

—Innovation in Italian Programs and Pedagogy—

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Italian departments, researchers, and teachers have been faced with the more and more pressing need to find innovative ways to confront the challenges brought about by changes in education and the general shift in students' interests. The past two MLA reports have clearly outlined a drop in the number of students deciding to enroll in Italian courses. How do we entice students to come through our doors and then get them to stay? How do we counteract the intensity with which administrators, both at the high school and college level, publicize STEM to the detriment of the Humanities? The Georgetown Italian Language and Culture Conference in 2017 provided a venue for reflection upon these very essential questions in the field of Italian language instruction today.

The third iteration of the Georgetown Italian Language and Culture Conference titled *Innovation in Italian Programs and Pedagogy*, took place on October 21, 2017 and welcomed over 120 participants between presenters and registered attendees. The event was made possible by the financial support of the Embassy of Italy and the Italian Cultural Institute in Washington DC, and the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Linguistics at Georgetown University. The conference program, published here as an appendix (181), shows the breadth of topics examined at the conference, from the theory behind task-based learning instruction to the hands-on creative implementation of technology and gamification. The panel on AP Italian chaired by AP Chief Reader Paola Morgavi that focused on effective approaches to teaching high school Italian courses was of particular importance. As was the afternoon workshop led by Professors Piera Margutti and Sandra Covino from the University for Foreigners in Perugia. This 75-minute workshop functioned as a step by step guide to accessing and utilizing the LIRA platform, an open access database of didactic materials.

In an effort to share the excellent work of our colleagues with a broader audience and to contribute to the scholarship in our field at such a critical time, we sought out a collaboration with the online journal TILCA to publish selected papers from the conference. We are extremely grateful to Anthony Tamburri, Tom Means, and Roberto Dolci as well as the entire editorial board of TILCA who have worked tirelessly to put to-

gether this Special Volume of TILCA. These selected peer-reviewed essays showcase the quality of work that is going on in our field and provide exemplary models of innovation that can enrich and enhance Italian programs of all types.

The keynote address by Giuseppe Cavatorta *Innovation and Increasing Enrollments in Italian Language Programs. Una sfida all'insegna dell'incertezza*, set the stage for the conference as it does here for this collection of essays. Prof. Cavatorta begins by taking a very candid look at the numbers of students enrolled in Italian based on reports by the MLA, AATI, and AP. He lists a series of reasons for the observed decline including, among others, the reduction or elimination of the language requirement at many universities, the predilection for the sciences on the part of administrators, and the emphasis on learning languages that are considered of practical usefulness. Although he allows that each Italian program lives in its own particular reality with its unique set of circumstances, he suggests that winning the numbers game can occur only through collaboration, sharing, and combatting the problem collectively on all fronts. Collaboration is essential between tenure and non-tenure line faculty, between high schools and universities, with Consulates and Embassies, and with Italians in the larger community beyond the walls of academia. He lists the corrective measures taken by programs that have seemed to buck the trend and maintain their enrollments through actions that impact the formats in which courses are offered and how they are evaluated, and reach beyond the classroom through study abroad, immersion programs, and internships. This essay gives an overview of the issues that Italian programs are facing today and is a call for action and cooperation.

The second item is a collaborative essay that collects the reflections of Italian Program Directors from different universities in the U.S. What emerges from these contributions is a series of practical guidelines or strategic best practices for confronting the decrease in enrollments in Italian Programs. Prof. De Fina discusses the efforts at Georgetown to innovate whilst at the same time maintaining the rigor of the Italian program. At the language level, to make scheduling more manageable for students, hybrid courses are offered as an alternative to the traditional 5-day a week six-credit intensive courses. Accelerated courses for Spanish Speak-

ers and a one-credit Teletandem course have been implemented to target specific student populations. Upper-division literature courses are complemented with courses on topics in which students have expressed interest through online surveys (such as Business, Translation, Migration and Cinema). Finally, a new push to emphasize the practical applications of the language seeks out internships with Italian businesses for Italian Majors. Prof. Cristina Abbona Sneider from Brown University writes of the difficulties faced by an Italian program at a university that has no language requirement. She outlines what is essentially a "top down" approach where English language cross-listed courses in Culture and Media, History, Anthropology and Comparative Literature serve as a source from which to draw students into the language program. Essential to this effort has also been the enhancement of the renowned semester and year-long abroad programs in Bologna with a new summer course on Cinema taught in English. Prof. Luciana Fellin then highlights what she calls a series of *micro* and *macro* strategies that the program at Duke University has recently undertaken. Macro strategies are those that essentially make Italian more visible on campus such as reaching out to students during first year seminar courses that are taught in English, cross listing and co-teaching interdisciplinary courses ranging on topics from Biology to Cinema, and capitalizing on all opportunities for outreach through service learning and extracurricular activities. Micro strategies focus on the courses themselves, on scheduling and formats, on the emphasis on experiential and collaborative learning coupled with effective formative assessments. Lastly, Prof. Teresa Fiore from Montclair State University presents the innovative strategies undertaken at one of the largest Italian programs in the US. This revision of the program, which has been in the making for over five years, focuses first on enhancing students' interest in Italian through the creation of *The Business Italian Style* project. Collaborations are forged as students video record interviews with major figures in the Italian business arena and write articles on their experience which are then published in the online magazine *La voce di New York*. This hands-on and practical approach also informs a second project on audio-visual translation. Students work with private agencies to subtitle Italian shows in English and the project has resulted in paid internships for students in

Florence and Macerata. The third project focuses on bridging the divide between high school and university through the creation a three-credit full-immersion summer course specifically designed to enhance the language skills of students enrolled in the AP program.

In the next section, the essays discuss the practical applications of research in Second Language Acquisition. Prof. Tom Means whose research has contributed significantly to the field of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) here focuses on the idea of students as *language users* as opposed to *language learners*. He traces the development of the philosophy of *learning by doing* and *by experiential learning* as a responsible and effective approach to teaching foreign languages. In his essay, he outlines the methodology of TBLT and includes a series of useful tasks that can be adapted for Italian language courses at all levels. Prof. Anna Santucci discusses the value of the performative approach to teaching Italian language and culture. She outlines the attributes of Theater Pedagogy as a means of increasing student engagement, helping students to become more "creative, collaborative, and participating members of society." She illustrates how this approach effectively lines up with the 5Cs of the ACTFL World-Readiness standards that inform most language learning curricula today and she completes her essay with some essential examples of the practical applications of this growing field of research on the intersections between theater performance and language acquisition. Prof. Lillyrose Veneziano Broccia presents the reworking of the language program at the University of Pennsylvania which moves away from what she describes as a more traditional method to concentrate on "project-based, goal-oriented and task-based activities." She lays out specific examples of this approach in second-year intermediate courses that pivot on the theme of biography and autobiography through authentic materials such as films, literature, and musical works, and materials that take full advantage of Open Educational Resources. Strategically planned activities ensure that students learn to communicate in interpersonal, interpretative and presentational modes. Formative assessments, likewise, follow these three modes as delineated by the ACTFL IPA (Integrated Performance Assessments). In the final pages of her essay, Prof. Broccia exem-

plifies this novel reworking of the program through the explanation of a series of effective task-based activities.

A common thread that flows through the next series of the papers in this volume is the theme of enhancing student engagement through the creation of new courses. Prof. Chiara De Santi's essay is one such example that details a General Education course taught in English titled *Food Culture in Practice* that was very successful at Farmingdale College. Students enthusiastically explored the history of Italian gastronomy and culture from the Middle Ages to today contextualizing a variety of dishes in their historical, political, economic and social settings. Targeted use of social media, newsletters and press releases created a buzz about the course on campus and the interest that it generated led to the development of gastronomic modules that were added to Italian language courses. The final part of the essay is a very effective "how to" guide on creating language modules that center around food culture and that are founded on the principles of task-based learning. Prof. Francesca Calamita, instead, focuses on the intersections of her research on Women, Gender and Sexuality with the Italian language classes that she also teaches. In an effort to capitalize on the enthusiasm that students showed in the topic of Gender and Language in her upper-division courses in English, she created a multimedia virtual laboratory course for Intermediate level language students. She sees this as an essential addition to the language curriculum considering that many language textbooks tend to perpetuate stereotypes on gender, race, sexuality and class. Her essay shows how students, through the analysis of newspaper articles and headlines, study the effects of socio-cultural fluctuations on language, explore the bias that is inherent in the media, and acquire the necessary tools to question social injustice. At the end of her essay she includes sample activities and assessment rubrics. Continuing the discussion on enhancing learning and student engagement, Prof. Alessia Valfredini presents a fifth semester Italian Conversation and Composition course that centers around an interdisciplinary, multicultural and multilingual approach. Students work on descriptive, narrative and argumentative texts, and the larger theme of the mobility of languages, ideas, and people provides cohesion to the content. Autonomous learning activities as well as extracurricular events and

interdisciplinary activities ensure that students are actively involved and committed to their learning. Prof. Valfredini’s essay shows how her approach, based not only on language learning but on skill-building and cultural competence, provides essential tools to prepare students for the workplace, no matter the professional field they choose upon graduation. This she states, is an important facet of the marketability of Italian that should not be underestimated.

In the next section of the volume, Professors Luisanna Sardu and Lucia Ducci focus on student wellbeing as essential to optimizing language acquisition. Prof. Sardu presents her research into how “bad anxiety” can negatively impact student performance in oral presentations and how she has adapted new technologies to successfully counteract this negative effect. Prof. Ducci, instead, looks at how mindfulness and the practice of yoga can positively impact learners’ ability to absorb a new language and increase their overall engagement and enjoyment of the process.

In the final essay of the volume, Prof. Sandra Covino defends the importance of teaching the Italian Literary Classics, which she sees as a unifying factor of Italian identity, and essential to the promotion of Italian cultural abroad. This online course, available also to students outside the University of Foreigners in Perugia, targets advanced-level learners (C1 following the CEFR standards) and is unique in its diachronic variation of the strategically selected texts and in the emphasis on metalinguistic learning. This essay takes us through the procedure followed by the working group to select highly readable and comprehensible texts. It details the structure of the didactic units that maximize online resources and that help students develop a high competency in textual and linguistic analysis.

In conclusion, we would like to extend our thanks to all those who contributed essays to this volume and to the presenters and attendees at the conference who facilitated a very lively and productive conversation. We hope to continue these discussions at the next Georgetown Conference that will be held in October 2019.

Louise Hipwell and Donatella Melucci  
Conference Organizers

INNOVATION AND INCREASING ENROLLMENTS IN ITALIAN  
LANGUAGE PROGRAMS  
UNA SFIDA ALL'INSEGNA DELL'INCERTEZZA

Giuseppe Cavatorta  
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Dobbiamo diffidare delle innovazioni superflue, soprattutto quando sono guidate dalla logica.

(Winston Churchill)

“Un difetto del carattere umano è che tutti vogliono costruire e nessuno vuole fare manutenzione.”

(Kurt Vonnegut Jr.)

Un'obiezione non è ancora una confutazione, e una innovazione non è necessariamente un progresso.

(Sigmund Freud)

**N**el mio *keynote address* per il convegno “Innovation in Italian Programs and Pedagogy” tenutosi a Georgetown il 21 ottobre 2017 avevo iniziato ringraziando tutte le persone che si erano impegnate per avermi voluto in quella sede. Le ringraziavo anche perché, personalmente, mi considero più un manovale che un tecnico quando si tratta di pedagogia e didattica della lingua (mi muovo certamente con più naturalezza quando si tratta di scritture sperimentali) e la giustificazione che avevo dato a me stesso per quell'invito che professionalmente mi onorava moltissimo era che dipendesse proprio da quella manovalanza, dal tempo da me dedicato a sostegno dell'importanza dell'insegnamento della lingua, dalla mia disponibilità a viaggiare e offrire workshop a insegnanti di liceo, dal mio ruolo nella promozione e sviluppo dell'esame AP e, forse, dal fatto di far parte di un programma che, nonostante una drammatica flessione, può ancora vantare una quarantina di *majors* e una sessantina di *minors*.

Oggi, ripensandoci bene, vorrei aggiungere che la mia presenza ad un convegno di questo tipo dovrebbe essere vista come un segnale importante di un'apertura che, visto le arie che tirano, non può che essere riconosciuta come necessaria. Se lo stato di salute dell'insegnamento dell'italiano si presenta in una condizione di indubbia emergenza, l'atavica e irresponsabile partizione tra insegnanti di serie A (chi fa letteratura) e di serie B (chi si occupa di lingua) che per decenni ha tenuto in ostaggio l'insegnamento

dell’italiano negli Stati Uniti deve cedere il passo ad uno spirito di collaborazione e a un atteggiamento di rispetto reciproco. Il calo repentino di specializzandi in italiano lo si può arginare solo ed unicamente ponendo al centro del nostro lavoro l’insegnamento della lingua e della cultura perché è in quei corsi che gli studenti si innamorano della lingua e della cultura italiana, che decidono che i corsi da fare per i loro *language requirements* non sono abbastanza e senza questi studenti, oggi è più evidente che mai, sarebbe impensabile poter persino offrire corsi di letteratura se non in inglese.

Comunque, aldilà dei toni allarmistici, per altro giustificati, visto che dal 2010 ad oggi il battito del paziente non sembra voler migliorare, non siamo ancora alla disperazione. Il malato infatti è nelle mani di un agguerrito corpo sanitario che, in faccia alle avversità, si è sempre schierato ordinatamente: e non importa se lo fa dalle cattedre di una scuola elementare, media, di un liceo o dell’università, o dagli uffici di un Consolato o di un Istituto di Cultura.

Per cominciare, intendo ripercorrere la strada che ci ha portati fino a questo punto e che ci impone di serrare le fila per cercare di dare un po’ d’ossigeno al nostro malato.

Oso prendere il via da qualche aneddoto personale, ma la mia storia accademica si presta benissimo, nel suo rivelarsi per certi versi speculare, ad illustrare l’andamento dell’insegnamento dell’italiano in questi ultimi anni negli Stati Uniti. Nel 1995 sono arrivato all’Università della Virginia in un ben consolidato programma di Master, con un costante numero di studenti iscritti nei corsi di lingua e una quarantina tra *majors* e *minors*. Nel 1997 ho cominciato il mio PhD a UCLA che al momento era uno dei più rispettati programmi di dottorato in italiano con la capacità di attirare e sponsorizzare ogni anno nuovi *graduate students* da ogni parte del mondo e con un bacino di studenti *undergraduate* impressionante. Nel 2001 il primo lavoro a Dartmouth College, dove l’enfasi sull’importanza della lingua e il requisito di partecipare ad uno *study abroad* risultava vitale per un programma ricco e stabile. Oggi, gran parte di quel passato non esiste più: il Master all’Università della Virginia ha chiuso i battenti nell’autunno del 2015; il dipartimento a UCLA è stato visibilmente ridimensionato e nonostante l’iscrizione all’italiano nel primo anno si mantenga su numeri importanti, ad oggi si registrano 8 *majors* e 4 *minors* di-

chiarati; Dartmouth negli ultimi anni ha una media di 4 *majors*, numero assai ridotto rispetto a una decina di anni fa, ma lo status dell’istituzione (sappiamo bene che le Ivy League hanno una forza economica che le mette al riparo dai problemi di noi comuni mortali), permette di non preoccuparsi più di tanto fino a che le iscrizioni nelle classi di lingua si mantengono stabili.

E purtroppo, non sono qui a raccontarvi cose nuove. L’ultima indagine dell’MLA sullo stato dell’insegnamento della lingua risale all’autunno del 2013, e allora si era già evidenziata l’inversione di tendenza cominciata nel 2009, anno in cui il boom delle lingue in genere aveva raggiunto il suo apice.

	2002	2006	% Change, 2002–06	2009	% Change, 2006–09	2013	% Change, 2009–13
Spanish	745,215	822,094	10.3	861,008	4.7	790,756	-8.2
French	201,985	206,014	2.0	215,244	4.5	197,757	-8.1
American Sign Language	60,781	79,708	31.1	92,072	15.5	109,577	19.0
German	91,100	94,147	3.3	95,628	1.6	86,700	-9.3
Italian	63,899	78,176	22.3	80,322	2.7	71,285	-11.3
Japanese	52,238	65,403	25.2	72,359	10.6	66,740	-7.8
Chinese	34,153	51,381	50.4	59,876	16.5	61,055	2.0
Arabic	10,584	23,987	126.6	34,908	45.5	32,286	-7.5
Latin	29,841	32,164	7.8	32,444	0.9	27,192	-16.2
Russian	23,921	24,770	3.5	26,753	8.0	21,962	-17.9
Greek, Ancient	20,376	22,831	12.0	20,040	-12.2	12,917	-35.5
Hebrew, Biblical	14,155	14,109	-0.3	13,749	-2.6	12,551	-8.7
Portuguese	8,385	10,310	23.0	11,273	9.3	12,415	10.1
Korean	5,211	7,146	37.1	8,449	18.2	12,229	44.7
Hebrew, Modern	8,619	9,620	11.6	8,307	-13.6	6,698	-19.4
Other languages	25,344	33,855	33.6	41,111	21.4	40,059	-2.6
Total	1,395,807	1,575,715	12.9	1,673,543	6.2	1,562,179	-6.7

Un calo generale che piuttosto che rendere la situazione meno preoccupante va visto anzi come un campanello d’allarme e dove l’adagio “mal comune mezzo gaudio” risulterebbe a dir poco fuorviante. Fosse l’italiano l’eccezione, si potrebbero avere modelli da imitare per correggere il tiro, ma quando si è tutti al “si salvi chi può” viene a mancare qualsiasi tipo di appiglio così come l’appoggio di altri programmi, di altri dipartimenti, che nel passato è spesso risultato prezioso.

Da un punto di vista dell’italiano, i dati dell’MLA erano stati analizzati puntualmente da Herman Haller e presentati al convegno dell’Associazione per la Storia della Lingua Italiana a Napoli nel 2014<sup>1</sup>. Haller ci ri-

<sup>1</sup> Hermann W. Haller, “Per una politica dell’italiano negli USA: impressioni e riflessioni”, in Rita Librandi, Rosa Piro (eds.), *L’italiano della politica e la politica per l’italiano*. Atti del XI Convegno ASLI, Napoli 20-22 novembre 2014). Firenze: Cesati, 2016, pp. 743-752.

cordava che oltre alla crisi generale delle Humanities, l’italiano doveva scontare, e questo continua ad essere vero anche oggi, un ulteriore dazio in quanto “soggetto spesso” negli Stati Uniti, “a decisioni arbitrarie mirate all’esclusione di lingue prive di ‘obiettivi pratici’”:

In un paese in cui oggi nove studenti su dieci ottengono una laurea senza avere mai seguito un corso di lingua straniera, la promozione dell’italiano come «lingua leggera», esportata e diffusa pacificamente, senza impero o esercito, si deve prima di tutto all’impegno dei docenti della lingua, alle associazioni professionali a favore delle *Languages Other Than English*, alle iniziative promosse dall’Italia attraverso i lettori, le università per stranieri, l’Accademia della Crusca, la Società Dante Alighieri, ma anche al supporto della comunità di origine italiana e delle loro organizzazioni, nonché alla nuova immagine dell’Italia. (743-744)

Per l’italiano, grazie a Colleen Ryan, abbiamo anche qualche dato più recente. Un suo sondaggio portato avanti sotto il patrocinio dell’AATI, condotto nel 2015 e presentato al convegno dell’MLA nel gennaio del 2016, rivelava infatti che il trend al ribasso per l’italiano rilevato nel 2009 non era affatto in controtendenza.<sup>2</sup> Al sondaggio avevano partecipato 65 istituti universitari e 18 high schools e nonostante si trattasse di “soft data” confermavano lo stato di “stress” di un buon numero di programmi.

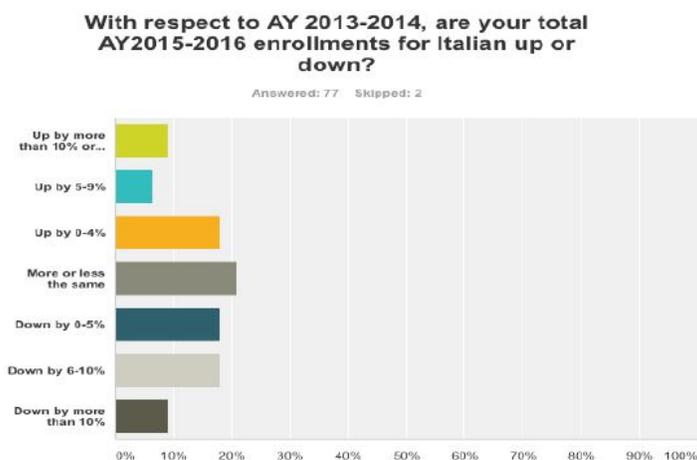


Image 1

<sup>2</sup> Ringrazio Colleen Ryan per aver messo a mia disposizione i dati della sua ricerca. Le due immagini che seguono appartengono alla sua presentazione al convegno dell’MLA del 2016 a Austin.

## Enrollments up or down?

Answer Choices	Responses
Up by more than 10% or more	9.09% 7
Up by 5-9%	6.49% 5
Up by 0-4%	18.18% 14
More or less the same	20.78% 16
Down by 0-5%	18.18% 14
Down by 6-10%	18.18% 14
Down by more than 10%	9.09% 7
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>

Image 2

Magari non da un punto di vista numerico, come possiamo verificare da questi due grafici, ma sicuramente da un punto di vista di percezione, dato che il 75% degli insegnanti aveva indicato, tra i trends del momento, l’interesse verso l’italiano come in rapida discesa. E chi partecipa a conferenze, chi si tiene in contatto con i propri colleghi sa che, a parte rare eccezioni, la realtà è effettivamente quella.

Le ultime notizie che arrivano da Stony Brook in questi giorni poi, non dissimili da quelle del disastro di Albany, con l’eliminazione del programma d’italiano (ma

AP World Language Exam Volume Trend					AP
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Chinese	10,121 +10%	10,728 +6%	11,633 +8%	12,524 +8%	13,091 +4%
French	20,725 +5%	21,268 +3%	22,804 +7%	22,051 -3%	22,621 3%
German	4,966 +4%	5,111 +3%	5,103 -0%	4,945 -3%	5,089 +3
<b>Italian</b>	<b>1,980</b> <b>+10%</b>	<b>2,331</b> <b>+18%</b>	<b>2,573</b> <b>+10%</b>	<b>2,774</b> <b>+8%</b>	<b>2,571</b> <b>-8%</b>
Japanese	2,234 +2%	2,311 +3%	2,431 +5%	2,481 +2%	2,429 -2%
Latin	6,667 +4%	6,542 -2%	6,571 +0%	6,584 +0%	6,647 +1%
Spanish Language	135,259 +4%	135,341 +1%	144,561 +7%	155,258 +7%	168,307 +8%
Spanish Literature	18,785 +5%	20,118 +7	21,755 +8%	24,061 +11%	25,834 +7%
<b>TOTAL WL</b>	<b>200,737</b> <b>+5%</b>	<b>203,750</b> <b>+2%</b>	<b>217,431</b> <b>+7%</b>	<b>230,678</b> <b>+6%</b>	<b>246,589</b> <b>+6%</b>

anche francese, russo e latino) del 2010, servono a rafforzare il clima di incertezza, di precarietà che va ben aldilà della realtà americana. Le cattive notizie, infatti, continuano ad arrivare anche dall’estero, persino da luoghi dove l’insegnamento dell’italiano era sempre stato numericamente rilevante:

nel 2016 è stato il caso della Germania, in percentuale la nazione in cui l’italiano si studia di più, che dopo il salvataggio in extremis del dipartimento d’italianistica dell’università di Saarbrücken (l’università del Lessico Etimologico Italiano, che dal 1979 ad oggi ha visto l’uscita di 136 fascicoli e al completamento fino alla lettera C) si segnala per un effettivo calo d’interesse per l’italiano e la soppressione dei corsi d’italiano al Politecnico di Berlino. Nello stesso anno il caso della Svizzera, ancora più eclatante visto che l’italiano è una delle lingue ufficiali della confederazione, nei cantoni non italofofoni. Di quest’anno invece è il “tradimento” della Scozia, dove alla Strathclyde University di Glasgow, a meno di un altro miracolo, non sarà più possibile specializzarsi in italiano. In casa nostra, qui, per intenderci, e questo è l’ultimo dei dati su cui mi voglio soffermare, credo siano da vedere con assoluta preoccupazione i numeri dall’esame AP di questo ultimo anno dove si è assistito a un calo dell’8% in confronto a una crescita globale delle altre lingue (il latino con un più 1% e il Giapponese con un meno 2% se non in crescita possono comunque considerarsi stabili).

Di fronte a uno scenario del genere, vorrei poter essere in grado di darvi la formula per un ritrovato capace di assicurare una pronta guarigione. Purtroppo si tratta di una selva in cui è quasi impossibile districarsi: troppe le diversificazioni locali, non solo tra stato e stato, ma anche tra università e università (si pensi solo a quali siano le priorità nell’agenda di un liberal art college o quelli di una grande università statale), tra scuola e scuola, con tali e tante differenze da rendere il numero delle variabili praticamente infinito.

Quello che possiamo fare, comunque, è provare a dare un’occhiata a cosa sembri funzionare in quei casi dove lo stato dell’italiano sembra più stabile rispetto alla media o dove si è già cominciato a mettere giù paletti per arginare la situazione, ma anche sottolineare dove si può e si dovrebbe fare meglio. Per fare questo, mi rifarò sia ai dati raccolti da Herman Haller e Colleen Ryan, sia a quelli di un sondaggio da me effettuato nell’estate del 2017 e che, aldilà di un numero ancora limitato di risposte (una trentina tra istituti universitari e liceali), può offrire spunti da tenere in considerazione.

Per Herman Haller erano tre i principali ostacoli da superare per una crescita dell’offerta dell’italiano: eliminazione o riduzione dei requisiti dello studio di una lingua straniera; la priorità data all’utilità pratica di una lingua straniera e la crescente anglicizzazione nell’offerta dell’italianistica. Le proposte di Haller per un possibile potenziamento dell’offerta rientravano in parte in quello che oggi sembra essere diventato il mantra di chi cerca di tracciare un percorso nuovo per l’italianistica, in parte in quello che possiamo chiamare “buon senso”: sensibilizzare studenti e amministratori sull’importanza delle competenze in lingue straniere, del loro uso, e del loro valore di mercato; la promozione attraverso borse di studio dell’immersione linguistico-culturale nel paese autoctono; attrarre la nicchia degli *hispano-hablantes* e cercare di incrementare l’offerta dell’italiano nelle high schools con il loro alto numero di studenti di lingue straniere.

Dal sondaggio di Colleen Ryan possiamo estrapolare i dati relativi a quello che si fa in programmi che si considerano in buona salute e che hanno visto se non un incremento di iscrizioni, una pacificante stabilità. Se alcune delle risposte sembrano scadere nell’ovvietà (ma anche nelle cose ovvie si nascondono possibili vie d’intervento) ed alcune coincidono con le possibili strategie indicate da Haller, altre possono offrire idee per percorsi da valutare. Tuttavia l’estrema varietà di risposte date ci ricorda nuovamente che non esiste un’unica soluzione e che ad ogni scuola, ad ogni università serve un intervento assolutamente mirato.

**CHE SI FA NEI PROGRAMMI IN BUONA SALUTE?  
(RYAN)**

- DYNAMIC QUALITY OF TEACHING
- GOOD TEACHING, GOOD COURSES
- PROMOTE STUDY ABROAD
- MORE SECTIONS OF ITALIAN FOR BEGINNERS (1ST YEAR)
- FLYERS ADVERTISING COURSES
- STUDENTS PROMOTING ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS
- CLOSE, FLEXIBLE, AVAILABLE ADVISING
- CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH ADVISING CENTRE AND ADMISSIONS FOR INCOMING STUDENTS
- FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITIES
- HONORS SOCIETY
- MORE CULTURE, LESS GRAMMAR IN LANGUAGE COURSES
- QUALITY OVER QUANTITY APPROACH
- INVEST IN TEACHERS
- STRONG ACADEMIC AND CHALLENGING PROGRAM
- BROADEN THE SCOPE OF COURSE OFFERINGS
- HYBRID / ABROAD / INTERNSHIPS
- APPLIED MODERN LANGUAGES - A 4 YEAR PROGRAM FULLY DRIVEN BY CAREERS EMBEDDING ABILITY TO WORK IN MULTILINGUAL SETTINGS
- FACEBOOK AND SOCIAL MEDIA TO KEEP IN CONTACT AND ANNOUNCE
- ONLINE / HYBRID COURSE OFFERINGS
- FORGE IMPORTANT DOUBLE MAJORS (ITALIAN AND ECONOMICS, ITALIAN AND PUBLIC POLICY)
- DUAL DEGREES (ITALIAN / MUSIC) (ITALIAN / BUSINESS)

Per quanto riguarda invece il mio sondaggio, finalizzato ad un’indagine quantitativa e qualitativa dei nostri programmi, notizie poco incoraggianti arrivano, come del resto c’era da aspettarsi, dai numeri, mentre dal punto di vista della risposta alla crisi molti hanno già cominciato a muoversi nel tentativo almeno di frenare la caduta. Delle 22 istituzioni universitarie che hanno risposto (8 i licei) solamente due indicano un’inversione di tendenza con un aumento di studenti generale negli ultimi 3 anni (James Madison e University of Alabama), mentre per il resto si va dal “leggermente in calo” della University of Pennsylvania e di Dartmouth College alla riduzione drastica dei nostri programmi a Ohio State e a Tuft (una perdita di circa 100 studenti dal 2012-2013 ad oggi). Stesso discorso per quanto riguarda majors e minors con numeri che in certi casi lasciano a bocca aperta: ai già menzionati 8 majors di UCLA, si aggiungano i 3 di Tufts University, i 2 della Dominican University, e i casi della University of Pennsylvania e della Loyola University di Chicago, con al momento un major ciascuna. Ma non si trascuri di valutare anche il dato di Ohio State che a fronte di un corpo studentesco imponente non arriva che a 20 studenti in totale, tra majors e minors.

Chi più chi meno, si può tranquillamente affermare che ogni programma stia approntando correttivi per dare una svolta alla situazione. È chiaro che non tutti non possono avere le risorse per muoversi aggressivamente come sembra stare facendo la DePaul University di Chicago, con un investimento importante in un nuovo MA e in nuovi study abroad, oltre a una crescente offerta di nuovi corsi, sia dal punto di vista del contenuto sia da quello della modalità. Comunque anche in tutti gli altri casi non si sta con le mani in mano: si va dall’offerta di corsi in formato online, ibrido o, in alcuni casi, “blended” (3 giorni in classe, uno online) al passaggio a “tasked based assessment” o “integrated performance assessment” in luogo di più tradizionali metodi di valutazione, dall’offerta di corsi in inglese al cross-listing di corsi nuovi o già esistenti alla ricerca dei grandi numeri all’apertura di tracks in Italian studies, da nuovi corsi accelerati per chi parla spagnolo all’accresciuta attenzione verso il singolo studente fuori dalla classe soprattutto in qualità di advisors, dalla riduzione dei costi per lo studente (materiali gratuiti) all’implementazione di Humanities lab per un’esperienza pratica, oserei direi manuale, nella lin-

gua e nella cultura italiana. Ce n’è davvero abbastanza per cominciare questa nuova resistenza.

INSTITUTION	STUDENT BODY (UNDERGRADUATE)	ITALIAN MAJORS/MINORS
OHIO STATE	48,811	20*
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA	34,072	36/55
UCGA	32,288	8/5
JAMES MADISON	19,927	10/30
DEPAUL UNIVERSITY	13,407	7/26
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO	11,129	1/35
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA	10,019	1/5
UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO	5,711	6/15
TUFTS UNIVERSITY	5,588	3/4
DARTMOUTH COLLEGE	4,300	4/N. A.
DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY	2,306	2/N. A.

\* total of majors and minors.

Cosa possiamo fare di più, allora? Due o tre considerazioni mi sembrano a questo punto importanti che vanno aldilà della modalità di offerta dei corsi, dei metodi di valutazione o della necessità di riuscire a mantenere quell’aria accogliente, quasi familiare, che sono sempre stati i dipartimenti d’italiano e che ha spesso stregato gli studenti delle nostre classi, in un mondo che ci vuole in giacca e cravatta, con la ventiquattre e pronti ad accettare qualsiasi compromesso in nome dei grandi numeri.

### 1) La questione dell’anglicizzazione dell’offerta dell’italianistica

Mi sembra si sia ormai superata la paura espressa da Haller per la smodata anglicizzazione dell’offerta dell’italianistica. Anzi, oggi riusciamo a vedere con chiarezza che non si tratta di una via da disprezzare a patto che non diventi l’unica alternativa. L’inglese ci permette infatti di raggiungere studenti attraverso quelli che sono gli aspetti dell’Italia che più affascinano l’immaginario americano, perché l’italiano è ancora visto come la lingua letteraria, dell’arte, della musica e della bellezza oltre che dell’opera, della cucina, della moda, del design, dell’innovazione creativa e dello sport. E insegnando questi corsi si avrà la possibilità di raggiungere anche altri studenti, quelli che si iscrivono perché hanno semplicemente bisogno di un corso e allargare così il pool dove poter fare opera di

proselitismo. Perché sappiamo bene che non è cosa facilissima raggiungere i freshmen prima che scelgano i corsi del loro primo semestre e sono veramente pochissimi quelli che arrivano on campus pensando di studiare l’italiano: i corsi di General Education, soprattutto quelli che gli studenti seguono nel loro primo anno diventano così una delle poche vie da sfruttare per arrivare a loro prima che sia troppo tardi. A quel punto starà a noi farli innamorare della nostra cultura e così, magari, spingerli anche a cimentarsi in quella che Thomas Mann chiama “la lingua degli angeli”. Nel momento in cui si avranno abbastanza corsi in inglese non credo sia nemmeno una cattiva idea affiancare un track in Italian Studies. Spesso la resistenza nei confronti degli Italian Studies nasce dalla preoccupazione che possa danneggiare numericamente quello in lingua e letteratura. La mia esperienza personale mi dice il contrario. Dal 2007 a oggi all’Università dell’Arizona abbiamo i due tracks e da quell’anno a oggi i nostri *majors* (anche più di 100 nel momento di massimo splendore) non sono mai stati più del 5% quelli che hanno scelto gli Italian Studies. E quest’anno, avere 4 grandi corsi di General Education con iscrizioni che vanno dai 60 ai 300 studenti, è stato usato come carta di scambio per tenere aperto un corso di cultura/letteratura in italiano, con soli 3 studenti, in un’università che chiede come numero minimo i quindici iscritti. Il successo di corsi sul cibo o sul Made in Italy segnalati da alcuni degli insegnanti nel mio sondaggio non fanno che confermare il beneficio di poter offrire corsi del genere.

## **2) Il programma AP di italiano. High schools, Enti Gestori, Istituti di cultura e Università: una questione di sinergie**

Negli ultimi anni il numero di studenti che ha sostenuto l’esame AP di Italiano è arrivato a sfiorare i 3000. Si tratta di un patrimonio che va in primo luogo salvaguardato e in secondo luogo convogliato con maggiore successo verso i nostri corsi universitari. Il calo di quest’anno è un dato che ci deve preoccupare e che deve farci capire che non si può mai allentare la guardia. Una volta raggiunto il fatidico numero di 2500 esami con un anno di anticipo rispetto alla scadenza data da College Board e con percentuali di crescita di tutto rispetto di anno in anno, si è un po’ persa quell’energia che aveva caratterizzato i primi anni della rinascita e questo è l’unico risultato che ci si poteva aspettare: un’inversione di tendenza. Quest’anno negli

Stati Uniti sono stati approvati 49 nuovi corsi AP, un numero che ci dovrebbe far dormire sonni tranquilli se non fosse che 46 sono invece quelli che hanno chiuso i battenti. Programmi che chiudono perché chi va in pensione non viene sostituito o peggio perché non si riesce a trovare qualcuno da assumere in possesso di certificazione. Gli sforzi del governo italiano, che nel libro bianco “L’italiano nel mondo che cambia”, presentato nel 2014 a Firenze durante gli Stati generali della lingua italiana nel mondo, aveva sostenuto che “la promozione e la diffusione linguistico-culturale costituiscono obiettivi prioritari della politica estera del nostro Paese”, credo vadano fatti soprattutto verso le middle school e high school. E nel caso non ci fossero i mezzi per sostenere e sponsorizzare l’apertura di nuovi programmi, è di vitale importanza che vengano mantenuti quelli in essere. Capisco che le risorse di chi lavora e s’impegna nei nostri consolati e nei nostri Istituti di cultura non siano infinite, anzi. Se consideriamo che nel 2016 il finanziamento stanziato dal governo italiano per tutta la rete estera è stato di 700,000 euro e che per il triennio 2015-2018 le priorità geografiche per l’azione di promozione linguistica e culturale italiana erano state identificate in tre aree – Cina, Nord Africa e Medio Oriente e i Balcani Occidentali – strategicamente ben individuate ma sfortunatamente non inclusive

Investment Priority	Specific Goal
Priority #1 AP Exam volumes	Increase in Exam volumes nationwide and internationally
Priority #2 AP Exam scores	Increase in Exam scores
Priority #3 Developing Italian courses	Increasing Italian Courses in US schools
Priority #4 Increasing the quality of teachers	Training of teachers
Priority #5 Keeping Italian alive post High School and post AP	Increase the # of AP HS grads who keeps learning Italian in post secondary education
Priority #6 Fund raising	Ensure sustainable financing
Priority #7 Communication and Digital marketing strategy for Italian	Develop a Communication/Digital strategy Targeting out audience correctly

della nostra realtà, possiamo dire che chi è qui sta già facendo miracoli. Sta a noi indicare loro le nostre necessità, sta a noi dialogare con loro, tenendo sempre in mente il bene dell’italianistica aldilà delle esigenze delle singole istituzioni. Da parte loro, se diamo un’occhiata alle priorità recentemente indicate dall’Osservatorio, pos-

siamo capire che non c’è solo buona volontà, ma anche tanta voglia di fare.

