie (qualitative) propose une analyse de quelques extraits d'entretiens menés avec des enseignants travaillant dans cette même école publique en Suisse : la Filière Bilingue (FiBi) dans la ville bilingue de Biel/Bienne (que nous écrirons « Bienne » dans la suite du texte). Cette école propose depuis 2010 un cursus complet d'école primaire (élèves âgés de 4 à 12 ans) bilingue français-(suisse) allemand (50%-50%), en appliquant le modèle de l'immersion réciproque (élèves issus des deux communautés linguistiques présents dans les classes). Le contexte géo-démographique de cette ville implique également la présence de nombreux élèves plurilingues dans cette école.

Notre chapitre est structuré en trois parties principales. Premièrement, nous donnons un cadre contextuel comprenant des clés terminologiques utiles à la lecture du texte, quelques résultats de recherche concernant l'enseignement bilingue et une description détaillée du contexte dans lequel les données ont été récoltées (FiBi). Deuxièmement, nous décrivons l'approche méthodologique retenue et les étapes de travail qui ont mené à cette étude. Troisièmement, une présentation des résultats (tant sur le plan quantitatif que qualitatif) donne des éléments de réponse à notre question de recherche. Une discussion/conclusion fournit non seulement des éléments de synthèse des résultats, mais aussi des pistes pour la formation d'enseignants travaillant avec des élèves (ou dans des contextes scolaires) bi-plurilingues.

## II. Cadre contextuel et scientifique

Cette partie définit quelques éléments terminologiques donnant une base de compréhension commune des enjeux liés à l'enseignement bilingue, présente différents résultats de recherche en lien avec le thème de ce chapitre et décrit le contexte scolaire et social dans lequel les données ont été récoltées. Enfin, notre question de recherche et les hypothèses qui en découlent sont présentées.

### Terminologie

Dans ce chapitre, la notion de L1 désigne la première langue enseignée dans le cursus scolaire, par exemple le français dans une classe d'une région francophone. La L2 représente alors la deuxième langue (ou la première langue étrangère) que les élèves devront apprendre à l'école, par exemple l'allemand en Suisse romande, et par conséquent, la langue-cible généralement visée par un programme d'enseignement bilingue. Nous parlerons de langue(s) premières(s) pour désigner les langues d'origine des élèves bi-plurilingues (nombreux à Bienne) dans ce texte. Par ailleurs, le terme d'enseignement bilingue sera utilisé de manière générique et englobera plusieurs approches visant l'utilisation de deux langues d'enseignement dans une école. La définition donnée par Gajo et Berthoud (2008, p. 1) va dans ce sens et décrit l'enseignement bilingue comme un programme qui propose « *une partie du cursus scolaire au moins dans une autre langue que la langue locale de référence* ». De nombreuses modalités peuvent ainsi entrer dans cette définition large de l'enseignement bilingue. Pour les analyses, nous avons constitué des groupes d'élèves dits « monolingues » et « plurilingues » sur la base des réponses données par les élèves à un questionnaire. Les élèves ayant indiqué utiliser la même langue dans le cadre familial et social ont été attribués au profil « monolingue ». Nous sommes conscients que ces catégories sont réductrices et ne reflètent pas les nombreuses variétés de plurilinguisme et la manière d'être plurilingue.

## Principaux résultats scientifiques concernant l'enseignement bilingue et ses déclinaisons

Le bi-plurilinguisme a longtemps été considéré comme une source de troubles intellectuels et les premières études menées aux États-Unis au début du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle percevaient des déficits chez les individus bilingues (voir, par exemple, Saer, 1923). Toutefois, ces recherches ont été vivement critiquées pour leur manque de rigueur sur le plan méthodologique, notamment parce qu'elles comparaient des personnes issues de l'immigration (considérées comme plurilingues) avec d'autres, issues des communautés locales (considérées comme monolingues), ayant un statut socio-économique différent.

Depuis les années 1960, de nombreux projets d'immersion ont fait l'objet d'études scientifiques, surtout au Canada, aux États-Unis et en Europe. Les chercheurs se sont pour la plupart penchés sur les quatre thèmes suivants (cf. Gajo, 2001 : 1) le développement des compétences en L1 ; 2) le développement de compétences en L2 ; 3) le développement de compétences en disciplines dites non linguistiques (DdNL) ; 4) la possibilité d'inclure dans les projets d'immersion des enfants rencontrant des difficultés d'apprentissage. Des travaux de synthèse (voir, par exemple, Genesee, 2006) montrent que les élèves issus de classes bilingues développent souvent de meilleures compétences en L2 et obtiennent des résultats en L1 similaires à ceux des élèves de classes ordinaires. Une différence a surtout été constatée dans le cadre des compétences réceptives (lecture et écoute), bien que la diversité des contextes (à la fois linguistiques, politiques et sociologiques) ne permette pas de généraliser ce résultat. Subséquemment, chaque projet devrait être étudié en tenant compte de ces dispositions locales et les conclusions ne devraient être tirées qu'en lien avec les éléments linguistiques, sociologiques et politiques du contexte.

Depuis une vingtaine d'années, des scientifiques s'intéressent à la question des disciplines scolaires en contexte bilingue. Bialystok (2001) a, par exemple, montré que les élèves issus de classes immersives obtenaient habituellement des résultats similaires à ceux d'élèves issus de classes régulières. Par ailleurs, les recherches de Gajo, Steffen (2015), ainsi que de Gajo (2018,) ont montré qu'une approche plurilingue conscientisée et didactisée pouvait aider les élèves à développer de bonnes compétences dans les disciplines enseignées en L2 (DdNL). Selon ces travaux, le choix des mots par les enseignants, l'utilisation de deux langues pour clarifier les contenus ainsi que la distance prise par rapport aux contenus enseignés peuvent constituer un enrichissement dans le processus d'apprentissage. En ce qui concerne les difficultés d'apprentissage, des recherches, menées dans les années 1970 et 1980, ont montré que les élèves ayant des besoins éducatifs particuliers réussissaient aussi bien en L1 et en mathématiques (en contexte bilingue) que les enfants ayant un profil similaire dans les classes ordinaires (voir, entre autres, Genesee, 1976, ou Erdos, Genesee, Savage, Haigh, 2013). En outre, il a été constaté que les élèves des classes bilingues avaient souvent une attitude plus positive envers l'apprentissage des langues et envers l'école en général (voir Brühwiler, Le Pape Racine, 2017).

En contraste à ces nombreux résultats, très peu d'études ont à ce jour porté sur les résultats d'élèves plurilingues dans des contextes scolaires immersifs bi-plurilingues. Hélot (2004) rend attentif à la distinction entre le bilinguisme des migrants (menant parfois à une concurrence entre deux langues dont les statuts sont différents) et le bilinguisme des élites (apprentissage conscient de deux langues prestigieuses et valorisées par l'entourage) afin d'éviter d'attribuer certaines particularités de ces groupes à l'ensemble des « bilingues ». Par ailleurs, selon différents auteurs comme Deprez (1994), Coste (2000) ou Lüdi, Py (2013), le système scolaire se focalise encore trop sur la correction de la langue et pas assez sur le répertoire plurilingue des élèves. C'est pourquoi le *code-switching* (ou parler bilingue) est encore souvent perçu comme une trace de non-compétence, alors même qu'il est la preuve que l'enfant peut communiquer dans différents codes. Ainsi, la définition de la compétence plurilingue donnée par Moore (2006) est importante pour le présent travail : un système dy-

namique dans lequel les contacts entre les langues peuvent être restructurés en fonction de la situation et des besoins. Ainsi, des déséquilibres, par exemple entre les compétences orales et écrites, peuvent exister. L'apparition de la notion de *translanguage*, qui indique que deux langues sont utilisées dans une dynamique intégrée (García, Lin, 2016), illustre bien le changement de paradigme dans l'analyse de l'utilisation des langues dans l'éducation bilingue. En outre, Grosjean (1993) souligne depuis longtemps qu'une personne bilingue ne possède pas nécessairement une double compétence de locuteur natif, mais est capable de participer régulièrement à des interactions dans deux langues et deux cultures et de savoir s'adapter dans des situations multilingues (plurilinguisme fonctionnel). Par extension, l'individu bilingue peut disposer d'une compétence biculturelle, qui est une combinaison d'éléments des deux langues et des deux cultures. Selon la situation et l'interlocuteur, la personne bi-plurilingue peut s'adapter et activer son répertoire en conséquence.

Ces recherches montrent combien les questions langagières et, dans une certaine mesure, les compétences dans d'autres disciplines telles que les mathématiques, ont été analysées durant ces trente dernières années dans le cadre de l'enseignement bilingue. En revanche, peu d'études ont porté sur la question des élèves plurilingues, encore moins dans le contexte spécifique de l'immersion réciproque, qui est un type d'enseignement bilingue encore récent en Europe et en Suisse. Il nous semble par conséquent important de documenter ce contexte, tout en approfondissant le débat (plus large) sur l'enseignement bilingue et les élèves plurilingues qui y évoluent.

### **Immersion réciproque et FiBi à Bienne**

Cette section donne une définition générale de l'immersion réciproque et les éléments-clés de compréhension du dispositif de la FiBi dans lequel les données présentées dans ce chapitre ont pu être récoltées.

L'immersion réciproque a connu plusieurs définitions au fil des années et son profil dépend fortement du contexte dans lequel elle est implantée. Du point de vue conceptuel, la plupart des auteurs s'accordent sur les deux grands aspects de l'immersion réciproque : 1) une répartition équitable des enseignements entre deux langues et 2) la présence dans la classe d'élèves issus des communautés parlant l'une ou l'autre de ces langues (voir notamment Brohy, Gajo, 2008 ; May, 2017 ; Jenny, 2021). Historiquement, l'enseignement par immersion réciproque trouve ses origines aux États-Unis dans le contexte migratoire des années 1970, impliquant l'arrivée de nombreux ressortissants d'Amérique Centrale sur la côte Est. García (2008) décrit notamment un projet scolaire de la ville de New York dans lequel l'enseignement bi-plurilingue s'est développé par la force des choses puisque la plupart des élèves ainsi que certains enseignants étaient issus des communautés hispanophones et que les idéologies politiques et pédagogiques des années 1970 incitaient à construire les savoirs sur les compétences existantes des élèves. Cet enseignement visait principalement l'intégration de cette population et était alors appelé « *enseignement bilingue de transition* » (García, 2008 : 112) avec l'objectif principal de permettre aux élèves allophones de rejoindre les classes monolingues anglophones du pays à la suite de leur passage dans ces classes. Ce cadre institutionnel ne correspond pas aux définitions actuelles de l'enseignement bilingue et s'apparente plutôt à la situation d'une classe d'accueil, dans laquelle la langue d'origine des élèves serait utilisée comme langue d'enseignement à temps partiel. Toutefois, l'évolution des pratiques et la prise en compte des résultats de la recherche ont donné naissance à un nouveau modèle d'enseignement bilingue aux États-Unis dès les années 2000 : l'immersion réciproque (en anglais *two-way dual language* ; voir, par exemple, May, 2017). Dans cette approche, les langues d'enseignement utilisées sont presque toujours l'anglais et l'espagnol mais elles peuvent également concerner d'autres langues à côté de l'anglais, comme le chinois. La part dévolue à l'enseignement dans une autre langue que l'anglais est généralement proche de cinquante

pour cent et deux enseignants se partagent les disciplines, en parlant chacun dans une seule langue et en appliquant ainsi la modalité « une personne/une langue » (1P/1L).

La ville bilingue de Bienne en Suisse représente un endroit privilégié pour l'installation d'un projet d'immersion réciproque, tout d'abord puisque deux communautés linguistiques (francophone et germanophone) sont présentes dans des proportions relativement équilibrées (58% des résidents indiquent l'allemand comme langue officielle alors que 42% indiquent le français ; voir Ville de Bienne, 2019), et ensuite parce que la promotion du bilinguisme fait partie des objectifs politiques au niveau communal. Par ailleurs, Bienne présente une grande proportion de personnes plurilingues : 53.2% des habitants indique parler deux ou plus de deux langues (Ville de Bienne, 2019).

Ainsi, en 2010, la ville ouvre une école primaire publique bilingue (FiBi) qui applique le principe de l'immersion réciproque. Le concept, rédigé par Le Pape Racine, Merkelbach, Salzmann et Walther (2010, p. 3), précise :

« [...] chaque classe est composée à parts égales d'enfants germanophones et francophones. Par principe, l'enseignement est dispensé à parts égales en allemand et en français. L'on encourage modérément la langue principale des enfants dans des disciplines d'enseignement linguistiquement homogènes. Ce modèle permet l'acquisition de compétences linguistiques, non seulement dans le cadre de l'enseignement, mais encore dans les contacts entre élèves, notamment lors des pauses et durant les loisirs ».

Sur le plan structurel, la FiBi est une entité scolaire qui dispose d'une direction, d'un site géographique et d'une équipe enseignante. Deux classes parallèles de chaque degré scolaire ont été créées afin de permettre aux enseignants de travailler de manière collaborative. Les classes sont composées d'élèves ayant pour langue principale le français (environ 1/3), l'allemand (environ 1/3), et d'autres langues (environ 1/3). Le projet a été évalué en 2013, puis en 2017, afin de valider sa continuation après chaque phase (cycle 1, cycle 2<sup>2</sup>). Il s'est agrandi à raison de deux classes par année et compte actuellement 16 classes allant de la 1<sup>e</sup> à la 8<sup>e</sup>, soit plus de 300 élèves. Deux classes de 9<sup>e</sup> (niveau secondaire) ont également été ouvertes en 2020.

En raison des différentes spécificités décrites ci-dessus, cette filière constitue un terrain d'investigation privilégié pour l'étude de l'évolution d'élèves plurilingues scolarisés dans une structure bilingue.

## Question de recherche et hypothèses

Nous avons formulé notre principale question de recherche de la manière suivante : comment évoluent les élèves plurilingues dans une structure bilingue telle que la FiBi ?

Par rapport à cette question, nous avons formulé trois hypothèses que le présent travail vise à vérifier :

1. il n'existe pas de différence significative entre les résultats en L2 des élèves monolingues et ceux des élèves plurilingues de la FiBi ;
2. il n'existe pas de différence significative entre les résultats en mathématiques des élèves monolingues et ceux des élèves plurilingues de la FiBi ;
3. les enseignants interviewés dans le cadre de ce projet prennent conscience en compte le répertoire langagier de leurs élèves dans le cadre de l'enseignement par immersion réciproque.

<sup>2</sup> Dans le système scolaire suisse, la scolarité obligatoire est divisée en trois cycles : le cycle 1 (élèves âgés entre 4 et 7 ans) comprenant les degrés de 1 à 4, le cycle 2 (élèves âgés entre 8 et 12 ans) comprenant les degrés de 5 à 8 et le cycle 3 (élèves âgés entre 13 et 15 ans) comprenant les degrés de 9 à 11.

Les trois hypothèses définissent nos deux axes : premièrement, un focus quantitatif sur les compétences monolingues et plurilingues des élèves en L2 et en mathématiques (hypothèses 1 et 2), et deuxièmement un focus qualitatif sur le discours des enseignants sur la question du plurilinguisme dans le cas concret de l'immersion réciproque à Biel/Bienne (hypothèse 3). Les éléments de réponses à ces aspects pourront alimenter les discussions sur l'évolution des élèves plurilingues dans des dispositifs bilingues.

### **III. Approche méthodologique**

Sur la base de la question principale présentée et des hypothèses formulées ci-dessus, nous avons décidé d'appliquer une méthodologie mixte, afin de croiser la mesure des compétences des élèves plurilingues (approche quantitative) avec une meilleure compréhension des discours et des pratiques des enseignants (approche qualitative). Pour ce qui est de la partie quantitative, les analyses ont principalement porté sur les compétences en L2 dans le sens développé par le Conseil de l'Europe, et, dans une perspective plurilingue (Coste, Moore, Zarate, 2009 ; Conseil de l'Europe, 2001, 2018), sur les compétences en mathématiques décrites dans les plans d'études francophone (PER) et germanophone (*Lehrplan21*<sup>3</sup>). Pour ce qui est de la partie qualitative, trois entretiens semi-dirigés ont été conduits avec des enseignants francophones et germanophones de la FiBi et ont notamment porté sur la question de la gestion du plurilinguisme dans leur enseignement.

#### **Participants et données**

Il a été décidé de travailler avec les élèves de 7<sup>e</sup> (10-12 ans) parce que cette tranche d'âge n'a été que peu étudiée jusqu'à présent, et parce que le temps passé dans cette école (sept années) permet d'observer plus aisément les compétences développées par les élèves. L'échantillon d'élèves ayant participé aux tests (n=202) comprend 131 élèves germanophones et 71 élèves francophones, dont beaucoup sont plurilingues.

#### **Partie quantitative : évaluation des compétences en L2 et en mathématiques des élèves plurilingues de la FiBi**

La première partie de ce travail vise à mesurer les compétences développées par les élèves plurilingues de la FiBi en L2 et en mathématiques, en comparaison avec les élèves monolingues des mêmes classes et du même âge. Les élèves participant à la recherche ont passé des tests de langue dans les activités langagières suivantes : compréhension écrite (CE) ; compréhension orale (CO) ; expression écrite (EO) ; expression orale (EO). Les résultats à ces quatre tests ont donné lieu à la variable indépendante « résultat général en L2 » (R\_L2). Les tests de langue ont été construits sur la base des exercices de l'ouvrage *Lingualevel*, réalisé par Lenz et Studer (2014), afin d'évaluer les compétences en langue française et anglaise d'apprenants germanophones de tous les âges. Par conséquent, certains tests ont été adaptés afin de permettre la mesure des compétences langagières d'élèves francophones en allemand. Les tests se basent sur les niveaux de langue A1-C2 proposés par le Conseil de l'Europe (2001, 2018) et ont été expérimentés dans différents pays. Afin de pouvoir les utiliser dans les cursus scolaires avec plus de précision, ils ont été déclinés en sous-niveaux (A1.2-B2.2) comme proposé dans le Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les langues (CECR). Ces distinctions sont d'ailleurs reprises dans les plans d'études actuellement en vigueur en Suisse.

<sup>3</sup> La conférence des directeurs de l'instruction publique des cantons suisses, où l'allemand est la langue d'enseignement (D-EDK) a élaboré et publié un plan d'études commun devant être introduit progressivement dans chaque canton dès 2014.

Les sous-niveaux permettent une appréciation plus précise des compétences d'apprenants entre les niveaux A1 et C2. Pour ce travail, des exercices allant du niveau A1.1 au niveau B2.2 ont été choisis afin de permettre aux élèves d'effectuer des exercices de plus en plus difficiles, selon leur niveau de compétence.

Pour les mathématiques, des exercices visant l'évaluation des compétences d'élèves de la même tranche d'âge, développés par la Humboldt-Universität Berlin (2013), ont été repris et adaptés. Afin de couvrir le plus grand nombre de compétences possibles, le choix a porté sur un test relativement long (45 minutes) couvrant les thématiques principales qui apparaissent dans les plans d'étude pour les mathématiques : addition, soustraction, multiplication, division, quantité et unités, chiffres, nombres et fractions, géométrie et logique. Des exercices avec un niveau de difficulté croissant ont été choisis afin de permettre à tous les profils d'élèves d'aller le plus loin possible en fonction de leurs compétences. Au total, 33 questions, tirées des tests de Humboldt-Universität Berlin (2013), mais aussi inspirées des moyens d'enseignement obligatoires des deux régions linguistiques, ont été sélectionnées. Le nombre total de points pour ce test était de 54.

Afin de récolter des données sur le profil des élèves, un questionnaire fermé à réponse unique a été utilisé, permettant d'identifier rapidement plusieurs aspects de la population étudiée. Le questionnaire élaboré pour ce travail se divise en quatre parties : les données personnelles, les données sur l'école, la situation familiale et la situation langagière. Pour nos analyses, la partie dédiée à la situation langagière était particulièrement importante. Elle regroupait 4 items portant sur les pratiques langagières de l'individu dans différents environnements tels que le lieu de résidence, les loisirs, les relations amicales et l'école. Un cinquième item portant sur la langue dans laquelle l'individu se sent le plus à l'aise a été ajouté afin de permettre l'identification d'une ou de plusieurs langues de préférence pour l'individu. C'est sur cette base que nous avons attribué aux élèves le statut de « monolingue » et de « plurilingue ». Précisons que les élèves avec un profil bilingue « français-allemand » ont été retirés de l'échantillon, car il était plus difficile d'attribuer leurs résultats uniquement au dispositif scolaire (en concurrence avec l'environnement familial et social). Le questionnaire a été testé et ajusté à deux reprises.

### **Partie qualitative : place accordée aux langues premières des élèves – entretiens avec trois enseignants**

Pour explorer les aspects qualitatifs de notre recherche nous avons donné la parole à trois enseignants au sujet de leurs pratiques et de la gestion du plurilinguisme de leurs élèves. Ainsi, trois entretiens semi-dirigés et approfondis ont été menés avec ces enseignants germanophones et francophones de la FiBi. L'objectif, ici, était bien plus une exemplification des pratiques, des réflexions et des représentations d'enseignants de cette école qu'une analyse exhaustive du discours des enseignants impliqués dans le projet. À cette fin, une approche analytique inductive a été adoptée afin d'obtenir une première vision des enjeux didactiques de l'enseignement immersif-réiproque au travers du discours de ces enseignants. Le canevas d'entretien provenait d'une étude bien plus large (Jenny, 2021) et les questions portaient sur les points de rupture entre contenu et langue, les difficultés rencontrées par les participants à l'étude, les particularités didactiques du dispositif mis en place, ainsi que sur les pratiques d'évaluation. Les réponses ont été isolées et examinées séparément au cours de la rédaction du présent texte. Des outils issus de l'analyse du discours, visant en premier lieu le contenu ainsi que la position du locuteur par rapport à celui-ci (voir, par exemple, Roulet, 1991), ont été utilisés pour l'analyse. Des extraits de l'interview ont été ensuite sélectionnés en fonction du statut plurilingue des élèves. Il s'agit donc d'un procédé idiographique de recherche de sens qui devrait permettre de mettre en relation les résultats de la première partie du travail avec les observations et les commentaires de l'enseignant. Les entretiens ont duré entre 45 et 60 minutes et ont été enregistrés, transcrits puis répartis en différentes séquences selon les thématiques abordées.

## IV. Résultats

Cette section présente d'abord les résultats issus des analyses quantitatives (comparaisons de résultats d'élèves monolingues et plurilingues en L2 et en mathématiques), puis ceux issus des analyses qualitatives (entretiens avec les enseignants concernant la prise en compte des ressources plurilingues des élèves).

### Compétences en L2 des élèves plurilingues de classes bilingues

La première étape a consisté à comparer les résultats obtenus par les élèves plurilingues de la FiBi avec ceux des élèves considérés « monolingues » dans ce même contexte. Pour cela, nous avons effectué plusieurs *t*-Test de Student, dont les résultats seront présentés ci-après. Le contenu des différentes colonnes des tableaux peut être synthétisés comme suit :

- *Groupe* : dénomination des groupes comparés ;
- *N* : nombre d'individus dans chacun des groupes dont les résultats ont pu être considérés pour la recherche (en excluant les tests dont les réponses n'étaient pas analysables) ;
- *Moyenne* : somme d'un groupe de valeurs divisée par le nombre de valeurs représentées dans le groupe ;
- *Diff./points max.* : différence de points qui sépare les deux groupes et le nombre maximum de points qu'un élève pouvait obtenir à chaque test (par exemple 7 pour les différentes compétences testées en L2). Pour permettre des comparaisons entre des tests n'ayant pas le même nombre de points, nous avons également indiqué l'importance de cette différence en pourcentage ;
- *Écart-type* : indicateur de la distribution des résultats en fonction de la valeur moyenne.
- *Sig.* : indicateur de la significativité du résultat. Nous considérons qu'une valeur de *p* inférieure à 0.05 met en évidence un résultat significatif, c'est-à-dire fiable pour les interprétations.

	<b>GROUPE</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>MOYENNE</b>	<b>DIFF./POINTS MAX.</b>	<b>ÉCART TYPE</b>	<b>SIG.</b>
R_L2	Germanophones monolingues	81	2.63		1.05	
	Germanophones plurilingues	51	2.45	0.18/7 (2.57%)	.361	1.06

**Tableau 1.** Comparaison des moyennes (*t*-Test de Student) obtenues par les élèves germanophones monolingues et plurilingues de la FiBi aux différents tests de L2 (regroupés dans la variable R\_L2).

Nous relevons que les élèves germanophones monolingues obtiennent une moyenne légèrement supérieure à celle des élèves germanophones plurilingues (2.56%). Mais, ce résultat n'étant pas significatif, nous retenons principalement que le fait d'être monolingue ou plurilingue n'a pas un impact significatif sur les résultats obtenus en L2.

Nous avons effectué le même test statistique pour les élèves francophones de cette école, qui a donné lieu au résultat suivant.

	<b>GROUPE</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>MOYENNE</b>	<b>DIFF./POINTS MAX.</b>	<b>ÉCART TYPE</b>	<b>SIG.</b>
R_L2	Francophones monolingues	45	2.45		0.72	
	Francophones plurilingues	26	2.82	-0.37/7 (5.29%)	.069	0.94

**Tableau 2.** Comparaison des moyennes (*t*-Test de Student) obtenues par les élèves francophones monolingues et plurilingues de la FiBi aux différents tests de L2 (regroupés dans la variable R\_L2).

Dans ce cas, ce sont les élèves francophones plurilingues qui obtiennent une moyenne légèrement supérieure (5.29%) à celle des élèves francophones monolingues. Comme le résultat est à nouveau non-significatif, on ne peut pas considérer que les élèves plurilingues apprennent mieux la L2 dans ce contexte immersif réciproque. En revanche, on peut considérer qu'ils ne l'apprennent en tous cas pas moins bien que des élèves monolingues. Il faut néanmoins être prudent dans l'interprétation de ce résultat car le nombre d'individus dans le groupe « francophones plurilingues » est relativement restreint (N=26).

Ces deux tests statistiques permettent de conclure que, dans le contexte spécifique de la FiBi, les élèves plurilingues apprennent la L2 de manière similaire aux élèves monolingues. Par extension, on peut considérer que le répertoire plurilingue de ces élèves ne représente pas un obstacle pour l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère en contexte immersif. Comme nous l'avons déjà souligné, les ressources plurilingues des élèves devraient être considérées bien davantage comme une base dynamique sur laquelle des apprentissages peuvent être construits.

### **Compétences en mathématiques des élèves monolingues vs les élèves plurilingues**

Dans un deuxième temps, nous avons comparé les résultats de ces quatre groupes (germanophones monolingues vs germanophones plurilingues, francophones monolingues vs francophones plurilingues) obtenus au test de mathématiques au moyen de *t*-Tests de Student. Les résultats sont mis en évidence ci-dessous (Tableaux 3 et 4).

	GROUPE	N	MOYENNE	DIFF./POINTS MAX.	ÉCART TYPE	SIG.
R_Maths	Germanophones monolingues	79	26.68		9.19	
	Germanophones plurilingues	51	24.52	2.16/54 (4.00%)		.179

**Tableau 3.** Comparaison des moyennes (*t*-Test de Student) obtenues par les élèves germanophones monolingues et plurilingues de la FiBi au test de mathématiques.

Comme dans le cas des résultats en L2, nous constatons que les élèves germanophones monolingues obtiennent des résultats légèrement supérieurs (4%) aux élèves germanophones plurilingues en mathématiques. Ce résultat n'est pas significatif, ce qui permet d'affirmer que la variable « monolinguisme/plurilinguisme » n'a pas d'impact significatif sur les résultats en mathématiques chez les élèves germanophones.

Nous avons procédé de la même manière pour les élèves francophones, ce qui nous amène au résultat suivant :

	GROUPE	N	MOYENNE	DIFF./POINTS MAX.	ÉCART TYPE	SIG.
R_Maths	Francophones monolingues	45	26.83		8.89	
	Francophones plurilingues	26	24.29	2.54/54 (4.70%)		.265

**Tableau 4.** Comparaison des moyennes (*t*-Test de Student) obtenues par les élèves francophones monolingues et plurilingues de la FiBi au test de mathématiques.

Selon ce test, il n'existe pas de différence significative entre les résultats en mathématiques des élèves francophones monolingues et plurilingues de l'échantillon, bien que les élèves avec un profil francophone monolingue aient obtenu une moyenne légèrement supérieure (4.7%) à celle des élèves à profil francophone plurilingue.

Sur la base de ces deux analyses statistiques, nous constatons encore une fois que le profil langagier n'a pas d'impact significatif sur les résultats en mathématiques dans ce contexte bilingue spécifique.

Les propos tenus par les enseignants concernant leurs pratiques pédagogiques (présentés dans la partie suivante) pourront donner un éclairage complémentaire à ces résultats.

### **Le discours de trois enseignants au sujet des ressources plurilingues des élèves en contexte immersif réciproque**

Dans la continuité des analyses des résultats des élèves, des entretiens semi-dirigés et approfondis ont été conduits avec trois enseignants (germanophones et francophones) travaillant à la FiBi. Nous avons sélectionné quelques extraits spécifiques donnant des indications sur les pratiques pédagogiques de ces acteurs, ainsi que sur leurs représentations en relation avec le plurilinguisme de leur classe. Dans le but d'être le plus proche possible des propos tenus par les personnes interviewées, nous les avons transcrits en langue originale (parfois en français, parfois en allemand) et, si nécessaire, nous avons proposé une traduction en français en pied de page. Nous avons utilisé les conventions de transcription suivantes:

.	fin d'une phrase
?	question
« »	autocitation de l'enseignant
..	micro-pause
...	pause de 2 secondes
(2.1)	pauses en secondes, à partir de 2.1 secondes
xxx	segment inaudible
exTRA	segment accentué
[...]	ellipses
((rire))	phénomènes non transcrits, commentaires de l'auteur
par-	troncation

Le premier extrait provient d'un enseignant travaillant à la FiBi depuis 2010 et ayant auparavant enseigné dans des classes monolingues germanophones. Au moment de l'entretien, il enseignait l'allemand, les mathématiques, l'éducation physique et les arts visuels en allemand à une classe composée d'élèves francophones, germanophones et allophones. Il a suivi plusieurs formations sur le plurilinguisme et l'enseignement bilingue.

78-INT Es gibt wahrscheinlich in deiner Klasse viele anderen Sprachen [f] welche sind es?

79-ENS1 Spanisch, Tigrinya, Albanisch noch, Italienisch, Englisch und ich habe auch ein Kind, das spricht Französisch zu Hause. Sie [die Familie] kommen glaube ich aus dem Kongo aber sprechen Französisch zu Hause... ehm. Mehr weiss ich gerade spontan nicht.

80-INT Haben diese Sprache einen Einfluss auf deinen Unterricht?

81-ENS1 Habe ich jetzt weniger [gemerkt]. Ja also insofern mit dem Kind, das aus Argentinien kommt habe ich auch plötzlich etwas auf Spanisch gesagt, weil es nicht verstanden hat. Oder wir haben etwas mit dem Spanischen verglichen ehm aber sonst habe ich jetzt nicht etwas extrem aus dem bemerkt.

82-INT Ja also du stützt in diesem Fall nicht jeden Tag auf plurilingualen Ressourcen in dem Sinn, dass ihr Sprachen miteinander vergleicht oder Aktivitäten macht, in denen man die eigene Sprache auch einbeziehen kann.

89-ENS1 Wenn, dann mit Französisch. Vielleicht punktuell aber vielleicht einmal pro- keine Ahnung drei vier Monate, wirklich sehr sehr selten. So Wenn ich merke, « das Kind macht das und das falsch » zum Beispiel und dann « wieso aha genau » zum Beispiel in der letzten Klasse hatte ich ein Kind, das hat Schwierigkeiten gehabt mit dem « J » und dann haben wir gesehen aha das ist wegen dem Spanisch vom euh « me llamo » oder « jesus » und dann habe ich gesagt « aha im Spanisch ist das « J » aber auf Deutsch ist es halt anders ». So. Aber sonst mit der Klasse habe ich das nicht. Oder mache ich das sehr sehr selten.<sup>4</sup>

Nous relevons ici que l'enseignant prend peu en compte le plurilinguisme de ses élèves (il dit « très très rarement ») et ne semble pas planifier d'activités métalinguistiques. L'accent semble surtout porté sur le français et l'allemand (les langues officiellement enseignées dans le projet), mais peu sur les langues de migration, pourtant bien représentées dans sa classe (cf. tour de parole 79 avec l'énumération des langues présentes dans la classe). Il ne semble d'ailleurs pas certain d'avoir identifié toutes les langues, ce qui peut traduire l'absence de temps accordé/planifié pour (re)connaître les langues de la classe et donner la parole aux élèves pour décrire leurs parcours langagiers. On relève aussi le besoin de se sentir compétent ou légitimé pour s'appuyer sur d'autres langues, puisqu'il ne donne qu'un exemple (très pertinent d'ailleurs) d'un travail spécifique bilingue allemand-espagnol (langues qui font partie de son répertoire langagier personnel) pour surmonter une difficulté de prononciation d'un de ses élèves. On ne relève malheureusement pas de traces plus fréquentes de ce type de geste pédagogique ou encore de prise en compte d'autres langues, parfois linguistiquement plus éloignées du français ou de l'allemand.

Le prochain extrait provient d'un entretien avec une enseignante germanophone qui travaille depuis deux ans dans le projet FiBi. Elle enseigne les mathématiques, l'allemand, l'éducation physique et les activités créatives. Elle n'a pas suivi de formation spécifique concernant le bi-plurilinguisme ou l'enseignement par immersion.

53 INT Welche Sprache hast du in deiner Klasse ausser Französisch und Deutsch.

54 ENS2 Spanisch, was sonst noch Kroatisch, Albanisch. Ich muss überlegen. Ich habe das Gefühl es sind gar nicht so viele, weil es gibt dann immer mehrere, die dann die jeweilige Sprache sprechen. Also es gibt auch Kinder, die sind Englisch-Deutsch bilingue, also Englisch wäre auch so eine Sprache

55 INT Es muss ja nicht eine vollständige Liste sein

56 ENS2 Dann eben das eine Mädchen aber ich ((lacht)) kann mich die Sprache nicht merken.

<sup>4</sup> 78-INT Il y a probablement beaucoup d'autres langues dans ta classe [...] quelles sont-elles ?

79-ENS1 L'espagnol, le tigrinya, l'albanais encore, l'italien, l'anglais et j'ai aussi un enfant qui parle français à la maison. Ils [la famille] viennent du Congo je crois, mais ils parlent français à la maison... C'est tout ce que je sais spontanément.

80-INT Est-ce que cette langue a une influence sur ton enseignement ?

81-ENS1 Je ne crois pas. Oui donc avec l'enfant qui vient d'Argentine, j'ai aussi dit quelque chose en espagnol parce qu'il ne comprenait pas. Ou nous avons comparé quelque chose avec l'espagnol, mais sinon je n'ai pas remarqué quelque chose d'extrême.

82-INT Oui, donc, dans ce cas tu ne t'appuies pas tous les jours sur des ressources plurilingues dans le sens où vous comparez des langues entre elles ou vous faites des activités dans lesquelles on peut aussi intégrer sa propre langue.

89-ENS1 Si c'est le cas, c'est avec le français. Peut-être ponctuellement mais peut-être une fois par-, je ne sais pas, trois quatre mois, vraiment très, très rarement. Par exemple, dans la dernière classe, j'ai eu un enfant qui avait des difficultés avec le « J » et nous avons vu que c'était à cause de l'espagnol de «me llamo» ou «jesus» et j'ai dit «aha en espagnol, c'est le «J» mais en allemand, c'est différent». Voilà. Mais sinon, je ne le fais pas avec la classe. Ou alors je le fais très rarement.

57 INT Ist das die, die du vorher erwähnt hast? Die aus Eritrea?

58 ENS2 Nein, [...] spanischsprachig. Nicht das Mädchen.

[...]

60 INT Und eben die nächste Frage ist in Bezug auf diese Sprachen. Hat das einen Einfluss auf deine Art und Weise zu unterrichten? Vielleicht zuerst, ob du diese Sprachen miteinbeziehst, ob das irgendeinen Einfluss hat auf deine Praxis.

61 ENS2 Also ehrlich gesagt jetzt nicht konkret. Ich- wir versuchen eher zum Teil das Französisch miteinzubeziehen jetzt auch bei den Fällen oder so aber wie gesagt auf Französisch heisst das jetzt das und das zum Beispiel. Aber ich spreche halt die Sprache auch nicht. Mit Spanisch könnte ich jetzt halt irgendetwas anfangen, habe selber mal gestartet Spanisch zu lernen, es gibt schon viele Ähnlichkeiten zum Französisch, gehört ja auch zu den gleichen Sprachen aber jetzt Albanisch oder- oder so. Nein da habe ich wie selber gar keinen Bezug dazu. Da könnte ich auch keine konkreten Hinweise oder so geben. Also beziehe ich nicht ein, nein.

62 INT Und wie lernen diese Schüler die L2?

63 ENS2 Es hat natürlich schon sehr viel vor mir begonnen. Darum ich denke das ist sehr eine Frage, die vor allem ja auf den Kindergarten, 1. und 2. Klasse zurückgeht. Jetzt sind sie halt wie schon drin.

64 INT Ja aber merkst du einen Unterschied zwischen einem französischsprachigen Schüler und einem mehrsprachigen Schüler, der vielleicht Französisch UND noch eine andere Sprach zu Hause spricht.

65 ENS2 Nein kann ich jetzt nicht so allgemein sagen. Jetzt zum Beispiel das albanischsprachige Mädchen spricht auch sehr sehr gut Deutsch finde ich, es macht auch ganz wenige Fehler. Wo ich denke, ich weiss nicht genau wieviel Albanisch mit Deutsch zu tun hat, aber ich denke jetzt eher wenig, so irgendwie die Paar Wörter, die man vielleicht aufgeschnappt hat oder die irgendwo ((lacht)) dran gesprayt waren oder so, sehe ich jetzt nicht so einen Zusammenhang zum Deutsch. Gut Spanisch auch nicht unbedingt, aber jetzt die Spanischsprachigen haben eher Mühe als das jetzt albanischsprachige Kind. Aber ich denke jetzt nicht, dass man das verallgemeinern kann. Es ist wahrscheinlich eher zufällig jetzt gerade so<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> 53 INT Quelle langue as-tu dans ta classe à part le français et l'allemand ?

54 ENS2 Espagnol, quoi d'autre, croate, albanais. Je dois réfléchir. J'ai l'impression qu'il n'y en a pas tant que ça, parce qu'il y en a toujours plusieurs qui parlent la langue en question. Donc il y a aussi des enfants qui sont bilingues anglais-allemand, donc l'anglais serait aussi une langue comme ça.

55 INT Cela ne doit pas être une liste complète.

56 ENS2 Alors la fille, mais je ((rires)) ne peux pas me souvenir de la langue.

57 INT Est-ce que c'est celle que tu as mentionnée avant ? Celle qui vient d'Érythrée ?

58 ENS2 Non, [...] hispanophone. Pas la fille.

[...]

60 INT Et justement la question suivante est par rapport à ces langues. Est-ce que cela a une influence sur ta façon d'enseigner ? Peut-être d'abord, si tu inclus ces langues, si cela a une influence quelconque sur ta pratique.

61 ENS2 Alors, honnêtement, pas concrètement. Je- nous essayons plutôt d'intégrer en partie le français aussi dans les cas ou autres, mais comme je l'ai dit, en français ça veut dire ceci et cela par exemple. Mais je ne parle pas non plus la langue. Avec l'espagnol, je pourrais peut-être faire quelque chose, j'ai moi-même commencé à apprendre l'espagnol, il y a déjà beaucoup de similitudes avec le français, il appartient à la même famille de langues, mais maintenant l'albanais ou autre. Non, je n'ai aucun lien avec ça. Je ne pourrais pas non plus donner d'indications concrètes ou quoi que ce soit. Alors je ne les intègre pas, non.

62 INT Et comment ces élèves apprennent-ils la L2 ?

63 ENS2 Bien entendu, beaucoup de choses ont déjà commencé avant moi. C'est pourquoi je pense que c'est une

La vision de cette enseignant laisse transparaître une certaine bienveillance à l'égard de ses élèves et de leur plurilinguisme. Mais elle ne met pas en avant une prise en considération consciente (et didactisée) des répertoires plurilingues des élèves de la classe. Elle admet en fait ne pas le faire (tour de parole 61), sauf en espagnol, langue qu'elle étudie. Or, encore une fois, le tour de parole 54 met bien en avant la diversité langagière présente dans cette classe et nous relevons que l'enseignante n'est pas en connaissance de toutes les langues et variétés parlées par les élèves (tours de paroles 54 à 58). En revanche, nous remarquons en 61 que les liens entre français et allemand semblent faire partie du quotidien de cette enseignante, ce qui représente une approche pertinente pour les enseignements, tant sur le plan langagier que disciplinaire.

Le dernier extrait provient d'une enseignante ayant 12 ans d'expérience professionnelle, mais seulement deux dans le contexte bilingue précis de la FiBi. Elle enseigne le français, les mathématiques, l'éducation physique, les arts visuels, les sciences humaines et sociales et les activités créatives. Elle a suivi plusieurs formations spécifiques pour l'enseignement bi-plurilingue.

84 INT Est-ce que tu arrives à donner un peu de place aux langues premières des élèves [...] ? Est-ce qu'il y a des fois des mots, je sais pas, en allemand, en arabe, en italien, en espagnol qui apparaissent ?

85 ENS3 Oui. ça dépend dans quel domaine, mais je pense que moi je fais très peu, moi je fais vraiment que du français et des maths, malheureusement. Mais je pense que dans l'enseignement, par exemple, du dessin ou dans l'enseignement des travaux manuels ou des sciences, avec le latin l'italien on pourrait faire des liens. Clairement, on peut faire des liens. On avait fait des liens avec les langues quand on avait appris des mots comme pantalons, pantalone, qui vient du mot italien ou le mot sandwich on avait fait une un thème comme ça et puis là on avait fait des liens. Mais ça dépend, vraiment.

Cet extrait met en avant des pratiques métalinguistiques, déclenchées par des situations d'enseignement qui laissent une certaine place au plurilinguisme. On ne peut malheureusement pas non plus parler ici de pratique consciente ou didactisée, mais on peut valoriser la posture de cette enseignante qui n'a pas peur de « se mouiller » en faisant des liens avec des langues qui ne font pas partie de son répertoire (« *pantalone* » n'est d'ailleurs pas le pluriel de pantalons, la version correcte étant « *pantaloni* »). Toutefois, cet exemple montre que l'on peut prendre en considération les langues de la classe et attraper « au vol » des occasions de travailler de manière plurilingue.

Ces trois extraits mettent en avant une application limitée des principes d'une didactique du plurilinguisme, qui auraient pourtant d'autant plus de sens dans ce contexte officiellement bi- (voire tri-)lingue, qui offre aux élèves des répertoires plurilingues riches et variés. La question du suisse-allemand n'a été abordée que très peu, alors qu'elle est centrale dans les régions germanophones de Suisse et consiste en une diglossie impliquant des compétences (et ressources) plurilingues de la part des élèves ayant des contacts réguliers en allemand et en suisse-allemand. En revanche, on peut se réjouir d'entendre de plusieurs enseignants que

question qui remonte surtout à l'école maternelle, à la 1ère et à la 2ème classe. Maintenant, ils sont comme déjà dedans.

64 INT Oui, mais est-ce que tu remarques une différence entre un élève francophone et un élève plurilingue qui parle peut-être le français *ET* une autre langue à la maison.

65 ENS2 Non, je ne peux pas dire ça de manière générale. Maintenant, par exemple, la fille albanophone parle aussi très bien l'allemand je trouve, elle fait aussi très peu de fautes. Je pense que je ne sais pas exactement combien l'albanais a à voir avec l'allemand, mais je pense que c'est assez peu, je ne vois pas vraiment le rapport avec l'allemand, les quelques mots que l'on a peut-être attrapés ou qui ont été tagués quelque part ((rires)) ou quelque chose comme ça. Bon, l'espagnol, non plus, mais maintenant les hispanophones ont plus de mal que l'enfant albanophone. Mais je ne pense pas que l'on puisse généraliser. C'est probablement un hasard.

des liens sont effectués entre l'allemand et le français (et, dans une moindre mesure, avec l'espagnol et l'italien) dans un projet bilingue impliquant ces deux langues. Ceci va dans le sens d'un enseignement bilingue qui ne soit pas la juxtaposition de deux cursus monolingues non-connectés entre eux.

Ces pratiques mériteraient d'être approfondies et plus souvent sollicitées, ce qui pourrait peut-être permettre aux élèves plurilingues d'obtenir de meilleurs résultats en L2 et en certaines disciplines comme les mathématiques, en plus des nombreux avantages d'approches métá- et interlinguistiques. Les élèves monolingues devraient aussi pouvoir profiter de telles activités, en tous cas dans les apprentissages en L2 (dans le sens de compétences plurilingues applicables à différents contextes).

## V. Discussion et conclusions

Les résultats présentés ci-dessus mettent en avant deux aspects importants de l'enseignement bilingue. Premièrement, l'étude montre que le fait d'être plurilingue ne représente pas un désavantage pour suivre un cursus bilingue (argument parfois avancé par les parents pour plaider contre la scolarisation bilingue d'enfants plurilingues). Deuxièmement, elle montre que le potentiel de la didactique du plurilinguisme n'est encore que très peu exploité, en tous cas dans ce contexte, alors même que le bilinguisme officiel de l'école ouvre les portes à des pratiques bi-plurilingues dans les classes. Un travail important de sensibilisation et de formation serait souhaité afin d'optimiser l'efficacité d'un tel dispositif pour les apprentissages langagiers et disciplinaires, mais aussi pour une valorisation du plurilinguisme et d'individus capables d'interagir dans des situations en plusieurs langues, en établissant des liens entre les langues.

L'approche méthodologique mixte appliquée dans cette étude a également permis de disposer d'une vision plus précise des apprentissages en L2 et en mathématiques des élèves plurilingues des classes FiBi. En effet, la partie quantitative a donné des indications sur leurs résultats en L2 et en mathématiques, et la partie qualitative a permis d'explorer le discours sur les pratiques de différents enseignants, ainsi que sur certains enjeux liés au plurilinguisme des élèves, de la classe et des enseignements. La combinaison de ces résultats montre que l'immersion réciproque peut profiter à des élèves de différents profils langagiers, mais également qu'il reste un potentiel important à exploiter en vue d'une éducation bi-plurilingue.

Les perceptions des enseignants interrogés indiquent une capacité adaptative dans leur manière d'enseigner au sein du contexte bilingue observé. Comme avancé dans d'autres travaux (Jenny, Arcidiacono, 2019a, 2019b), l'utilisation consciente d'une palette plus large de stratégies de communication, qui implique une articulation entre langue et contenu et une différenciation dans la manière d'enseigner les langues ou les DdNL, est un levier pour favoriser les apprentissages en contexte bi-plurilingues. Des pratiques didactiques utilisant ce potentiel pourraient représenter une réelle plus-value pour le projet FiBi et constitueraient une piste pertinente de formation pour les futurs enseignants qui se destinent aux écoles pratiquant l'immersion réciproque. De plus, la possibilité d'exploiter les compétences des élèves dans une langue ou dans d'autres, afin de faciliter la progression de la classe dans un processus de didactisation du rôle d'expert que peuvent apporter à tour de rôle les élèves francophones ou germanophones, pourrait constituer un élément à travailler au sein du dispositif FiBi.

Les directions d'écoles et les formateurs d'enseignants au niveau tertiaire pourraient donc tirer profit de ces faits pour mieux comprendre la portée des analyses des pratiques effectives dans les programmes d'immersion réciproque (mais aussi des interactions élève-enseignant) pour la compréhension des enjeux didactiques de l'enseignement bilingue et en particulier de l'immersion réciproque (Jenny, Gajo, Arcidiacono, 2019).

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# How multimodal digital literacy develops critical thinking skills in second language learners<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** As Kress argues (2010), *human communication is multimodal – i.e., speakers use different semiotic resources to interact, or rather, to make meaning. This implies that speakers acquire skills that enable them to use all the resources effectively.* Literacy then no longer means having competencies in reading and writing verbal texts only but also learning how to interpret, analyse, and evaluate multimodal meanings. Today, another facet of the concept of literacy regards technological development. The pervasiveness and ubiquity of digital technologies and devices have affected our social practices and shaped our forms of interaction (Domingo et al., 2015). Education, in particular, is a domain where information technology plays a pivotal role. For this reason, the technology-education binomial pushes educational researchers to reconceptualise the nature of literacy (Kamil et al., 2000, Leu et al., 2004, Leu, 2006). If we also include the necessity for learners to know how to categorise and critically interpret multimodal meanings – mostly consumed through digital media – the urgency about new pedagogies of literacy is evident. This theoretical contribution aims to speculate on and expand the concept of 'literacy' in order to support a multifaceted approach to education. Multimodality, digitality, and Critical Thinking will be explored and, at the same time, integrated within a holistic view of education and pedagogy with a particular focus on second language learning and teaching.

**KEYWORDS:** *Multimodality, Second Language Learning and Teaching, Digital Literacy, Critical Thinking, Metacognitive Strategies*

## I. Introduction

« The world of meaning has always been multimodal. [...] *Teaching and learning are communication*: they are reciprocal aspects of one relation. *Learning* is the obverse of *making meaning*. *Learning* is the result of a semiotic/conceptual/meaning-making engagement with an aspect of the world; as a result, the learner's semiotic/conceptual resources for making meaning and, therefore, for acting in the world, are changed – they are augmented. This augmentation of an individual's capacity is at the same time a change in *identity* of the person who now has different capacities for acting – in whatever way – through *knowledge-as-tool* to deal with problems in that individual's life-world » (Kress, 2010: 174).

This long citation represents the pivots of this contribution. The « multimodal turn » (Jewitt, 2009) has dramatically affected the concept of literacy, learning and teaching. As Kress argues, human communication is multimodal – i.e., speakers use different semiotic resources to interact, or rather, to make meaning. This implies that speakers acquire skills that enable them to

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use all the resources effectively. Literacy then no longer means having competencies in reading and writing verbal texts only but also learning how to interpret, analyse, and evaluate multimodal meanings. « Questions of meaning and of learning are in essence the same questions, though posed from distinct disciplinary perspectives – one semiotic and one pedagogic – and posed therefore with different purposes. One cannot have a theory of learning without a theory of meaning, however implicit that may be; a theory of learning always entails a theory of meaning » (Kress, 2010: 178).

Another facet of the concept of literacy regards technological development. The pervasiveness and ubiquity of digital technologies and devices have affected our social practices and shaped our forms of interaction (Domingo et al., 2015). Education, in particular, is a domain where information technology plays a pivotal role. For this reason, the technology-education binomial pushes educational researchers to reconceptualise the nature of literacy (Kamil et al., 2000; Leu et al., 2004; Leu, 2006). If we also include the necessity for learners to know how to categorise and critically interpret multimodal meanings – mostly consumed through digital media – the urgency about new pedagogies of literacy is evident.

It has been demonstrated that initiatives in (digital) media literacy education enhance « learning experiences where students strengthen *critical thinking skills* to reach their own understandings about how to fully participate as citizens and consumers in a media-saturated society' (Hobbs, 2004: 44, *my italics*). Learners become « more critical viewers, more cautious about advertising, and more sceptical of Internet content [...], more skilful in recognising a media message's purpose, the message genre, and point of view » (Hobbs, 2004: 48).

Of course, students can think naturally. However, Critical Thinking (CT) implies skills that should be an essential part of all curricula and disciplines (Gul et al., 2014). Techniques such as problem-based learning and Socratic questions are incredibly effective in developing CT skills in any subject, including second language learning.

This theoretical contribution aims to speculate on and expand the concept of 'literacy' in order to support a multifaceted approach to education. Multimodality, digitality, and CT will be explored and, at the same time, integrated within a holistic view of education and pedagogy with a particular focus on second language learning and teaching.

## **II. Multimodality and digitality: (multi)literacies for new pedagogies**

Multimodality has long been recognised as an academic field of research by different disciplines, including semiotics, linguistics, media studies, new literacy studies, education, sociology, psychology, and many others. The term appeared in the mid-1990s and spread out in diverse parts of the world (O'Halloran, 1999 in Australia, Goodwin, 2000 in the US, Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001 in the UK). However, the necessity to investigate meaning-making processes in different forms finds its upsurge in the early 20th century thanks to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), who defined « linguistics » as part of a broader science named « semiology ». In the second half of the past century, before the coinage of the term « multimodality », attention to other modalities (or « modes ») was paid in the works of semioticians and linguists in Canada and US, such as Sebeok, Kendon, Ekman, Wallace, Friesen, Poyatos, Schiffrin, Argyle, Bouissac<sup>2</sup>, and Danesi (2004), but also in Italy thanks to Eco (1968, 1975) and Trusso (1995, 2002). Their interest was to demonstrate how different signs (or systems of signs) can make meaning or, to say better, how human communication uses a variety of signs to make meaning, apart from the linguistic ones.

Over the last three decades, adopting a multimodal approach in different areas of study has become a shared phenomenon and a standard methodology. However, the concept remains differently articulated both across and within the diverse domains and research schools. One of these areas of study is education, where, according to Jewitt (2009), the « multimodal turn »

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<sup>2</sup> Most of their works have been collected in a volume (Kendon et al., 1981).

is necessary since drawing attention only to verbal language in literacy learning is inadequate, given the multimodal nature of human communication, and hence multimodal meaning-making needs to be included in learners' curricula (Kress et al., 2005; Jewitt, 2008; Lim et al., 2012). According to Jewitt (2008), one of the crucial pivots of a multimodal literacies approach is: « the promotion of a pluralised notion of literacy and forms of representation and communication to help students negotiate a broader range of text types and modes of persuasion » (Jewitt, 2008: 255). O'Halloran and Lim (2011: 16) suggest that a 'multimodal literate' student « must be sensitised to the meaning potential and choices afforded in the production of the text, rendering an enhanced ability to make deliberate and effective choices in the construction and presentation of knowledge ». The multimodal approach can be applied to the study of English just as to other subject areas, such as social sciences, mathematics, and science since in every discipline, diverse modes of representation (e.g., language, images, gestures, actions, sounds, and other resources) are utilised to build up knowledge and competency. As O'Halloran et al. (2010: 4) state:

« we believe that, in practice, texts of all kinds are always multimodal, making use of, and combining, the resources of diverse semiotic systems to facilitate both generic (i.e., standardised) and specific (i.e., individualised, and even innovative) ways of making meaning. »

The term 'multimodal literacy', proposed for the first time by Jewitt and Kress (2003), is rooted in the concept of 'multiliteracies,' coined by a group of international educational scholars (New London Group, 1996) who theorised a new pedagogy that goes beyond conventional understandings of literacy to integrate a « multiplicity of discourses, » or multiliteracies. A multiliteracies pedagogy aimed to offer « the increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioural, and so on. » (New London Group, 1996: 64). Acquiring multimodal literacy means understanding and having competency in the different modes thanks to which meanings are produced.

Nowadays, due to the advent of digital technologies and their pervasiveness in every social practice, digital literacy has become one of the 'multi-'. Thanks to the digital revolution, meaningful changes have affected how we make meaning. As Cope and Kalantzis claim,

« [m]eaning is the primary focus of multiliteracies work. And 'work' is the operative word for us, more so than « cognition » or « thought » separate from the embodied and affective activity of making meaning. Multiliteracies focus on the artefacts used in the work of meaning-making and the material traces of that working. Meaning arises in actions using media – pen-to-paper, voice-in-place, image-to-screen, gesture-in-situation, object-for-setting, and a myriad of other such meaning-making practices. Multiliteracies is an ontological rather than a cognitive theory of meaning. By « ontology » we mean to focus on human biosensory being and meaning-making by means of the materials available in the sense-making world (Cope, Kalantzis, 2020: 271-88), rather than mind and thinking as if they might be separable from embodied practices of meaning. » (Cope, Kalantzis, forthcoming: 11).

This means that an ontological theory of multiliteracies draws, on the one hand, on the « full range of meanings in the world in all their inter-related forms (text, image, space, object, body, sound and speech), not just language (text and speech). » (Cope, Kalantzis, forthcoming: 11). On the other, it focuses on the material manifestations of meanings in media practices and, last but not least, on the complex diversities of 'agency' referred to as meaning-makers and their single environments.

Digital technologies offer new opportunities for teachers to communicate learnable contents and for students to instantiate their knowledge and competencies. Before the diffusion of digital media, students understood meanings simply by the voice of the teacher or the pages of a handbook. With analog media (television, tape/cd recorder, radio), students could sometimes use them and learn contents edited by experts and produced by separate producers (typewriters,

photographers, radio, and television producers). Students could demonstrate their proficiency by either scribing (mainly) or speaking. The latter was always ephemeral since oral practices were not recorded. Today digital media provide teachers and learners with new functionalities, given the convergent nature of digitality. As Cope, Kalantzis (2021: 38) state:

« [s]ound and image, and by extension speech and text, can be captured, reduced to binary calculation, transmitted or stored, then re-rendered on demand. Unlike analog technologies, sound/speech and text/image are made of the same stuff. They can be created and rendered easily and cheaply on the same devices. »

Learners can now create their multimodal knowledge contents since they can access multimodal resources to design their learning. « Instead of memory of fact or correct application of memorised procedure as the primary objectives of assessable learning, today's learners need to develop capacities to navigate the immediately-at-hand universe of digital knowledge, to apply machine-reckoned answered procedures appropriately to context, to critically analyse knowledge sources for their validity, to discern differences in purpose, and to apply facts and procedures appropriately. » (Cope, Kalantzis, 2021: 41).

But the two scholars argue that most e-learning practices have not exploited enough digitality's potentialities to give rise to a pedagogical 'turn' driven by the technological revolution. The result is that the e-learning theories often 'recycle' old pedagogies by reproducing teacher-centred, content-oriented, and skills-based activities and by migrating teacher-led print-based materials into digital environments. The authors' proposal is to look at a « reflexive pedagogy » that is based on five principles of learning:

« 1) *sociable learning*, with students learning with each other in groups (compared to the highly individualised didactic learning); 2) *engaged learning*, where students are positioned as active makers of knowledge (in contrast to the positioning of learners as knowledge consumers in content-transmission pedagogies); 3) *deep learning*, with a focus on holistic, critical, creative and design thinking (rather than the memorisation of fact and procedure); 4) *recursive learning*, with a focus on regular and feedback in support of incremental learning (instead of gross, end-of-unit judgments reduced to grades); and 5) *equitable learning*, where every learner has the potential to attain the criterion of success (as opposed to norm-distributed assessment which insists that educational outcomes must be unequal, and by extension social outcomes). » (*ibid.* p. 37). Thus, the role of the teacher is to 'scaffold' a sort of 'safety net' that enlarges over time as the student « increasingly develops the *critical multimodal awareness* which is crucial when approaching digital texts and artefacts responsibly. » (Vasta, Baldry, 2020: 19, *my italics*).

Digital literacy is now an essential competence along with multimodal literacy. A multiliteracies pedagogy implies a change of attitude and role for both teachers and learners where the latter become agents of their learning, meaning-makers, and knowledge producers. Students are actively engaged in knowledge practices and are pushed to develop their 'critical thinking'. What is pivotal to remember is that « it is not the technology that makes the difference, it is the pedagogy. » (Cope, Kalantzis, 2017: 9).

### **III. Critical thinking and multimodal digital literacies**

John Dewey (1910: 74), argued that « [t]he essence of critical thinking is suspended judgment, and the essence of this suspense is an inquiry to determine the nature of the problem before proceeding to attempts at its solution. » For the author, critical thought implies judgment or consent that is hindered by the need to understand the origin of a problem, with this need being necessary for the attempt at solving the problem. Although most educators agree with the pedagogical assumption regarding the importance of CT, its definition is still not exhaustive and consequently challenging to teach students.

One of the most influential pedagogical theories of the 20th century about CT is Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom, 1956; Steel et al., 2007a). This theory is based on evaluating target skills associated with the cognition process. Bloom identified in the cognition chain six individual stages: 1) knowledge, 2) comprehension, 3) application, 4) analysis, 5) synthesis, and 6) evaluation. Bloom's taxonomy raised an intense debate and controversies, and it was updated several times, one of which reformulates each stage by recognising its cognitive, affective, and sensory nature. It groups these stages into two primary domains: 1) the lower order (knowledge of facts, notions, and procedures) and 2) upper order (comparison, evaluation, and application) CT skills, i.e., concrete vs abstract knowledge (Anderson, Krathwohl, 2001). A detailed description of CT is also provided by Klooster (2001), who describes it by attributing five key features, namely 1) CT is independent thinking 2) Information is the starting point of CT, not the endpoint 3) CT begins with questions, with problems to be solved 4) CT seeks reasoned arguments 5) CT is social thinking. CT is defined by Martinez (2006) as a qualitative assessment of ideas by inquiring whether such questions are purposeful. Critical thinkers are aware that they can do something in another way as they have high self-esteem and more responsibility, and their actions are more accurate. Furthermore, they are motivated to learn and to demonstrate their improved performance.

In 2010 Elder and Paul defined CT as « the ability and disposition to improve one's thinking by systematically subjecting it to intellectual self-assessment »<sup>3</sup>. Thus, teachers' instruction should focus on specific abilities to make students achieve particular results (see Table 1).

STUDENTS' ABILITIES	STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE
<p>1) state and explain goals and purposes,</p> <p>2) clarify the questions they need to answer and the problems they need to solve,</p> <p>3) gather and organise information and data,</p> <p>4) explicitly assess the meaning and significance of information you give them,</p> <p>5) demonstrate that they understand concepts,</p> <p>6) identify assumptions,</p> <p>7) consider implications and consequences,</p> <p>8) examine things from more than one point of view,</p> <p>9) state what they say clearly,</p> <p>10) test and check for accuracy,</p> <p>11) stick to questions, issues, or problems; and not wander in their thinking,</p> <p>12) express themselves precisely and exactly,</p> <p>13) deal with complexities in problems and issues,</p> <p>14) consider the point of view of others,</p> <p>15) express their thinking logically,</p> <p>16) distinguish significant matters from insignificant ones,</p>	<p>a. learn content at a deeper and more permanent level</p> <p>b. are better able to explain and apply what they learn,</p> <p>c. are better able to connect what they are learning in one class with what they are learning in other classes,</p> <p>d. ask more and better questions in class,</p> <p>e. understand the textbook better,</p> <p>f. follow directions better,</p> <p>g. understand more of what you present in class,</p> <p>h. write better,</p> <p>i. apply more of what they are learning to their everyday life,</p> <p>k. become more motivated learners in general,</p> <p>j. become progressively easier to teach.</p>

**Table 1.** Taxonomy of students' competencies when adopting a CT-based instruction (Elder and Paul, 2010, my adaptation).

<sup>3</sup> Elder, Paul (2010) available online at <https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/critical-thinking-development-a-stage-theory/483>

Coşkun (2011) states that CT is an intellectual process, which allows us to make interpretations, since most questions we try to answer start with 'why,' 'what for' and 'how. One of the most broadly accepted definitions of CT comes from the American Philosophical Association's Delphi Committee in 1990, where CT is considered as a non-linear, recursive cognitive process thanks to which « a person forms a judgment about what to believe or what to do in a given context. » (Facione et al., 1995: 3). In this process, six-core skills are identified, namely: analysis, interpretation, inference, explanation, evaluation, and self-regulation. O'Halloran (2015: 10 ff.) in her attempt at developing a new pedagogical approach for teaching and learning CT through multimodal analysis (i.e., MACT, Multimodal Analysis for Critical Thinking), remodels these six skills by including sixteen subskills:

1. *Interpretation*: to comprehend and express the meaning or significance of various experiences, situations, data, events, judgments, conventions, beliefs, rules, procedures, or criteria.

**SUBSKILLS:** categorise, decode significance, and clarify meaning.

2. *Analysis*: to identify the intended and actual inferential relationships among statements, questions, concepts, descriptions, or other forms of representation intended to express belief, judgment, experiences, reasons, information, or opinions.

**SUBSKILLS:** examine ideas, identify arguments, and identify reasons and claims.

3. *Inference*: to identify and secure elements needed to draw reasonable conclusions; to form conjectures and hypotheses; to consider relevant information and to deduce the consequences flowing from data statements, principles, evidence, judgments, beliefs, opinions, concepts, descriptions, questions, or other forms of representation.

**SUBSKILLS:** query evidence, conjecture alternatives, draw conclusions using inductive or deductive reasoning.

4. *Evaluation*: to assess the credibility of statements or other representations which are accounts or descriptions of a person's perception, experience, situation, judgment, belief, or opinion; and to assess the logical strength of the actual or intended inferential relationships among statements, descriptions, questions or other forms of representation.

**SUBSKILLS:** assess creditability of claims, assess quality of arguments that were made using inductive or deductive reasoning.

5. *Explanation*: to state and justify that reasoning in terms of evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, and contextual considerations upon which one's results were based; and to present one's reasoning in the form of cogent arguments.

**SUBSKILLS:** state results, justify procedures, present arguments.

6. *Self-regulation* to self-consciously monitor one's cognitive activities, the elements used in those activities, and the results educed, in particular by applying skills in analysis and evaluation to one's own inferential judgments with a view toward questioning, confirming, validating, or correcting either one's reasoning or one's results.

**SUBSKILLS:** self-monitor, self-correct.

The efficacy and effectiveness of this pedagogical approach are determined not only by the fact that the six CT core skills plus their sub-skills are clearly defined but also by the implementation of purpose-built software applications, which include exhaustive analytical frameworks created to facilitate the systematic teaching and learning of multimodal analysis. Furthermore, the approach aims at developing learner's analytical and critical thinking skills necessary for life in the digital age and empower students « to become informed, confident, responsible, and active contributors to the consumption, creation, and dissemination of knowledge and information in present-day society. » (*ibid.* p. 4). Digital literacy should include CT since it is « ... the ability to understand and use information in multiple for-

mats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers. » (Gilster, 1997: 1). This implies that users (learners) can access, search for, and evaluate information by surfing the web hypertextually. Navigating is a cognitive process since users make choices when searching for information, i.e., they have to choose where to go and what to click. They do not simply read and write but process data by analysing and interpreting them. Information cannot be assessed by its factual accuracy only (Buckingham, 2006: 266). Digitalisation and platformization<sup>4</sup> are two widespread phenomena that have crucially affected our social practices, actions, and cognition. For this reason, educators have to train students to develop a critical understanding of the digital media they use daily and of their role. A digital literate is « skilful in analysing media codes and conventions, able to criticise stereotypes, values, and ideologies, and competent to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts. » (Kellner, 2006: 249-250).

#### **IV. The effects of critical thinking on second language teaching and learning**

So far, we have seen that if multimodal digital literacy is a crucial skill to acquire today, CT skills represent the other side of the same coin. They corroborate both the development of digital understandings and the acquisition of a critical view of the ‘hidden’ mechanisms that reside behind digital technologies. Due to the overabundance of information and its easy-to-get accessibility, the crucial matter now is how to manage, process, and apply it in daily practices. These procedures imply new challenges for studying and working in various sectors across disciplines. The job market requires new professions and, at the same time, prospective employees need new types of skills. Consequently, a meaningful change is necessary for educational training at all levels.

Curricula, contents, approaches, and methodologies should be revised and updated in light of the digital and multimodal turns. The relationship between students and teachers should be rethought to make students ‘critical thinkers’. Learners need key competencies to succeed in studies and job careers. The combination of CT and second language skills within a curriculum at all grades increases study potential since, in both domains, students have to learn how to express attitudes, formulate opinions, both in spoken and written form, offer solutions to newly arising situations, and have a good command of argumentation, negotiation, presentation, and problem-solving skills (Sieglová, 2017). According to Favell (1979), CT should be included in the definition of metacognition to the extent to which metacognitive strategies for language learning allow students to reflect on learning. Camillo (2011) claims that metacognitive learners are aware of how they systematise and evaluate their learning through self-management. Metacognitive strategies such as planning, discerning, monitoring, and judgment enable learners to increase their learning potential. For this reason, self-management skills are part of metacognitive awareness (Doğanay, Demir, 2009). Furthermore, self-regulation and planning processes are present in metacognitive control (Flavell, 1979). Centralising learning enables learners to draw their attention to certain language activities and skills. Organising, planning, and directing learning processes autonomously help students obtain benefits from their efforts. Metacognitive strategies, CT, and self-regulative skills are all interdependent.

In 2000, in teaching practices, Meredith and Steel introduced a framework named « Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking » (RWCT) that is still valid in modern educational systems. At the basis of this method, there is the transformation of teacher and student roles.

<sup>4</sup> Platformization refers to a recent process that has a great impact on our societies. « ‘Platform society’ [is] a term which emphasises the inextricable relation between online platforms and societal structures. Platforms do not reflect the social: they produce the social structure we live in. » (van Dijck et al., 2018: 2).

Both can access information, which implies that students no longer need someone who transmits knowledge but someone who 'mediates' between knowledge learning and themselves. Teacher as a 'mediator of learning' is a long-debated issue (Dewey, 1938; Rumelhart, Norman, 1978; Williams, Burden, 1997; Feuerstein et al., 2010; Walters, 2021). The concept differs from that of the teacher as 'facilitator' since the mediating role aims at helping learners explore their world by « skilfully providing guidance, support and 'real-time' feedback to all children at the point of need. » (Walters, 2021: 9). Feuerstein et al. (2010: 48) claim that:

« [m]ediated learning experience – as an interaction with a unique quality – is what creates human beings' flexibility, sensitivity, readiness, and desire to understand what is going on, and capacity to generalise it over and above the isolated phenomenon that is being experienced. The mediation of transcendence is responsible for the constant expansion of the human need system beyond the primary, biological needs and the emergence of special, spiritual, moral and aesthetic needs. »

The RWCT model is still valid and can be integrated within a multimodal digital framework in English language learning and teaching settings (O'Halloran, 2015; Vasta and Baldry, 2020; Sindoni, Moschini, 2021). It is a three-phase learning model (Steel, 2001; Steel et al., 2007b; Steel et al., 2007c), namely: 1) evocation, 2) realisation and 3) reflection. The first phase identifies techniques necessary to activate existing knowledge, attitudes, or impressions. In the second phase, students start producing meaning about a selected topic and use different resources. The third phase leads them to apply the acquired meaning to context and its implementation into practice thanks to problem-solving techniques. Thus, students are actively engaged in the process since they are responsible for their choices regarding the resources used (writing, audio-visual etc.) and their content analysis. Furthermore, they participate in cooperative teaching activities (Steel et al., 2007c) realised through various class set-ups (in pairs, small or mid-size groups, or space-using techniques) to encourage interaction among all students during instruction.

For ESL students, for example, the evocation phase allows them to use their language production skills (including the phonetic, lexical, grammatical, or syntactic structures of general, professional, or academic English in use) when they are engaged in discussion, opinion exchange, clarification of meaning, and written or short oral presentations and nonverbal resources. Digital devices provide a substantial contribution to this phase. Instead, the realisation phase involves receptive skills since students have to analyse and interpret the new content and meanings to implement and enlarge their previous knowledge. To do this, they need to use authentic (digital) texts, audio/video materials, visuals and other realia where they can find new contextual up-to-date key terms, collocations, and language forms. If cooperative learning and teaching techniques are utilised, students will also be engaged in productive skills as they will discuss, negotiate meanings and share their opinions about the new content. Students refine their acquired skills by using them in context in the last phase. Thanks to activities such as summarising, synthesising, suggesting solutions to problems, commenting on their choices, and presenting results, students will be able to retain what they have just learnt. They can carry out these activities through digital media and software: via face-to-face presentations, distance presentations (using platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft teams, Google meet etc.), or traditional written texts (essays, reports, project reports etc.).

Another factor that affects language learners' CT skills is the assessment method. According to Shirkhani and Fahim, five practices can be carried out to develop CT among language learners via assessment methods:

1. *Use ongoing assessment rather than one-shot exams at the end of the semester.* An ongoing assessment gives the teacher the opportunity to test a larger range of knowledge and skills, including critical thinking skills.
2. *Use criterion-referenced (CR) testing rather than norm-referenced (NR) testing.* CR testing welcomes the differences among learners, and consequently, differences among learners lead them to learn from each other in a friendly non-competitive atmosphere. While the learners

become more cooperative than competitors do, they become more concerned with understanding than outcomes. As such, they help each other in developing critical thinking skills.

*3. Include activities in your assessment that encourage the learner to think about the major objectives of the course, including developing critical thinking skills.* Good activities for promoting critical thinking skills require learners to think, cooperate, ask questions from themselves and others etc.

*4. Provide learners with feedback that gives learners an understanding that thinking is an integral part of their learning experience.* This integration of performance and feedback is precisely what students need as they work to develop their understanding of a particular topic or concept. Feedback also needs to provide students with information about how well they have carried out the activities and how they might improve them. Another requirement of feedback is that it must come from various perspectives: from students' reflection on their work, from classmates reflecting on one another's work, and from the teacher.

*5. Co-develop criteria for assessment.*

Even if you have a sense of what the requirements for a particular performance should be, try inviting learners to develop the requirements themselves by looking at models of similar performances. Help students see how the requirements relate to the goals of the activities (Shirkhani, Fahim, 2011: 113-114).

Self- and peer-assessment are also pivotal for implementing CT skills. Students inevitably become responsible for their or others' performances and need to reflect on their knowledge and competencies.

## VI. Concluding remarks

The technological turn has led to a change in many teaching and learning practices, and e-learning platforms with their e-activities are the most evident example. However, these 'new' educational tools do not always reflect a change in the concept of literacy. The affordances of an e-textbook used in the classroom are similar to those of the printed version in terms of the possibility for students to develop their receptive skills. A learning management system represents the online version of a pre-packaged syllabus where learners do not take responsibility for their learning process. Likely, video lectures or video discussions do not differ from those delivered *in presentia*. Online assessment procedures like summative tests do not have a different cognitive and affective impact on learners compared to face-to-face tasks.

On the contrary, what makes a meaningful difference in digital education is how our primary tools of meaning production (writing) and meaning interpretation (reading) have been augmented. To the traditional pivots of literacy -reading, writing, and arithmetic- we need to add new skills such as interpreting and designing multi-resourced artefacts, navigating, coding, and, finally yet importantly, thinking critically. This transformation also includes a change in the way learners conceptualise meanings. It is no longer a matter of cognitive and mental capacities necessary for constructing our knowledge and understanding. Other new abilities are making and interpreting meanings through media materiality perceived by our body and senses on the one hand and through our affective response during the learning processes on the other. Cope and Kalantzis (forthcoming) define all these skills as « epistemic capital. »

Consequently, the assessment of learning performances has to change, and this is a great challenge for educators. « [T]his broader conception of the outcomes of learning requires a change of focus from a tendentious inference about what is in learners' heads to the practical materiality of the artefacts of meaning they have made (Cope and Kalantzis, 2016, Cope and Kalantzis, 2019). Not only will these artefacts offer evidence of personal 'knowledge'. They will demonstrate a capacity to act meaningfully, to share meanings with others and to interpret others' differences » (Cope, Kalantzis, forthcoming: 25). If students are critical thinkers, teachers have to allow them to develop the ability of self- and peer-assessment.

Much work needs still to be done and many challenges have to be faced, but the necessity of a « pedagogical revolution » is imperative. With this view, many projects worldwide have been implemented<sup>5</sup>, and they push us to envisage new optimistic scenarios in the educational domain.

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<sup>5</sup> The author of this contribution participated in the EUMADE4LL project (European Multimodal and Digital Education for Language Learning), a 3-year project (2016-19), funded by the European commission, Erasmus+ project key Action 2, and carried out by seven European partners ([www.eumade4ll.eu](http://www.eumade4ll.eu)). It was designed and implemented to develop multimodal digital literacies in educational and professional contexts using English as the language of international communication. CFRIDiL (Common Framework of Reference for Intercultural Digital Literacies) is one of the three intellectual outputs and aims at integrating, and expanding, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp 2.0) and the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters: Context, concepts and theories (AIE) (Sindoni et al., 2019, 2021). For other international projects see Vasta , Baldry (2020); Lim (2020), (2021a), (2021b); Sindoni et al. (2021). Another exciting initiative is the suite of application CGScholar (Common Ground Scholar) (<https://www.cgscholar.com/>) developed by the Common Ground Media Lab, the research and technology branch of Common Ground Research Networks. As users can read on its 'about us' section, "CGScholar is a platform that seeks to become a trusted marketplace for knowledge work, one that rigorously democratises the process of knowledge-making, rewards participants, and offers a secure basis for the sustainable creation and distribution of digital knowledge artefacts".

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# La enseñanza del italiano como lengua extranjera en contexto de pandemia. Experiencias en la Universidad Nacional de Rosario (Argentina)<sup>1</sup>

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**TITLE:** *Teaching FL Italian language during the pandemic: some experiences in the National University of Rosario (Argentina).*

**ABSTRACT:** *This main objective of this paper is to describe the experience of Italian language teaching in the National University of Rosario (Argentina) during the pandemic with a particular focus on the year 2020. After a brief presentation of this academic institution, some basic features of foreign language teaching in the Faculty of Languages and Humanities are outlined, followed by the analysis of the unpredictable problematics arisen by the pandemic and the strategies by which these were faced. Among the educational novelties, a new approach to the study of textual genres is proposed. Finally, the paper analyzes strengths, weaknesses and challenges to face in order to elaborate new strategies in foreign language teaching.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Foreign language Teaching, University students, Argentina, Italian language, pandemic.*

## I. Introducción

Mi interés por el estudio de las habilidades metalingüísticas y la enseñanza/aprendizaje del italiano como lengua extranjera (LE) surge hacia fines de los años noventa cuando participé de diversos seminarios impartidos por la Prof. Maria Antonietta Pinto en la Sociedad Dante Alighieri de Rosario. Posteriormente, comenzó un proceso formativo de importante impacto que permitió una activa colaboración en estudios, investigaciones y publicaciones conjuntas en ambos países, Italia y Argentina.

En los últimos años, la relación entre conciencia metalingüística y aprendizaje de las lenguas extranjeras ha despertado el interés de docentes, lingüistas e investigadores sobre todo para tratar de establecer una teoría de la adquisición de la LE.

Para definir la conciencia metalingüística haremos referencia a lingüistas y psicólogos del desarrollo que más allá de sus diferencias, la literatura internacional menciona tradicionalmente (Jakobson, 1963; Benveniste, 1974; Pinto, Titone, 1989; Tunmer et al., 1984; Bialystok, 1986; Pinto, 1999; Grazzani Gavazzi, Calvino, 2000). A modo de ejemplo, Tunmer et al. (1984 : 12) definen la conciencia metalingüística como « la habilidad de reflexionar sobre la lengua y de manipular las características estructurales del lenguaje hablado, tratando al lenguaje mismo como objeto de pensamiento, en oposición al simple uso del sistema lingüístico para comprender y producir frases ». Bialystok (1986) va más allá, y define la capacidad de

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reflexionar sobre la lengua distinguiendo dos componentes de procesamiento del lenguaje: el análisis del conocimiento lingüístico, como proceso que permite reorganizar las representaciones mentales, y el control de la atención, que permite enfocar los diferentes aspectos para resolver un problema lingüístico. Así, según la autora, mientras mayor sea el conocimiento lingüístico del estudiante y su control de la atención, mayor será el éxito en alcanzar su meta. Pero la conciencia metalingüística no puede explicar por sí sola, el éxito o el fracaso en la adquisición de una LE, sino que se apoya en la enseñanza formal/académica.

En estudios anteriores hemos analizado y descripto sobre las múltiples formas que la competencia metalingüística puede asumir, específicamente y dentro del cuadro de los estudios evolutivos, la comprensión de metáforas y la habilidad de paráfrasis, ejes de los aportes realizados por la Prof. Pinto durante su vasta e inagotable incidencia.

Una corriente considera la paráfrasis como una habilidad de estudio, con particular focus en la comprensión del texto escrito, y es entendida como la puerta de ingreso al estudio auto-regulado y eficaz (Balboni, Luise, 1994; Marinetto, 1998; Pazzaglia et al., 2002). Asumiendo la definición de « estudio » de Boscolo (1986) como « forma de lectura dirigida a obtener informaciones específicas, útiles para la ejecución de cualquier prueba », damos cuenta de la naturaleza metalingüística de la paráfrasis y valoramos su importancia para apropiarse del significado de textos, tanto en comprensión como en producción.

Entre las estrategias de estudio entendidas como las más representativas del comportamiento metacognitivo (De Beni, Pazzaglia, 1991; Cornoldi, De Beni, 1993; Pazzaglia et al., 2002) encontramos una gama de habilidades de paráfrasis aun cuando el sujeto no sea siempre consciente. Entre las estrategias mencionamos la toma de apuntes, las evidenciaciones, las esquematizaciones, los resúmenes, las traducciones (de oral a escrito, de registro estándar a coloquial etc.)

Cada una de estas estrategias permite un trabajo continuo sobre la lengua del texto de partida y junto al bagaje de conocimientos previos o ya adquiridos permite un modo más efectivo de afrontar el estudio de la lengua meta.

A partir de estas consideraciones, resulta interesante describir la experiencia de la enseñanza del italiano como lengua extranjera para estudiantes de grado de la UNR.

## **II. Las lenguas extranjeras en el Departamento de Idiomas Modernos de la Facultad de Lenguas de Rosario (Argentina)**

De acuerdo al Plan de Estudios vigente, las materias Italiano I y II se dictan en el Departamento de Idiomas Modernos (DIM) que funciona en la Escuela de Lenguas de la Facultad de Humanidades y Artes de la Universidad Nacional de Rosario (Argentina) desde su creación, en la década del 70.

Además de italiano, el DIM ofrece alemán, catalán, croata, francés, guaraní, inglés, portugués, ruso y vasco (euskeria). La inscripción al cursado de estos idiomas es gratuita y está restringida a estudiantes de carreras de la UNR. Algunos idiomas se ofrecen también para estudiantes externos a la Universidad (guaraní, croata, vasco y catalán). El DIM también cuenta con el curso de inglés académico y con comisiones orientadas a carreras específicas (italiano para Arquitectura, inglés para Gestión Cultural, francés e italiano para las Carreras de Música). A partir del 2019, se incorporaron qom, quechua y chino y en 2020, mientras se trabajaba en la virtualización de la enseñanza, se incorporaron árabe y hebreo.

En el presente artículo nos proponemos describir las experiencias desarrolladas en las clases de italiano, en particular en contexto de pandemia Covid-19 y el regreso a una nueva normalidad en contexto de pospandemia. Para esto, nos situamos en la línea del Interaccionismo Sociodiscursivo (Bronckart, 2003, entre otros).

Cabe destacar que quienes cursan estas materias son estudiantes de las distintas carreras de las 12 facultades pertenecientes a la Universidad Nacional de Rosario (Argentina).

## Un nuevo inicio

El 20 de marzo de 2020, cuando en Argentina comenzó la etapa denominada « Aislamiento social preventivo y obligatorio » (ASPO), el Rector de la Universidad Nacional de Rosario junto a Decanos/as y Directores/as de las distintas Escuelas que la conforman, decidieron suspender transitoriamente todas las actividades académicas y realizar un acompañamiento pedagógico a los estudiantes, disponiendo, para tal fin, la apertura de aulas virtuales.

La entrada a la virtualidad fue abrupta, no hubo momentos de planificación ni de preparación; gran parte de los docentes aceptaron rápidamente las nuevas condiciones y buscaron nuevas modalidades de trabajo. En el DIM comenzó a discutirse cómo enseñar idiomas en estas nuevas condiciones a pesar de que hacía algunos años que se daba la discusión sobre la necesidad de modificar la práctica de la enseñanza centrada exclusivamente en la lecto-comprensión.

Algunos de los idiomas ya habían incorporado el abordaje de prácticas de comprensión oral y de producción oral y escrita. Esto había sido posible, entre otras razones, por el hecho de contar con comisiones que en la presencialidad no eran muy numerosas (salvo algunas excepciones de comisiones de inglés o italiano con cerca de 100 alumnos). Con la virtualización de la oferta de idiomas gratuitos para todos los estudiantes de la UNR, la inscripción alcanzó dimensiones nunca vistas y surgieron comisiones de 300 estudiantes.

Con respecto a las modificaciones en las prácticas de enseñanza en el DIM, cabe señalar la necesidad de replantearse distintas formas de interacción con los estudiantes y los contenidos a desarrollar y, en este sentido, se observó un regreso a la preponderancia de la lecto-comprensión en algunos de los idiomas. La organización de las actividades exigió que los docentes elaboraran nuevos materiales didácticos, y, además de las adaptaciones necesarias para la enseñanza de los idiomas, surgió el debate en el momento de resolver las situaciones de evaluación.

## La propuesta de la enseñanza del italiano

Para el desarrollo del segundo nivel de la materia, es decir para los estudiantes que iniciaban el cursado de segundo año de italiano y que ya contaban con conocimientos y herramientas básicas de la lengua para poder comunicarse y reflexionar en lengua italiana, definimos como principal objetivo formar a los estudiantes en la expresión oral y escrita científico/académica para que adquieran las competencias en la producción de géneros textuales orales y escritos característicos de este ámbito. Otro de los objetivos fue el de enfrentar al estudiante con la situación de participación (real o simulada/ficticia) de un evento académico ya que esta participación implica conocer los géneros y ámbito de circulación y divulgación.

Para poder llevar a cabo estos objetivos y desarrollar las diferentes competencias lingüísticas, nos situamos en la línea y los aportes teóricos del interaccionismo sociodiscursivo, específicamente en el campo de la didáctica de lenguas (Bronckart, 2003; Schneuwly, Dolz, 2004). De esta manera, el desarrollo de la materia se centra específicamente en los géneros textuales escritos y orales como instrumentos de desarrollo de las capacidades de producción escrita y oral en el contexto específico de la enseñanza del italiano como lengua extranjera.

## La noción de género y las capacidades metalingüísticas

Los géneros textuales como instrumentos de comunicación constituyen el principal objeto de enseñanza en el camino hacia el desarrollo de las capacidades lingüísticas y metalingüísticas de los estudiantes.

Es de suma importancia introducir en las clases de lengua extranjera la noción de género textual como categoría organizativa de los contenidos ya que contribuye a aportar claridad y concreción en la organización de tales contenidos. Además, es necesario concretar los saberes

y habilidades lingüísticas que el manejo de los géneros orales implica, diferenciando distintos niveles de dominio en el contexto referido.

De acuerdo con De Pietro y Schneuwly (2003), y sobre la base del modelo de producción del lenguaje desarrollado por el interaccionismo sociodiscursivo (Bronckart et al., 2003, entre otros), el « modelo didáctico » se compone de una estructura con 5 componentes: 1) Definición general de género; 2) Parámetros de contexto comunicativo; 3) Contenidos específicos; 4) Estructura textual global; 5) Operaciones de lenguaje y marcas lingüísticas.

Sabemos que la lectura es un proceso mental en el que intervienen fuentes de conocimiento fonológico, morfológico, sintáctico, semántico y pragmático. El modelo de van Dijk (1979), basado en estrategias (proposicionales, de coherencia y macroestructurales) brinda elementos para comprender cuáles son los procesos que intervienen en la construcción del conocimiento, y presenta las diferentes combinaciones resultantes que guían el proceso de la comprensión lectora. La creatividad y el pensamiento lógico (intervinientes en los procesos de aprendizaje de la lengua materna), juegan un rol fundamental también en la adquisición de la lengua extranjera. Cuando el estudiante es expuesto al input en lengua extranjera descubre relaciones, establece similitudes y traza diferencias entre ambas lenguas (la materna y la meta), al tiempo que reconoce otros elementos lingüísticos para referirse a la realidad.

Tal como refiere Bajtin (2003), la lengua es entendida como un discurso encuadrado en un contexto socio-histórico, es un fenómeno social, cultural, histórico y cognitivo que varía a lo largo del tiempo de acuerdo a los hablantes. Desde este punto de vista, entendemos que la comunicación se realiza por medio de algún género textual y cada género tiene una forma de ser producido e interpretado. El género es un indicador importante de sentido, ya que no se interpreta o lee un texto de la misma manera que otro. Cuando una persona se posiciona como enunciador y produce un texto va a considerar diversos parámetros que intervienen en la producción de ese texto. Es así que, de acuerdo con la interacción que va a establecer, va a adoptar un género – elegido dentro de la nebulosa de géneros textuales o architexto- y lo adapta al objetivo que persigue el texto, a las condiciones espacio-temporales, al destinatario, al soporte etc. Es por eso que en las clases de italiano se adoptan géneros de textos relacionados al ámbito académico y se los desarrolla a través de actividades didácticas que se adaptan a las diferentes estructuras que presentan los géneros.

Schneuwly y Dolz (2004), creen que la elección de un género constituye el instrumento de mediación de toda estrategia de enseñanza, y que debe responder a una situación definida por un cierto número de parámetros, tales como finalidad, destinatario, contenido y lugar social. Por eso, los estudiantes deben dominar el género no sólo a nivel de comprensión sino también de producción.

En el ámbito académico universitario, el estudiante aprende una lengua extranjera con un fin específico: ampliar el conocimiento disciplinar y científico. En primer lugar, la comprensión de una lengua extranjera dota al estudiante de la posibilidad de personalizar su recorrido formativo, y esto le permite diferenciarse del resto de sus colegas. En segundo lugar, la competencia de la lecto-comprensión requiere por parte del estudiante el desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas, pragmáticas y textuales en el marco de una enseñanza sistemática.

En relación a la producción oral en contexto académico, observamos que se presentan dificultades, y por eso consideramos que es necesario elaborar herramientas didácticas adecuadas a este contexto específico.

Uno de los desafíos de la cátedra durante el año 2020 era saber si los estudiantes podían comprender, escribir y producir textos científicos-académicos. El interrogante surgió porque los estudiantes casi siempre asumen el rol de destinatarios, y no se encuentran en el de productores. Además, se le sumaban las dificultades propias del desarrollo de clases en aulas virtuales y encuentros sincrónicos. Por eso, la cátedra propuso didactizar algunos de los géneros de textos científico-académicos tales como: circular de eventos científicos, resumen de ponencia, artículo científico, pósters, debates, reseñas, entre otros.

## Los objetivos planteados por la cátedra

El objetivo principal del curso de italiano en el Dim es que el estudiante desarrolle capacidades que ultrapasen el género, en otras palabras, que funcione en otro lugar social diferente al que fue originado, en este caso, la clase en la facultad. Por este motivo, es de suma importancia que el estudiante se coloque en situaciones de comunicación que tengan sentido para él. Es en ese « hacer de cuenta » de la práctica que caracteriza las clases de lengua extranjera, donde el género aparece como instrumento de comunicación y como objeto de estudio al mismo tiempo (Schneuwly, Dolz, 2004). En este sentido, los objetivos que se plantearon para la materia se enfocaron en:

- Desarrollar autonomía para elaborar estrategias de lectura en italiano;
- Leer comprensivamente en italiano textos relacionados con las carreras afines;
- Interpretar el discurso escrito para lograr la competencia pragmática que le permita abordar textos auténticos de su carrera;
- Contextualizar un texto en su contenido socio cultural;
- Desarrollar una actitud crítica del texto, acorde a su competencia disciplinar;
- Adquirir familiaridad con el discurso oral en el ámbito académico.

Como objetivos específicos, la cátedra se propuso que el estudiante fuera capaz de:

- Reconocer el valor pragmático de las distintas formas gramaticales, las funciones dominantes en un texto y las modalidades lingüísticas en determinadas situaciones
- Descubrir redes semánticas en un texto
- Reconstruir un texto respondiendo a consignas señaladas para tal fin
- Seguir el hilo del discurso durante los espacios de la clase en los que el docente se expresa íntegramente en lengua italiana.

## La didáctica del italiano en el ámbito de la UNR

La elección de los géneros obedece a la necesidad de que el alumno incorpore el vocabulario, las estructuras gramaticales y las prácticas discursivas (en la lengua extranjera) tomando como punto de partida el evento científico.

Es importante destacar que los estudiantes que aprenden idiomas en el DIM, deben tener aprobadas todas las materias del primer año de su carrera, en su Unidad Académica de origen<sup>2</sup>, y, en particular, los estudiantes del segundo nivel de italiano que ya han adquirido un nivel medio de conocimiento. Así, conocen los géneros de texto primarios y comienzan a interiorizarse en el análisis de los géneros secundarios. En general, la mayor parte de los estudiantes producen géneros textuales escritos como referencias biográficas, ponencias, posters etc., que posteriormente servirán para la práctica de la exposición oral en contextos académicos.