Una volta assicurata la salvaguardia di queste risorse si potrà anche pensare di sfruttarle come si è sempre pensato di poterlo fare. Ma anche qui si tratta di sinergie che ancora non sono state implementate. In un mondo accademico che tende sempre di più a spingere gli studenti verso le materie scientifiche è nostro dovere fare quel passo in più che permetta a noi insegnanti universitari di raggiungere e dialogare con quel buon gruppo di studenti che sostiene e passa l’esame AP. Quanti di voi vanno a far visita alle scuole dove il corso AP è offerto a pubblicizzare i vostri programmi, a spiegare che non devono specializzarsi in italiano ma che con un limitatissimo numero di corsi possono tranquillamente completare un minor? Che magari lo possono fare con corsi da seguire direttamente in Italia, per quelli di voi che hanno uno Study Abroad? Aldilà delle tante buone idee, della tanta voglia di fare, la situazione dell’italianistica comincerà a migliorare quando tutti quanti si impegneranno a condividere, a collaborare e a guardare al problema come un fronte compatto e non dal piccolo mondo della propria singola realtà. Questa credo sia una delle due nostre più grandi sfide.

### **3) Rendere l’italiano vendibile**

L’altra, segnalata in tempi non sospetti da Haller, è quella di rendere plausibile per gli studenti (ma anche per le loro famiglie) l’idea che l’italiano possa tornar loro di qualche utilità nella vita da adulti. E non parliamo naturalmente di uno studente che si specializza in materie umanistiche. Ma piuttosto dello studente di economia, di ingegneria, di informatica o iscritto a corsi propedeutici per la scuola di medicina che se decide di continuare con una lingua lo fa spesso con in testa il mercato dove, al momento, non abbiamo scampo nei confronti del cinese, del francese, o dell’arabo. Persino il giapponese e il tedesco con le loro economie forti sembrano sempre capaci di risultare più appetibili. Lo spagnolo naturalmente è fuori classifica. Come rispondere? Forse una strada da percorrere è quella di portare nelle nostre classi l’Italia che lavora e creare collaborazioni che vadano aldilà della lezione, o che per lo meno, rendano quella lezione, quella classe un momento di crescita personale. Non è una cosa semplicissima ma se il governo italiano e le università si

impegnassero in questo senso credo che potremmo essere molto più competitivi. E c’è chi è già riuscito a muoversi in questa direzione. Mi riferisco ad un’amica e collega, Lyn Scolaro, che lavora a Chicago alla Prospect High School che per i suoi ragazzi del corso AP ha stipulato una partnership con la compagnia di Olio d’Oliva Redoro per un programma che aiuti da un lato la compagnia veneta a lanciare i propri prodotti negli Stati Uniti (studio in una prima fase e lancio nella seconda), dall’altro di offrire agli studenti possibilità di scholarships, internship in Italia, di un’immersione nella cultura italiana reale e di sviluppare abilità linguistiche commerciali da poter utilizzare nella loro vita futura (i progetti degli studenti, tutti legati all’olio d’oliva, vanno dal marketing all’ambiente, dall’economia alla cosmesi, dai social media alla cucina). E l’investimento per i due anni di questa partnership è di 100,000 dollari. Le eccellenze italiane vanno bene al di là del cibo e della moda: migliaia di piccole e medie industrie che esportano in tutto il mondo dal design ai motori, dall’industria farmaceutica a quella tessile, dalla lavorazione della ceramica alla produzione di macchine per l’industria. E nel frattempo, mentre aspettiamo di trovare la nostra piccola industria, si può sempre cominciare in piccolo: magari includendo nelle nostre classi di lingua un workshop sulla cucina dove gli studenti imparino veramente a cucinare. Invitate ristoratori e pizzaioli locali a parlare del loro lavoro qui negli Stati Uniti, del perché sono qui e non in Italia, a dare dimostrazioni. Forse questo non farà guadagnare di più in futuro ai nostri studenti, di trovare un lavoro migliore, ma gli permetterà di portare via dalle nostre classi qualcosa di concreto, qualcosa che resterà nella loro vita a venire.

### **Conclusion**

Vorrei ora concludere con una o due considerazioni sul concetto di innovazione. Se oggi apriamo il dizionario della Treccani alla ricerca della parola “innovazione”, troveremo più o meno questa definizione:

- a.** L’atto, l’opera di innovare, cioè di introdurre nuovi sistemi, nuovi ordinamenti, nuovi metodi di produzione e sim. [...] **b.** In senso concreto, ogni novità, mutamento, trasformazione che modifichi radicalmente o provochi comunque un efficace svecchiamento in un ordinamento politico o sociale, in un metodo di produzione, in una tecnica, ecc.

La maggior parte degli altri dizionari si allinea naturalmente con questa definizione, ma il più delle volte si nota, in questi, la necessità di sottolineare che questi mutamenti, queste trasformazioni siano di carattere intrinsecamente positivo. E chi potrebbe pensare il contrario quando in pratica si tratta di “rendere qualcosa migliore” secondo l’accezione che oggi sembra andare per la maggiore? In realtà questa accezione è piuttosto moderna. Benoît Godin, professore dell’Institut national de la recherche scientifique di Montreal, nel suo *Innovation Contested: The Idea of Innovation Over the Centuries* (Routledge, 2015), ci ricorda infatti che nel Medioevo essere un innovatore significa mettere in dubbio la dottrina religiosa e quindi fungeva da sinonimo per eretico, mentre nel diciassettesimo e diciottesimo secolo il termine era utilizzato come un insulto (innovatore era detto di persona smodata e malvagia). Solo nel 1940, Joseph Schumpeter, professore di Economia ad Harvard, porterà il termine all’interno di una categoria positiva, con il suo lavoro sulla “creatività distruttiva” in cui l’idea di innovazione viene legata al lancio di prodotti sul mercato. Negli anni novanta, con Clayton Christensen, un altro economista di Harvard, che porta avanti il lavoro iniziato da Schumpeter, l’innovazione è qualcosa di positivamente “dirompente” che implica il totale sconvolgimento dello status quo. Questa è l’innovazione abbracciata dalla Silicon Valley prima e, quindi, dai mercati in generale e che oggi la fa da padrona. Ma si faccia attenzione perché questa innovazione non gioca secondo le regole, passa e distrugge senza preoccuparsi di nulla a patto che si vada avanti: con la stessa indifferenza di Dante e Virgilio nei confronti degli ignavi (“non ragioniam di loro, ma guarda e passa”) e con lo stesso spirito iconoclasta e guerrafondaio del nostro Marinetti nel nome dell’innovazione bisogna andare avanti, cancellare il passato e vivere di presente e futuro. E se in un primo momento “innovazione” è diventata la parola d’ordine nel mondo dei mercati, non stupisce che l’accademia oggi, nel cui tempio ormai da anni la fanno da padroni i mercanti (leggi le amministrazioni), l’abbia assunta a vessillo da sventolare in ogni occasione.

A me personalmente la parola sta antipatica, forse per come le nostre amministrazioni la hanno svuotata di qualsiasi significato, e soprattutto di qualsiasi significato “umano”, o forse perché anche quando usata in termini positivi sottintende un’azione devastante (i suddetti economisti

ne specificano le caratteristiche con aggettivi quali “distruttiva”, “dirompente” ad implicare un “totale sconvolgimento dello status quo”), quasi a dire che quello che abbiamo fatto finora e quello che facciamo oggi sia da cancellare completamente per poter ripartire. Niente di più falso.

Proviamo allora ad usarla meno questa parola e sostituirla ogni volta ci si presenti l’occasione con termini quali far crescere, rinnovare, aggiornare, prendersi cura, fare manutenzione, modificare, rimodernare, riqualificare, far crescere.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Si veda anche Jesse Adam Stein, “Is 2017 The Year to Ditch the Term Innovation” ([theconversation.com/is-2017-the-year-to-ditch-the-term-innovation-71483](https://theconversation.com/is-2017-the-year-to-ditch-the-term-innovation-71483)) da cui queste mie conclusioni prendono chiara ispirazione.

INNOVATION AND INCREASING ENROLLMENTS  
IN ITALIAN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS  
ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

In this section, we present the contributions to the Roundtable Discussion that closed the 2017 edition of the Italian Language and Culture Conference held at Georgetown University. The invited participants were Cristina Abbona-Sneider from Brown University, Beppe Cavatorta from the University of Arizona, Anna De Fina from Georgetown University, Luciana Fellin from Duke University, and Teresa Fiore from Montclair State University. Contributors delivered papers focused on the topic of the conference: *Innovation in Italian Programs and Pedagogy*. They offered reflections on the different actions that their institutions have taken to meet the challenges and to capitalize on the opportunities for change that the current state of affairs in the teaching of Italian presents at the university level. The contribution by Beppe Cavatorta will be included in his more general article also published in this issue.

Anna De Fina,  
Georgetown University

Anna De Fina  
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In this brief note, I will describe the actions that the Italian Department at Georgetown University has taken to introduce elements of innovation into its Language and Literature Program and curricula.

The need for innovation has become particularly urgent in the case of the teaching and diffusion of Italian language and culture given the general decline in the number of students who enroll, not only in Italian (see MLA 2015 data on enrolments in languages other than English in Higher Education), but in other languages and in disciplines in the humanities more in general as well. At the same time, there are concurrent reasons that push us to look for innovative solutions. Students are different today than they were in years past in both their interests and their ways of learning (Stansbury, 2017), thus pedagogical content and strategies need to change as well in order to adapt to the requirements and learning styles of the young people enrolled in our courses. It is also fair to say that teachers and educators need to conceive of their work and mission in different terms given the revolution that has taken place in the definition of what it means to be an expert (Cummings, 2013).

In the face of this new situation, a dilemma has presented itself to us as a department: How can we change and make our course offerings and curriculum more attractive to students without losing our academic rigor and stance? Can we avoid simplifying or falling into the trap of fashions and trends? Our response has been to try to introduce changes that do not lead us to abandon the high standards that our program sets for students at all levels, but that reflect a greater appreciation for the changing ways in which Italy and Italians are perceived in the US.

The innovations that we have introduced in recent years can be subsumed under the following headings: changes in course offerings and content, changes to the Language Program Curriculum, the use of assessment tools, outreach.

### **Changes in course offerings and content**

We have introduced a series of new courses that reflect both the need to differentiate learner opportunities and to create new areas of interest to attract them. The following courses have been integrated into the Italian Program:

- Italian for Spanish Speakers
- Basic Italian through Visual Arts
- Business Italian
- Italian Translation
- Language and Migration
- Italian American Language Literature and Cinema
- Medici, Patrons of the Renaissance: A Dynasty
- The Dark Prince: Machiavelli
- *Cantautori* and Italian Songs

Italian for Spanish Speakers is an accelerated intensive course designed specifically for speakers of Spanish that, considering their different path to language acquisition with respect to English speakers, gives them the possibility to complete two semesters in one. Its introduction allows us to provide targeted learning strategies to a distinct student population, opening up space for inter-comprehension as a new area of interest.

Our push to propose different offerings to a composite and diverse student population is reflected also in the creation of Basic Italian through Art, Italian Translation, and Business Italian, which introduce language study through content and at the same time allow us to explore the possibilities of creating new minors and of offering hands-on experience through internships. Interest in business has been constantly growing and it reflects an aspect of Italian studies that attracts advanced students of Italian drawn to the Made in Italy and other Italian economic and cultural phenomena. In terms of upper level content courses, we have introduced Language and Migration and Italian American Language, Literature and Cinema (taught in English), which on the one hand expand the possible fields of engagement for advanced students, and on the other allow us to cross-list with other departments and schools such as Linguistics and the School of Foreign Service. Cross-listings and interdisciplinary explora-

tions are indeed other productive avenues to widen the reach of Italian departments. The Medici and the Dark Prince courses present historical and literary content on the Renaissance through the history of particular families or figures, thus making history more concrete and real to young people, and this new approach has allowed us to attract more students from different disciplines while at the same time teaching them about a very important area of Italian Studies. The course on *Cantautori* also presents an innovative approach to songs as it highlights the threads that link folk songs to the rich Italian literary tradition.

In addition to new courses, we have also strengthened and reviewed the cultural content of existing courses and, as mentioned, we have paid particular attention to cross-listing with other departments and therefore also to diversifying the selection of courses that are taught in English or that cover various Core Requirements of the College. In addition, we, as many other language departments, encourage Double Majors. The possibility of double majoring has attracted not only students who are interested in other humanistic fields such as Art History and Philosophy, but also students who are focused on the sciences or business.

### **Changes to the Language Program Curriculum**

Innovation in the language program has focused on a more concentrated use of technology. We have introduced the use of Voice Thread and Zoom into many courses and we have moved from Blackboard to Canvas, a platform that offers better options for collaboration and easier links with external content.

In collaboration with the Universities of Salento and Turin, we have introduced Teletandem in the form of a one-credit course that allows students to complete a series of conversations via Zoom. Teletandem has been a success in that it has offered students the possibility of authentic interactions with peers in Italy and therefore opportunities to carry out conversations and cultural exchanges that they do not easily encounter in traditional courses.

Starting in Fall 2014, we launched a hybrid format for our third and fourth semester intensive Italian classes. These courses meet three days a week and have online work for two days a week. Through hybrid courses

we have been able to emphasize cultural enrichment and communication in the classroom by moving some of the grammar instruction to online platforms and by carving out extra time for oral production through Voice Thread (for more information see [https://tilca.qc.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/From-Traditional-to-Hybrid\\_Hipwell\\_Melucci-Finale.pdf](https://tilca.qc.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/From-Traditional-to-Hybrid_Hipwell_Melucci-Finale.pdf)).

We have also moved the rest of our language courses from 5 days a week face-to-face to 4 days a week in class and one day online, a modification that has given students who want to take Italian courses the possibility of greater flexibility in their schedule.

### **Use of Assessment Tools**

Another way in which we have tried to identify areas for innovation has been through the use of assessment in order to evaluate the efficacy of different aspects of our program. Thus, in Spring 2017 we distributed a Graduating Senior Survey to gauge the overall level of student satisfaction, and to identify possible areas that require innovation within the program or specific courses. Student suggestions have been fundamental in guiding us in the creation of new courses and in the launching of departmental initiatives, and for this reason we will continue to distribute the survey every year.

### **Outreach**

An important area for innovation has been outreach and the expansion and diversification of opportunities for students to study and work in Italy or to come into contact with Italians directly since this is an excellent motivator for our majors, minors, and also for those who do not specialize in Italian. At the same time, it is through occasions of direct contact that students become interested in continuing to enroll in Italian, and for this reason we have expanded these possibilities for exchange with Italy through Teletandem, the requirement for MA students to spend one semester at an Italian University, and the launching of a summer abroad course for third semester students at Villa Le Balze in Fiesole. We have also explored internships that may give students a fresh look at the world of Italian business. Over the last year, we have partnered with the

Georgetown Italian Research Institute to offer our students the opportunity to participate in workshops organized by Italian firms with the objective of stimulating innovative solutions to business issues. Following the workshops, some of the participating students are selected for internships with the same firms in Italy. Two students of Italian who have won internships in Italy have taken advantage of the opportunity with great success. Starting in Summer 2018, we are launching an internship for an undergraduate student with the Amina Rubinacci firm in Naples, and another internship for a graduate student at the Library of Congress.

Through these initiatives, we are confident that we will maintain the innovative character of our program while at the same time attracting new students to explore the many ways in which the study of Italian can enhance their resumes.

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The title of our roundtable – *Innovation and Increasing Enrollments in Italian Language Programs* – emphasizes the synergy between curricular innovation and student enrollment. There is no question that recent enrollment trends are worrisome, part of a decline in the study of European languages and a general move away from the study of the humanities. We teach students who increasingly feel that they must concentrate their studies in disciplines that they believe offer a greater certainty of finding work, and it is therefore crucial that we assure them of the value of second language acquisition and cultural competence. We must convince them that these skills serve not only to broaden their personal perspectives but also to make them global citizens prepared for professions that require breadth of vision and critical thinking, skills that rest on a strong foundation in the liberal arts. The most recent MLA report on enrollment trends in foreign languages is certainly disheartening, but it is also a call to action – it is time to rethink the way second language study is presented to students by instructors and by departments as a whole.

For this reason, I believe it is important to focus on the point of departure for this roundtable: “innovation.” In my department, curricular innovation has become a critical part of our effort to retain students beyond the introductory level. Brown’s foreign language departments face an unusual challenge as our institution does not have a core curriculum and therefore no language requirement. The Open Curriculum requires students to complete at least thirty courses over the course of eight semesters and to choose a concentration that corresponds to the major at most institutions. Although there is nothing that corresponds to a minor, students are allowed to do a double concentration by completing all the courses required for two disciplines. Both concentrators and double concentrators in Italian Studies are required to take eight courses beyond the fifth semester of language and culture. This requirement is difficult enough for students who begin to

study Italian as freshmen, but imagine the plight of a computer science student interested in Italian Studies. They would need to complete the fifteen courses and the labs required by their home department while finding the time to study Italian for five semesters and then, if they decide to become double concentrators, to take a further eight courses.

To face these challenges my department has “reimagined itself” and has begun to emphasize interdisciplinary courses that are accessible to students who do not yet have the fluency to handle all the coursework in Italian. Since almost all faculty members in Italian Studies have a joint appointment with another department (Modern Culture and the Media, History, Art History, Anthropology, Comparative Literature), the majority of the courses taught outside the language program are now cross-listed and therefore taught in English – often team taught by colleagues who are specialists in two different fields. While our earlier approach had been to focus on language courses to attract students to what our institution calls “content courses,” we are now doing the reverse. We are offering many more English language cross-listed classes with the hope that they will build interest among students who would not otherwise take courses in Italian Studies; ultimately, we hope to cultivate this interest into a passion for language study (students, moreover, might take these courses alongside introductory language courses, building up Italian concentration credits).

We have also made additions to our longstanding study abroad program in Bologna. Although the semester-long and yearlong programs remain experiences of full linguistic and cultural immersion, two years ago we began offering a summer course in Film Studies tied to Bologna’s *Festival del Cinema Ritrovato*. This course is taught in English with no prerequisites and it concludes with a practical assignment – the writing and filming of a short film under the guidance of a director of shorts and documentaries in collaboration with the *Cineteca di Bologna*. We have noticed something interesting: a considerable number of the students who return to campus after taking this course decide to begin their formal study of Italian, and they do so inspired by their experiences in Italy. The course also gives students with good language abilities who for one reason or another are not able to spend a semester or a year in Bologna, the opportunity to experience life in Italy – even if this experience is not fully im-

mersive. Strengthening our connections with Bologna provides a range of opportunities for our students to put into practice and to sharpen those language skills acquired in the classroom while gaining professional experience abroad. In fact, we have begun to develop a network of paid internships for advanced students in Bologna. These internships will be very diverse in character and will enable students to use their language in contexts that are not just academic but also professional – hospitals, publishing houses, museums, laboratories, etc. Similar internships have already been created for other study abroad programs at Brown and are part of the university’s “internationalization plans.”

Cultural awareness and intellectual enrichment are crucial parts of “global education” that is the mission of Brown University’s Office of Global Engagement. The importance of this office is reflected in our enrollments for international study: there are almost five hundred undergraduates studying abroad this year and we have almost seventeen hundred international students on campus. This is the perfect context in which to advocate forcefully for the importance of second language acquisition. In my opinion, what is needed is a collective effort, not limited to colleagues in Italian Studies, but one that unites the twenty-five languages taught on campus. A step was taken in this direction when in September, for the first time, a presentation was made to the incoming freshman class in which a group of seniors from various disciplines spoke on the importance of language study during their years at Brown. The goal was to present our courses in a new way, making sure prospective students understand that in a global society trans-lingual and trans-cultural competence is absolutely essential to their future professional life. It is our job to underscore the limitations of monolingualism not only in the humanities but also in the sciences and to insist on the advantages to be gained through the study of Italian – the language of a country that today, as in centuries past, is a Mediterranean crossroads of peoples and cultures.

To conclude, the path we have chosen at Brown is to fully embrace the notion of Italian *Studies*, going beyond the format of the more traditional language and literature courses and using interdisciplinarity as a way of presenting our students with a complex view of Italy and being Italian. Students who experience this during a semester or a summer at

the University of Bologna or during internships with Italian companies will understand that the Italian language does not live within the four walls of a classroom alone, but in a world of study, research, and work across disciplines. When we accomplish this, we have reached one of our objectives as teachers of Italian and more broadly as educators in this ever more global academic world.

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As of the last three academic years (2015-2018), our language program has seen a drop in numbers that, given its recurrence, can be defined as a trend rather than as a fluke. Noteworthy is that the decrease in enrollments occurred in elementary Italian 101, the first semester offering where the vast majority of our students, who are true beginners, come into contact with Italian at Duke.

As compared to other languages on campus such as Spanish, French and increasingly, Mandarin, where students enroll in language courses at different levels when they first arrive at university, Italian, which is scarcely offered at the High School level, and which has scant numbers of heritage speakers, must, for the most part, cultivate its majors and minors “in house.” As a consequence, the decline in enrollments at the elementary level is particularly detrimental as it determines future outcomes of the whole Italian section. Unlike the more commonly taught languages, a smaller pool in elementary Italian simply means a smaller number of students in upper level courses taught in the language. Moreover, and importantly for my argument, is that the decline in elementary course enrollments gives us a sense of the ideologies and attitudes about different languages in society at large that often inform students’ course selection. There is a long history of the waxing and waning of different languages’ popularity according to the socio-political and economic climate; for example, the post WW II doubling of Russian course offerings (Shur, 2016), the 46.3% increase in Arabic enrollments in the peak years (2006-09) of the US involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the concomitant slight dip in French numbers during the Chirac-Bush falling out that gave way to “Freedom Fries” and the more recent, 44.7% increase of Korean (MLA Report, 2015) that can in part, be attributed to the greater visibility of Korea in the pop and political arena with the rise in popularity of K-pop and the increased political and media attention to North Korea.

The history of Italian offerings in the US also reflects societal language attitudes or ideologies linked to cultural phenomena. Carnevale (2009), reports that notwithstanding the density of the Italian presence in certain New York neighborhoods, their high schools offered French, Latin and German rather than Italian, which lacked the academic and societal clout that these languages possessed. As Italian became more and more associated with a glamorous image of Italy and less with the “swarthy immigrant,” its popularity grew. Italian enrollments rose steadily in the early 2000s, peaking in the 2009 MLA survey that counted 80,322 students enrolled in courses across the US, dropping 11% in the last 2013 poll. The popularity of Italian in those years coincides with the heyday of Italian culture in the American imaginary, after the New York Times bestseller *Under the Tuscan Sun* (Mayes, 1997) replaced the Francophile *A year in Provence* (Mayle, 1989), on many American coffee tables; holidays in Italy became more accessible and popular among the growing middle class, and the *Made in Italy* phenomenon hit American shores. Although these factors alone do not explain the rise in popularity of Italian among college students, the italophile zeitgeist certainly contributed to it. Attention to such ideas toward language(s) is crucial in approaching the crisis in Italian enrollments, couched, in very recent times, in an ever growing isolationism and monolingual culture that values transaction and profit over intercultural awareness and understanding that language study can bring about. The issue is, thus, larger than our departments or universities; however, it is from there that we can start to tackle it. In the following sections, I will discuss the strategies adopted by the Italian Program at Duke University to attract students to our courses and foster the study of Italian.

I divide them in macro and micro strategies: the former encompasses larger scale aspects, such as course offerings and institutional outreach, and the latter, the scheduling and format of the courses offered and pedagogical approaches. Crucial to the success of any strategic plan is the collaboration and synergy between upper and lower level courses, i.e., language and literature courses and the faculty who teach them, as discussed in the 2007 MLA report, which has been enacted by the Italian faculty cohort at Duke.

## MACRO STRATEGIES

Following is a list of areas crucial to the livelihood of Italian and interventions within them that were discussed at the roundtable on *Innovations in Italian Programs and Pedagogy* held at Georgetown in October 2017.

**Course offerings:** We determined that it is critical to differentiate offerings and connect them to current events, student needs and interests, and to capitalize on student movements to and from study abroad in Italy. To reach a broader public, some courses, categorized as Italian Studies, are taught in English with break-out discussion sections in Italian where course content is expanded in breadth and depth through readings and discussion in the language. These are called “preceptorials” and count toward the minor in Italian Studies. They tend to pique student interest, enhance rapport with professors, and create a community of Italophiles. Examples of courses that connect to the current times are “Cultures of Fascism,” “Food, Culture and Society,” “Sex, Death and Love,” “Jewish Italy and its Literatures: The Most Ancient Minority,” and “Soccer Politics,” (taught by a colleague in French), all with discussion sessions conducted in Italian and cross-listed in various departments across campus, from Anthropology and Linguistics, to History and Religion.

A number of our faculty teach first year seminars that range from literary survey courses, to courses in linguistics and Medieval and Renaissance studies. Courses directed towards first year students are important. Contact with first-year students is crucial as it allows them to know Italian faculty, explore Italian related content and build interests and relationships during the often most influential and formative of semesters.

**Presence and Relevance:** The visibility and relevance of Italian is crucial to make it attractive to students. To this effect, we actively seek cross-listing with other departments as well as opportunities to co-teach interdisciplinary courses in clusters with faculty from other fields and schools. For instance, a food studies course is co-taught with colleagues from Biology and Environmental Science, a cinema course with colleagues from English and literature. We are present at first year students’ orientation and sign up as advisors and mentors. Faculty-student contact is of es-

sence: it builds connections and trust, and reaches students directly, ultimately becoming the best form of publicity.

**Institutional Outreach:** Our participation in the advising process, active presence at different cultural centers, museums and initiatives on campus and in the community, such as Service Learning, are important for contacts and visibility and strong integration into university happenings that can foster networks of interest. Our events are prominent on the wider University Calendar, but also take place inside student dorms.

**Events:** Film festivals, art exhibits, concerts, performances, guest speakers and their connection to our course content help render Italian culture visible and directly relevant to students. Campus and community events are woven into our teaching, either by charging students to attend events with a specific task or pedagogical activity, or having guests visit our classes.

**Extracurricular:** We have made a priority of offering rich and diversified extracurricular activities that range from pasta-making and cheese-tasting workshops to voice and dance lessons, and from improv-theater to soccer games, all of which are integrated into course content and expectations. Students are required to participate, document and elaborate on a minimum of two Italian oriented activities that take place outside of class that they then integrate into their final learning portfolio under the connections and communities goals of the ACTFL devised standards that stress the application of learning a language beyond the instructional setting (ACTFL, 2006; 2011).

**Study Abroad:** One of the most potent motivators of language study is the abroad experience. Creating study abroad programs and encouraging participation in those from other universities is one of the best ways of getting students into our courses. We schedule advanced conversation, Italian sociolinguistics, and cultural studies themed courses for post-study abroad students who are eager to continue contact with the language and culture and to make sense of the abroad experience through a reflective in-depth study of Italian themes.

## MICRO STRATEGIES

Strategies on the micro level include planning and interventions on classroom practices, pedagogical choices, course formats and scheduling, communication and technology as well as curricular and bureaucratic decisions.

**Scheduling and formats:** Providing a wide array of times and concentrating courses in the Monday through Thursday window seems to entice students, and jibes well with the flipped classroom approach we adopt. Shifting from a five-day week class contact to a hybrid format with four day class contact, and crucially, Friday online work, seems to favor enrollments and allows collaborative planning for teacher and graduate student fellows, leaving a viable day where all teachers can attend professionalization workshops and talks.

Accelerated format courses for speakers of Romance languages attract students that are highly motivated and often good candidates for study abroad programs and for continuing study at upper level courses beyond the required three semesters.

**Student centered curriculum and pedagogy:** In addition to being effective and just, a student-centered pedagogy engages and motivates students making the study of Italian relevant to their personal and academic lives and selves. Experiential and collaborative learning has grounded our courses in real-life community and campus culture that is relatable to students and creates a learning community. An example of this pedagogy is a learning module whereby students visit the local museum to observe, document, and reflect, and then collaboratively create a learning artifact in the form of a video guide or museum brochure for students in lower proficiency level courses to use. The collaborative and experiential learning activities in the museum are based on the idea that learning occurs through communication, interaction with others, and joint problem solving while engaging in real-life settings and tasks. Through such processes, students achieve higher levels of learning, develop linguistic abilities, and typically have a more positive attitude about the language class (Gokhale, 1995, Lafford, 2013). As Brooks (1991) and Thorne (2011) note, there is a need to use the world as its own model, and, in the words of

Byrnes (2011: 291), "Language learning is no longer to be primarily of and in the classroom alone, but of, with, and for the community." To this effect, we have implemented cultural projects at all levels of learning that connect Italian to students' real-life academic pursuits. These consist of research projects conducted in English where students explore Italian culture and scholarship in their specific fields of interest. The use of English fosters in-depth research because it avoids the infantilization that is often a hindrance for students' exploration of more demanding or unconventional topics in Italian. Interviews with Italians on campus and in the community also function as motivators and connectors to different fields and communities.

The student-centered pedagogy is complemented by an approach to assessment that is formative rather than merely summative. The introduction of learning portfolios as final course projects has yielded positive results in terms of language learning and intercultural awareness, but also a boost in interest for courses past the language requirement.

Showcasing our pedagogy and student achievements at forums such as portfolio and poster exhibits, undergraduate conferences and honors theses discussions all increases the visibility of our courses and Italian among students, faculty and administration, which, will hopefully lead to greater interest in Italian in general.

Finally, the goal of implementing the micro and macro strategies outlined in the paragraphs above is to render Italian visible, relevant and attractive to students who arrive on campus often imbued with language ideologies that purport a hierarchy of languages ordered according to their immediate utilitarian value. These hierarchies change according to socio-cultural, political, and economic factors that at this point in time favor English as the *Lingua Franca* or languages other than Italian. It is thus our task to collectively find strategies that can help increase interest in Italian in each of our campuses, to counter the monoglot culture and bring Italian to the fore. For this it is necessary to work inside and outside the class making the curricular offerings and pedagogical practices exciting and relevant. However, working on campus alone will not suffice. We need the support of institutions and entities outside academia that can foster interest in the language and culture of Italy in the broader context. These can range from

governmental agencies such as the *Istituti di Cultura*, to Italian industrial entities, or cultural institutions such as Italian Universities and learning centers and our professional associations in synergy.

Ultimately, the demise of Italian at our universities is a broader and deeper issue that must be approached together to make Italian language and culture more visible, relevant and attractive. The presence of recent Italian immigrants and their investment in Italian language and culture could be a rich source of support with which to engage. We need negotiations and pressure from governmental and civilian agencies to offer Italian at the middle and high school levels, incentives to circulate cultural events across the country and not only in the major urban areas, to sustain exchanges between schools and universities in Italy and the US, and donors to support Italian Programs so that Italian does not merely survive, but, rather thrive.

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**Italian Language and Culture “at Work”:  
New Projects in Business, Audio-Visual Translation and High-School  
Outreach at Montclair State University**

**Introduction: Italian, a Beautiful Useful Language**

The ever-growing perception and representation of a university learning experience as the route to a career has prompted a steep rethinking of all disciplines, but in particular the field of the humanities, and within it modern languages, and Italian among them. Coupled with the enrollment reduction induced by the financial crisis of 2007-2009 in the liberal arts at large, this process of rethinking, with all its contents and discontents, has moved the faculty in Italian Programs and Departments towards a broader re-consideration of the professional application of a degree in Italian.<sup>1</sup> This process combines both challenges and opportunities in complex ways, as it requires creative but at the same time risky redesigns of Italian programs – new classes need to be protected from low-enrolment-related cuts while being made meaningful to a fresh student population. In general, this operation has offered the occasion to inject vital sap into the field by including it in a dialogue within and outside of academia that far from compromising the tenets of the discipline with its focus on the centrality of culture, provides it with a new dynamism. Essentially, this operation shows Italian language and culture “at work.” In my view, a carefully planned shift from “la bella lingua” (the beautiful language) to “una lingua utile” (a useful language) is able to leverage the sedimented strength of the field while adding contemporary and concrete relevance

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<sup>1</sup> The umbrella container of this operation remains the Italian page of the Lead with Languages portal: <http://www.leadwithlanguages.org/lwl-language/italian/>

to it as part of what I have elsewhere called “an update and expansion” of the field rather than a “radical revisitation.”<sup>2</sup>

At Montclair State University, the Italian Program, which is one of the largest in the country as per the latest MLA data,<sup>3</sup> has embraced this vision. Thanks to the presence of an endowment<sup>4</sup> tasked with the promotion of Italian and Italian American Studies, several opportunities have been created to interact with experts from business and cultural sectors. Specifically, two areas of focus have emerged: one linked to the Made in Italy business sectors and the other to Audio Visual Translation (AVT) for the cultural industry. Another important initiative is the introduction of an intensive college-credit-earning summer course for high-school students, which has proven to be an effective tool in further emphasizing the role of Italian AP as a bridge to higher education.

### **The Business/Made in Italy Path**

The Business/Made in Italy path was prompted by an assessment of the specific nature of the metropolitan area in which MSU operates. The fact that New Jersey plays a leading role in the Italian economy<sup>5</sup> and that it is only 15 miles away from a profoundly Italian city like New York created a natural opportunity to connect students to certain companies. “Business Italian Style” – the first project launched as part of this new experimentation<sup>6</sup> – was integrated into a pre-existing course called “Commercial Italian,” and entailed the production of video-interviews in four Made in Italy

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<sup>2</sup> See *La Voce di New York's* article “Lingua italiana in America.”

<sup>3</sup> The Italian Program is the largest in the state of New Jersey and the fifth largest in the nation, according to the 2013 MLA Report on Foreign Languages. Despite a recent drop in enrollments as reflected in the 2016 MLA report (see Looney), the MSU Italian program continues to be one of the ten largest programs nationwide.

<sup>4</sup> Named after the parents of the main donor, Mr. Lawrence R. Inserra Jr., the endowment operates through the Theresa and Lawrence R. Inserra Endowed Chair. For a full description of its mission and activities, see [montclair.edu/inserra-chair](http://montclair.edu/inserra-chair).

<sup>5</sup> As reported in a specialized online magazine: “New Jersey ... has a strong connection with Italian companies, importing \$6.6 billion worth of goods. The total is not only higher than any other state in the nation—it represents 17 percent of Italy’s total exports” (Bergeron).

<sup>6</sup> Links to the Business Italian Style project, as well as the paid student internship, the meeting with local companies and the “Critical Made in Italy” series described in this section can be found here: <http://montclair.edu/inserra-chair/opportunities-for-the-students/ita-and-business/>.

sectors (food, fashion, design, and art) with contributions by major artists and business figures. Students drafted, ran, and edited the interviews under the guidance of a team of faculty members and experts in videomaking and journalism. They also wrote articles on the different subjects from an economic and cultural perspective in both Italian and English, and, additionally, they subtitled the videos. The materials were published in the online magazine *La Voce di New York* as part of a series on Made in Italy that highlighted the dynamic presence of Italian businesses in the area, and their openness to exchanges with the new generation of American students as part of educational initiatives. The project was repeated three years afterwards in a more focused form concentrating on the topical theme of Food and Sustainability. As a whole, the interviews have had over 100,000 viewers online, a result that effectively connected the classroom experience to the outside world, strongly enhancing the interest of students in continuing the study of Italian.

These exchanges revealed the possibility of establishing more structured relationships with the various players in this vast Italian economic ecosystem to both create tangible pre-professional experiences for students and to revisit the curriculum through a reverse engineering approach that sets up a dialogue about acquiring skills that are relevant for the prevailing job market. Tangible follow-ups have included a 2017 meeting with a dozen companies active in New York and New Jersey to develop targeted internships and to introduce a new paid internship embracing the Italian Trade Agency in New York and Choose New Jersey in Princeton, both invested in supporting the growth of Italian economy in this area. Finally, a series of public panels called “Critical Made in Italy” focusing on design, food and cinema was presented over three semesters to produce an analytical exchange on the topic with speakers from the academic, economic, and creative sectors.

The Business/Made in Italy path described so far should be eventually subsumed within a larger inter-college initiative on campus provisionally called “Language, Business and Culture” at MSU, which revolves around the offering of a combined major in Business and one of four languages, including Italian. The new major is now awaiting campus and state approvals in order to be launched: the hope is that it will represent the per-

fect container through which continuing and new efforts in this area will be channeled.

### **The (Audio-Visual) Translation Path**

The second path undertaken as part of the re-shaping of the Italian Program is in Translation, in general, and in Audio-Visual Translation for cinema, opera and the performing arts, more specifically. The embracement of the AVT field was the result of *ad hoc* collaborations with private agencies for entire calendars of shows to be subtitled in English, a notable example being Prescott Studio for the Piccolo Teatro di Milano on the occasion of the Expo 2015. Since then, dozens of AVT projects have been accepted as classroom-related assignments overseen by faculty members with commissioning entities ranging from prestigious Italian theaters to award-winning directors and with funding agencies including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. This operation dubbed “Translating Voices Across Continents” eventually developed into paid internships in Florence and Macerata designed to give students first-hand experience of running titles after developing and timing them. The internship at the Macerata Opera Festival also opened up pre-professional experiences in audio-descriptions for sight-impaired people within a broader accessibility project. This internship is in part linked to an inter-university agreement with the Università degli Studi di Macerata that, given the caliber of their program in Translation, may open new possibilities in this field with international exchanges and collaborations.