La metodología adoptada para el desarrollo de las clases es ir aumentando el grado de dificultad, es decir, comenzar con el análisis, la reflexión y la producción de los géneros más simples como la redacción de referencias biográficas, biografía, autobiografía o el CV, pasando por la carta de presentación, y llegando al resumen de comunicación como producción final.

En un primer momento se realiza un relevamiento de las características de los géneros académicos ya conocidos por los estudiantes, haciendo reflexiones sobre qué elementos, qué mecanismos y qué estructuras se consideran en la organización textual propia de esos géneros. Posteriormente, tomando como eje el evento científico como una actividad de lenguaje, indagamos sobre cuáles géneros entrarían en contacto con los estudiantes en el caso de ser participantes de un evento de dichas características.

<sup>2</sup> Facultad de procedencia donde el estudiante registra su inscripción a la carrera.

Así, teniendo en cuenta que una de las primeras actividades en un congreso es presentarse, hacemos la producción escrita con su posterior presentación oral de las referencias biográficas. Para tal fin, los alumnos analizan diferentes textos en ambos idiomas (español/italiano), con el objetivo de identificar las características lingüísticas de las mismas, como, por ejemplo, el empleo de los tiempos verbales, los mecanismos de cohesión y coherencia etc.

En relación a los géneros orales en eventos académicos, observamos y diferenciamos los tipos de presentaciones, como paneles, mesas redondas, mesas coordinadas, ponencias, conferencias y trabajamos las diferencias y similitudes que existen en cada una de estas presentaciones.

De acuerdo con Dolz y Schneuwly (2004: 160), en la producción de un género oral no debemos dejar de considerar los elementos no lingüísticos que, durante « la interacción comunicativa, confirman o invalidan la codificación lingüística y/o prosódica, y, a veces, la sustituyen ». En este sentido, entre los medios no-lingüísticos destacamos:

- a) medios paralingüísticos
  - calidad de la voz
  - melodía
  - ritmo
  - risa
  - respiración
- b) medios kinésicos:
  - postura física
  - movimientos de brazos o piernas
  - gestos
- c) posición de los locutores:
  - ocupación del espacio personal
  - distancias
  - contacto físico
- d) aspecto exterior:
  - vestimenta

Por último, se trabajan los inconvenientes más frecuentes a la hora de exponer, por ejemplo, cómo hacer para resolver problemas que escapan de su responsabilidad como expositor. Nos referimos al mal funcionamiento o falta del proyector, de computadoras, o cómo lidiar con los micrófonos y no entrar en pánico etc.

### **III. Consideraciones finales**

A lo largo de este artículo, mostré la experiencia llevada a cabo en la cátedra de italiano del DIM a partir de la imperiosa necesidad de realizar cambios metodológicos durante el primer año de pandemia, es decir durante el 2020, y que posteriormente se extendió hasta el regreso a la presencialidad en nuestra facultad, en marzo de 2023.

Como es evidente, el cambio de modalidad generó una enorme reorganización de estrategias y medios de enseñanza, a la vez que puso en discusión una nueva forma de interacción con los estudiantes. El espacio de encuentros sincrónicos en aulas virtuales trataba de recrear el espacio del aula física de la facultad, a pesar de los múltiples inconvenientes que fuimos descubriendo (poca conectividad, problemas técnicos de audio y video etc).

En la enseñanza/aprendizaje de idiomas, y en particular en el desarrollo de las clases de italiano del DIM, esta escasa interacción durante los encuentros virtuales sincrónicos, trajo como consecuencia negativa un menor desarrollo de las capacidades lingüístico-discursivas de los estudiantes.

A raíz del seguimiento continuo a los estudiantes, identificamos algunos problemas relacionados con la comprensión y la producción escrita. Entendemos que estas dificultades son transversales a los distintos géneros textuales y pueden ser causados por la falta de práctica o por el desconocimiento del género. Sin embargo, al finalizar el año académico se pudo observar un proceso de avance en aquellos estudiantes que lograron hacer una adaptación de los géneros textuales a las diferentes situaciones de comunicación en el ámbito académico. Esto significa que lograron poner en marcha capacidades metalingüísticas, como la habilidad de reflexionar sobre la lengua a partir de la reorganización de las representaciones mentales y del control de la atención, apoyados en la enseñanza sistemática.

Es importante señalar que, como ya lo mencionamos anteriormente, a partir de marzo 2022 se volvió al dictado presencial de las clases de italiano en el DIM. En esta nueva etapa de transición, será necesario redefinir criterios que articulen la virtualidad y la presencialidad. Esto permitirá configurar nuevas modalidades de enseñanza que pongan en juego las capacidades metalingüísticas de los estudiantes para alcanzar sus metas y los objetivos planteados desde la cátedra. Entendemos que es una oportunidad de desarrollo y reflexión imprescindible, que puede mejorar notablemente la enseñanza del italiano, en particular, y de las lenguas extranjeras en general, en el ámbito de nuestra Universidad.

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# Une première proposition de protocole expérimental pour l'évaluation des connaissances implicites et explicites sur la sémantique de *quelques* et *plusieurs*<sup>1</sup>

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**TITLE:** *A first proposal of experimental protocol to evaluate implicit and explicit knowledge about the semantics of the French 'quelques' and 'plusieurs' (Eng: 'some' and 'many').*

**ABSTRACT:** *Based on classical grammars, lexicographic resources and quantitative linguistics studies, the identity of the French adjectives 'quelques' and 'plusieurs' (eng. 'some' and 'many') remains problematic. In the present study, we propose a novel experimental protocol to investigate implicit and explicit speakers' knowledge about the semantics of these adjectives: what are the distinctive criteria underlying the choice between the two forms in the native speakers' subjective and explicit perception? This methodology will then lead us to reflect on the possibility and usefulness of combining the qualitative method of eliciting metalinguistic intuitions and the empirical method of collecting a quantifiable corpus.*

**KEYWORDS:** 'Quelques' and 'plusieurs' (eng. 'some' and 'many'); epilinguistic competence; metalinguistic consciousness; quali-quantitative methods.

## I. Notes de synthèse sur la sémantique de *quelques* et *plusieurs*<sup>2</sup>

En comparant les hypothèses avancées par un certain nombre de grammaires classiques et de ressources lexicographiques avec des études empiriques plus récentes, il ne fait aucun doute que *quelques* et *plusieurs* se prêtent encore à des interprétations variées et contradictoires. L'une des définitions classiques les plus discutées est défendue, entre autres, par le dictionnaire *Le Robert*, selon lequel les deux déterminants reviennent à désigner la même notion, à savoir un petit groupe sans identité précise faisant partie d'un ensemble d'éléments plus large. Cette lecture suppose donc que *quelques* et *plusieurs* peuvent commuter sans problème, l'emploi de l'un ou de l'autre s'avérant totalement naturel à l'oreille de l'interlocuteur natif.

De forts doutes subsistent depuis longtemps quant à la synonymie de *quelques* et *plusieurs* (Gondret, 1976 ; Leeman, 2004 ; Gréa, 2008, 2012 ; Wilmet, 2010) car elle n'est pas en mesure d'expliquer les phrases dans (a), où la commutation n'est pas admise, ni celles dans (b), où le choix de l'un ou de l'autre peut signaler un usage peu authentique :

- (a) Il n'y a que *quelques* personnes / \**plusieurs* ; Il y a seulement *quelques* personnes / \**plusieurs* ;  
J'ai *quelques* oreilles / \**plusieurs* ;  
J'ai *plusieurs* enfants / \**quelques* ;
- (b) Il a *plusieurs* euros / *plusieurs* sous ; il m'a dit *plusieurs* mots.

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<sup>2</sup> Dans cette étude, nous reprenons et retravaillons un protocole expérimental esquissé dans un mémoire non publié (Matano, Sapienza Università di Roma, 2016).

Cette note introductory se donne pour objet de présenter les principales hypothèses qui s'opposent à la lecture synonymique de *quelques* et *plusieurs* en tentant d'établir un élément de discrimination. Pour une meilleure lisibilité, ces hypothèses seront classées en fonction de trois critères distinctifs : a) la mesure précise désignée par *quelques N* et *plusieurs N* ; b) le point de vue opposé qualifié par les deux adjectifs ; c) la manière de désigner le total des éléments contenus dans *N*, autrement dit la manière d'exprimer la pluralité.

Notre contribution s'organise comme suit : après une présentation non exhaustive des trois lectures interprétatives, les objectifs de l'étude et les concepts théoriques de base seront précisés ; sera présenté ensuite un protocole expérimental inédit, conçu pour l'évaluation des connaissances implicites et explicites des locuteurs non linguistes au sujet de la sémantique de *quelques* et *plusieurs*, instrument absent dans les études actuelles. Enfin, nous proposerons une estimation des avantages et des points critiques de la technique élaborée.

## La lecture par quantification

Un premier critère de distinction évalue la différence sémantique entre *quelques N* et *plusieurs N* en termes de quantité et volume de *N* (Jayez, 2005 ; Asnès, 2006). Cette hypothèse a conduit à différentes interprétations en fonction des linguistes : selon certains, les deux adjectifs désignent un nombre indéfini et peu élevé, mais malgré tout égal ou supérieur à un (Wagner, Pinchon, 1962 ; Chevalier et al., 1964 ; Grevisse, Goosse, 2008), ou éventuellement non supérieur à 10 (Asnès, 2006) ; d'autres estiment que *plusieurs*, tout en déterminant une petite quantité, désigne toujours un volume plus grand que *quelques* (Arrivé et al., 1986) ; d'autres encore défendent l'idée que *quelques* s'utilise en opposition à *beaucoup de*, alors que *plusieurs*, par sa dérivation latine du comparatif *plusiores*, se prêterait plutôt à signifier la comparaison avec l'unité, c'est-à-dire le « plus d'un ou deux » (Gaatone, 1991 : 5-6 ; Grevisse et Goosse, 2008 : 889-890).

La lecture en termes de quantité s'avère cependant trop vague (quel serait le volume précis déterminé par l'un et l'autre ? Un, deux ou plus ?) et ne suffit pas pour éclairer certains cas tout à fait naturels comme « cet honnête homme, content que sa femme lui ait donné *quelques* enfants, dont *plusieurs* étaient de lui ! » (Wilmet, 2010 : 435-436), où l'on ne saurait dire que *plusieurs N* se réduit simplement à une mesure plus grande que *quelques N*<sup>3</sup>. En outre, cette lecture laisse sans réponse un certain nombre de cas ambigus attestés, comme, par exemple, l'emploi bien établi de *plusieurs* comme synonyme de *beaucoup de*, dans certaines régions francophones<sup>4</sup>.

Enfin, si *quelques* peut correspondre à 2 comme le soutiennent la plupart des sources susmentionnées, pourquoi ne peut-on pas dire *j'ai quelques enfants* quand on en a justement deux ? Tentant de répondre à cette question, Gondret (1976) avance l'hypothèse que la distinction précise entre *quelques N* et *plusieurs N* peut s'expliquer en termes de relations entre la quantité des éléments contenus dans le sous-ensemble *N* et ceux contenus dans son ensemble plus large. Ainsi, dans la phrase *Il lui reste quelques cheveux*, on utilisera naturellement *quelques*, et non *plusieurs*, parce que seul *quelques* peut désigner un petit sous-ensemble d'une collection d'éléments généralement très nombreux (*les cheveux*). Dans la phrase *j'ai plusieurs enfants*, en revanche, on utilise *plusieurs*, et non *quelques*, parce que le volume désigné par l'adjectif est mis en relation avec un groupe d'éléments se présentant normalement en quantités plus petites (*les enfants*) (Gondret, 1976 : 147).

<sup>3</sup> Gondret (1976) et Charaudeau (1992) remarquent justement que la force ou la faiblesse de la quantité est toujours relative (*quelques* pouvant désigner un nombre égal à 2 ou bien plus grand en fonction du groupe dont *N* constitue le sous-ensemble) et extralinguistique : dans *il vit avec plusieurs femmes*, la quantité exprimée par *plusieurs* est forte seulement au niveau de la perception sociale.

<sup>4</sup> Comme chez les Tunisiens étudiés par Bacha (1997) ou les Canadiens, dont l'usage est décrit par l'Office Québécois de la langue française.

## La lecture par points de vue opposés

La lecture par points de vue opposés place la distinction sur le point de vue positif ou négatif à partir duquel on présente et interprète le volume de *N*. Considérons les phrases suivantes :

- (c) J'ai attendu le bus *quelques / plusieurs* minutes (Leeman, 2004 : 167-168) ;
- (d) Nous sommes encore à *plusieurs semaines* des élections / Nous sommes déjà à *quelques semaines* des élections (Bacha, 1997 : 54).

Dans (c) comme dans (d), les quantités de temps sous-tendues peuvent être similaires (possons cinq minutes dans *c* et quinze jours dans *d*). Si *quelques* et *plusieurs* expriment donc la même notion (autrement dit la même quantité), comme le prouvent les exemples (c) et (d), la distinction entre eux doit dépendre plutôt de la valeur qui leur est attribuée : *quelques* est alors employé lorsque le point de vue s'oriente vers le peu, la minoration, le négatif (*Nous sommes déjà à quelques semaines des élections* → il reste peu de temps) ; quant à *plusieurs*, on l'utilise quand le point de vue s'oriente vers le beaucoup, la valorisation, le positif (*Nous sommes encore à plusieurs semaines des élections* → il reste beaucoup de temps). Par conséquent, la lecture de Bacha (1997) et Leeman (2004) considère que les deux adjectifs peuvent déterminer la même quantité mais se distinguent par les conclusions opposées qu'ils amènent.

L'interprétation de Wilmet (2010 : 436) va dans le même sens. Il propose en effet l'exemple *La religion chrétienne interdit d'avoir plusieurs femmes / \*quelques femmes* où la quantité désignée par *plusieurs* correspond évidemment à « plus d'une ». Selon le linguiste, seul *plusieurs* serait compatible avec cette phrase, étant le seul à souligner « le dépassement d'une attente », et se prêterait à une lecture augmentative. *Quelques*, en revanche, qui « minimise l'évaluation », se prêterait plutôt à une lecture négative et ne peut donc pas s'appliquer à l'exemple observé.

Considérons enfin l'interprétation de Gondret (1976) et Riegel et al. (2009) qui insistent sur la qualité minorisante de *quelques* et valorisante de *plusieurs*, en remarquant que seul *quelques* peut figurer dans les formules restrictives du type *ne... que...* (*Il n'y a que quelques jours / \*Il n'y a que plusieurs jours* (Riegel et al., 2009 : 298-299)).

Ducrot (1980) et Gaatone (1991, 2006) se montrent néanmoins perplexes quant à l'orientation exclusivement négative de *quelques*. Ainsi, dans l'exemple *heureusement, quelques amis sont venus / \*malheureusement, quelques amis sont venus*, ils démontrent que *quelques* peut en réalité correspondre au point de vue positif. Force est de conclure, comme le note Gréa (2008 : 2032), que les éléments à disposition ne sont pas suffisants pour affirmer que *quelques* et *plusieurs* expriment un point de vue opposé ; la seule évidence disponible est que *quelques* n'est pas incompatible avec les contextes restrictifs.

## La lecture « collectivo-distributive »

La troisième hypothèse, que nous appellerons « collectivo-distributive » ressort de deux articles récents basés sur une étude de corpus (Gréa, 2008, 2012). Cette dernière avance que la différence entre *quelques N* et *plusieurs N* porte sur la manière dont est présenté le total des éléments de *N*. Considérons les occurrences suivantes, extraites du corpus de Gréa :

- (e) *quelques pas, quelques gouttes, quelques larmes, quelques chiffres, quelques nuages* ;
- (f) *plusieurs pas, plusieurs gouttes, plusieurs larmes, plusieurs chiffres, plusieurs nuages*.

Dans les exemples (e), statistiquement bien plus fréquents que ceux de (f), ce n'est pas tant la quantité d'éléments qui est exprimée, mais plutôt un procès global (celui de marcher, pleuvoir, pleurer etc.), un « pluriel continu » pour reprendre les mots de Damourette, Pichon (1911-1927), où « la discontinuité entre les atomes de la pluralité s'efface au profit du tout et de son unité » (Gréa, 2012 : 195). De toute évidence, renvoyant à des entités collectives comme

les pas, les gouttes, les larmes etc., cette interprétation ne s'applique pas aux occurrences dans (f) où, en revanche, la pluralité impose une lecture « distributive », dans la mesure où elle insiste sur une somme d'éléments bien différenciés et dénombrables (notion que l'auteur qualifie de « pluriel discontinu »)<sup>5</sup>.

Une telle analyse semble contredire l'intuition de Gondret (1976) déjà mentionnée : *quelques cheveux* indiquerait, selon Gréa, une petite chevelure (une entité collective), alors que *plusieurs cheveux* imposerait une lecture distributive qui donne l'impression que les cheveux sont considérés un par un.

L'opposition collectif *vs* distributif se trouve par ailleurs confirmée empiriquement sur corpus, les noms les plus fréquents après *quelques* renvoyant généralement à une collectivité (p. ex. *vers, pas, fleurs, notes*), et les noms massifs et non comptables (p. ex. épinards) n'apparaissant qu'après *quelques*.

## II. L'étude

Cette étude se propose de présenter une première proposition de protocole expérimental élaboré et conçu pour vérifier quelle hypothèse mentionnée ci-dessus au sujet de la sémantique de *quelques* et *plusieurs* se trouve confirmée dans les connaissances implicites et explicites des locuteurs natifs adultes<sup>6</sup>.

Cette proposition répondra à deux objectifs : le premier est de fournir au linguiste chercheur une technique efficace et scientifiquement acceptable pour investiguer empiriquement un terrain d'analyse original, celui de l'analyse des règles implicites et explicites qui régissent l'emploi de *quelques* et *plusieurs* chez les usagers non linguistes ; le second est d'entamer une réflexion sur la possibilité d'exploiter des données nouvelles issues de la combinaison des deux méthodes opposées de la linguistique appliquée : la méthode introspective, basée sur l'observation des intuitions linguistiques des locuteurs ordinaires, et la méthode quantitative, basée sur l'annotation et le comptage des réponses qualitatives.

### Spécifications théoriques

On notera que dans le protocole illustré ci-après les techniques d'élicitation et d'évaluation des connaissances implicites et explicites empruntent certains aspects essentiels à l'épreuve d'acceptabilité contenue dans le THAM-3<sup>7</sup> de Pinto et El Euch (2015). Ce choix de reprise pour la formulation d'un test sur la sémantique de *quelques* et *plusieurs* est motivé par des caractéristiques exclusives (consulter, à cet égard, Woll, 2019), qui rendent cette technique particulièrement adaptée à notre expérimentation<sup>8</sup>. L'un des aspects théoriques les plus remarquables du THAM-3 tient au fait que ce test reflète une vision de la langue autant comme instrument

<sup>5</sup> On peut consulter à cet égard Bacha (1997 : 55-56) et Leeman (2004 : 169) qui défendent que la différence entre *quelques arbres* et *plusieurs arbres* tient au fait que, dans le premier cas, les arbres forment un ensemble d'éléments indifférenciés, alors que, dans le second « chaque élément est perçu dans son identité propre » et peut être dénombré.

<sup>6</sup> À notre connaissance, aucune étude n'a pris en compte les aspects perceptifs liés à la sémantique de *quelques* et *plusieurs*. Une enquête de Leeman (2004 : 165-166), qui prouve que *quelques* correspond à moins de la moitié du groupe et que *plusieurs* évoque une mesure plus grande que *quelques*, ne se propose que d'observer à quelle mesure correspond l'identité de *quelques* dans les interprétations des natifs français mais ne considère pas les aspects spécifiques liés à la perception du rapport entre les deux adjectifs.

<sup>7</sup> Acronyme de Test d'Habiletés Métalinguistiques. Le THAM-3 contient 3 épreuves (*Compréhension, Langage figuré, Acceptabilité*) élaborées dans le cadre de la psychologie développementale pour évaluer les processus de réflexion métalinguistique (méta-syntaxique, méta-morpho-phonologique et méta-sémantique) chez les adolescents et les adultes.

<sup>8</sup> Comme nous avons pu l'observer ailleurs, il a déjà été possible de tirer parti de cette caractéristique du THAM-3 en le réadaptant de manière efficace à l'étude de structures spécifiques de la langue, et en le soumettant à des populations adultes françaises et plus généralement francophones (voir, à cet égard, De Flaviis, 2021a, pour deux études perceptives sur la sémantique de *deuxième* et *second* ou encore, Celata et al., 2020, et De Flaviis, 2021b pour l'analyse des processus métaphonologiques liés aux interprétations des liaisons).

de communication que comme objet de la pensée : le participant étant en effet appelé à disso-cier la forme des énoncés de leur contenu par le biais de jugements tels que *X est synonyme de Y*, ou bien *X est correct/n'est pas correct*, et à se focaliser sur les structures abstraites de la langue qu'il utilise spontanément pour communiquer. Il active ainsi une faculté « contemplative » plus ou moins consciente, que l'on qualifie généralement de « métalinguistique » (Benveniste, 1974 ; Cazden, 1976 ; Tunmer et al., 1984 ; James, 1998).

Concernant exclusivement l'épreuve d'acceptabilité n.3, un aspect essentiel réside dans son élaboration, apte à différencier et évaluer simultanément les processus responsables de deux niveaux de réflexion sur la langue (non pas une seule, comme cela arrive dans la plupart des tâches d'acceptabilité usitées en linguistique) : le niveau *épilinguistique*, relatif à la perception implicite des règles de la grammaire et leur mise en œuvre lorsque le locuteur s'exprime spontanément sur la justesse d'une forme linguistique ; le niveau proprement *métalinguistique*, relatif aux interprétations explicites de ces mêmes règles, que le locuteur met intentionnellement en mots lorsqu'il expose et justifie ses jugements<sup>9</sup>. Enfin, cette épreuve permet une mesure originale, à savoir celle des processus métalinguistiques grâce à l'attribution des scores 0, 1 ou 2 en fonction de la pertinence et du degré d'élaboration des justifications.

Conformément aux procédures du test de Pinto et El Euch (2015), le protocole illustré dans cette étude consiste en un test papier-crayon visant l'évaluation et l'analyse des réponses épi- et métalinguistiques des locuteurs. Le véritable changement de ce test consiste en le fait qu'il envisage une catégorie circonscrite de la langue (la perception du rapport entre *quelques* et *plusieurs*), et non le niveau sémantique au sens large. En outre, il n'implique pas l'échelle numérique 0-1-2 mais propose un certain type d'annotation et une quantification des réponses qualitatives en termes de pourcentages de fréquence.

## Le protocole

Le protocole consiste en un test écrit composé de trois questionnaires, chacun construit pour vérifier ou contredire les hypothèses résumées dans notre note de synthèse sur les connaissances implicites et explicites des locuteurs.

Dans les deux premières épreuves, l'élicitation vise aussi bien le niveau épilinguistique que le niveau métalinguistique. Pour l'analyse du niveau épilinguistique, on demande au sujet d'exprimer une préférence entre différents emplois de *quelques* et *plusieurs* qui lui sont présentés en fonction de leur acceptabilité. Pour l'analyse du niveau métalinguistique, on demande au sujet d'argumenter ses choix. Enfin, dans la dernière partie, le sujet est confronté à des paires d'énoncés dont il doit préciser les différences perçues. Seul le niveau métalinguistique est pris en compte ici.

La deuxième épreuve comprend deux formats de présentation : verbal et imagé. L'objectif de ce double format est d'observer si la vue d'une image conditionne le jugement, mais aussi de vérifier si les réponses demeurent cohérentes en variant les *input*.

Les trois questionnaires se déroulent dans l'ordre où ils sont présentés ci-dessous. Aucune limite de temps n'est imposée au participant, et le chercheur ne l'informe pas de l'objet précis de l'expérimentation.

### L'épreuve n. 1

Au cours de la première épreuve, on présente au sujet un texte informatif ayant la forme d'un article scientifique (cf. Annexe). Le choix du sujet scientifique (le comportement des abeilles) est motivé par la volonté de diriger l'attention du participant sur le contenu plutôt que sur la forme, afin de garantir une plus grande spontanéité dans le repérage des anomalies. En

<sup>9</sup> On trouvera des définitions précises d'« épilinguistique » et « métalinguistique » aussi bien dans le cadre de la psychologie du développement (Gombert, 1990) que dans le cadre de la linguistique (Culioli, 1990).

outre, le protocole prévoit comme première épreuve la lecture du texte car, comme nous le verrons, la deuxième épreuve se focalise sur l'acceptabilité de *quelques* et *plusieurs* dans des paires d'énoncés isolés, ce qui rend plus clair l'objet de l'observation.

Dans le texte, trois occurrences de *quelques* et *plusieurs* ont été introduites à une distance similaire. Chaque occurrence est répétée deux fois, la première dans sa forme correcte, la seconde dans une forme déviante. Cinq distracteurs orthographiques, syntaxiques et morphologiques ont également été introduits pour dissimuler l'objectif du test (cf. Tableau 1). Le sujet doit sélectionner les formes qu'il estime anormales et expliquer ses choix. Il ne possède aucune information sur la typologie des anomalies présentes dans le texte, ni sur leur nombre.

La consigne relative à la première épreuve est la suivante : *Trouvez les anomalies dans le texte et commentez-les.*

### Les items

Les *items* introduits dans le texte se trouvent en gras dans les trois extraits ci-dessous :

[1] **Plusieurs espèces** sont élevées pour la pollinisation des récoltes [...]. Par contre, beaucoup d'abeilles sont plutôt spécialisées et *ne* récoltent *que* le pollen de **plusieurs espèces** végétales voisines (oligolectisme).

Dans l'extrait n.1, la double occurrence de *plusieurs* vise à vérifier la lecture par points de vue opposés, selon laquelle seul *quelques* serait compatible avec les formules restrictives, puisqu'il orienterait l'interprétation vers la minorisation. La seconde occurrence de *plusieurs*, associée erronément à *ne...que...*, veut vérifier justement cet aspect.

[2] Le partage d'un nid entre **quelques individus** (souvent apparentés) caractérise un nombre d'espèces d'abeilles de la sueur [...]. **Quelques abeilles** (*la plupart* généralement), accompagnées d'une reine, quittent la ruche mère [...].

Dans ce cas, la double occurrence de *quelques* vise à vérifier l'hypothèse de la lecture par quantification, qui interprète *quelques* comme un adjectif désignant une petite quantité égale à un ou à deux, ou tout du moins inférieure à la moitié du groupe. La forme déviante de cette règle est testée via l'ajout immédiat de *la plupart* entre parenthèses, qui laisse entendre que la quantité d'abeilles désignée dépasse largement la moitié du groupe.

[3] Les abeilles en **quelques chiffres** : [...]. Une ruche produit de 100 à 300 grammes de propolis. Appliquer **plusieurs gouttes** dans la gorge ou sur le palais.

Les *items* dans (3) visent à vérifier l'hypothèse collectivo-distributive selon laquelle seul l'emploi de *quelques* serait adapté aux noms qui renvoient à une entité collective, tels que *chiffres* et *gouttes* (qui comptabilisent respectivement 69 occurrences sur 74 et 449 occurrences sur 450 dans le corpus analysé par Gréa, 2008). En revanche, l'emploi de *plusieurs* avec ces mots reviendrait à déterminer une véritable pluralité d'éléments dénombrables, ce qui ne correspond pas aux notions contenues dans l'extrait.

### Les distracteurs

Les distracteurs sont présentés au Tableau 1. Ils sont au nombre de cinq et sont construits à partir de déviations de différente nature :

- morphologiques : l'accord avec *plantes* est fait sur le masculin *cultivés* au lieu du féminin ; le verbe *s'étendre* associé à *le comportement* est accordé à la troisième personne du pluriel, et non au singulier ;
- orthographiques : la conjonction *ou* présente l'accent grave de l'adverbe homophone *où* ;
- syntaxiques : le gérondif *en comptant* se trouve au lieu du participe *comptant* avec fonction relative ; l'adjectif *nouvel* est remplacé par *neuf* et présenté erronément en position post-nominale.

DISTRACTEURS	
Forme erronée	Forme correcte
plantes <i>cultivés</i>	plantes <i>cultivées</i>
où	ou
le comportement [...] <i>s'étendent</i>	le comportement [...] <i>s'étend</i>
<i>en comptant</i>	<i>comptant</i>
endroit <i>neuf</i>	nouvel endroit

**Tableau 1.** Liste des distracteurs introduits dans l'épreuve n. 1.

### L'épreuve n. 2

La deuxième épreuve implique six questions, dont trois sont accompagnées d'une image. Pour chaque question, on demande au sujet de choisir entre trois alternatives en fonction de leur acceptabilité (question épilinguistique) et, dans un second temps, de justifier sa réponse (question métalinguistique).

Les questions (1) et (2) sont illustrées et commentées ci-dessous :

(1) *Le pays obtint l'indépendance après les conflits de 1945, 1948 et 1951. Cela veut dire que :*

- a. Quelques conflits furent nécessaires à l'indépendance du pays.
- b. Plusieurs conflits furent nécessaires à l'indépendance du pays.
- c. Les deux réponses sont possibles.

*Commentez votre réponse.*

(2) *Regardez l'image et choisissez une réponse :*

	<p>a. Il reste quelques jours avant l'examen.</p> <p>b. Il reste plusieurs jours avant l'examen.</p> <p>c. Les deux réponses sont possibles.</p> <p><i>Commentez votre réponse.</i></p>
--	---

Dans les questions (1) et (2), on teste l'hypothèse des points de vue opposés. Dans les réponses (a), l'interprétation s'oriente vers le point de vue négatif (le peu, la minorisation) alors que, dans les réponses (b), le point de vue exprimé s'oriente vers le positif et la valorisation. L'accent est en effet mis sur le fait que la quantité de conflits nécessaires à l'indépendance du pays et le nombre de jours restant avant l'examen du 19 juin dépasse l'unité. Les réponses (c) insistent quant à elles sur la synonymie de *quelques* et *plusieurs*.

La variable de l'image introduite dans la question (2) peut s'avérer utile pour notre hypothèse pour observer la cohérence des réponses dans (1) et (2) à partir de formats diversifiés, et donc vérifier si la vue des éléments désignés peut conditionner la perception des adjectifs.

Les questions (3) et (4) sont les suivantes :

- (3) a. Malgré le climat agréable, il y a seulement quelques marguerites dans le jardin.
- b. Malgré le climat agréable, il y a seulement plusieurs marguerites dans le jardin.
- c. Les deux réponses sont possibles.

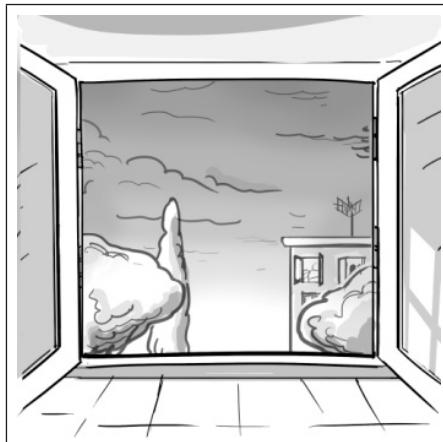
*Commentez votre réponse.*

- (4) a. Heureusement, quelques articles sont en soldes dans ce magasin.
- b. Heureusement, plusieurs articles sont en soldes dans ce magasin.
- c. Les deux réponses sont possibles.

*Commentez votre réponse.*

Par les questions (3) et (4), on se propose d'observer si *quelques* est perçu comme étant le seul à pouvoir être appliqué aux contextes restrictifs (dans la question 3, figurent en effet *malgré* et *seulement* qui déterminent une telle lecture), ou s'il est possible de l'appliquer également à des interprétations positives (dans la question 4, aussi bien *quelques* que *plusieurs* sont associés à *heureusement*).

(5) Regardez l'image et choisissez une réponse :



- a. Il y a quelques nuages dans le ciel. J'imagine que le festival est annulé.
- b. Il y a plusieurs nuages dans le ciel. J'imagine que le festival est annulé.
- c. Les deux réponses sont possibles.

*Commentez votre réponse.*

(6) Regardez l'image et choisissez une réponse :



- a. Dans ma bibliothèque, j'ai quelques livres de Balzac.
- b. Dans ma bibliothèque, j'ai plusieurs livres de Balzac.
- c. Les deux réponses sont possibles.

*Commentez votre réponse.*

La question (5), par le support de l'image, vise à vérifier quelle lecture, entre la quantification, les points de vue opposés, le pluriel continu/discontinu et la synonymie, s'impose dans les interprétations du sujet. Selon notre hypothèse, si la lecture par quantification se trouvait

confirmée, les réponses devraient porter sur *plusieurs*, la quantité de nuages dans le ciel étant supérieure à un ou deux. La réponse devrait être également *plusieurs* si la lecture confirmée était celle des points de vue opposés, les nuages étant en quantité suffisante pour annuler le festival. Enfin, si l'hypothèse collectivo-distributive primait, la réponse la plus fréquente des participants devrait être *quelques*, car seul *quelques nuages* correspond à l'entité collective du *ciel nuageux*.

Dans la question (6), le support de l'image permet également de vérifier plusieurs lectures à la fois. On pourrait avancer l'hypothèse que les réponses convergeront vers *quelques* si la lecture par quantification se confirme dans la grammaire des locuteurs, les livres de Balzac dans la bibliothèque étant au nombre de 16, autrement dit moins de la moitié du total (= 41). Par contre, les réponses convergeront vers *plusieurs* si c'est la lecture collectivo-distributive qui se confirme : dans ce cas, les livres sont considérés dans leur individualité propre et sont dénombrables. Enfin, si les locuteurs perçoivent la lecture par points de vue opposés comme la seule possible, les conclusions suivantes s'imposeront : *j'ai quelques livres de Balzac* → *j'ai peu de livres de Balzac, je ne connais pas assez cet auteur* vs *J'ai plusieurs livres de Balzac* → *J'en ai beaucoup, je connais très bien l'auteur.*

### L'épreuve n. 3

La troisième épreuve ne contient que des questions métalinguistiques. Elle se positionne en dernier parce qu'elle stimule directement le processus d'analyse métacognitif plus profond, mais aussi parce qu'elle requiert de porter l'attention de manière plus ciblée sur la distinction sémantique entre *quelques* et *plusieurs*. Les questions sont au nombre de trois et sont présentées ci-dessous :

(7) *Quelle est la différence entre :*

- a. Il lui reste quelques cheveux.
- b. Il lui reste plusieurs cheveux.

(8) *Quelle est la différence entre :*

- a. Il a fait quelques pas avant de nous communiquer sa décision.
- b. Il a fait plusieurs pas avant de nous communiquer sa décision.

(9) *Quelle est la différence entre :*

- a. Je dirige quelques entreprises, parmi lesquelles plusieurs activités marchandes.
- b. Je dirige plusieurs entreprises, parmi lesquelles quelques activités marchandes.

La question (7) tente de vérifier les hypothèses de Gaatone (1991) et de Gréa (2008, 2012), qui proposent des interprétations différentes pour le même exemple (la relation entre la quantité de *N* et *N* ; le pluriel continu/discontinu). La question (8) en revanche, reprend directement l'hypothèse de Gréa (*quelques pas* signifie *une petite marche*, *plusieurs pas* désigne *un nombre de pas différenciés et énumérables*). Dans la question (9), enfin, on examine l'intuition de Wilmet (*quelques* minimise l'évaluation, *plusieurs* souligne le dépassement d'une attente).

### Codage

L'annotation des réponses qualitatives doit favoriser la construction d'un corpus contrôlable et mesurable en termes statistiques. Les réponses doivent donc être annotées et codées à partir de critères standard. Ci-dessous sont illustrées les méthodes d'annotation des réponses épilinguistiques (valables pour les épreuves 1 et 2) et métalinguistiques (valables pour les épreuves 1, 2 et 3).

## Réponses épilinguistiques

Pour chaque *item* de l'épreuve n.1, le chercheur attribue « 0 » si l'anomalie passe inaperçue et « 1 » si le sujet estime devoir signaler la forme en tant qu'anormale. Il calcule ensuite le nombre d'anomalies repérées.

Pour l'épreuve n. 2, le chercheur associe chaque option sélectionnée à une des catégories suivantes : « Synonymie » si l'option choisie est « Les deux réponses sont possibles » ; « Quantification » si l'option choisie insiste sur le volume désigné par *quelques* et *plusieurs* ; « Minorisation » ou « Augmentation » si la réponse favorise la lecture par points de vue opposés ; « Collection » ou « Distribution » si la réponse peut s'associer à la lecture collectivo-distributive.

## Réponses métalinguistiques

Le chercheur procède ensuite à l'annotation des réponses métalinguistiques (épreuves 1, 2 et 3). Il regroupe ces réponses sous les mêmes catégories susmentionnées (« Synonymie », « Quantification », « Minorisation »-« Augmentation », « Collection »-« Distribution ») mais il ajoute la catégorie « Autre », où sont regroupées toutes les réponses ne pouvant être associées à l'un des groupes prédéfinis. Le chercheur procède ensuite au comptage du corpus pour chaque groupe et obtient des pourcentages relatifs à la fréquence des réponses. Ces pourcentages lui seront utiles pour faire émerger des régularités ou des tendances par rapport aux connaissances implicites et explicites des locuteurs quant à l'usage de *quelques* et *plusieurs*.

## III. Discussion et conclusions

Le protocole proposé dans cette étude est conçu pour observer quelles règles les locuteurs déclarent suivre implicitement et explicitement lorsqu'ils interprètent le rapport entre *quelques* et *plusieurs*. Cette observation se base sur l'analyse des jugements épilinguistiques et des commentaires métalinguistiques du sujet, qui est d'abord appelé à choisir une option qu'il estime acceptable parmi trois alternatives proposées, et ensuite à argumenter son choix.

La reprise de l'épreuve d'acceptabilité contenue dans le THAM-3 a présenté plusieurs avantages pour l'approche que nous avons adoptée : comme nous avons pu le voir, elle a permis l'investigation simultanée de deux niveaux d'analyse métacognitive (épi- et métalinguistique), élément absent dans les tests d'acceptabilité classiques usités en linguistique introspective ; elle a, en outre, favorisé la construction d'un corpus contrôlé de réponses qualitatives pouvant être annotées et quantifiées en termes fréquentiels ; elle a fourni au linguiste chercheur des données empiriques originales issues de l'adoption d'une double technique quali-quantitative.

Au-delà des aspects spécifiques de l'épreuve n.3 du THAM-3, il importe de mentionner rapidement certaines différences substantielles avec le test exposé ici, qui concernent notamment les objectifs de l'expérimentation : en premier lieu, l'observation des activités métalinguistiques dans le cadre du THAM-3 s'articule autour de l'analyse des processus de correction et de justification métalinguistique dans son sens large, mis en œuvre par les locuteurs. Dans notre cas, par contre, l'expérimentation ne vise que l'évaluation des réponses épi- et métalinguistiques associées à une structure précise de la langue : la sémantique de *quelques* et *plusieurs*. En deuxième lieu, le test de Pinto et El Euch propose l'attribution des scores en fonction de la norme grammaticale et dans une perspective développementale ; dans notre perspective, orientée vers la linguistique empirique, le caractère normatif se trouve exclu en faveur de la pure observation des jugements. En troisième lieu, le caractère foncièrement descriptif de notre test implique que l'annotation des réponses qualitatives ne prévoit pas d'échelle de mesure numérique, mais seulement un comptage des fréquences pour vérifier si des tendances significatives peuvent être mises en relation avec les hypothèses des linguistes.

Un dernier point doit être soulevé au sujet de la méthode adoptée. Comme on le sait, l'emploi des tests d'acceptabilité en sciences du langage demeure controversé (Schütze, 1996 ; Edelman et Christiansen, 2003 ; Gibson et Fedorenko, 2010 ; Tabatabaei et Dehghani, 2012 ; Gibson *et al.*, 2013). Dans quelle mesure peut-on affirmer que ce qui a été déclaré par le locuteur correspond à ce qu'il a effectivement perçu ? En tant que fait intérieur à la conscience subjective, le jugement d'acceptabilité est en effet inaccessible directement. En outre, le commentaire argumentatif que nous utilisons pour accéder au niveau d'analyse métalinguistique plus profond n'est qu'une réélaboration de ce que l'on a réellement perçu. À cet égard, la proposition faite dans cette étude repose sur l'idée que nous avons déjà soutenue ailleurs (Celata *et al.*, 2020 ; De Flaviis, 2021a et b), c'est-à-dire que l'élicitation de ces données, si elle est contrôlée lors de la construction du protocole et bien intégrée à la méthode quantitative de comptabilisation des réponses, peut s'avérer très utile au linguiste pour vérifier, par exemple, la correspondance entre les intuitions des experts et les interprétations subjectives des locuteurs ordinaires, ou encore entre les connaissances implicites des sujets parlants et les usages attestés par le corpus.

Une perspective intéressante pourrait s'ouvrir en appliquant le protocole à différentes situations sociolinguistiques, pour observer si des facteurs comme l'âge, le sexe, le niveau d'étude ou encore l'origine géographique peuvent influencer la perception des règles régissant l'emploi de *quelques* et *plusieurs*.

Bien entendu, les réflexions amorcées dans cette étude demeureront à l'état de pure théorie si une étude pilote et des enquêtes de terrain futures ne viennent corroborer l'efficacité réelle du protocole.

## Annexe

*Les abeilles sont des hyménoptères dont les habitudes alimentaires, se résument à la consommation de pollen et de nectar, en font d'importants polliniseurs de plantes cultivées et de fleurs. La plupart sont solitaires et sauvages, mais plusieurs espèces sont élevées pour la pollinisation des récoltes où pour produire du miel. En ce qui concerne la méthode de butinage, l'abeille domestique récolte le pollen d'une grande variété de fleurs distinctes (polylectisme). Par contre, beaucoup d'abeilles sont plutôt spécialisées et ne récoltent que le pollen de plusieurs espèces végétales voisines (oligolectisme). En matière de nidification, le comportement des abeilles s'étendent du solitarisme à l'eusocialité. La plupart des abeilles sont solitaires. D'autres sont communales, ce qui signifie que les femelles utilisent le même nid, mais chacune approvisionne ses cellules et y pond ses œufs. Le partage d'un nid entre quelques individus (souvent apparentés) caractérise un nombre d'espèces d'abeilles de la sueur (famille Halictidae). Les colonies des abeilles domestiques sont généralement très populeuses, en comptant des dizaines de milliers d'individus sous l'influence d'une seule reine. Le mode de propagation des colonies de ces abeilles est l'essaimage : quelques abeilles (la plupart généralement), accompagnées d'une reine, quittent la ruche mère et se trouvent un endroit neuf où vivre. La ruche mère, quant à elle, poursuit ses activités dans le même nid avec une nouvelle reine.*

*Les abeilles en quelques chiffres :*

- *les abeilles et autres insectes pollinisateurs représentent par leur action la reproduction de 80% des espèces végétales. Leur contribution à la biodiversité est inestimable ;*
- *une ruche produit de 100 à 300 grammes de propolis. Appliquer plusieurs gouttes dans la gorge ou sur le palais pour bénéficier de ses vertus ;*
- *pour produire 1 kg de miel 600 abeilles doivent parcourir environ 380000 km.*

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# An exploratory study on metaphor comprehension in portuguese preschoolers: some preliminary results<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *The current study presents the preliminary results obtained with a task that measures metaphor comprehension in children from 4 to 6, originally conceived in Italian language, then validated on an Italian-speaking sample (Pinto, Melogno, Iliceto, 2008), and afterward translated into European Portuguese (Figueira, Pinto, Bastos Andrade, Melogno, 2023a). The task has been administered to 31 typically developing, monolingual Portuguese children aged 4 and 5, according to the administration procedures and the coding system of the original Italian test. This system is based on a 3-step scale, where each step represents a qualitative level in metaphor processing. The assessment can thus be seen at the same time in terms of total score, to which both descriptive and inferential statistics can be applied, and of percentages of qualitative levels of responding. The results showed normal curves at each age, increasing means from age 4 to 5 although the differences were not significant, and an interesting qualitative evolution of the responses with age. Another result worth mentioning is that the responses were very similar to those of the original Italian-speaking sample, and each of the three qualitative levels of the coding system was present also in this Portuguese sample. Beyond the limitations that are essentially due to the reduced number of participants, this study provides interesting preliminary results that encourage a more systematic data collection in view of future validation of this task.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Metaphor comprehension, meta-semantic abilities, preschoolers, Portuguese language, test translation-adaptation.*

## I. Introduction

In this study we present the preliminary results obtained with a task to assess metaphor comprehension in children aged from 4 to 6 which was originally conceived in Italian language, then validated on an Italian-speaking sample as TCM junior (*Test di Comprensione di Metafore Junior, 4-6 anni*; Pinto, Melogno, Iliceto, 2008; eng: Junior MCT), and afterward translated into Portuguese (Figueira, Pinto, Bastos Andrade, Melogno, 2023a). The interest for this topic is motivated by the relevance of the linguistic-cognitive abilities this test measures, as the authors of the original test convincingly show, in addition to the absence of similar tools in Portuguese language. The current study, thus, is part of a broad project on metaphor comprehension in children from preschool to advanced school age in European Portuguese (Figueira et al., 2023a; Figueira, Pinto, Bastos Andrade, Melogno, 2023b), itself a part of a project on the development of metalinguistic abilities in this language (Couceiro Figueira, Pinto, 2018).

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At the current stage of research, the present introduction will focus on the theoretical construct of metaphor comprehension that underlies the test<sup>2</sup>. As the authors of the original Italian test state (Pinto et al., 2006; and also Pinto, Melogno, Iliceto, 2008), to fully understand a metaphor means being able to overcome the literal meaning (Melogno, Pinto, Mashal, 2022) resulting from the juxtaposition of the separate meanings of each component, which would be otherwise incongruent. For instance, if we say «The moon is a light bulb» (Pinto et al., 2008), we are not meaning that this is true neither on literal nor on real grounds. Rather, we can imagine that the utterance means that the two terms *moon* and *light bulb* must have something in common, namely that they both illuminate from above, have a light color, more or less yellow, and in some circumstances also have a similar shape. Therefore, the problem with understanding metaphors is about being able to analyze the meanings of its terms, technically called «tenor» (in this case, the *moon*) and «vehicle» (in this case, the *light bulb*; Richards, 1936), and finding some common denominator, technically called «ground» (Richards, 1936), likely to justify an apparently anomalous semantic combination. In this sense, this type of ability fully meets the requirement of a *meta-semantic ability*, which is one of many metalinguistic abilities (Bonnet-Tamine-Gardes, 1984; Gombert, 1990; Melogno, D'Ardia, Pinto, Levi, 2012; Melogno et al., 2022). In turn, every metalinguistic ability is a form of metacognitive ability applied to language use inasmuch as it transforms basic language comprehension and production abilities into «objects of thought», as underlined by linguists, theoretical and applied, and psycholinguists (Benveniste, 1974; Tunmer, Pratt, Herriman, 1984; James, 1999; Jessner, 2006; Pinto, Melogno, 2014). In other words, language can be at the same time a tool to convey our thoughts and an object we can reflect upon in order to analyze its forms and meanings. Back to our *moon-light bulb* example, the meta-semantic ability we apply to *moon* and *light bulb* not only requires reflection, which is already a cognitive ability, but also leads to a different categorization of each term. This novel categorization, in turn, is generated by the very interaction between tenor and vehicle. *Moon* can be framed as a sort of «device» to illuminate the world, and *light bulb* as a sort of star impeding on us. Thus, a metaphor has the actual power to change the way we look at things and seems to fulfill the typically human exigency to *categorize* single parts of the world by means of images (Cacciari, 1991), which, in turn, generates novel linguistic categorizations.

However, the interpretation of the above *moon-light bulb* metaphor does not only presuppose a cognitive activity but also a communicative exchange between at least two interlocutors. The very fact that the meaning of the metaphor *cannot be* intended in a literal way suggests that the metaphor is a *linguistic game* that requires the existence of two players who must find some agreement about the meaning to attribute to an apparently anomalous sentence. Since there is always more than just one interpretation, the participants in the game need to negotiate the meanings at hand, and each one must make an effort to enter the other's mind to grasp his/her communicative intention. On the other hand, linguistic games vary according to culture (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980), which means that a given metaphor may evoke very different representations depending on the cultural context and also on the historical moment in which this metaphor is used, since each term is likely to evoke variable representations. If we say, for instance, that «the mind is a computer» (Pinto et al., 2008) this metaphor can be understood only in modern, industrialized societies while it would be meaningless in societies where computers simply do not exist.

The aim of the current study was to see how 4- and 5-year old Portuguese children responded to the metaphorical items of the Portuguese version of the Italian TCM junior. In particular, we focused on the evolution of the responses from younger to older children and the qualitative aspects of these responses to see to what extent they resembled those that were found in the Italian-speaking sample of the original test.

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<sup>2</sup> For a review in Portuguese language, see Amante, L., Morgado, L. (1994), Seixas, N. S. (2017); Figueira et al. (2019).

## II. Method

### Participants

Thirty-one children whose age ranged from 4 to 5 years-old (4 years: range 4-4.11; N = 14; 5 years: range 5-5.11; N = 17; 20 males and 11 females; see Table 1) participated in this study during the month of February, 2022. They were recruited using non-probabilistic convenience or accidental sampling (Hill, Hill, 2005).

Data collection was carried out in a small urban city in the district of Aveiro, a central area of Portugal. All the participants spoke European Portuguese as their mother tongue, and no diagnosis of cognitive or other developmental disorder was mentioned by the educators of the school nor by the parents.

AGE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
4 years	10	4	14
5 years	10	7	17

**Table 1.** Participants' distribution by age and sex.

### Instrument

The TCM Junior, in its original Italian version (Pinto et al., 2008), is an instrument to analyze the understanding of metaphors from 4 to 6 years of age. To date, it is in the process of being validated, having gone through all the translation/adaptation phases to European Portuguese (Figueira et al., 2023a). The TCM Junior is an individual, oral administration test, consisting of 25 metaphorical items, of which 12 are presented in the form of simple sentences (M-FR, Portuguese acronym) and the remaining (13) in the context of short stories (M-HS, Portuguese acronym), where some words can be interpreted in a metaphorical sense.

The distinction between metaphors in isolated sentences (M-FR) and metaphors contextualized in stories (M-H) had been introduced by the original authors (Pinto et al., 2008), based on the position of some researchers (Waggoner, Palermo, 1989) who hypothesized that to contextualize metaphors in stories would facilitate its understanding. Actually, during the validation process of the original Italian test, it was found that there were no differences in comprehension related to this distinction, which, nevertheless, remained in the definitive test, and, for this reason, we have also maintained it in the Portuguese version.

The examiner must have a protocol for each child, where to transcribe the answers provided by the children, supported by a recorder that can always be helpful in case there is a more extended interaction between the examiner and the child that would be difficult to transcribe in real time.

The instrument is presented to the child with an example of a metaphorical item formed by a sentence (M-Fr), where it is explained to the child that he/she will hear some words which might seem « weird » and say what he/she thinks they mean. The examiner and the child analyze two familiarization items together – « The sun is a ball », « The sun has arms ».

As anticipated in the Introduction, to be able to explain a metaphor one must account for the grounds that make the association between T and V, which could seem implausible on logical or real grounds, something which, on the contrary, is plausible. To this end, one must overcome the semantic conflict created by the apparent dissonance between the respective semantic fields of T and V, and analyze the possible commonalities that justify their association in the metaphor.

Depending on the type of metaphor, which, in the case of the TCM Junior are mainly sensory, that is of the most concrete type, even preschoolers can successfully try to detect

such a type of semantic conflict, analyze the possible commonalities between T and V, and recompose the conflict.

The coding system espouses the view of metaphor comprehension as a semantic conflict resolution and frames this process as composed of three fundamental steps, which are based on three types of « mental regulations », alfa, beta and gamma, according to the latest equilibration model by Piaget (1975). Alfa regulations consist of responses where a given semantic conflict is simply ignored; beta regulations consist of types of responses where this conflict is at least acknowledged but faced with local and only partial adjustments, while gamma regulations consist of responses where the conflict is analyzed in its multiple components and then consistently recomposed.

In quantitative terms, this tripartition is reflected in three possible scores: 0,1 and 2, for each item, which means that the maximum total test score is 50 (25 x 2).

Interestingly, the variants of the 0 level that the original authors (Pinto et al., 2008) detected in the Italian children's protocols have been found also in the Portuguese protocols. Below, we provide examples of each of these 0 level variants.

- a) *Global rejection of the metaphor*: the association between T and V is denied, alleged to be false.  
Ex (Item: « The moon is a lamp »): « It's not true, the moon is not a lamp », « It's a lie ».
- b) *Total elusion of the conflict*: Ex: « I don't know ».
- c) *Elusion of the conflict based on partial centering*: the focus is centered either on T or on V or on both but without connection between the two.  
Ex: « The house has a hat »; answer: « he house is big and the hat is small ».
- d) *Literal interpretation*: creation of an alternative context where the metaphor is plausible.  
Ex (Item: « The houses' eyes are closed at night »): « Houses have closed eyes at night ».
- e) *Magical interpretation*: a supernatural force turned one term into the other.  
Ex: (Item: « The houses' eyes are closed at night »): «With a magic wand, the fairy had closed the houses' eyes».
- f) *Metonymic*: the meanings of the two words are related on the basis of spatial or temporal criteria. For example, for the item «My father is the car's doctor» a metonymic response can be: «It means that he goes and injects people inside the cars».

At level 1, the conflict is only partially recognized, the exploration of the common ground between T and V is not exhaustive. Responses are assigned 1 point. For example, for the metaphor «The moon is a lamp», a level 1 response can be «It sends light» which shows a partial approximation between the two terms of the metaphor.

At level 2, with a score of 2 points, the conflict is fully recognized and the common ground between T and V appropriately identified, based on similarities as well as on differences between the two terms of the metaphor. In the previous item, a level 2 response can be: «The moon illuminates like the lamp but the lamp also illuminates during the day while the moon only illuminates the sky at night», which clearly shows a more complete and consistent view of the metaphorical analogy that relates T and V, and therefore of the resolution of the apparent semantic conflict between the two.

Maximum possible score: 50 (2 x 25).

## Procedure

Before entering the school, the examiner was requested to ask for the authorization to carry out the present study by specifying the objectives and modalities of the administration, and the anonymity of the results. After collecting the duly signed authorizations, the sessions to administer the TCM junior were scheduled with the educators. The administration took place in February, 2022, in a peaceful environment without noise nor distractor

elements, and with appropriate lighting in order to favor the individual face-to-face interactional character of the testing.

The TCM Junior was presented to each child in the form of a game. The examiner gave an example of a metaphorical sentence out of the list of the real items asking the child to say what he/she thought about it. Then the examiner would jointly construct with the child the appropriate responses in order to make him/her familiarize with the type of task.

Throughout the entire process of data collection and processing, conditions of anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed for all participants, respecting the ethical principles underlying the conduct of investigations.

### III. Results

First of all, the curves of each age group were normal, as it appears from both Asymmetry and Curtosis (Asymmetry 4 y: -.128; Curtosis 4 y: -.764; Asymmetry 5 y: .143; Curtosis: -.735). We then calculated means and standard deviations in all the test scores at each age, as reported in Table 2, which showed a relative increase from one year to another, as expected.

To verify whether those differences were significant or not, we applied a two-tailed unpaired *t* test which yielded a nonsignificant result (*t* = 1.1866; df = 29; *p*: 0.2450).

AGE	SENTENCES		STORIES		TOT TCM JNR	
	M	sd	M	sd	M	sd
4 y (N = 14)	5.43	3.3446	4.57	3.018	10	5.657
5 y (N = 17)	6.12	3.018	6.47	3.710	12.599	6.3841

**Table 2.** Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*sd*) in 4- and 5 year-old children. TCM Junior sentences, stories and total scores.

On qualitative grounds, we also calculated the percentages of responses by level (0, 1, 2) for each part and for the total test, as reported in Table 3. As we can see, at age 4 we find a dominance of 0 level: 64.4% (about 2/3 of the total responses), followed by 30.99% of level 1 (less than one third of the total responses), finally followed by 4.59% of level 2 (a very low percentage).

At age 5, we can note a relative qualitative improvement because the lowest level (0) decreases to about half of the total responses (0 level: 52.91%) while the intermediate level (1) increases up to 43.82%, although the highest level (2) remains quite low (3.28%).

AGE	0	1	2
4 y: Sentences:	60.12%	34.52%	5.35%
4 y: Stories:	68.68%	27.46%	3.84%
4 y: Tot Jnr TCM	64.40%	30.99%	4.59%
5 y: Sentences	51.98%	45.10%	2.95%
5 y: Stories:	53.84%	42.55%	3.62%
5 y: Tot Jnr TCM	52.91%	43.82%	3.28%

**Table 3.** Percentages of responses by level (0, 1, 2) in each part and in the total TCM Junior in 4- and 5 year-old children.

We also identified the most difficult and the easiest items (See the list of the items, in the Appendix). At both ages, the most difficult were:

*Children are balloons*

*On the mountains there is whipped cream*

And the easiest items were:

*The moon is a lamp (S)*

*The house has a hat (S)*

While at age 5 only, the easiest were:

*Mountain of biscuits*

*The sky started to cry*

We will also add that level 2 responses were very rare: only 4 items in the Sentence part at both ages and only 3 in the Stories part at age 4 and only 5 at age 5.

#### IV. Discussion and conclusion

In this exploratory study we administered the Portuguese version of the Italian TCM Junior (Pinto et al., 2008), a test of metaphor comprehension for children aged 4 to 6 translated and adapted from the original source (Figueira et al., 2023a). The Italian test has long been validated on a consistent sample of 600 children aged 4, 5 and 6 with 200 participants per age, showing good psychometric properties and a conversion table from raw to standardized points (T points, subdivided into 5 levels, from deficitary to superior). The present study is a preliminary phase that anticipates the data collection needed for a future validation. It was based on two groups of 4- and 5 year-old children of a small urban city in the district of Aveiro, a central area of Portugal, all monolinguals with Portuguese as L1, and with no cognitive nor language deficit.

The test is composed of two parts, with 12 metaphors in isolated sentences and 13 included in short stories. The assessment proceeds by levels of elaborateness which can range from totally absent response or literal or metonymic or magic responses, coded as 0, to partially relevant analysis of the semantic features of the metaphor, coded as 1, up to a more complete analysis of those features and recompositon of their apparent conflictual character, coded as 2. An interesting and innovative aspect of this assessment modality is that it allows obtaining overall scores of metaphor comprehension, to which inferential statistics can be applied, and at the same time a fine-grained, qualitative analysis of the responses to each item, as expressed by the percentages of the above three levels.

The results showed normal curves at both ages, and an increase in the means that, however, were not significant when submitted to a 2-tailed *t* test for unpaired groups. When we look at the evolution of the response level percentages from age 4 to age 5 we can see a visible shift from a clear predominance of 0 level at 4 (nearly 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the responses at 0 level and 1/3 at level 1, and a very poor percentage of level 2) to a more balanced distribution of 0 level and level 1 (52.91%, 43.82%, respectively) with level 2 still remaining very scarce. This trend, expressed in percentage of levels, is consistent with the increase of the means from 4 to 5 but illuminates an interesting aspect of the evolution, namely the change in the quality of responses. In this sense, our study, although limited in terms of numerosity of participants and absence of significance of the *t* test, is totally in line with the trends observed in the Italian sample at the same ages. In a similar vein, we could also observe that the nature of the responses of the Portuguese preschoolers in this study was very similar to what we found in the Italian-speaking sample of the Junior MCT. In both contexts, children analyzed meanings based on form or color or function, which highlights an embryonic but significant capability to cope with a complex meta-semantic and meta-pragmatic ability such as metaphor comprehension at a very early age.

## Appendix

The items of the Portuguese version of the Junior MCT (*partially translated into English*).

### Metáforas em frases (M-Fr)

1. A lua é uma lâmpada. (*The moon is a lamp*)
2. A casa tem um chapéu. (*The house has a hat*)
3. A árvore do jardim despiu-se. (*The tree in the garden got undressed*)
4. Uma nuvem é uma esponja. (*The cloud is a sponge*)
5. As crianças são balões. (*Children are balloons*)
6. Os olhos das casas fecham-se à noite. (*The houses' eyes are closed at night*)
7. Um pássaro poisa no braço de uma árvore. (*A birdie leaned on the arm of a tree*)
8. O meu pai é o médico dos carros. (*My Dad is the car's doctor*)
9. O lenço do céu é colorido. (*The scarf of the sky is coloured*)
10. As folhas das árvores dançam. (*The leaves of the trees are dancing*)
11. Um papagaio de papel é um pássaro. (*A kite is a bird*)
12. Nas montanhas há natas. (*On the mountains there is whipped cream*)

### Metáforas em histórias (M-Hs)

(N.B. For copyright reasons, we have translated only one story as an example of this part of the test)

#### História nº 1

O João era uma criança, um menino pequenino. Um dia a mãe fez uns biscoitos e cobriu-os com açúcar. Ao vê-los, o João disse: « Que lindos bolinhos cobertos de neve ». Vou comê-los todos ». E, sem ser visto pela mãe, o João agarra nos biscoitos todos e esconde-os. Mas a mãe vê e diz-lhe: « Que grande gatinho guloso és, onde colocaste a montanha de biscoitos? ».

*English: Story n. 1*

John was a young boy. One day his mother cooked some biscuits and covered them with sugar. When he sees them, John says: « What nice biscuits covered with snow! I'm going to eat them all ». Without being seen by his mother John takes all the biscuits and hide them but his mother sees him and tells him: « What a greedy kitten you are, where did you put the mountain of biscuits? ».

#### História nº 2

A Maria era uma garotinha. Um dia a mãe dela levou-a para brincar na relva. A Maria estava feliz porque dava cambalhotas no tapete verde e perfumado. Mas, ao olhar o céu, coberto de nuvens negras, viu que, o céu, começou a chorar. Então, a mãe disse para irem embora: « Maria és um passarinho que tem que voltar para a gaiola ».

#### História nº 3

« Era uma vez um menino chamado Filipe. Uma manhã, o Filipe voou com o pai para a cave da casa. O pai abriu a porta da cave e o Filipe vê a noite e começa a ter medo. Então, decide fugir e corre rápido. O pai diz à mãe, « O Filipe é um comboio ».

#### História nº 4

A Camila nunca quer ir à escola. A mãe acorda-a de manhã, mas ela é uma pedra em cima da cama. Ela finge sempre que está a dormir e fica no seu ninho. Mas aí a mãe, zangada, diz: « Eu sei que estás acordada. Não estás com pressa e assim vais chegar atrasada. És mesmo um caracol ».

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# The role of oral components in Italian sign language comprehension<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *What is the role of oral components in sign language? To shed light on such a controversial phenomenon, an experimental test was designed and disseminated online. It involved over 273 deaf and hearing signers from all over Italy. The purpose of the test was to provide quantitative data on the role that the oral components plays at the lexical level of LIS (Lingua Italiana dei Segni/Italian Sign Language), to supplement the observations that have been made in qualitative studies of LIS and other sign languages. The results show that deaf participants recognise, more than hearing ones, signs where the oral component is obscured, confirming their higher proficiency in sign comprehension probably due to their larger vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, deaf native signers provide a significantly higher number of correct answers than non-native deaf signers. The same is not true for hearing participants, who do not differ according to being native or non-native signers. In general, the results confirm that mouthing has a distinctive disambiguating function at the lexical level, which leads us to conclude that mouth actions have a constitutive role in LIS and should not be considered an extralinguistic phenomenon, as had been assumed in older traditional linguistic descriptions of this language.*

**KEYWORDS:** LIS (Italian Sign Language), Oral components, Mouthing, Mouth gesture, Lexical comprehension.

## I. Introduction

### Maria Antonietta Pinto

Maria Antonietta Pinto has always been extremely attracted to new research fields. This has been particularly true for the important areas of gesture and sign languages which have been extensively explored in other countries but have found little space in the Italian academic world. As Editor-in-chief of the international peer-reviewed Journal of Applied Psycholinguistics, she has given voice to relevant empirical studies on topics related to deafness, gestures and sign language starting from 2008.<sup>2</sup> In addition, she has co-edited three special issues on bimodal bilingualism<sup>3</sup> with contributions by specialists from all over the world.

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<sup>2</sup> These studies have been published in the following years: 2008, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2019, and 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Pinto, M. A., Volterra, V. (a cura di / ed. by) (2008). *Bilinguismo lingue vocali / lingue dei segni: Aspetti educativi e psicolinguistici / Spoken languages / vocal languages bilingualism: Educational and psycholinguistic issues*. Special issue, *Rivista di Psicolinguistica Applicata / Journal of Applied Psycholinguistics*, VIII, 3. Pinto, M. A., Fontana, S. (a cura di / ed. by) (2011). *L'interpretariato lingue vocali / lingue dei segni: questioni sociolinguistiche, psicolinguistiche, educative / Insights into*

Before other Italian scholars, Maria Antonietta had recognized the importance of studies of gesture and sign languages for a more comprehensive understanding of language as a multimodal phenomenon. For this reason, we have chosen to describe, in the present chapter, the phenomenon of oral components in Italian Sign Language, in which the strong interconnection between action, gesture, signed and spoken languages is clearly present.

## II. An overview of previous research

The phenomenon of orality in sign languages is rather controversial. During the early years of sign language (SL) research, it was regarded with suspicion by signers and researchers alike, for fear that a phenomenon of this sort might raise questions concerning not only the independence of SL from spoken language but also its linguistic prestige. It must be noted that at the time this research field was only beginning to establish itself. Considered an often-redundant phenomenon resulting from contact with Italian, the linguistic functions of oral components were, until the end of the last century, almost totally overlooked.

The first crucial international publication to focus completely on the phenomenon of « mouth components » in sign language dates back to 2001. In the book *The Hands are the Head of the Mouth: The Mouth as Articulator in Sign Language*, the editors Penny Boyes Braem and Rachel Sutton-Spence (2001) collected material from a workshop held three years earlier in Leiden, Holland, devoted entirely to the studies that were just starting in the 1980s to look at the presence of oral components in different sign languages, including Italian Sign Language (Lingua dei Segni Italiana, LIS). The goals of the Leiden workshop were two-fold: to open a debate on this linguistic aspect of signed languages, and to standardize terminology being used for this phenomenon.

In Italy, for example, sign language literature made use of various definitions and terminologies to identify the two phenomena which came to fall under the generic notion of « oral components » (Fontana, 2009) and can be of the following types:

- *Mouth gestures*, also known in Italian as COS (componenti orali speciali/oral special components) are a form of mouth actions which is not connected to spoken languages. They are associated with a functional role both at the phonological level (they can have distinctive features) and at the morphological level (they can act as adverbs) with intensive, temporal, actional and modal values;
- *Mouthing*, (also known in Italian as IPP, immagini di parole prestate/borrowed word pictures) are units or fragments of the spoken language, with or without vocalization, in which the most visible part of the pronunciation of the word is articulated.

Three basic perspectives emerged from the works included in the 2001 volume on the mouth as articulator, all of which still underlie analyses in more recent studies. The first is an intra-linguistic perspective, which views these oral components as a part of the structure of sign language (Zeshan, 2001; Zeshan, De Vos, 2012; Hohenberger, Happ, 2001; Crasborn, 2006; Pfau, Quer, 2010; Bank, 2014).

Another approach adopts a sociolinguistic perspective (Vogt-Svendsen, 2001; Bergman, Wallin, 2001; Sutton-Spence, Day, 2001). According to these researchers, the orality in sign languages can only be traced back to the sociolinguistic situation in which sign communities have lived, e.g., to the lack of standardization of sign language, to the characteristics of the signer or interlocutor, or to the context and the communicative intention. Oral components

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*sign language interpreting: sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and educational issues*. Special issue, *Rivista di Psicolinguistica Applicata / Journal of Applied Psycholinguistics* XI, 3. Pinto, M. A., Rinaldi, P. (ed. by) (2016). *Metalinguistic awareness and bimodal bilingualism: studies on deaf and hearing subjects*. Special issue, *Rivista di Psicolinguistica Applicata / Journal of Applied Psycholinguistics*, XVI, 2.

in this approach would therefore be a contact phenomenon resulting from an education strongly focused on a strictly oral education of deaf children and destined to disappear with increasing socio-cultural acceptance of sign languages.

Lastly, there is an approach which favors a mixed hypothesis (Lucas, Valli, 1992; Lucas et al., 2001; Keller, 2001; Udoff, 2013; Balvet, Sallandre, 2016). From this perspective, orality comes into play as a constituent of meaning, like gesture in speech, coordinating both with the manual components of its own language and with extra-linguistic variables, such as, for example, the context and the linguistic knowledge of the signer and the speaker.

In Italy, the first mention of « Italian sign language oral components » by Maria Luisa Franchi, appeared in the book *La lingua italiana dei segni* (1987). Another pioneering research on oral components of LIS was conducted by Ajello et al. (1997), which was expanded upon in 2001. Moreover, Fontana, Fabbretti (2000) and Fontana (2008, 2009) described the phenomenon of LIS mouth actions posing questions about its nature and origins. Such research attributed to oral components in sign languages a function similar to that of co-verbal gestures in spoken languages.

A later survey conducted by Fontana and Raniolo (2015) with ten deaf people confirms the central importance of mouthing in LIS in which, when questioned about the acceptability of LIS utterances produced without lip movements, most of the signers found these utterances unacceptable.

Experimental research conducted by Giustolisi, Mereghetti et al. (2017) questions that mouthing is a distinctive component on an equal level with the other formation parameters of sign languages. According to their results, the authors consider mouthing to be a component external to the sign and a phenomenon of code mixing. In contrast, the research carried out by Roccaforte (2018; 2019) as part of her doctoral thesis focuses on the function of the oral components and argues that mouthings are a form of co-signing orality, similar to co-verbal gestures in spoken languages, which, using the resources of a more standardized language (e.g., Italian), interface at the signing level and provide for greater stability and intelligibility in communication among signers, performing semantic, prosodic, pragmatic and meta-conversational functions.

### **III. The present study**

In the study described here we would like to focus on the role of oral components in sign language comprehension. One aim of this study is to provide more quantitative data on the role that one form of oral components ('mouthing') plays at the lexical level of LIS, to supplement the observations that have been made in qualitative studies of LIS and other sign languages. The research question underlying the study reported here is the following:

1. Can we confirm that these oral components have an important function in LIS for disambiguating signs which from their manual components alone would be homonyms?
2. If so, are these oral components better considered to be external to the sign or as having a constitutive role in the linguistic structure of the language?

### **Method**

In order to answer our research question, we first looked at a corpus of video recorded data that has been collected by Maria de la Luz Perea Costa<sup>4</sup> using a picture-naming task with 6

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<sup>4</sup> The data from this study are stored at the Language and Communication Across Modalities Laboratory (LaCAM – Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies, CNR) in Rome. Maria Luz Perea Costa gave Maria Roccaforte permission to use the video recorded data for the study reported here.

LIS deaf signers, each from 5 Italian cities (Genoa, Gorizia, Rome, Foggia and Caltanissetta) for a total of 30 participants. All participants (3 men and 3 women for each city) had at least one deaf parent, and were thus considered as native signers. Each participant was asked to name in Italian sign language (LIS) pictures representing different foods and drinks and to talk about their eating habits.

### Test items

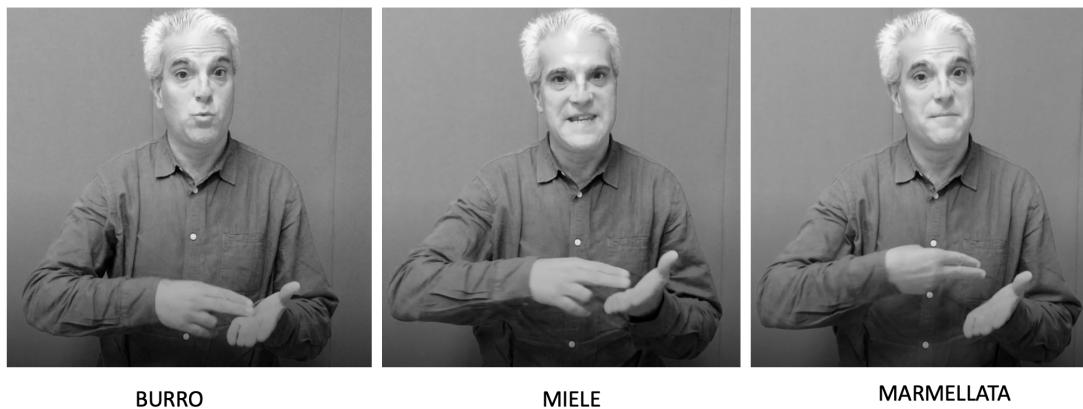
A careful analysis of all the signs that were accompanied by oral components produced by the participants in this corpus brought to light a great similarity in the manual parameters of some signs. This indicates that these signs could potentially be confused with each other, as opposed to other signs, which look very different both in the manual parameters as well as in the oral components.

For the purposes of this study, we then chose 4 triplets of manually « similar » signs. In each triplet, the signs have very similar manual formation parameters but different oral components. Figure 1a shows an example of a triplet containing the signs for « salt », « sugar » and « flour » (It.: « sale », « zucchero », « farina »), and in Figure 1b, another triplet with the signs for « butter », « honey » and « jam » (It.: « burro », « miele », « marmellata »).

a.



b.



**Figure 1.** The triplets of LIS signs for (a) « salt » (It.: « sale »), « sugar » (It.: « zucchero »), « flour » (It.: « farina »), and (b) for « butter » (It.: « burro »), « honey » (It.: « miele »), « jam » (It.: « marmellata »).

Each of the signs in Figure 1a is produced with a different oral component. However, all of them are executed with the same hand orientation, movement, and similar location, although the sign for « flour » is executed with a slightly different handshape. In Figure 1b, all of the signs are produced with the same manual parameters but with a different oral component.

If one looks only at the manual components, these are all « manual homonyms », which we will refer to here as « ambiguous » signs. Twelve additional signs were added to the test items, all of which have very different formation manual parameters, and which we will refer to here as « recognizable signs ». Videos were then made by an adult deaf native signer producing in isolation each of the 24 selected signs. A test was developed with the resulting 48 stimuli: 24 videos of signs with the mouth area blurred through video editing and the same 24 videos with the signer totally visible. The test was taken at home by deaf and hearing participants using their own computer, smartphone or tablet. After viewing the video of each lexical item, the participant was asked to select among 5 pictures presented below the video frame, as shown in Fig. 2. These 5 images represent the following:

- a) « Target » answer: An image corresponding to the sign produced in the video;
- b) « False target »: An image corresponding to a meaning that was different from that of the target sign from both a phonological (linguistic form of the sign) and visual (based on the image presented) points of view;
- c) « Visual iconic distractor »: An image that from a visual point of view can resemble the referent of the sign produced in the video;
- d) « Cheremic<sup>5</sup> distractor »: An image representing a meaning whose corresponding sign in LIS was similar to the sign seen in the video;
- e) « I don't know »: An emoticon with an interrogative expression, corresponding to the answer.

Participants were asked to select the image corresponding to the food signed in the video. Instructions were given in both written and signed form.

In Figure 2, the video presents the LIS sign for 'butter'. The first image below the video, a jar of jam, is a « Cheremic distractor » as the LIS sign for 'jam' shares with the sign for 'butter' all the same manual components but one, the handshape. The artichokes in the second image are a « False target », having no form or meaning relation to the « Target ». The cheeses in the third image are the « visual distractor » since they can resemble the referent of the sign produced in the video from a visual point of view. The fourth image is the « Target ». The last image is the emoticon meaning « I don't know ».



**Figure 2.** Example of the task: The sign for 'butter' ('burro') in the mouth blurred condition and the 5 options.

<sup>5</sup> In referring to the formation parameters of manual signs we prefer to use the term "chereme", firstly introduced by W. Stokoe, in resemblance to the term "phoneme" used for spoken languages.

Participants had the possibility to view the video more than once, but the number of repeated viewings requested was recorded. After clicking one of the options, the next item was immediately presented, with no way to go back on the choice. The data collected were exported in a.csv file and then imported in SPSS for statistical analysis.

## Participants

An invitation to perform the recognition task has been spread through online social networks. Data collection took place throughout 3 weeks with 273 signers from 79 Italian cities: 48% from central Italy (mainly from Rome), 20% from northern Italy and 32% from southern Italy (including Sicily and Sardinia). Participants had an average age of 38.5 ( $SD = 7.97$ , range = 17-56); 114 were deaf (83 native and 31 non-native signers) and 159 hearing (45 native and 114 non-native signers) persons. Thus, among all participants, 128 reported to be native signers, the remaining 145 reported to have acquired LIS after 6 years of age.

Before performing the task, participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire in order to obtain sociolinguistic information about their hearing status, linguistic knowledge of LIS, age, city, past experience with speech therapy, past experience and their awareness of the role of mouthing and mouth gestures in LIS.

## Results

The deaf participants provided overall significant higher numbers of correct answers than did the hearing participants  $F(1.271)=5.509$ ;  $p=0.02$ ; partial eta squared=0.02.

		CORRECT ANSWERS			
	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Deaf	114	41.08	5.652	17	48
Hearing	159	39.76	3.613	18	47

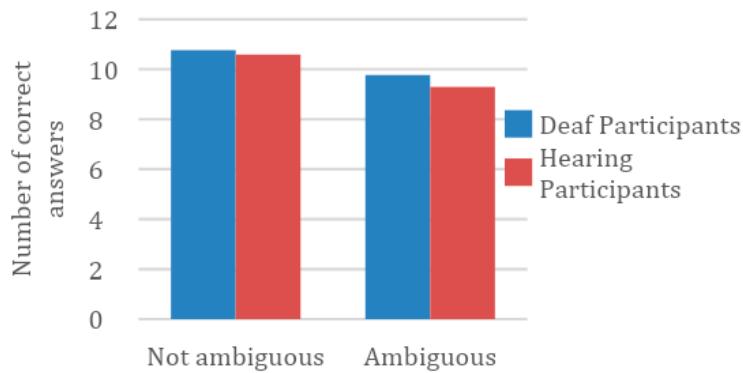
**Table 1.** Mean, standard deviation (SD) and minimum and maximum number of correct answers provided by all participants (deaf and hearing).

In order to explore the role of the different variables (i.e., hearing/deaf status, ambiguous/recognizable signs, visible/blurred condition), as well as the interrelationships among them, we ran a general linear model, with two factors within subjects: « ambiguity » (two levels: recognizable sign; ambiguous sign) and « blurring » (two levels: oral component visible; oral component blurred), and « deafness » (presence *vs* absence of deafness) as factor between participants.

The single effects of all the variables inserted were statistically significant: ambiguity  $F(1.271) = 273.528$ ;  $p < 0.0001$ ; partial eta squared=0.502; blurring  $F(1.271)=666.531$ ; partial eta squared=0.599 and deafness ( $F(1.271)=5.509$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; partial eta squared=0.02. On average, participants obtained higher scores for recognizable signs than for ambiguous signs, as well as higher scores in signs with the oral component visible than with the signs with the oral component blurred. In addition, deaf participants obtained higher scores than hearing participants.

As for the interactions among variables, the interaction between ambiguity and deafness ( $F(1.271) = 4.519$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ; partial eta squared=0.16), and the interaction between ambiguity and blurring ( $F(1.271)=129.127$ ;  $p < 0.0001$ ; partial eta squared = 0.324) were statistically significant. The first one shows that deaf participants obtained significantly higher scores than hearing participants with ambiguous signs but not with recognizable signs.

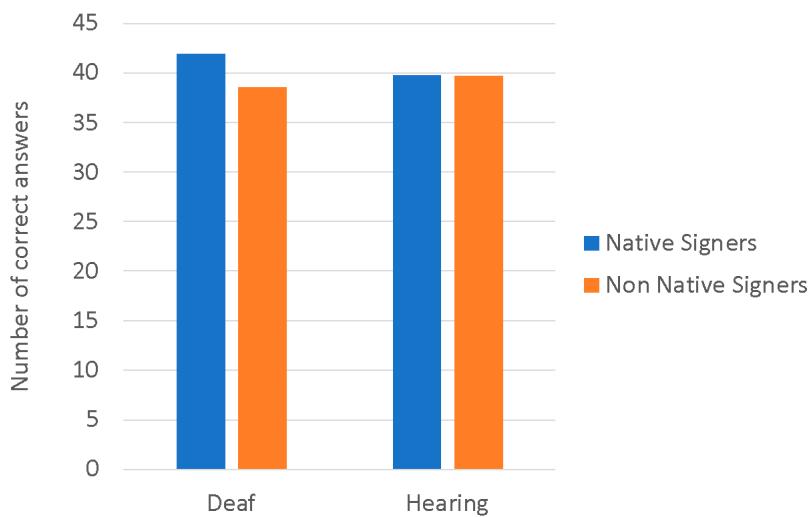
The second one shows that when signs are ambiguous, participants (both deaf and hearing) obtained significantly higher scores when they are presented with the oral component visible than when they are presented with the oral component not visible. The interaction between blurring and deafness and the interaction among ambiguity, blurring and deafness were not statistically significant.



**Figure 3.** Number of correct answers provided by all participants (deaf and hearing) in ambiguous and unambiguous signs.

Our data showed that the ambiguity of the sign has a different effect on deaf participants compared to hearing participants. In the absence of oral components, deaf persons tend to recognize similar signs more easily. However, when the ambiguity of the sign is combined with the masking, the chance of producing a correct answer decreases significantly for ambiguous signs, both with deaf and hearing participants.

Considering the total number of items administered in all conditions, deaf native signers provided a significantly higher number of correct answers than deaf non-native signers  $F(1,112) = 8.653$ ;  $p = 0.004$ . The same difference was not significant in respect to native and non-native hearing signers.



**Figure 4.** Number of correct answers provided by native (deaf and hearing) and non-native (deaf and hearing) signers for all items in all conditions.

An additional analysis concerned the 4 types of answers chosen apart from the correct answer (TARGET), which involved the following options:

- Image that is not similar either visually or phonologically: « False target »
- Image that is visually similar to the referent: « Iconic distractor »
- Image that is phonologically similar: « Cheremic distractor »
- « Don't know »

The following chart provides the percentages of each category of answers different from targets provided by deaf and hearing participants.

	RECOGNIZABLE MASKED		RECOGNIZABLE NON-MASKED		AMBIGUOUS MASKED		AMBIGUOUS NON-MASKED	
	Deaf	Hearing	Deaf	Hearing	Deaf	Hearing	Deaf	Hearing
False target	11%	12%	19%	12%	4%	6%	25%	15%
Iconic distractor	19%	15%	26%	20%	23%	14%	32%	28%
Cheremic distractor	22%	21%	42%	41%	49%	60%	27%	28%
Don't know	48%	52%	13%	27%	24%	20%	16%	29%

**Table 2.** Distribution of incorrect answers (percentage) for deaf and hearing participants.

The most interesting results come, as anticipated, from the analysis of the answers elicited in the masked sign condition: about half of the participants who gave a wrong answer choose the option « I don't know » as if feeling justified in not being able to decipher the sign in the absence of a component (i.e., a mouthing) that is fundamental for its decoding. In the other cases, the cheremic distractor is chosen most often, especially for the ambiguous signs with masked oral components. In these cases, the hearing participants (native and non-native signers), are more likely to confuse the sign that can be distinguished only by a single chereme, demonstrating once again that the presence of the oral component is very relevant for hearing persons in the comprehension of a decontextualized sign.

We found that the number of times the participants asked to watch the video again (between 1 to 5 times) was very high: 87% of all participants had viewed one of the videos more than once. Ambiguous signs were viewed again more often than recognizable (unambiguous) signs, and signs with the oral component obscured were viewed more often than signs with the oral component visible. After viewing the video more than once, 84% of participants provided a correct answer.

As could have been predicted, the very high number of viewing repetitions reached its highest point when ambiguous signs had the oral components obscured. Masked ambiguous signs were seen again by almost all participants and, after having seen the sign, only about two thirds of them answered correctly, while the rest chose either the « Cheremic distractor » or the « Iconic distractor ». Furthermore, if the oral component was masked, the deaf participants chose less frequently the option « I don't know », and rather tended to choose one of the options anyway.

#### IV. Discussion and concluding remarks

The results present a complex picture. First, as expected, deaf participants provided significantly higher numbers of correct answers than hearing participants, confirming their higher proficiency in sign comprehension probably due to their larger vocabulary knowledge. Again, it is interesting to note that they chose the option « I don't know » less frequently than the hearing participants.

Deaf native signers provided a significantly higher number of correct answers than the non-native deaf signers. The same was not true for hearing participants, who did not differ according to being native or non-native signers, suggesting that having deaf parents does not by itself mean growing in a signing environment, nor does by itself automatically produce the same competency in signing as when the learner is also deaf.

As for our main research question, ambiguous signs with an obscured oral component were confirmed as being more difficult for both deaf and hearing participants. However, deaf participants recognized signs with the obscured oral component better than hearing

participants. What could be the reason for the better performance of the deaf L1 learners, then? Perhaps there is some other slight difference in one of the manual components (e.g., movement, orientation) that disambiguates what one thinks to be manual homonyms? Years of practice in lip-reading of all sorts? All these hypotheses deserve further investigation with a research design that takes into account all these possible explanations.

Approximately half of all participants (both deaf and hearing) did not provide the correct answer when the oral component was obscured, and the preferred choice for the answer was the cheremic distractor. This finding could be explained by the fact that, when the mouth components were missing, participants conveyed their attention toward similarities among other manual formation parameters.

The results presented above confirm that mouthing has a distinctive disambiguating function at the lexical level. This leads us to conclude that mouth actions have a constitutive role in LIS and should not be considered to be an extralinguistic phenomenon, as had been assumed in older traditional linguistic descriptions of the language.

In a recent socio-semiotic analysis of LIS (Volterra, Roccaforte, Di Renzo, Fontana, 2022) all the articulatory components that contribute to the production of the signs (i.e., hands, positions of the torso, facial expression, eye gaze direction and movements of the mouth) are considered to be of equal importance and therefore should be included in the basic linguistic description of the language. The results of the present study offer empirical evidence of the importance of mouthing for correct recognition and identification of LIS lexical items, and therefore confirm mouthing as a basic constituent of LIS. In the past, many so-called « non-manual components » were treated as paralinguistic elements comparable to prosody or gesture in spoken languages that were traditionally considered paralinguistic or extralinguistic. These types of elements have been often excluded from linguistic analysis also because they are difficult to describe based on traditional, discrete categories of structuralist or formal linguistics. In signed languages, orality seems to come into play as a basic component for conveying meaning, and – like co-speech gestures – can be characterized as being « unstable » (as it is highly variable and idiosyncratic), and functional at the same time.

Furthermore, all these phenomena are also gradient and often produced simultaneously with other elements, which also makes it difficult to analyze them in terms of discrete and sequential categories.

We view spoken and signed language as being alike in including not only elements with inherent and stable properties but also multimodal linguistic units with flexible and intrinsically gradient boundaries. If we accept, therefore, that in both spoken and signed languages many of the basic components are continuous and gradient, many concepts and categories have to be reconsidered. Linguistic elements including gradient boundaries may appear more variable but their variation is limited by the need for comprehensibility of the content whether it be spoken or signed.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of mouthing – as co-signed orality – is borrowed, bound and subject to the movement and rhythm involved in the execution of the sign, losing its articulatory nature and transforming itself into a global unit, as expressive gestalt, or articulatory cluster. Once again, the results confirm the centrality of the oral components in recognizing isolated signs, supporting the intelligibility of the sign through cues borrowed from a more standardized language i.e., spoken Italian in our case.

The topic of mouth actions, as we have seen, is wide-ranging as it is tied to the social and identity-related questions of Deaf people and thus, in some cases, could be seen as an addition that might damage the prestige and linguistic independence of sign language. Rather, our results show that mouthing has a fundamental role in sign language comprehension in helping to disambiguate lexical items which belong to the same semantic field and which could easily result in being misunderstood without the oral component. According to our perspective, mouth actions accompanying the flow of signs can provide increased stability in communication.

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# Deaf professionals know: perspectives on interpreters, employers, and creating communication equity in the workplace<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *Deaf employees who use a signed language bring a lifetime of experience to the workplace regarding how to navigate communication with non-signers. However, Deaf employees rarely, if ever, are consulted about how to foster equitable communication at work, particularly in regard to the use of signed language interpreters. Interpreter-mediated communication in the workplace holds legal ramifications, impacts Deaf employees over decades of their careers, and is often extremely unsatisfactory. In this paper, we report a portion of research data revealing the comprehensive knowledge of Deaf employees regarding critical aspects of workplace communication, including power dynamics, hierarchical structure, position, status, and influence. The data shows that Deaf employees hold detailed knowledge about interpreters' professional practice, cognitive processes, linguistic skills, interpersonal behaviors, knowledge, and experience. We speculate on reasons that employers do not include Deaf employees in decisions about workplace communication. We argue for a shift towards a conscious approach to communication access through consumer-centered conversations about creating effective and equitable communication practices for all employees.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Deaf, interpreters, Deaf employees, sign language, equitable communication, power dynamics.*

## I. Introduction

Effective workplace communication is the smooth exchange of information and ideas between employees that serves to advance organizational goals and generate a sense of well-being, belonging, and job satisfaction (Day et al., 2014; Waddell, Burton, 2006). If employees have quality communication, misunderstandings can be reduced and job performance enhanced. However, when communication breaks down, the result may negatively impact organizational performance, workplace climate, and employee morale (Conrad, 2014). Indeed, ineffective workplace communication can result in tensions and incivility that grinds productivity to a halt (Okoro, Washington, 2012). For the most part, workplace communication occurs between employees who use the same language; however, even when sharing a common language, misunderstandings and communication problems may still arise. Unlike their hearing colleagues, ease of workplace communication for Deaf employees is not a given; rather, communication is a daily process of negotiation with the potential for misunderstandings and mishaps. Deaf employees may endure forty or more years of communication difficulties, which can have cumulative effects on both the individual and the workplace.

In the United States, Deaf employees who use American Sign Language frequently communicate at work via signed language interpreters; however, recurrent issues regarding the

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laws, practice, and experience of interpreter-mediated communication make it a topic worthy of investigation. First, in the U.S., disability legislation mandates that all government and many private employers hold a legal obligation to make reasonable accommodations for their Deaf employees, which often takes the form of signed language interpreters. All large-scale governmental rulings deserve examination; however, the effectiveness of interpreter provision historically has not been well governed nor evaluated for its effectiveness. Second, Deaf employees may use interpreters throughout their entire working lives making language-mediated communication a protracted and important service that warrants careful examination. Third, despite the enormous impact of interpreting on Deaf employees' working lives, they frequently report in conversation that the systems for interpreter provision are neither uniform nor satisfactory. Fourth, communicating via an interpreter who is not fully qualified – or even minimally bilingual – can create obstacles that non-Deaf employees never encounter. In addition, the systems that underlie interpreter provision in the workplace also can undermine the goal of communication equity, rather than facilitate it. Finally, the interaction of Deaf employees through a signed language interpreter is a complex but relatively understudied topic, thus the full impact of interpreter-mediated communication is still unclear. As a result, employers and interpreters do not have sufficient information for making decisions that can support the ease of communication for Deaf employees that is experienced by hearing employees. Considering the legal obligations of providing equitable communication, the long-term ramifications of interpreting on Deaf employees, the logistical challenges of providing high quality services, the need for skilled interpreters, and the complexity of workplace interaction, it is surprising that more attention has not been given to the topic of signed language interpreting in the workplace.

The central argument of this paper is that Deaf employees are experts in their communication needs, yet, for a variety of reasons, are rarely asked about their perspectives on what constitutes effective interpreted communication. This is not to say that Deaf employees are never asked about their preferences, but their suggestions may not be implemented or they may be given added responsibilities surrounding interpreter provision. In this paper, we provide an overview of studies that examine the communication of Deaf employees. We then present data from a 2019 study by Harrelson of 17 Deaf professionals that documents their experiences and perspectives of interpreter-mediated communication in the workplace.

## **II. Deaf employees are bilingual experts in communication**

Deaf adults who use signed languages hold a lifetime of experience negotiating communication with hearing people who do not sign (Moriarty, Harrelson, 2017; Moriarty, Kusters, 2021). Deaf employees bring this wealth of experience to the workplace when communicating with their non-signing colleagues. One avenue of communication used by Deaf people at various points in their lives is via signed language interpreters. Given Deaf people's long experience with interpreters, it seems logical that they would guide the policies and systems for the provision of interpreters in their workplace. Thus, without seeking – and implementing – Deaf employees' expertise, interpreted communication cannot adequately meet Deaf employees' needs. This is important because inadequate or unsatisfactory communication for Deaf employees not only marginalizes the participation of Deaf employees, but is also detrimental to the overall goals of the workplace.