The efforts in the broader field of Translation have also entailed new curricular development with the redesign of core courses to include translation, the incorporation of AVT components in several new and pre-existing courses, and the introduction of a course entirely devoted to AVT.<sup>7</sup> Supported in various forms by government funds and private commissions, the overall goal of this Italian Translation Curriculum, Grants and

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<sup>7</sup> The Major in Italian now requires such courses as “Reading, Writing, Translating Early Modern Italy” and “Reading, Writing, Translating Modern and Contemporary Italy” in lieu of the traditional Italian Lit I and II; the film class is called “Topics in Italian Cinema and Introduction to Subtitling;” Commercial Italian was renamed “Introduction to Italian Business and Commercial Translation;” and “Introduction to Translating” and “Translation for Tourism and Cultural Promotion” were newly introduced along with the already mentioned AVT course and its capstone pair.

Internship Project<sup>8</sup> would be that of developing a post-BA certificate with pre-professional opportunities to also attract a new pool of students interested in entering, with the proper credentials, what is a fast-growing field supporting the (online) circulation of audiovisual materials. The initial objective of providing English titles for films, plays, etc. as part of the so-called internationalization of Italian culture, to make it available to Anglophone audiences, will be constantly enriched by accessibility projects offering a social service component in line with governmental regulations. Indeed, the very field of translation continues to be redefined by changing socio-cultural-demographic shifts as well as epistemological questions. New projects focusing on trans-lingual and trans-cultural competence with Italy at their core<sup>9</sup> will hopefully be models for U.S. administrators to understand the central role of carrying meanings across languages and cultures as a human endeavor fundamental to all disciplines.<sup>10</sup>

### **Recruiting from Below: A Summer Course for High School Students**

One of the most intriguing challenges and opportunities for the growth of Italian is the relationship between the university and the HS systems. In New Jersey, there is a large network of schools<sup>11</sup> with teachers of Italian regularly involved in professional development and student programming.<sup>12</sup> Yet, a quick look at the numbers reveals how even a long-term decision to study Italian in HS does not necessarily translate into a long-term

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<sup>8</sup> The full list of projects completed along with grants and internships can be found here: [montclair.edu/inserra-chair/opportunities-for-students/the-italian-translation-curriculum-and-internship-project](http://montclair.edu/inserra-chair/opportunities-for-students/the-italian-translation-curriculum-and-internship-project).

<sup>9</sup> The U.K. project “Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Mobility, Identity and Translation in Modern Italian Cultures,” supported by the government and run by a consortium of universities via a group of scholars, artists, and professionals, is a key model in this approach. Briefly, the Italian migratory past and present is viewed as a grid of reference to explore how languages and cultures come into contact and, tellingly, how “people translate each other for each other,” to use the words of one of the leading researchers, Loredana Polezzi, in the video available on the grant’s website: [transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/](http://transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/).

<sup>10</sup> See also the video that introduces the free online course “Working with Translation: Theory and Practice” at [futurelearn.com/courses/working-with-translation](http://futurelearn.com/courses/working-with-translation).

<sup>11</sup> There are over 100 programs listed in the AATI (American Association of Italian Teachers) survey of high schools in New Jersey.

<sup>12</sup> See in particular the Italian Symposium organized by the Italian Program in conjunction with the Coccia Institute at MSU every October: <http://www.montclair.edu/chss/modern-languages-literatures/italian/teaching-italian-symposium/>.

commitment upon entering college. Strong encouragement would come from offering an AP Italian program in all high schools, but this objective is as of now only partially attained.

In Spring 2017, a synergy between high school teachers and professors at MSU introduced a class that gives high school students the chance to develop skills useful in an AP Italian class while also sampling a university campus experience. The Summer Intensive Course for College Credit combines regular instruction in the classroom, guided tours in New York and New Jersey (museums, Italian companies), and guest-speaker talks designed to introduce students to the new paths in Italian Studies, i.e. Business/Made in Italy and Translation. The first edition embraced a diverse group of students in terms of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and relied on various funding sources to also guarantee a number of scholarships.<sup>13</sup> The course offers three college credits expendable at any university that accepts them, but does not grant automatic admission to MSU. Only a small percentage of students ended up applying to MSU, but all of them have upon admission embraced Italian in their studies in various ways. Despite the contained results in direct recruiting, the course’s main objective – promotion of Italian at large by seamlessly linking the high school and the university systems – is amply fulfilled in terms of the hybrid organizing team and student experience. In the hope of inspiring even more students to study Italian after the diploma, especially via the AP exam, and with a more dynamic look at the discipline, and Italy by extension, the summer course was offered again as it provides the chance to truly create a learning continuum across educational systems and concrete opportunities for the growth of the field in the future.

### **Conclusions**

The positive outcomes of the projects described above, which have brought attention to the MSU Italian program for its innovative approach, need further systematic support, both in and outside the institution itself, to be truly successful in the long run. In this context, I will mention some possibilities for optimizing the institutional setup for modern languages

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<sup>13</sup> See the program’s description at: [montclair.edu/inserra-chair/opportunities-for-students/summer-course/](http://montclair.edu/inserra-chair/opportunities-for-students/summer-course/).

at MSU with the additional support of a government campaign for Italian.

Cross-listing is not a common practice at MSU, despite its broad application on many campuses across the country. So far, the Italian faculty has resorted to the fruitful introduction of GenEd classes on campus within an established trans-national vision of Italian Studies.<sup>14</sup> And while it is true that GenEd classes run the risk of shifting the focus away from language competence since they are offered in English, with a well-balanced internal formula in the recognition of credits, they can be useful as magnets towards the program, and as siphons of rich content in the first and second year.

Another challenge on campus is the absence of a culture that encourages double majoring, due to the concern that it can negatively impact the graduation rate, and consequently university ratings. Given that the literature shows the increasing popularity of double majoring (Pitt 8), as well as its effectiveness in terms of broadening the students’ learning experience and their post-degree employability, MSU should engage with this practice in more structured ways. While that very literature indicates that the double majoring trend entails different, even contradictory, drives and outcomes (10), it also shows how it is a healthy mechanism to incorporate languages (and the humanities at large) in the students’ learning experience (9 n.5) as part of the internationalization of college studies. In fact, the Italian program’s experience has shown that double majors – usually pairing Italian with Business, International Justice, or Spanish – are among the most accomplished students. Effective combinations that the administration at MSU could support as part of inter-departmental collaborations include Italian and: Food Studies, Fashion Studies, and Communication, which are all large programs on campus. In my view, this is one truly fundamental mechanism that can ensure the growth of the Italian Program in substantial forms.

The other major contribution to the tangible efforts towards rethinking Italian Studies on campus should come from the marketing area. Cir-

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<sup>14</sup> The Italian Program at MSU includes a number of classes in areas linked to Italian migration (“The Italian America Experience,” “The Italian American Novel,” and more recently “Italian Americans in Film”) anticipating the current conversations about trans-national and diaspora studies as an overall framework for Italian Studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

culuation of information about the novelties and specific strengths of the Italian Program at MSU can rely on the major communication channels of the university, which tap into a vast audience from HS counselors via special listservs to parents via brochures or billboard advertisements. In this era of specialization and declining enrolments, Italian Programs can only benefit from telling distinctive stories about the focused paths they provide. This would ensure longer-term commitments to the discipline, while also eschewing unnecessary competition among comparable universities in the local area. The university’s marketing of the Italian Program would ideally be paired with an Italian governmental campaign about the advantages of studying Italian as a modern language with a long trans-national history. A video with testimonials (celebrities who speak Italian as a SL, students, parents, faculty) and a captivating slogan would provide Italian faculty with a precious tool of widespread applicability (campus tours, visits to schools, exchanges with parents, presentations for undeclared students on campus).

In conclusion, the new paths undertaken at MSU in the course of the past five years have underlined both the importance of rethinking the field to support its growth and the labor-intensive nature of this process. In terms of measurable outcomes, despite the contraction in overall enrolment in Italian classes (which is in line with national trends), the number of majors at MSU has remained relatively steady and that of minors has increased substantially, especially in the area of Business and Communication.

Still, for the current experimentation to bear further fruits and make the faculty’s consistent efforts towards innovation even more meaningful, the above-described infrastructural and contextual interventions need to be introduced as part of a shared and sustained dialogue about the role of modern languages, and in particular a language of such presence on campus vis-à-vis the national landscape. At the same time, the faculty members involved in this rethinking will continue to be aware of the shortcomings entailed in the new vision and apply the necessary adjustments to their approach. Concretely, if the Made-in-Italy focus remains on the educational values it offers, as a counterpoint to hype-modernity and rampant capitalism thanks to its emphasis on slowness, health, ecol-

ogy, and beauty, then the Business path should minimize the risks of “selling out” and turning Italian into the language of luxury.<sup>15</sup> In the same vein, the Translation path is far from reducing Italian to a mere tool within a reconfiguration of the university curriculum towards vocational learning. It is instead a rich terrain for reinvigorating the relationship between language and text whether that is an opera libretto, a film script, or a set of historical articles about the Italian diaspora. Students’ feedback on the novel projects of the past half-a decade at MSU reveals that studying Italian continues to entail the embracement of “la bella lingua” as an entry point to the “Belpaese,” but within a new framework that comfortably identifies in Italian a major of broad and creative applicability.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The power of this counter-vision lies in the desire to bring attention to its soft power (see Testa), while still highlighting the role of Italy as a G7 country.

<sup>16</sup> The cautionary tales coming from studies emphasizing the importance of separating the liberal arts from “usefulness” bear importance in this re-envisioning process. Nonetheless, if studies such as the Heatmaps produced by the George Mason’s College of the Humanities and Social Sciences are effective in busting the myth of a humanities major as “useless,” their campus slogan – “a major is not a career” – does not necessarily provide a beneficial approach for Italian, a field that has traditionally dodged any association with concrete applicability. See [chss.gmu.edu/careers/where-do-our-students-work](http://chss.gmu.edu/careers/where-do-our-students-work).

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# INPUT-HEAVY TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

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In 2008, I ventured a new label for Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), “Input-heavy TBLT,” and I did so **exclusively because of its intended usage in foreign-language classrooms**. This article hopes to explain the logic behind that label (Means 2008) and its paramount importance for teachers of foreign languages.

What follows is my re-introduction of Input-heavy TBLT as a well-defined, research-supported, comprehensive model of **TBLT for use in foreign language classrooms**. This model, presented anew below, has sufficient detail and description for immediate classroom use. Before describing a few model tasks, some of the nuts and bolts of the model, and some of the learning and cognitive theories that inform it, let’s look at it in black and white:

## Input-heavy Task Cycle

### I. Pre-task

- a. Introduce the task assignment for this chapter (often aligned with a book)
- b. Watch teacher demonstrate task performance (at least twice)
- c. Listening/Reading/Viewing Activity 1; Speaking/Writing Activity 1
- d. Listening/Reading/Viewing Activity 2; Speaking/Writing Activity 2
- e. Teacher-led brainstorm
- f. Pre-task planning time (individual and/or pairs)

### II. During-task

- a. Do task (with time pressure; if task is oral, no ‘reading’ of notes allowed)
- b. If oral, record individual task performances in classroom

### III. Post-task

- a. If oral, students prepare transcription, Version A
- b. Teacher provides individual feedback on written/transcribed tasks
- c. Group assessment on task strengths and weaknesses
- d. Teach relevant grammar points; do relevant grammar exercises

- e. If task was oral, students revise transcription, Version B, to be handed in
- f. Illustrate connections between students’ performances and grammar points
- g. Unit-end quiz, with a *required summary of the task performance*

### **Model Tasks for Beginners**

The following model tasks have been used extensively in my (Italian) foreign language classrooms. At its foundation, this model of Input-heavy TBLT was informed by J. Willis (1996) and Lee and VanPatten (2003), I encourage readers to consult these two resources, either before or after experimenting with a few of these model tasks:

- Read 5 questions out loud (record yourself for 15 seconds as you ask 5 genuine questions about Italian, e.g., “*come si dice curtain?*”)
- True or False (record yourself for at least 20 seconds; present 4 “facts” about yourself, your classmates will judge which one is false)
- Present your task partner’s family (you will be recorded for a minimum of 20 seconds)
- What’s in my task partner’s fridge (you have 5 minutes to write about what is usually in your partner’s fridge, and one conclusion about his/her lifestyle)

### **Model Tasks for Intermediate/Advanced:**

- Record and narrate a 60-second commercial for our town (you and your partner will present what you like about our town)
- Present what your task partner did last weekend (you will be recorded for a minimum of 45 seconds)
- Leave your teacher a voicemail describing how you got to school today (speak for at least 30 seconds, include all turns and modes of transportation)

### **What is TBLT?**

TBLT can *still* mean a thousand different things to a thousand different people. The descriptive and replicable model of Input-heavy TBLT that this article presents is an attempt to establish a standard for TBLT of a foreign language.

This article hopes to make a small contribution to an enduring problem in our field: TBLT is still too general a pedagogical notion: “There are several lines of ‘task-based’ work in the applied linguistics literature. . . .

Most really involve little more than the use of tasks in place of exercises as carriers of an overt or a covert grammatical syllabus” (Long 2000, 186).

### **Tasks as a motivational approach to learning languages**

The rationale behind the choice of task as the unit of teaching and learning also has a motivational basis (Long 2015). For example, teachers and learners can point to it and say, “When this task is accomplished by all students, we have reached the goal of the lesson and we can move on to the next lesson,” (Lee and VanPatten 2004). The question of how to stimulate learners to want to learn (and just exactly what type of *wanting* is the driving force) is a complex one, and it is addressed in the increasingly large body of work about motivation in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Dornyei 2009). Having said that, there is some evidence that students themselves feel a difference with TBLT (Means 2014) and that the entire cycle of Input-heavy TBLT, with its repertoire of mixed modalities of speaking/reading/writing/listening, helps “get things in [their] head” (ibid) in a way that traditional instruction does not.

### **The four major task types**

There are four major task types in the TBLT literature, the following descriptions of them are an adaption of Richards and Rodgers (2001):

#### *1. Presentational tasks*

Learners present authentic information about themselves and/or about a classmate(s). E.g., “My partner’s (Thursday) routine;” “What my partner’s room looks like;” “How my partner spent spring break.”

#### *2. Information-gap tasks also known as Spot-the-difference tasks*

One student (or one pair) has one image and another student (or another pair) has a complementary set of the same image--the “complementary” image is usually altered in some way: a missing person, an extra window, different weather, no shoes, etc. Together the students must negotiate and find out how the other party’s image is different, *without looking at the partner’s image*.

E.g., “You have two pictures of the same house, find five differences;” “You both have a picture with three people in it, find out which two people you both have.”

3. *Problem-solving tasks*

Students are divided into pairs or small groups. Each group is given the same problem and the same set of information. They must arrive at a (creative) solution to the problem. E.g., “We will watch all but the last 10 minutes of this movie, you and your partner will write the ending;” “We are going to read this short story, minus the final two pages—you and your partner will write a creative conclusion.”

4. *Jigsaw tasks*

These involve learners (usually pairs or small groups) combining different pieces of information to form a whole. For example, the three members of a group have different parts of a short story—after reading their respective part and returning it to the teacher, they have to work together to piece the story together and present a summary, *while only looking at their notes*. Another example, a pair is split up: Partner A watches the first 3 minutes of a film clip (several times), and then partner B watches the last 3 minutes of the same clip (several times). Together, they combine their knowledge to report on a summary of the clip.

### **Tasks as experiential learning**

To speak about the philosophy of learning with this pedagogy, we can say that TBLT also addresses the complex and organic nature of language learning (Long 2015). It provides *holistic* opportunities for learners to digest dynamic, changing input and to produce meaningful output (Willis 2004). This speaks to a view of language learning as *experiential learning* (Dewey, 1933) and as *learning by doing*.

TBLT clearly aligns with holistic types of education (in that students are asked to engage in complex behaviour that calls for the integrated use of different linguistic subskills in order to perform pedagogical tasks). (Van den Branden et al. 2009, 6)

The pioneering work of John Dewey (1933) has an increasing presence in the justification of the TBLT agenda. Dewey believed that there is an intimate connection between education (in the classroom) and action (in the real world). Students should have a sense that they are being asked to perform a classroom language activity because it has a relationship to how language is used in the real world (Bygate and Samuda 2008). The TBLT agenda speaks to this logical connection between learning (in the classroom) and doing (out in the real world) by asking students to learn through doing tasks, and then to learn more through reflecting on what

they have done (with language) in the accomplishment of their tasks. Norris comments on this small but crucial difference:

Task offers a helpful way of encapsulating the things humans tend to do with language, in particular because it emphasizes the functional sense of language use. Without that impetus toward use, language reverts to a body of knowledge to be apprehended, a canon of great words, but not a particularly functional (or essential?) ability. Task also provides a useful frame of reference, directing teachers and learners toward a purpose for communicating, affording contextualized meaning to language forms, and indicating starting and ending points to the communicative effort. . . . To achieve the benefits of task-based practice, we must first accept that language develops not as an accretion of discrete bits of knowledge but through a series of holistic experiences. (Norris, 2009, 588)

### **Applaud the students’ accomplishment of the task**

Anecdotally, I see something profoundly honest in TBLT that I haven’t seen in other language teaching approaches, and that something honest may relate to my sincere *applause* and *gratitude* for their task accomplishments. *Applause* because I’m not faking it when I say that they achieved task completion—their Italian surely wasn’t perfect, but honestly, who speaks perfectly in any language?—and I’m proud of that accomplishment. *Gratitude* because I very often learn things I did not previously know through their task performances, e.g., when they present what their task-partner usually has in their fridge. Whether the presentation is straightforward and/or creative, I can sincerely thank them for acquiring and sharing that knowledge. For example, with that specific task about the fridge, I frequently learn that some students are vegetarian, or vegan, or have diabetes. This knowledge allows me to know the presented student much better, and for that I thank the student who reported it in the form of a successful task performance.

### **Backwards design of tasks**

Tasks must be designed backwards. To paraphrase VanPatten (2017), questions about task design must be considered in this order:

1. What is the end-of-unit performance?
2. What do learners need to know, and know how to do in order to accomplish the performance?

3. What input, activities and mini-tasks must I develop and/or identify (for the pre-task phase) so their brains get the gasoline they need to drive through the finish line?

The perspective of backwards design can fundamentally change a teacher’s perception about how to teach, what to teach, when to teach it, and why. If we start with the learners, in the sense of the students being the drivers who need direction and fuel to drive their own cars, it can force the teacher to entirely reframe the goal of language teaching.

### **The profound importance of rich input in language learning**

An endorsement of the task-based agenda must make primary note on the role of input. TBLT is predominantly input-based, learners spend at least two thirds of their time comprehending, elaborating and negotiating audio, visual, and written input. This input-heaviness is especially important for the present model of TBLT because it was *designed in a foreign language setting*, where input is not naturally available for Italian. So the model must be engineered to meet a standard that SLA research shows us to be optimal. Contrarily, traditional instruction (TI) is predominantly output-based, learners often spend at least two thirds of their time producing written and oral samples of the language (Ellis 2003). Doughty and Long (2003) explain that the output-heaviness in TI has to be greater than the intentionally restricted input side of the equation in order to remain consistent with the stated goals of the synthetic syllabus that such a program espouses.

Linguistically simplified input, which goes hand in hand with synthetic (especially structural, or grammatical) syllabuses, also tends to be impoverished input. Controlling grammar, vocabulary, and sentence length results, intentionally and by definition, in a more limited source of target-language use upon which learners must rely in order to learn the code. The often tiny samples are worked and reworked in class. (ibid., 61)

The input-heaviness in this model was dictated because research has shown the superior learning effects on (foreign language) learners who receive copious amounts of relevant target-language input. Such input is

believed to promote the growth of grammatical competence (Cadierno 1995; Benati 2004). Doughty and Long continue:

Elaborated texts (in the sense of [TBLT]) go a long way towards remedying the situation... Adult foreign language learners require not just linguistically complex input, but *rich* input (i.e., realistic samples of discourse use surrounding [native speaker and non-native speaker] accomplishment of target tasks). (2003, 61)

### **Training teachers to deliver “real talk”**

As mentioned extensively in this article, good language teaching will make use of supplements like YouTube videos, recorded dialogues and appropriate written excerpts. These supplements are necessary, yet not sufficient. In order to drive home the priority of sharing rich input with our students, the teachers must deliver *real talk* across the learning program. As VanPatten (2017) describes it, *real talk* is relatively easy to teach to our instructors and have them deliver. Following are seven keys that VanPatten illustrates to help make *real talk* a reality in the target language:

- Use short sentences;
- Use appropriate pauses;
- Repeat;
- Rephrase;
- Use here-and-now demonstrations of images and props;
- Use visual aids extensively, e.g., Power Point presentations;
- Prioritize—above all—learner involvement and engagement.

*Real talk* in the target language is simple yet complex. Simple because the teacher just has to be him/herself and speak naturally and authentically. Complex because the teacher must gauge the learners’ level of comprehension and then deliver the *real talk* at that level, plus one. Obviously, this has echoes of Krashen’s *i+1* (Krashen, 1982).

### **Cognitive theory of learning in TBLT**

In terms of cognitive theory, I view the acquisition of a foreign language from the perspective of Peter Skehan’s Cognitive Theory (1998) on how the human adult brain learns second languages. This theory has several things to say about how language learning takes place in the adult

mind; primarily, it is presented as a phenomenon of a *dual-processing, limited-capacity, information-processing* system.

After a brief description of this theoretical model of mind (the next three paragraphs), I will make the tie between the theory and the efficacy of TBLT.

Skehan has proposed a cognitive system with two types of linguistic knowledge; hence this is referred to as a dual-processing system. It assumes two modes of language-related cognition in such a context: one mode is primarily exemplar-based and lexical in nature; the other is primarily rule-based and syntactic in nature. The exemplar-based system is assumed to be easily and quickly accessed, and is therefore ideally suited for fluent performance. The rule-based system is assumed to require more processing of a syntactic nature, and is therefore a relatively slow system; however, it is ideally suited for more precise and more sociolinguistically appropriate language.

This dual-mode system is of a “limited capacity” in that it cannot simultaneously process all of the input that is received. Limited capacity models of attention suggest that there is a finite set of attentional resources available at any given moment to perceive and take in the information that surrounds them. Hence, humans are assumed to have mechanisms that allow them to attend selectively to incoming stimuli. Without these hypothesized mechanisms there would be informational overload and the brain may short-circuit (Lee and VanPatten 2004). Therefore, *decisions are made as to what information to focus on*, and other aspects of the input are filtered out.

This will vary with every individual, and although everyone has a limited capacity in working memory, research suggests that some people’s working memories are more limited than others (VanPatten 2003). Key to the rationale informing this project is the theory’s position that *the human mind in such a situation is predisposed to prioritize meaning over form*, with the result that an instructionally designed focus on form must make up for the “ignored” form.

The architecture of this Input-heavy TBLT model provides for the *research-based cognitive preference of meaning over form*. Following Skehan’s dual-mode theory of second language (L2) mental representation, a TBLT

model of instruction that *asks learners to first complete meaning-based tasks*, and then to analyze the language they have produced for accuracy of form, should be best suited to helping the L2 knowledge mature.

### **The role of “chunks” in language learning**

Another point of synchronicity between TBLT and this theory of language representation can be found in TBLT’s provision of space for the teaching and use of memorized language chunks in more natural settings. As referenced in the outline above, this pedagogical space is most often located in the “brainstorming” section of the pre-task phase.

Skehan’s cognitive model assigns a privileged position to such memorized “chunk” language because the exemplar-based mode can store and access them quickly, and they seem to reflect how humans communicate. Such memorized chunk-language consists of the polyword expressions that fill our everyday native language discourse, e.g., “I’ll take . . .”; “What time does . . . ?” and “Are you ready?” This type of chunk-language is presented and demonstrated in the TBLT model’s pre-task phase and post-task phase, and it is encouraged that learners notice and exploit such language throughout the cycle.

### **The internal syllabus versus the external syllabus**

The question of the learners’ “internal syllabus” is a central argument in SLA: it is now widely accepted that learners are guided by internal mechanisms and an *implicit* linguistic system that is forever dynamic. “Research has demonstrated that the order in which language is learned is determined psycholinguistically, not by the various orders in which it may appear in language textbooks” (Doughty and Long 2003, 66). The *elusive quest* to match the learners’ internal syllabus with our external one led to Long’s proposal for a new option in language teaching, Focus on Form (1988).

Long (2000, 182) justifies this new approach, in part, by way of the inefficiency of its alternative: “The idea that what you teach is what they learn, and that when you teach it is when they learn it, is not just simplistic: it is wrong.... Despite the best efforts of highly skilled teachers and

textbook writers, [TI] tends to produce boring lessons, with resulting declines in motivation, attention, and student enrollments.”

Focus on Form instruction is driven by the idea that the best practices in language instruction are the creation of favorable conditions to activate and drive forward the learners’ internal mechanisms and the skills that draw on that implicit system during language use.

Focus on form, therefore, is learner-centered in a radical, psycholinguistic sense: it respects the learner’s internal syllabus.... These are conditions most would consider optimal for learning—the psycholinguistic equivalent of worker control of the means of production. (Long 2000, 185)

### **The balance between input and output in TBLT**

As a researcher and practitioner in SLA, I respect the evidence-based necessity for extreme heaviness of input; at the same time I see the need (student-motivational need; see Means 2014) for the role of output. In recent work, some researchers have attempted to clarify the role, or roles, played by output compared to, and/or in combination with, the structured input associated with VanPatten’s work on the primacy of input (Izumi 2002).

These researchers do not deny the essential role of input in SLA; they do, however, question whether input alone can directly affect the interlanguage system (Selinker 1972). This line of research is theoretically motivated by Swain’s Output Hypothesis (1995, 2000, 2005). Evidence from this line of research suggests that output, frequently operationalized as Meaningful Output-Based Instruction (MOBI), might indeed be beneficial for SLA. These findings lend some support to the idea that output may have beneficial effects on interlanguage development in addition to the crucial role of input—and *not* in opposition to it.

The combined effects of an emphasis on (level-appropriate, engaging) input and output have been elegantly presented in several studies (Morgan-Short and Bowden 2006). To summarize these input/output comparative studies, it is safe to suggest that output-based instruction is at least as effective as input-based instruction.

### **The rationale for Input-heavy TBLT**

The research presented above provides the general rationale for the architecture of this model of Input-heavy TBLT, which is composed of (heavy) structured input, and structured, meaningful output. The input-based theory and research led by VanPatten has illustrated that heavy input leads to better form-meaning connections (Lee and Valdman 2000) and the output-based theory and research led by Swain (Swain 2005) have demonstrated the same. Important for the model of TBLT presented in this paper is the consistent finding that output (operationalized here as task performances) helps develop learners' *production* skills and strategies, while input (operationalized here as heavy input in the pre-task phase) helps develop learners' *comprehension* skills and strategies.

### **TBLT's three phases**

I will now briefly present the most linguistically nutritious components of each of the model's three phases: pre-task, during-task, post-task.

#### **Pre-task phase**

The pre-task phase is the stage that is most marked by the abundant and rich input that SLA research has shown to be effective for interlanguage growth (VanPatten 2003). Accordingly, it is the lengthiest of the three stages, as each task cycle is approximately 2/3 pre-task. (I will not start the fool's errand of speaking about how readers should use their teaching time, since we all teach in so many different settings—e.g., large classes vs small classes; daily meetings vs hybrid classes vs online classes—so I will summarize by saying that in order for this approach to work, one would be well counseled to spend the majority of students' time on input.) The pre-task phase's aim is essentially to take learners through the input and relevant activities that will incrementally build up the necessary skills and language required to complete the unit's task performance. It is the first step, and the most important step, in the sequence of backward design.

In this TBLT model, the first pre-task variable is the task demonstration. The task is demonstrated by the teacher, at least twice. Students es-

entially watch a successful demonstration of the task. E.g., for the task, “Present your partner’s (Tuesday) daily routine,” the teacher could record him/herself while speaking in front of the class for one minute as he/she speaks spontaneously about a friend’s daily (Tuesday) routine. After the recording, the teacher will immediately play it again. The language demonstrated is colloquial, rife with fillers, clear, and most importantly, successful. The backward design has started in a clear and concise way, e.g., “Look here, learners, you will do something exactly like this. Now listen again!”

The demonstration is assumed to ease the cognitive processing load during the task to come (Ellis 2003), and should increase fluency and accuracy. Similar to the facilitative role of lexical chunks, such a task demonstration promises to liberate more cognitive resources for other aspects of the learners’ performance. It is hoped that through such demonstrations students will “learn” to do what native speakers do. This is imperative not only for motivational reasons (Dornyei 2002; Means 2014), but also so that students may gain some experience with samples of spontaneous conversation.

After the teacher demonstrations of the task, as evident in the outline above, the pre-task phase consists of four to six subtasks. These *activities are sequenced with backward design in mind*: These subgoals take the learners through the types of exposure, interaction, and activities that they will need to know in order to successfully perform the task. In planning the subtasks for every task cycle, I am always guided by the overarching question of backward design: What do they need to see, hear, read and watch in order for their brains to prepare for their task performance?

Accordingly, each subtask provides abundant input, opportunity for negotiation via collaborative dialogue (Swain 2000), and some sort of Focus on Form through a relevant activity.

The types of language used in my pre-task phase are always of several stamps, e.g., extended (recorded) dialogues of Italians engaged in informal chats, YouTube videos of Italians ‘performing’ for other Italians, as well as more formal monologues, and a range of different kinds of related writing samples, e.g., postcards, emails, and notes. Norris comments:

The [pre-task] input phase introduces the target task as it is realized in actual communication. Repeated viewing of video segments, observing live performances, reading texts, and other techniques enable the presentation of a full-fledged target task without manipulation. By seeing what they will do in its entirety, learners become motivated and begin to establish essential linkages to the contexts in which the target task occurs. By engaging receptively with the task, learners begin to focus their attention on trying to understand what is being said or written, thereby initiating their noticing of what forms are used in what ways. (2009, 583)

Across the input floods of the pre-task phase, students are constantly reminded that *it is not important for them to understand everything*; in fact, it is precisely in this type of cognitive “stretching” to comprehend that learning is most likely to take place, that is, in the zone Krashen refers to as  $i + 1$  (1982).

Overall, the focus of the pre-task phase is to engage the learners in manipulating copious information on the task topic, and *to introduce and reactivate relevant vocabulary*.

In each of these activities, the learners first receive some sort of extended input and are then asked to create some sort of output. This follows the larger cognitive scheme of building up the learners’ interlanguage system through the “raw material” of input, and then providing the learners with opportunities to access that system, in an increasingly fluent and accurate way, through output channels. These are *the two minimal abilities involved in SLA: intake/system-building*—the form and structure of language built up through input; and *access/production strategies*—the accuracy and fluency of language built up through output (Terrell 1991).

One key aspect of the pre-task phase that is not apparent on the outline above is its time-pressure component. *Each activity* is given a precise time limit, e.g., “You will have two minutes to discuss, with your task partner, the dialogue you just heard: try to clear up any confusion and use this time to summarize what you think you heard.” The teacher should time each activity; I get good results by simply writing the target time on the board, e.g., “Finish by 11:48.” (Truth be told, this helps *me* stay on task more than anything else!)

The inclusion of a time-pressure component in all activities adheres to TBLT’s stated goal of achieving a high degree of representativeness. In

the real world, operating in real time, “online,” so to speak, there is almost always a degree of pressure to create fluent speech without undue hesitation. This pedagogical variable should contribute to the TBLT learners’ increased ability to produce spontaneous language. The type of time-pressured, pair-activity mentioned in the preceding paragraph is a key feature in this model’s pre-task phase and is implemented several times for *each* task.

By working with a partner, especially with time pressure, we are creating a context that aims to develop the learners’ “zone of proximal development,” (ZPD) defined by Lantolf (2000) as “the difference between what a person can achieve when acting alone and what the same person can accomplish when acting with support from someone else” (ibid., 17). This metaphor, originally proposed by Vygotsky (1978), addresses one of the key ingredients in language learning—mediation: people working together (peers, in this case) to co-construct contexts and meanings that they would not arrive at alone. The ZPD is also referred to as “collaborative dialogue” and is defined by Swain (2000) as follows:

It is knowledge-building dialogue . . . dialogue that constructs linguistic knowledge. It is what allows performance to outstrip competence. It is where language use and language learning can co-occur. It is language use mediating language learning. It is cognitive activity and it is social activity. (ibid., 97)

(Further mention of this sociocultural influence in TBLT will be made in the discussion of the post-task phase below.)

The final pre-task variable we will discuss is planning: guided by research like Mehnert (1998), this model of Input-heavy TBLT includes space for a few minutes of teacher-prompted, silent task-planning for the participants. Mehnert’s study showed that as little as one minute was enough time within which to observe a large effect in performances (as compared with control groups that had no time allotted for planning). In essence, the teacher-guided, silent planning phase gives learners the opportunity to take seriously the impending task, and to marshal all their resources.

Overall, the pre-task phase goes a long way toward the provision of two of the elements that we know to be necessary for successful SLA to

occur: sufficient exposure to the L2 and sufficient opportunities for negotiating input and output of the L2.

### **During-task phase**

One notes on the TBLT outline above that the during-task phase is the slimmest of the three stages; it is also the richest. This phase provides an opportunity for the potential of this approach to be a radically learner-centered pedagogy that fosters individuals’ ability to speak/write spontaneously (Long 2015).

A prerequisite for allowing this important learner-language to emerge is *the decentralization of the teacher*—a cornerstone of TBLT. At this pivotal during-task phase, the teacher must withdraw and allow natural, spontaneous language acquisitional processes to operate. In fact, a significant piece of TBLT literature is dedicated to the discussion of the teacher’s decentralized role.

Central to the role of the teacher in [TBLT] must be ways of working *with* tasks to guide learners . . . This implies a relationship between task and teacher that is essentially complementary, in which a role for the task is to create opportunities for the formulation and negotiation of meanings, and a role for the teacher is to “lead from behind.” (Samuda 2001, 120)

Overall, the during-task phase (the task performance) is the central pivot around which this entire pedagogy rotates. Norris comments on this cardinal pedagogical point:

By “going it alone” with a target task...learners practice the use of language for meaningful purposes, thereby engaging their developing cognitive, motivational, linguistic, content-knowledge, and other resources under conditions that vary from the safety of structured pedagogic tasks. (2009, 584)

### **Post-task phase**

The purpose of the post-task phase in the TBLT cycle is to allow for a focus on form that should result in more accurate language. The placement of *grammar analysis at the end of the cycle* speaks to the central belief of TBLT—that form should follow meaning. Willis and Willis (1996) refer

to this meaning > form directionality as a natural progression from the holistic to the specific.

At this point the students should be ready to focus on form; they have already successfully performed their task with a focus on meaning—the assumption is that there should now be a greater occurrence of noticing of detail. These activities are assumed to help change the way in which learners direct their attention, *reminding them that fluency is not the only goal* during task completion—i.e., that accuracy has importance too.

The learners’ reflection on their own performance allows us to say with greater certainty that the merits of the Output Hypothesis (Swain 1995, 2005) are being realized. Swain posits that such merits of output push learners to process language on a deeper level, and with more mental effort, than processing input would do alone. Her claim is, essentially, that learners’ own output can serve as “an attention-getting device which brings to their awareness something that they need to know” (Doughty 2001, 252). For Swain (2005, 474-478), working from a sociocultural theory of mind, “pushed output” should minimally operate as one or more of the following functions:

- *Noticing/Triggering Function*: the activity of producing the target language should prompt learners to notice some of their linguistic problems.
- *Hypothesis Testing Function*: from the learners’ perspective, output may sometimes be a “trial run,” reflecting their hypothesis of how to say (or write) their intent.
- *Metalinguistic (Reflective) Function*: using language to reflect on language produced by others or the self, mediates second language learning.

## Conclusions

If a task cycle is sequenced (backwardly) very clearly--and due respect is paid to the environment, i.e., is this a foreign language classroom?—then learners experiencing this approach should succeed. Learners are provided with a structure to follow, concrete and repeated demonstrations on how to use the language, a reason to take in all the *real talk*, guidance on how/when/why to perform, and applause for successfully using the language. Most hopefully, their upward spiral of language use has been touched off, or sustained (Fredrickson 2009).

As most educators across disciplines would agree, our highest goal is to set off self-learning. In this model of Input-heavy TBLT, if the teacher’s *real talk* and the students’ task performance flow naturally, we’ve started an upward spiral of language use, and *that* will beget more language use and more understanding. This has the potential to lead to self-learning.

Anecdotally, after 20 years in the classroom, this is now the only way I teach languages. My students learn by doing, they learn through *real talk* and interpersonal experience (maybe even personal creativity). As a language educator, I do the only truly responsible thing I have to do, I put gas in their tanks—hours and hours of level-appropriate, engaging input—(VanPatten 2017), and I give them a clear destination to drive to. The rest is out of my hands, I can only hope that they enjoy the drive and want to get back in the saddle again.

This should be our goal as (Italian) foreign language educators: to give them the tools to accomplish successful language *use*, and the opportunity to feel proud about that achievement.

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## HOW THE PERFORMING ARTS CAN HELP US ENHANCE THE ITALIAN CURRICULUM

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This article puts Theater as a Liberal Art in conversation with Foreign Language and Culture Pedagogy, framing the advantages that a performative approach to the teaching of Italian Language and Culture can offer to our curricula and our programs. I will briefly introduce the work that has been done on the topic and suggest some resources and references that can guide readers who are interested in exploring this growing field of research and practice. I will then offer some reflections on the diverse ways in which the performing arts can be successfully integrated into different contexts depending on the diverse configurations and possibilities at our disposal.