In 1968, Alan Crammatte, a Deaf professor in the Department of Business at Gallaudet University, conducted one of the first studies of Deaf professionals in the United States. Crammatte examined various aspects of the employees' professional life and documented the « pervasive nature of communication problems » (Crammatte, 1968: 88). Interestingly, Crammatte's study took place prior to the passage of legislative protections in the U.S. and the availability of interpreters in the workplace. Therefore it is unsurprising that scant mention is made of the use of

interpreters in the workplace. Over six decades have passed since Crammatte's seminal study, and the social conditions for Deaf citizens have changed markedly in that time.

After a period of time with little research on Deaf perspectives of interpreter-mediated communication, Forestal (2005) collected survey results from 394 Deaf individuals who were officers and board members of national and state Deaf associations. Among the perspectives shared by these community leaders, Forestal found that 55% of respondents reported negative experiences, specifically citing poor performance in ASL-to-English interpretations. Respondents reported negative perceptions of interpreters for reasons including interpreters' use of lag time, late arrival, patronizing attitude, ego-control, lack of training, deficient signed language skills, inappropriate attire, lack of facial expressions, immaturity, and explaining instead of interpreting. They also reported that interpreters exhibited bad attitudes, produced exaggerated sign production and facial expressions, and became personally involved in interactions. In a more recent study, Haug et al. (2017) examined Deaf leaders across seven countries. The participants identified varied levels of confidence in interpreters in both language directions, the need to establish criteria for interpreter selection, their evaluation of interpreters' competences, and strategies for working with interpreters.

With increasing frequency, Deaf people have shared their thoughts about signed language interpreters in various settings (See for example, educational interpreting – Oliva, Lytle, 2002; community interpreting – Holcomb, Smith, 2018; healthcare interpreting – Nicodemus, Kushalnagar, Whynot, 2021). Taken together, these studies reveal both problematic issues in interpreting as well as strategies to improve the quality of interpretation. Such studies make evident that Deaf people are highly aware of the issues with interpreter-mediated communication across various settings.

A breakthrough volume by Hauser et al. (2008) revealed the evolution in Deaf employees' working conditions since the time of Crammatte's study forty years earlier, in which interpreters were barely mentioned. Since that time interpreters in the workplace have become more commonplace. Notably, Hauser et al. (2008) contains first-person narratives by Deaf professionals who use « designated interpreters » practitioners who work over an extended period with one Deaf professional. Designated interpreters are described as being well-prepared communication specialists, knowledgeable about the field and specialized content, and highly familiar with the Deaf professional, their workplace, and colleagues. Critically, the concept of a designated interpreter reinforced that interpreters are not interchangeable parts that can be easily shifted between settings. The contributors in Hauser et al. (2008) argue that designated interpreters provide Deaf professionals with consistent, ready access to communication that approaches parity with their hearing colleagues, resulting in greater communication equity among employees. These first-person observations given by Deaf professionals offer much-needed recognition to the value of consumer expertise in interpreter provision. Deaf professionals are shown to be serious and knowledgeable specialists committed to their professions, and also experts in their own communication access. While designated interpreters are still not in widespread use, cultivating awareness of the benefits of this arrangement was trailblazing and has shaped hiring practices for some Deaf professionals.

Using a linguistic ethnography approach to examine workplace interpreting, Dickinson (2017) collected data from questionnaires, journals, field observations, video recordings of interpreted interactions and video playback interviews with participants. As a result of this extensive study, Dickinson published a series of papers (2010, 2013; Dickinson, Turner, 2008, 2009) emphasizing the complex work of interpreters by highlighting specific aspects of discourse (e.g., turn-taking, footing shifts, « water cooler talk ») in interpreter-mediated communication. Her work illustrated the complexity and importance of conveying various discourse features in facilitating successful interactions between Deaf and hearing employees. As in Hauser et al. (2008), Dickinson's findings reinforce the multilayered challenges of effective workplace interpreting.

Several other studies have added to the literature about signed language interpreters in the workplace. Topics have included the effect of fatigue while interpreting (Brasel et al., 1974), significant access work required by Deaf academics (Campbell, Rohan, Wilcox, 2008), working conditions of Deaf professionals (Bristoll, 2009), interpreting for Deaf medical professionals (Moreland, Agan, 2012), evaluations of Deaf tour guides by hearing supervisors as compared who use interpreters (Feyne, 2015), the roles and relationships of designated interpreters with Deaf employees (Miner, 2015), perspectives of non-signers toward their Deaf colleagues (Young et al., 2019), and the discrete interpreter behaviors and institutional systems that influence Deaf employees' workplace communication (Harrelson, 2020).

We offer these descriptions of prior studies about Deaf employees and interpreters as the foundation for arguments in this paper – that is, Deaf professionals hold expertise in how to communicate effectively via interpreters in the workplace. Our findings support these earlier studies about Deaf professionals' expertise and extend them by presenting a more granular analysis of Deaf professionals' observations about interpreter behaviors and interpreting delivery systems. In addition, we provide data regarding the costs that Deaf professionals may have to pay for sharing their experience and knowledge in the workplace.

### **III. Defining effectiveness in interpreters and systems**

Harrelson (2019) interviewed 17 Deaf professionals to collect their observations of workplace communication using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), a research method often employed to examine workplace processes (Flanagan, 1954). In CIT the researcher asks a participant, referred to as an « observer, » to recall a specific situation in which some behavior impacted, either positively or negatively, the outcome under investigation. The words « critical incident » may imply an action with a momentous impact, however, to be regarded as critical in the CIT approach, « an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects » (Flanagan, 1954: 327). For example, a Deaf employee may describe an instance of a spontaneous workplace interaction in which she had immediate access to an interpreter, which she judged to be effective. CIT categorizes such accounts as critical incidents. Collecting such observations from knowledgeable participants is useful for uncovering the effects of seemingly mundane behaviors.

Harrelson (2019) collected a total of 947 critical incidents from Deaf professionals' regarding interpreter behaviors and systemic factors that influenced the participants' interpreter-mediated communication in the workplace. The critical incidents were categorized into 270 desired behaviors that describe specific behaviors both about interpreters and the systems that would create more successful workplace communication. To our knowledge, this is the first study that collected detailed observations from Deaf professionals about the effectiveness of communication at work and which reveals their extensive understanding about interpreters.

#### **Deaf professionals hold expertise about interpreter behaviors**

In this study, Deaf participants provided a multitude of specific observations (614 critical incidents) about interpreters which led to the formation of 154 specific desired behaviors across five thematic clusters of interpreter behaviors: (a) professional practice, (b) interpreting process, (c) linguistic skills, (d) interpersonal skills, and (e) knowledge and experience. Deaf professionals pointed to numerous characteristics of interpreters, indicating their rich understanding of the complexity and nuances of interpreter-mediated communication. We provide a brief data sample from each thematic cluster below.

*Professional practice* comprises behaviors related to preparation, attire, demeanor, business practices, and timeliness, among others. Professional practice was the largest cluster of critical incidents about interpreter behavior ( $n=220$ ), which resulted in 63 desired behaviors. One of the most prevalent critical incidents described by participants surrounded the importance of the interpreters preparing for assignments which includes materials review, attending meetings while not interpreting (with or without the Deaf professional), and rehearsal with the Deaf professional. For example, one participant, Melanie<sup>2</sup>, made observations about interpreters' preparation for her presentations.

**Melanie:** Some people assume that Deaf people can't be effective public speakers but I'm on the speaking circuit here at work. I know the content and I rehearse quite a bit before I give a presentation. I work with interpreters who know me well and we rehearse together. I get to the point where I can actually engage with an audience, speak eloquently, and the interpreter uses the exact words I've selected in English. The interpreters get so comfortable with my content that I can then weave in comments about the current environment at the department or people attending the event. Because of that comfort level and trust I get great reviews on my presentations. The rehearsal time is a big part of those positive reviews.

*Interpreting process* included observations about working with other interpreters, clarifying the message, deciding what to interpret, who to interpret for, when to interpret, turn management, and processing time. Interpreting process was the second largest cluster of critical incidents about interpreter behavior ( $n=140$ ), and resulted in 42 desired behaviors. In the following examples, we give data from two participants, Elizabeth and Linda, who observed issues with interpreters maintaining a neutral stance in their work.

**Elizabeth:** There is one freelance interpreter who has been here about three times who is very politically liberal. And I get it. Politics is hard. But I work for a Republican. I have one interpreter who always rolls her eyes or makes facial expressions if my boss says something the interpreter doesn't agree with. Maybe the Deaf population is more politically liberal and less conservative. But I'm a Republican and I work for a Republican. It frustrates me even though I am the only one who sees it and it distracts me from what my boss is saying. This isn't the time and place for that kind of thing. It is totally unprofessional.

**Linda:** One time I had an interpreter for an intake interview in which the client was newly released from jail and had been charged with murder. This client talked about how he was having visions of the person he had killed. You could interpret this to mean that he was seeing ghosts or that this was evidence of a mental health issue. The interpreter was incredibly uncomfortable in the situation. It was clear that she was judging my client to the point where I had to intervene and start voicing for myself. I needed to go with the flow with this particular client and explore what he was experiencing. The interpreter really struggled with maintaining professionalism. Her lack of experience and exposure to this kind of situation really showed. She didn't know how to deal with a murderer who perhaps had mental health issues.

*Linguistic skills* include observations about comprehension and production of American Sign Language and English as well as interpretation between the two languages (130 critical incidents; 30 desired behaviors). Several participants described the natural use of ASL features in the interpreters' target language production. Melanie described interpreters' distracting eye gaze behaviors while watching her sign, specifically, interpreters who look at her hands when she signs instead of the typical practice of gazing at the signer's face. Melanie added, « I also don't like interpreters who use excessive wide-eyed nodding... they look like a deer in the headlights. »

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<sup>2</sup> All participant names in this paper are pseudonyms.

Participants described the ineffectiveness of working with interpreters who do not have sufficient ASL fluency, commenting that they disrupt the workflow in a fast-paced office environment. Joseph finds himself facing additional cognitive demands during meetings with interpreters who don't have a sufficiently large and complex ASL vocabulary. « Our meetings are fast paced. If I have to continually feed the interpreter we get behind, it is distracting for me, and I can't ask the other participants to wait until we catch up. »

In their comments regarding interpreters' English production, Deaf participants described a preference for interpreters to represent them professionally with English discourse norms appropriate to the workplace. Critical incidents included observations about target language register, technical vocabulary, workplace English, disfluencies, and fillers. For example, several participants commented on interpreters either lower – or raise – the register of the ASL-to-English interpretation. Edward asserted that interpreters should produce English interpretations that are in accordance with the Deaf consumer's professional status.

**Edward:** I love my current interpreter but sometimes she isn't familiar with certain vocabulary, for example, the word 'permutations.' I had to spell it a few times, she tried pronouncing it, and my colleagues finally got it. But she clearly didn't know that word. If I had signed it in ASL she might have said 'combination' or 'mix' but I didn't want those words. I wanted 'permutations.' It has a specific work-related meaning.

Richard states that having effective interpretation into English is « really important so that I don't look like an idiot. » As with many aspects of workplace communication, Deaf professionals view interpreters' English production as having a high-stakes impact on how they are perceived in the workplace.

**Edward:** I worked with a guy one time and he ended up being in a grad program with my wife. He didn't know the two of us were married and he mentioned to her that he worked with a Deaf guy who at first didn't seem very bright but that once he started getting emails from me he realized that it was the interpretations that had given him that impression. He found the interpretations to be brief and overly simplistic. When we corresponded on email he had a completely different impression of me and he realized that I did know what I was talking about.

*Interpersonal skills* include observations regarding interpreters' engaging in small talk with Deaf and hearing consumers, maintaining boundaries, and forging their connection to the Deaf community (84 critical incidents; 12 desired behaviors). For example, participants noted that through small talk, interpreters are able to create bonds with consumers while also managing interpersonal distance. One participant, Halah, commented that she engages in small talk with the interpreter for strategic reasons, « Small talk really helps me calibrate my ASL to fit their needs. Interpreters are here to work and meet my needs, of course. But I need to be able to meet their needs, too ».

Melanie pointed to engaging in small talk to increase rapport with interpreters, expose them to her language style, and remind them of her professional goals.

**Melanie:** I foster a casual atmosphere here in the office to build that rapport with my on-call interpreters for two reasons. One, it helps interpreters understand my signing style organically. It isn't enough for interpreters to see an explanation or read prep materials about my position or about a presentation I'm scheduled to give. Instead, we chat about a wide variety of events and through that they learn a lot about me and my personality. It is important that interpreters understand the range of topics that may come up.

Melanie also remarked that she wants interpreters to understand her position and expectations for interpreters and that a conversational approach is more effective when discussing boundaries.

Thus, Deaf professionals regard engaging in small talk directly with interpreters as having value; however, the participants reported that boundary issues can arise when interpreters engage in small talk with their hearing colleagues. As the following comment shows, when interpreters engage in small talk with hearing colleagues, it can delay immediate access to interpreting, devalue the connections between Deaf and hearing colleagues, and weaken the professional status of the Deaf professional.

**Edward:** One of my previous interpreters would be chatting in the office and when I let her know I needed interpreting she would say 'oh, just a minute' and continue with her conversation. She really should quickly cut her conversation short and interpret for me when I need her... I think that kind of disrespect shows my co-workers that I'm not important.

Interestingly, a few Deaf professionals offered an opposing view about interpreters' engagement in small talk with hearing colleagues. Unlike Edward's experience, Susan shared that in an international setting, small talk with hearing colleagues has served to model the appropriate degree of professional regard for her position. She also recognized that interpreters' friendly engagement with her hearing colleagues can lay the groundwork for her own positive association with those colleagues.

**Susan:** In [country] they aren't used to seeing Deaf people in professional occupations. If the interpreter has her own relationships with my colleagues, she can more easily serve in a cultural-mediator role. If they are more comfortable with her, they will be more comfortable having her interpret and they will be more comfortable interacting with me.

Susan also described the benefits of interpreters engaging in small talk with international colleagues as a means of creating contextualized interpretations. For example, when her interpreter develops a relationship with local employees, the interpreter is able to « effectively interpret concepts without relying on me to teach her all of those very specific culturally-bound details. »

*Knowledge and experience* included observations (40 critical incidents; 7 desired behaviors) about interpreter-mediated communication in which the interpreter demonstrated understanding of the Deaf person's profession, the goals of specific meetings or projects, and the roles and personalities of other professionals in the setting. Diana, an engineer in the federal nuclear agency, despaired at never having interpreters with the sufficient knowledge and experience of her field, and reported the toll that it takes on her.

**Diana:** The type of work I do is highly specialized. The interpreters I have are really bad. I am always having to translate in my head what I'm seeing and it isn't easy. Sometimes they are way off! Recently in a meeting we were discussing the 'uranium enrichment process' and the interpreter signed 'Richmond, Virginia.' I said, 'Did he just say uranium?' and she said 'No.' This kind of thing is so frustrating!... We have a concept in our field called 'criticality' and interpreters often express it using the sign for IMPORTANT. That isn't the right meaning. It should be [demonstrates sign]! It is so much work for me just to follow a conversation and interpreters think that this is just a regular assignment or that the signs they create or the misunderstandings that occur are funny.

A supervisor in the information technology field, James described the importance of interpreters having knowledge about the roles of people in meetings.

**James:** In a meeting there may be ten or fifteen people all talking at the same time. It can be hard to make a comment. If I am trying to interject my own comment, the interpreter should let me know that my boss is talking so I can wait. Office politeness dictates that you don't interrupt your boss. But it is perfectly okay to interrupt a colleague or subordinate. Interpreters need to know who is who and what their position is within the organization. When there is fast turn-

taking going on or things become heated, I don't always know who is speaking. So I need the interpreter to tell me if I am about to interrupt my boss if I hadn't noticed that. I can wait.

Taken together these quotes exemplify that participants highly value having interpreters who have extensive knowledge about their professional field. The participants further report that this knowledge results in demonstrably more effective interpretations. Such specialized knowledge may be gained through education and specialized content training. The participants also point to the importance of interpreters having experience within the Deaf professional's specific workplace. The participants noted that having the same interpreters in their workplace over an extended period of time results in the interpreters' acquisition of background knowledge, which again results in more effective interpretations.

#### IV. Discussion

In this paper, we offer observations from Deaf employees about effective workplace communication via signed language interpreters. One might predict that the most frequently cited characteristic the participants would mention is that of interpreters' linguistic skills; surprisingly, however, linguistic skills ranked third among the themes in the data. The Deaf participants identified a wide range and number of interpreters' characteristics that revealed their nuanced understanding of the complexity of interpreter-mediated communication. For example, participants noted other critical aspects of the workplace that influence communication, including recognition of power dynamics, hierarchical structure, position, status, and influence. Based on their expertise, the participants in this study concluded that effective interpreting should be provided by responsive, prepared, knowledgeable, bilingual, and professional signed language interpreters who understand the challenges inherent to workplace communication. The participants' multi-faceted observations in this study support our central argument – that Deaf employees are experts about their communication needs.

For a variety of reasons, however, Deaf employees are rarely asked to share their perspectives about what constitutes effective interpreting. We are not suggesting that Deaf employees are *never* asked about their preferences, but Deaf employees regularly report that they are rarely consulted about interpreting services in their workplace. And when they are asked, Deaf employees state that their feedback and preferences are largely ignored or that they may be assigned added responsibilities surrounding interpreter provision. This situation leads us to the questions: « Why aren't Deaf employees consulted about their communication preferences and, when they are, why are their comments typically unheeded? » We offer speculations about potential responses about what underlies this question.

First, we must acknowledge that professional signed language interpreters hold responsibility in providing communication access to Deaf employees. Indeed, the vast majority of interpreters are highly committed professionals. While the participants made some negative observations about interpreters, we are not insinuating that such comments are driven by individual interpreters' lack of effort or ability. Rather, we attribute these comments in part to a lack of communication about the elements that result in more effective interpreting in the workplace. Without question, there are unqualified interpreters working in the field; however, it may also be that interpreters who are labeled as « unfit » may merely be the wrong fit for specific Deaf employees or a particular workplace. This mismatch may arise because of unstated expectations of the interpreter, the Deaf employee, or the employer who provides, supervises, and pays the interpreter.

Returning to the central question: why aren't Deaf employees asked about their communication in the workplace and why is their feedback largely ignored? We propose that employers are responsible for effective communication for their Deaf employees, but frequently

fail in that endeavor. As stated earlier, Deaf employees are highly informed and sophisticated consumers with a broad range of experiences negotiating communication. In contrast, hearing employers generally have very limited experience with Deaf employees or signed language interpreters. In fact, many employers may only encounter one Deaf employee in their entire career. To complicate matters, their experience may be with a Deaf employee who they believe can navigate the workplace without an interpreter, overlooking the degree to which this assumption is accurate. This leads the employer to the mistaken belief that all Deaf employees are the same and further, other Deaf employees should fall in line with what is comfortable for the employer.

Below, in italics we suggest several statements that may be made by employers to justify both their management of interpreting services and their rationale for not consulting with Deaf employees about their communication preferences.

#### **« Nobody told me. I didn't know! »**

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (PL 101-336) are the primary pieces of American legislation that guarantees certain rights to individuals with disabilities in the workplace. It may be that supervisors are not well trained about their legal responsibilities regarding communication access for Deaf employees in the workplace. As a result, they may make decisions about communication access that are based on their own personal viewpoints or outdated workplace practices, rather than legal mandates. In the same vein, it may also be that employers have not considered the impact that limited communication has on the effectiveness and productivity of Deaf employees in the workplace. We suggest here that the simple solution to this lack of knowledge lies in both becoming familiar with disability legislation and further, asking Deaf employees what would provide them with equitable communication.

#### **« Interpreters aren't central to our mission and besides, they're too expensive! »**

Supervisors may also perceive providing communication to their Deaf employees is not central to the mission of the organization or further, that interpreters are an undesirable distraction in that mission. Employers who also have the responsibility of budgetary oversight, may believe that hiring interpreters is a financial burden to the department. Hiring professional interpreters bears a cost, which may disincentivize employers from considering how to provide the most effective services. As a result, they may try to cut costs by seeking the cheapest services, even if they are substandard according to the Deaf employee. Ironically, the cost of interpreters may also cause employers to resist hiring more Deaf employees; however, having more Deaf employees in an organization actually may reduce the incremental costs of communication access over that of having only one Deaf employee. Further, employers may believe that Deaf employees make unnecessary and therefore wasteful requests. That belief may be grounded on an unconscious comparison to non-Deaf employees' requests for communication, which is nothing.

#### **« Can't this problem be resolved by technology?! »**

Employers may have the impression that there is an easy technological « fix » for providing communication access to Deaf employees. Much communication in the modern workplace has moved to text-based technologies; text messaging, email, and other forms of written communication have become the norm. Computer-generated captioning in video conferencing platforms are now ubiquitous and readily available to all employees. The advent of cochlear implants may also promulgate the idea that all Deaf employees could hear if they only utilized this technology, which is far from the case. Employers may assume that these technolo-

gies eliminate the need for interpreter-mediated communication; however, this overlooks the importance of both scheduled and impromptu interactions between Deaf professionals and colleagues, managers and customers.

**« Even when we do request interpreters, they are never available! Given that, how can you expect us to get interpreters who also have knowledge about our work? »**

In our study, Deaf employees stated a preference for interpreters who have even a basic understanding about their specific profession, but employers may feel it is impossible to fulfill such requests. Interpreting agencies may report that they can't find interpreters who bring such expertise to a specific workplace. It may be the case that there are not signed language interpreters who also have training in such areas as enterprise architecture or information security. However, we contend that organizations recruit, incentivize, and train professionals in all other areas of their organizations and hiring qualified interpreters should be no different. « Build it and they will come » could be rephrased as « incentivize them and they will come. »

**« Can't they see how hard I'm trying and how much I'm already doing for them? Why aren't they just grateful for having a job? »**

It may be that some employers do not have an infrastructure that makes interpreter service provision an integrated component of the workplace, which can result in headaches for the supervisor. Unfortunately, it may also be that supervisors hold negative attitudes toward Deaf employees, viewing them as ungrateful complainers who should be grateful for whatever services they receive. In this study, Deaf people reported that supervisors frequently were condescending to them, an attitude that may be borne on personal perceptions about people with disabilities, their status as users of a minority language, or their hearing and speech differences. Deaf employees frequently report being viewed as recipients of charity, rather than as individuals who bring important knowledge to the workplace. In the « charity » perspective, Deaf people are given to, rather than consulted with, a situation that can result in both an ineffective and inefficient use of funds and supervisors' resentment when the Deaf employee argues for services that would actually meet their needs. Employers may feel « Can't they see I'm just trying to help? » when a better question would be: « What are they telling me? »

We have speculated about five potential factors underlying employers' current management of interpreting services and for not consulting with Deaf employees about their communication preferences. We conclude this section with an argument for why providing communication access in consultation with Deaf employees is of critical importance. That is, what are the implications of doing things right? At a basic level, ensuring equity in communication for Deaf employees not only satisfies mandated legislative requirements, but also fulfills the spirit of the law. If the employer genuinely wants to meet the requirements and spirit of the legislation, actively asking Deaf employees' preferences is the means to more fully and effectively meet their needs. By asking, it is revealed that signed language interpreting is a specific service for each individual and the final arbiter of any personal service is the consumer. Interpreting services are by definition personal, and highly variable, both in the provision and in the reception, and must be tailored to the recipient. Doing so also supports society's growing awareness of the need for equity of all citizens. Finally, providing effective access to workplace communication allows the Deaf professional to fully engage in the workplace and contribute their talents toward meeting organizational goals. Cultivating a workplace environment in which Deaf employees can experience communication similar to that of the direct communication of their non-Deaf colleagues has the potential to increase productivity in the workplace for everyone.

## IV. Conclusion

Work is a significant and long-lasting human activity that affects people's economic, social, and psychological lives. In the United States, recognition of the value of work has led to legislation that mandates various accommodations for employees with disabilities. Deaf citizens, a linguistic and cultural minority, are considered a protected class under these legislative mandates. For Deaf employees who use a signed language, accommodations center around communication access, which is often provided through signed language interpreters. We report data from a study of Deaf employees' observations about their experience with interpreters at work. One key finding in the study is that Deaf employees, who bring a lifetime of experiences with communicating with non-signers, are highly knowledgeable about the complexities of the interpreting process. However, the study indicates that Deaf employees are rarely, if ever, asked about how interpreting can best meet their need for workplace communication. Under the law, many employers are responsible for ensuring equitable communication for their Deaf employees. We suggest that a critical step in ensuring access is to draw on Deaf professionals' expertise, and then to provide the services that they request. That said, Deaf employees should not be required to bear the burden of managing their communication access, in addition to their regular work duties. If additional responsibilities are taken on by Deaf employees, this 'shadow work' should be incentivized and incorporated into their job descriptions. This risk of additional uncompensated labor being foisted upon Deaf employees is real and should not be trivialized.

We argue for a conscious approach to communication access through consumer-centered conversations about what Deaf employees need for effective communication at work. To some, this issue may seem trivial when considering the larger scheme of organizational goals; however, we suggest that attention to communication access ultimately results in both greater productivity and a workplace culture that achieves equity among all employees. Such outcomes are created through intentional action. Organizational structures are designed to achieve specific intents; however, to date the provision of interpreters has not been well designed. We argue that the workplace *can* be designed for success as functional systems that produce specific outcomes, products, or results. Organizations invest time, energy, and money to create efficient and effective workplaces and we contend that this same standard should be held for the provision of interpreters.

Deaf employees know what they need for effective communication. They usually aren't asked what they need and when they are asked, their expertise is often disregarded. Deaf participants in this study reiterated they do not want a workplace in which they merely clock in and wait for retirement. Rather, this study shows that they seek a workplace environment in which they can skillfully execute their jobs and succeed in their professions. A starting point for discussing communication and the provision of interpreting services must come in the recognition of Deaf employees' expertise. To create effective systems for interpreter provision requires a paradigm shift from one of suspicion, scarcity, and bureaucratic hurdles to one in which efficient provision of appropriate resources is the norm. In this paradigm, the Deaf employee guides the services provided because they are acknowledged as the experts in their own communication access.

## Acknowledgements

We give sincere thanks to the Deaf professionals in this study who graciously shared their time and wisdom. Without their insights, this paper would not have been possible. We also extend gratitude to the members of Paul Harrelson's dissertation committee, Brenda Nicodemus (chair), Jules Dickinson, Khadijat Rashid, Emily Shaw, and Lori Whynot, for their support of this research.

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# Giochi linguistici e teoria della mente nella prima e seconda infanzia<sup>1</sup>

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TITLE: *Language games and the development of theory of mind in infancy and childhood.*

ABSTRACT: *The aim of this chapter is reviewing literature on the development of theory of mind, analyzing in depth the role of language in the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic domains to account for individual differences in theory of mind development and for the transition from implicit to explicit theory of mind. The role of language games focused on the use of psychological lexicon in the educational context is underlined, in light of the findings from two training studies carried out from the Laboratory of developmental and educational psychology (Lab-PSE) of the University of Milan « Bicocca ».*

KEYWORDS: *Language, theory of mind, mental state talk, language games, children.*

## I. Introduzione

L’obiettivo di questo contributo è mostrare come la *teoria della mente* del bambino si sviluppi molto presto, ancor prima della comparsa delle competenze linguistiche di base e, tuttavia, come il linguaggio sia una variabile che nel corso dell’infanzia spiega una buona parte di varianza individuale nello sviluppo della stessa teoria della mente. Il punto di vista sostenuto da chi scrive è che il linguaggio sia motore di sviluppo e svolga un ruolo rilevante nel passaggio da una teoria della mente *implicita* ad una teoria della mente *esplicita*. Un’attenzione particolare viene dedicata al linguaggio degli stati interni, o psicologici, che trova spazio in molte conversazioni quotidiane degli adulti ma inizia a svilupparsi già nell’infanzia. In questo contributo, vengono descritte due ricerche promosse dal Lab-PSE, il Laboratorio di psicologia dello sviluppo e dell’educazione dell’Università di Milano-Bicocca, che realizza studi finalizzati a testare sperimentalmente l’efficacia di programmi che promuovono lo sviluppo della comprensione sociale (teoria della mente epistemica ed emotivo-affettiva) nei contesti educativi. Si tratta di programmi di intervento che mettono in primo piano i *giochi linguistici* con il lessico degli stati interni. Il contributo si conclude soffermandosi sulle ricadute applicative dei risultati di tali ricerche. Esse mostrano come giochi linguistici condotti al nido e nella scuola dell’infanzia con piccoli gruppi di bambini, e realizzati a partire dalla lettura di storie da parte di adulti opportunamente formati, possano favorire abilità di comprensione di sé e dell’altro, ovvero lo sviluppo della teoria della mente e, più in generale, della *comprendere sociale*. Quest’ultimo costrutto rimanda alla consapevolezza della ricchezza di stati psicologici

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che animano l'interiorità umana. Intenzioni, desideri, scopi, motivazioni, cognizioni, affetti, emozioni spiegano, in gran parte, il dispiegarsi delle nostre azioni, e senza comprensione sociale non potremmo capirne l'origine (Grazzani, Brockmeier, 2019).

## II. Lessico psicologico e teoria della mente

A partire dai primi anni Ottanta del secolo scorso, alcuni psicologi hanno iniziato ad approfondire la comparsa del lessico psicologico o « lessico mentale », un tipo particolare di vocabolario caratterizzato da sostantivi, aggettivi e verbi che si riferiscono a stati mentali o interni (Bretherton, Beeghly, 1982)<sup>2</sup>. Essi hanno notato che, nella vita quotidiana, molto presto (a partire dalla fine del secondo anno di vita) i bambini utilizzano espressioni come: « *mi piace* andare al mare », « *voglio* il gelato al cioccolato », « *credevo* di trovare qui la zia », « *il papà si è arrabbiato* con me ». Essi hanno altresì approfondito l'uso spontaneo o genuino di tali termini (durante le interazioni conversazionali tra pari o con interlocutori adulti), in contrasto con il loro uso meramente conversazionale, come nelle espressioni « *sai che?* », « *non so* », « *no, non penso* ». In particolare, questi autori hanno sottolineato la corrispondenza tra uso genuino del lessico psicologico e comprensione degli stati mentali (Lecce, Pagnin, 2007). Per esempio, Wellman, Harris, Banerjee, Sinclair (1995) hanno mostrato che, già a partire dai due anni, i bambini utilizzano genuinamente il lessico psicologico di tipo emotivo non solo *durante* un'esperienza (il che potrebbe denotare, secondo gli scettici, che si è in presenza di un'espressione vocale simile a qualsiasi altra esclamazione sonora prodotta dai bambini di questa età!) ma anche in riferimento ad esperienze passate proprie ed altrui. Il fatto che i bambini così presto parlino da soli o tra di loro degli stati mentali del passato è un indicatore cruciale della genesi della consapevolezza circa l'esistenza di un mondo interno tipicamente umano.

Tale consapevolezza è definita « teoria della mente » (« theory of mind », o semplicemente ToM), ovvero la capacità di attribuire a se stessi e agli altri una varietà di stati interni che sono alla base delle azioni manifeste. Lo sviluppo della teoria della mente è oggetto di studio da almeno quattro decenni, a partire dal lavoro di Premack e Woodruff (1978) con gli scimpanzé. Il loro fondamentale scritto ha stimolato gli psicologi dello sviluppo che hanno accumulato una vastissima mole di dati scientifici sugli esseri umani<sup>3</sup>. Il riferimento alla teoria della mente chiama in causa il compito di falsa credenza (*false belief task*). Nella sua forma standard, si tratta di una prova verbale in cui si chiede al bambino di immaginare dove un certo personaggio cercherà un oggetto che, a sua insaputa, è stato spostato dal luogo dove questo personaggio lo aveva originariamente posto in un altro luogo. Per molto tempo si è sostenuto che i bambini sono in possesso di una teoria della mente se rispondono correttamente (in media intorno ai 4 anni d'età) che il personaggio, avendo una falsa o erronea credenza rispetto alla realtà dei fatti, cercherebbe l'oggetto dove lo ha inizialmente posto, e non dove si trova attualmente. Jerome Bruner ha ironizzato sul fatto che i ricercatori avessero a lungo considerato il superamento del compito di falsa credenza come « l'acquisizione del pagellino della ToM » e ha invitato a ripensare le scansioni temporali del suo sviluppo e, soprattutto, le precoci abilità mostrate dai bambini nel « leggere la mente dell'altro » (data l'importanza di questo compito all'interno del filone di ricerca sullo sviluppo della teoria della mente, esso è presentato in Appendice 1).

Gli studi sull'emergere del lessico psicologico indicano proprio questo: i bambini hanno una certa comprensione della mente ben prima dei 4 anni e quindi decisamente prima di risolvere il compito di falsa credenza nella sua formulazione verbale (Wimmer, Perner, 1983) e nelle sue numerose varianti. Infatti, tra la fine del primo anno di vita i bambini attribuiscono

<sup>2</sup> In questo capitolo, in accordo con la letteratura nazionale e internazionale, utilizzeremo in modo interscambiabile espressioni come « lessico psicologico », « lessico degli stati interni », « linguaggio degli stati mentali », « termini mentalistici » e locuzioni simili.

<sup>3</sup> Il lettore interessato può trovare riferimenti bibliografici aggiornati in Ornaghi, Grazzani (2020) e in Castelli et al. (2022).

agli altri stati interni come intenzioni, percezioni, volizioni e desideri; inoltre, come mostrato dallo studio pionieristico di Onishi, Baillargeon (2005) e da ricerche successive, nel secondo anno di vita e l'inizio del secondo sarebbero già in grado di attribuire false credenze ad altri. Questo risultato rivoluzionario è stato raggiunto grazie all'utilizzo di innovativi paradigmi di ricerca, oggi ricondotti a tre principali tipologie di compito non verbale (Baillargeon et al., 2018): violazione dell'aspettativa (*violation of expectation*), anticipazione dello sguardo (*anticipatory-looking*) e interazione (*interactive tasks*). Il paradigma della violazione dell'aspettativa si basa sul fatto che i piccoli tendono a guardare più a lungo quegli eventi che contrastano con le loro aspettative. Onishi, Baillargeon (2005) hanno usato il *looking-time paradigm*, nell'esperimento messo a punto per sondare la capacità del piccolo di attribuire ad un altro una falsa credenza sullo stato di realtà. La situazione sperimentale prevede che un soggetto metta un oggetto nella scatola 1 e, a sua insaputa, l'oggetto venga spostato nella scatola 2. I bambini di quindici mesi, che assistono alla scena, appena il soggetto torna guardano prontamente la scatola 1, ove il soggetto aveva riposto l'oggetto e dovrà credere che attualmente si trovi (essendo ignaro dello spostamento). Inoltre, i bambini guardano più a lungo una scena (che ha valore di sorpresa) se il soggetto si dirige verso la scatola 2 dove effettivamente l'oggetto si trova, ma il soggetto non dovrebbe saperlo perché all'oscuro dello spostamento. I bambini, pertanto, già nel corso del secondo anno di vita, si stupiscono se una persona che ha una falsa credenza si comporta come se avesse una vera credenza. È come se nutrissero un'aspettativa che l'azione di un soggetto è inevitabilmente influenzata dalla sua falsa credenza; la violazione di tale aspettativa produce, nei bambini, reazioni comportamentali che coinvolgono la direzione dello sguardo e i tempi di fissazione, indicativi di straordinarie capacità. Per i ricercatori, infatti, si tratta di indizi molto rilevanti per affermare che il bambino in età preverbale, e già dopo i dodici mesi circa, ha una rappresentazione dello stato mentale dell'altro, addirittura della sua credenza falsa. Questo risultato è stato confermato da numerosi studi basati anche sull'*active paradigm*, adottato in particolare da Tomasello e collaboratori (Buttelmann et al., 2009; Buttelmann et al., 2014). Essi hanno mostrato che bambini intorno ai diciotto mesi di vita sono capaci sia di aiutare l'adulto, che, pur sapendo che un oggetto si trova in una scatola, cerca di aprire l'altra senza riuscirci, sia di aprire la scatola dove l'oggetto attualmente si trova, nel caso in cui l'adulto abbia una falsa credenza circa la sua collocazione.

Numerosi studi hanno confermato la validità delle conclusioni circa la capacità di attribuire stati mentali, come false credenze, già dal secondo anno di vita. Tuttavia, di recente è in corso un dibattito molto acceso legato al fallimento di alcune repliche sperimentali, che ha portato a mettere in discussione la legittimità dell'affermazione secondo cui i bambini, nel secondo anno di vita, attribuiscono false credenze ad altri (Burnside et al., 2018; Kulke et al., 2018). Inoltre, mentre alcuni autori ritengono che i bambini vengano al mondo dotati di un sistema per il ragionamento psicologico che incorpora una teoria della mente, ovvero un insieme di principi e concetti che riguardano i contenuti della mente e i modi con cui influenzano i comportamenti delle persone (*one system account*), altri ritengono che siano sufficienti competenze percettive e non rappresentative per superare i compiti proposti (*two systems account*).

Sullo sfondo di questo ricco e stimolante dibattito teorico si colloca la questione della valutazione della ToM attraverso prove non verbali, in una fase evolutiva precoce e non linguistica, rispetto alla sua valutazione per mezzo di prove verbali, come il compito di falsa credenza messo a punto da Wimmer, Perner (1983), e presentato poco sopra nella nota versione dei personaggi Sally ed Anne. Questa distinzione richiama quella tra possesso, da parte dei bambini, di una teoria della mente implicita (non verbale e precoce) e possesso di una teoria della mente esplicita (basata su prove verbali e presente da circa i 4 anni d'età). Se concludiamo che bambini preverbali mentalizzano a tal punto da attribuire stati mentali complessi come la falsa credenza, qual è il peso da dare alla competenza linguistica nello sviluppo della teoria della mente?

Un aspetto centrale del dibattito circa il ruolo del linguaggio nello sviluppo della ToM risiede proprio nel fatto che le prove empiriche (*in primis*, le prove di falsa credenza, FC) sono prove verbali. Per uscire dall'*impasse* a cui può portare il loro utilizzo, disporre di

dispositivi di ricerca « senza il linguaggio » risulta cruciale, come abbiamo visto illustrando i paradigmi innovativi usati con gli infanti. Si può allora ipotizzare che ci siano livelli crescenti di comprensione della mente, intesa come comprensione del fatto che gli altri possono avere una falsa o erronea credenza rispetto allo stato di realtà. Ad un primo livello, l'inferenza da parte del bambino circa la falsa credenza è agita, ma non verbalmente dichiarata. Il ricercatore, attraverso il proprio dispositivo sperimentale, per esempio basato sul paradigma della violazione dell'aspettativa, riesce a fare a meno del linguaggio ma si deve accontentare di una prestazione (direzione dello sguardo, tempi di fissazione) che rimanda ad un livello implicito e non necessariamente consci di comprensione della falsa credenza (Clements, Perner, 1994). Il livello successivo è quello in cui l'inferenza viene esplicitata con una risposta corretta alla domanda del compito (il bambino dirà che il protagonista cercherà l'oggetto dove lo aveva riposto e non dove, a sua insaputa, è stato spostato), mentre l'ultimo livello è quello in cui il bambino è anche in grado di spiegare i motivi della sua risposta e della sua previsione comportamentale. Solo a questo livello si dovrebbe parlare di possesso di teoria della mente come capacità di meta-rappresentazione esplicita: capacità che consente di rappresentarsi lo stato mentale dell'altro, di prevederne i comportamenti e di giustificarli verbalmente, quando richiesto.

In questa prospettiva, possiamo affermare che dal secondo anno di vita fino a circa 4 anni d'età la capacità rappresentativa evolve, rivelando il duplice ruolo del linguaggio: da strumento di potenziamento del pensiero diviene strumento che opera in modo sinergico e complementare al pensiero stesso. Il linguaggio verbale, capacità unicamente umana, amplifica una modalità comunicativa non verbale preesistente, e quindi si pone in continuità con la comunicazione pre-linguistica, producendo tuttavia anche una sorta di « rivoluzione psicologica ». Infatti, esso consente di comunicare sia quanto si pensa, crede, prova in un dato momento, sia quanto si è provato, creduto, pensato, ipotizzato nel passato, e quanto si potrebbe provare o credere in futuro, in situazioni simili o diverse da quelle attuali. Inoltre, la capacità di *tradurre in parole gli stati mentali* non consente solo di comunicare nel senso di condividere/mettere in comune con l'altro tali stati (ad es., dicendo « ho paura », « non voglio », « mi piace », e così via), ma anche di conversare su di essi, discuterli e attribuirvi quei significati che concorrono a creare copioni condivisi delle esperienze umane (Carpendale, Lewis, 2021; Grazzani, 2011; Grazzani, Brockmeier, 2019; Grazzani, Conte, in stampa).

### **III. Linguaggio e teoria della mente negli studi correlazionali, longitudinali e nei training**

Un'ampia tradizione di ricerca ha indagato il ruolo del linguaggio come predittore della teoria della mente, valutata attraverso il superamento del compito di falsa credenza che abbiamo poco sopra descritto. Al riguardo, in letteratura vi sono due principali tipi di studi. Il primo tipo, di natura correlazionale e longitudinale, ha mostrato che vi è un'associazione positiva tra precoce possesso e uso di termini mentalistici (come pensare, sapere, e credere), e successiva capacità di superare i compiti di falsa credenza (Grazzani et al., 2018). Tanto più i bambini padroneggiano la semantica dei verbi mentali, tanto più precoce ed esplicita è la loro capacità di rappresentarsi l'altro con stati mentali come credenze e false credenze (Astington, Jenkins, 1999; Lohmann, Tomasello, 2003). L'associazione si estende alla fascia d'età della scuola primaria quando vengono presi in considerazione termini astratti complessi (ad esempio, ipotizzare, congetturare) e prove di teoria della mente « di secondo ordine », che mettono in gioco credenze aventi per oggetto altre credenze (Grazzani, Ornaghi, 2012; Longobardi et al., 2016). Oltre al vocabolario degli stati interni o mentali, che rimanda alla dimensione semantica del linguaggio, alcuni studi hanno messo in rilievo l'importanza della componente grammaticale e sintattica. Il lessico degli stati mentali, infatti, si inserisce in frasi più o meno complesse, che il bambino comincia formulare intorno ai due anni. Una semplice

frase come « Paolo pensa che il papa sia a casa » è formata da una proposizione principale che contiene un verbo che si riferisce a uno stato mentale (« pensa »), e una subordinata che fornisce precisazioni sul contenuto dello stato mentale (« il papà è a casa »). Il *valore di verità aperto* di tale frase sarebbe uno stimolo per la comprensione mentale degli stati epistemici altrui. Anche per la componente sintattica sono state individuate associazioni con la capacità di risolvere compiti di teoria della mente esplicita e verbale (de Villiers, de Villiers, 2012; Kaltefleiter et al., 2022).

Il secondo tipo di studi riguarda le ricerche-intervento o *training studies*. La caratteristica principale di questo tipo di studi consiste nel mettere a confronto due o più gruppi di bambini, variando le condizioni sperimentali. In particolare, i bambini che partecipano al training sono messi nelle condizioni di potenziare le loro capacità linguistiche diversamente da quelli che non partecipano, e costituiscono il gruppo di controllo. Tale filone di studi ha preso in esame principalmente bambini a partire dai tre anni di età. Vediamo alcuni degli studi più significativi.

Appleton, Reddy (1996), per primi, hanno introdotto un paradigma di ricerca noto come « paradigma della spiegazione durante la conversazione » in uno studio con bambini di tre anni che venivano sollecitati ad esplicitare gli stati interni e le azioni dei protagonisti di videoclip. Il ruolo dell'adulto era quello di sostenerli nell'elaborazione delle loro risposte. Tale studio ha mostrato che i bambini sottoposti al training offrivano, successivamente, prestazioni significativamente migliori rispetto al gruppo di controllo nella risoluzione di compiti di falsa credenza. In seguito, Guajardo, Watson (2002) hanno ottenuto risultati simili con bambini di 3-4 anni sottoposti all'ascolto di storie e successiva discussione intorno al concetto di intenzione, falsa credenza, e così via, allo scopo di far riflettere sul rapporto tra stati mentali e azioni. I risultati hanno messo in luce il ruolo del discorso, che si dipana in un'interazione sociale, come fattore che promuove lo sviluppo della teoria della mente.

Analogamente, Lohmann, Tomasello (2003) hanno fornito conferma che l'uso di verbi che si riferiscono a stati mentali, in interazioni discorsive che avvengono in età prescolare, contribuisce al successivo progresso nello sviluppo della comprensione sociale<sup>4</sup>, in particolare della teoria della mente. Risultati analoghi sono stati trovati da Hale, Tager-Flusberg (2003) in un *training study* di potenziamento delle abilità linguistiche condotto con bambini di età prescolare che mostravano difficoltà nel risolvere una batteria di compiti di falsa credenza. In uno studio successivo, Aram et al. (2013) hanno mostrato l'efficacia della lettura condivisa tra genitori e figli, caratterizzata dal commento su temi relativi alla sfera del mondo interno nel migliorare la loro abilità di comprensione sociale. Tompkins (2015), analogamente, ha ottenuto risultati significativi realizzando un intervento basato sulla lettura di storie con bambini d'età prescolare che presentavano svantaggio socio-culturale.

La maggior parte dei *training studies* menzionati si caratterizza per l'adozione di una « prospettiva conversazionale ». Infatti, si tratta di studi in cui i bambini dei gruppi sperimentali vengono coinvolti nell'ascolto o nella partecipazione ad interazioni focalizzate su stati del mondo interno (pensieri, desideri, credenze, emozioni e così via), e sulle relative azioni. I bambini del gruppo di controllo, invece, non usufruiscono di interventi mirati a migliorare, attraverso la conversazione, la consapevolezza di stati mentali e la capacità di assumere punti di vista diversi dai propri.

All'interno del nostro laboratorio di ricerca<sup>5</sup> abbiamo condotto studi che si collocano nel solco del filone di indagine appena descritto. Tali studi possiedono un impianto sperimentale che prevede il coinvolgimento di bambini distribuiti in un gruppo sperimentale e almeno

<sup>4</sup> Il costrutto psicologico di comprensione sociale, come abbiamo accennato, include sia quello di « teoria della mente » (*theory of mind*) sia quello di « comprensione delle emozioni » (*emotion understanding*). Globalmente, si riferisce alla comprensione degli stati interni dell'altro, sia per quanto riguarda gli stati epistemici (ad esempio, credenze, ricordi), sia per quanto concerne quelli emotivo-affettivi (ad esempio, aver paura, essere tristi).