Let me first clarify what I mean by “performative,” as this is a term with a long and complex history. I do not intend to evoke here J. L. Austin’s seminal speech acts theory, which defined “performative” utterances in terms of their illocutionary capacity to “perform” the action they describe, and whose rather neo-platonic distrust of representational arts described them as practicing a “non-serious” use of language, excluding them from the realm of “felicitous” performatives. Austin’s work was strongly influential, and his theories have been countered and further elaborated by multiple and evolving conversations in deconstruction, linguistics, psychoanalysis, theater arts, gender studies, and sociology. In this context, however, I will settle for a simpler definition of “performative” as “pertaining to the performing arts, which” is the meaning intended by Manfred Schewe when he advocates for a “Performative Teaching and Learning Culture” within the scope of foreign and second language education.<sup>1</sup>

As Nancy Kindelan effectively argues in her work on *Artistic Literacy*, theater studies can and should play a central role in contemporary education, as “theatre’s signature pedagogy of engagement” significantly helps

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<sup>1</sup> See Schewe.

students become “analytical, creative, collaborative, and participating members of society” (Kindelan, publisher’s note). She surveys the history and meaning of a liberal arts education, the philosophy and practices of theatre programs, and the history of theatre’s entry into the academy to prove that “Theatre programs can establish a higher standard for liberal education in the twenty-first century. [...] Few educators outside the arts recognize that theatre programs play a valuable role in developing leadership skills and social responsibility through their interdisciplinary, independent, and cooperative research activities, as well as reflective pedagogies of engagement and their unique experiential practices in and out of the classroom.” (Kindelan, ix-x)

She presents “numerous examples from specific case studies within a historical and theoretical framework” in order to illustrate how “theatre’s curricula and activities develop analytic and creative thinking, social awareness, and transformative educational experiences, as well as integrative, collaborative, and practical problem-solving skills.” Her examples go on to prove “how theatre programs help students become more “intentional” in their learning [...] developing fundamental intellectual, communication, and literacy skills; considering moral and ethical dilemmas; experiencing diverse cultures and issues; and becoming socially responsible.” (xi) She points out that through theatrical studies “students perceive how social conditioning motivates characters to make specific choices that in the end affect their own lives and the lives of others,” and maintains that “the philosophy and pedagogy of theatre programs contribute to the development of what John Dewey calls “social intelligence,” the ability to see and comprehend situations.” As she states, “democratic values — social awareness, moral growth, and civic responsibility — develop through theatre’s pedagogy of engagement [...], the practice of theatre trains its participants to identify, understand, and evaluate human behaviors and moral dilemmas,” and her case studies shed light on “how immersive learning projects encourage teamwork, social thought, ethical decisions, and civic responsibility” (xiv-xv).

Kindelan’s stated objective is to underline the value of “artistic literacy: the critical ability to recognize and reify complex social ideas in symbolic form,” and to “encourage ongoing discussion about how theatre can

make itself central to a twenty-first century liberal education” (xvi). I believe her call should be heeded, and most especially by foreign language and culture programs. The articulation of theater as a core liberal art is relevant for us as educators, as it aligns particularly well with the objectives identified by the 2007 MLA report in terms of “translingual and transcultural competence” and “integrative” approaches to curriculum development. Indeed, theater pedagogy works in perfect harmony with the “Five C’s” of Foreign Language Education developed by ACTFL that currently shape our language curricula—Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities. Moreover, it emphasizes the additional component of CREATIVITY, a fundamental “sixth C” that I was happy to hear highlighted during our conference at Georgetown. This theme emerged in particular during the inspiring conversation that followed Lillyrose Veneziano Broccia’s excellent contribution on “Intermediate Italian as a Bridge to Many Bridges.” The taxonomies of educational learning objectives developed by the highly influential work of Benjamin Bloom,<sup>2</sup> list cognitive skills according to increasing levels of complexity and intend to help educators apply instructional scaffolding in order to shape activities and curricula in the most beneficial way. The skill “to create” normally occupies the highest level of the pyramid: by accompanying our students up the ladder, through the steps of remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, and evaluating, the final goal is to enable them to engage in the creation of knowledge. The abilities to create, to shape meaning verbally and non verbally, to come up with creative solutions to problems, to think outside the box when faced with a task, are crucial to the development of our students as critical thinkers and responsible cultural agents. The development of these abilities can be fostered through a structural integration of the performing arts into our language and culture curricula.

Models for successful interdisciplinary collaboration between theater and performance and foreign language education already exist and are rapidly evolving. It is indeed “a growing field of practice and research,” as Madonna Stinson & Joe Winston already stated in 2011,<sup>3</sup> and lively de-

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<sup>2</sup> See Anderson and Bloom.

<sup>3</sup> See Stinson & Winston.

bates continued to expand. The *Scenario* project, housed at University College Cork, is one of the hubs for these conversations: since its birth in 2007, its peer-reviewed online journal, symposia, and conferences have created a thriving community of research and practice. The *Scenario* journal is edited by Manfred Schewe (University College Cork) and Susanne Even (Indiana University Bloomington), and it provides a great resource for up-to-date information on this evolving field. For interested readers, I would suggest starting with Manfred Schewe’s 2013 article “Taking Stock and Looking Ahead.” *Scenario* has also recently launched a call for correspondents with the aim of mapping current practice and research within different national contexts worldwide, an initiative that will hopefully provide a much-needed international overview of the field.

The current practice and research landscape is indeed quite active in Australia and Europe, where the tradition of Process Drama, Drama in Education and Theatre in Education movements born in the UK has grown over the years and has, in some circumstances, blossomed into productive encounters with language pedagogy.<sup>4</sup> Another significant non-European community of research and practice that can provide quite useful materials for novice practitioners is the *Habla* Center for Language and Culture, whose headquarters are in Merida (Mexico), and which has been convening an annual week-long teachers’ institute for ten years. Their website features a “Best Practices Handbook” focused on the integration of the arts with literacy and language teaching.<sup>5</sup>

As far as the North American context is concerned, there are two collected volumes, both edited by Colleen Ryan and Nicoletta Marini Maio, that I strongly recommend to readers interested in identifying teachers and higher education institutions that have been or are currently active in integrating theater and language instruction. The first one is *Dramatic Interactions: Teaching Languages, Literature and Cultures through Theater — Theoretical Approaches and Classroom Practices*, which was published in 2011 and whose contributors, almost all US based, practice and/or research

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<sup>4</sup> For an introduction to this topic, see the collection edited by Bräuer and the seminal work by Kao and O’Neill. For an introductory history of Theater in Education and Drama in Education, see Jackson and Vine. For a more extensive and comprehensive bibliography, see my forthcoming doctoral dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.habla.org/en/for-educators>.

performative teaching in a variety of different languages. The second one is *Set the Stage!: Teaching Italian through Theater*, which was published in 2008 and focuses specifically on North-America-based Italian pedagogy. The contributors have been and/or are currently still teaching Italian with methodologies that involve theater practices at several institutions such as Indiana University, University of Toronto, Dickinson College, University of Pittsburgh, University of Pennsylvania, University of Notre Dame, Middlebury College, Harvard University, University of Texas.

One of the recurring themes of our 2017 conference at Georgetown University has been interdisciplinarity, both in terms of recognizing it as a necessity in order to innovate our programs, and in relation to the rich opportunities that it offers. I would like to suggest that this crucial richness should not manifest itself only in terms of content, but also in terms of teaching methods. We attract and retain more students not only by offering courses that explore inter- or cross-disciplinary topics, but also by strengthening our communities through integrated pedagogies that borrow teaching strategies and methods from other fields, and through joint appointments of faculty with diverse competencies in different fields, which is also in line with the changes advocated by the MLA reports.

There are numerous reasons why the theater arts in particular can constitute a significantly productive interdisciplinary ally. As I have already mentioned, there are many intersecting trends and practices of Applied Theatre and Drama in Education, where a specific focus on language teaching can be seen as a sub-field. To briefly summarize the extensive, though not always systematic and consistent in methodology and scope, work that has been done on the topic, practitioners and researchers that advocate for educational theater stress how:

- it promotes active and embodied learning experiences that are particularly student-centered and holistic in that they involve the whole body and mind of the student;
- it facilitates the dissolution of cognitive barriers by offering safe spaces where students can engage in playful and lower stakes tasks and become comfortable around each other, therefore fostering cooperation among students and the creation of truly collaborative, cohesive and supporting communities that constitute the ideal learning environment;

- it stimulates critical thinking and supports the development of trans-cultural competence and responsible citizenship through meaningful aesthetic experiences that help develop students’ artistic literacy (see Kindelan above).

All of these crucial points are closely related to the topics of the other very interesting contributions that were part of the panel in which I had the pleasure of participating at our ILCC conference. Viviana Altieri’s presentation on “Gamification,” recently proposed by Edilingua, referred to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of “flow” as the ideal mental state of focus in which we achieve the optimal learning experience. This bears significant connections to the importance of playfulness in the classroom and with the fundamental role played by emotions in learning processes—a topic that has always fascinated educators. The seminal work of developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky, to offer just one significant example, is particularly interesting as it explored both language and drama and highlighted the connections between emotion and cognition through a fundamentally social theory of learning.<sup>6</sup> Lucia Ducci’s contribution on “Learning Italian through Mindfulness” focused on the concept of mindful teaching and stressed the importance of the mindful body. I certainly agree that as educators it is our responsibility to be constantly aware of our students’ whole being. Body and mind constitute an inseparable and extremely fascinating union, which is again something that theater scholars and practitioners constantly engage with and reflect upon, in the last decade sometimes even putting their work in close conversation with neuroscience and cognitive studies.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Michela Baraldi’s presentation “No More Textbooks for Intermediate-Advanced Italian” highlighted the advantages of designing courses with a personal and flexible structure, which offered very stimulating food for thought particularly in relation to the crucial issue of flexibility.

Flexible curriculum design that allows ample space for the integration of students’ diverse backgrounds and real life experiences was indeed one of the common denominators of most of the best ideas I heard during

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<sup>6</sup> For a nice introduction to Vygotsky’s work, particularly in relation to language and drama, see the collection edited by Davis.

<sup>7</sup> For an introduction to this so-called “cognitive turn,” see the volumes edited by McConachie & Hart; Falletti, Sofia & Jacono; and Blair & Cook.

our conference. This is yet another reason why integrating performative teaching and learning can help strengthen our curricula, as flexibility is a signature component of theater pedagogy. Theatrical work by its very nature stems from and builds on “the empty space”, to borrow Peter Brook’s influential definition, a space where things can be allowed to emerge in unpredictable ways. As Charles Marowitz has beautifully written, “it is only when we don’t get what we have been led to expect that we are on the threshold of having an experience” (25). If we want our students to have meaningful learning experiences, we need curriculum planning and syllabus design strategies that allow for things to emerge, that allow them to experiment with the learning matter at hand, that allow all of us to go where we don’t necessarily expect. The challenge is: how do we “plan” flexibility? How can we best provide space for things to emerge while also making sure we achieve our course and curricular learning objectives? As I argued during the 2017 Summer School on “The role of drama in higher and adult language education: from theory to practice” that took place at the University of Padua, I believe this is one of the most important issues that we are currently debating in the field of performative teaching and learning.

As the various institutions and programs that include some form of it can attest, performative teaching and learning of a foreign language and culture takes a variety of different shapes within the diverse contexts in which it occurs. For the benefit of colleagues interested in experimenting with these methodologies, the remainder of this paper will briefly and very generally summarize these possibilities in a way that will hopefully speak to the various and different contexts in which we teach, so that informed decisions can be made when considering whether and how to implement some degree of performance in our Italian programs.

For the beginner classroom, theatrical warm-ups and improvisation games constitute a powerful tool in the arsenal of Communicative Language Teaching: bodily, interactive and playful warm-ups contribute to creating the collaborative and positive learning environment I have previously described, while vocal warm-ups provide extremely valuable exercises for pronunciation and enunciation. Improvisation games can help shape culturally meaningful participatory activities, in which students can

build up their confidence thanks to low-stakes interactions that involve basic language structures, filling information gaps and creating meaning together through simple language and non-verbal communication.

For the intermediate classroom, rehearsing theatrical excerpts and engaging in more complex improvisation activities constitute dramatic interactions that are perfectly equipped to help students develop their conversation skills and start paying more attention to the nuances of intonation that contribute to the locutionary and illocutionary subtleties of verbal communication. At the same time, the dialogic structure of dramatic texts provides a conveniently accessible introduction to literary content, which can in turn lead the way to an easier transition to more complex literary explorations in the advanced classroom.

For the advanced classroom, Process Drama workshops can help us guide students in exploring complex and delicate cultural issues, while undertaking the project of staging a full-fledged theatrical production constitutes an extraordinary collaborative task and community building endeavor. I have personally witnessed the extent to which this type of experience can improve peer-to-peer relationships and students’ interpersonal skills and team-playing abilities. Moreover—as Francesca Savoia has argued following Margaret Haggstrom—through drama, students can learn to become “interpreters” able to treat literary texts with the necessary “irreverence” (117). The theatrical creation process fosters the development of higher-level critical thinking skills, as students experiment first-hand and become practically aware of what it means to interpret a text: by literally rehearsing diverse possibilities, the constantly creative process of interpretation, with its endless explorations and its absence of clear-cut answers, becomes wonderfully apparent and vivid.

Coming back to Creativity—the “sixth C” component that as I mentioned above would be quite an appropriate addition to our standards-based instruction: performative teaching involves assessment through creative projects at all levels of the language curriculum. All of the learning activities suggested above entail performance-based forms of assessment that integrate the performing arts, as I said, not only in terms of content (which is of course a very valid form of interdisciplinarity, as it could for example be the case for content courses taught in English that explore

the rich Italian performance landscape), but also in terms of pedagogical structures that allow for assessment through a variety of diverse semiotic spaces.<sup>8</sup>

Before concluding, these last paragraphs will offer a few additional reflections that I gathered from conversations with colleagues and from my personal experiences both as a student and as a teacher, which I hope will help interested readers tailor some form of performative teaching into their own realities and according to their institutions’ diverse needs and possibilities. The first issue I wish to consider relates to engaging students in performative experiences as extra-curricular or co-curricular activities. On the one hand, integrating a performative component into the actual curriculum has its advantages because it creates a context in which students’ commitment is tangibly rewarded and they therefore feel more actively responsible for contributing to the success of the project. On the other hand, I have been exposed to contexts in which extra-curricular foreign language theatrical workshops function really well. Students that choose to take part in these programs are usually motivated by personal interests and inclinations, and are likely to contribute with genuine and positive commitment for these reasons. Extra-curricular activities can constitute a very practical and viable option when curriculum integration is not a possibility, although there will of course be plenty of students who do not actively pursue extra-curricular opportunities and who will inevitably deselect themselves from something that I firmly believe can be very formative for them on a variety of levels.

Among curricular performative courses, we can further distinguish between those that are completely elective and those that students might have to take in order to complete, for example, a language requirement. Elective courses are certainly an easier task for instructors, in the sense that they are naturally constituted of performance-inclined students that are already interested, at least at some level, in theatrical work and therefore ready for and receptive to the proposed activities. Within courses

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<sup>8</sup> See Colleen Ryan’s extremely interesting work on this: “by interacting with art—evaluating, interpreting, experiencing, embodying, and even producing it, in any one of its many forms—learners can understand culture as a process in which they are motivated to participate as subjects. This process can deepen the cognitive, social, aesthetic, and subjective dimensions of language learning” (from the abstract of *Integrating the Arts*).

that fulfill some type of requirement, instead, theatrical work might encounter mild to strong resistance from certain students, to the point that one has to consider whether it is ethically sound to force them to participate in something that they do not feel comfortable doing. However, these are often the very same students who, when carefully guided so that they can become more confident and comfortable, can benefit from the theatrical experience the most, especially in terms of personal development, precisely because they might otherwise never have another chance to actively engage in a creative performance project. This is something that I have personally experienced as an instructor, and it presents a conundrum with which I have struggled. As it is the case for many of the ethical dilemmas that constantly face educators, there are no definite answers or solutions; rather, it is something of which to be mindful and acutely aware.

The final point I wish to address relates to interdisciplinarity. I believe a serious commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration is of paramount importance for any successful FL or L2 theatrical or dramatic endeavor on a variety of levels. Firstly, I am convinced that just as collaboration is fundamental in learning, it can greatly benefit any teaching effort; in the specific context of conducting drama activities in a foreign language, collaboration can significantly help build the necessary skill set when and where a single instructor is not sufficient.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, involving other languages and inviting them to conduct common or parallel activities can help gain momentum and increase interest in FL performative teaching. Furthermore, collaboration among languages and arts departments is not only helpful in order for practical and logistical components to work smoothly, but also extremely desirable in order to build opportunities for long-lasting projects in which both parties can benefit and learn from each other. I believe that truly interdisciplinary collaborations still happen too rarely, and that we all should do our best to foster them within our institutions. Finally, and coming back to what I previously said on the importance of flexibility, interacting with different departments and learning about different traditions of pedagogy, particularly about the

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<sup>9</sup> Much has been written on the diverse set of skills that instructors need in order to practice this type of work; see for example Dunn and Stinson.

pedagogy and practice of Theater as a Liberal Art, can teach us important lessons and legitimize our efforts towards flexible curriculum design.

To summarize, I firmly believe that a sound and thorough integration of the performing arts can help us craft innovative and effective Italian curricula. Learning from the diverse trends and traditions that already exist, we can work towards consistent integrative curricula that go beyond sporadic experiments and “incursions” into the realm of the arts, and that encompass all the aspects outlined above: curricula that provide students with careful scaffolding while also allowing for the unexpected to emerge, they build truly collaborative learning communities where students can be creative and bring their whole self to the classroom, and are grounded in a shared understanding of the collective journey that is learning.

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## INTERMEDIATE ITALIAN AS A BRIDGE TO MANY BRIDGES

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“Non lo so, non riesco a capire, sarò malato, ma io amo questo ponte. Ci devo passare almeno due volte al giorno.”

(“I don’t know, I may be mad, but I love this bridge. I have to cross it at least twice a day.”)

Nanni Moretti, *Caro diario* (1993)

This article will highlight examples of content and outcomes from Intermediate Italian courses at the University of Pennsylvania that focus on fundamental aspects of language development such as meaningful vocabulary building and process reading, listening, viewing, and writing. Project-based, goal-oriented teaching, and task-based activities, divert from the traditional model of “coverage,” offering students authentic cultural content through which to reach communicative and pedagogically sound objectives. Differentiating the Intermediate level also affords students the freedom and responsibility to work with the instructor on all aspects of this journey “across the bridge,” that carries them from Beginning, through Intermediate, toward Advanced levels, to innumerable other cultural and linguistic “bridges,” and beyond. Cited materials will underscore the incorporation of the ACTFL 5Cs, focus on the 3 modes of Communication, and shine a spotlight on how Creativity motivates students to become, and remain, engaged with Italian Language and Culture, both inside and outside the classroom, via the careful use of technology as well as extra-curricular events. These innovative approaches to teaching foster a strong and welcoming learning community, contributing to positive, standards-based learning outcomes, as well as to the type of word-of-mouth buzz among students that leads to the retention and growth of our programs at all levels of instruction.

At the University of Pennsylvania, Intermediate Italian I and II, “Dear Diaries—Biography, Autobiography, and the Fiction(s) in Between,” accompany and support students as they get to know themselves and others in the target language and culture, explore ways we can recount our own and others’ stories, and become acquainted with customized approaches to

using and creating authentic materials through project-based, differentiated scaffolding. The ongoing aim of Intermediate Italian I and II has been to focus on examples of biography and autobiography centered around cinematic, literary, and musical works that investigate and challenge the very notion of keeping a diary, or scrapbook. The objectives have been to tailor the content to students’ needs and interests in order to most appropriately guide them toward reaching and surpassing learning goals within linguistic and cultural proficiency levels and contexts. Over the course of several years, the curriculum has moved away from traditional pedagogical materials and more closely concentrated on tasks and activities that facilitate meaningful communication, research and application of cultural content, and creativity. The materials have been developed around authentic realia as well as open sources. The aim is to continue to refine original materials, offer them in a format that will contribute to Italian Studies at large—while complementing and strengthening a dynamic, interdisciplinary, inclusive vision—and to open sharing environments. It also incorporates well-developed, open-source materials that already exist, to help to promote and strengthen those, and to become more stable partners to and resources for fellow educators and students—as we all work to nurture and grow our field. While this article will focus on Intermediate Italian I, the foundational approaches and pedagogical methodologies outlined herein serve as the blueprint for the entire sequence, and very much inform all language courses in our section.

The goal of Intermediate Italian is to provide students with courses that are inspiring as well as academically rigorous. These courses allow students to prepare for the cultural and linguistic challenges they will face once they arrive in Italy, continue on to Advanced study, and—more importantly—weave their studies of Italian language and culture into their academic, personal, and professional lives. In the future, more open-source formatting will afford a larger community of students and teachers the chance to take advantage of the materials we develop.

At the University of Pennsylvania, we are reinvigorating Italian Studies. This is an exciting opportunity to take part in the advancement of language learning technologies and open source learning. This is also a promising format for our field because it is not meant to replicate the tra-

ditional text-based courses offered in the classroom, but rather to create and use OER (Open Educational Resources) task-based, practical, conversational Italian in an accelerated, contextualized, and meaningful way so that students may apply what they learn as they study, and beyond. In conceptualizing course goals, students of previous Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, and Study Abroad have been kept in mind as very specific audiences, though these courses are also open to all learners with similar, complementary goals.

The pedagogical foundations of these Intermediate courses are rooted in Differentiated Instruction. By tailoring content to their experience, interests, goals, and preferred or most-effective learning styles, educators can more efficiently meet individual student needs. The process through which students are led to learning objectives varies in both synchronous and asynchronous work. Preparatory activities, such as pre-viewing or pre-listening tasks, provide scaffolding that allows students to focus their attention on specific features of the authentic materials so that they can notice, understand, and apply their newly-acquired and/or ever-more-refined skills. They are carefully guided toward meaningful engagement with the materials and ultimately to creating their own, original works that show their comprehension. The products students create reflect the development of their cultural and linguistic knowledge of the target content.

The learning environments differ as much as possible in order to reflect the flexibility we are working to bring to our lessons, modules, semesters, academic years, and degree-granting curricula. Even within our face-to-face courses, we apply blended and/or flipped formats that meaningfully enhance learning experiences. In the case-studies referenced here, students met four days per week, each lesson lasting 50 minutes. Simultaneously, there were evening sections that met twice per week, each lesson lasting one hour and fifty minutes. However, these courses all take full advantage of learning management systems, wherein students prepare, study, assess, and/or review course materials outside of the classroom in an online environment. The particular content that will be discussed later is being reframed to also reflect the possibility of fully online Intermediate courses.

Assessments are ongoing in these courses and focus particularly, though not exclusively, on formative aspects of the learning, and teaching, experience. Students are guided toward specific topics of discussion, vocabulary-building activities, responses, and exercises that allow them to learn, notice, reuse and/or recycle content. Weekly written blog entries, voice and/or video recordings in the learning management system build to create a living, interactive repository of individual as well as class development of the cultural and linguistic content. Assignments completed at home serve as a springboard for in-class pair-work and group-work. Warm-up activities, for example, may stem from research conducted at home. These activities range from whole-class debates, to students discussing in pairs and then reporting their findings to the class, to informal mingling, to using the chalkboard, working with handouts, etc.

In addition to Differentiated Approaches, these courses are also rooted in the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards (2015). The five Cs (Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities, Communication) guide both the instructor input as well as the student output. These categories are carefully considered in terms of their particular enriching qualities. The knowledge and understanding of Italian Culture, in its very rich and varied contexts, are shared via a meticulously chosen variety of examples of the three Ps (Practices, Products, Perspectives): The tangible and intangible Products of Italian Culture; the observed and executed Practices of what members of Italian and Italian-speaking Communities are doing, when, and where; and the Perspectives of target language and culture community members are considered in terms of their meanings, attitudes, and values. All of these aspects of the target Culture serve not only as artifacts to study from the outside, but also as mirrors in which students are invited to reflect upon their own Cultures’ Products, Practices, and Perspectives.

Of fundamental importance as we work to rebuild, reframe, and showcase our true relevance as Italian Studies is attention to the Connections we can make with and for our students to the other disciplines and fields that interest and drive them academically, professionally, and personally. Just as Italy and Italian exist in a varied and rich global context,

so must our approaches and methodologies reflect our place in a dynamic, interdisciplinary, and multifaceted “bigger picture.”

Meaningful Communication in the target language about the target culture is central to each piece of the Intermediate scaffolding. Students communicate regularly in each of the three modes. They communicate interpersonally during oral warm-up activities, for example, taking advantage of the many opportunities to negotiate meaning and enrich their perspectives by learning about others’. These spontaneous discussions take place daily at the beginning of each lesson, and throughout each meeting as is appropriate to the learning objectives. Though backward design is critical, flexibility is also built in to the course plan—so that we can truly take advantage of learning moments as they arise organically during our time with our students. The course site offers a dynamic space within which students communicate interpersonally via discussions, recordings, and collaborative content pages. Here students are able to negotiate meaning in their writing by reading, commenting on, and responding to one another’s posts and inquiries. They also engage in these types of interpersonal exchanges via voice and video recordings. These asynchronous activities stem from and contribute to synchronous engagement and are crucial to optimizing community building among students and instructors.

Authentic materials are carefully chosen for the Intermediate level and students actively work on building their written, oral, and visual comprehension throughout their studies. Though there is no negotiation of meaning in the moment, students are offered ample opportunity before and after these interpretive-mode targeted activities to build not only their understanding of the materials, but also their interest and confidence in interacting with it and each other.

Assessments in Intermediate Italian include written tests, quizzes, compositions, oral interviews and daily assignments that focus on the presentational mode of Communication. Students prepare, based on guidelines, for both written and oral presentations of their understanding of and ability to apply course content. Many of these tasks are prepared and rehearsed in some way. Importantly, students are provided with specific feedback so that they may better understand their own learning pro-

cess, and meaningfully refine their skills at their own pace, focused on their own work. In our benchmark assessments at the University of Pennsylvania, this has proven to have much more concrete and lasting learning outcomes than generic, broadly focused testing of specific vocabulary, grammatical structures, etc. that had been used in the past. Though admittedly, personalized assessments are more challenging to grade according to standards, they are proving to be worth the investment for instructors as well as for learners.

The final foundational piece of the structure of Intermediate Italian at the University of Pennsylvania is Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA). Just as ACTFL’s literature explains, and CARLA (The Center for Advanced Research in Language Acquisition) at the University of Minnesota states on their website:

ACTFL has developed a prototype for assessing the progress language students are making in building their proficiency through the World-Readiness Standards. The Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) is a cluster assessment featuring three tasks, each of which reflects one of the three modes of communication—Interpretive, Interpersonal and Presentational. The three tasks are aligned within a single theme or content area, reflecting the manner in which students naturally acquire and use the language in the real world or the classroom. Each task provides the information and elicits the linguistic interaction that is necessary for students to complete the subsequent task. IPAs are designed for students at the novice, intermediate, and advanced levels of proficiency. They are standards-based, performance-based, developmental in nature, integrative. IPAs are designed to be used with scoring rubrics that rate performance in terms of whether the performance meets expectations, exceeds expectations, or does not meet expectations for the task.<sup>1</sup>

What has been most compelling over the past few years of implementing IPA-inspired approaches to Italian Language courses at the University of Pennsylvania is the tangible confidence-building result of these assessments. Students have concrete evidence of their learning that goes far beyond an instructor’s grade. The IPA offers teachers and learners standards that are meaningful to both parties, thereby allowing each to be more fully aware of what the other is teaching and/or learning. CARLA’s website continues,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://carla.umn.edu/assessment/vac/CreateUnit/p\\_2.html](http://carla.umn.edu/assessment/vac/CreateUnit/p_2.html).

The IPA serves as a model in exemplifying not only how research and practice can be more closely aligned, but also how standards-based classroom instruction and assessment practices can meet to form a seamless connection. It holds much promise for the future as our profession continues to advance in standards-based instruction and assessment.<sup>2</sup>

According to our learning outcomes at UPenn, we too see the promise of this meaningful, clear approach to language and culture instruction. It embodies a transparency, and therefore fairness, that encourages students to learn and instructors to teach.

At the University of Pennsylvania, Intermediate Italian is ideally conceived of as a bridge to Advanced coursework, and perhaps even certificates, minors, or majors. However, it is of utmost importance to our Section that, regardless of how many or few courses our students take in Italian Studies, those experiences be meaningful, enriching, inspirational, and fundamentally positive. Therefore, the particular course content follows a linguistic progression that leads students along a bridge of authentic, complex, rich materials. These materials have changed and will continue to do so. The choice of specific content is secondary to the learning objectives and foundational approaches outlined above. The remainder of this article will focus on the particular materials currently used in Intermediate Italian at UPenn, but the reader is asked to keep in mind that these—though successfully implemented—can and should be easily freed from the underlying structure that renders the bridge traversable and, more importantly, sustainable—regardless of institution or level.

Intermediate Italian I is the first half of a two-semester intermediate sequence designed to help learners attain a level of proficiency that will allow them to function comfortably in an Italian-speaking environment. While the course builds on students’ existing skills in Italian, it increases their confidence and ability to read, write, speak and understand the language, and it introduces them to more refined lexical items, more complex grammatical structures, and more challenging cultural material. Course materials allow learners to explore culturally relevant topics and to develop cross-cultural skills through the exploration of similarities and

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<sup>2</sup> [http://carla.umn.edu/assessment/vac/CreateUnit/p\\_2.html](http://carla.umn.edu/assessment/vac/CreateUnit/p_2.html).

differences between their native culture, other cultures, and the Italian world(s).

In Intermediate Italian I, students begin the semester revisiting and refining their ability to describe themselves and others. They are always invited to be as imaginative as they wish, thereby avoiding the possibility of learners feeling pressured to share information they would prefer to keep to themselves. Suggestions include taking on invented personas, talking about famous people, discussing fictional characters, etc. Clearly and purposefully reminding students of these options has helped to create comfortable learning environments in which, then, many feel at home sharing their stories and all feel welcome and engaged regardless of the sources of the stories they compose throughout the semester.

Intermediate Italian I begins with a close reading of a portion of Natalia Ginzburg’s “Lui e io (1962).” As part of their pre-reading preparation, students recall the language they know from their previous studies to describe people in as much detail as possible. We move beyond simple descriptions and delve into individual character and personality traits. Again, students are regularly invited to talk about anyone they like, themselves or others. They are first guided to notice how the characters, notably “lui” and “io,” are described in the text, in terms of all aspects of these two beings, specifically categorizing these details as positive vs. negative qualities. Right from the onset of Intermediate Italian, we respectfully recognize that the Italian language itself is binary in nature, and that therefore we will be actively making gendered statements and assumptions. The limits of the linguistic structure do not, however, keep us from welcoming students’ and teachers’ more inclusive view of the world. Such gestures may seem trivial, but letting students know that we realize we may be generalizing and/or excluding, and that these choices are neither intentional nor ill-intentioned, are of great assistance in creating the Classroom Community discussed above.

Students then zoom out from Ginzburg’s work and our study of its details to offer their own visualization of the characters described by the author. Learners complete a formative assessment on the course site in which they use the linguistic structures and vocabulary reviewed and introduced during the first days of class to offer examples of who “lui” and

“io” might actually be. They choose from the widest array of people possible: cinema, animation, the famous, their own imagination, etc. Students in this way apply what they grasp from the writer’s words to their own body of knowledge and interests. They describe the images they chose and explain why those were chosen.

In a subsequent step, students choose any relationship between two people, then describe the two and their relationship in as much detail as possible. For both of these tasks, students have the motivation to describe any relationship that interests them and to share their own ideas of what relationships can look like, in comparison to Ginzburg’s, to each other’s, to the cultural context they are studying, to their own, and to others’. For all assignments related to this text, and to all authentic materials, students use new vocabulary as much as possible and apply it to the ideas they are formulating and sharing in the target language.

After working with a literary example of descriptions of people and relationships, we then move on to Mina’s song, “Parole parole parole (1972),” a duet performed with Alberto Lupò (see appendix 1). As a pre-listening activity, students read through quotes from the song text. They complete a table asking them to assume which character in the duet speaks/sings these lines. This is, of course, based on stereotypes and assumptions. Every effort is made to ensure respectful yet playful negotiation of the content of these quotes and of opinions shared. Students justify why they chose “lui” or “lei” for each. Based on the quotes, students are asked what type of relationship they imagine “lui” and “lei,” the singers, have together. For the first listening activity, the class only has access to the audio of the first half of the song and the aforementioned table, listening for the listed quotes and checking off whether they had assumed correctly or not. We then discuss the correct answers and whether or not the students are surprised by who sang which lines. Students then listen to the entire song several times, completing the text with missing words. Students subsequently brainstorm adjectives that describe Mina, Alberto, and Mina & Alberto as a couple—building upon structures they used in conjunction with Ginzburg, but applying them to a different genre that offers diverse context clues. Learners write some adjectives on the chalkboard in appropriate columns, also reapplying rich vocabulary from

Ginzburg. Keeping in mind their own descriptions, students then create dialogues as the Mina and Alberto they have gotten to know and imagined, that is meant to take place the evening after the words they exchanged in their duet. Once these have been created and shared, students watch a recording of “Parole parole parole,” comparing how they envisioned these two singers to the video. All descriptions and assumptions are revisited, challenged, and/or revised as is called for by the class discussion. Finally, in a last challenge to preconceptions, students watch a parody of “Parole parole parole” in which the gender roles are reversed, Mina singing Alberto Lupo’s part, and Adriano Celentano singing Mina’s. This opens the floor to interesting and engaging ideas on gender roles, how they have changed, how they are changing, and what we might expect in the future. From here, students begin to brainstorm for a composition in which they are asked to now begin to describe how they, and others, were vs. how they now are.

From Mina’s easy-listening music of the 60s and 70s, students are ushered into the 2000s via a Jovanotti and Michael Franti Italian and English collaboration called “The Sound of Sunshine.” They begin with the video, and therefore more images of relationships between people, the most noteworthy in this case being the affectionate friendship between the two singers. As they watch and listen, students are asked to keep their antennae up for specific English to Italian translations and to recognize in them specific linguistic structures. This is a difficult task, and often only one or two students can hear the showcased use of the relative pronoun in the lines:

Michael Franti: “You’re the one I want to be with [...].”

Lorenzo “Jovanotti” Cherubini: “Sei tu quella con cui voglio stare [...].”

Learners use these lines as a model to create their own verses for the duet. They fuse vocabulary they have been using to describe relationships to the context of this song, all while meaningfully applying a new and often challenging grammatical structure to their own, original work.

Currently, the central point of Intermediate I is Nanni Moretti’s *Caro diario* (1993). The title and format lend themselves beautifully to the above-mentioned theme for the Intermediate Italian sequence at UPenn,

“Dear Diaries—Biography, Autobiography, and the Fiction(s) in Between.” Students are guided from one communicative goal to the next, from one cultural topic to another, via meticulously woven transitions. For example, learners are accompanied from “The Sound of Sunshine” to *Caro diario* through a further exploration of the depth relative pronouns can lend to the linguistic elaboration of a theme. Students are provided with blank tables and empty timelines and asked to populate them with the people, places, things, and events that have been most meaningful to them so far on their journey (see Appendix 2). After in-class brainstorming, students work on a composition in which they recount, using the central structure, relative pronouns, important moments in their lives (whether they be autobiographical, imagined, or some combination of the two). From here, we find the beginning of the *Caro diario* theme: all compositions begin with this greeting and are framed within the context of a Diary.

Once the groundwork has been established, students begin their pre-viewing experience by studying Nanni Moretti’s actual biography. They read an abridged account of the most well-known parts of his life, and research his work in cinema. The IPA approaches mentioned above are particularly effective within the context of an artist as complex as Moretti and a film as multi-faceted as *Caro diario*. Key vocabulary that is crucial to understanding the artist’s biography is rendered more approachable and memorable through non-target language study of complex lexical components.

Once learners have a solid understanding of Nanni Moretti, work begins on the content of the movie itself. Students are invited to venture guesses based on what they know about him, the images on the DVD, and the title of the film. This pattern repeats for each sequence, as students try to anticipate a storyline that they inevitably begin to refer to as, “come si dice [“how do you say”], ‘random?’”

The key to using an authentic artifact such as *Caro diario* is to highlight the pegs that learners can look for, find and hold onto as the journey progresses. In the case of this film, I will offer specific samples that show what, exactly, this means (see Appendix 3). For example, before viewing, students are asked what they know about Italy in the summertime and where they would expect to go on a tour of the city of Rome. As per the

first inquiry, learners are unaware of the peculiarity of Italian cities in August. They are thus asked to consider different times and seasons in their own hometowns and to recall how Philadelphia changes or remains the same throughout the year. As for the second, students expect they will visit the most renowned and well-known parts of Rome. They are surprised to learn that Nanni’s tour includes sites that are far less traveled.

The film begins with Moretti writing on the lines of his diary, “C’è una cosa che mi piace fare più di tutte [...] (“There is one thing I like to do most of all [...]).” Before watching the opening sequence, students ask themselves and each other what they like to do above all other activities. Once we watch the film, see these same handwritten words, and hear Moretti speak them, students are more than ready to find out what makes this character tick. They are amazed to learn what Nanni likes to do. It is not what they expected. Nothing about him or this film is what any of them anticipated or can predict. He keeps them guessing, and this engages their imaginations.

The next concrete peg to hold onto in the screen play is Moretti’s opening to the famous Jennifer Beals scene, “In realtà il mio sogno è sempre stato quello di [...]” (“My dream has actually always been to [...]).” Just as before, students complete the thought on their own and talk about their dreams with their peers and instructor. As the film progresses, and students become more accustomed to feeling a bit lost with their tour guide, Moretti, their hypotheses on what Nanni might do or say become more and more creative and inventive.

As a final example of the markers highlighted for students along their journey, we focus on the line Moretti uses to introduce his melancholic pilgrimage to Pasolini’s memorial: “[...] quando vado nelle altre città l’unica cosa che mi piace fare è [...]” (“When I go to other cities the only thing I like to do is [...]).” Students complete this verse, compare and contrast with their classmates, and prepare to find out what Nanni likes to do in other cities.

Final student projects for Intermediate Italian I include a complete diary—a combination of their corrected compositions from throughout the semester as well as one final, original entry that is built on the skeleton of the closing lines of *Caro diario*: “Una cosa però l’ho imparata

da tutta questa vicenda, no, anzi, due” (“I learned one thing from this whole experience, no, actually, two.”). With Moretti’s cinematic journey complete, and *Intermediate Italian I* drawing to a close, students reflect on what were the most memorable lessons for them—while considering Nanni’s unexpected conclusions as well. As part of their final, cumulative assessment, students also work on a creative reinterpretation of any of the materials used in the course. Many of them choose to orchestrate their own versions of a scene from the film. While outside the scope of this written article, it was truly a pleasure to share with participants at the Georgetown conference videos that were made by *Intermediate Italian I* students at the University of Pennsylvania during these years that we have been studying *Caro diario*. Some highlights include: students taking viewers on a bicycle tour of campus (as opposed to a Vespa tour of Rome); a walking tour of the interiors of historical UPenn buildings, complete with names and dates (inspired by Nanni’s tour of Roman houses and neighborhoods); a main character searching for a beloved celebrity all across campus and asking everyone if they are that person (reflecting Moretti’s Jennifer Beals sequence). The music, language, tone, scenery and settings that students choose to showcase their developed linguistic and cultural knowledge, coupled with the homage they pay to Nanni Moretti’s cinematographic style and ironic voice, combine to create truly moving pieces of original art that are born of differentiated interests, styles, and goals—yet meet and surpass learning objectives and proficiency levels. Each semester the final products serve as evidence not only of what students took away from their experience, but also what they added to it—and will continue to. Of note is that each Spring, students are invited to share their projects with the broader community at our annual Italian Showcase. They proudly do so, and applaud each other’s insights, creativity, and originality. Keeping in mind that their work has an audience that is neither limited to their instructor nor to only their classmates drives them to create high quality finished products that thoughtfully represent their achievements in *Intermediate Italian*.

*Intermediate Italian II*, on the other hand, centers on the novel (Ammaniti, 2001) and film (Salvatores, 2003) *Io non ho paura*. This is a less evident diary—but a closer look at the film’s main character, Michele, re-

veals that storytelling is a tool he uses to cope with and understand the world around him. Intermediate II will be discussed in further detail in a future article.

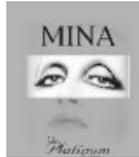
The outcomes of Intermediate Italian at the University of Pennsylvania are that students capture who they are and are becoming in the target language; we are able to track how students (and their Italian lives) are transforming; students consider various genre(s); they write/speak/create in many styles for varied audiences; they discuss with peers (both inside and outside the classroom); they connect their studies and their lives; they develop vocabulary building, use, and reuse; they meaningfully communicate and understand Italian linguistic structures; their ongoing self-reflection is stimulated; they feel inspired and welcome to explore and share their creativity; communities are fostered and nurtured; and, most relevant to the present discussion, bridges across languages, cultures, disciplines, and life are built and maintained. These bridges may carry students from one language level to another, beyond a language requirement, onto a minor, major, or maybe even travel and graduate work. These bridges may also serve the much more seemingly modest, and yet profoundly more significant, purpose of enriching our students’ lives, informing their ever-developing understanding of their own culture and those around them, and instill in them the confidence to continue onto other destinations along their academic, professional, and personal paths. Offering our students our hand, literally, to guide them from one proficiency level to the next, crisscrossing along the messy yet inviting itinerary of second or foreign language development, enhances their learning experience and builds our community. These are the students that will remember that Rome is not merely the Coliseum, sunshine makes a sound, and Italian can be a bridge to many bridges—most of which they will now be able to build for themselves, and even guide others across, thanks in no small part to the interdisciplinary, inclusive, dynamic higher-level thinking skills they have been motivated to explore, develop, and apply in our Italian Language and Culture courses.

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APPENDIX I

Mina - *Platinum Collection* (1968-1975) - “Parole parole”



A) Pre-ascolto

1. “Parole parole” è un dialogo tra un uomo e una donna. Indovina chi dice le seguenti parole, lei o lui?

[ per es. B ]

	<i>lei</i>	<i>lui</i>	<i>vero</i>	<i>falso</i>
a) “non vorrei parlare”				
b) “non cambi mai”				
c) “certe volte non ti capisco”				
d) “parole, parole, parole”				
e) “ascoltami”				
f) “ecco il mio destino, parlarti”				

2. Perché hai scelto *lei* o *lui* per queste frasi?

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3. Secondo te, che tipo di rapporto esiste tra lei e lui?

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B) Primo ascolto

Ascolta la prima metà della canzone e controlla le tue risposte dell'esercizio A, #1. Avevi ragione? Ti sorprende sentire chi ha veramente detto queste parole? Perché sì/no?

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C) 2° ascolto



1. Prima, leggi gli infiniti elencati. Poi, inserisci i verbi che senti negli spazi vuoti.

pregare<sup>1</sup> - capire - essere - succedere<sup>2</sup> - potere (2) - volere - andare - giurare<sup>3</sup>

Cara, cosa mi \_\_\_\_\_ stasera, ti guardo ed è come la prima volta  
Che cosa sei, che cosa sei, che cosa sei  
Non vorrei parlare  
Cosa sei  
Ma tu \_\_\_\_\_ la frase d'amore cominciata e mai finita  
Non cambi mai, non cambi mai, non cambi mai  
Tu sei il mio ieri, il mio oggi  
Proprio mai  
Il mio sempre, inquietudine  
Adesso ormai<sup>4</sup> ci \_\_\_\_\_ provare, chiamami tormento dai<sup>5</sup>, hai visto mai  
Tu sei come il vento che porta i violini e le rose  
Caramelle<sup>6</sup> non ne \_\_\_\_\_ più  
Certe volte non ti \_\_\_\_\_  
Le rose e i violini, questa sera raccontali a un'altra, violini e rose li \_\_\_\_\_ sentire, quando la cosa mi  
\_\_\_\_\_, se mi va<sup>7</sup>, quando è il momento, e dopo si vedrà  
Una parola ancora  
Parole, parole, parole  
Ascoltami  
Parole, parole, parole  
Ti \_\_\_\_\_  
Parole, parole, parole  
Io ti \_\_\_\_\_  
Parole, parole, parole, parole, parole, soltanto parole, parole tra noi  
Ecco il mio destino, parlarti, parlarti come la prima volta

<sup>1</sup> implorare

<sup>2</sup> to happen

<sup>3</sup> promettere, garantire

<sup>4</sup> by now

<sup>5</sup> c'mon

<sup>6</sup> dolci, cioccolatini, ecc.

<sup>7</sup> mi piace, mi interessa

volere - accendere<sup>8</sup> - tenere - essere - potere (2) - spegnere<sup>9</sup>

Che cosa sei, che cosa sei, che cosa sei  
No, non dire nulla, c'è la notte che parla  
Cosa sei  
La romantica notte  
Non cambi mai, non cambi mai, non cambi mai  
Tu \_\_\_\_\_ il mio sogno proibito  
Proprio mai  
E' vero, speranza  
Nessuno più ti \_\_\_\_\_ fermare<sup>10</sup>, chiamami passione dai, hai visto mai  
Si \_\_\_\_\_ nei tuoi occhi la luna e si \_\_\_\_\_ i grilli<sup>11</sup>  
Caramelle non ne voglio più  
Se tu non ci fossi bisognerebbe inventarti  
La luna ed i grilli, normalmente mi \_\_\_\_\_ sveglia, mentre io \_\_\_\_\_ dormire e sognare, l'uomo che a  
volte c'è in te, quando c'è, che parla meno, ma \_\_\_\_\_ piacere a me  
Una parola ancora  
Parole, parole, parole  
Ascoltami  
Parole, parole, parole  
Ti prego  
Parole, parole, parole  
Io ti giuro  
Parole, parole, parole, parole, parole, soltanto parole, parole tra noi  
Che cosa sei  
Parole, parole, parole  
Che cosa sei  
Parole, parole, parole  
Che cosa sei  
Parole, parole, parole  
Che cosa sei  
Parole, parole, parole, parole, parole, soltanto parole, parole tra noi

2. Ascolta la canzone per la terza volta e controlla i verbi che hai scritto.

<sup>8</sup> *turn on*

<sup>9</sup> *turn off*



D) Descrizioni

1. Prima, guarda il video per “Parole, parole, parole.” Dopo, sotto le foto, scrivi degli aggettivi vari per descrivere lei, lui e poi tutti e due:



Mina

Alberto

Mina & Alberto


2. Usando i tuoi aggettivi, scrivi frasi originali in cui descrivi i due personaggi:

- a) Lei \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Lui \_\_\_\_\_
- c) Lei e lui \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_
- e) \_\_\_\_\_
- f) \_\_\_\_\_
- g) \_\_\_\_\_



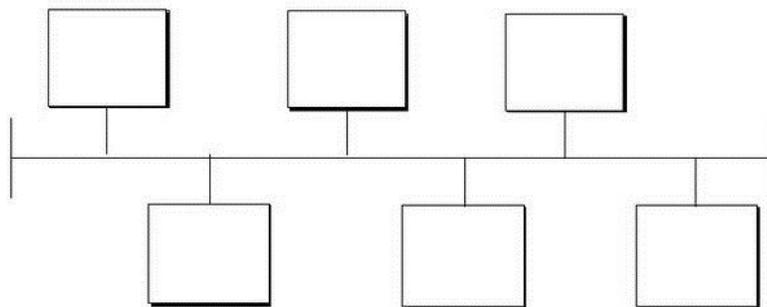
**APPENDIX 2**

A. Il tuo viaggio personale: Completa le schede con delle informazioni che riguardano i momenti più significativi della tua vita. Poi, usa questi dati per scrivere un paragrafo (“Le persone che ho conosciuto al liceo nel 2008 sono...Gli amici a cui voglio tanto bene si chiamano...”).

A1.

<b>PERSONE</b>	<b>POSTI</b>	<b>PROGETTI</b>	<b>SOGNI</b>	<b>altro...</b>

A2. **Anni, mesi, giorni...**





APPENDIX 3

**Caro diario** (1993) di Nanni Moretti  
Capitolo 1, “in Vespa” (00:00-9:19)



A. Pre-visione

1. Il film che vedrai si chiama *Caro diario*. Come immagini che comincerà un film di questo titolo? Perché?

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2. Cosa c'è da fare nella tua città d'estate?

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3. Sai come sono le città italiane d'estate? Se no, chiedilo all'insegnante.

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4. Cosa ti viene in mente quando pensi alla città di Roma? Perché?

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5. Descrivi l'immagine della copertina del film. Cosa sta per fare questa persona, secondo te?

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6. Completa la frase,

*“C’è una cosa che mi piace fare più di tutte:*

\_\_\_\_\_!”

B1. Vocabolario: Abbina le parole ed espressioni a sinistra con il loro sinonimo a destra.

a. oppure	1. a questo punto
b. ormai	2. buona fortuna
c. vabbé	3. per niente male
d. auguri	4. sentirmi bene, comodo
e. mica male	5. o
f. a mio agio	6. va bene

B2. Scegli la categoria adatta dalla lista per le colonne di parole ed espressioni sotto.

1. un atto criminale - 2. una partita/lo sport/la vita - 3. il lavoro/la carriera 4. la casa/ il quartiere/la città - 5. il passare degli anni/diventare più vecchi
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a.	b.	c.	d.	e.
rimettersi in gioco	pesare	il complice	il corteo	il pasticcere
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
la sconfitta	imbiancare le tempie	il sopralluogo	andarsene in giro	l’agente di borsa
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
	peggiore		il lotto popolare	
_____	invecchiare	_____	il citofono	<small>© Original Artist Reproduction rights obtainable from www.CartoonStock.com</small>
_____	inacidire	_____	il padrone	<small>“Gentlemen-the sweets smell of success!”</small>
_____	imbruttire	_____		_____
_____	quarantenne	_____	_____	_____
_____		_____	_____	_____

B3. Fornisci delle definizioni e/o dei sinonimi per le parole ed espressioni elencate su scrivendo sotto ognuna.

B4. Conosci i seguenti personaggi storici? Chiedi all’insegnante chi sono!

Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882)	Leon Trotsky (1879-1940)
	

C1. Prima visione: Guarda il primo capitolo del film (**senza leggere il copione**), cercando di ascoltare per le nuove parole ed espressioni che hai appena imparato. Le capisci meglio vedendo e sentendo il contesto?

C2. Seconda visione: Guarda il primo capitolo del film mentre leggi il copione. Cominci a capirle sempre meglio?

**Caro diario** (1993) di Nanni Moretti  
Capitolo 1, “in Vespa” (00:00-9:19)

NANNI MORETTI: D'estate a Roma i cinema sono tutti chiusi, oppure ci sono film come "Sesso amore e pastorizia", "Desideri bestiali", "Biancaneve e i sette negri", oppure qualche film dell'orrore come "Henry", oppure qualche film italiano.

.....  
 ....

ANTONIO PETROCELLI: Ormai ho paura di rimettermi in gioco. Sono un vigliacco. Ma cos'è successo in tutti questi anni, ditemelo voi, io non lo so più.

SEBASTIANO NARDONE: Ti si stanno imbiancando le tempie.

ANTONIO: Incominciano a pesare le sconfitte.

GIOVANNA BOZZOLO: Una serie ininterrotta di sconfitte.

SEBASTIANO: La nostra generazione, che cosa siamo diventati? Siamo diventati pubblicitari, architetti, agenti di borsa, deputati, assessori, giornalisti. Siamo tanto cambiati, tutti peggiorati, oggi siamo tutti complici.

MORETTI: Ma perché tutti? Questa fissazione, tutti uguali, tutti compromessi, siamo tutti complici.

GIOVANNA: Non c'è niente di concreto nella mia vita. Quand'è l'ultima volta che abbiamo fatto una passeggiata? Ormai noi due stiamo insieme solo per abitudine.

ANTONIO: Tu ti vergogni di me. Che mal di testa, anche gli Optalidon non sono più gli stessi. Ti ricordi il tintinnio rassicurante del vecchio tubetto? Ora è tutto cambiato. Ora è veramente tutto cambiato.

GIOVANNA: Sai una cosa Antonio? Sei peggiorato. Non riesci più a provare un sentimento autentico.

SEBASTIANO: Siamo invecchiati, siamo inaciditi, siamo disonesti nel nostro lavoro. Gridavamo cose orrende, violentissime, nei nostri cortei, e ora guarda come siamo tutti imbruttiti.

MORETTI: Voi gridavate cose orrende e violentissime, e voi siete imbruttiti. Io gridavo cose giuste, e ora sono uno splendido quarantenne. Sì, la cosa che mi piace più di tutte è vedere le case, vedere i quartieri, e il quartiere che mi piace più di tutti è la Garbatella. E me ne vado in giro per i lotti popolari. Però non mi piace vedere solo le case dall'esterno, ogni tanto mi piace vedere anche come sono fatte dentro. E allora suono un citofono, e faccio finta di fare un sopralluogo, e dico che sto preparando un film. Il padrone di casa mi chiede: "Di che parla questo film?" E io non so che dire. Cos'è questo film? È la storia di un pasticcere, trozkista... Un pasticcere trozkista nell'Italia degli anni '50, è un film musicale. Un musical. Però, mica male il musical sul pasticcere trozkista nell'Italia conformista degli anni '50. E andando in Vespa mi piace anche fermarmi a guardare gli attici dove mi piacerebbe abitare. Mi immagino di ristrutturare appartamenti su in alto che vedo dalla strada, ma appartamenti che i proprietari non hanno nessuna intenzione di vendere. Un giorno poi un attico che mi sembrava più accessibile di altri io e Silvia siamo anche saliti a vederlo. Abbiamo chiesto quanto costava e ci hanno risposto dieci milioni a metro quadro. Come dieci milioni al metro quadro? E dice, sì ma non si può fare un discorso di tanto a metro quadro perché via Dandolo è una via storica, ha detto il proprietario, qui Garibaldi ci ha fatto la resistenza. Non lo so, non riesco a capire, sarò malato, ma io amo questo ponte. Ci devo passare almeno due volte al giorno. Sa cosa stavo pensando? Io stavo pensando una cosa molto triste. Cioè che io, anche in una società più decente di questa, mi ritroverò sempre con una minoranza di persone. Ma non nel senso di quei film dove c'è un uomo e una donna che si odiano, si sbranano su un'isola deserta perché il regista non crede nelle persone... Io credo nelle persone. Però non credo nella maggioranza delle persone. Mi sa che mi troverò sempre d'accordo e a mio agio con una minoranza....

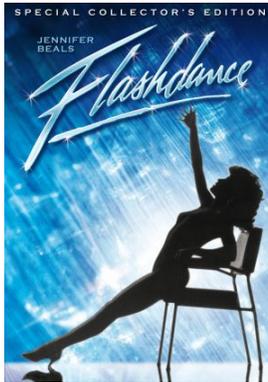
AUTOMOBILISTA: Vabbé, auguri.

MORETTI: ... e qui...

[Copione da <http://anjaqantina.jimdo.com/caro-diario/>]



D2. A casa: Fate una ricerca su internet il film *Flashdance* e l'attrice Jennifer Beals. Presenterai *in italiano* alla classe quello che impari.



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# L'INSEGNAMENTO DELLA LINGUA E DELLA CULTURA ITALIANA ATTRAVERSO LA GASTRONOMIA: CUCINIAMOLE!

Chiara De Santi

FARMINGDALE STATE COLLEGE, SUNY

Maccarone, m'hai provocato e io ti distruggo!

Adesso, maccarone, io me te magno, ahmmm!

Alberto Sordi in *Un americano a Roma*

## INTRODUZIONE

Quando si pensa all'Italia, una delle associazioni che spontaneamente viene alla mente e smuove i nostri sensi è la cucina, che si evidenzia come uno degli elementi più apprezzati della cultura italiana. Ma perché il cibo è così importante da diventare centrale perfino nelle conversazioni con dei perfetti sconosciuti? Forse perché un qualsiasi piatto può spingerci in un viaggio sensoriale dove tutti e cinque i sensi sono stimolati? Per comprenderlo, lasciamoci prendere per mano e condurre nei meandri della nostra storia personale. Per far questo, provate a chiudere gli occhi e a richiamare alla memoria un'esperienza, se non la più straordinaria, una delle più singolari che abbiate mai avuto con un piatto italiano (o un piatto di origine italiana). Adesso pensate ai cinque sensi e come questi siano stati, allora, stimolati da quello che avevate davanti agli occhi (senso della vista), da quello che odoravate (olfatto), gustavate (gusto), toccavate (tatto), o sentivate (udito) attorno a voi in termini di rumori e parole. Pensate al posto dove avete mangiato, alle persone con cui eravate e al momento della vostra vita in cui quest'esperienza gastronomica e sensoriale ha avuto luogo. Bene, il vostro viaggio per capire come si possa insegnare e apprendere la lingua e la cultura italiana attraverso la cucina è appena iniziato. Infatti, comprendere come la gastronomia italiana rappresenti non solo l'arte del mangiar bene e il simbolo di uno stile distinto di cucina nazionale, ma personifichi anche la relazione tra cibo e cultura, può rendere gli studenti di lingua degli entusiasti fruitori e gli insegnanti stessi dei mediatori linguistici e culturali appagati, per usare un termine gastronomico.

Le nostre esperienze e quelle dei nostri studenti possono veicolare una comunicazione e un apprendimento interculturale (Kearney 33-69) che va oltre la classe e ci conduce ad un livello altro di comprensione reciproca. Per capirlo, pensate solo a come sia stata indimenticabile quella volta in cui avete mangiato la pizza nella migliore pizzeria di Napoli o di Roma, o perfino nel vostro paese d’origine, a cinque minuti da casa. Pensate che forse anche i vostri studenti sono passati attraverso quest’esperienza. La vista di quella pizza, il suo sapore e il suo profumo sono stati arricchiti dal mangiare la pizza con le mani, così da attivare il senso del tatto, e dal sentire il rumore della crosta che scricchiolava e si sbriciolava in bocca, mentre tutto attorno la pizzeria brulicava di voci e di rumori famigliari. E molte altre volte ancora, voi o i vostri studenti avete gioito di quella pizza come parte di un viaggio in Italia, oppure di una cena per festeggiare un compleanno di un amico, facendovi comprendere che il cibo è, senza dubbio, un’esperienza culturale e sensoriale di gruppo che trascende i limiti della lingua stessa, facendoci comunicare anche attraverso i gesti e le espressioni del volto.

Proprio per l’interesse che suscita la cucina italiana e per l’esperienza di cui si può beneficiare, si è pensato di sviluppare un corso in inglese prima e dei moduli linguistici poi che includessero una componente pratica per gli studenti improvvisatisi cuochi. E questo è avvenuto solo pochi mesi prima della pubblicazione, nel 2017, di un libro di testo su come insegnare l’italiano attraverso il cibo (Parisi), anticipato, tra gli altri, da *L’italiano in cucina* di Maurizio Pinzani e Riccardo Piancastelli (2002). Non solo. La rappresentazione del cibo in testi cinematografici e letterari italiani sta riscontrando molto successo sia alle conferenze (è sufficiente dare un’occhiata ai programmi) sia nelle pubblicazioni di articoli o libri, come quello curato da Peter Naccarato, Zachary Nowak ed Elgin K. Eckert, *Representing Italy Through Food* (2017).

Questo mio contributo di natura pedagogica trova una sua ragione di essere proprio nell’ambito di queste pubblicazioni al fine di condividere corsi e moduli interdisciplinari innovativi, i quali possono contribuire al successo dei corsi d’italiano e attrarre anche più studenti nei programmi di lingua e di cultura, specialmente adesso che si riscontra, ahimè, un declino proprio nel numero degli studenti nei Major and nei Minor. La

*keynote speech* di Giuseppe Cavatorta (University of Arizona) alla conferenza, *Innovation in Italian Programs and Pedagogy*, ha incluso i primi risultati di una ricerca a livello statunitense proprio su questi numeri, che confermano una diminuzione che però si può contrastare.

#### LE ORIGINI DELL’IDEA

Come si è ricordato, la gastronomia italiana interessa molto in generale e agli studenti nello specifico, ma questa non è entrata nelle mie classi di lingua da un giorno all’altro. La prima volta che ho realizzato quanto influente possa essere la relazione tra cibo e cultura in un’aula universitaria è stato attraverso un progetto creativo di natura linguistica e culturale nei miei primi due semestri d’italiano. In questo progetto dedicato all’e-portfolio, ovvero un portfolio elettronico (un articolo su questo progetto è in uscita nel 2018: De Santi, “Portfolios”), agli studenti è richiesto di scegliere un argomento di natura culturale da sviluppare nel corso del semestre, e posso senza dubbio affermare che il cibo italiano, in tutte le sue più conosciute e apprezzate forme (la pasta, la pizza, il gelato, i dolci, l’espresso, il vino), e le cucine regionali sono sempre stati gli argomenti che hanno attratto il maggior numero di studenti, anche se certamente non sono mai stati gli unici. Tra gli altri argomenti molto popolari si enumerano anche il calcio, le macchine, l’opera, la musica, il teatro e il cinema.

Proprio quest’interesse suscitato dalla gastronomia italiana nelle classi di lingua ha creato le basi per un corso interamente dedicato a quest’argomento e con una componente pratica preponderante, che ha visto gli studenti cucinare alcuni piatti italiani, contestualizzandoli accademicamente da un punto di vista storico, politico, economico, sociale e culturale. Il corso *Italian Food Culture in Practice* (un articolo sul corso è appena uscito: De Santi, “Lezioni accademiche, lezioni pratiche”), insegnato in inglese come un seminario di Educazione Generale (*General Education*) del Programma *Honors* (da lode) presso una delle università del sistema SUNY (State University of New York), è diventato la fucina per lo sviluppo di un modulo all’interno delle classi di lingua. Ma per comprendere l’evoluzione del corso *Italian Food Culture in Practice*, sarà bene spiegare brevemente com’era strutturato.

Dunque, *Italian Food Culture in Practice* è stato insegnato a quindici studenti di varie discipline nel corso di un semestre e ha seguito un approccio tematico e cronologico. Il testo di John Dickie, *Delizia! The Epic History of the Italians and Their Food* (tradotto in italiano con il titolo *Con gusto. Storia degli italiani a tavola*) è stato il testo di riferimento, mentre gli studenti hanno avuto accesso sin dal primo giorno del semestre ad una vasta bibliografia e filmografia (“Sources,” *Italian Food Culture*) ospitata nel sito del corso, per altro attivato gratuitamente sulla piattaforma di Word Press (<https://italianfoodcultureblog.wordpress.com>). Si deve subito dire che la maggior parte del lavoro accademico richiesto è stato compiuto al di fuori dell’aula, dove gli studenti hanno scritto circa 10.000 parole ciascuno. Durante gli incontri settimanali di due ore e mezza, gli studenti dovevano discutere il periodo storico di riferimento e anche contestualizzare i piatti che sarebbero stati poi cucinati. Nel lavoro pratico svolto in una cucina di un convitto universitario all’interno del campus, gli studenti-cuochi sono stati coadiuvati da chi scrive e dal direttore dei servizi di ristorazione universitaria, un ex-chef di origine italiana.

L’obiettivo del corso era principalmente di istruire gli studenti da un punto di vista accademico sulla storia gastronomica e culturale italiana dal Medioevo ai giorni nostri, offrendo loro l’opportunità di “assaggiare” la storia e la cultura italiana, e fornendo loro delle abilità pratiche utili anche dopo la laurea. Non solo. Attraverso questo corso c’era l’intenzione di pubblicizzare il più possibile il programma di studi italiani, che sicuramente è stato sotto i riflettori del campus per un intero semestre, e questo è stato possibile grazie ad una copertura mediatica ingente. Infatti, il corso è stato ed è tuttora accessibile su Word Press, dove sono ancora disponibili i video degli incontri settimanali (“Videos,” *Italian Food Culture*), mentre Instagram e Twitter, che sono stati aggiornati settimana dopo settimana durante il semestre, adesso funzionano soprattutto come archivi. Al successo mediatico e alla pubblicità su larga scala hanno contribuito due stagisti (uno ingaggiato per le Pubbliche Relazioni e uno per la Produzione Video) del Dipartimento di Scienze della Comunicazione, i quali, acquisendo anche tre crediti formativi, hanno documentato l’intero corso.

Ovviamente non si è soltanto parlato del testo di Dickie o cucinato. Tra i requisiti del corso vi erano, infatti, una partecipazione attiva sia in

aula che in cucina (10%), quindici composizioni a cadenza settimanale di almeno 200 parole ciascuna sulle letture assegnate dal testo *Delizia!* (15%), sedici composizioni diaristiche di almeno 200 parole ciascuna sugli incontri settimanali (16%), due recensioni di almeno 1.000 parole ciascuna su due libri diversi tra quelli proposti nella bibliografia generale (10%), una recensione cinematografica di almeno 1.000 parole su un film a scelta dello studente tra quelli proposti (5%), una presentazione digitale realizzata con il programma gratuito (se fino a 15 minuti di registrazione) di Screencast-O-Matic (<http://www.screencast-o-matic.com/>) di almeno dieci minuti (e massimo 15) su un argomento gastronomico-culturale a scelta dello studente (15%), quattordici commenti di almeno 30 parole ciascuno sulle presentazioni digitali degli altri studenti (14%), il cosiddetto Progetto del Giorno del Ringraziamento consistente nella preparazione di piatti della tradizione italiana o italo-americana cucinati da gruppi di due, tre o quattro studenti e condivisi nella settimana antecedente al Giorno del Ringraziamento (5%), e infine la cena finale preparata come classe e aperta solo ad ospiti selezionati (10%).

Inutile dire che il corso ha ricevuto un successo straordinario sia tra gli studenti frequentanti sia tra quelli che ne avevano solo sentito parlare. In un articolo apparso sul giornale universitario, *The Leader*, Curtis Lord, lo stagista esperto in Pubbliche Relazioni che ci ha affiancato nel corso del semestre, ha riportato le impressioni di alcuni studenti, mentre altre riflessioni finali degli studenti sono state pubblicate in traduzione dall'inglese (De Santi, “Lezioni accademiche, lezioni pratiche”). Come parte del lavoro pianificato nel contratto firmato all'inizio del semestre, Curtis Lord ha preparato anche dei comunicati stampa e una newsletter finale, che hanno rappresentato un modo ulteriore per incrementare la visibilità del corso e del programma d'italiano. Infatti, proprio in seguito a quest'esperienza e nell'ottica di rendere i programmi d'italiano più visibili, s'inco-raggia a reclutare studenti di altre discipline che possano curare la parte mediatica dei programmi: garantire, infatti, alcuni crediti formativi a degli studenti provenienti da altri dipartimenti per curare il Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram o il sito web, solo per citarne alcuni) e le pubbliche relazioni è un ottimo modo per instaurare relazioni esterne e offrire stage in cambio di servizi che altrimenti dovrebbero essere pagati a caro prezzo.

Ma adesso entriamo nel merito del contributo vero e proprio, vedendo prima di tutto quale sia stata l’evoluzione del corso *Italian Food Culture in Practice*.

#### L’EVOLUZIONE DEL CORSO

Proprio per quest’esperienza positiva, si è deciso di portare la gastronomia italiana nelle classi di lingua. Ma com’è avvenuto questo passaggio? Il primo passo è stata una riflessione su quello che era stato il corso *Italian Food Culture in Practice*, il quale, non dimentichiamocelo, è stato insegnato in inglese e ha avuto degli obiettivi di apprendimento (*Student Learning Outcomes*) che non possono essere paragonabili a quelli di una classe di lingua. Da una riflessione sommaria siamo poi passati alla teoria, condividendo con alcuni colleghi di lingue straniere (soprattutto di italiano, francese e spagnolo), durante un laboratorio seminariale, le possibili evoluzioni del corso. Da qui si è specificamente valutato l’applicazione nelle classi d’italiano. Ma come? Prima di tutto, abbiamo iniziato a prendere nota dei piatti più rappresentativi della gastronomia italiana, anche se ci siamo resi conto che questo può essere molto soggettivo. Poi abbiamo delineato la struttura dei pasti in Italia (antipasti, primi, secondi e contorni, dolci) e degli orari in cui questi generalmente si consumano (e quanto durano in media), come questi siano diversi nei giorni feriali, in quelli festivi o durante le grandi feste famigliari (per esempio, i matrimoni), come i pasti siano cambiati nel tempo e come si diversifichino in base alle regioni. Lavorando su questi aspetti, ci siamo resi conto come spesso si diano per scontate queste informazioni, mentre è un esercizio utile e fruttuoso riflettere su questi aspetti e fare ulteriori ricerche (il libro di Parasecoli può essere un buon testo di riferimento) per colmare le eventuali lacune, soffermandosi anche sulle differenze con altri contesti culturali.

Successivamente si è cercato di contestualizzare la gastronomia italiana nell’ambito mondiale e in quello specificamente statunitense, dove chi scrive insegna. Ci siamo resi conto che c’erano dei piatti trasversali a molte culture, come per esempio la pizza. In questo brainstorming, ci siamo anche resi conto che, almeno nel caso statunitense, si deve assolutamente distinguere tra la cucina italiana e quella italo-americana per via dei famigerati spaghetti con le polpette (*spaghetti with meatballs*), le *fettuccine Al-*

*fredo* e la zuppa di nozze italiana (*Italian Wedding Soup*), solo per citarne alcuni, ovvero piatti che non sono tradizionalmente italiani, oppure piatti che sono stati riadattati al palato nord-americano. Inutile dire che gli stereotipi e le false attribuzioni hanno iniziato ad emergere, allargando così il discorso gastronomico alle differenze, alle costruzioni culturali e all’interculturalità, ricordandoci come studenti di culture diverse possano iniziare a dialogare proprio partendo dalla gastronomia italiana e dalla sua evoluzione fuori dei confini italiani. A questo proposito, un libro utile da consultare per comprendere l’intersezione tra cibo, famiglia e comunità negli Stati Uniti, è quello di Simone Cinotto, *The Italian American Table*, che analizza l’argomento nella città di New York nei primi quattro decenni del Novecento. Assieme a questo e tra gli altri, un’interessante lettura è il saggio di Elizabeth Zanoni (“In Italy Everyone Enjoys It”), che offre una prospettiva storica transnazionale.

Dopo queste prime riflessioni e ricerche, ci siamo chiesti quali piatti italiani (o italo-americani) avremmo potuto cucinare assieme agli studenti. Ovviamente dovevano essere dei piatti accessibili in termini di ingredienti (fuori dell’Italia si trova tanto, ma non tutto) e realizzabili velocemente (nell’arco di una classe). I piatti dovevano anche essere contestualizzati culturalmente, partendo da una contestualizzazione regionale. Per esempio, il pesto: la prima associazione che viene in mente è con la Liguria, mentre gli spaghetti alla carbonara e i bucatini all’amatriciana ci portano nel Lazio, la pizza a Napoli, i cannoli in Sicilia, il risotto e la cotoletta alla milanese in Lombardia, la bagna cauda in Piemonte, le orecchiette con le cime di rapa in Puglia, e così via. La galleria curata da Francesco Tortora sul *Corriere della Sera* su 45 piatti regionali italiani significativi può essere un buon punto di partenza per delle idee, mentre il volume dell’Accademia Italiana della Cucina, *La Cucina: The Regional Cooking of Italy*, offre un’ampia varietà di ricette regionali a cui attingere. Infine, un testo utile di riferimento organizzato come un dizionario dei termini gastronomici italiani è *The Oxford Companion to Italian Food* di Gillian Riley.

Attenzione! Cucinare dei piatti nell’ambito di un’istituzione scolastica o universitaria non è sempre facile o possibile. Devono essere tenuti in considerazione una serie di fattori: quale tipo di strutture si hanno a disposizione nell’istituzione dove s’insegna (classi multimediali e cucine at-

trezzate, oppure solo un fornello portatile), se si hanno stoviglie e tutta l’attrezzatura necessaria per cucinare, se si hanno fondi per acquistare i prodotti alimentari, se si ha il supporto dell’amministrazione, o anche a chi ci si può rivolgere per avere informazioni sul tipo di assicurazione in caso di danni a cose o persone. Insomma, quando si cucina, a scuola o all’università, sono tanti gli elementi da considerare e da pianificare in anticipo, e questi possono variare da istituzione a istituzione e da zona a zona.

In ogni caso, una volta valutata la fattibilità del progetto e fatta una lista dei piatti possibili, magari cercando di coprire la penisola da nord a sud, come si procede? Ci si deve chiedere per quale livello concepire dei moduli gastronomici inclusivi di certe strutture grammaticali, di un certo vocabolario e anche di una parte pratica, che vede appunto la preparazione dei piatti scelti e la loro degustazione. Per ogni piatto selezionato, si deve pensare alla regione, al contesto storico-culturale (com’è nato e quando, per quali fasce della popolazione era inizialmente destinato, come si è evoluto nel tempo e, se possibile, com’è stato trasformato oltre oceano o altrove). Per ogni piatto si deve anche tenere presente che uno degli obiettivi è insegnare agli studenti la lingua e la cultura attraverso i sensi, e come tutti e quattro le abilità linguistiche debbano essere incluse. Inoltre, si deve tener conto degli obiettivi di apprendimento e di eventuali attività che possono essere ulteriormente sviluppate, e delle 5C dell’*American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, World-Readiness Standards)*: comunicazione (C: *Communication*), culture (C: *Cultures*), connessioni (C: *Connections*), paragoni (C: *Comparisons*) e comunità (C: *Communities*).

Dopo queste prime riflessioni, offerte anche come guida a chi intenda sviluppare dei moduli linguistici simili nelle proprie classi di lingua, è tempo adesso di condividere un esempio di modulo sviluppato in un primo semestre d’italiano, il quale copre almeno un paio di settimane, con incontri bi-settimanali e con un approccio gastronomico di tipo pratico e sensoriale. Non c’è bisogno di ricordare che ogni attività può essere adattata e ampliata in base alle conoscenze linguistiche degli studenti, alle ore di lezioni settimanali e alle strutture istituzionali disponibili (a questo proposito, si offrono esempi di possibili ampliamenti).

LE CLASSI DI LINGUA TRA STRUTTURE, CULTURA ED ESPERIENZA SENSORIALE

Prima di tutto, è opportuno sottolineare come l'intero modulo privilegi l'approccio culturale (C: *Cultures*) e quello comunicativo (C: *Communication*), i cui livelli possono ovviamente essere adattati in base alle conoscenze degli studenti. L'obiettivo del modulo è di sviluppare una competenza linguistica nei discenti attraverso l'uso di situazioni di vita reale e di testi autentici in cui sia richiesto uno scambio orale. L'approccio metodologico è quello definito come *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) realizzato attraverso *Task-Based Instruction* (TBI) (Brandl 5-22; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 115-130, 149-163) che, tra gli altri principi, promuove un apprendimento attraverso il fare (*learning by doing*), come ricorda Klaus Brandl (12). Per quanto riguarda l'impianto teorico della cultura contestualizzata nell'ambito dell'insegnamento della L2, si rimanda specificamente al testo di Claire Kramsch, *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*.

In ogni caso, prima ancora d'iniziare il modulo in aula, è importante far condurre agli studenti una ricerca al di fuori di questa. La ricerca può essere condotta individualmente oppure in gruppi di due o tre studenti, i quali sono invitati ad individuare gli esempi più significativi della gastronomia italiana, i principali pasti della giornata e gli orari in cui questi vengono consumati, le strutture dei pasti (antipasti, primi, secondi e contorni, dolci) e le eventuali differenze tra giorni feriali, festivi e celebrazioni particolari, e tra pranzi e cene. Una volta eseguita questa prima ricerca, gli studenti devono essere incoraggiati a paragonare i risultati con la realtà in cui vivono e questo per spingerli a riflettere sulle differenze culturali. In questo modo, gli studenti iniziano a sperimentare l'importanza di paragonare, per esempio, la cultura italiana con quella americana o, specificamente, con quella italo-americana (C: *Comparisons*).