<sup>5</sup> Si tratta del Lab-PSE (Laboratorio di psicologia dello sviluppo e dell'educazione) – Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca, a cui si accede attraverso il link <https://www.labpse.it/>

un gruppo di controllo. Si tratta di ricerche caratterizzate dalla proposta di un intervento sistematico, sulla base di materiali costruiti ad hoc e di precise procedure per il loro utilizzo. Esse hanno previsto l'uso di strumenti standardizzati (di tipo diretto o indiretto) per valutare l'efficacia dell'intervento attraverso la raccolta di dati da codificare e sottoporre ad analisi statistica. La caratteristica trasversale ai vari studi che abbiamo realizzato è data dalla presenza di un training o intervento, che mette al centro l'interazione linguistica non solo tra adulto e bambino ma anche tra i bambini stessi, in situazione di piccolo gruppo. Durante tale interazione, il bambino viene sollecitato a parlare e a conversare su temi introdotti dall'adulto relativi agli stati mentali, confrontandosi costantemente con quanto detto dai pari.

#### IV. Ricerche-intervento ispirate all'uso dei giochi linguistici

In questo contributo, desideriamo soffermarci su due ricerche in particolare: una condotta con bambini d'età prescolare e l'altra, più recente e particolarmente innovativa, realizzata con bambini nell'età del nido.

La ricerca realizzata nel contesto della scuola dell'infanzia era mossa dai seguenti quesiti: i bambini che ascoltano storie arricchite di linguaggio degli stati mentali, e inoltre vengono sollecitati ad usare tale lessico, migliorano significativamente nelle prove di comprensione sociale (cioè di teoria della mente e di comprensione delle emozioni) rispetto a un gruppo di controllo? In altre parole, è possibile che vi sia un miglioramento significativo rispetto a quello valutabile in bambini che si limitano a far esperienza di semplice ascolto delle stesse storie ma non sono motivati ad usare il lessico degli stati mentali attivamente? La Tabella 1 (tratta da Grazzani, Ornaghi, 2022) offre alcuni esempi di verbi appartenenti a diverse categorie di lessico psicologico, sulla base di varie classificazioni prodotte da studiosi di questo argomento.

CATEGORIE DI VERBI MENTALISTICI	ESEMPI
Percettivi	Vedere, sentire, guardare, osservare, fare attenzione, sentire caldo, sentire freddo, sentirsi stanchi
Volitivi e di abilità	Volere, desiderare, esaudire, preferire, insistere, riuscire, cercare di, riuscire, essere capaci, essere bravi, avere intenzione di
Emotivi positivi	Amare, affezionarsi, fare amicizia, fare pace, divertirsi, emozionarsi, piacere, sentirsi orgogliosi, voler bene, essere allegri, contenti, felici, soddisfatti
Emotivi negativi	Avere paura, odiare, detestare, arrabbiarsi, vergognarsi, sentirsi in colpa, preoccuparsi, rimanerci male, sentirsi tristi, terrorizzati, infelici
Cognitivi o epistemici	Pensare, sapere, credere, domandarsi, spiegare, intuire, dedurre, essere curiosi, escogitare, riflettere, ingannare, mentire, scoprire, capire
Stati di giudizio morale	Ammirare, approfittare, beffarsi di, dovere o avere l'obbligo di, essere costretto, pentirsi, perdonare, potere o avere il permesso di prendere in giro, ridere di, rispettare, sacrificarsi, essere buoni/cattivi

Tabella 1. Esempi di verbi appartenenti alle diverse categorie di lessico psicologico.

Il training, predisposto per promuovere tale uso, si è basato sulla lettura e l'ascolto, da parte di bambini di età compresa tra i 3 e i 5 anni, di storie – ora contenute nel volume di Ornaghi, Grazzani (2020) – arricchite da verbi mentalistici, come « desiderare », « credere », « pensare », « avere paura », e così via. Le storie sono state proposte una alla volta per circa due mesi all'ascolto dei bambini sia del gruppo sperimentale che del gruppo di controllo.

I bambini del gruppo sperimentale, tuttavia, non si limitavano all'ascolto, ma partecipavano a giochi linguistici guidati dall'adulto esperto. Rifacendoci al significato filosofico elaborato da Wittgenstein (1953), con « gioco linguistico » ci siamo riferiti all'insieme degli usi socialmente determinati di una parola, che ne costituiscono il significato. Ogni verbo appartenente alle categorie di linguaggio degli stati mentali diveniva il termine target del gioco linguistico, attraverso la tecnica del « lancio della parola » (Ciceri, 2001). Il gioco linguistico consisteva quindi nello stimolare ogni bambino del gruppo ad un uso attivo e genuino del vocabolo (ad esempio « ricordare »), con domande-stimolo tese a sollecitare il confronto tra i diversi punti di vista dei bambini raccolti in piccolo gruppo. Tale attività, che partiva dal contenuto della storia letta, metteva in luce gli stati fisiologici, i desideri, i pensieri, le emozioni, a volte simili e a volte diversi, tra i piccoli partecipanti. Giocare con le parole, nel senso coniato da Wittgenstein, allude all'uso pragmatico dei termini, che include anche la dimensione dell'intenzione insita negli enunciati e la loro funzione comunicativa. Allude, inoltre, al fatto che nell'usare un termine all'interno di uno scambio conversazionale, il soggetto si appropria pienamente del suo significato, lo interiorizza e lo può utilizzare genuinamente in nuovi scambi comunicativi.

Riassumendo, le attività di gioco linguistico si svolgevano seguendo un protocollo preciso, per quanto flessibile (per es., la durata di ciascuna sessione poteva variare, seppur di poco). I passaggi principali erano i seguenti: a) creazione del setting, nel contesto della scuola dell'infanzia, e lettura della storia arricchita di lessico psicologico e contenente una parola target; b) avvio del gioco linguistico, ripetendo una frase della storia che presentava il verbo-target (per es., « ricordare »), su cui s'intendeva dirigere l'attenzione dei bambini: « Oggi giochiamo con la parola *ricordare*... [lancio della parola]..., nella storia che vi ho appena letto abbiamo visto che Jack *ricorda*... proviamo a giocare con la parola *ricordare*... la usiamo e ripetiamo insieme... ascoltatevi: io *ricordo quando* ho visto la mia maestra per la prima volta... e tu, Giulio, ti ricordi quando...»; c) attività di stimolo alla conversazione linguistica tra bambino e adulto e tra bambini, prestando attenzione al fatto che ogni partecipante usasse la parola target, quella « lanciata », e che, nel conversare, creasse opportuni legami tra stati mentali e azioni; d) conclusione della sessione di gioco linguistico, ricapitolando l'obiettivo dell'attività (giocare con le parole, usarle, in particolare con la parola-target della specifica sessione) e riprendendo i contenuti principali emersi dagli scambi conversazionali usando il lessico psicologico. Un esempio tratto dal corpus di dati è il seguente:

L'insegnante che conduce il training, riprendendo una frase dalla storia letta, dice:  
 «Il delfino Jack si ricordò che quello era il fiore che piaceva tanto alla sua mamma... Oggi, bambini, giochiamo con la parola ricordare... se dico la parola ricordare che cosa vi viene in mente? »

*Francesco* (3 anni): «Io ricordo»

Insegnante: «Che cosa ricordi, Francesco? »

*Francesco*: «Ricordo come si fanno le cose»

*Marta* (4 anni): «Io ricordo quando ero ammalata...»

*Anna* (4 anni): « Io ricordo quando ero piccola, avevo la paperella [da bagno] e ora non ce l'ho più perché l'ho regalata a un altro bimbo... io sono grande»

*Luca* (4 anni): «Io ricordo con la testa...»

Insegnante: «È vero Luca noi ricordiamo con la testa»

*Anna*: «Anch'io ricordo con la mia testa...»

Il confronto tra i livelli di partenza dei bambini di entrambi i gruppi, prima e dopo la fase dell'intervento, ha permesso di verificare in che misura i giochi linguistici producessero un effetto nel favorire la loro comprensione sociale, intesa sia come teoria della mente che come comprensione delle emozioni (Ornaghi et al., 2011). La significatività dei risultati ottenuti

con i bambini delle tre diverse fasce d'età, e per entrambi i costrutti teorici presi in esame, ha dato luogo ad un programma di intervento educativo che abbiamo riproposto di recente (Ornaghi, Grazzani, 2020), arricchito da nuove evidenze empiriche e applicabile nelle scuole dell'infanzia con bambini tra i tre e i sei anni.

La ricerca realizzata nel contesto dei nidi è stata particolarmente innovativa poiché è consistita nel proporre i giochi linguistici a bambini di età compresa tra i 2 e i 3 anni (più precisamente tra i 22 e i 36 mesi), in una fase in cui i livelli di sviluppo della competenza linguistica rendono problematica la conversazione tra bambini. In questa ricerca (Agliati et al., 2015) ci eravamo poste l'obiettivo di promuovere, in particolare, il lessico psicologico di tipo emotivo. Anche in questo caso, i partecipanti erano distribuiti in un gruppo sperimentale e in uno di controllo, e disponevamo dei livelli di partenza rispetto a vari ambiti di sviluppo, da quello linguistico a quello relativo alla comprensione delle emozioni. Il training conversazionale era costruito sulla lettura di storie preparate dal gruppo di ricerca ( contenute in: "L'emozionante mondo di Ciro e Beba", Agliati et al., 2015) e dedicate, ciascuna, ad una emozione particolare fra quelle di paura, felicità, rabbia e tristezza. I momenti del training erano i seguenti: a) introduzione dell'attività e creazione del setting; b) lettura di una storia tratta dalla raccolta creata ad hoc; c) conversazione e gioco linguistico collegato all'emozione target, allo scopo di approfondirne tre principali dimensioni: espressione, regolazione e comprensione delle cause; d) conclusione dell'attività, con una sintesi degli aspetti principali emersi durante gli scambi conversazionali guidati dall'adulto.

I giochi linguistici proposti avevano caratteristiche diverse rispetto a quelli realizzati con i bambini d'età prescolare. Mentre con i bambini più grandi era possibile adottare una tecnica di vero e proprio lancio della parola (ad es.; « bambini, oggi giochiamo con la parola ricordare »), con i più piccoli l'attività linguistica prendeva spunto da una frase contenuta nella storia (ad es., « Beba ha tanta paura »), per poi mettere a fuoco il tema della paura come delineato poco sopra (punto c). I risultati di questa ricerca sono sorprendenti perché mostrano come, tra i due e i tre anni, i bambini incrementino la loro comprensione sociale sia in termini di comprensione delle emozioni sia di teoria della mente (Grazzani et al., 2016) grazie alla conversazione sugli stati interni. Una conversazione condotta in piccolo gruppo, con l'aiuto di un adulto esperto, diventa fattore di promozione delle capacità di comprensione sociale, grazie alla possibilità sia di mettere in rapporto etichette verbali con stati psicologici (in questo caso di natura prevalentemente emotiva), sia di confrontare costantemente il proprio punto di vista con quello di altri bambini appartenenti al gruppo sperimentale, coinvolti nei giochi linguistici.

Riportiamo qui di seguito lo stralcio di una conversazione divertente, tratto dal nostro corpus di dati, che bene illustra la capacità dei bambini di parlare delle emozioni e di riportarle a delle cause:

L'educatrice ha appena concluso la lettura della storia dal titolo *Mamma che rabbia!* e introduce la conversazione con l'ormai consueta domanda: «Come si sente oggi Beba?».

I bambini affermano che è arrabbiata, così l'educatrice rilancia: «E allora che cosa fa?»,

*Anita* risponde: «Dice < Voglio la bambolina!! >».

A questo punto, *Edoardo* prende spontaneamente parola e inizia a raccontare la sua esperienza: «Quando io dico < Voglio la macchinina > e il papà dice < no >, io mi sento diventare rosso. Tutto rosso negli occhi, sulla faccia, sulle gambe....» e man mano elenca le parti del corpo, le indica con i gesti: «Le braccia, la pancia...»

L'educatrice si avvicina a lui ascoltandolo con serietà, dandogli conferma di ogni parola ripetendola a sua volta: « Ti senti rosso, rosso... negli occhi, sulla faccia [...] ».

*Edoardo* conclude: « Tutto rosso rosso... anche nelle mutande ».

E l'educatrice ribadisce: « Ti senti rosso, rosso anche nelle mutande!? Ti senti così perché sei molto arrabbiato ».

I risultati degli studi menzionati, in particolare del secondo, suggeriscono che il linguaggio sia un potente fattore di promozione del passaggio da una comprensione della mente dell'altro dapprima implicita e poi sempre più esplicita. La consapevolezza dell'esistenza di un mondo interno proprio e altrui, fatto di stati mentali come i desideri, le emozioni, le credenze e le false credenze, è favorita e sostenuta dal parlare e ragionare su tali stati. Se dunque sembra che i bambini di età inferiore a quelli considerati nella ricerca da noi condotta nei nidi, abbiano una certa comprensione implicita e non verbale di stati mentali complessi come le false credenze (Onishi, Baillargeon, 2005), è anche vero che la risoluzione verbale e consapevole di prove esplicite di falsa credenza (che avverrà intorno ai 4 anni) è favorita dai precoci scambi conversazionali mediati da un adulto esperto.

Vygotskij faceva riferimento alla zona di sviluppo prossimale per promuovere apprendimento da parte dell'adulto; Bruner menzionava lo *scaffolding*, come strumento di sviluppo e di creazione di *format* interattivi tra bambino e *caregiver*, mentre la psicologia dell'educazione contemporanea parla di « facilitatore ». Di fatto, è proprio l'adulto che ha un ruolo cruciale nel favorire quella progressione, su cui ci siamo soffermati poco sopra, dal piano implicito a quello esplicito della comprensione del proprio e altrui mondo interno. Sulla base della nostra esperienza di ricerca e di formazione, i giochi linguistici con il lessico mentalistico, a partire dalla lettura di storie, permettono l'acquisizione di significati in modo naturale e divertente all'interno dei contesti educativi, promuovendo la qualità delle relazioni sociali e il benessere psicologico di chi vi abita.

## Ringraziamenti

Desidero ringraziare i membri del Laboratorio di Psicologia dello Sviluppo e dell'Educazione (Lab-PSE), del Dipartimento di Scienze Umane per la Formazione « Riccardo Massa » (Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca), con cui ho realizzato nel corso degli anni riflessioni teoriche e studi empirici sullo sviluppo della comprensione sociale nei bambini. Questo capitolo è anche il frutto dell'attività scientifica condivisa con loro. Desidero inoltre ringraziare Jens Brockmeier, amico e collega, che mi ha sostenuta da lontano nella ricerca sul rapporto tra linguaggio e teoria della mente, con particolare attenzione alla promozione dei giochi linguistici nei contesti educativi.

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## Appendice. Teoria della mente: la prova di falsa credenza

Una nota versione del compito di falsa credenza è quella di Baron-Cohen, Leslie e Frith (1985). Si tratta della prova di Sally e Anne (cfr. Fig. 1) così strutturata: al bambino a cui viene proposta vengono presentate le due bambole e si verifica che abbia associato correttamente i nomi di Sally e Anne ad esse (*naming question*). Poi, si racconta al bambino che esse insieme nascondono una biglia in un cesto. In seguito, una delle due (Sally) si allontana. Nel frattempo, all'insaputa di Sally, Anne sposta la biglia in una scatola. Sally ritorna in scena con l'intenzione di riprendere la sua biglia. Al bambino viene posta la seguente domanda: «Dove Sally cercherà la biglia?». Seguono due domande di controllo, una di realtà («Dove si trova davvero la biglia?») e una di memoria («Dov'era la biglia all'inizio?»). I bambini di tre anni per lo più rispondono erroneamente, affermando che Sally cercherà la biglia dove si trova attualmente (ovvero nella scatola) e non dove l'aveva nascosta insieme ad Anne (nel cesto), prima di allontanarsi dalla scena. Solo a partire dai quattro anni d'età i bambini iniziano a rispondere correttamente ai quesiti del compito di FC (Sally cerca la biglia dove l'aveva nascosta e non dove, a sua insaputa, è stata spostata), dimostrando di saper prevedere il comportamento di Sally in base alle sue credenze e non allo stato di cose effettivo (ovvero Sally cercherà la pallina dove *crede* che sia – coerentemente con la sua falsa credenza – e non dove si trova *realmente*).



**Figura 1.** Il compito di Sally e Anne (fonte: Frith, 1989).

# Gioco, performance e travestimenti nel parlato degli adulti con i bambini: spunti per una discussione<sup>1</sup>

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TITLE: *Play, performance and disguises in adults talking to children: some starting points for a discussion.*

ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the concept of baby talk (Ferguson, 1964) and the critical reflection that Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin did in their well-known 1984 work « Language acquisition and socialization: Three developmental stories and their implications », by means of the conversation analysis of examples taken from natural adult-child interactions in clinical and educational settings. Meant as a simplified register, at early stages of language development, baby talk works to respond to and support the child's preferences for intonational and rhythmic aspects of the language, and particularly communicates the adult speakers' cultural preference for signalling affiliation, affect and solidarity with the child. These aspects appear to resist change and turn into a habitus, characteristic of Child-centered communication (Ochs, Sterponi, Solomon, 2005), which unnaturally favors the expression of affiliation over the relevance and coherence of the adult speakers discourse moves, with regards either the ongoing activity, or the observable competence of the young (and sometimes not so young) interlocutor. The work discusses the effects of the habitus so defined on the child's and the adult's identity, and solicits to open a new season of observational studies, which would reveal the close interrelation between practices of interactions with children, inside and outside the family (Fasulo, Pontecorvo, 1999; Pontecorvo, Arcidiacono, 2006), theories of childhood and cultural values of childrens' socialization in contemporary times.

KEYWORDS: Baby talk, Language socialization, Conversation Analysis, Habitus, Intersubjectivity, Interaction ritual.

## I. Introduzione

Eravamo al bar, in piazzetta vicino via dei Marsi (Edificio della Facoltà di Psicologia) a Roma, dove periodicamente ci incontravamo per pianificare e confrontarci sullo stato di avanzamento dei lavori del numero monografico della *Rivista di Psicolinguistica Applicata/Journal of Applied Psycholinguistics* su « Conversare, leggere, scrivere » (Pinto, Fatigante (a cura di), 2007). Sono stati mesi intensi di « conversazioni », particolarmente, e di condivisione di interessi multipli e multidisciplinari. Un pomeriggio, nonostante l'ora del caffè fosse già scoccata e fosse stata debitamente onorata, Maria Antonietta, leggendo forse nel mio silenzio dopo un suo intervento e un dilazionato cenno di assenso, mi disse, sollecita: « Marilena, svegliati! »

Parto da qui, da questa memoria, che certo non mi ero anticipata quando ho immaginato di scrivere e unirmi – con gratitudine – al coro di persone colleghie e amiche di Maria Antonietta,

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per riflettere sulle funzioni del comunicare. Dico intanto che quell'imperativo, che in quel momento mi colse impreparata e che trattai in maniera letterale (dovevo essere apparsa a Maria Antonietta evidentemente molto stanca) oggi, a distanza di quindici anni, risulta un mandato simbolico, che richiama alla presenza e all'attenzione, che, come si impara meravigliosamente da Simone Weil (2008/1950), è anche la forma « più generosa » dell'amore. E quanto ingenerosa fu dunque quell'assenza, quella pausa nell'interazione con Maria Antonietta, come tante di quelle che – anche dove appaiano, invece che pause, riempite da parole – gli interlocutori ad una conversazione « registrano » emotivamente, nonostante in superficie si mantenga coerenza, continuità, sequenzialità (nel discorso).

Il contributo che decido di dedicare a questa collezione riguarderà da lontano questo episodio, ma – come accade nel sogno o piuttosto nelle tracce di memoria che ne rimangono in veglia – mi lascio suggestionare da questa immagine, che torni o meno sensata, nel corso di questa riflessione. Avvertendo che quanto seguirà non ha pretesa di avere (ancora) nulla di sistematico, sono grata di poter dare inizio e forma ad un interrogativo che mi sta sollecitando da un certo tempo.

Il contributo si situa, da un lato, entro il paradigma teorico-metodologico dell'Analisi della Conversazione, paradigma cui si sono sempre rivolti i miei sforzi e le mie preferenze da più o meno 25 anni (essendomi formata all'esercizio minuto della trascrizione e analisi, turno per turno, sin dalla tesi di laurea, sotto la preziosa guida di Clotilde Pontecorvo, sulle conversazioni familiari a tavola), e, dall'altro, entro la prospettiva della « Language Socialization » (Ochs, Schieffelin, 1984; Ochs, 2007; Duranti, Ochs, Schieffelin, 2011). Quest'ultima, in particolare, tiene in conto, nell'analisi delle pratiche di interazione adulto – bambino o esperto-novizio, i valori, le norme e preferenze culturali che orientano le scelte linguistiche e discursiveive, e rintraccia le rappresentazioni « native » di bambino e adulto, che quelle pratiche segnalano e portano alla superficie.

A partire dall'analisi di una collezione di esempi tratti dai *setting* clinico e riabilitativo, con rapide incursioni nei territori familiare ed educativo, discuto in questo lavoro alcune caratteristiche formali delle pratiche di interazione dell'adulto (genitore, psicologa/o, educatrice/ore) con il bambino, e le loro implicazioni, da un lato, sulla rappresentazione culturale e identitaria del bambino e, dall'altro, sul significato che ha per l'adulto incontrarlo come interlocutore. Partirò da una breve nota di campo, incidentale ad un viaggio recente.

## **II. Quale intersoggettività tra adulto e bambini?**

Sono in treno, di là nella fila opposta alla mia, in una posizione da dove riesco a vederlo, un bambino canticchia, intonato, da circa quindici minuti. La mamma, vicino, è assorta davanti al cellulare. Non coinvolta, e tuttavia accessibile. Ma il bambino non ne ha bisogno: lo vedo completamente appagato dal modo di ascoltarsi e articolare quella cantilena, la ripetizione non lo annoia, non è interessato a far nulla d'altro da quel gioco sonoro.

Nella mattina, mentre distrattamente mi arrivavano le voci di un ragazzino più grande e del suo papà mentre giocavano a pallone, avevo fatto una simile riflessione sulla ripetizione: il papà, ad un certo punto, aveva giudicato che era tempo di interrompere quel gioco, ed orientarsi verso un'altra attività. Il ragazzino aveva provato a protestare con un: « ancora uno ». Due scene, convergenti in una domanda sulla inevitabile, dolorosa consapevolezza che adulti e bambini siano creature diverse, i primi dimentichi delle motivazioni e dei piaceri del puro coinvolgimento in un'attività, i secondi indifferenti – spesso in maniera spietata – alle esigenze di un mondo rivolto in primo luogo ad attività e ritmi funzionali, orientati ad uno scopo. Creature, dunque, per le quali il mantenimento di una comprensione reciproca, e la sicurezza di saper e poter assumere il punto di vista dell'altro/a apparirebbe quanto mai fragile e non garantita.

Eppure, i primi studi sperimentali sullo sviluppo dell'intersoggettività (Trevarthen, 1979; Schaffer, 1984; Stern, 1985; Tronick, 1989; Tomasello, 2009) hanno guardato proprio all'inte-

razione precoce tra adulti (prevalentemente, madri) e bambini come sede originaria della costruzione di un terreno condiviso. Che prima delle parole, avviene nello sguardo reciproco:

« Ora, a un certo punto, viene il momento in cui il bambino si guarda intorno. Forse il bambino al seno non guarda il seno. E' più probabile che una caratteristica sia quella di guardare la faccia. [...] Che cosa vede il lattante quando guarda il viso della madre? Secondo me, di solito ciò che il lattante vede è sé stesso. In altre parole, la madre guarda il bambino e ciò che essa appare è in rapporto con ciò che essa scorge. » (Winnicott, 1971).

Gli studi sperimentali nell'ambito dell'*infant research* hanno confermato l'intuizione di un reciproco rispecchiamento, e dell'esistenza di sistemi di co-regolazione evidenti nella corrispondenza formale di gesti, vocalizzazioni e movimenti da parte di madre e bambino, i quali si impegnano sin dai primi giorni di vita del bambino in pattern ritmici, sonori e multimodali, nei quali, come in una partitura musicale (Trevarthen et al., 2011), le vocalizzazioni o gesti del bambino si inseriscono nelle « nicchie » lasciate libere dalla madre, quando quest'ultima fa una pausa nell'attività. Trevarthen parla a proposito di un senso innato nei bambini di « *animate time in movement* », che si svilupperà in danza, musica, narrazione, oltre alla opportunità di insegnare e apprendere competenze culturali (Trevarthen et al., 2011: 11, traduzione mia).

Questa sintonizzazione, che, dove non vi siano impedimenti, appaga, ed è immediatamente disponibile nell'interazione tra una madre e un lattante, diventa invece un prodotto più vulnerabile, proprio nel momento in cui i bambini cominciano a « prendere parola », quella parola che in maniera tanto improvvisa e imprevista, quanto tuttavia investita di aspettative da parte di entrambi, irrompe sulla scena e d'un tratto separa, introduce un « terzo » oggetto, laddove prima, per richiamarsi, occorreva necessariamente continuità, prossimità corporea o contatto visivo.

Propongo che sia proprio questa separazione e l'imbarazzo di interagire con un « ente » – il bambino – che si propone al momento della nascita della parola come interlocutore reale dell'adulto, capace di negoziare con lei/lui significati e replicare alle iniziative con un mezzo comune, convenzionale e dunque « pubblico », disponibile ad entrambi in una misura più « democratica » che nel passato, ad aprire opportunità per gli adulti di « fingere », cioè di incarnare ruoli e maschere diverse, dal comico al drammatico, dal romantico all'*horror*, la cui cifra comune è quella di introdurre modifiche rilevanti alle « ceremonie » dell'interazione che normalmente, ordinariamente, utilizziamo tra adulti.

### **III. Il *baby talk* e i racconti etnografici di Elinor Ochs e Bambi Schieffelin sull'acquisizione della lingua**

Nel 1984, Ochs e Schieffelin firmano congiuntamente quello che diventa il « manifesto » di una nuova prospettiva, che incrocia l'antropologia linguistica, da un lato, e la psicolinguistica evolutiva, dall'altro: la *language socialization*. Nel loro testo, partendo dalla conoscenza etnografica maturata nelle due comunità, rispettivamente, quella della Samoa Occidentale e quella dei Kaluli della Nuova Guinea, le autrici avanzano una discussione critica sul cosiddetto *baby talk* (Ferguson, 1964), una forma « specializzata » di linguaggio o « registro linguistico » che caratterizzerebbe il parlato rivolto ai bambini piccoli, preverbali, in differenti comunità. Il *baby talk* si differenzia dall'impiego ordinario utilizzato nella conversazione tra adulti per alcuni aspetti formali specifici, quali: (1) aspetti prosodici: intonazione acuta, volume relativamente alto, articolazione lenta e sillabata; (2) aspetti morfo-sintattici: uso di diminutivi, frasi semplici e abbreviate, ripetizioni di parole, preferenza per il tempo presente e omissione dei pronomi, impiego del plurale come forma affilativa ecc.; (3) aspetti lessicali, come l'impiego di termini di uso specifico del bambino, vocativi e nomignoli, onomatopee, formule specifiche indicanti routine e ceremonie (es. *bubu settete!*), e infine (4) preferenza per alcune

azioni conversazionali specifiche, come i richiami e le valutazioni positive delle prestazioni (anche linguistiche) del bambino.

Di recente, ho chiesto alle studentesse e studenti del corso di *Socializzazione e contesti educativi* (Sapienza Università di Roma) di trascrivere questo video, rintracciato su youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssYmnh2y7RA>). Si rinvia all'Appendice per la legenda dei simboli di trascrizione utilizzati.

## Estratto 1

((mom, non visibile, Charlize, di 2 mesi, stesa sul letto, agita le gambe e vocalizza alla madre, sorride))

1. mom **hey!** (.) **hey!** (1.0) ↑↑↑**hI:::**  
**hey!** (.) **hey!** (1.0) ↑↑↑**cIA:::o!**
2. (2.0)
3. > (want)< ta(h)lk to me?  
> (vuoi)< **parl(h)are con me?**
4. talk to mom[my.  
**parla con m[amma**
5. Charlize [h↑ih ((vocalizza))
6. mom ↑oh::::[::
7. Charlize [↑he ((vocalizza))
8. mom please some m↑ore?  
**un po' di p↑iù per favore?**
9. (1.0)
10. show everybody how you can talk!  
**fa vedere a tutti che sai parlare!**
11. Charlize hehe↑,
12. mom ye::s very goo:d
13. (1.0) ((Charlize muove le braccia))
14. say something (out) you  
**dì qualcosina**
15. Charlize n gne:::
16. (1.0)
17. mom ↑o↓h:::: this sounds bea:utifufl:::::,  
↑o↓h:::: **questo è meraviglio:so:::,**
18. (0.5)
19. y↑ffes (please) hi↑i:::::  
**s↑ffi (per favore) cia↑tō:::::**
20. ((Charlize muove le braccia))
21. mom talk to ma↑ma-  
**parla alla mamma-**
22. Charlize eh↑ h. heh ((vocalizza))
23. mom ↑m↓ooo:::::
24. Charlize ↑ h. b↓a:. (.) ↑eh h. ((vocalizza più forte))
25. mom oh wa::: that beautiful  
**oh wo::: è bello**
26. Charlize ↑ h. ↑A:. e::: m.
27. mom oh. ↑Hi(h)i!: (.) (I'm crazy!)  
**oh. ↑Ci(h)a:o! (.) (è pazzesco!)**
28. (it's) the most interesting stuff me at (ever)  
**(è la) cosa più interessante che abbia (mai visto)**
29. h↑↑m. (.) ba ye↑↑ah!

30. (1.5)
31. Charlize nh ((vocalizza))
32. mom ↑o↓h:[::::: (1.0) that's beau:tiful  
↑o↓h:[::::: (1.0) **questo è be:lllo**
33. [ ((Charlize volge il viso a destra e distoglie lo sguardo dalla madre))

È molto chiaro dalla visione del trascritto quanto scrive Trevarthen (1979: 339):

« è evidente che la madre percepisce il suo bambino come persona, come lei stessa. Le madri interpretano i comportamenti infantili non solo come intenzionalmente comunicativi ma anche come verbali e dotati di significato ».

Lo stesso Ferguson aveva dichiarato che il « lavoro » del *baby talk* non è universale, e tuttavia aveva attribuito a quel lavoro in ciascuna delle comunità studiate un facilitatore nell'apprendimento del linguaggio, e in particolare del vocabolario (in fasi di acquisizione precedenti alla grammatica), che consentirebbe, a quello stadio, l'acquisizione e l'esercizio di parole che saranno poi abbandonate in futuro, non appena parole intere e regole grammaticali di costruzione della frase prendano più spazio. Ancora Ferguson aveva già segnalato la funzione « indessicale » del *baby talk* nel segnalare identità e atteggiamenti: indipendentemente dall'età degli interlocutori o dallo scopo, manifesto o implicito, di « insegnare a parlare », l'impiego del *baby talk* segnala una relazione tra parlanti connotata da affetto positivo e qualità di cura. Per questo motivo, e per questa funzione, caratteristiche del *baby talk* si ritrovano nel parlato agli animali domestici, e connotano in generale interazioni con partner considerati più vulnerabili per competenza linguistica (es, parlanti stranieri) o per fragilità fisica /psicologica (persone bisognose di cura), ma anche interazioni nelle quali si esaltino dimensioni di intimità e tenerezza (relazioni tra amici e/o innamorati).

La revisione che Ochs e Schieffelin introducono sulla lettura in chiave funzionale del *baby talk* riguarda la necessità di considerare questo registro come espressione di una particolare visione e rappresentazione culturale del bambino (e corrispondentemente dell'adulto che gli si rivolge), che nelle culture occidentali è coerente con gli assunti di base dei ricercatori (adulti osservatori dell'interazione adulto-bambino tanto quanto i genitori che comunicano con lui), e che dunque porta a considerare quello specifico modo di interagire come « naturale » e utile allo sviluppo. Ochs e Schieffelin avvertono della opportunità di considerare le descrizioni dello sviluppo del linguaggio nei bambini piccoli come una etnografia di una visione bambino-centrica caratteristica di famiglie nucleari di classe media, con madri e padri scolarizzati, collocati per lo più in contesti urbani, che si associa ad una particolare modalità di intendere: 1) la natura del bambino come soggetto; 2) il compito e la responsabilità sociale dell'adulto come interlocutore ed educatore.

Se il *baby talk* costruisce il bambino come un soggetto già dotato di intenzioni, e portatore di produzioni che l'adulto riconosce come dotati di significato e che – come tali – si sforza pertanto di comprendere e proporre al bambino, esso costruisce anche l'adulto come qualcuno che si mette al servizio del bambino nello sciogliere il rebus delle sue comunicazioni inizialmente – e a lungo – ambigue.

In un lavoro rimasto non tradotto di Ochs, *Indexing gender* (1992), l'autrice fa riflettere su quanto l'abitudine a rendere il bambino centrale e modificare il proprio stile linguistico al suo favore (o quantomeno a come questo viene rappresentato) collochi e costruisca l'identità materna – e, per estensione, l'identità femminile – come soggetto « diminuito » rispetto al bambino, agente solidale principalmente impegnato ad « onorare » ed innalzare la competenza del piccolo (o meno piccolo) interlocutore (Ochs 1991, tr. it. 2006: 159-176). Questo aspetto è particolarmente evidenziato nell'abitudine di esagerare le lodi (*praising*) del bambino per le sue realizzazioni, ma è presente anche nell'abitudine, ad esempio, di coinvolgersi come soggetto agente in realizzazioni che avrebbero il bambino come unico responsabile.

È tipico osservare, ad esempio, l'impiego massivo del plurale inclusivo rivolto ai bambini nel corso della formulazione di atti direttivi (Searle, 1969; Ervin-Tripp, 1976), i quali comprendono richieste, inviti, imperativi, suppliche, che condividono tutti la finalità di esercitare un controllo del parlante sulle azioni del ricevente. In questione, c'è l'autorità di chi formula il direttivo, e l'accettazione di un necessario stato di sottomissione e ossequio del bambino a quanto presentato. Questa distribuzione di diritti e responsabilità subisce un interessante *camouflage* nell'impiego della forma inclusiva del plurale, che genitori e educatori utilizzano per ottenere che il bambino faccia qualcosa.

### **Estratto 2 (da Galeano, Fasulo, 2009: 268)**

Partecipanti: MA(dre); LE(onardo, 8 anni)

((La madre ha raggiunto Leonardo in sala da pranzo, dove è seduto al tavolo e fa lavori di modellismo.))

1. MA mchu ((lo bacia sonoramente sulla guancia))
2. °senti. (. ) mancano cinque minuti. °
3. (2.0) ((Leonardo continua a fare le costruzioni e ha lo sguardo orientato su esse))
4. MA °andiamo a lavarci i denti? mh?

Come noto, la forma del plurale inclusivo grammaticalizza relazioni di affetto e solidarietà (Brown, Gilman, 1960; Benveniste, 1966; Ochs, Schieffelin, 1989) e sacrifica la « verità » dell'asserzione alla costruzione di una realtà – relazionale – in cui il bambino non è confrontato davvero con la « forza » dell'ingiunzione, distribuita invece tra se stesso e l'adulto che la pronuncia. Il plurale, dunque, mitiga la natura coercitiva del direttivo, e instaura una finzione per cui ciò che è valido per il bambino è altrettanto valido per l'adulto. Impieghi simili hanno dunque effetto non solo sulla qualità persuasiva dell'azione e sull'esito stesso dell'adempimento ma contribuiscono a generare o modificare un'intera struttura politica familiare (Ochs, Taylor, 1992; Aronsson, Cekaite, 2011), intesa come l'organizzazione di diritti e doveri, aspettative e responsabilità associate a ciascuno dei membri familiari e che ne definiscono gli status.

Concludo quindi questa prima parte, sottolineando – evidentemente, in maniera non inedita e certa di aver trascurato molte fonti e studi empirici sul tema – quanto il parlato ai bambini in situazioni non apertamente conflittuali (dove le regole cambiano radicalmente e i dispositivi di mitigazione lasciano in fretta il posto ad azioni dirette, aggravate e anche fisiche di esercizio del potere; cf. Goodwin, 2006; Galeano, Fasulo, 2009; Hepburn, Potter, 2011; Cekaite, 2015) esibisce più di altri « generi » (Hymes, 1974) quella proprietà della lingua e del discorso di creare veri e propri scenari fintizi della realtà e del sé, rovesciamenti delle rispettive titolarità ed obblighi, che la relazione educativa e di cura per definizione prevede asimmetricamente distribuiti.

Nella seconda parte del lavoro, attingerò da due contesti clinici e specificamente di riabilitazione cognitiva per evidenziare e discutere come alcuni degli aspetti ceremoniali dell'interazione (Goffman, 1967), con i bambini appena descritti producano effetti non pertinenti, e mostrino una esplicita inefficacia nel realizzare una comprensione intersoggettiva tra psicologa/o e bambina/o. Inoltre, proverò a documentare brevemente il « viaggio », anche personale, che le operatrici / operatori che lavorano con le /i bambine/i hanno realizzato per modificare il loro habitus e gli esiti sui loro interlocutori.

## **IV. La storia di Cecilia: reggere l'astinenza**

In uno studio osservativo realizzato con Margherita Orsolini e Samantha Salomone (2022) abbiamo utilizzato l'Analisi della Conversazione per esaminare caratteristiche formali del parlato della psicologa rivolto ad una ragazza durante sessioni riabilitative mirate a potenziarne

le abilità cognitive e pragmatiche. Cecilia, di 13 anni all'epoca dell'intervento, aveva un profilo cognitivo con una disabilità intellettuale di grado moderato, accompagnata da alcune difficoltà a livello pragmatico che ne accostavano il funzionamento anche al quadro diagnostico dello spettro autistico. La ragazza, all'inizio, mostrava difficoltà specifiche nell'interazione con la psicologa, che includevano difficoltà nell'introdurre un argomento di conversazione, lunghi silenzi ( $> 2,5$  sec) in risposta a domande o sollecitazioni della psicologa, e mantenimento della coerenza discorsiva. Risultava altrettanto instabile, all'inizio del trattamento, la reciprocità di sguardo con l'interlocutrice e l'impiego di segnali espressivi e prosodici per veicolare stati affettivi coerenti con quanto veniva detto o narrato. Nell'équipe si era deciso di realizzare delle sessioni « preliminari » al trattamento, che avessero come obiettivo terapeutico esplicito la possibilità di raccontare l'esperienza quotidiana e condividerne, nell'interazione con la psicologa, una partecipazione emotiva utile, da un lato, ad affinare delle risorse comunicative per rappresentare e riflettere sull'esperienza, e dall'altro, a costruire e valorizzare una propria rappresentazione.

In quel contributo, le autrici analizzano come le prime interazioni con la psicologa fossero profondamente influenzate dall'*habitus CDC* (*Child-Directed Communication*) descritto da Ochs et al. (2005). La psicologa iniziava la conversazione con una domanda, e alla risposta della ragazza, rispondeva con valutazioni positive o commenti connotati da una intensa qualità affiliativa, come nell'esempio di seguito:

### Estratto 3

Partecipanti: P(sicologa), C(cecelia, 13 anni)

1. P com'è andato il viaggio oggi?
2. C be:ne. ((sorride))
3. (0.4)
4. C io a cavallo faccio anche le gare.
5. P davve:ro?
6. (.) ((R continua a sorridere, sguardo davanti a sé))
7. ma davv<sup>↑</sup>e:ro? ((sporgendosi in avanti))
8. (.) ((R si gira verso P, continuando a sorridere e annuisce))
9. P ma ↑quando ce l'hai la gara?
10. C una l'ho fatta ieri.
11. P davve:ro?

Nell'estratto, lo scambio iniziale con cui la psicologa inaugura lo scambio è un esempio di quanto è noto come *small talk* (Coupland, 2000), « chiacchiere » utili a rompere il ghiaccio e preliminari a conversazioni più rilevanti per l'incontro in corso, centrate su argomenti specifici. Di seguito a questo inizio, dopo un breve silenzio, la ragazza introduce un argomento di conversazione, riferendo di essere coinvolta in gare con i cavalli (l'equitazione è una sua passione e il tema dei cavalli prende spesso posto nello scambio con la psicologa). Occorre immaginare che il tono emotivo del resoconto è molto composto, diremmo poco partecipato, senza alcuna enfasi. A fronte di ciò, tuttavia, la psicologa risponde invece con un intervento in forma di domanda (« davvero ?? », prodotto con una intonazione ed enfasi elevate. Heritage (1984) comprende « davvero » (« *really?* » in inglese) all'interno di quei marcatori o *response tokens*, che segnalano un cambiamento di stato (epistemico) da parte di chi riceve un'informazione, comunicano, cioè, che chi ha ricevuto la notizia ha « realizzato » quella informazione come nuova. Occorre considerare come qui l'avverbio « davvero », in quanto appare in forma di domanda, dal punto di vista letterale chiede conferma, e sottrae dunque certezza e attendibilità all'interlocutrice. Inoltre, il marcitore, insieme a segnali non verbali quali l'espressione del viso, lo sguardo, il busto proteso in avanti da parte della psicologa

(riga 7), veicola un orientamento affettivo non coerente con l'orientamento e la qualità emotiva (decisamente meno intensa) « incorporata » dalla ragazza. Cecilia, infatti, dà deboli se non nulle evidenze di allinearsi alla valutazione entusiastica della psicologa sull'informazione, sollecitando la psicologa a ripetere la sua valutazione con un altro « davvero »? È interessante, infine, poter segnalare come la domanda « davvero »? in quanto domanda « chiusa » possa anticipare unicamente due opzioni: sì o no – opzione altamente improbabile, in quanto comporterebbe una smentita del parlante e dunque qualificherebbe come informazione non veritiera (menzogna o scherzo) quanto appena riferito. In quanto incorpora una valutazione da parte della psicologa, e in quanto propone solo come possibile seguito una risposta di conferma o smentita da parte della ragazza, l'intervento dunque « chiude » lo sviluppo della sequenza, come accade anche agli interventi apertamente valutativi delle interazioni asimmetriche e specificamente pedagogiche (tripletta IRV *Initiation Response Evaluation*; Sinclair, Coulthard, 1975). Di seguito alla risposta della ragazza (che annuisce), alla psicologa non resta che proporsi – in assenza di un'altra iniziativa della ragazza – con una domanda (riga 9 « ma quando ce l'hai la gara »?), a partire dalla quale si genera una sequenza simile, in cui fa nuovamente apparizione, come un'abitudine discorsiva, automatica, il marcitore « davvero ». In un'altra occasione, dello stesso periodo, abbiamo osservato un fenomeno simile:

#### Estratto 4

((Cecilia sta parlando di un breve viaggio fatto con i genitori))

1. P            siete stati pure da qualche altra parte?
2. C            (0.3)
3.                no, dopo siamo ritornati in albergo. ((guarda P))
4. P            mh.
5.                (.)
6. P            e avete cenato in albergo?
7. C            (0.2) no, abbiamo cenato:::, al ristorante.
8. P            **ah:!**
9.                **quindi pure ristorante ieri, fantastico!**
10. C           ((annuisce))

o ancora:

#### Estratto 5

11. C           li guardo ancora i Cesaroni.
12.                quelli li guardo più di Peppa Pig! ((sorride))
13. P            **wo::w! Bellissimi i Cesaroni.**
14. C           si. li vedeva quando li facevano in televisione,

Anche in queste sequenze, e in maniera ancor più evidente dell'esempio precedente, l'orientamento della psicologa, convocata ad ascoltare e ricevere il racconto di Cecilia, testimonia di una sua partecipazione affettiva (cf. riga 8-9 esempio 2, riga 13 esempio 5) rispetto alle caratteristiche di narrabilità dell'evento (quanto cioè esso si separi dal canonico e ordinario e possa organizzare gli eventi secondo una struttura drammatica; cf. Bruner, 1992), ed ai segnali di partecipazione della ragazza a quanto (lei stessa) sta dicendo, come esagerata, eccessiva, artificiosa.

Lontane dal giudicare che vi sia un modo giusto ed efficace in assoluto per comunicare con i bambini, e che l'interazione debba (o possa) essere « depurata » dall'influenza di attitudini e preferenze personali che ci spingono a fare ciò che facciamo nei modi in cui lo facciamo,

possiamo però interrogare le similitudini nel registro adottato in queste diverse – apparentemente lontane – situazioni, e chiederci se in esse non sia operante lo stesso « artificio ».

Proponiamo che l'adulto (qui psicologa, come lì madre) intenda infondere una qualità fondamentalmente affiliativa, un senso di solidarietà e di intimità che, nella nostra cultura, è associato al godimento e alla condivisione di un affetto positivo e di una « comunione » di intenti, atteggiamenti, e stati emotivi. Se questo è lecito con i bambini piccoli, perché è da quella anticipazione che trarrebbero (se nascono e crescono in contesti occidentali) informazioni sufficienti a comprendere i propri stati e intenzioni, e corrispondere coerentemente a quelli loro proposti, la stessa cosa non può dirsi con bambini che hanno maturato nel tempo un proprio modo, e spesso idiosincratico o, come si direbbe, « atipico » di interpretare gli eventi e le relazioni.

Gli studi sullo *storytelling* o narrazione di storie conversazionali (Jefferson, 1978, 1984; Goodwin, 1984; Mandelbaum, 1989; Sacks, 1974, 1992; Schegloff, 1997) sottolineano come sia il parlante che racconta la storia a fornire, in particolari momenti centrali (*climax*) la « chiave » affettiva cui il destinatario è invitato a « sintonizzarsi » (Stivers, 2008; Heritage, 2011). In assenza di una segnalazione chiara, esplicita o a volte in assenza di segnalazione alcuna del tono emotivo da parte della ragazza rispetto a quanto andava dicendo, la psicologa, nei casi mostrati, agisce tale partecipazione in vece del parlante, amplificando le caratteristiche « anticonvenzionali », non canoniche, straordinarie, dell'evento e dunque intensificando le sue caratteristiche di narrabilità. Sebbene le intenzioni della psicologa siano più che buone e legittime, i suoi interventi « infusi » di entusiasmo negli esempi esaminati hanno l'effetto, su una ragazzina apparentemente caratterizzata da una affettività deppressa e dalla difficoltà a partecipare emotivamente agli eventi narrati, di « proiettare » una propria prospettiva. L'habitus all'accoglimento positivo « a tutti i costi » dei contributi della ragazza (come la lode espressa ai bambini piccoli per le loro *performances*, indipendentemente dal livello dell'esecuzione nella pratica del *baby talk*) concorre infatti ad orientare fortemente il seguito della narrazione lungo direttive e intensità scelte dalla psicologa/destinataria del racconto, e non dalla ragazza /narratrice. Ma può chi ascolta ed è testimone solo in quel momento di un'esperienza narrata anticiparsi cosa chi narra prova, ha provato, intende comunicare ed enfatizzare nel racconto? L'esito di queste sequenze è di chiudere anticipatamente a volte anche le possibili evoluzioni delle narrazioni, laddove (come è stato poi sperimentato in sessioni successive a queste analisi), l'attesa, il silenzio, l'astinenza a produrre valutazioni immediate, la produzione unicamente di *continuers*, segnali minimi di *feedback* dell'ascoltatrice (« mh, mh »), e di semplice incoraggiamento a continuare possono ottenere, sebbene brevi, autonome elaborazioni da parte della ragazza, e soprattutto, contribuire a creare episodi di maggiore comprensione della qualità emotiva sperimentata dalla ragazza (e non anticipati dalla psicologa) rispetto agli eventi narrati.