Un ampliamento della ricerca potrebbe coinvolgere la contestualizzazione della gastronomia italiana sia a livello mondiale che a livello nord-americano. Soprattutto per quanto riguarda la seconda parte, è importante ricordare agli studenti che la cucina italiana in Italia e la cucina italiana all'estero (inclusi gli Stati Uniti) non sono esattamente la stessa cosa, e che la seconda è piuttosto un adattamento della prima ad una realtà altra. Proprio per questo, gli studenti potrebbero essere sollecitati a identificare le differenze, e magari a ricercare le ragioni e le radici storiche dei vari

piatti in libri di storia, antropologia, sociologia, scienze politiche o economia. In base alle specializzazioni degli studenti, questi possono facilmente portare avanti la ricerca nelle discipline di loro competenza, cercando di connetterle con la lingua e la cultura italiana (C: *Connections*).

Nella fase di ricerca, può essere inoltre richiesta un’attività che porti gli studenti nelle comunità di appartenenza. In questo caso, gli studenti scelgono un ristorante italiano o una pizzeria della zona in cui vivono e scaricano il menu da internet (o ne recuperano uno direttamente dal locale). Allo stesso tempo, devono anche cercare un menu simile di un ristorante italiano in Italia e confrontare i due menu, rispondendo ad alcune domande inerenti ai tipi di piatti presenti nei due locali e al costo medio di ciascuno di loro (l’utilizzo dei tassi di cambio tra euro e dollaro può essere un’attività stimolante a cui non tutti sono abituati). Un ulteriore ampliamento che soddisfa i requisiti dell’*Experiential Learning* (apprendimento pratico) è far intervistare i proprietari di ristoranti, pizzerie e perfino di supermercati italiani per raccogliere informazioni sulla storia, sulla filosofia, sui prodotti (se acquistati dall’Italia oppure negli Stati Uniti), sul tipo di clientela che frequenta il locale e il negozio, e così via. Si è sperimentato questo tipo di attività in una classe di cultura e civiltà italiana in inglese, e gli studenti sono rimasti così entusiasti che è ormai parte dei requisiti. E poiché quest’attività è ottima per sviluppare delle relazioni con la comunità locale (C: *Communities*), vi è l’intenzione da parte di chi scrive d’introdurla anche nei corsi di lingua italiana come un requisito obbligatorio.

In ogni caso, una volta conclusa la ricerca al di fuori dell’aula, è opportuno che gli studenti condividano i risultati con l’intera classe, incoraggiando una sessione di domande e risposte, magari chiedendo un minimo di tre domande a chi presenta da parte del pubblico. In base al livello di conoscenza della lingua, le presentazioni possono essere condotte in inglese o in italiano, e rappresentano la base culturale per costruire le attività linguistiche e pratiche successive. Per motivi di spazio, in questo contributo si offre un solo esempio di modulo che può essere sviluppato nelle due settimane successive alle presentazioni, durante le quali si lavora in classe su un piatto semplice e veloce come gli *spaghetti alla carbonara*, che può essere riprodotto dagli studenti anche a casa e che è sempre mol-

to apprezzato, risultando quello che ha raccolto il maggior numero di consensi tra gli studenti del corso *Italian Food Culture in Practice*.

Inutile dire che una volta scelta la pietanza su cui lavorare, sarebbe consigliabile far condurre agli studenti una breve ricerca sulla stessa, che in questo caso specifico sarà esattamente sugli spaghetti alla carbonara, incluse le sue origini, che tra l’altro non sono del tutto chiare, e la regione di provenienza. Se il tempo a disposizione lo permette, o se s’intende dilatare le settimane di copertura del modulo, possono essere condotte ulteriori ricerche e sviluppate altre attività. Può essere fatta, per esempio, una ricerca su Roma e sul Lazio, sulla loro storia, la politica e la cucina, solo per citare alcune opzioni. Inoltre, poiché il piatto è un primo a base di pasta, un incontro potrebbe essere dedicato alle origini della pasta e ai suoi sviluppi a livello italiano e internazionale, inclusa l’industria alimentare e le esportazioni, collegando così discipline diverse, incluse quelle economiche.

E ancor prima di entrare nel merito dell’esperienza pratica e sensoriale, si possono introdurre delle attività specificamente dedicate alle abilità linguistiche, come la lettura e la comprensione della storia della carbonara estratta e adattata dal sito del *Carbonara Club*. Assieme al paragrafo riprodotto in Appendice, si possono fornire delle domande di comprensione, che possono variare in base al livello degli studenti. Inoltre, è possibile estrarre dallo stesso sito del *Carbonara Club* alcuni passi che possono essere letti in classe, chiedendo poi agli studenti di decidere se alcune affermazioni relative ai passi scelti siano vere o false, oppure se le informazioni siano fornite nel testo letto oppure no, o anche chiedendo di comporre alcune frasi in italiano sulla base della comprensione orale.

Una volta completate queste attività, si procura la lista degli ingredienti degli spaghetti alla carbonara, offrendo sia la ricetta tradizionale che quella vegetariana con le zucchine tagliate alla julienne al posto del richiesto guanciale: pasta, olio EVO, guanciale (nella maggior parte dei casi, si userà la pancetta al posto del guanciale, se questo non è disponibile sul mercato locale), uova, pecorino romano grattugiato, sale e pepe. I vari ingredienti devono essere messi a disposizione degli studenti per essere osservati, annusati e assaggiati. Sulla base di questo “incontro” con gli ingredienti, gli studenti descrivono la loro esperienza sensoriale, ovviamente con il supporto di un’apposita lista di aggettivi. Per guidarli, si possono

porre domande su tutti gli ingredienti, partendo dall’olio di cui va indagata la sigla EVO: gli studenti sanno cosa significa un tale acronimo? Usano l’olio EVO a casa? Se no, quale olio usano per cucinare? Si possono ovviamente incoraggiare gli studenti a formulare altre domande per ampliare la riflessione e indagare la conoscenza personale dei vari ingredienti. Quindi si chiede di mettere in moto i sensi della vista, dell’olfatto, del gusto e del tatto: come si è detto, gli studenti sono invitati ad osservare l’olio, ad annusarlo, a toccarlo e ad assaggiarlo:

Com’è l’olio? Che aspetto ha? Che profumo ha? Di cosa sa? Che consistenza ha? È diverso dall’olio usato a casa? Se sì, in cosa si diversifica?

Agli studenti si può richiedere una descrizione orale dell’olio, oppure di scrivere delle frasi sullo stesso, le quali possono essere scambiate tra due studenti in un lavoro di revisione paritaria (*peer-review*) al fine di verificare che le strutture grammaticali di base, incluso l’accordo verbo-soggetto e l’accordo degli aggettivi, siano state ben comprese. In un secondo tempo, la condivisione può essere aperta all’intera classe.

Dopo quest’attività, si può far completare un’attività pratica tradizionale, ovvero il completamento della ricetta attraverso la coniugazione di alcuni verbi all’infinito. Non dimentichiamoci che quest’esempio di modulo è relativo ad un primo semestre d’italiano, quando gli studenti stanno ancora imparando le strutture di base della lingua. In ogni caso, in base al livello, può essere usato il presente, che ovviamente aiuta ad introdurre l’imperativo, oppure l’imperativo stesso, e si può anche far trasformare, successivamente, i verbi al passato prossimo e al futuro. Qui di seguito proponiamo l’adattamento della ricetta degli spaghetti alla carbonara (“Spaghetti alla carbonara,” *Il cucchiaino*) dal sito del noto manuale di cucina, *Il cucchiaino d’argento*:

*Ingredienti:*

- 500 g di spaghetti
- 200 g di guanciale (o pancetta)
- 4 uova
- 30 g di pecorino (romano) grattugiato
- olio
- sale
- pepe

*Esecuzione ricetta: facile*

*Tempo di preparazione: 20 minuti*

*Tempo di cottura: 10 minuti*

*Calorie: 859*

*Porzioni: 4*

*Procedimento*

In un tegame voi \_\_\_\_\_ (*fare*) rosolare il guanciale a cubetti. Quando il guanciale \_\_\_\_\_ (*avere*) preso colore, \_\_\_\_\_ (*eliminare*) il grasso e \_\_\_\_\_ (*conservare*) un cucchiaino di questo. \_\_\_\_\_ (*lasciare*) intiepidire. Intanto, in una zuppiera \_\_\_\_\_ (*sbattere*) le uova con il grasso del guanciale, il pecorino grattugiato e abbondante pepe macinato al momento.

\_\_\_\_\_ (*lessare*) gli spaghetti al dente, \_\_\_\_\_ (*sgocciolate*) la pasta, \_\_\_\_\_ (*trasferire*) gli spaghetti nella zuppiera assieme al guanciale e \_\_\_\_\_ (*girare*) il tutto energicamente. \_\_\_\_\_ (*servire*).

Dopo la condivisione della ricetta, s’inizia la preparazione vera e propria degli spaghetti alla carbonara. Dall’esperienza, il modo migliore è dividere la classe in gruppi e assegnar loro le varie fasi della preparazione. Una volta che gli spaghetti alla carbonara sono pronti, si ripete l’attività dell’esperienza sensoriale, chiedendo agli studenti di descriverla.

Come sono gli spaghetti alla carbonara? Che aspetto hanno? Che profumo hanno? Di cosa sanno? Che consistenza hanno?

Può anche essere fruttuoso far loro descrivere i suoni che hanno accompagnato la preparazione di questo piatto tradizionale e quelli che si sono uditi durante la condivisione della pietanza con la classe, mettendo così in moto anche il senso dell’udito. Alla fine dell’esperienza sensoriale, si può certamente richiedere agli studenti di scrivere in italiano una pagina di diario in cui descriveranno il loro percorso di conoscenza degli spaghetti alla carbonara e questo per sviluppare ulteriormente l’abilità della scrittura. I diari possono anche venire raccolti e distribuiti tra gli studenti, mentre un ampliamento comunicativo può certamente includere la discussione dei diari con una sessione di domande e risposte.

Un altro ampliamento possibile riguarda l’inclusione di un video clip tratto dal film *Un americano a Roma* di Steno (1954). Prima della visione, può essere mostrata una foto dell’attore romano Alberto Sordi (Nando Mericoni nel film) mentre mangia i famosi “maccaroni”:



Agli studenti può essere chiesto di descrivere la foto, d’immaginare cosa sia avvenuto prima della scena e cosa succeda dopo che Nando ha mangiato gli spaghetti. Sulla foto, può essere aperta una discussione, dividendo prima la classe a coppie o in piccoli gruppi, e poi aprendo la discussione all’intera classe. Quindi può essere mostrata la scena del film (con o senza sottotitoli), dalla presentazione di Nando fatta dalla voce narrante fino alla scena vera e propria degli spaghetti (in totale: 00:4:10 – 00:13:27), e può essere proposta una serie di domande di comprensione linguistica e culturale. Quindi può essere interessante paragonare quello che era stato supposto dagli studenti sulla base dell’immagine e quello che invece accade realmente nel film, il cui script è stato pubblicato da Alberto Pallotta. Inoltre, agli studenti può essere chiesto di produrre una piccola composizione scritta sulla scena del film, anche analizzando la probabile esperienza sensoriale di Nando (in base ai gesti e alle espressioni del viso) e paragonandola alla propria dopo aver mangiato gli spaghetti alla carbonara. Il film può anche essere assegnato da guardare interamente a casa poiché, ad oggi, è disponibile su YouTube. Sul film completo possono anche essere sviluppate delle attività linguistiche e culturali in grado di suscitare discussioni vivaci tra gli studenti, specialmente se ci si concentra sulle differenze gastronomiche e culturali tra l’Italia e gli Stati Uniti, di cui il personaggio di Nando è un fanatico. In ogni caso, questi ampliamenti sul film *Un americano a Roma* vanno oltre gli obiettivi

di questo contributo e si rimanda la discussione pedagogica sul film di Steno ad un articolo attualmente in preparazione da parte di chi scrive.

#### CONCLUSIONI

Come si è visto, questo percorso nella lingua e nella cultura italiana attraverso la gastronomia, alla fine “cucinandole,” ha avuto una gestazione lunga, che ha incluso diverse fasi, tra cui una sperimentazione in un corso insegnato in inglese e un lavoro seminariale condiviso con i colleghi. L’obiettivo che ci proponevamo era d’introdurre nelle classi di lingua un apprendimento attraverso l’esperienza pratica (*learning by doing*) e l’utilizzo di testi autentici, che rispecchiasse l’approccio comunicativo. Per di più, soprattutto dopo aver verificato il successo del corso *Italian Food Culture in Practice* tra gli studenti, che lo hanno definito se non il migliore, uno dei migliori frequentati nei loro anni universitari, quest’approccio pedagogico nelle classi di L2 aveva e ha l’obiettivo di coinvolgere un maggior numero di studenti e appassionarli alla lingua e alla cultura italiana. Se pubblicizzato anche a livello di social media, si ritiene che un approccio pedagogico che coinvolga la preparazione e la degustazione di alcuni piatti della tradizione regionale italiana possa contribuire a promuovere maggiormente i corsi di lingua e di cultura (e gli stessi programmi).

Se entriamo nello specifico, alla fine del modulo sugli spaghetti alla carbonara presentato in questo contributo, gli studenti avranno soddisfatto le 5C dell’ACTFL e avranno utilizzato le quattro abilità linguistiche, ampliando il vocabolario e la conoscenza di alcune strutture grammaticali. Avranno usato l’italiano scritto e orale per descrivere gli ingredienti, il processo di preparazione e la degustazione di questo famoso piatto tradizionale. Avranno imparato qualcosa sulla storia e sulla cultura regionale gastronomica italiana e, in questo caso particolare, di Roma e del Lazio. Cucinando loro stessi gli spaghetti alla carbonara, avranno imparato delle abilità pratiche che si porteranno dietro oltre le pareti dell’aula universitaria e perfino dopo la laurea. Ma soprattutto, gli studenti e l’insegnante avranno avuto un’esperienza sensoriale che avrà reso il viaggio nella lingua e nella cultura italiana molto più... appetitoso!

APPENDICE

“La carbonara, come tante altre ‘invenzioni’ importanti della storia, ha origini incerte, e comunque piuttosto recenti; i libri di cucina con oltre cinquant’anni sulle spalle non parlano di nulla del genere. Secondo alcuni, il nome deriva da un ‘carbonaro’ (cioè uno spazzacamino) che, una volta in pensione, apre un’osteria a Roma e inizia a proporre un piatto simile all’attuale, chiamato appunto Carbonara in onore alla sua precedente professione. Secondo altri, la Carbonara nasce appena finita la guerra, con l’arrivo degli americani in Italia e la conseguente ampia disponibilità di bacon e uova, che stimola la naturale unione degli ingredienti alla pasta. Nel novembre 2005, il mensile enogastronomico *Vie del Gusto* invece formula un’altra ipotesi: “Polesine, la carbonara nasce qui,” ‘strilla’ la rivista in copertina, e sostiene la tesi che invece tutto accade nel Polesine, esattamente centottantasette anni fa... Sembra poi che a Fratta, in provincia di Rovigo, durante il Risorgimento, nell’Ottocento, un gruppo di Carbonari, nei (pochi) attimi di tranquillità disponibili in quei momenti di aspirazione alla libertà dell’Italia, sono abituali ospiti alla buona tavola della nobildonna Cecilia Monti. E anche che all’*Osteria delle Tre Corone*, locanda dell’epoca arrivata sino a noi, si tengono le riunioni segrete dei Carbonari. Da qui si sostiene che la Carbonara nasce nel Polesine. Una cosa è certa: oggi la carbonara non si trova solo a Roma, ma anche in buona parte dell’Italia, nei ristoranti – italiani e non – delle capitali europee, da Londra a Parigi, da Amsterdam ad Oslo, e addirittura a Tokio e a Bali. Come si legge nel menu del ristorante *Ambiente*, a Praga, si tratta della preparazione preferita in assoluto della pasta!” (adattato da “La storia della carbonara,” *Carbonara Club*).

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# SEXISM AND GENDER STEREOTYPES IN ITALIAN LANGUAGE COURSES: NO, GRAZIE!

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*“Oggi la parità di diritti passa  
per il riconoscimento  
– anche attraverso la lingua –  
della differenza di genere”.*  
Cecilia Robustelli

## Background

There are many instructors of world languages who may have happened to hear someone state that teaching a language is an easy task, particularly if the instructor is a native speaker of the language. In other words, according to the so-called *immaginario collettivo*, professors of languages and culture simply pass some sort of ‘natural’ knowledge they have had since birth on to their students.<sup>1</sup> If it is true that very often in Italian departments and programs around the world, scholars that teach both language and content classes are the majority, it must be remarked that teaching a language has little to do with technical skills and that, on the contrary, it is a sophisticated art form. Like other subjects, it requires research, dedication and innovation, not only to achieve academic excellence as scholars, but also to be successful teachers in the classroom. Professors who teach both language and content classes must work on both their pedagogical and scholarly research, and sometimes the two happen

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<sup>1</sup> At the *Italian Language and Culture Conference: Innovation in Italian Programs and Pedagogy* held at Georgetown in Washington, DC in October 2017, participants debated on the role of scholars of Italian language in American universities. Delegates expressed concerns about the way they are perceived in the academic context and the difficulties encountered in language departments where, very often, important decisions concerning language classes are taken by tenured faculty who do not teach the subject. Over the last few years several universities have recognized the important role played by non-tenure track faculty members, including many language teachers, and have created professorial paths also for them. This is the case at the University of Virginia, where PhD holders with a 3-year contract have the Assistant Professor General Faculty title and can be promoted to Associate and Full Professorships over the course of their careers. On the challenges that teaching practice imposes today see Luiz Carlos Balga Rodrigues, “The Education of the Foreign Language Teacher in the Twenty-First Century: Between Old Pressure and New Challenges,” *Signum: Estudos da Linguagem*, Vol 2, no 19, 2016, pp. 13-34.

to cross paths, as in the case analysed in this article, in which a project connecting Italian language and gender studies is discussed. Innovating means taking into consideration several new techniques and learning strategies, which include digital education, curricular activities outside conventional class time, and blended courses, to cite just a few examples currently trending in language departments.

When we teach Italian or any other world language, it is vital that we consider how the target language changes over time and how socio-cultural fluctuations affect the language and vice versa. It is important to discuss these changes in the classroom, not only to be innovative or *al passo coi tempi* but also to convey messages of gender equality and social justice to students. When I was a pupil in elementary school in Italy, my teachers used to say “buongiorno ragazzi,” employing the masculine form. Today if a teacher wants to pass a message of gender equality they would say “buongiorno ragazze e ragazzi.” However, not all teachers are keen to do this and are often stuck with using the masculine form to refer to a group of students made up of women and men.<sup>2</sup> Some teachers might also argue that they are simply applying the traditional grammar rule according to which the masculine form is used to address a group of people where at least one man is present. In truth, sexism is inherent in the Italian language and other romance languages such as French and Spanish, and, as a language teacher, endeavouring daily to achieve what I call in this article “linguistic gender equality” is often very challenging. This is due not only to the traditional grammar norms that shape the Italian language, but also to the resistance shown by some language teachers at the high school and university levels.<sup>3</sup> However, since the publication of Alma Sabatini’s *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana* (1987), linguistic gender equality has been progressively promoted and sometimes achieved, at least in theory while in practice many obstacles need to be overcome

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<sup>2</sup> This is true also among colleagues where the formula “carissimi” in emails is used rather than alternative and inclusive options such as “Cari/e tutti/e”, “Carissimi/e” or “Car\* tutt\*”.

<sup>3</sup> It is particularly problematic if students of a target language attend classes with a teacher who would like to promote linguistic gender equality and in the future they take a course with an instructor who is not willing to question traditional grammar rules. The students themselves might be confused and unsure about the correct form to apply.

within and beyond academia.<sup>4</sup> This article focuses on a new project I launched in Spring 2017 in Intermediate Italian (ITAL 2020) at the University of Virginia (UVa) titled “A Gendered Wor(l)d: Grammar, Sexism and Cultural Changes in Italian Language and Society.” The project is a multimodal learning experience that allows students to engage critically with Italian media and to become sensitive to the gendered politics of language. With this essay, I will analyse several strengths and challenges of this new component of the syllabus and trace its future evolution. I also hope to start a debate on teaching Italian with linguistic gender equality, inspiring other colleagues to engage in similar projects.<sup>5</sup>

As a scholar of Italian women’s writing and gender studies whose instructional duties, since the beginning of my doctoral studies, have also included teaching Italian language, I have recently begun to find a way to integrate some of my research interests on gender into my pedagogical tasks in Italian language classes. At UVa I teach both Italian Studies and Women, Gender and Sexuality and I spend many hours in the classroom discussing—and promoting—gender equality with my upper level students. In the past, every time I stepped into the Italian language classroom and had to explain grammar concepts where sexism is inherent in

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<sup>4</sup>Since the publication of the revolutionary analysis by Sabatini on grammar and sexism in Italian Language, a few years after the publication of the ground-breaking *Feminism & Linguistic Theory* by American scholar Deborah Cameron, Italian language scholars in the area of sociolinguistics and gender have been debating this subject. Very recently Cecilia Robustelli (University of Bologna), one of the leading academics in this area, in collaboration with a group of journalists proposed a grammar model to follow in *Donne, Grammatica and Media* (2014) which I employ in all my classes and therefore also in the project “Gender and Language” as a form of reference for the students. Furthermore, in one her latest guidelines, Robustelli talks about the obstacles to achieving linguistic gender equality in administrative language. Despite such efforts, there is still much cultural resistance on this subject. See *Linee guida per l’uso del genere nel linguaggio amministrativo*, 2012, Progetto Accademia della Crusca e Comune di Firenze. [https://www.uniss.it/sites/default/files/documentazione/c.\\_robustelli\\_linee\\_guida\\_uso\\_del\\_genere\\_nel\\_linguaggio\\_amministrativo.pdf](https://www.uniss.it/sites/default/files/documentazione/c._robustelli_linee_guida_uso_del_genere_nel_linguaggio_amministrativo.pdf) (18/12/2017)

<sup>5</sup>*gender/sexuality/italy* a well-known scholarly journal in Italian Studies and Women, Gender and Sexuality dedicated an entire issue in 2016 to the intersection between Italian language and gender. Articles are available online: <http://www.gendersexualityitaly.com/journal/issues/gsi-3-2016> (last accessed 16/12/2017). In particular see articles by Ilaria Marotta and Salvatore Monaco, “Un linguaggio più esclusivo. Rischi e asterischi nella lingua italiana” and Michela Baldo, Fabio Corbisiero, and Pietro Maturi, “Ricostruire il genere attraverso il linguaggio: per un uso della lingua (italiana) non sessista e non omotransfobico”.

the rule itself, I felt uncomfortable. I was used to pointing out the characteristic sexism of the Italian language when I came across pertinent examples with my students. However, I had little time to work extensively on it during classes. Over the years, I noticed that some students were very curious and passionate about the socio-cultural changes that are currently undermining traditional Italian society and their relation to the development of the language. How could I help my students question and fight gender stereotypes in my upper level classes, and then in the language course state that the masculine agreement prevails when both sexes are involved? How could I pass a message of gender equality if sexism is part of the Italian language itself? If it is true that some nouns that refer to professions traditionally only performed by men in the past are now widely used in the feminine form, such as *ministra* and *avvocata*, it is still challenging to find textbooks that take this necessary fluctuation of language into consideration.<sup>6</sup> It would be surprising to see the word *casalingo* in a textbook, while *casalinga* is usually mentioned several times. It is often a man who is introduced in textbooks to teach the word *direttore* and a woman who is portrayed as the *mamma italiana* who takes care of all the household duties. Same sex couples are almost non-existent and the portrayal of the traditional family pervades many textbooks teachers use daily, thus suggesting an old—and patriarchal—idea of Italy, often dominated by the Catholic Church and its traditions.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the portrayal of social class and status are often problematic: professions and lifestyles mentioned in textbooks often reflect the upper or middle classes. Together with challenging messages on gender, race, sexuality and social class, issues where inclusion and diversity are rarely taken into consideration, students are constantly bombarded with messages of women’s objectification on television and in the media. What could I do to improve this

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<sup>6</sup> In my language classes, I adopt the guidelines given in *Donne, Grammatica e Media*. A very clear appendix illustrates all the feminine forms of nouns referring to professions; this includes also *medica* and *architetta*.

<sup>7</sup> The idea of Italy as a white and Catholic country is very diffused among North American students. If it is true that Italy has, for a long time, been populated by white people and influenced by the Catholic Church, it is also true that many Italians do not attend church regularly, belong to other religions or are atheists. In this historical time, when the dangerous message of white supremacy has reappeared, it is important to send messages of inclusion and diversity in language classes, to point out that Italy has been evolving, and that society has dramatically changed.

scenario? How could I help students learn the Italian language, avoiding gender stereotypes and achieving linguistic gender equality?

### **A Gendered Wor(l)d: Grammar, Sexism and Cultural Changes in Italian Language and Society**

In 2017, under my guidance, the Italian Program at UVa instituted a multimedia, virtual laboratory for the study of gender in Italian language.<sup>8</sup> The aim of this new course component—offered for Spring 2017 ITAL 2020 (Intermediate Italian Language II) students and soon to be offered to Spring 2018 ITAL2020 classes—is to discuss with students how sexism is inherent in the Italian language. The laboratory focused on how the Italian language has been, and continues to be influenced by socio-cultural changes—particularly as women have started to access traditionally male professions—and how these socio-cultural fluctuations have been changing the language. In 2017, there were 46 students involved in the project. The virtual component of the laboratory consisted of an on-line bi-weekly analysis of widely-read and well-known Italian newspapers (such as *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera*). Every two weeks, students were required to close-read and analyse a number of newspaper headlines, and rewrite them in such a way that avoided any gender stereotypes through language. This task enabled them to strengthen and advance their proficiency in Italian while thinking critically about the socio-cultural issues animating current debates in Italy. Students created a blog page with WordPress to collect the analysed materials.<sup>9</sup> In their blog, they assembled scanned copies of the articles, the rewritten headlines, and their reflections on the project. They were encouraged to comment on each other’s blogs in Italian a number of times during the semester, as well as to upload video and audio clips relevant to the socio-cultural issues addressed/discussed in the articles. They also recorded monologues and dialogues thus reflecting orally on the project. These tasks generated an authentic online archive of sexism in Italian grammar that will be used as a starting point for future developments of the project. Students also

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<sup>8</sup> I am very grateful to my colleague Sarah Annunziato for the support with this activity. Students from her sections of ITAL2020 were also involved in the project.

<sup>9</sup> WordPress is an online program to create blogs, accessible through Collab, the online platform used by the University of Virginia.

presented their work at the end of the semester in the active learning space,<sup>10</sup> projecting their blogs and using a variety of media to showcase the outcome of this new learning experience.<sup>11</sup>

### Goals

While designing this new component of the ITAL2020 syllabus, I kept three main goals in mind. The laboratory should enable students to discuss the socio-cultural changes that currently characterize Italian society in terms of women’s advancement in political and economic terrains, to identify the influence of the media in restyling the Italian language, and to write and speak in Italian without perpetrating gender stereotypes. As I have already pointed out, if traditional textbooks often perpetrate stereotypes and do not help students think critically about the relationship between gender issues and grammar, this project would help them navigate the issue. This multimedia laboratory would give students the opportunity to work in Italian beyond the boundaries of the class textbook and to focus on second language acquisition in a stimulating and authentic way that traces the evolution of Italian grammar through Italian society and vice versa. Students would acquire the knowledge and skills to be able to debate this topic and to develop a better understanding of present-day Italy, as well as gender-related issues. As a secondary goal, the project would help students engage with realistic situations. Jan Herrington, Ron Oliver and Thomas Reeves describe the ideal learning scenario in their article on authentic on-line learning environments as, “courses ... based on complex and sustained scenarios and cases, where students become immersed in problem solving within realistic situations resembling the contexts where the knowledge they are learning can be realistically ap-

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<sup>10</sup> “Active learning is generally defined as any instructional method that engages students in the learning process. [John] Bean (2011) states that active learning classrooms are intentionally designed to incorporate interest-provoking writing and critical thinking activities into courses that encourage inquiry, exploration, discussion, and debate.” These spaces are available at the University of Virginia and I attended a series of workshops to teach in these spaces in 2016. <http://learningdesign.as.virginia.edu/activelearningclassrooms> (last accessed 18/12/2017)

<sup>11</sup> Final presentations took place on April 24. Students were divided into groups of 4-5 members. I am very grateful to Ellen Contini-Morava, Professor of Linguistics Anthropology for her introduction and engagement with my students.

plied.”<sup>12</sup> The addition of this component to ITAL2020 stemmed from this theoretical approach. Finally, the laboratory would be an ideal student-centred learning environment where Arts & Sciences technology specialists and faculty members at UVa could work together to design learning platforms and tasks to maximize student engagement and performance.<sup>13</sup>

### Examples of the Project

With the following two examples about headlines on Virginia Raggi, Mayor of Rome, and Rosella Fiammingo, Olympic athlete, I would like to share some of the material discussed in class with my students.

**EXAMPLE 1:** Leggi i titoli qui sotto, tratti da noti giornali e quotidiani italiani, e riscrivili su Wordpress in modo da rispettare le regole proposte dalla grammatica di Cecilia Robustelli e le giornaliste italiane di G.I.U.L.I.A; correggi eventuali espressioni sessiste, omofobe e razziste. In classe discuteremo le tue scelte. Rifletti anche sulle immagini; ne parleremo in modo approfondito nella discussione.



<sup>12</sup> Herrington, J. A., Oliver, R. G., & Reeves, T., “Patterns of Engagement in Authentic Online Learning Environments”, *Australian Journal of Educational Technology*, vol. 19, no 1, 2003, pp. 59-71.

<sup>13</sup> For this activity I was awarded a small grant and I attended a series of workshops with a group of colleagues working on different projects with an Arts and Sciences technology specialist. I worked closely with Dr. Gail Hunger who helped me out in particular with using the active learning space for the final presentations.

**Contesto:** Virginia Raggi (nella foto) è stata candidata alla carica di sindaca di Roma la scorsa estate ed oggi è la sindaca di Roma; fa parte del Movimento 5 Stelle, un partito che promette di essere diverso dalla politica convenzionale. A Roma prima della sua candidatura c'è stato un grande scandalo chiamato “Mafia capitale” in cui molti politici sono stati coinvolti. Molte persone, stanche degli sprechi di denaro delle precedenti amministrazioni, hanno deciso di votare per Raggi.

**Aiuto:** la parola “bambola” significa:

Pupazzo di materiale vario rappresentante una bambina o una donna, usato come giocattolo soprattutto femminile.

Donna o ragazza bella, formosa, appariscente SIN pupa: *che bambola!*

Andare/Essere in bambola significa “perdere lucidità”, “non capire più niente”

**Correggi il titolo:** “Roma in bambola”

**Correggi il sottotitolo:** “è il primo sindaco donna della storia capitolina”

**Cosa pensi del fotomontaggio con la bambola e la faccia di Virginia Raggi?**

**EXAMPLE 2:** Leggi i **titoli** qui sotto, tratti da noti giornali e quotidiani italiani, e riscrivili sul tuo e-portfolio in modo da rispettare le regole proposte dalla grammatica di Cecilia Robustelli e le giornaliste italiane di G.I.U.L.I.A.; correggi eventuali espressioni sessiste, omofobe e razziste. In classe discuteremo le tue scelte.

MERAVIGLIE

## Rossella Fiamingo, argento a Rio e oro in bikini: le foto da urlo, lato B disegnato col compasso / Guarda

07 Agosto 2016

Commenti

N. commenti 5



:-D 10 >:( 45 :-0 2 :-(: 27

aaa

ARTICOLI CORRELATI

ARTICOLO  
Ciclismo femminile,  
bronzo per l'azzurra



**Contesto:** Rossella Fiamingo è una bravissima schermitrice italiana. Ha vinto la medaglia d’argento ai giochi olimpici di Rio in Brasile l’estate scorsa. L’articolo è tratto da *Il Corriere della sera*, un quotidiano molto noto e letto in Italia.

**Aiuto:** Ecco alcune parole che potrebbero aiutarti. “**Bikini**” è il termine che in italiano usiamo per indicare il costume a due pezzi portato al mare o in piscina dalle ragazze e dalle donne. “**Lato B**”, espressione colloquiale per descrivere il fondoschiena, soprattutto quello femminile. “**Da urlo**” è modo colloquiale per esprimere un apprezzamento. Il “**compasso**” è uno strumento che si usa in geometria.

**Correggi il titolo!** Se lo ritieni necessario, puoi omettere delle parole.

**Rifletti:** Perché il titolo originale è offensivo?

In both cases, students found the titles offensive and changed them. Considering the first example with Virginia Raggi, one student suggested: “Il Tempo ha scritto un titolo sessista sulla sindaca Raggi e l’ha mostrata come una bambola. Secondo me, il titolo “Roma in bambola” dev’essere qualcosa completamente diversa come, ad esempio, “la Roma della Raggi.” Il sottotitolo può facilmente cambiare da “è il primo sindaco donna della storia capitolina” a “è la prima sindaca della storia capitolina.” “Non mi piace il fotomontaggio della bambola con la faccia di Raggi. Invece di dare enfasi alla politica, il giornale si focalizza nel fatto che lei è una donna, come se essere una donna in questo settore fosse automaticamente un problema o una barzelletta [...]” With this short paragraph, the student answered all of my questions and raised good points for the discussion in class. Concerning the second entry another student commented: “Un altro titolo sessista da un giornale molto letto in Italia: *Il Corriere della Sera*. L’articolo si intitola “Rossella Fiamingo, argento a Rio e oro in bikini: le foto da urlo, lato B disegnato col compasso.” Invece di apprezzare le sue abilità come schermitrice, questo giornale la giudica per il suo corpo. Si può scrivere invece “Rossella Fiamingo, argento a Rio per l’Italia!” e forse un sottotitolo come “Guarda le foto dalla gara!” Avete visto gli emoji sulla sinistra della pagina? 45 persone hanno votato >:( che vuol dire furioso/a e solo 10 persone hanno votato ☺ che vuol dire contento/a. Spero che il giornale abbia capito il messaggio”. Similarly another student said: “Il titolo

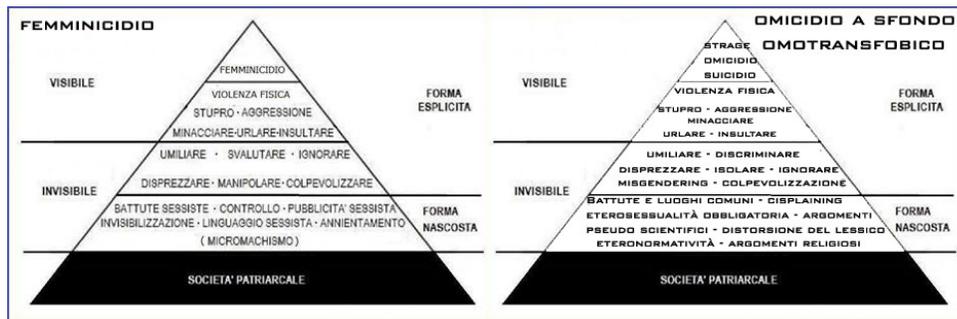


ies of Italian, others have finally reached their last semester of the language and are not interested in additional projects that require dedication beyond regular class time. I asked my students to express their ideas on the project in my teaching evaluations and some of them took the time to give me feedback. One student said: “I enjoyed the class and Professoressa Calamita! I really enjoyed the Gender and Language Studies were integrated into the coursework!” However, another one wrote: “The gender and language project was interesting at first, but by the time we had the final project assigned, it became too repetitive. I think it is important to be aware of sexism in the media but after doing 4 activities on it, the final presentation was time consuming.” These two extracts exemplify well the aspects I have just explained, particularly the lack of interest in working outside the conventional timeframe. Keeping these suggestions in mind, in Spring 2018, I will eliminate some online grammar exercises that students were required to do before class in an effort to give more time and space to the project. Furthermore, I will not ask students to upload copies of their work to the e-portfolio, an online diary that we use in almost all UVa language classes; while it is a very good idea to keep all of their compositions and cultural projects in one place, it is also true that students spend too much time scanning and uploading them. By applying these two simple steps, I hope to create more space for the Language and Gender project. Classes have usually 16/18 students and the level of the language varies. Some, despite their interest, were not linguistically ready to work on this project, lying somewhere between C+ and B. Those belonging to the group between A and B+ however, did not have many difficulties in successfully completing the activities. Another important challenge I faced while proposing this project in ITAL2020 has something to do with the topic itself. While many were very curious about the fluctuation of the language, others seemed not to be so enticed by the subject matter. A final barrier is to find colleagues who are keen to participate in this project and believe in linguistic gender equality. I was fortunate to collaborate with Sarah Annunziato who also tested my project in her two sections of ITAL2020 and supported my idea with insightful suggestions. Ultimately, my hope is that students who complete the project will be able to apply what they learn in their future courses of Italian language, literature and culture.

### What is next?

I will present my experience of this project to other members of the Institute of World Languages at UVa to suggest the integration of this project into their courses. As in Spring 2017, in Spring 2018 I will invite Spanish, Italian and Portuguese colleagues to attend student presentations in the active learning space at the end of the semester, with a view to building similar components into other courses, such as ITAL3010/3020, or SPAN 3010/3020. Further down the line, a Center for the Study of Languages, Gender and Sexism could be established and involve different courses and scholars (particularly in sociolinguistics) from across the College of Arts and Sciences and beyond, strengthening the collaboration between several language Departments and the Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality. I am planning to have a website where selected students’ projects and our findings are showcased to the UVa languages community and beyond. Ideally, in the future one of our majors in Italian could help build this website. The website will become central to further developing the project in the coming years and to having all of the materials available in one place.

### Conclusion



These pyramids on gender violence show that using sexist language is among the invisible tools, together with sexist advertisements for example, which normalize femminicide, rape and sexual abuse in patriarchal culture.<sup>14</sup> As a feminist scholar and teacher of Italian, I am committed to conveying messages of gender equality to my students that can be applied not only in the language classroom, but also in their lives. The pro-

<sup>14</sup> Image from <https://abbattoimuri.wordpress.com/> (last accessed 15/01/2018).

ject “A Gendered Wor(l)d” aids in this task and allows me to shape their understanding of the intersections between language, patriarchy and feminism. At this historical time, in which violence on women is being publicly advertised, but also called out, it is important to give our students the instruments to question social injustices. Furthermore, this project enhances their knowledge of Italian culture, of topics that are characterizing present-day debates in Italy while at the same time developing their language skills. In language classes, professors have the opportunity to convey messages of gender equality and social justice and I have outlined just one example of many on how to integrate these topics into language teaching. It is also further proof that teaching a language has little to do with being a native speaker of the target language, but requires sophisticated skills including research on language pedagogy, and on the culture and literature of Italy.

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PREPARING FOR LIFE AND CAREER IN THE 21ST CENTURY  
A Role for Italian Courses from a Multilingual, Multicultural,  
Interdisciplinary, and Critical Perspective

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**Introductory Comments**

In his keynote address at the Italian Language and Culture Conference on Innovation in Italian Programs and Pedagogy, Giuseppe Cavatorta (2018) delivered an illuminated reflection on the status of the teaching of Italian. While acknowledging the steady decline in the study of Italian that started in 2009, he also identified the significant initiatives that educational institutions are undertaking to revitalize their offerings. A common trait across many of the initiatives is increasing the marketability of Italian: recasting Italian as attractive to students and their families by making its value for their future lives and careers visible. Some successful initiatives, exemplary in this direction, stress the instrumental usefulness of Italian: by capitalizing on Made in Italy and Italian businesses at Montclair University (Fiore, 2018); by offering high-visibility internship opportunities at DePaul University (Daniela Cavallero), at Montclair University (Fiore, 2018), and at Prospect High School (Cavatorta, 2018); by training students in audiovisual translation at Montclair (Fiore, 2018); by strengthening the connection to other subjects through teaching appointments shared with other departments at Brown University (Abbona-Sneider, 2018) or with interdisciplinary offerings, including Italian for STEM disciplines, at Duke University (Fellin, 2018).

These remarkable new models project a modern and dynamic view of Italy and the Italian language. In this paper I will focus on a different thread of possible initiatives, where the instrumentality of learning Italian is not specific to a certain career path of specialization; rather, its instrumentality is in making meaning, as a formative tool for thought, critical analysis, and knowledge. I will suggest ways to design courses that capitalize on the immense potential of studying Italian with respect to the goal of learners becoming flexible, critical thinkers who thrive in complex and dynamically changing contexts. The marketability of Italian, in this case, is within a multilingual and multicultural view of the critical skills

that are vital for the job market of the future and for creating literate, active, and engaged members of society in the 21st century.

Stating that languages are a key part of preparing for a career in the contemporary world is not novel, but arguments in favor of language learning have often centered on language use for practical purposes and intercultural communication. ACTFL 21st Century Skills Map (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006) emphasizes the capability to interact with the world community. It details language knowledge as spanning across the domains of Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. Two components of the document are particularly relevant to my point: Connections and Comparisons, because of their connection respectively to interdisciplinarity and cultural perspectives. However, I would like to push these concepts further to position the role of learning languages, and specifically Italian, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and for 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills within a multicultural critical framework in which the languages and cultures available to individuals equip them to understand, interpret, and act upon the world around them. My stance extends the idea of multicompetence(s) beyond language proficiency and use. Multicompetence was first theorized by Cook (1991) to indicate the concomitance or knowledge of more than one language in the same individual. Hall, Cheng, and Carson (2006) affirmed the dynamic and socially contingent nature of multicompetence through a usage-based conceptualization (Hall et al., Chen, & Carson, 2006). More recently, Franceschini (2011) revisited the multicompetence theory to refer to the complex, integrative, and context-sensitive use of a highly adaptable multilingual linguistic repertoire. Canagarajah (2010, 2011) further developed the idea of multicompetence by framing multilingual writing as an innovative, strategic, and purposeful exploration of concepts. If we want the study of Italian to be relevant to our students’ lives and to prepare them to be active participants in the professional, civic, and social world, then becoming a speaker of Italian means developing a multicompetence that involves taking on perspectives that are otherwise not accessible, owning new analytical and interpretative frameworks, and acquiring different ways of reasoning. Besides accruing skills and knowledge that are specialized, in this view students enrolled in the Italian course develop broad and critical skills related to their way of thinking. They also leverage their

knowledge of Italian language and culture to act as citizens of a multilingual and multicultural world.

If this is a priority for the Italian curriculum, then in our courses we should deliberately select topics, texts and materials that are thought provoking, that offer perspective and challenge views. In addition, we should present them by asking key questions that will lead students to reflect on their human experience and those of others: make meaning. The value of Italian within an increasingly varied offering of options to students resides within this text selection. Meyer and Land (2003) elaborated the idea of *threshold concepts*, notions that offer a novel way to look at something. Acquiring a threshold concept is transformative in that it offers ways of thinking that were unavailable before. The acquisition of threshold concepts should be a goal of our courses if we want our courses to be valuable. These goals motivated my decision to redesign a Conversation and Composition course for undergraduate college students, a step in the right direction that I hope will serve as an imperfect but promising example and inspiration.

### **Features of the Course**

I will describe a Conversation and Composition course offered at the undergraduate level and conceptualized as a bridge course, open to students who completed the language sequence (comprised of four semesters of language instruction, with the first semester offered as intensive), aimed at preparing them for upper level elective courses in Italian Literature and Cinema. In its essence, Conversation and Composition was born as a skill-building course. Skill building courses can be problematic because they define language skills as an end unto themselves, thus they inherently lack other purposes that are generally expected in a higher education context. Instead, I wanted to recast language as a tool, as a meaning-making tool, where the attention to skills is woven into a solid path focused on content discussion, and language is one of the topics for content discussion. Language is seen as a tool and as an object at the same time. In order to stimulate a reflection on language via language, I adopted the conceptual lens of the mobility of words, languages, ideas, and people.

The skills-building part of the course was centered around three broad genres and three corresponding broad learning units: descriptive,

narrative and argumentative texts. Students were exposed to a variety of model texts for each genre and analyzed how form determined content in those texts, while working on their own writing craft. Each unit culminated in one major final student-written text, the last one being an essay on a topic chosen by each student. Oral skills were developed through debates, class discussions, and various types of presentations. Throughout the semester, mini-language workshops addressed linguistic structures and general skills that were particularly pertinent at specific points in the learning unit.

However, the objective of developing skills was the least visible to the students: lessons were focused on themes and content discussion. All texts and materials were discussed through a common framework throughout the course: the theoretical lens of mobility mentioned above, defined as the mobility of words, languages, ideas, and people. The coursework included different content channels: course materials (written, aural and audiovisual) and guests invited into the classroom; talks and initiatives across languages in the MLL series *Itinerancies*; and events beyond the university walls, created within the city-wide community. Students approached all these channels via the analytical lens of mobility, which functioned as a unifying thread.

*In the classroom: materials and invited guests*

The first learning unit, revolving around descriptive texts, will serve as an example of the course structure. Throughout the unit, students read, listened to, watched, and analyzed texts ranging from pop culture (such as blog posts, video comments or articles on languages and identity, pop songs) to literary texts, used as models of excellence in description or examined for their contributions to an ongoing reflection on itinerant words and languages and their implications for identity. Each analysis of these literary portraits centered around the rhetorical strategies of the author and highlighted connections between the character’s features and the elements that influenced his or her life. In most cases this was achieved by additional readings that cast the model portrait within a complex view of the subject described. The portraits of Fra’ Cristoforo and Gertrude by Alessandro Manzoni were excellent starting points to stress those connections, due to the very apparent links between their life stories, their ap-

pearance, and their personalities. For other texts, supplementary materials offered insights from different vantage points. For example, the analysis of *Ritratto di un amico* by Natalia Ginzburg, in which the writer remembers her friend Cesare Pavese after his tragic death, was complemented by biographical notes, by a video on the places dear to Cesare Pavese, and by an interview of Natalia Ginzburg by Marino Sinibaldi. In the same unit, students attended a theatrical adaptation in English of Calvino’s short stories, performed on campus, and, after reading two of the original stories, reflected upon the implications of the translation, of the transmediality, and of the transposition into a US campus context, besides looking at the texts as models for descriptions. Their reflections were supported by additional readings on the influences of foreign writers on Italo Calvino, a video in which Italo Calvino himself talks about his life, an in-class reading of *L’Antilingua*, and a piece by Guido Davico Bonino in which he remembers his experience learning the job of editor from Italo Calvino at Einaudi (in many ways, all portraits of the author). In sum, throughout the first learning unit, students learned about the craft of descriptive writing while beginning to track the movements of words, languages, ideas, and people, and to notice a thick net of connections and implications of that mobility.

The two subsequent units, centered respectively on narrative and argumentative linguistic functions, followed a similar format and approach. Similarly to the first learning unit, when a company performed a play for the students, these units also involved invited speakers. Alessandra Di Maio, from the University of Palermo was invited to introduce the second unit. She spoke about her curated volume *Migrations/Migrazioni*, a collection of poems by Italian and African authors with texts in Italian and in English. The intervention furthered the reflection on mobility at multiple levels, from the experience of displacement or relocation to the mobility of words and the translation between languages. It also introduced a theme that later became central: migration. The third and final invited guest was Jacqueline Reich, a colleague from Communication and Media Studies and scholar of Italian Cinema, who led a highly engaging class on Bertolucci’s film *L’Assedio*. The involvement of a scholar from another discipline brought breadth, depth and richness to the discussions on mobility, introducing elements specific to the semiotics of cinema.

While the three events—Calvino’s plays and the talks by Alessandra Di Maio and Jacqueline Reich—individually contributed tremendously to the students’ learning experience in the course, their value was further amplified by inserting them within a series of department-wide initiatives open to all students and grouped under the umbrella of *Itinerancies*. Our course was one of several language courses - in Arabic, French, German, Italian, and Spanish - offering events open to students of all courses and programmatically included in all syllabi.

*Outside the classroom: other courses and the City of New York*

The *Itinerancies* series was made possible by Francesca Parmeggiani, who conceived of and coordinated the project, and by the support of a vast range of departments and institutes within the university to attest to the interdisciplinary appeal of the series (African and African American Studies, Communication and Media Studies, Comparative Literature, the Institute of International and Humanitarian Affairs, Latin American and Latino Studies, Modern Languages and Literatures, Political Science, and the Dean of the college). The participating instructors planned and organized events (in English or in the language taught) that related to the theme of *Itinerancies* (movements). All events were open to all students, and instructors either encouraged or prescribed attendance as part of the course description. For Italian conversation and composition students, this translated into a syllabus dense with stimulating initiatives. Some were mandatory (labeled *high priority*), while others were recommended. Students were able to pursue their specific interests and encouraged to rely on these initiatives to identify a final essay topic. The program included film directors Rama Thiaw, Marcello Merletto, and Abe Kasbo, writer Amara Lakhous, various film screenings and a panel discussion.

Creating such a series presented remarkable advantages. From a practical perspective, it gave us all access to university funding that may have not been accessible to such a degree, were the audience limited to one class. From a pedagogical perspective, its contributions were remarkable. First and foremost, the very existence of a multilingual and multicultural series on a theme (*itinerancies*) tightly connected to the main theme of the course (*mobility*) was in itself an example of the mobility of ideas, languages and people. In other words, the series embraced and embodied

the theoretical approach of the course. Furthermore, this abundance of talks, screenings, and events provided countless opportunities to examine the themes from angles and perspectives more closely related to the students’ interests and cultural/linguistic background, since they were free to choose from an extensive menu of options.

The calendar of initiatives within *Itinerancies* was complemented by additional events, hosted in various institutions of the City of New York throughout the semester. Most of these events were listed in the course calendar as optional, but the whole class toward the end of the semester attended a high priority panel discussion hosted by Columbia University. The panel of experts offered a range of disciplinary approaches and perspectives on *Italy and the Euro-Mediterranean Migrant Crisis*. By the time the event took place, the class was deeply invested in the discussion of mobility and each student had found a personal direction for further reflection. The students and I decided to gather for a quick bite right before the evening panel. Spontaneously, each of us brought something that embodied mobility or reminisced about past and current life itineraries, a sign of the shared intellectual experience resulted from the class. While at that moment the path walked in the course made sense, seeing the common thread across the various and diverse course materials examined during the semester was a challenging aspect of the course. The most instrumental tool to achieve a cohesive and coherent view of the course materials was a class blog maintained by the students.

#### *The class blog*

A class blog served the purpose of *tenere il filo conduttore*, keeping the guiding principle clear and seeing the diverse class materials as contributing to an overall, meaningful goal. The blog was managed by the students who, in turn, took the role of leaders. The leader was responsible for writing a blog post that raised an issue in response to the course materials examined in the previous two weeks. He or she had to think of a specific focus and was directed to present issues and raise questions to which all of the other students would respond. The blog logs, in Italian, presented grammar inaccuracies at times, but, in my opinion, the linguistic focus rested on linguistic effectiveness, complexity of the arguments conveyed, and linguistic complexity, more than on accuracy. The class

blog is accessible at <https://goo.gl/sc139K>.

Like most bottom-up initiatives, blogging required some adjustments. The first challenge encountered was that blog logging required a high commitment of time and work, not just for the leader, but also for those engaging in a conversation in response to the initial post. To address this problem, I directed the respondents to provide an engaged response only to one of every two posts, based on their interests; the new load required a more feasible time commitment while preserving a sustained engagement with the content.

A more problematic aspect was finding strategies to enforce a deep and critical reflection of the topics and materials. In response, I discussed my expectations openly, providing examples of good and less than acceptable critical engagement. Although I purposefully limited intruding upon the blog posts, I occasionally added comments, mainly in the form of questions, or requested that a page be revised by adding a second round of responses to further the reflection. Overall, favoring depth over quantity lead to more substantial results toward the goal of developing mobility as a theoretical framework of analysis. From among the others, I would like to share two more specific strategies that sustained that goal.

*Two suggestions: Revisit big pieces and use class presentations as a venue for critical feedback from the group*

Although the effort toward developing mobility as an interpretive lens was sustained in the discussion of each text, two specific activities were particularly important to developing that framework. The first one was reading and discussing a very powerful and profound text twice. We read Mea Michela Mivida's *L'orizzonte della moralità*, for the first time, mid-way through the semester. Simplistically speaking, it is a piece about the encounter with otherness. Students understood the writing at the literal level and learned some basic information about Hannah Arendt, referenced in the reading (Mivida, 2005). With a certain degree of individual variation, students overall grasped the various points Mivida made and the key concepts. During the last class of the semester, I presented the piece again handing out a pristine copy, asking the students to read it in light of the work done during the course. The conversation that followed revealed a much more nuanced and detailed analysis, a leap in the quali-

ty of their understanding, and a clear sense of the ultimate message of the writer - not just the various points made, but the takeaway. This second reading informed their view of everything we had read before, bringing it together in a system that was complex and diversified but also organically connected and meaningful. Allowing time to revisit and reflect on the whole path was a crucial step for the success of the course.

A second practice that was effective in pushing the students to be critical in their textual analyses and rigorous in making their arguments was scheduling, for each student, a 20-25 minute presentation of his or her draft of the final essay. Key elements of this strategy were scheduling the presentations when there was already a developed thesis with points of analysis and arguments (although the essay was still in an early draft stage), and spreading out the presentations over a period of a few weeks, so that each student received feedback from attentive and engaged classmates. The final project for this course was an argumentative essay that examined any topic of interest to the student through the lens of the mobility of words, languages, ideas, objects, or people. One of the requirements was that the essay should rely on at least two textual sources. Since all students, at that point, had developed a solid understanding of the framework, these presentations became the venue for on-point, constructive critical feedback. The improvement from the draft stage to the final version of the essay was remarkable for all students.

#### *Holistic View of Students and Learning*

Even though this course section was centered on the lens of mobility, conversation and composition could be developed with a vast range of content foci and analytical frameworks. What characterizes the course is its critical approach to content that relies on an inductive analysis centered around the whole student, hence inherently interdisciplinary. By “centered on the student,” I refer both to the fact that students inductively derived their conclusions, rather than listening to lectures, and that students had a voice in choosing the direction in which to push the lens of mobility (for example, they led the class blog and they chose the topics for their final essays without any limitations). In this model, knowledge is seen holistically, and disciplinary boundaries cannot apply; students bring their expertise to the course, whether disciplinary or as part of their

background. This is why the course is inherently interdisciplinary and multilingual/multicultural.

Students started the semester by creating a visual representation of their lives, including elements that influenced them, and walked the rest of the class through the visualization, responding to questions from their classmates. They finished it by writing essays on the implications of the translations of a bible verse; on the connotations associated with accents in the United States; on the significance of traveling; on the representation of the female body in social media; on migratory fluxes as resources; and on the connections between Ngozi Adichie and Italo Calvino. This holistic view of knowledge presented challenges in the context of a traditional higher education setting because I often lacked the expertise to guide each student in their research. Students relied on their own expertise, aided by mentors in that field, whether from the Psychology Department or from an Italian professor of Theology. Classmates became experts too, due to their proficiency in Hebrew or Italian dialects. What started as a holistic view of the student and of learning grew into a holistic and organic view of the university community, first via the collaboration of *Itinerancies*, then via the contribution of these informal external advisors as the students wrote their final papers. Mobility became embodied in the course itself and the course became solidly grounded in a view of language learning, skill building, cultural learning, and meaning-making as tightly connected.

#### *Increasing Enrollment*

In conclusion, I would like to return to the initial issue: What can we do to improve the marketability of Italian in higher education? What the various strategies presented by my dedicated colleagues made certain is that marketability does not come to detriment of intellectual quality, quite the opposite. Marketability consists in making the value embedded in learning Italian language and culture visible. A part of that value is connected to specific career paths, another part consists of preparing students with the flexibility, the critical thinking, and the multicompetence they will need to fully participate in the professional and social world for years to come, regardless of their specific career paths. My contribution today elaborates on the latter, providing an example of skills and knowledge

acquirable uniquely in an Italian course that can be transferred and applied for life.

Italian courses are a privileged venue for our students to become multicompetent, strategic users of the resources associated with their knowledge of languages and cultures. Instead of being protectionist, we should embrace multilingualism and multiculturalism and make our courses the site that enables a deep reflection on what it truly means to be multilingual. By doing so, Italian courses also become the venue for deep critical thinking, where assumptions are questioned, inductive work is nurtured, and complex, nuanced ways of reasoning are modeled and validated. Finally, Italian courses become the venue where disciplinary and academic boundaries are crossed, where Italian is the tool to explore knowledge in a truly holistic fashion, making the intellectual meaning of what we do relevant and valuable to the students. For all three threads of work, we are in the privileged position of being able to leverage our tradition and current areas of excellence to offer novel perspectives on the world, drawing from an extremely rich pool of texts. We should select them wisely: the response to decreased enrollment is not lowering the bar; it is raising it.

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## LEARNING WITH TECHNOLOGY

### The Impact of Video Presentations on Italian Oral Skill

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Various scholars of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Foreign Language (FL), including Michael and Elaine Horwitz, Joann Cope, and others, have demonstrated a causal link between student anxiety and an aversion to engaging in traditional oral presentations in the classroom setting.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I offer a method of helping students overcome these anxieties through the innovative integration of new technologies into Italian programs and pedagogy. By offering students a modern and relatable approach to learning Italian, instructors can help ease student anxiety and encourage their participation in, and engagement with, their new language.

Generally, student anxiety stems from inherent discomfort in a second, and for most, new language, in addition to the pressure they feel about presenting in class in front of their peers and their instructor. Considering these challenges that students have to face and the importance of oral practice in SLA, how then do we bridge the divide between student comfort and educational necessity when it comes to the oral presentation? How can we ease the anxiety factor for students who are preparing oral exams and presentations? These considerations led to the idea of having students complete video presentations as final projects in my Italian 102 courses. Students completed this project after performing different task repetitions in class and sometimes timed games.

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<sup>1</sup> Horwitz & Horwitz were the first scholars to study and measure anxiety in classroom. They elaborated the Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a test created to identify the range and degree of foreign language anxiety in Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B. and Cope, J. (1986).

Chastain, K. (1975), "Affective and Ability Factors in Second-Language Acquisition." *Language Learning*, 25: 153–161. In her study, Chastain (1975) found a positive link between anxiety and second language learning, while Aida (1994) studied the negative relationship between anxiety and second language acquisition.

Lindy Woodrow (2006), found a correlation between second language speaking anxiety and speaking performance. She created a second language speaking anxiety scale (SLSAS) that included the significance of the location in a second language learning environment.

Second Language (SL) learners, generally those who are exposed to a FL for the first time, have difficulty fully grasping the grammar and cultural knowledge of a language that is not part of their cultural or linguistic routine. Moreover, when teaching material contains culturally specific themes, learners often fail to understand key cultural concepts because they lack the contextual insight of the language necessary to fully grasp these ideas.<sup>2</sup> A great part of learners' anxiety derives from a combination of factors, including the exposure to a "foreign phonetic sound," which intimidates and demotivates them; the anxiety to perform in front of classmates and their professor; and their fear of the impact of their performance on their overall GPA. According to Horwitz and Cope (1986) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), language anxiety can be awakened by multiple factors, including quizzes and speaking in front of the class. According to Na (2007) anxiety can play a detrimental role in language learning, and high-anxiety students may feel discouraged and attempt to elude class participation. Magdalena Szyszka (2017) also asserts that a relationship between language anxiety and pronunciation learning exists. By engaging with Dalton and Seidlhofer's acquisition theories, Szyszka explains that "L2 pronunciation learning places considerable affective demands upon a learner, and how strongly these demands make themselves felt will depend on a combination of motivation instructional situations, social attitudes, and personality factors, such as anxiety" (Szyszka, 52). Additionally, in combination with Eysenck and Derakshan's study on efficiency theory, Szyszka states that anxiety can negatively affect cognitive processes such as memory, which among other things, is responsible for planning, strategy selection, attention control, as well as the learner's absorption of phonological and visual input (59).

Other studies argue that a certain level of anxiety can actually be beneficial for SL learners – if they are exposed to an environment of repeated-narrative activity and placed under time pressure, it follows, these stud-

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<sup>2</sup> According to Galina Zashchitina and Natalia Moysyak (2017), "Culturally specific texts may require more background knowledge. Those learners who lack sufficient background knowledge or are unable to activate this knowledge may fail to understand the key concepts and grasp the message of the text. High prior knowledge of a subject area or key vocabulary of a text often means higher scores on reading comprehension" (265).

ies suggest, that their fluency can improve.<sup>3</sup> This has proved to be true with video presentations as well. A certain level of anxiety in working with a SL is inherent in the process, and video provides students an outlet to channel that anxiety for the better, without the added pressures of an audience.

While the above-mentioned studies and theories have been utilized to analyze the response of groups of students who were learning English as a Second Language, I believe that all first time learners of a SL show a certain degree of anxiety when they are asked to present orally in front of their peers and professor. In my Italian language courses, I have found that even those students who carry some knowledge of Italian language, derived from an Italian American background for instance, experience a certain degree of anxiety.

Keeping in mind the various theoretical approaches to dealing with anxiety and SLA, and orchestrating the right balance between “good” pressure and “good” anxiety, my approach was to ask my students to prepare video presentations with the purpose of establishing realistic and attainable targets while eliminating one of the main causes of anxiety: the classroom audience. In order to better direct my students in writing their scripts, I relied on Ellis and Yuan’s study on pre-task planning and low-pressure on-line tasks, which they assert can enhance learner output in a written task (Ellis and Fangyuan 2004). Video poses several advantages over live performance, not the least of which is the ability to thoughtfully script yourself multiple times, the opportunity to record and hear your pronunciation over and over again, and to engage in multiple takes, providing students with opportunities both innovative and ‘native’ to their modern digital experiences. By modernizing my pedagogy to reflect the real-world experiences of students while maintaining focus on a core SLA teaching methodology – the oral presentation – students felt liberated from the anxieties often associated with the task of preparing and presenting the traditional presentation, and comfortable enough to experiment with the grammatical and cultural elements of FL learning.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Chau and Boers (2016), learners in particular those in the time-pressure condition, resorted to a high amount of verbatim duplication from one delivery of a narrative to the next. Also, de Jong concludes that repetition with time pressure could benefit fluent production of complex language (2012).

According to Asta Lileikienė and Lina Danilevičienė (2016), by establishing realistic and achievable goals and combining them with a more relaxed language-learning environment, students can achieve better results. In order to establish realistic and achievable objectives and to push students to engage in a pre-task planning process, I did the following:

- Selected a relatable topic for students.
- Established reasonable deadlines to prepare scripts and video presentations.
- Supported knowledge of vocabulary and grammar with apps and tech tools with which students were familiar.
- Enforced narrative and writing repetition.
- Supported pronunciation practice with apps like Vocaroo or Google Voice Recorder.
- Gave students leeway for their creativity.

Every semester I select a topic inherent in Italian culture and explore it throughout the term. For Spring 2017, I picked food. Appropriate as a here-and-now theme, it is also one of the easiest topics for Italian students to engage with. In addition to the plethora of vocabulary it offers, the fact is that the culturally pervasive nature of Italian food in the United States means that the vast majority of students already have a comfort level with these terms, and, whether they realize it or not, a certain amount of prior knowledge of Italian vocabulary. The purpose of the video presentations is to leverage their background knowledge and to utilize it in an active way when learning a SL. In this, schema theory asserts that students will learn through acquisition, activating their subconscious and thus, reinforcing and expanding their prior knowledge.<sup>4</sup> I tried to offer “meaningful learning” to my students so that they could construct and interpret their own learning of Italian language and culture.

In order to absorb vocabulary about food, I used different sources of grammar and vocabulary, including everything from recipes in the cookbook “Buon Appetito: Cucina Regionale!” to YouTube videos from “Giallo Zafferano,” to the app platform Duolingo which has an in-class version. Everything was uploaded on the classroom management software,

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<sup>4</sup>According to Zashchitina and Moysyak (2017), a learner’s conscious focus on form or rules is “learning,” while subconscious focus on content or meaning is “acquisition.”

Moodle, with the purpose of surrounding students with another of their favorite, and familiar elements: technology and digital material.

While recipes proved to be excellent material for grammar and fill-in-the-blank exercises, YouTube and Duolingo proved to be excellent sources for vocabulary and pronunciation activities. Students could listen and watch those videos anytime and anywhere they wanted. As for Duolingo, the system would send reminders to complete daily tasks, effectively gamifying the language learning process. However, unlike traditional game structures that produce competition and thus perhaps too much anxiety, these technologies allow students to “play,” and learn, at their own pace. Students enjoyed it, probably because of the game format.

After 3 weeks of input<sup>5</sup> about food (images, culture, and vocabulary), students were asked to prepare a script for a recipe. Students were given a list of easy recipes to prepare in pairs, and offered the option to prepare something else if they had other recipes in mind.

In order for the script to be acceptable and ready to use for the video presentation, students were asked to first prepare the list of ingredients and verbs used in the script, and to then prepare the script pretending they were on a TV show for a food network. This format combined a number of elements: new grammar and vocabulary acquired through the “games” of YouTube and Duolingo, a single partner with whom they felt comfortable, vocabulary (recipes) and a theme (Italian food) with which they were familiar, and the idea of a cooking show, adding an additional level of familiarity, creativity, and fun to the entire process. Combined with their ability to switch the camera on and off at will and to take as many additional takes and edits as they wanted, the videos were among the most successful task-based projects I have experienced with my students.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In the introduction to the journal *Creating Comprehensible Input and Output*, Bill Van Patten has extensively researched the importance of mental representation for language and how learners hear and see language in a communicative context that students process for meaning. Van Patten calls this type of language *input* (24).

<sup>6</sup> The video presentations now belong to Manhattan College. They can be seen at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLIc8pMA35c&list=PLo0zEFab7i6YBmm8hshPiKneWJ1XCMWMU>.

Traditional instruction<sup>7</sup> of a FL relies too heavily on books, repetition, grammar drills, and the ever-fearful oral presentation. It assumes a world in which information is only tangentially available to students through incidental cultural exposure. However, this is not the world in which today's second and FL learners live. Through YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Duolingo, and a host of entertainment outlets such as Netflix, HBO, and others, today's students are already preconditioned to comprehend other cultures and languages. The trick is simply to help them come to this realization on their own. Language learning remains a challenge for many students, not because they fail to grasp sufficient levels of vocabulary or to absorb enough grammar, but because a FL is too often presented in a format that today's students consider archaic and needlessly intimidating: textbooks, drills, and oral presentations. Of course, these tools remain vital to a SL educator's tool box, and vocabulary and grammar remain the cornerstone elements of learning. Nevertheless, the technological realities of today's world also mean that students are better preconditioned than ever to understand and appreciate a SL. Our job as FL educators is to help them unlock that appreciation, leverage it towards a desire to delve deeply into the language and culture of their choice. By providing students with the appropriate tools, encouragement and support they need to take part in language learning in a manner that seems natural to them, we can help students nurture their abilities better than ever before. This presents unique opportunities to today's instructors.

Video presentations are no longer simply a remote analogue for in-class oral presentations, and, given that anyone who has a cell phone has a video camera, they no longer feel like it is hard work. Today, videos are a natural extension of students' lives, and allow educators to design a curriculum that combines pre-knowledge of culture and language with innovative teaching/learning techniques. This approach effectively turns language learning into a social media experience and improves students' oral skills, adding a new context in which FL instructors can leverage technology to bridge the divide between students and the anxieties they experience during oral presentations.

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<sup>7</sup>Traditional language teaching has been defined as the introduction to grammar structures and vocabulary according to sequenced contents of a textbook (Swan 2005).

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# PRACTICING ITALIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE WITH YOGA AND MINDFULNESS

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**M**otivation and consciousness in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) enhance the benefits of extra-curricular activities in language instruction, as was discussed at the Conference “Italian Language and Culture: Innovation in Italian Programs and Pedagogy” held at Georgetown University in October 2017. In this paper I will pursue a link between Dörnyei’s research (Dörnyei, 2011) on motivational teaching methods, Robinson’s work on consciousness and implicit learning (Robinson, 1996) and my experimental pedagogy in the classroom. As an Italian teacher, I offer school-based yoga classes and mindfulness sessions in my native idiom to college students. The results I have collected over the last 3 years have encouraged me to more fully investigate the connection between physical/mental engagement/relaxation. These activities noticeably facilitate the acquisition of new vocabulary and grammar structures for students, while nurturing the desire to expand their knowledge of Italian and the ability to express their own identity. Studies have proved, indeed, that immersing learners in practical exercises such as acting, watching movies, cooking or singing may help them gain confidence and motivation while mastering or better retaining the L2 (Marini-Maio, 2008), (Borra, 2007).

In the broad context of innovation and pedagogy for language classes, I will show how yoga and mindfulness have the potential to become critically important resources for more effective teaching (Morgan, 2011). In fact, they can enhance students’ motivation and language proficiency in a specific way: on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. This mindful approach embraces multiple disciplines, from applied linguistics to psychology and, although the positive aspects of yoga and meditation are widely recognized nowadays, the field is still quite unexplored.

Debate in SLA theory has already focused on the role of consciousness in L2 development, which also represents the core of mindfulness. As Schmidt has stated, in fact, conscious awareness of the form of input at

the level of ‘noticing’ is a necessary condition for language development to occur (Schmidt, 1995). If the instructions given in Italian during a yoga class or in a meditation session are considered means of meaningful input, therefore, they can play an important role in SLA, as the students have to follow them in order to participate. They certainly contribute to creating favorable conditions in which the L2 develops in the mind of the learners. A positive learning environment is in fact an essential part of SLA, as claimed by the studies of Aslam (Aslam, 1998) (Corder, 1967) (Lee, 2000). Furthermore, the mindful approach facilitates aspects that several SLA researchers have pointed out as pivotal: the important role of ‘consciousness-raising’ (Yip, 1994), ‘input-enhancement’ (Smith, 1991), and ‘focus on form’ (Long, 1991). It is directly through the passage of these learning processes that students internalize the L2 system.

Studies in the field of psychology have also demonstrated that yoga and meditation have a positive effect on the learners. It helps reduce mental stress and their practitioners develop a better quality of concentration after a regular practice (Naveen, 2013). From a scientific point of view, researchers have documented that mindfulness promotes tissue growth in the hippocampus, an area of the brain that is responsible for learning, memory and resilience (Holzel, 2011). Meditation and breathing exercises promote activity in the prefrontal cortex, including planning attention, decision-making, problem-solving and memory (Ireland, 2014). Mindful practice is also linked to a decrease in the reactivity of the amygdala, the part of the brain associated with stress and fight/flight/freeze response (Holzel, 2010). Furthermore, according to recent studies, mindfulness can be a remedy for the “continuous partial attention” (Schwartz, 2011) that is a typical trait of our contemporary society and a consequence of the extensive use of social media.

Some of the poses have the benefit of increasing the ability to concentrate, which is important especially for people who have to sit for a long time. Yoga and mindfulness have millions of followers all over the world, and in 2014 the United Nations established June 21<sup>st</sup> as the International Day of Yoga.<sup>1</sup> Advocates of the practice aim to preserve general physical and mental wellness.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nation Resolution N. 69-131.

If it is true that mindful movement practices help create a positive learning environment where the practitioners lower their stress levels and concentrate more easily, I thought that there had to be a fruitful application of this discipline within my Italian language classes, where sedentary students are asked to master a variety of grammar topics in the span of few months. After a few sessions, I immediately noticed that students welcomed my experiment with joy and excitement and that they were happy to do yoga and meditate, which makes this approach more effective and productive. Their language skills improved, which confirms the theoretical arguments that claim that L2 development is a largely unconscious process. (Krashen, 1981).

I encourage teachers to take this approach into consideration, for several reasons. It helps to create an inclusive, positive context of learning which facilitates the acquisition of L2, as demonstrated in VanPatten (VanPatten, 2003). Students naturally benefit from the exposure to a practice that is conducted completely in Italian. Also, as demonstrated by Reber, implicit learning, which is the result of following instructions and memorizing sequences during the activity, is more effective and students perform significantly better, even if they are not able to articulate the rules of the grammar that produced those instructions (Reber, 1993). During the yoga/meditation class there is an activation of “input processing” or, in other words, students make the effort to make sense of what they are hearing. This is called “accommodation” in SLA and it takes place, according to VanPatten, when the learner is listening to someone else talking in L2. The learner hears a word several times and he/she doesn’t know what it means. Through the context and the movement, after a while the learner correctly identifies the meaning. Once the learner hears the word again, the form-meaning connection is strengthened. The word will become part of the learner’s vocabulary and therefore used when needed (VanPatten, 2003).

These are the results I collected over the last three years and the graphs present the anonymous answers of about 300 students.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Students at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Table 1: What was your favorite aspect of the Italian course?



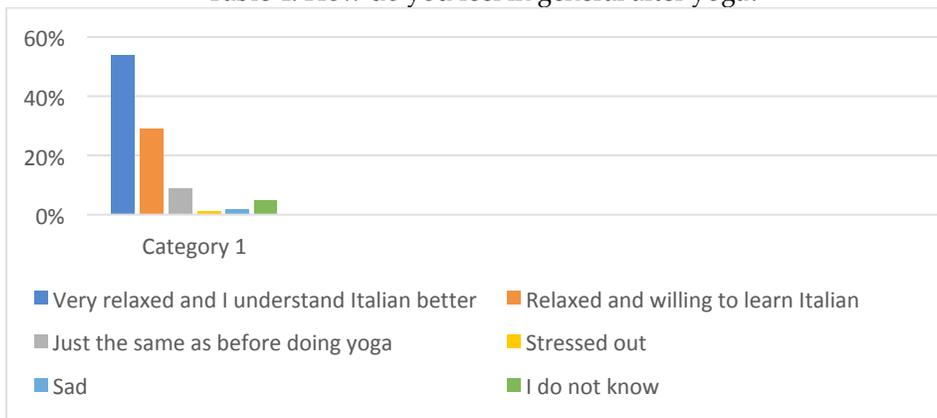
Table 2: How did yoga and meditation increase your general school performance?



Table 3: How did yoga and mindfulness help you to learn Italian?



Table 4: How do you feel in general after yoga?



Undergraduate students enrolled in any Italian course mandatorily take 3 regular classes of Italian per week (50 mins. each), 2 practica (cultural activities led by an instructor who is a native speaker), and one optional hour of yoga or meditation. It applies to all levels.

Beginner students might be concerned about not having enough vocabulary that allows them to follow the instructions. Clearly, they need to tap into their intuition and stretch their knowledge. After a few weeks, students not only desire to come to class to meditate or to do yoga, but they also reverse the mindset where learning a language is connected to long hours of painful and stressful studying, test preparation, online work and quizzes. In fact, they find themselves relaxed, open, intuitive, using their imagination and ability to visualize places, sounds, scents while absorbing Italian.