## V. I limiti della volontà di cooperare nel bambino: la storia di Davide e la necessità di imporsi

Un'altra comune caratteristica del parlato ai bambini secondo un registro e una prospettiva *Child-Centered* è la richiesta e l'appello al « piacere » o alla « volontà » del bambino di correre ad un certo corso d'azione proposto. L'appello alle preferenze del bambino è quanto qualifica le richieste, ad esempio, sul cibo, sui giochi, sui vestiti (« Cosa vuoi mangiare/mettere oggi? »), e che si invoca anche quando, di fatto, si sta invitando il bambino ad aderire ad una azione « comandata ». In questo esempio, raccolto nel contesto di interazione tra educatrice e bambini all'interno di un nido (Fatigante et al., 2022), Manolo, 3 anni, stringe tra le mani un gioco portato da casa (una macchinina di plastica), che è previsto lasci immediatamente dopo l'ingresso al nido, prima che comincino le attività. La regola è nota ai

bambini e l'educatrice formula una serie di direttivi, formulati variamente come richieste, inviti, imperativi, perché Manolo sia persuaso a posare la macchinetta su un mobile vicino. Il primo di questi inviti è prodotto in questo modo:

### Estratto 6

1. Edu vogliamo posare qualcosa
2. [qua sul mobile?= ((colpendo con la mano l'armadietto come indicando dove metterlo))  
[Manolo va a sedersi sulle gambe dell'educatrice
3. Edu =lo [me:tti a posto.
4. Manolo [fa cenno di no con il capo
5. (2.5) ((Manolo guarda alle costruzioni sul tappeto e mantiene la macchinina in mano))

L'educatrice utilizza il plurale inclusivo « noi » (Benveniste, 1966) nel momento in cui propone « vogliamo mettere qui qualcosa ». La forma plurale del verbo ha valore affiliativo (cf. Ochs, Schieffelin, 1989), ed è teso a sostenere o, piuttosto, ad indirizzare la motivazione del bambino ad ingaggiarsi nell'attività. È interessante notare che la proposta « vogliamo posare » – evidentemente in assenza di qualsiasi segnalazione del bambino di tale volontà – preceda la formulazione dell'ordine: « lo metti qui », come ad operare un tentativo di assicurarsi la volontà del destinatario, per poi proporre l'esercizio di una (propria) volontà sull'azione del bambino.

Nell'esempio di seguito, osserviamo un procedimento simile. Siamo a casa di Laura (nome fittizio della bambina), precisamente nella sua cameretta. Laura è una bambina con una sindrome encefalopatica, epilessia, difficoltà severe nella comunicazione espressiva e sospetta diagnosi di autismo e ADHD. Davide è uno psicologo in formazione. Lavora con Laura con strumenti mutuati dalla sua formazione psicologica, da un lato e teatrale, dall'altro, per promuoverne le abilità espressive, la capacità di autocontrollo e la capacità di *focusing* dell'attenzione. Partendo da alcune problematicità come l'erraticità della condotta di Laura e l'intermittenza di azioni e attenzione da parte sua, da un lato, e avendo osservato la difficoltà da parte di Davide e il senso di frustrazione nel non riuscire a comunicare e interagire con Laura attraverso il gioco, dall'altro, abbiamo analizzato le videoregistrazioni e trascrizioni degli incontri, e realizzato sessioni di supervisione dell'intervento di Davide per migliorarne le strategie comunicative e comprendere gli ostacoli specifici alla comprensione e all'accordo. Nell'esempio che mostriamo, adulto e bambina sono seduti l'uno di fronte all'altra, e l'adulto ha proposto già poco prima la sua intenzione di coinvolgere la bambina in alcuni giochi. La bambina ha però preso, e posto a sedere al lato del tavolino, due bambole: Anita e Anna.

### Estratto 7

((Laura mette le bambole di lato, poi mette in bocca il dito di una delle due))

1. Davide ti va se loro ti guardano mentre noi facciamo dei giochi?
2. Laura mm: ((Laura tiene in bocca il dito di una delle bambole))
3. Davide ti andrebbe?
4. Laura hmh°. ((Laura tiene in bocca il dito di una delle bambole))
5. Davide ti va? (.) ((chino su Laura))  
senza mettere in bocca eh?
6. Davide facciamo così. allora= Anita,
7. ((Laura si alza))
8. e Anna, si mettono sedute qua.
9. (1.0)

10. giusto?
11. Davide e qu[esto,
12. Laura [giochi↑↑a::mo,
13. (..)
14. giochiAAA↑MO::! =A↑ni:ta↑↑ e Anna,
15. Davide no. Anita e Anna, ci guardano adesso.
16. e poi ↑do:po, magari giochiamo un po' con loro.
17. (0.5) ((Laura ha lo sguardo in basso, fermo))
18. Davide ti va:?
19. Laura ((prende per i capelli la bambola Anita e si gira))

Nell'esaminare, alla prima persona, questa sequenza, Davide, lo psicologo, scrive: « Rivedendomi, l'interazione di questo primo incontro è davvero difficile da seguire, perché io faccio continuamente domande cui Laura non risponde, e non mi accorgo che dò per scontato l'accordo tra me e lei sul *frame*<sup>2</sup> (Goffman, 1974), sul significato, cioè, di quello che stiamo facendo. Infatti, la bambina (riga 8) vuole che giochiamo con le bambole, e non che le bambole (come io propongo) siano « spettatrici » di quello che facciamo. E che ancora non è stato per niente chiarito! »

Nel corso dell'interazione, Davide si confronta con l'ambivalenza creata dalla « forma del parlare » abitudinaria che si indirizza ai bambini (l'affetto indiscriminatamente positivo, l'assunzione che sia la bambina a scegliere e dirigere, l'assunzione che ci si possa e debba sempre poter « accordare » intorno a ciò che si sta facendo o si sta per fare) e lo scopo dell'interazione, cioè l'intervento, che prevede che sia l'adulto – lo psicologo – ad introdurre e condurre a sé e all'attività l'attenzione e l'ingaggio della bambina. Così, Davide, all'inizio dell'intervento, fa un impiego massiccio di strategie di « cortesia » conversazionale (Brown, Levinson, 1987; Mariottini, 2007; Duranti, 2012), di dispositivi, cioè, tesi a promuovere una immagine di sé come partecipante solidale, e a garantire all'interlocutore la percezione di apparente ampio margine di autonomia all'interno della conversazione, come l'agire un proprio desiderio e intervenire con una propria volontà sulla direzione dello scambio (« ti va? » « Ti piacerebbe? »).

Tali abitudini, a fronte della innegabile difficoltà ad intendere molte delle comunicazioni della bambina, conducevano inizialmente ad esiti bizzarri e ambivalenti: Davide, da un lato, aveva necessità di dirigere costantemente il flusso dell'interazione, richiamando continuamente l'attenzione della bambina a sé e a quanto andava proponendo, incontrando peraltro molta resistenza alle sue proposte. Dall'altro, mostrava una sorta di *laissez faire* o passività personale, evidente, ad esempio, nella bizzarra posizione di « servizio » (da cameriere) nei confronti di Laura e nell'assenza di riparazione e sanzione per le occasioni (numerose) in cui non riceveva risposta da parte della bambina.

Queste mosse « cortesi » incontrano molta resistenza da parte di Laura, anche per una difficoltà insita nel disturbo stesso della bambina: una breve, brevissima durata dello *span* attentivo, tale da renderle difficile tollerare fasi di « preparazione » dell'azione o del gioco proposto. In questo senso, Davide appariva all'inizio « inseguire » Laura in lunghe sequenze preliminari che, se osservate e osservabili anche nel gioco tra bambini (Corsaro, 1997), presuppongono però un orientamento comune e una possibilità simile, simmetrica, di (entrambi) gli interlocutori a parteciparvi. Se, all'inizio, Davide pone questi interventi preliminari come domande (« ti va? » « posso? » « possiamo? » « ti piacerebbe? ») successivamente, comincia invece a proporre i suoi interventi in maniera più determinata, dichiarandole come « proprie » decisioni. Ne vediamo un esempio nel seguente estratto. Qui, Laura e Davide stanno giocando a palla. La palla tuttavia è sgonfia. Davide propone ad un certo punto di fermarsi:

<sup>2</sup> In linea con la definizione datane da Goffman (1974) come l'« accordo operativo » o « definizione condivisa » tra partecipanti sul significato dell'attività in corso. Condizione preliminare per il *frame* è che i partecipanti siano coorientati verso un focus di attenzione comune.

### Estratto 8

((Laura ha in mano la palla e di tanto in tanto la gonfia. Davide cerca di portare l'attenzione di Laura sull'attività « Facciamo finta che »))

Partecipanti: Davide, Laura

1. Davide aspetta. ascolta=ascolta=ascolta.
2. ((Laura è voltata, gira le spalle a Davide))
3. Davide guardami. guardami= guardami.
4. (.)
5. guardami
6. Laura no. noo::
7. Davide però guarda siccome è rotta ((riferendosi alla palla))
8. non ci possiamo giocare. siccome è rotta =non ci si può giocare
9. quindi, (.) si mette a posto
10. ((Davide mette a posto la palla, Laura lo osserva))
11. Davide io ho un gioco da proporre
12. Laura aaah ((guarda Davide facendo espressione di meraviglia))
13. Davide io ho un gioco che mi piace e che vorrei fare con te,
14. il gioco si chiama facciamo finta che. facciamo finta che.
15. hai capito come si chiama ?
16. Laura ((Laura si volta e prende)) eh. a.
17. Davide sto parlando con te. vorrei fare un gioco. questa ((=la palla))
18. adesso la mettiamo da parte, e io ti insegno il gioco.
19. ((Laura guarda Davide))
20. Davide facciamo finta che.
21. (.)
22. facciamo finta che!
23. (.)
24. dillo tu:
25. Laura beluleina
26. Davide dillo tu. facciamo finta che.
27. Laura < facciamo fi:nta
28. (.)
29. che> ,

In questo ed altri estratti, è evidente come Davide, anche se in maniera sensibile e cauta, esprima a Laura delle richieste esplicite richieste di attenzione e orientamento a sé (« guardami », « ascolta »), lasciando poca ambiguità sul senso di quanto sta proponendo (riga 13, « ho un gioco che mi piace e che vorrei fare con te »; riga 18 « ti insegno il gioco ») e sulle condizioni che quanto sta proponendo richiede di sospendere o rinunciare al gioco della palla (righe 7 e 8, « non ci possiamo giocare perché è rotta »; riga 18 « adesso la mettiamo da parte »). Infine, ciò che chiede alla bambina è di ripetere quanto lui dice (il nome del gioco « facciamo finta che », riga 20) e, a partire dalla ripetizione della bambina (riga 23), dare inizio all'attività congiunta.

La richiesta di ripetere quanto dice Davide ricorda la particolare strategia delle madri Kaluli descritte da Ochs, Schieffelin (1984) e Schieffelin (1990). Come descritto in quei lavori, la richiesta comprende l'attribuzione al bambino di un'identità autentica di apprendente, in quanto le si porge una « porzione » di linguaggio perché ella la ripeta, identicamente, e perché si allinei inoltre all'orientamento d'azione indicato dall'adulto. Nell'esempio, osserviamo come questa strategia sia efficace perché la bambina arresti la sua irrequietezza e aderisca, come ancora non era mai accaduto, ad una proposta dell'adulto.

Questo breve esempio, benché insufficiente a chiarirne il complesso e lungo lavoro, testimonia già di una transizione dello psicologo da una postura troppo « adattata » alle (presunte) esigenze della bambina, ad una maggiore « autenticità », intesa come aderenza – che trova evidenze esplicite nel suo modo di indicare a Laura un orientamento per l’azione – a quanto quell’evento comprende. Un adulto che è lì per sostenere e promuovere nuovi apprendimenti per la bambina, una bambina che conosce quanto quell’adulto non è pari al genitore né ad un amico. E come tale, l’adulto ha cominciato ad esprimere chiaramente ed esplicitamente le sue richieste alla bambina, presentandole la necessità che la bambina stessa le riconoscesse in quanto richieste, adattandovisi.

Nel lavoro individuale, Davide ha riconosciuto che la percezione di vulnerabilità della bambina, da un lato, ma anche di imprevedibilità e di incomprensibilità delle sue comunicazioni ed intenzioni, dall’altro, lo sollecitava ad utilizzare modalità abitudinarie, irriflessive, che, attestandosi su una tonalità emotiva ridondantemente affiliativa – anche in assenza di reciprocità della bambina – tenevano al riparo da un confronto e riconoscimento serio ed esplicito con lei, e con gli scopi e il potenziale del loro incontro.

## VI. Riflessioni conclusive: quale cooperazione nella comunicazione con i bambini

Abbiamo visto come il parlato indirizzato ai bambini dagli adulti sia abitualmente connotato dalla accentuazione degli aspetti di segnalazione di solidarietà e cooperazione, manifesti nell’esagerazione dell’affetto, dell’approvazione, e in generale nell’enfasi conferita alla qualità affiliativa, preliminare allo stabilirsi di una effettiva alleanza di lavoro tra bambino e adulto, e nell’impiego di strategie tese a mitigare la possibile distanza tra corso d’azione dell’adulto e corso d’azione anticipato – o anticipabile – del bambino. Nel loro articolo per una « Semiotica della cooperazione », Duranti e La Mattina (2022) evidenziano quanto ciò che chiamano *intersubjective attunement*, traducibile come regolazione reciproca e adesione ad un patto comune necessario alla realizzazione di un corso d’azione condiviso, non risieda in una rappresentazione a priori o comprensione anticipata, mentale ed astratta, dello scopo e del contenuto di quel corso d’azione. Né, sostengono gli autori, tale regolazione reciproca è mai garantita fuori dalla sua realizzazione temporale, progressiva, situata nelle singole azioni o turni che si succedono l’uno dopo l’altro, e che non sono mai predicibili a priori. Al contrario, l’interazione umana, anche nei corsi d’azione più altamente cooperativi (come ad esempio, il gioco, la *performance* rituale, l’esecuzione di un compito comune ecc.) sono costantemente ed inerentemente vulnerabili a rotture, inciampi e fallimenti (Throop, Duranti, 2015). A « saldare » costantemente e riparare, nonostante le più o meno grandi fratture, questo tessuto negoziale, è l’opportunità dei parlanti di coordinare le proprie risorse linguistiche e multimodali, in una maniera che, se richiede – al minimo della cooperazione – che i partecipanti non abbandonino il campo o non si armino l’uno contro l’altro, dall’altra parte non implica che quella cooperazione, la solidarietà del partecipante al progetto, sia esplicitamente invocata, dichiarata o rinforzata.

Si dà, cioè, per scontato che i partecipanti applichino secondo regole condivise e mutualmente comprensibili aggiustamenti continui alle « contingenze dell’interazione » (Schegloff, 1992), e che questo accada all’impronta, contando sulla capacità di « improvvisazione » (Duranti, Black, 2011; Duranti, La Mattina, 2022).

Questo livello strutturale della collaborazione sembra non fornire rassicurazioni nell’interazione con il bambino. In queste situazioni, nulla delle cinque dimensioni individuate da Duranti e La Mattina come costitutive della cooperazione come attività semiotica (accettazione dell’asimmetria nell’accesso sensoriale alle risorse, delle fluttuazioni nell’attenzione, riconoscimento di una intenzionalità distribuita, mobilità e negoziabilità nelle ascrizioni di ruolo, capacità di improvvisazione) può essere data per scontata, e pare invece che l’adulto

si assuma un (extra) carico di dichiarare la collaborazione, commentandola o esibendola teatralmente perché il bambino possa appoggiarvisi e venirne attratto, quasi « trascinato ». La conseguenza è l'immissione di un artificio, per cui quello spazio, immanemente rischioso, in cui l'azione (il turno) si espone alla ratifica dell'interlocutore viene in certo modo fortificato da dispositivi propri (tra gli altri) della cortesia conversazionale. Questi procedimenti risultano « ceremoniosi » più che ceremoniali (Goffman, 1963), in quanto la cerimonia richiede la partecipazione e l'esecuzione di tutti i partecipanti all'*officium*, e nel rendere al bambino un eccesso di omaggio, senza chiederne che esso venga reso in cambio, tradiscono la natura fittizia del contratto: la mancata fiducia dell'adulto che possa effettivamente darsi tra lui e il piccolo destinatario un'alleanza di lavoro, fondata sulla razionalità e rendicontabilità delle azioni individuali che l'etnometodologia (Garfinkel, 1967) ha indicato come costitutive e indiscusse del soggetto come attore sociale competente.

Che dunque questo eccesso di preoccupazione dell'adulto, ed esagerata disponibilità a fornire al bambino rassicurazioni sulla sua disponibilità ad assistarlo, riconoscerlo, dargli onore, si fondi su una avvertita incapacità di incontrarlo davvero come interlocutore reale? E se allora il bambino nasce e si forma specchiandosi nello sguardo di un interlocutore sensibile, all'origine la madre, cosa e come si guarda in un adulto che si scherma dal guardarlo?

C'è uno spazio ineffabile nell'interazione tra adulto e bambino. Le strategie di presentazione di sé che gli adulti offrono al bambino, che accentuino aspetti simulati o che si candidino semplicemente a farsi percepire da lui come partner intimi e solidali, provano a negare il senso di incertezza e vertigine che si dà di fronte ad un interlocutore poco prevedibile o forse solo poco conosciuto.

L'argomento non è accedere ad una presunta maggiore « autenticità », impossibile da realizzarsi anche tra persone adulte, nell'interazione ordinaria. La lingua provvede di un ampio bagaglio di risorse per schermarsi dall'autenticità, e a ragione.

Harvey Sacks, interessato a capire (come Goffman prima, e Garfinkel poi, e prima che gli sviluppi dell'Analisi della Conversazione spostassero l'accento più lontano dalle esigenze dei membri e fossero primariamente assorbiti dall'esame delle strutture delle sequenze interattive), come gli attori sociali giocassero la loro parte nel perenne teatro sociale che è la vita in interazione, e delle ragioni per cui lo fanno, ha insistito come Goffman (che però lavorava su dati inventati, non reali) sull'aspetto ceremoniale degli scambi sociali: « we have *ceremonial relationships* between various objects and their proper return », scriveva Sacks (1992: 239). In uno dei suoi saggi più citati, egli si pone una domanda seria relativa ai limiti, e alle opportunità, di costruire intimità e autenticità nell'interazione, mentre svela il meccanismo di simulazione e finzione e la necessità di mentire in semplici scambi sociali quali quello implicato dalla domanda ingenua: « Come stai »?, risorsa *passe-partout* per iniziare una conversazione. Quella domanda richiede condizioni molto particolari, generate unicamente in un tempo lungo, perché vi si possa rispondere avvicinando degli elementi di realtà e non con una risposta sommaria, di cortesia, utile soltanto a corrispondere a vincoli formali di composizione della sequenza, che intende sollevare. E gli stessi saluti sono dispositivi di simulazione di solidarietà che proteggono dalla minaccia percepita di essere sfidati, offesi, o alienati dall'altro (Frake, 1975; Duranti, 1992).

Alla luce di queste riflessioni, la preferenza dell'adulto di intensificare la qualità collaborativa dello scambio con il bambino, e la sua assunzione di responsabilità in merito a questo « compito » – assunzione svolta in totale autonomia – può essere interpretata come tentativo di compensare e negare il rischio di essere « da soli » – e lasciati soli – nel gioco sociale, dove tutti giocano parti diverse ma nessuno ha un copione certo da poter seguire. Sfuggirebbero pertanto alle lusinghe del « maternese » o « bambinese » quei parlanti adulti di comunità nelle quali il contributo di improvvisazione individuale e capacità di contrattazione non è valorizzata, e in cui dunque sono anche minori i rischi di un fallimento del rituale, che viene mantenuto grazie alle procedure di modellamento della condotta infantile su quella dell'adulto ; e quei parlanti adulti che stipulano un patto con i bambini fondato sul riconoscimento

autentico di una loro cittadinanza nel territorio discorsivo, familiare (Pontecorvo, Arcidiacano, 2006), così come educativo-scolastico (Fasulo, Pontecorvo, 1999; Orsolini, 1993; Pontecorvo et al., 1991; Pontecorvo, 1993) e del discorso tra pari (Corsaro, 2003).

In questi casi, si assiste al fatto che le comunicazioni al bambino, benché ancora infuse di tenerezza e affetto, prendono « sul serio » l'interazione con lui: è un territorio dove le domande al bambino sopraggiungono perché e quando c'è un interesse ad ascoltare le risposte, le valutazioni hanno la misura dell'emozione realmente percepita dal destinatario rispetto ad un elemento appreso; direttivi, richieste o comandi insistono perché si realizzzi davvero il piano cui sono destinati e ottengano riconoscimento. Perché se, come sottolineava Becchi (1997: 20) « il porsi domande circa l'infanzia è innanzitutto un *atto di parola* (corsivo mio) », e se l'atto di parola è un atto che non può fare a meno del contributo di tutti i partecipanti all'interazione perché abbia corso e tratta significato, allora è tempo che anche il parlare ai o con i bambini si (ri)apra ad una indagine seria sulla natura del soggetto-adulto e bambino, su cui si poggiano le pratiche di interazione tra loro, e sulla natura inerentemente misteriosa e sempre aperta al rischio del loro incontro.

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## Appendice

### Simboli notazionali del sistema di trascrizione jeffersoniano (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, 1974)

(0.5)	durata (in decimi di secondo) della pausa infra o tra turni
[	inizio di sovrapposizione tra turni (o tra turno verbale e non verbale)
]	fine di sovrapposizione tra turni
:	allungamento della vocale o sillaba che precede
?	tono interrogativo
,	tono sospeso
!	tono animato
.	caduta del tono
.h	inspirazione
h.	espirazione
hhh hhh	riso / risata
(h)	particelle aspirate dentro il parlato
parola_	enfasi (stile sottolineato)
PAROLA	innalzamento del volume di voce (maiuscolo)
°xx°/°°xx°°	abbassamento sensibile del volume di voce o sussurrato
◎ -	innalzamento o abbassamento sensibile del tono
=	allacciamento (mancanza di scansione) tra turni
-	interruzione brusca del parlato
> <	accelerazione del parlato
< >	decelerazione del parlato
(())	conto

# Emotion, communication and social change in Italian second-generation migrants: Karima 2G<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper focuses on the social and discursive construction of emotion in the artistic work and biography of an Italian singer of Liberian descent, Karima 2G – a second-generation migrant who questions a white-only view of Italianness, and on the pragmatic meaning of this ‘emotion talk’. Karima’s songs (particularly her debut album), widely shared as videos, have strong affective overtones, and communication in these videos is embodied, involving visual and audible semiosis. So, affective information is located in more than one « channel ». The investigation, currently still at the initial stage, relies on an « anthropology of the person », referring to Karima’s biographical data, so that her songs make sense within her personal life story. Drawing on biographical fragments allows for triangulation, which in turn makes it possible to discern Karima’s complex self-identification, constructed at the intersection of several communities and values. Karima’s biography and the events that characterise it, together with her artistic production, would appear to inscribe this individual within the characteristics of the cross-cultural identity dimension increasingly characterising Italian society but which fits into a planetary process. These new post-modern identities result from an acrobatic feat that sees the subject balancing along a line without a centre or periphery in continuous redefinition.

**KEYWORDS:** Emotion talk, anthropology of the person, Karima 2G, embodied stance.

## I. Introduction

This paper reports on an on-going investigation on the intersection of emotion, communication, and social change in the artistic work and biography of an Italian singer of Liberian descent, Karima 2G, a second-generation migrant whose language appears to us to be « feelingfully harnessed » (Wilce, 2009: 2) in the task of questioning a white-only view of Italianness.

The focus of the paper is primarily the social and discursive construction of emotion in Karima’s songs and the pragmatic meaning of this ‘emotion talk’. Karima’s songs (particularly her debut album) would appear to combine discourse (lyrics) and music to offend. They are bold. They have strong affective overtones. Moreover, these songs are widely shared as videos and communication in these videos is embodied, and thus involves visual and audible semiosis. So, affective information is located in more than one « channel »: sound and lyrics, of course, but gesture, postural orientation, gaze, and facial expression are also part of the same semiotic cluster. We are currently just at the initial stage, collecting videos for analysis, but once we move to the practical stage of our study we intend to analyse not just the lyrics of the songs (verbal language), but also prosodic markers, body

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posture, facial expression, gestures which, like grammar and lexis, are elements of « embodied stance ». In particular, the intense, muscular arm and leg movements, accompanied by defiant looks and clenched jaws, which feature in some of the videos, would appear to depict anger through gesture. On top of this, Karima's use of Pidgin would appear to be the most obvious index of Karima's anger in some of her songs insofar as it manifests her disidentification with the offending language. So, we intend to use clues such as these in combination to see whether or not Karima's songs looked at as multimodal digital objects, analysed frame by frame, can actually be considered to be events performing 'anger talk' (which, on the face of it, they would appear to be), and whether or not their pragmatic meaning can be said to be that of tackling racism (as it would appear to be). These are the hypotheses and research questions of our study.

Our investigation relies on an « anthropology of the person ». This means we intend to refer to Karima's biographical data, so that her songs make sense within her personal life story. Drawing on biographical fragments will allow us to triangulate data, which in turn allows us to discern Karima's self-identification, which is rather complex since Karima appears to construct it at the intersection of several communities and values.

Just to give an idea of this complexity, we tend to perceive the intense muscular movements and syncopated beats which are typical of Karima's songs as iconic of anger because the sign-vehicle (the specific movements and rhythm which are constitutive of the song) resembles the object. Now, the dominant aesthetic sensibility in Western societies is that ownership of emotion is better than performance. So, Karima's songs would appear to be the perfect representation of the covert racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes, which look at specific categories of individuals as models for pathologies of 'excessive emotion' or lack of control. Through attention to biographical data, though, we understand that Karima is actually cleverly drawing on both a performance and an ownership model, which places her at the intersection of different belongings, empowering her and making her message more effective. Karima is a migrant. However, as the daughter of an employee at the Liberian embassy, hers clearly represents a model of successful migration. So, her biography and the events that characterise it, together with her artistic production, would appear to inscribe this individual within the characteristics of the cross-cultural identity dimension increasingly characterising Italian society but which fits into a planetary process. These new post-modern identities result from an acrobatic feat that sees the subject balancing along a line without a centre or periphery in continuous redefinition.

## II. Anthropological introduction

The new Italian culture and new identity affiliations, relating in particular to the second generations of migrants are represented in this paper, through the example of Karima 2G, as a significant model defining the new Italians (Appadurai, 2005[1997]). These new post-modern identities are the result of an acrobatic effort that sees the subject balancing along a line without a center or periphery, in continuous redefinition, through a suspension made up of fullness and emptiness; one which welcomes and selects, rejects and re-elaborates. Crapanzano convincingly contends that, « Certainly, we have a responsibility to attend to the voice of those we study not only in terms of what they have to say about themselves but also what they have to say about us » (Crapanzano, 2004: 4-5): the new Italians tell us as much about themselves as they say about the 'old' Italians.

The investigation relies on an anthropology of the person (Levy, 1994) that focuses on the subject rather than on empty socio/anthropological categories, classes, and ethnicities. The paper argues for a combination of reflective anthropology (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992), and anthropology of repatriation (Clifford, 1997) as a possible tool to compare multiple languages and worlds, a multiplicity of cultures in a relationship of continuous and virtuous reciprocity.

The analysis reveals that this multiplicity results in unsuspected forms of resilience, new relational creativity, and, as in this case, innovative artistic products: relational and empathic skills that focus on the theme of migrant identity and the paths that different generations of migrants cross to define themselves. Emotional vulnerabilities and moods have the opportunity for staging through cultural shaping, through emotions conveyed by complex and layered symbolic systems that, in the course of a more thorough analysis to be carried out in years to come, will be examined and dissected through the selected sources (songs, videos, interviews, Twitter and Facebook posts), and Karima 2G's life events. From this perspective, the resulting ethnography seeks, among other things, to follow the free rhythm of the improvisations and action plans that arise in an individual's life. Living, from this point of view, means construing oneself through the objectives we plan and the directions we take without any prior preparation, in the heat of the moment: a true anthropology of life (Montes, 2015).

The use and collection of biographical data, understood as Karima 2G's personal life story, is the chosen method of investigation without, however, neglecting sources coming from Karima's artistic output and her personal use of the Internet. A new « nomadic subject » would appear to emerge that rewrites and re-elaborates itself, acquiring connotations, among other things, of gender assertiveness and a new trans-cultural feminism (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, Fraser, 2019). In the complexity that characterises every post-modern ethnographic investigation, in these pages the new materials and sources of what can be described as an ethnography of communication and the Internet will also be briefly addressed. The communications revolution produced by the explosion of telematic networks, especially the Internet with its continuous transformations, has multiple effects that potentially involve all spheres of human activity and organization. Netnography represents a concrete and scientific possibility for today's anthropological research and specifically for the study of the Karima 2G phenomenon: it constitutes a significant part of the forms of emotional and relational communication that the artist appears to privilege. It is interesting to see how Karima 2G is using the Internet to perform identity work rather than conform, since online spaces are spaces through which individuals expose themselves to the gaze of the Other, to be listened to or simply to leave a trace of themselves.

### III. Karima's 'emotion talk'

In a beautiful Introduction entitled « Feelingful language » Wilce tells about an interview he happened to have with an exchange student. He remembers this student in connection with a laptop full of songs, which he would be humming whenever, during the course of the interview, there was a dull moment: not just any songs, but Shia Muslim laments, songs of mourning. Through this memory, Wilce reminds us that the « stuff of culture » is to be found in the « fusion of language and feeling »: « language and emotion, for the linguistic anthropologist, are not only linked together, nor are they ends in themselves. They are linked to cultural ends. » (Wilce, 2009: 1)

As anticipated in the Preface, this paper reports on an on-going investigation on the intersection of emotion, communication and social change in the artistic work and biography of Karima 2G, a cross-cultural identity voicing social exclusion, discrimination and inequality in contemporary Italy. A second generation migrant whose language is « feelingfully harnessed » in the task of questioning a white-only view of Italianness (Figure 1).

We believe that Karima is a singer whose songs provide evidence that « the link between language and affect passes through the *process of identification* » (Wilce, 2009: 2; See the definition of identification – over identity – as a dynamic process in Wilce, 2009: 144), Karima's identification with the fights for « the cause of integration and the right to second-generation citizenship in Italy. » (Taronna, 2018: 309)



Nata e cresciuta in Italia, come ha affrontato la te bambina e poi donna in un "corpo nero", il diventare grande in un paese come il nostro? Da piccola ero sempre la prima e unica bambina nera, ovunque mi trovassi. A scuola, in particolare, mi sentivo diversa, non perché lo volessi io: per le maestre, in quanto nera, non potevo essere italiana e, di conseguenza, dovevo essere trattata diversamente dagli altri. Questa alienazione ha generato in me una serie di domande... Poi quando il mio corpo ha iniziato a prendere forma, questa emarginazione istituzionale è diventata un giudizio collettivo, intensificando gli stereotipi: la mia esoticità era sinonimo di ragazza facile. In seguito al colonialismo, la donna in un corpo nero viene "stereotipizzata" e "oggettificata" (spesso dalle stesse autorità e dai media). Il processo è simile a ciò che Edward Said definì "Orientalismo", ossia l'immagine basata su stereotipi e contrapposizioni usata dall'occidentale per ingabbiare le culture orientali e affermare la propria identità suprema. La traccia "U don't know me" parla proprio della rivalsa di una donna che ritrova il suo potere femminile e si libera da un maschio autoritario che non l'ha mai riconosciuta per quello che è realmente. Penso che questo nostro Paese mi abbia dato la possibilità di imparare molto dal mio corpo nero, che vedo come un grande tempio pieno di ricchezze. Più gli altri mi vedono diversa e più io mi sento unica.

**Fig. 1.** « Intervista a Karima 2G, la nostra M.I.A. liberiana che canta contro l'oppressione », *Musique Buffet*, 6 March 2018, <http://www.musiquebuffet.com/3470-2/>. Screenshot: Margherita Marta.

From a methodological point of view, the focus of the paper is, to start with, on the social and discursive construction of emotion in Karima's songs, and on the pragmatic meaning of such 'emotion talk', i.e. on what it *does*: emotion talk is a form of action; it does things. More precisely, it is a form of collaborative rather than expressive action. Indeed, still following Wilce, we do not view emotions as the expression of an essentialised individual self, but as « shared intersubjective states, performed in complex multimodal contexts involving [...] nearly every dimension of language and visible semiosis » (Wilce, 2009: 8). Variations in language and feeling at large – and so also variations in emotion talk – are socialised, in the sense that delimiting emotions is a cultural activity: we learn to recognise them and to interpret their meaning from infancy in the context of specific cultural events. The scope of what a specific emotion might mean varies considerably across cultures. However, cultures are not isolated entities, and as such emotions are explored in this paper as processes. Moreover, in the specific case at hand we argue that the emotions involved perform interested representations, linked with particular political economies: in short, we believe that they are ideological.

#### IV. Who is Karima?

Karima is an Italian singer of Liberian descent who speaks up against injustice. She is also a dancer, a beatmaker and a producer. She gained a mention in the NYT recently for organising a demonstration in Rome's Piazza del Popolo on June, 7, 2020 to express solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement (Figure 2).

In Rome, Karima 2G, an Italian singer of Liberian descent who hosted the protest, spoke of “solidarity with African-Americans” even as migrants from Africa struggle to get a footing in Italy and across Europe.

She said in an interview later that she was pleased to see a big turnout in Italy, where children of residents of African descent are often not considered Italian.

“That’s a form of racism, too,” she said.

**Fig. 2.** *The New York Times*, 7 June 2020. Screenshot: « Majority of Minneapolis City Council Pledges to Dismantle Police Department ».

As one can easily guess, the « 2G » in her name stands for second generation. Indeed, through her music, Karina advocates for the rights of migrants to Italian territory. A song from her debut album, «Orangutan», is a very explicit response on the racist comments of some Italian politicians in the context of the election of Italy's first black government minister Cécile Kyenge in 2013 (Figures 3 and 4).



**Fig. 3.** *KarimaOfficial*, 24 March 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=15&v=EKQOltxexX0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=15&v=EKQOltxexX0&feature=emb_logo). Screenshot: 'Orangutan'.



**Fig. 4.** *KarimaOfficial*, 24 March 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=15&v=EKQOltxexX0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=15&v=EKQOltxexX0&feature=emb_logo). Screenshot: 'Orangutan'.

## V. Karima's songs as communicative events

The song as a communicative event is an activity. As such, it involves agents and consequences that both reproduce and potentially transform both the resources of the specific action – the language used – and the social worlds in relation to which the action operates (Giddens, 1979 and Wilce, 2009). And from interaction, emotive and other semiotic acts emerge (Wilce, 2009).

Karima's songs (particularly her debut album, Figures 5, 6, 7, 8) combine discourse (lyrics) and music to offend. They are bold. They have strong affective overtones.

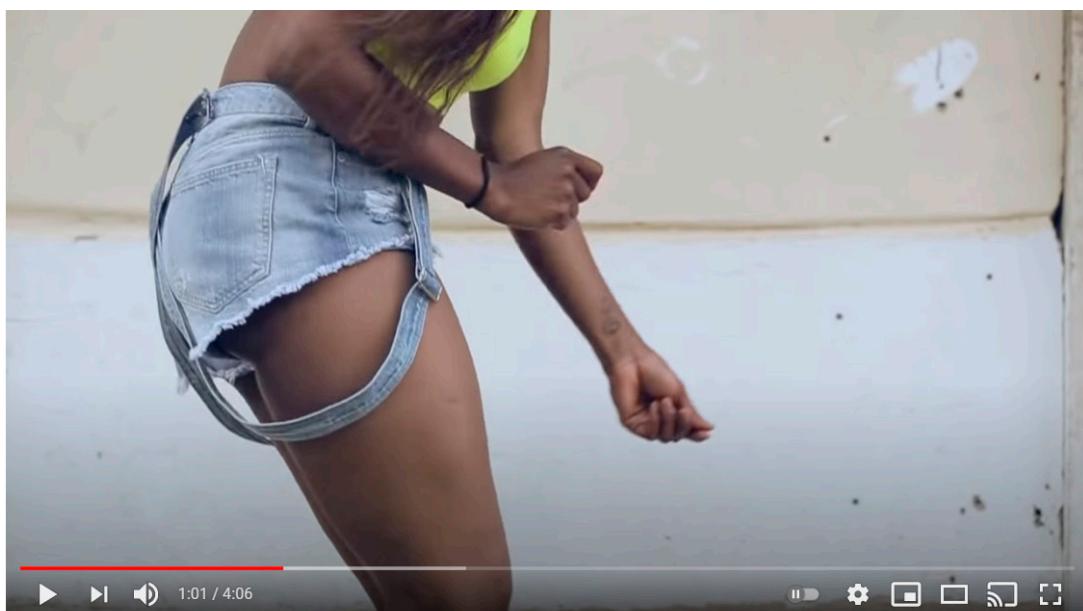
Communication in these videos (which we are currently collecting for analysis. We are at a very initial stage in our research) is embodied and thus involves visual as well as audible semiosis. So affective information is located in more than one « channel »: sound, lyrics, but also gesture, postural orientation, eye gaze, and facial expression are part of the same semiotic cluster.

According to Crapanzano, « The nonverbal expression of emotions, through gesture, intonation, demeanor, or pallor is relevant insofar as it marks the occurrence of emotions and offers an occasion for glossing them » (Crapanzano, 1989: 79). We intend to follow Wilce, for whom nonverbal expression is not just a gloss; language, for Wilce, is shorthand for social semiotics. So, following Wilce, we intend to move beyond lexicocentric analysis, we do not intend to work on linguistic stance: these are music videos which allow us to see, not just to read or hear. They make it possible to consider the emotional significance of movements of gestures.

Actually, with Wilce, we follow Matoesian, who – Wilce argues – « has explicitly returned the metaphor ('stance') itself to its embodied origins. » (Wilce, 2009: 36) Stance is the way in which someone stands; it a person's posture. « Voice, it may be said, is a metaphor of sound, whereas stance is a metaphor of body awareness or position. » (Swain, Graves, Morse, 2015: 32).

Matoesian considers stance not only as linguistic expression but as « interactive, bodily engagement, synchronised in multimodal layers of participation. » (2005: 167) This means that prosodic markers, body posture, facial expression, gestures, like grammar and lexis, are elements of « embodied stance. » The loci of emotions are many.

So, in our study of Karima's artistic production we intend to focus on « embodied stance », which means making room and actually devote equal weight to prosodic markers, body posture, facial expression, gestures than we apply to grammar and lexis. Wilce explains that prosody is « a key linguistic site of affect » (Wilce, 2009: 69): « Human beings leak affectivity through their voices – through the intensity, pitch, and quality of voice used [...]. »



KARIMA 2G - BUNGA BUNGA (OFFICIAL VIDEO HQ)

**Fig. 5.** Screenshot of 'Bunga Bunga', *KarimaOfficial*, 3 July 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRXWRgNbNBI>.



KARIMA 2G - BUNGA BUNGA (OFFICIAL VIDEO HQ)

**Fig. 6.** Screenshot of 'Bunga Bunga', *KarimaOfficial*, 3 July 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRXWRgNbNBI>.



**Fig. 7.** Screenshot of 'Bunga Bunga', *KarimaOfficial*, 3 July 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRXWRgNbNBI>.



**Fig. 8.** Screenshot of 'Bunga Bunga', *KarimaOfficial*, 3 July 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRXWRgNbNBI>.

(Wilce, 2009: 42). This means that, for our analysis, when we get to that stage, we are going to analyse Karima's sonic features of singing, how she conveys a stance of intense commitment to her ideological proposition « multimodally », relying, for example, on such clues as how she vocalises words in a certain way; on the patterns of rhythm and sound, so, also on the technicalities of Karima's music style. Styles are culturally embedded, and as such they index emotional stances, conventionalised sets of expectations. We have come to associate certain music styles with specific emotional stances. Karima has named her style « Bantu Juke Fever » (Figure 9).

« Bantu Juke Fever » is in fact a mix of styles all characterised by aggressive electronic sound: syncopated beats pounding rapidly, some of the styles emerging from ghettos or accompanied by lyrics often revolving around gritty depictions of urban life, like Chicago Juke and grime. We are going to draw on prosody and on body posture, facial expression, and gestures; for example, in the specific case at hand, the intense, muscular arm and leg movements enacted (Figures 5, 7, 8), together with the defiant looks and clenching jaws (Figure 6) which stand out in the video of 'Bunga Bunga', gesturally, iconically depict anger. And anger is also constructed through the lyrics of the songs: « I hit you and I give you some Berlusconi TV Station gaves Bunga Bunga Education ». On top of this, the choice of Pidgin is already ideological. Pidgin provides an outlet for 'other' identity and it may be the most obvious index of Karima's anger in the song, in the sense that it manifests her *disidentification* with the offending language. So, we are going to use such clues, in the specific case of the two videos mentioned above ('Orangutan' and 'Bunga Bunga') to argue that these songs are events performing 'anger talk' multimodally and that the pragmatic meaning of such 'anger talk' (what it does) is tackling racism.



Fig. 9. Screenshot of Karima 2G, 'Bantu Juke Fever', *bandcamp*, 8 July 2015, <https://anusrecords.bandcamp.com/album/bantu-juke-fever-2>.

## VI. Karima's biographical data as Karima 2G's personal life story

However, we are not just going to take Karima's artistic production into account. We are also going to use and collect Karima's biographical data, understood, in this context, as Karima 2G's personal life story. Indeed, our investigation relies on an anthropology of the person (Levy, 1994) that focuses on the subject rather than on empty socio/anthropological categories, classes, and ethnicities. We argue for a combination of reflective anthropology (Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992) and anthropology of repatriation (Clifford, 1997) as a possible tool to compare multiple languages and worlds, a multiplicity of cultures in a relationship of continuous and virtuous reciprocity.

Karima's biographical data as we get to learn it through her personal posts on Facebook (Figure 10) and declarations to the press (Figure 11), for example, do indeed tell us that these songs are events performing 'anger talk' intended to tackle racism.



**Fig. 10.** Screenshot of *Karima DueG*, 17 January 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/karimanb1/posts/1995436087341409/>.

"I do music to send a message and to express anger and the need to be recognized as an Italian, but also as a Black woman in Italy."

- Karima 2G

**Fig. 11.** « This Liberian Italian beatmaker uses music to tackle racism in Italy », *The World*, 29 June 2020, <https://theworld.org/stories/2020-06-29/liberian-italian-beatmaker-uses-music-tackle-racism-italy>. Screenshot: Angelica Marin.

Drawing on the anthropology of the person and referring to biographical pieces of information gives us the possibility of triangulating data in the comprehension of Karima's identification, which is quite complex, since Karima appears to construct it at the intersection of several groups and values.

## VII. Karima's model as pathological from a dominant western perspective?

Wilce grounds his model of language as emotional object in a theory of the political economy. The political economy is organised to reflect a distribution of emotion-performing roles (Lutz, 1990, reflects on this in terms of gender). In dominant discourses of Western society – where control is a paramount virtue – value is not attached to performing feelings, but to referring to them, embracing an 'ownership' model of emotion talk.

« Therapy culture encourages lexicalising feelings – 'I feel [emotion lexeme]' – *not* what it calls 'acting out.' Acting out can involve one child hitting another; but it can also involve verbally acting out anger by raising the voice – and failing to 'own' that feeling through rendering emotion-talk a kind of referential practice. Value is not attached to performing feelings in any form of action, including vocalization, but to referring to them. » (Wilce, 2009: 171).

« [...] capitalist classes produce persons and discourses that are most likely to embrace an 'ownership' model of emotion talk. » (*Ibidem*)

We tend to perceive intense muscular movements and syncopated beats, for example, as iconic of anger, in the sense that the sign-vehicle (the specific movement and rhythm) resembles the object (Peirce, 1931-1958). Of course, this perception is ideological. We develop specific aesthetic sensibilities and come to attribute emotional significance to things socially. So, in the specific case, the perspective that ownership of emotion is better than performance is constructed through covert racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes, which look at certain categories of individuals as models for pathologies of 'excessive emotion' or lack of control:

« Certain categories of people have been and are putatively 'inherently' unable to exercise control over themselves because of their emotional character. This is said of emotional others who might be 'uncivilized' (i.e., culturally different), or of a 'different' gender, age or putative 'race' ... Unable to control their emotions, they are suspect (Gaines, 1992: 16). » (Wilce, 2009: 172).

« To attribute emotion to a person or group is at least potentially an act of power. » (Wilce, 2009: 89).

Through recourse to the anthropology of the person and attention to biographical data, we understand that Karima is cleverly drawing both on a performance (Figure 11 above), and on an ownership (Figure 10 above) model, basically picking and mixing fragments from multiple cultural belongings into her mosaic identity. In particular, for example, the statement expressed in Figure 10 well sits within a 'therapeutic culture' Western paradigm, which tends to impose a new form conformity through the management of emotions (Furedi, 2004). This places Karima at the intersection of different belongings, empowering her and making her message more effective.

## VIII. Karima 2G as a cross-cultural identity

Karima's biography (she is a migrant. However, as the daughter of someone working at the Liberian embassy – Figure 12 – hers clearly represents a model of successful migration) and the events that characterise it, as well as her artistic production, appear to inscribe this individual within the characteristics of that cross-cultural identity dimension that increasingly characterizes Italian society but which is part and parcel of a planetary process.