Classrooms do not need to be equipped with fancy yoga mats as it is possible to practice yoga by simply sitting comfortably on the floor. From ten to sixty minutes can be dedicated to yoga, starting from the traditional sequence (mountain pose, chair pose, forward fold and downward facing dog) and concluding with the final relaxation, where the students are guided on releasing every part of their body. At the elementary level of Italian, this activity can help review the vocabulary of the body, the names of some animals (the cat, the cow, the dog, the scorpion, the crow, etc.), numbers, the verbs in the present tense and the imperative, as well as prepositions. The instructor doesn't need to be an athlete, or a yoga teacher, as a simple yoga sequence can be led by anybody with a clear

and confident voice without necessarily having to perform any of the poses. Students are usually happy as their language assimilation increases. On a more advanced level, visualization exercises of places in Italy, descriptions of works of art, and cultural references can be introduced during the relaxation phase with positive outcomes as demonstrated by the study of Berkovits (Berkovits, 2005). For example, when the students are either laying down or sitting quietly and receptive, I describe a famous *piazza* in Florence to them, or a hiking trail in the Cinque Terre. I try give as many details as possible, referencing colors, scents, shapes, while I leave some space for their imaginations by asking questions such as: who would you bring with you? What would the weather be like? How would you feel? In my descriptions, I include idiomatic expressions or the use of subjunctive if it has already been introduced in their regular class. After the relaxation part is over, students generally remember my words and they like to compare their versions of the story with those of their classmates in the target language.

As claimed by Ushioda, students are encouraged to develop and express their own identities through the language they are acquiring. It is important that they learn how to be themselves in Italian, and not simply language learners. The language class, in fact, should not be separate from the surrounding world and a stable connection to reality can stimulate a much higher level of personal involvement among the students (Ushioda, 2011).

Sitting for hours doing grammar exercises is not the only and best way to learn.<sup>3</sup> Language pedagogy has evolved since the times when repetitive fill-in-the blank exercises were regarded as an effective process. Over the past 30 years, empirical research and task-based language teaching (TBLT) has promoted successful SLA. In the case of yoga, the task of performing a full practice in Italian can help students strengthen their comprehension skills thanks to the practical application of the language (Robinson, 2011). They increase their fluency and complexity of L2 ex-

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<sup>3</sup> The New York Times published an article on August 16, 2017, on the importance of physical activities when learning a new language. Studies reported that they amplify people’s ability to memorize and retain information, by stimulating the blood flow and the circulation of oxygen in the braincells. The findings provide more evidence that to engage our minds and perform a good learning activity, it is important to reduce stress levels.

pression, they benefit from individual differences in cognitive and motivational variables during the practice, and teacher intervention may enhance the quantity and the quality of interactions that facilitate L2 learning as proved by task-based learning research in classroom settings (Robinson, 2011). The primary purpose of language, indeed, is communication and it cannot be implemented only through mechanical exercises; both the physical interaction and the mental engagement of the students are fundamental at any level of acquisition. While practicing yoga or meditating, distractions or other interferences should be avoided as much as possible (Dawson, 1996). Furthermore, this approach facilitates collaboration among students who work together to accomplish real-world tasks. Learner interaction, in fact, has been highlighted either in the field of SLA and L2 pedagogy (Tracy-Ventura, 2011).

From an historical perspective, the introduction of yoga into the classroom embraces the principles proposed by Maria Montessori and other theorists of student-centered education (Miller, 2007). Yoga helps develop learner autonomy and independence by placing the responsibility for learning in the hands of students (Hoidn, 2017), (Moretti, 2011). The concrete boundaries of the classrooms are expanded and overcome, and the learning experience can happen anywhere, indoors or outdoors. Yoga promotes the aggregation of students, their support of one another and their equality, as its non-judgmental attitude embraces differences like race, socioeconomic status, ability, or other. It also reinforces the relationship with the instructor who leads the practice with respect for the students’ needs and safety. It is in this context in fact, that the teacher’s motivation represents an important aspect of the learning process. As explained by Dörnyei and Ushioda, there is plenty of evidence to confirm that teacher motivation has a direct impact on students’ achievements (Dörnyei, 2011; Ushioda, 2011).

Recently, the increasing popularity of yoga and mindfulness in the Western hemisphere has sprung from personalities like Jon Kabat-Zinn who gradually integrated them into his medical practice.<sup>4</sup> There is a gen-

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<sup>4</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn is an Emeritus Professor of Medicine and a creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester. He practiced yoga for a long time while studying with Buddhist teachers and eventually decided to integrate their

eral need for mindfulness, as the stress and speed of modern lifestyles negatively impact an increasing number of people. In Italian programs in the United States, for example, the push for innovation has often forced teachers to detach from the natural pace of learning and from content that is connected to reality. At any school level, in fact, the concept of innovation is frequently and univocally connected to the use of technology and the replacement of homework with interactive exercises (Cooper, 1996).

This latter type of activity certainly represents an important support for the study of Italian, but at the same time while students enjoy working on grammar as they play videogames, it has significantly dehumanized the approach to languages. On the one hand, students are expected to sit in front of a computer where the screens, the codes, the deadlines are relentless and stressful elements that are soon imprinted upon their brains. On the other hand, in order to meet language requirements and to contain a general decline in interest in romance languages, teachers design syllabi that are more and more condensed.

I personally believe that we need to slow down and reintroduce simplicity into our communication with students. The relationship between instructors and students should be as close and personable as possible. Not a hierarchical relationship but one that comprises of a constant exchange that enriches both sides. Teachers need to be more aware of the power of their words, of the repetition of them, of the tone and rhythm of their voices. In fact, as stated by VanPatten, the role of repetition and imitation can be fundamental if they are used as input (VanPatten, 2003). Therefore, a guided meditation or a yoga practice can be a fantastic tool in the teacher’s arsenal as they persuade, motivate, and inspire their apprentices.

Yoga and meditation are not an excuse to come to class unprepared, or simply a diversion to waste time every now and then. On the contrary, the mindful approach requires students to be fully focused on the present moment, in a state of relaxation, with mental openness, connected to their breathing. Students quickly learn how to declutter their mental space, erasing their daily problems, concerns, duties, expectations, and all the

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teachings with scientific findings. The stress reduction program created by Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), is offered by medical centers, hospitals, and health maintenance organizations.

senses can be involved in focusing on the practice. Once they let go of what is not necessary to them in the present moment during the yoga practice, the lesson begins, and they must listen and comprehend the teacher’s words. Their imagination can be an important part of the practice and it can stimulate students’ will to get better and better without competing. Their imaginations can activate positive feelings, and learning through emotions has been proven to be an effective way to retain new information (Boudreau, 2018), (Mondal, 2016).

Though there has yet to be a scientific study on the specific benefits that yoga and meditation bring to the L2 classroom, my observations are based on the advantages of the practice in general and on my own personal experience. As we are aware of different ways of learning, as explained by Boekaerts (Boekaerts, 1987), this type of approach works well with any type of learner, but it is particularly favorable in the case of students who do not function optimally in a traditional classroom setting. While collecting the data from my own classroom experience, I have seen positive results in students affected by learning disabilities, attention disorders, and problems related to anxiety. When students come to the Italian yoga class, in fact, they do not experience the stress or the pressure linked to the insecurity of not being well prepared or the fear of being judged and evaluated that can play a role in demotivating the learner (Boekaerts, 2001). Each student in the class focuses on him/herself, and much of the session is completed while keeping the eyes closed. These are not irrelevant aspects, as research has increasingly shown that affective variables such as anxiety and motivation may impact language development (Gardner, 1994), and survey studies have demonstrated a correlation between anxiety and language achievement (Onwuegbuzie A., 1999). Students are not assessed for their performance in yoga or meditation, but their attendance counts as participation, which is 5% of the final grade in my courses. However, the benefits of these practices are visible in the regular written and oral tests during the semester, and students achieve higher grades not only in Italian but also in other disciplines.

This result makes the mindful approach even more useful as the rates of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) have increased exponentially in recent years. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities,

about a third of college students encounters problems in learning though only half of them seek support or guidance (Cortiella, 2014). Thence, practicing yoga and meditation can be a good alternative and complementary learning activity because it enhances motivation and stabilizes the mood with proven anti-depressant effects. The mindful approach helps create a positive, welcoming and healthy environment where the students feel included, and following the example set by the teacher, they acquire a non-judgmental attitude.

As VanPatten has noted, there is no best method for teaching and learning, but certainly the more quality input, the better. Yoga can be a powerful complementary tool to learn Italian, but it does not suffice by itself. In the context of the Italian language classroom, yoga and meditation do not have any therapeutic purposes, but they assist in the creation of an optimal learning environment. In contrast to NLP (neurolinguistics programming), where a therapist guides the passive patient subconsciously through words and images, here, instead, the Italian students have an active role as the commands of the instructor require conscious alertness.

The ACTFL requirements of the 5Cs can help summarize the benefits of the mindful approach: Communication, as the activity is performed entirely in Italian; Cultures, as it includes cultural references to the art, history, food, and the geography of Italy; Connections, as students expand their knowledge of other disciplines while using the Italian language; Comparisons, as they compare expressions in Italian to those of their mother tongue; Communities, as through yoga and mindful activities, the concept of group is reinforced and the emphasis is on solidarity and respect towards one another.

The numbers of American students enrolling in Italian classes is on the wane and it is necessary to examine the reasons for this decline. As discussed at the conference held at Georgetown University, innovation is important, but it is not always a synonym for speed and technology (Aski, 2015). If we consider listening to our students' real needs, more positive results may await us. Innovative methods are those that adhere to reality. If society feels the need to slow down and find appeasement in mindful contexts, why should it be any different for our students? Perhaps true innova-

tion lies in the opportunity to combine the study of Italian language and culture with the healthy habits of contemporary society.

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# INSEGNARE L'ITALIANO LETTERARIO IN RETE

## Un progetto per apprendenti stranieri di livello avanzato

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### 1. Introduzione

La partecipazione al progetto ELLEU—*E-learning per le Lingue e Letterature Europee*, finanziato dalla Commissione Europea per promuovere una maggiore integrazione culturale tra i cittadini dell'Unione attraverso lo studio delle letterature comparate,<sup>1</sup> mi ha spinto qualche anno fa a costituire con altri colleghi e collaboratori un gruppo di lavoro che provasse a dare organizzazione scientifica alle riflessioni e alle pratiche didattiche sviluppate in una sede accademica peculiare come la nostra, l'Università per Stranieri di Perugia, all'interno dei corsi di Storia della lingua italiana frequentati da studenti stranieri provenienti da tutto il mondo. Le finalità del nostro lavoro sono state duplici, da un lato di natura didattico-applicativa dall'altro di natura teorica.

Ponendoci come obiettivo fondamentale l'addestramento alla lettura dei classici italiani in versione originale, ci siamo infatti proposti di mettere a punto materiali didattici con un alto indice di leggibilità e comprensibilità (testi a scrittura controllata), il cui punto di forza e di innovazione, rispetto ai tradizionali corsi di lingua già erogati in rete da università ed enti privati, fosse costituito dal focus sulla variazione diacronica dell'italiano e sull'apprendimento metalinguistico, che giudichiamo entrambi strategici.

Abbiamo ritenuto che la fase di somministrazione telematica delle unità didattiche potesse sia precedere (e quindi rendere più proficua) la frequenza sul posto dei nostri corsi avanzati di lingua e letteratura, sia seguire quell'esperienza, in modo da consolidare e approfondire nozioni e abilità in parte già acquisite. In ogni caso, i requisiti dei destinatari ideali (anche di utenti esterni alla nostra Università) sono stati individuati non

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<sup>1</sup> Il progetto Elleu ([www.elleu.org](http://www.elleu.org)) si proponeva di realizzare, oltre a quattro corsi di letteratura italiana comparata con le letterature polacca, ungherese, spagnolo-catalana e maltese, un corso propedeutico di lingua letteraria italiana ripartito su due livelli.

solo nelle competenze linguistiche di partenza, corrispondenti almeno al livello C1 del QCRE, ma anche nella motivazione, cioè in un reale interesse a un approccio non superficiale al grande patrimonio letterario della cultura italiana (quale può essere quello di studenti stranieri di lauree magistrali e di dottorandi in italianistica o anche di semplici amatori), profilandosi la nostra offerta come proposta per l’insegnamento dell’italiano *for special purposes*.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Unità didattiche: impostazione metodologica

Per la realizzazione delle unità didattiche, abbiamo seguito i seguenti criteri:

- scansione modulare dei contenuti e procedimenti imposti dall’e-learning;
- attenzione ai requisiti della scrittura in internet e alla semplificazione dei testi disciplinari destinati a utenti stranieri;<sup>3</sup>
- centralità del commento linguistico e retorico rispetto all’inquadramento storico-culturale dei testi letterari proposti; inquadramento

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<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Ciliberti (1981), che, tralasciando gli scopi *occupazionali*, si concentra sugli scopi “speciali” di tipo *educativo* (secondo la distinzione operata da Strevens 1977), concernenti soprattutto fini *accademici*, «cioè l’apprendimento motivato da ragioni di studio e di aggiornamento in discipline o branche del sapere particolari» (ivi, p. 1).

<sup>3</sup> Sui testi a scrittura controllata e il loro impiego nella prassi didattica, cfr. Menegaldo (2004 e 2011) e Tempesta (2015). Per le analisi, i commenti, il glossario e gli altri apparati didattici da noi prodotti (vedi § 3), la verifica della leggibilità – valutata, com’è noto, in base a fattori di tipo quantitativo – si è avvalsa del servizio di analisi automatica Èulogos-Corrige! (offerto dal sito [www.eulogos.net](http://www.eulogos.net)), che considera anche variabili lessicali di frequenza fondate sulla classificazione del Vocabolario di Base stabilita da Tullio De Mauro (1980). L’attenzione alla chiarezza dei testi ha riguardato però anche la comprensibilità, che dipende da fattori come l’organizzazione logico-concettuale, gli aspetti semantici del lessico, il numero ed il tipo di inferenze richieste, ecc. (cfr. Rigo 2005, in particolare il § 2.8 – sulle difficoltà di comprensione nel sistema lettore/testo – e 1a bibliografia ivi indicata, nonché Raso 2002). Per quanto riguarda le caratteristiche della scrittura in rete e le sue differenze rispetto a quella su supporto cartaceo, la bibliografia, anche in italiano, è molto ampia, a partire da Simone (2000); tra i contributi che per primi hanno messo a fuoco in Italia i requisiti della scrittura in internet fornendo utili consigli pratici per la realizzazione di testi efficaci in rete, mi limito a ricordare Acerboni (2005), nonché il sito e il blog di Luisa Carrada: [www.mestierediscrivere.com](http://www.mestierediscrivere.com) (in particolare la sezione “scrivere per il web”) e <https://blog.mestierediscrivere.com> (sezione “web writing”). Impossibile (e qui poco pertinente) citare anche gli ormai molti studi descrittivi sull’evoluzione dell’italiano nei nuovi media; per l’attenzione alla prospettiva didattica, mi sembra comunque utile segnalare Telve (2016) e Palermo (2017).

che è invece stato affidato, grazie ai link di collegamento ipertestuale, a schede di approfondimento sugli autori e sui generi letterari;

- messa a fuoco del lessico settoriale e delle categorie di analisi proprie degli studi linguistici e letterari;
- presentazione e addestramento all’uso di strumenti per “fare da soli”, ovvero per superare in modo autonomo le difficoltà insite nei testi non contemporanei.

### 3. Contenuti delle unità

Ad eccezione della prima, che presenta un’introduzione al concetto di diacronia linguistica e una panoramica sintetica sulla storia dell’italiano letterario dalle origini all’Ottocento, le UD realizzate sono articolate secondo il seguente schema interno:

- breve introduzione al testo;
- riproduzione, secondo l’edizione filologicamente più affidabile, di testi (o brani) esemplari, dal XIV al XIX secolo, con alternanza di generi diversi, dalla novella alla lirica, dal poema al trattato, dal teatro al romanzo. Gli autori sono stati scelti in base al loro valore letterario e soprattutto per la loro rappresentatività in relazione al processo di formazione ed evoluzione nel tempo della lingua italiana (Boccaccio, Lorenzo de’ Medici, Ariosto, Galileo, Goldoni, Manzoni; altre unità, in corso di realizzazione, saranno dedicate a Dante, Petrarca, Machiavelli, Leopardi);
- parafrasi in italiano contemporaneo;
- analisi del testo scandita in brevi paragrafi (della lunghezza media di una schermata), che prendono in esame di volta in volta aspetti fonetici e morfologici, lessicali, sintattici e testuali, figurali e stilistici, riservando solo alla fine del commento osservazioni interpretative più generali che collegano i dati linguistici al contesto storico-sociale e culturale in cui essi si inseriscono;
- link alle voci di un ampio glossario (fruibile a due livelli di difficoltà e di approfondimento), che spiega la terminologia specialistica, introdotta con gradualità nelle analisi testuali, e che illustra, in modo semplice ma scientificamente rigoroso, nozioni fondamentali di linguistica, grammatica storica, filologia, teoria della letteratura, metrica, retorica e stilistica, la cui assimilazione è finalizzata al potenziamento delle capacità interpretative e di lettura critica possedute dagli studenti;

- batterie di esercizi a scelta multipla per l’autoverifica ed esercitazioni più complesse da svolgere sotto la guida e con la correzione di un tutor, a corredo di ciascuna unità.

Specifiche sezioni sono dedicate all’informazione bibliografica di base sulla storia dell’italiano letterario e sulla lingua dei singoli autori, ma particolare importanza abbiamo attribuito alle opere di consultazione, soprattutto *on line*, sussidi indispensabili, specie per chi risiede all’estero, dove non sempre esistono (almeno in contesti extraeuropei) biblioteche di italianistica sufficientemente attrezzate.

#### 4. Strumenti in rete

Proprio nelle attività di esercitazione e di verifica, gli studenti sono addestrati e sollecitati a utilizzare *digital libraries*, dove è possibile non solo leggere moltissimi testi della tradizione letteraria italiana ma interrogarne il DBT (ricavando, ad esempio, lessico di frequenza e relativi contesti testuali), e altri importanti strumenti disponibile in rete. A titolo esemplificativo cito

a) tra gli archivi di classici della letteratura e della cultura italiana

- la BIBLIOTECA ITALIANA: <http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it/> (che offre, oltre agli scaffali di lettura, un ottimo sistema di interrogazione testuale),
- la BIBLIOTECA DEI CLASSICI ITALIANI: <http://www.classicitaliani.it/>,
- LIBER LIBER: <https://www.liberliber.it/online/> (che offre anche audiolibri),
- la BIBLIOTECA DELLA LETTERATURA ITALIANA: <http://www.letteraturaitaliana.net/> (che offre testi in pdf, nelle edizioni Einaudi),
- INTRATEXT: <http://www.intratext.com/> (che offre testi solo in formato digitale, già predisposti per ricerche di tipo computazionale);<sup>4</sup>

b) tra i dizionari dell’uso

- il Sabatini-Coletti: <http://dizionari.corriere.it/>,
- il Vocabolario Treccani on line: <http://www.treccani.it/>,

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<sup>4</sup> Molto importante, in questo ambito di repertori, resta l’evoluzione della LIZ: la BIZ - *Biblioteca Italiana Zanichelli*, su DVD-ROM ma disponibile anche in versione, economicamente più accessibile, per iPhone, iPad e iPod Touch (<https://www.zanichelli.it/ricerca/prodotti/biblioteca-italiana-zanichelli>).

- il Vocabolario Garzanti on line: <http://www.garzantilinguistica.it/> (che offre anche i servizi “sinonimi e contrari” e “dubbi linguistici”),
- il nuovo De Mauro (*NVdB - Nuovo vocabolario di base della lingua italiana*): <https://dizionario.internazionale.it>,
- il DOP (*Dizionario di ortografia e pronuncia*): <http://www.dizionario.rai.it>;

c) tra i dizionari storici ed etimologici

- il *GDLI - Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (presto in rete grazie a un accordo firmato a settembre 2017 tra l’Accademia della Crusca e la casa editrice UTET Grandi Opere),
- le voci finora realizzate del *TLIO— Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini*: <http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO/>,
- il *LEI - Lessico Etimologico Italiano* (edito in cartaceo dal 1979 e giunto alla lettera E), i cui volumi sono in gran parte scaricabili dall’indirizzo <http://www.uni-saarland.de/lehrstuhl/schweickard/lei/pubblicazioni.html>;

d) relativamente alla tradizione lessicografica

- le Crusche in rete (le cinque edizioni del celebre *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*): <http://www.lessicografia.it/>;
- il *Dizionario della lingua italiana* di N. Tommaseo e B. Bellini: <http://www.tommaseobellini.it>,<sup>5</sup>

opere di consultazione anch’esse utili per attività su testi letterari dei secoli passati e reperibili in rete a partire dal sito dell’Accademia della Crusca (scaffali digitali).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Per quanto riguarda i dizionari, altri link utili sono reperibili all’indirizzo <http://www.accademiadellacrusca.it/it/link-utili/dizionari-sincronici>, che segnala, tra l’altro, il DIFIT elettronico (*Dizionario di italianismi in francese, inglese e tedesco*, digitalizzato dall’OIM - Osservatorio degli italianismi nel mondo): <http://www.italianismi.org/difit-elettronico>. Oltre alla consultazione dei vocabolari citati, attraverso il sito dell’Accademia della Crusca ci si può avvalere di consulenze linguistiche, offerte dai migliori specialisti nella sezione *Lingua italiana*, e ottenere molte altre informazioni sull’italiano antico e su quello contemporaneo, su pubblicazioni, convegni, progetti di ricerca e su temi di interesse linguistico in discussione nella società italiana.

<sup>6</sup> Riperto un piccolo esempio di esercizio proposto agli studenti:

Domanda = Nella prima colonna sono inseriti delle congiunzioni e degli avverbi in uso in italiano antico; nella seconda trovi il loro significato, cioè la forma corrispondente in italiano contemporaneo. L’ordine però non è stato rispettato: ristabilisci gli abbinamenti corretti, digitando la giusta sequenza (es: A1B2C3).

Tipo di connettivo	Significato
A. Avvegnaché	1. Subito

Disponibile gratuitamente in rete è pure la *Grammatica storica della lingua italiana e dei suoi dialetti* di Gerhard Rohlfs (1966-1969).<sup>7</sup>

Altri importanti strumenti d’informazione sull’italiano di ieri e di oggi, per ricerche guidate o condotte autonomamente, sono

- *l’Enciclopedia dell’italiano* Treccani;<sup>8</sup>
- VIVIT (Il portale dell’italiano nel mondo): <http://www.viv-it.org/>;
- RAI Cultura. Il grande portale della lingua italiana: <http://www.italiano.rai.it/categorie/naviganellitaliano/1012/1/default.aspx>;
- la sezione sulla lingua italiana del portale Treccani: [http://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua\\_italiana](http://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana),
- Il portale della lingua italiana nel mondo (sotto il patrocinio della Farnesina): <https://www.linguaitaliana.esteri.it/>.

## 5. Lingua e identità: perché insegnare l’italiano letterario a stranieri

Riassumendo, la nostra proposta formativa cerca di illustrare, attraverso un campione rappresentativo di testi esemplari, le linee fondamentali di formazione e sviluppo dell’italiano letterario, con tre obiettivi finali: 1) leggere i classici in versione originale; 2) sapere utilizzare gli stru-

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B. Laonde	2. Poiché
C. Tuttavia	3. Per cui
D. Tosto	4. Senza sosta
	5. Da dove

Testo per lo studente = Prima di rispondere, rileggi i §§ 2.4, 3.2, 5.5 e consulta il *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (le Crusche in rete) e il Tommaseo-Bellini *on line* agli indirizzi citati nella sitografia; oppure, se la tua biblioteca lo possiede, puoi consultare il *GDLI*.

La sequenza corretta è A2 (Avvegnaché/Poiché), B3 (Laonde/Per cui), C4 (Tuttavia/Senza sosta), D1 (Tosto/Subito).

<sup>7</sup> Vol. I (Fonetica): <https://archive.org/stream/GrammaticaStoricaDellaLinguaItaliana1/Grammatica%20storica%20della%20lingua%20italiana%201#page/n191/mode/1up>; vol. II (Morfologia):

<https://archive.org/stream/GrammaticaStoricaDellaLinguaItaliana2/Grammatica%20della%20lingua%20italiana%202#page/n0/mode/2up>; vol. III (Sintassi e formazione delle parole): <https://archive.org/stream/GrammaticaStoricaDellaLinguaItaliana3/Grammatica%20storica%20della%20lingua%20italiana%203#page/n1/mode/2up>.

<sup>8</sup> La modalità più semplice di reperimento delle voci *on line* è quella di inserirne il titolo-argomento in un motore di ricerca, selezionando tra i link generati quello relativo all’*EI*: ad es. *italiano antico* ([http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/italiano-antico\\_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27Italiano%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/italiano-antico_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27Italiano%29/)), *arcaismi* ([http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/arcaismi\\_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27Italiano%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/arcaismi_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27Italiano%29/)), *pubblicità e lingua* ([http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pubblicita-e-lingua\\_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27Italiano%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pubblicita-e-lingua_%28Enciclopedia-dell%27Italiano%29/)), ecc.

menti fondamentali per superare le difficoltà insite nei testi non contemporanei; 3) acquisire un metodo di analisi linguistico-testuale per potenziare le capacità di comprensione e di interpretazione, applicabile anche a testi diversi da quelli proposti. Sul piano teorico il nostro gruppo intende portare un piccolo ma fattivo contributo al dibattito in corso sulla promozione dell’identità italiana all’estero, sull’insegnamento dell’italiano a stranieri e più in generale sui compiti formativi della scuola anche all’interno dei confini nazionali. Partendo dalla convinzione che la necessaria “apertura al nuovo” non può ridursi all’adozione di tecnologie multimediali fine a se stessa, a scapito di competenze e saperi disciplinari specifici,<sup>9</sup> ma che quelle tecnologie possono essere messe a servizio proprio dello sviluppo e della diffusione del sapere, abbiamo concentrato la nostra attenzione sul carattere particolare che nella tradizione italiana riveste il rapporto lingua-identità. Nella nostra storia, infatti, a fronte della secolare frammentazione politica, la lingua letteraria, a partire da Dante, ha costituito un fattore generativo interno della stessa idea di italianità (cfr. Bruni 2010), che ha cominciato a prendere forma nel Rinascimento, come unità linguistica “inventata” da un’élite di filologi e letterati umanisti (cfr. Tesi 2005, p. 105), capaci di promuovere anche all’estero un’immagine identitaria di alto profilo. Tale idea si è poi consolidata, in epoca risorgimentale, come una “straordinaria costruzione retorica” che dette vita alla “scoperta della nazione italiana” anche grazie—il giudizio è dello storico Mario A. Banti (2011)—alla condivisione di miti e suggestioni letterarie. Nella nostra epoca, stando ai risultati dell’indagine demoscopica commissionata una dozzina di anni fa alla IPSOS dalla Società Dante Alighieri, la letteratura continua a essere un fattore culturale unificante per l’identità italiana e per la sua proiezione al di fuori dei confini nazionali.<sup>10</sup>

È noto infatti che l’irradiazione e la vitalità dell’italiano all’estero sono storicamente legate alla ricchezza e al prestigio del nostro patrimonio cul-

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<sup>9</sup> La questione è stata risolta di recente, a proposito delle cosiddette *digital humanities*, da Tomasin (2017).

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. i contributi di N. Pagnoncelli, *IPSOS. L’identità culturale italiana e le icone letterarie*, e di R. Cartocci, *Letteratura e identità degli italiani*, in Peluffi e Serianni (2005, pp. 47-72 e 97-105).

turale. Francesco Bruni, storico di vaglia della nostra lingua, ha definito l’italiano una “lingua senza impero”, proprio perché la sua notevole capacità di espansione in Europa, nel Mediterraneo e nel mondo non è stata mai sostenuta, se si esclude la parentesi negativa del fascismo, né dalla forza delle armi né da strategie di dominio politico, come è accaduto per altre lingue e potenze coloniali, quanto piuttosto dal dinamismo e dalla libera circolazione di idee, uomini e prodotti della creatività italiana, intesa nel senso più ampio.<sup>11</sup>

Negli ultimi decenni tra le motivazioni allo studio dell’italiano diffuso tra stranieri gli scopi professionali e commerciali hanno fatto registrare un forte incremento, ma proprio l’inchiesta coordinata da Tullio De Mauro (2002), *Italiano 2000*, che per prima ha evidenziato queste nuove linee di tendenza, attribuiva ancora il primo posto al tradizionale interesse di tipo culturale, confermato del resto dieci anni dopo dall’inchiesta coordinata da Claudio Giovanardi e Pietro Trifone (2012) e più di recente dalle indagini promosse dal MAECI in occasione degli Stati Generali della Lingua Italiana nel Mondo, organizzati a Firenze nel 2014 e nel 2016.<sup>12</sup>

Ne deriva che il nostro passato, con le sue espressioni letterarie ed artistiche di eccezionale valore, non costituisce un lascito di cui disfarsi per una malintesa esigenza di svecchiamento, ma una ricchezza su cui puntare per il rilancio di un modello forte della cultura italiana (cfr. Loporcaro 2006) e del *vivere all’italiana*: arte, moda, design, paesaggio, cucina, cinema (a cui è stata dedicata quest’anno la settimana della lingua italiana nel mondo). Sul piano più prosaico ma determinante dell’economia, ciò significa scommettere, per un avanzamento della posizione dell’italiano nel cosiddetto mercato globale delle lingue, sul prestigio che all’immagine dell’Italia deriva dal suo passato e dalle sue tradizioni culturali, compresa quella letteraria. Negli ultimi decenni le riforme dei programmi d’italiano nel triennio delle superiori hanno dato largo spazio alla contemporaneità, ciò ha avuto come conseguenza, sia pure involontaria, una penalizzazio-

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<sup>11</sup> Cfr. i saggi raccolti in Bruni (2013), con particolare riferimento a quello introduttivo, *Una lingua senza impero: l’italiano* (pp. 9-21), e si veda pure il capitolo *L’italiano fuori d’Italia e il ruolo dell’italiano letterario*, in Bruni (2007, pp. 199-205).

<sup>12</sup> Sull’inchiesta *Italiano 2000* e sugli sviluppi più recenti dell’italiano nel mondo (successivi alla crisi economica del 2008), si veda Vedovelli (2016, pp. 471-478).

ne dei grandi classici. Sono proprio i grandi classici però ad avere guadagnato e a garantire tuttora alla letteratura italiana uno “spazio sovranazionale” di assoluto rilievo, sia per significato storico sia per influenza culturale (cfr. Serianni 2002, pp. 13-14); basti pensare al ruolo di Boccaccio nella nascita del realismo narrativo europeo. L’attenzione ai fatti storico-linguistici, al centro del nostro progetto didattico, non è solo la chiave d’accesso fondamentale a questo straordinario patrimonio (che le traduzioni e le sintesi manualistiche inevitabilmente depauperano), ma è anche l’unico modo per perpetuare e incrementare il potere di attrazione di quel patrimonio tra le giovani generazioni in Italia e nel mondo.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> L’opportunità che il dialogo con i classici non si interrompa, cioè il valore della loro lettura (e rilettura) diretta sui testi originali, fu seduttivamente sostenuta proprio da uno dei nostri più importanti scrittori contemporanei, Italo Calvino (1991); tale opportunità va oggi ribadita nell’interesse anche dell’italiano all’estero.

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*Embassy of Italy*  
*Washington D. C.*



## Italian Language and Culture Conference:

*Innovation in Italian Programs and Pedagogy*

Department of Italian



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Washington D.C.

Saturday October 21<sup>st</sup> 2017

### Conference Program

8:00 – 8:30      **Registration and Breakfast (ICC 450)**

8:30 – 9:00      **Welcome and Opening Remarks (ICC 115)**

- Anna De Fina, *Professor and Chair of the Italian Department, Georgetown University, Washington D.C.*
- Christopher S. Celenza, *Dean of Georgetown College, Georgetown University, Washington D.C.*
- Catherine Flumiani, *Minister Plenipotentiary, Embassy of Italy, Washington D.C.*
- Emanuele Amendola, *Director, Italian Cultural Institute, Washington, D.C.*

9:00 – 10:20

**Session 1A (ICC 115)**

**Chair:** Fulvia Musti, Georgetown University

**Interdisciplinary, Multicultural and Multilingual Approaches to Developing the Curriculum**

**Enrico Minardi and Gina Pietrantoni**, Arizona State University, *Promoting Italian Awareness*

**Barbara Spinelli**, Columbia University, *“Imagined Community” and Linguistic Landscape: Adopting an Interdisciplinary Approach for Language Learning in a Multilingual Context*

**Alessia Valfredini**, Fordham University, *An Interdisciplinary, Multicultural, Multilingual, Critically-Engaged Take on Italian Conversation and Composition*

**Session 1B (ICC 116)**

**Chair:** Anna De Fina, Georgetown University

**Exploiting Open Educational Resources for a More Authentic Classroom Experience**

**Daniela Busciglio**, University of Oklahoma, *VITAL: Videos for Italian Teaching and Learning Open Education Resource (OER) Database*

**Sandra Covino**, Università per Stranieri di Perugia, *Teaching Literary Italian on the Net: a Project for Foreign Advanced Level Learners*

**Camilla Zamboni**, Wesleyan University, *ASSAGGI: an OER Approach to the Intermediate Italian Curriculum*

**Session 1C (ICC 120)**

**Chair:** Donatella Melucci, Georgetown University

**Task-Based Teaching and Assessment**

**Tom Means**, BMCC, City University of New York, *Task-based Language Teaching: The State of the Art*

**Donatella Melucci**, Georgetown University, *Implementing Task-Based Assessments*

**Claudia Ventura**, University of Oregon, *“Shift of Paradigm” in Online Teaching*

10:30 – 11:50

**Session 2A (ICC 115)**

**Chair:** Nicoletta Pireddu, Georgetown University

**Creative Teaching and Learning through Technology**

**Elda Buonanno Foley**, Iona College, *Teaching with Technology: Finding the perfect balance*

**Luisanna Sardu**, Manhattan College, *Learning with Technology: The Impact of Video Presentations on Italian Oral Skills*

**Carmela Scala**, Rutgers University, *Breaking the Boundaries of the ‘Flat Screen’ through Active Learning*

**Session 2B (ICC 116)**

**Chair:** Sara Hager, Georgetown University

**Personal, Public and Prosocial Identities. Helping Students Explore the Complexities of the Target Culture.**

**Patricia Di Silvio**, Tufts University, *A Thematic Approach to the Teaching of Italian Culture*

**Roberto Dolci**, Università per Stranieri di Perugia, *La lingua e la cultura italiane come strumenti per la promozione dell’immagine dell’Italia*

**Chiara Fabbian**, University of Illinois at Chicago, *Critical Pedagogy, Social Justice, and Prosocial Identities (I)*

**Emanuela Zanotti Carney**, University of Illinois at Chicago, *Critical Pedagogy, Social Justice, and Prosocial Identities (II)*

**Session 2C (ICC 120)**

**Chair:** Gianni Cicali, Georgetown University

**Eliminating the Textbook, Engaging the Student through Theater, Games, and Meditation**

**Viviana Altieri**, Edizioni Edilingua, *La gamification nella classe di italiano. La proposta di Edilingua*

**Michela Baraldi**, Cornell University, *No More Textbooks for Intermediate-Advanced Italian*

**Lucia Ducci**, College of Holy Cross, *Learning Italian through Mindfulness*

**Anna Santucci**, Brown University, *Learning through the Body: a Reflection on Theater Arts Integration in the Foreign Language and Culture Curriculum*

12:00 – 1:15 **Plenary Session (ICC 115): Keynote Address** Prof. Giuseppe Cavatorta, University of Arizona

1:15 – 2:30 **Lunch (Copley Hall)**

2:30 – 3:45 **Plenary Session: (ICC 115)**  
**Workshop** *The LIRA Project: Full Immersion into Italian Language and Culture through Authentic Material on the Web*, Piera Margutti, Sandra Covino, Università per Stranieri di Perugia

**Coffee Break (ICC 450)**

	<b>Session 3A (ICC 115)</b>	<b>Session 3B (ICC 116)</b>	<b>Session 3C (ICC 120)</b>
4:15 – 5:35	<b>Chair:</b> Paola Morgavi, Northwestern University  <b>How to Cultivate Interest in Italian Language and Culture from AP to College.</b>  <b>Paola Morgavi</b> , Northwestern University, <i>Dal corso AP alla specializzazione universitaria: come generare, alimentare e far crescere l'interesse nella lingua e cultura italiana</i>  <b>Daniela Cavallero</b> , DePaul University, <i>Specializzarsi in italiano: quali opportunità?</i>  <b>Antonietta Di Pietro</b> , Florida International University, World-Readiness: <i>A che età si è pronti per imparare ad imparare</i>  <b>Teresa Picarazzi</b> , The Hopkins School, <i>Approaches to Teaching AP Italian</i>	<b>Chair:</b> Louise Hipwell, Georgetown University  <b>Enhancing the Italian Curriculum with New Courses and Projects</b>  <b>Francesca Calamita</b> , University of Virginia, <i>Sexism and Gender Stereotypes in Italian Language Courses: No, Grazie!</i>  <b>Chiara De Santi</b> , Farmingdale State College, <i>Teaching Italian Language and Culture through its Cuisine</i>  <b>Lillyrose Veneziano Broccia</b> , University of Pennsylvania, <i>Intermediate Italian as a Bridge to Many Bridges</i>  <b>Louise Hipwell</b> , Georgetown University. <i>Integrating Telecollaboration into the Italian Language Curriculum</i>	<b>Chair:</b> Giuseppe Tosi, Georgetown University  <b>Preparing Students to Engage with Literary texts</b>  <b>Brandon K. Essary</b> , Elon University, <i>Teaching Italian Literature with Video Games</i>  <b>Sara Mattavelli</b> , College of William and Mary, <i>Rethink, Redesign, and Retain: the Use of the Multiliteracies Framework in the Italian Classroom</i>
5:45 – 7:00	<b>Plenary Session (ICC 115): Roundtable</b> on Innovation and Increasing Enrollments in Italian Language Programs with <b>Cristina Abbona-Sneider</b> , Brown University, <b>Giuseppe Cavatorta</b> , University of Arizona, <b>Anna De Fina</b> , Georgetown University, <b>Luciana Fellin</b> , Duke University, <b>Teresa Fiore</b> , Montclair State University		



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