The new Italian culture and new identity affiliations, relating in particular to the second generations of migrants are represented, through the example of Karima 2G, as a significant model defining the new Italians (Appadurai, 2005[1997]). These new post-modern identities

are the result of an acrobatic effort that sees the subject balancing along a line without a center or periphery, in continuous redefinition, through a suspension made up of fullness and emptiness; one which welcomes and selects, rejects and re-elaborates.

### **Quando è arrivata la tua famiglia in Italia?**

I miei genitori sono arrivati in Italia nel '78, perché a mio padre fu offerta la possibilità di lavorare nell'ambasciata liberiana. Il loro desiderio era quello di ritornare subito dopo, ma per una serie di motivi, tra cui la mia nascita decisero di restare.

**Fig. 12.** « Karima canta la seconda generazione. Fratelli africani uscite dalla solitudine », *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 24 May 2014. Photo: Daniele Sanzone.

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# Relazione tra linguaggio spaziale e abilità navigazionali in bambini italiani tra 3 e 6 anni. Uno studio pilota<sup>1</sup>

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**TITLE:** *Relationship between spatial language and navigational ability in Italian children between 3 and 6 years of age. A pilot study.*

**ABSTRACT:** *To move and find orientation appropriately in space requires the integration of different information from both the person and the surrounding context. The relationship between spatial cognition and spatial language appears to foster a better ability of the individual to interact and move in the environment. To understand the nature of this relationship our pilot study included a map-reading task as a measure of navigational ability, a component of spatial cognition, and a spatial preposition comprehension task, consisting of a spatial language measure built ad hoc for the Italian language. This new test allows the shifting of attention from the verb, understood as the vehicle of spatial expression, to the preposition, with a focus on the directionality expressed in the particle alone. Thirty-seven children (21 females and 16 males) in an age range between 3 to 6 years participated in the study. We conducted a correlation analysis, followed by a hierarchical regression analysis to understand whether spatial language can predict navigational performance. The results, although preliminary, confirmed our hypothesis that spatial language may favour navigational ability. This result is in line with recent literature pointing out that the mastery of spatial language leads to an improvement in spatial cognition.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Navigational ability, map-reading, prepositions, spatial cognition, spatial language.*

## I. Introduzione

Il linguaggio è stato da sempre riconosciuto come una risorsa essenziale ad accrescere la nostra conoscenza nell'ambito di vari domini cognitivi, quali, ad esempio, il ragionamento analogico (Gentner, 2003) e spaziale (Pyers et al.; 2010; Haun et al., 2011). Molte prove suggeriscono come la modalità di codifica linguistica influenzi la rappresentazione mentale del proprio spazio (Bowerman, 1996; Hermer-Vazquez et al., 1999; Levinson, 2003; Majid et al., 2004; Loewenstein, Gentner, 2005; Haun et al., 2006), anche se la relazione tra linguaggio spaziale e abilità navigazionali rimane ancora non completamente chiara (Li, Gleitman, 2002). Nello specifico, non è ancora chiaro se sia il linguaggio spaziale ad influenzare l'orientamento nello spazio in individui in via di sviluppo o le abilità navigazionali a condizionare l'acquisizione della competenza linguistica spaziale. A partire da questi interrogativi si sviluppa

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il presente lavoro di ricerca, volto a valutare le performance nei due domini, linguistico e navigazionale, in bambini tra i 3 e i 6 anni di età. È importante sottolineare che, a differenza di altre lingue, nella lingua italiana il linguaggio spaziale sembra essere mediato non solo dal verbo, dal quale nasce la nota definizione dell’italiano come lingua *verb-framed* (it: lingua « a quadro verbale »; Talmy, 1983), ma anche dalle preposizioni, indicatori della direzionalità dell’azione. Per tale motivo è stato costruito ad hoc un test volto alla valutazione della comprensione delle preposizioni al fine di sottolineare il ruolo che tali locativi detengono nelle competenze di tipo spaziale.

## II. La cognizione spaziale e il suo sviluppo

Nel corso della sua evoluzione, l’essere umano ha imparato ad orientarsi in modo funzionalmente soddisfacente nel contesto in cui vive grazie alle informazioni relative alla sua e altrui posizione, ai suoi continui spostamenti e alle sue brillanti capacità cognitive. In particolare, i processi percettivi, le capacità di attenzione spaziale e la programmazione ed esecuzione di atti motori rappresentano una parte integrante di ciò che denominiamo « cognizione spaziale ». Quest’ultima può essere definita come la :

capacità di scoprire, trasformare mentalmente ed usare l’informazione spaziale relativa al mondo, al fine di raggiungere una varietà di scopi quali il muoversi nel mondo, identificare oggetti ed agire su di essi, parlare di oggetti ed eventi, ed usare rappresentazioni simboliche esplicite quali mappe e diagrammi per comunicare informazioni relative allo spazio (Vallar, Papagno, 2011 : 250).

All’interno del dominio della cognizione spaziale la costruzione di una rappresentazione mentale dell’ambiente (mappa cognitiva) può avvenire tramite un’esplorazione diretta (*apprendimento primario*) da uno studio di mappe o da descrizioni esterne dell’ambiente (*apprendimento secondario*) (Tversky, 2000). In entrambi i casi, le rappresentazioni mentali dello spazio fisico possono usufruire di due differenti quadri di riferimento spaziale: egocentrico o allocentrico (Boccia et al., 2017). Tali attributi, difatti, pur essendo cornici di riferimento con coordinate specifiche rispetto alla posizione, alla direzione e alla dimensione di ciò che ci circonda, divengono talvolta etichette con utilizzazioni diverse in relazione anche a tipologie di personalità o di comportamento sociale. Basti pensare alla teorizzazione di Piaget, secondo cui l’egocentrismo cognitivo è una peculiarità di uno stadio precoce dello sviluppo cognitivo, in cui l’individuo è concentrato quasi esclusivamente sulle proprie azioni, pur non essendone consapevole (Piaget, 1936). D’altro canto, l’allocentrismo può essere visto come una tendenza comportamentale alla cooperazione per mezzo dell’assunzione della prospettiva dell’altro (Eisenberg, 2000; Triandis et al., 1985). La comparsa dei due quadri si posiziona in momenti temporali differenti nel corso dello sviluppo delle abilità sottostanti alla cognizione spaziale (Siegel, Sheldon, 1975). Imparare a ragionare e a rappresentare lo spazio sono attività di fondamentale importanza, che il bambino, fino a 6-9 mesi, è in grado di svolgere utilizzando le sole strategie egocentriche, caratterizzate dall’utilizzo di coordinate riferite a se stesso e ai propri movimenti (Piaget, Inhelder, 1948). Successivamente, a partire dagli 11 mesi, diviene possibile integrare tali informazioni nelle strategie allocentriche, che si servono di punti di riferimento salienti nel contesto in cui il bambino si trova ed infine, solo a 7-8 anni circa, iniziano a svilupparsi le strategie utili alla mappatura cognitiva, che risulta completa solo intorno ai 10 anni (Acredolo, Evans, 1980; Leplow et al., 2003; Piccardi et al., 2014a; Piccardi et al., 2014b). Solo nell’età adulta le capacità navigazionali permettono all’individuo l’utilizzo sia della geometria euclidea, sia di punti di riferimento (*landmarks*), mediante la codifica verbale delle informazioni relative al punto strategico, e quindi attraverso un vero e proprio « linguaggio spaziale » (Wang, Spelke, 2000). Wang e Spelke (2000), hanno intuito l’unicità della cognizione spaziale umana che, grazie alla capacità di rappresentare linguisti-

camente e graficamente il contesto ambientale è in grado di fornire alla loro navigazione una enorme potenzialità (Piccardi et al., 2011).

Le molteplici espressioni che permettono all'uomo di riferirsi all'ambiente, alla sua posizione, ai movimenti e alle modalità con cui li effettua, vanno a costituire quell'area del linguaggio nota come « linguaggio spaziale » (Bower, et al., 2020). Negli ultimi anni, l'attenzione della letteratura su tale forma di linguaggio è notevolmente aumentata anche in relazione alle diverse spiegazioni teoriche avanzate dagli studiosi. In base all'approccio innatista, determinate nozioni topografiche quali « il contenimento », « la prossimità », « la continuità » e « l'ordine » sono descritte come innate, primitive e universali. Esse sono espresse verbalmente attraverso un certo numero di strutture linguistiche, note, in lingua inglese, come *adpositions* (includenti preposizioni e postposizioni), in grado di coprire tutte le espressioni locative di una lingua, come descritto nel « modello a relazioni semplici » di Herskovits (Johnston, Slobin, 1979; Slobin et al., 1985; Talmy, 1983; Jackendoff, 1983; Landau, Jackendoff, 1993; Landau, 1994; Li, Gleitman, 2002). In base all'approccio funzionalista (Vandeloise, 1991; Levinson, 2003; Bowerman, 1996; Cuyckens, 1991) linguaggio e cognizione spaziale sono strumenti cognitivi codificati dalle convenzioni culturali delle varie comunità linguistiche. Le relazioni spaziali sarebbero distribuite all'interno della frase e non codificabili in un'unica classe grammaticale (Sinha, Kuteva, 1995). Analizzando varie espressioni locative, infatti, non sempre il linguaggio spaziale appare come l'espressione di concetti di base, quali 'contenimento' o 'prossimità', né tanto meno è facilmente intuibile la supposta natura primitiva di tali termini. Talmy, nel 1983, propone il concetto di « schematizzazione », prevedendo che l'individuo, nella costruzione di una rappresentazione mentale dello spazio, sia inevitabilmente incline a selezionare alcune porzioni di una scena e a tralasciarne altre. Secondo l'autore, il costrutto principale del linguaggio spaziale è l'evento di moto (*motion event*), cioè ogni situazione che implica movimento o mantenimento di una situazione stazionaria. Riprendendo la tipica distinzione gestaltica « figura-sfondo », Talmy (2000) propone di denominare Figura (*Figure*) l'entità che si muove o che è posizionata in una determinata collocazione, e Sfondo (*Ground*), l'entità rispetto alla quale la figura si muove o è collocata. Utilizzando una terminologia linguistica, il *tema* diviene l'entità da localizzare, e il *relatum* l'entità attraverso cui il tema stesso è localizzato o in relazione al quale si muove. Secondo Talmy (2000), l'evento basico di moto è costituito da quattro componenti principali indipendenti: (1) il *Moto* (*Motion*), indicante il cambiamento di posizione di un elemento da un punto all'altro della scena spaziale o la costanza della sua posizione; (2) il *Percorso* (*Path*), ovvero lo spostamento della figura in relazione allo Sfondo (3) la *Maniera* (*Manner*), ovvero la maniera in cui il Moto si verifica e (4) la *Causa* (*Cause*), che si riferisce all'evento esterno che provoca il Moto. Infine, in base all'approccio relativista, fondato sull'ipotesi di Sapir-Whorf, (Carroll, 1956), il pensiero, e l'elaborazione cognitiva in generale, sono mediati dal linguaggio. Nel campo specifico dello spazio, il linguaggio spaziale si formerebbe a partire dall'esposizione alla propria lingua madre e alle sue convenzioni culturali, e una volta formatosi, determinerebbe e modellerebbe il pensiero spaziale. (Levinson, 2003; Bowewrman, Choi, 2003; Brugman, 1983; Lakoff, 1987; Brugman, Lakoff, 1988).

### III. Il linguaggio spaziale: la prospettiva interlinguistica

Recentemente, l'attenzione degli studiosi si è concentrata sulle modalità con cui i quadri di riferimento adottati dal soggetto influenzano l'acquisizione del linguaggio spaziale, e come questi possano essere legati anche alle diversità con cui le diverse lingue codificano lo spazio. La diversità interlinguistica, infatti, può esplicarsi nella differente prospettiva che si materializza nelle varie espressioni spaziali. L'inglese, ad esempio, è maggiormente caratterizzato da termini egocentrici, quali « sinistra » (*left*) o « di fronte » (*front*) rispetto ad altre lingue che non usano termini relativi a quadri di riferimento soggettivi, oppure detengono locativi per

lo più geocentrici, quali i punti cardinali (Shusterman, Li, 2016). È da notare, inoltre, che le diverse lingue lessicalizzano l'evento di moto in maniera del tutto diversa. Talmy, a tal proposito, le distingue in *lingue a quadro satellitare (satellite-framed)*, come l'inglese, in cui sono le particelle-satelliti a descrivere la direzionalità, come, ad esempio, quando si esprime l'entrata o l'uscita usando lo stesso verbo ma cambiando la preposizione (*to out/in*), e *lingue a quadro verbale (verb-framed)*, come l'italiano e tutte le lingue romanze, le quali lessicalizzano nella sola voce verbale la relazione spaziale da esprimere (Talmy, 1985, 1991, 2000). Proprio in italiano, infatti, quando muta la semantica spaziale della frase, il cambiamento coinvolge innanzitutto il verbo e solo successivamente la preposizione (esempio: io *vado* al mare; io *ritorno* dal mare).

L'espressione delle relazioni spaziali costituisce un compito comunicativo ricorrente, visto che i parlanti sono continuamente costretti a localizzare delle entità in relazione ad altre o a sé stessi o anche a descrivere il percorso di un'entità che si sposta da un luogo ad un altro. L'italiano presenta un complesso articolato di elementi strutturali, sia lessicali che grammaticali, che forniscono ai parlanti la possibilità di esprimere e comprendere la collocazione nello spazio di persone ed oggetti, e di interpretarne le relazioni, così come di stabilire la direzionalità degli eventi stessi.

Nella cosiddetta *sintassi spaziale*, si distinguono, avverbi, preposizioni e locuzioni, ovvero strutture morfologiche e lessicali che definiscono e spiegano la posizione che oggetti, o individui, occupano in un determinato spazio (ad esempio, le preposizioni *stative* vs le preposizioni che denotano la *fonte (source)* o l'*obiettivo (goal)* (Nam, 1995). In relazione al lesema verbale a cui si accompagnano, tali strutture linguistiche concettualizzano :

« non solo il movimento e il percorso compiuto dal *trajector* (It: oggetto o soggetto in movimento) verso un dato *landmark* (It: l'approdo del movimento), ma indicano anche la localizzazione finale del *trajector* in un punto idealizzato del percorso » (Malinowska, 2002: 152)<sup>2</sup> »

con l'ausilio di una preposizione.

Il sistema topologico espresso dalle preposizioni italiane prevede la preposizione *in* protagonista della collocazione nel sottospazio interno di un *Relatum*, mono-bi o tridimensionale (per quest'ultimo caso sono possibili anche le preposizioni *dentro* o *all'interno di*), le preposizioni *vicino a*, *accanto a*, *attorno a* oppure *a fianco di*, indicanti il sottospazio intorno e, infine, la preposizione *fuori*, designante il sottospazio esterno. Per quanto riguarda le espressioni spaziali proiettive, abbiamo le locuzioni preposizionali : *davanti a*, *di fronte a*, *di faccia a* per esprimere le relazioni spaziali sul semiasse frontale, *dietro a*, *alle spalle di*, per quelle sul semiasse posteriore; *al di sopra di* o *sopra a* per le relazioni sul semiasse superiore, e *al di sotto di* o *sotto a* per quello inferiore; *a destra di* o *a sinistra di* per il semiasse laterale. L'insieme di queste risorse linguistiche consentono una notevole flessibilità nella rappresentazione del sistema topologico (Bowerman, 1996; Talmy, 2000).

## IV. Lo studio

### Obiettivi

Alla luce di quanto emerso dall'analisi della letteratura, ciò che risulta chiaro da un quadro teorico così complesso è che la cognizione spaziale trae vantaggio dal linguaggio appartenente a questa specifica area semantica (Gentner et al., 2014). Nonostante esistano recenti evidenze che sottolineano come la padronanza di specifici aspetti del linguaggio spaziale correli con le performance in compiti navigazionali (Gudde et al., 2018), i meccanismi che sottendono tale legame non sono ancora del tutto chiari.

<sup>2</sup> Corsivo e traduzione nostri.

Su tali basi, il nostro studio-pilota si è focalizzato sull'analisi del rapporto tra comprensione delle preposizioni spaziali e abilità navigazionali in un compito di lettura di mappa (*map-reading*), in bambini di età compresa fra 3 e 6 anni. In particolare, il nostro obiettivo è consistito nel cogliere il ruolo della comprensione delle preposizioni italiane che indicano la direzionalità e la propria posizione nell'azione.

Poiché l'italiano è una lingua appartenente alla tipologia *verb-framed*, l'attenzione è stata posta fin qui fondamentalmente sull'analisi del verbo come veicolo per eccellenza dell'espressione spaziale. La preposizione, tuttavia, risulta di fondamentale importanza qualora la direzionalità sia espressa dalla sola particella, in maniera quasi del tutto indipendente dal predicato.

## Partecipanti

Hanno preso parte allo studio 37 bambini residenti nella provincia dell'Aquila (16 maschi e 21 femmine) di età compresa tra i 3 e i 6 anni, previa autorizzazione ottenuta dai genitori o dai loro tutori con apposito consenso informato. Sono stati esclusi dallo studio bambini in cui l'italiano non rappresentasse la prima lingua e bambini con diagnosi di disturbi del neurosviluppo o con disabilità intellettive.

## Procedura

La somministrazione delle prove è avvenuta in maniera individuale in un'aula della scuola dei partecipanti, alla presenza dell'insegnante o di un collaboratore, in modo da far sentire il/la bambino/a proprio agio in un ambiente ecologico familiare. Le prove incluse nel nostro studio sono state selezionate considerando l'esigua capacità di attenzione sostenuta, tipica della fascia di età dei partecipanti.

## Strumenti

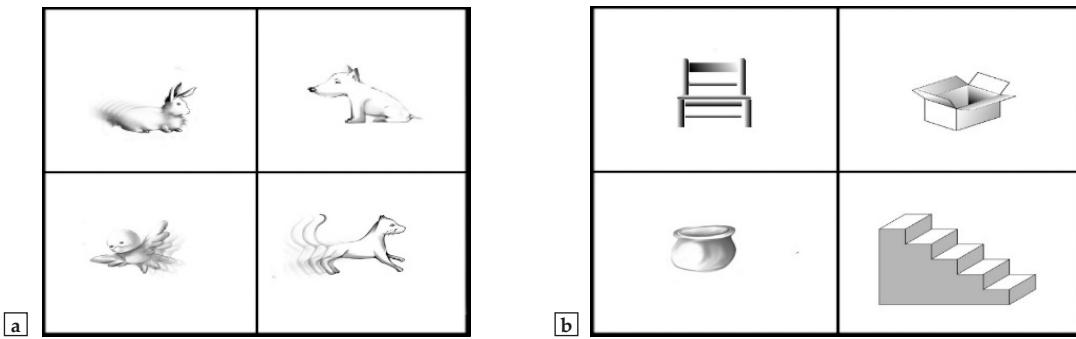
### Matrici Progressive Colore (CPM; Raven, Court, 1998; It.: Belacchi et al., 2008)

Si tratta di una versione ridotta delle Matrici Progressive di Raven PM38, sviluppata per misurare l'intelligenza fluida e il ragionamento logico-astratto su stimoli non verbali in bambini dai 3 agli 11 anni. Tale strumento si compone di tre serie (A, AB, B), ognuna comprensiva di 12 item, in cui il bambino è chiamato a completare una serie di figure con una figura mancante, secondo schemi di complessità crescente (Raven, Court, 1998; Belacchi et al., 2008).

### Compito di Comprensione delle Preposizioni Spaziali (CCPS; Giancola, D'Amico, in prep.)

È un test figurato con risposte a scelta multipla presentato su *device touch-screen*. Il CCPS è uno strumento creato ad hoc per questo studio e caratterizzato da 70 item divisi in due blocchi, preceduti entrambi da istruzioni vocali.

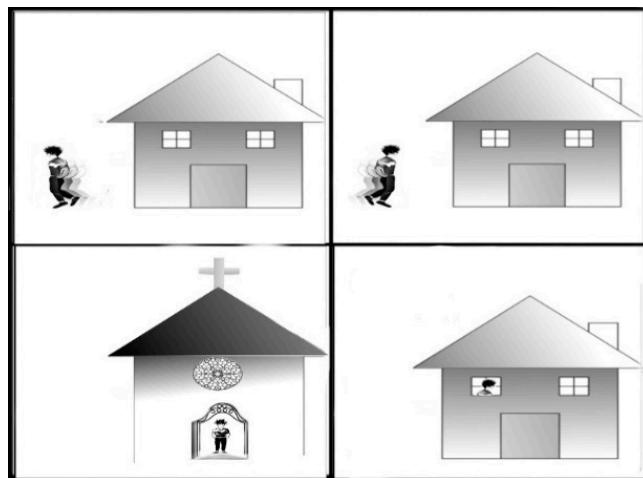
Il primo blocco, che si caratterizza come fase di training, è costituito da 41 item, e richiede al soggetto di riconoscere tutti gli elementi visivi presenti nel test, sia Temi che Relata, attraverso la presentazione di tavole grafiche. Le stesse tavole sono divise in 4 quadranti, ognuno raffigurante oggetti animati o non animati in base alle caratteristiche del target (Figura 1a e 1b). Si passa alla fase successiva, definita di *trial*, solo se il bambino è in grado di riconoscere più del 50% degli item.



**Fig. 1a-b.** Esempi di stimoli del CCPS nella fase di training.

Il secondo blocco (trial) si compone di 29 item, anch'essi costituiti da tavole grafiche con quattro diverse rappresentazioni. Seguendo il criterio della frequenza di utilizzo, come evidenziato dalla grammatica di Giangrande (2012), sono state selezionate preposizioni semplici e articolate, in modo da contenere voci sia maschili che femminili, sia singolari che plurali. Seguendo tale logica, sono state pensate ad hoc espressioni spaziali, statiche e dinamiche, il cui focus semantico è concentrato nella preposizione, eliminando l'effetto *verb-framed* della nostra lingua. A tal proposito, sono stati utilizzati verbi di locazione (*essere o stare*) e verbi dinamici del cluster « origine o destinazione » (*andare*) e di quello « maniera » (*correre, saltare*) (Meini, 2012). A queste espressioni e alle relative immagini target, sono state accostati tre distrattori :

- due distrattori legati ad un obiettivo (*goal*) o ad una fonte (*source*), sulla base del nucleo semantico (Nam, 1995);
- un distrattore caratterizzato dallo stesso Tema ma da Relata differenti sulla base della teorizzazione di Landau (2011), secondo cui, a essere codificate nella scena spaziale sono anche le proprietà delle relazioni spaziali, oltre che le relazioni stesse.



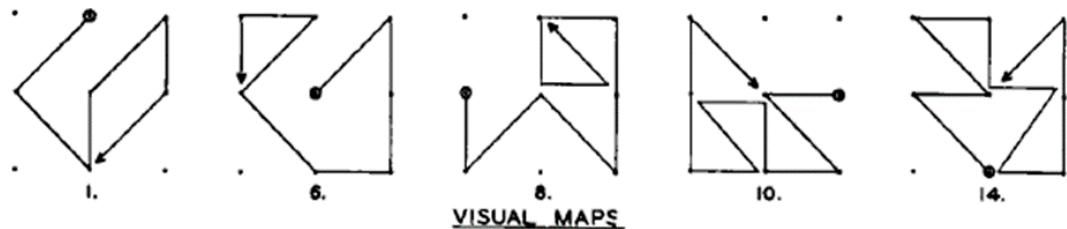
**Fig. 2.** Esempio di item del CCPS.

Il target, infatti, è stato localizzato in una posizione diversa per ciascun item, in modo da non avere un effetto di abituazione (Scuderi, 2014)

#### Test di Semmes (1955)

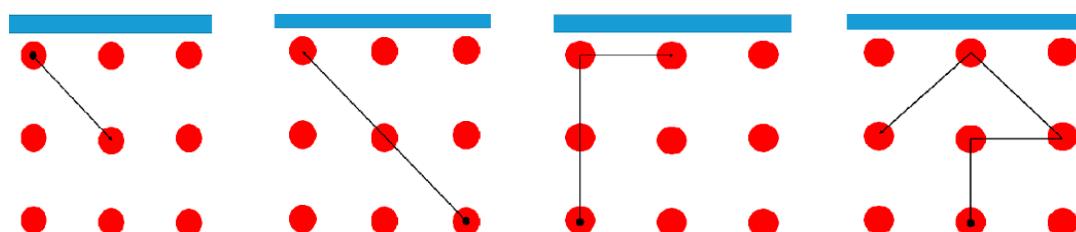
Sviluppato per valutare le capacità di *map-reading* in ambiente reale in pazienti neurolesi, consiste nell'esecuzione di un percorso guidato in una griglia 3x3 posta sul pavimento e raffigurata all'interno della mappa fornita al soggetto con la traiettoria da seguire. Nella versione

originale, le mappe consistono in 15 percorsi, di cui 5 rappresentati in modalità visiva e 10, in quella tattile. All'aumentare del numero delle mappe eseguite aumenta progressivamente anche la difficoltà del percorso, dettata dal numero di svolte da compiere (esempi delle mappe visive proposte si ritrovano nella Figura 3). Il soggetto non può ruotare fisicamente la mappa durante l'esecuzione. Tuttavia, può correggere la sua performance in qualsiasi momento anche se non viene fornito alcun feedback.



**Fig. 3.** Un esempio di item del test di Semmes (1955).

Nel nostro studio, è stata utilizzata una versione adattata per bambini di età compresa tra 3 e 6 anni. In particolare, il compito prevede la presentazione di 10 mappe di complessità crescente. Durante l'esecuzione, il bambino deve tener conto del giusto orientamento della mappa suggerito dalla linea superiore della stessa. Tale linea strategica, infatti, deve coincidere con la parete di riferimento indicata al soggetto prima dell'inizio del test. Il punto di partenza è rappresentato dal punto più marcato e naturalmente cambia di volta in volta, nelle varie mappe presentate. Anche in tale versione, il soggetto può autocorreggersi senza ricevere alcun feedback.



**Fig. 4.** Esempio di item del test di Semmes nella versione modificata per bambini.

## V. Risultati

Sono state condotte dapprima analisi descrittive (Tabella 1) e correlazionali per verificare preliminarmente le caratteristiche del campione e le relazioni tra le variabili di interesse. Il test di Pearson ha mostrato una correlazione significativa tra la variabile età e le seguenti variabili: Matrici colore di Raven ( $r = 0.46$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ); compito di comprensione di preposizioni spaziali-CCPS ( $r = 0.58$ ;  $p < 0.0001$ ) e con il test Semmes ( $r = 0.48$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). Inoltre, correlazioni significative sono state individuate tra le Matrici colore di Raven con il CCPS ( $r = 0.48$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) e il test di Semmes ( $r = 0.57$ ;  $p < 0.0001$ ). Anche il CCPS corrella significativamente con il test Semmes ( $r = 0.59$ ;  $p < 0.0001$ ). Il genere non corrella con nessuna delle variabili considerate.

È stata condotta successivamente una regressione gerarchica multipla (a blocchi) per valutare l'influenza che le variabili età, genere, abilità di ragionamento logico-astratto e comprensione di preposizioni spaziali possono avere sulla abilità navigazionale, misurata con il test di Semmes. Al fine di controllare l'effetto del genere e dell'età, tali variabili sono state inserite nel primo blocco. Nel secondo blocco è stata inserita l'abilità di ragionamento logico astratto, mentre nel terzo blocco è stata inserita la prestazione al compito di comprensione di preposizioni spaziali CCPS. I risultati hanno evidenziato che il primo

modello risulta significativo [ $F(2.34) = 6.82, p = 0.003$ ] e spiega il 25% della varianza. In particolare, l'età risulta significativa ( $\beta = 0.51, t = 3.51, p = 0.01$ ), differentemente dal genere, come ci aspettavamo dai risultati dell'analisi correlazionale ( $\beta = 0.24, t = 1.64, p = 0.11$ ). Anche il secondo modello risulta significativo [ $F(3.33) = 8.23, p < 0.0001$ ], spiegando il 38% della varianza, migliorando il modello con un incremento della varianza del 18%. Infine, l'introduzione dell'ultima variabile nel terzo modello, che è risultato anch'esso significativo [ $F(4.32) = 8.03, p < 0.0001$ ], ovvero il test di comprensione di preposizioni spaziali CCPS, ha potenziato il modello con una varianza spiegata pari al 44% (Tabella 3). Tutte le analisi statistiche sono state svolte utilizzando il software SPSS v. 24 per Windows (IBM Corporation, Armonk, New York, USA).

	MEDIA (deviazione standard)	MINIMO	MASSIMO
Età in anni	5.01 (0.83)	3.4	6.4
Genere	21 F; 16 M		
Matrici Colore di Raven	15.59 (3.15)	7	22
CCPS_Trial	18.89 (3.71)	13	25
Test di Seemes	2.89 (1.42)	1	8

**Tabella 1.** Statistiche descrittive.

## VI. Discussione

L'obiettivo del presente studio era di indagare il rapporto esistente tra l'abilità di comprensione di preposizioni spaziali, quale misura di linguaggio spaziale, e l'abilità navigazionale, basata sul costrutto della cognizione spaziale, in bambini di età compresa tra 3 e 6 anni. Entrambe le competenze, linguistica e cognitivo-spaziale, permettono ai bambini di organizzare mentalmente e fisicamente gli oggetti nel loro mondo. Infatti, la cognizione spaziale consente ai bambini di localizzare gli oggetti e di navigare con successo nel loro ambiente, mentre il linguaggio spaziale permette loro di esprimere esigenze spaziali specifiche e di descrivere spazialmente il mondo (Faedda et al., 2021; Piccardi et al., 2011). In linea con quanto appena detto, la nostra ipotesi era che la comprensione di preposizioni spaziali, insieme ad una buona capacità di ragionamento logico-astratto, potesse facilitare lo sviluppo di abilità navigazionali.

Per rispondere al nostro obiettivo di ricerca, abbiamo condotto un'analisi di regressione gerarchica, in cui la abilità navigazionale rappresentava la variabile dipendente, mentre i predittori erano rappresentati da età e genere (primo blocco), abilità di ragionamento logico-astratto (secondo blocco), abilità di comprensione di preposizioni spaziali (terzo blocco). I risultati di questo studio preliminare hanno mostrato che l'età, al contrario del genere, sembra influenzare lo sviluppo delle abilità navigazionali. Difatti, l'acquisizione e lo sviluppo del linguaggio è un processo graduale (Boccia et al., 2019) che si assesta generalmente intorno ai 4-5 anni, quando il bambino possiede un lessico mentale di migliaia di parole, affiancate da informazioni sulla pronuncia, il significato e le categorie grammaticali di appartenenza, ed ha completato il suo sviluppo fonologico, pronunciando correttamente tutte le parole che conosce (Lidzba et al., 2011; Berti, Bombi, 2013; D'Amico, Devescovi, 2013). Nonostante si sostenga generalmente la similarità strutturale delle forme di rappresentazione spaziale durante lo sviluppo (Madler, 1983), molti autori rilevano un cambiamento nella struttura delle inferenze tra i 3 e i 5 anni (Acredolo, 1977; Hazen, Lockman, Pick, 1978) Allo stesso modo, anche le abilità navigazionali evidenziano uno sviluppo progressivo che non sembra essere completo prima dei 10 anni di età. Ciò comporta necessariamente una maggiore accuratezza nell'esecuzione di compiti navigazionali connessa all'aumento dell'età, avvalorando in tal

modo la tesi di un processo olistico dello sviluppo cognitivo (Lenhung et al., 1998; Piccardi et al., 2014a). Contrariamente alle aspettative, il genere non si è rivelato predittore dello sviluppo di abilità navigazionali, benché le differenze di genere in relazione alle abilità di tipo spaziale siano state oggetto di notevoli ricerche e dibattiti (Levine et al., 2016). Sebbene in letteratura siano state riportate differenze di genere a favore dei maschi, (Hyde, 2007; Voyer et al., 1995; Scott et al., 1998), la maggiore differenza è stata riscontrata nei compiti che richiedono abilità di rotazione mentale (Levine et al., 2016), e tale differenza sembra emergere tra i 4,5 e i 7 anni di età. È importante precisare che il test utilizzato nel nostro studio non richiede abilità di rotazione mentale, il che potrebbe spiegare l'assenza di differenze di genere. L'altro aspetto potrebbe dipendere dalla limitata numerosità del campione dello studio, rappresentato solamente da 37 bambini.

Abbiamo successivamente introdotto nel modello di regressione l'abilità di ragionamento logico-astratto, misurata con il test delle Matrici colore di Raven, che aggiunge un nuovo tassello nella comprensione dello sviluppo delle abilità navigazionali. Ricordiamo, infatti, che questo test richiede al bambino la capacità di codificare e dare un significato logico a stimoli astratti per completare una matrice, ed è considerata una misura di intelligenza fluida, che viene normalmente considerata come strettamente correlata all'intelligenza spaziale (Meneghetti et al., 2017). Infatti, la buona riuscita in compiti di ragionamento logico-astratto, favorita dall'utilizzo di strategie di tipo spaziale, come, ad esempio, la rotazione mentale di oggetti, sembrerebbe migliorare la prestazione in compiti di tipo navigazionale (Meneghetti et al., 2017). L'ultima variabile inserita nella analisi di regressione è l'abilità di comprensione di preposizioni spaziali, misurata con un nuovo compito costruito ad hoc per questo studio, data l'assenza di test in lingua italiana specifici nel misurare questa competenza.

I risultati ottenuti supportano l'ipotesi che la comprensione della direzionalità espressa dalle preposizioni italiane sia un predittore della performance navigazionale, in accordo con la recente letteratura che sostiene come la padronanza linguistica, e nello specifico, la padronanza del linguaggio spaziale, determini un miglioramento della cognizione spaziale (Dessalegn, Landau, 2008; Gentner et al., 2003; Piccardi et al., 2015; Gudde et al., 2018; Bocchi et al., 2020). A sostegno di questo risultato, Loewenstein, Gentner (2005) dimostra che i bambini ottengono risultati migliori in un impegnativo compito di mappatura spaziale qualora i termini spaziali – *in alto, in mezzo, in basso o sotto*, – vengano utilizzati nel compito rispetto a quando questi non vengono utilizzati. Tale risultato suggerisce che il materiale con cui viene presentato un compito di navigazione (mediante stimoli visivi, verbali ecc.) ne influenza le prestazioni (Bocchi et al., 2018). Sulla base dei risultati ottenuti, possiamo affermare, seppur preliminarmente, che il linguaggio spaziale sembra avere un ruolo centrale nello sviluppo di abilità di tipo navigazionale, e quindi contribuire alla migliore comprensione del costrutto di cognizione spaziale.

## VII. Limiti e prospettive future

Il presente studio-pilota non è esente da alcune limitazioni che potranno essere affrontate nel prosieguo della ricerca. Fra queste, la dimensione campionaria rappresenta una delle più importanti ed il nostro obiettivo futuro è ampliare il numero dei partecipanti, così da replicare lo stesso studio mediante un'indagine più ampia. Un altro limite riguarda i test utilizzati, in particolare il test per la valutazione della comprensione di preposizioni spaziali. La costruzione di questo test è legata però all'assenza di compiti che permettano di valutare tale competenza sulla base delle caratteristiche della lingua italiana, dove, come già sottolineato, non possono essere utilizzate versioni tradotte da altre lingue con caratteristiche strutturali diverse dalla nostra. Per superare questo limite, occorre avviare una procedura di validazione e standardizzazione del test su un ampio campione rappresentativo della popolazione italiana nella fascia di età 3-6 anni, periodo in cui queste abilità emergono e quindi possono essere indagate.

Infine, siamo consapevoli che la cognizione spaziale è una abilità complessa costituita da diverse componenti, come ad esempio la codifica e la trasformazione mentale dell'informazione spaziale, la rotazione mentale, i processi percettivi, attentivi, l'esecuzione motoria, che sono tutti parte integrante di una complessa elaborazione cognitiva. Pertanto, la abilità navigazionale, che noi valutiamo con un compito di *map-reading*, rappresenta solo una parte di questo costrutto. Sarebbe interessante indagare in futuro se l'influenza del linguaggio spaziale mantiene la sua centralità anche per altri tipi di abilità spaziali.

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PART III

*CURRICULUM VITÆ* MARIA ANTONIETTA PINTO



# *Curriculum Vitæ Maria Antonietta Pinto*

- Born: 27/11/1946 in Rome.
- Enrolled at the Lycée Chateaubriand of Rome since 1<sup>st</sup> grade.  
1<sup>st</sup> year Baccalauréat – *Série A* (Latin and ancient Greek) (**June 1964**).  
2<sup>nd</sup> year Baccalauréat – *Série Philosophie* (**June 1965**).
- *Graduation* in Philosophy at Sapienza Università di Roma (Sapienza University of Rome) (**July 1970**) with a Master thesis in Psychology, entitled: *Ambivalence of guilt-related meanings in Sigmund Freud's and Melanie Klein's theories*. Graduated summa cum laude.
- *Research collaboration at the Istituto di Psicologia – CNR – Roma* (Institute of Psychology of the Center for National Research in Rome) (**1970-1971**) under the supervision of Dr. Marco Cecchini and Dr. Francesco Tonucci.
- *Scholarship of the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry* for international student exchange (**October 1971-October 1972**). Enrollment at the *Faculté de Psychologie et des Sciences de l'Éducation* Geneva (CH) (*Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences*) (**October 1971-July 1975**).
- *Graduation in Psychology – Option Psychologie génétique et expérimentale* (Genetic and experimental psychology) (**July 1975**).
- *Scholarship for collaboration in research and teaching* (**March 1975-January 1981**). *Istituto di Psicologia – Facoltà di Magistero – Sapienza Università di Roma* (Institute of Psychology – Faculty of “Magistero” – Sapienza University of Rome) c/o Chair of Educational Psychology and Educational Psycholinguistics – Prof. Renzo Titone.
- *Research assistant* of Educational Psychology and Educational Psycholinguistics – (Prof. Renzo Titone; **January 1981**. *Istituto di Psicologia – Facoltà di Magistero* – then transformed into the *Facoltà di Psicologia* (Faculty of Psychology) Sapienza University of Rome.
- *Associate Professor* of Developmental Psychology, Educational Psychology, Educational Psycholinguistics – *Facoltà di Psicologia* (Faculty of Psychology) Sapienza University of Rome (**October 2001-November 2017**).
- *Eligible as Full Professor* of Developmental Psychology, Educational Psychology, Educational Psycholinguistics – *Facoltà di Psicologia* (Faculty of Psychology) Sapienza University of Rome (**March 2013**).
- *Retired* in November, 2017 but still affiliated to the *Facoltà di Medicina e Psicologia* (Faculty of Medicine and Psychology) Sapienza University of Rome, and recognized as a highly qualified expert in teaching and research.

## Scientific Society Membership

ISAPL (*International Society for Applied Psycholinguistics*) 1982-2019.

ACLA/CAAL (*Association Canadienne de Linguistique Appliquée / Canadian Association of Applied Linguistics*) 2009-2015.

IEDPE (*Institut Européen pour le Développement des Potentialités de Tous les Enfants / European Institute for the Development of the Potentialities of all Children*) 1989-1996.

AIP (*Associazione Italiana di Psicologia- Italian Association of Psychology*). From 1992 onwards.

AIRIPA (*Associazione Italiana per la Ricerca e Intervento nella Psicopatologia dell'Apprendimento/ Italian Association for Research and Intervention in Learning Psychopathology*). From 2016 onwards.

CLASTA (*Communication and Language Acquisition Studies in Typical and Atypical Populations*). From 2008 onwards.

CONTEXT (Non-profit Italian Association for studies in Developmental and Educational Psychology) 2008-2015.

## Scientific roles in Editorial boards of scholarly journals and book series

- *Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata (Italian Review of Applied Linguistics)*. Bulzoni. Roma. ISSN: 0033-9725. (01-1995-12-2018).
- *LIDIL. Linguistique et didactique des langues. (Linguistics and language teaching)*. Université de Grenoble. FRANCE ISSN: From 01/1995 onwards
- *LINGUARUM ARENA*. Universidade do Porto. PORTUGAL. ISSN: 1647-8770. From 2010 onwards.
- *Psicologia del bilinguismo (Psychology of Bilingualism)* Fabrizio Serra Editore. Pisa-Roma. www.libraweb.net. From 1999 onwards.
- *Strumenti psicologici e processi educativi (Psychological tools and educational processes)*. Carocci Faber. Roma. www.carocci.it. From 2006 onwards.

## Editorship of scholarly journals

*Rivista di Psicolinguistica Applicata / Journal of Applied Psycholinguistics* (RIPLA / JAPL) ISSN 1592-1328. <http://www.libraweb.net/riviste.php?chiave=77.>

Co-founded by Maria Antonietta Pinto and Renzo Titone in 2000, RIPLA / JAPL is an international peer-review journal, indexed in Web of Science (since 2005) Scopus (since 2020), APA PsychINFO (since 2009), ERIH PLUS (since 2010).

Editor-in-Chief: Maria Antonietta Pinto (from 2000 to 2020)

Current co-Editors-in Chief: Maria Antonietta Pinto (Sapienza Università di Roma), and Pasquale Rinaldi (Istc-CNR).

## Organization of teaching and research in international institutions

- Institut Européen pour le Développement des Potentialités de tous les Enfants (IEDPE). Paris (France). M. A. Pinto has been responsible for the organization of research and dissemination in the following European groups (12/1989; 07/1996):

- "Acquisition of literacy at preschool age as a means to fight against illiteracy and school failure"
- "Early acquisition of foreign languages".
- Asociación Cultural "Dante Alighieri" – Rosario (Argentina).  
M.A. Pinto has been responsible for the implementation of an official agreement between the Department of Developmental and Socialization Psychology- Faculty of Medicine and Psychology (Sapienza Università di Roma) and the Asociación Cultural "Dante Alighieri" – Rosario (Argentina) (October 1998-October 2007) whose aim was to organize annual courses in developmental and educational psychology, psycholinguistics, Italian sociolinguistics, L2 Italian teaching, semiotics, methodology in social sciences, and anthropology for Argentinian teachers of Italian language in Argentina (*Profesorado de Italiano (Teacher training program in L2 Italian)*).

## National and international Projects

### 1. National projects (Sapienza, Rome)

- 1983:** *Potenzialità logiche e rendimento scolastico in alunni svantaggiati. Validazione delle prove piagetiane in relazione a prove di QI.* (Logical potentialities and academic achievement in disadvantaged children. Validation of Piagetian tasks in relation with IQ tests).
- 1985:** *Strutture operatorie: controllo longitudinale e stile cognitivo* (Piagetian operational structures: longitudinal control and cognitive style).
- 1986:** *Sviluppo del linguaggio orale e scritto e coscienza metalinguistica.* (Oral and written language development and metalinguistic awareness).
- 1987:** *Pensiero formale, adolescenza e rendimento scolastico.* (Formal operational thinking, adolescence and school achievement).
- 1989:** *Sviluppo del linguaggio orale e scritto e coscienza metalinguistica (2nda fase).* (Oral and written language development and metalinguistic awareness – 2nd phase).
- 1995:** *Abilità metalinguistiche, bilinguismo, apprendimento delle lingue straniere* (Metalinguistic abilities, bilingualism and second language learning).
- 2003:** *Elaborazione cognitiva di stimoli ambientali polimodali. Studio sull'interazione di informazioni visive e acustiche in bambini e adulti, normali e patologici.* (Cognitive processing of polymodal stimuli. Interaction between visual and acoustic information in children and adults, typical and atypical).
- 2004:** *Interazione in famiglie con bambini con difficoltà linguistico-comunicative.* (Interaction in families with children with language and communication difficulties).
- 2006:** *Strategie di costruzione della conoscenza in una comunità on-line: aspetti cognitivi e metacognitivi.* (Knowledge building strategies in an on-line community: cognitive and metacognitive aspects).
- 2007:** *"Valutazione di competenze e abilità implicate nell'acquisizione della lettura-scrittura in bambini da tre a cinque anni.* (Evaluating competences and abilities involved in the acquisition of literacy in children from 3 to 5).
- 2008:** *Il lessico psicologico nelle storie scritte da bambini di età scolare: il ruolo delle abilità meta-rappresentazionali, linguistiche e sociali.* (Mental lexicon in stories written by school-age children: the role of meta-representational, linguistic and social abilities).
- 2008:** *Sintassi e narrazione in età prescolare.* (Syntax and narratives at school age).
- 2009:** *Correlati comportamentali e fisiologici nella comunicazione e nell'interazione sociale.* (Behavioral and physiological correlates of communication and social interaction).

## 2. International Projects

**2013-2015:** European Lifelong Learning Programme – KA2- Language Multilateral Projects Reference: 543277-LLP-1-KA2-KA2MP “*Metalinguistic Awareness Tests in European Languages*” (MATEL). Principal Investigator and Coordinator: Prof. Maria Antonietta Pinto (Sapienza Università di Roma / Sapienza University of Rome). [www.pintomatel.com](http://www.pintomatel.com).

## Participation in national and international conferences

This section has been deliberately skipped due to the excessively long list of participation in national and international conferences, whose presentations have often been published in articles or Proceedings in more extended form.

## Publications

### 1. Books

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- TITONE, R., PINTO, M. A. (Cur.) (1999). *Una nueva didáctica: hacia la integración inter y transdisciplinaria*. Rosario, Asociacion Cultural Dante Alighieri.
- PINTO, M. A. (1999). *La consapevolezza metalinguistica. Teoria, sviluppo, strumenti di misurazione*. Pisa-Roma, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali.
- PINTO, M. A., TITONE, R., TRUSSO, F. (1999). *Metalinguistic awareness. Theory, development and measurement instruments*. Pisa-Roma, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali.
- PINTO, M. A., TITONE, R., GONZALES GIL, L. (2000). *La consciencia metalinguística. Teoria, desarrollo e instrumentos de medición*. Pisa-Roma, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali.
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- PINTO, M. A., ILICETO, P. (2007). *TAM-3. Test di abilità metalinguistiche n. 3. Fascia adolescenti-adulti*. Roma, Carocci Faber.
- PINTO, M. A., MELOGNO, S., ILICETO, P. (2008). *TCM junior. Test di comprensione di metafore. Scuola dell'Infanzia e scuola primaria*, Roma, Carocci Faber.
- BRACONE, I., PINTO, M. A. (2014). *Bilingue e biculturale? Uno studio sulla percezione della lingua e della cultura italiana in docenti di lingua italiana in Argentina*. Roma, Lilamé, Valore Italiano.
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## 2. Articles

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ISBN 978-88-9377-311-9



9 788893 773119



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