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Evaluation of the Italian Teaching in the Chinese Classroom Among the Young Adult Beginners

Relatore

Carmel Mary Coonan

Laureante

Lei Qiaoyi

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to the teaching of Italian in the language institute and at the university in China among the young adult learners from zero to the A2 level, to see whether the teaching method is suitable to the Chinese students. The teaching method indicates the organization of a course syllabus and the choice of the teaching materials. Under this concept, there is methodology and technique. Methodology indicates the realization of the method, namely the ideas of the didactical activities during the course, regarding both the language acquisition and the relation among the learners. The technique includes single exercises and specific activities for the realization of the methodology (Balboni 2014). In order to evaluate the Italian teaching, I have analyzed the teaching method, the needs of the learners and the language difficulties, attending an Italian course and doing some interviews and surveys among the teachers and the learners. After the analysis, it comes to the conclusion that the teaching of Italian can be considered as effective in China. Though still having many deficiencies, the Italian teaching in China is developing towards a positive direction.

Introduction

With the more and more frequent communication between Italy and China, the number of Chinese students learning Italian is growing year by year. However, from the situation of English education in China, we see that even though English is a required course in Chinese primary school, middle school, high school and university, most Chinese people are not able to communicate fluently in English. It is of high possibility that a Chinese student, after ten years of English studying at school, when comes across an Englishman, cannot understand what he/she is talking, nor is able to express explicitly what he himself/she herself wants to say, only being able to communicate with some simple and basic sentences. Fortunately, as a non-obligated course in the school but a specific major, most of the students choose the Italian language out of their own willing, taking account of their own capacity. In consequence, the teaching of Italian seems to be more effective than that of English. Nevertheless, in the teaching of Italian, there still exist many problems, that some students of Italian are not able to communicate with the Italian people after attending a course. There are many factors which may lead to such situation, one important factor regards the teaching method. How Italian is being taught in China? Are the teaching methods of Italian teaching suitable for the Chinese students? In order to answer the first question, I have attended a course of Italian offered by a language institute, observing how the course is organized, which teaching materials are applied, how are the teachers and the students and which teaching methods are adopted. I have also interviewed some teachers and students majored in Italian at the university to gather some supplementary information. In order to answer the second question, it is necessary to make clear the Chinese students' preferable way of learning and their difficulties in the learning of Italian. Thus, I have done a research among the students, investigating their preferable learning styles and ideologies of learning. I have also done a research of the differences between the Chinese language and the Italian language, as well as the main linguistic difficulties for the Chinese students. Since the foundation is of great importance for the further learning, in this paper we will concentrate on the beginners, namely those who are trying to reach the A2 level from zero.

This paper is consisted of seven chapters. The first chapter reviews briefly the general theory of foreign language teaching in China, introducing the most crucial factors in foreign language teaching and their current situation. The second chapter makes a rough comparison between the Chinese and the Italian language, analysing how Italian is different from Chinese phonologically, morphologically and syntactically. The third chapter introduces the objective, the research method and the procedure of the study. The fourth chapter records in detail a course of Italian in a language institute, adding some information of Italian teaching at university, to see how Italian is being taught in the institute and at the university. The fifth chapter, corresponding to the second chapter, analyses the difficulties for the Chinese students in learning Italian. In this chapter we will also discuss the Chinese students' main problems in Italian learning, especially the formation of their interlanguage. In the sixth chapter, several surveys are carried out among the students, discovering their learning styles, strategies and opinions. With the results of these surveys we can discuss whether a teaching method is suitable for the students. In the last chapter I discuss the courses observed in the fourth chapter, referring to the theory introduced in the first chapter, the language difficulties analysed in the fifth chapter and the students' characteristics discovered in the sixth chapter, and evaluate whether a teaching method is suitable for the Chinese students or not. In the same chapter, I also give some concrete suggestions for the Italian teaching, taking account of all the information and all the conclusions gathered in the previous chapters.

1

The Popular Theories of Foreign Language Teaching in China

1.1 The General Situation of Foreign Language Teaching in China

The foreign language teaching in China has got great achievements in the last 30 years. Not only the teaching of the foreign language, but also the drawing up of the syllabus and the design of the teaching materials, as well as the language proficiency test, have developed rapidly. Compared with 30 years ago, the overall quality of foreign language teaching has improved significantly and the Chinese people's competence in foreign language has improved evidently. Nevertheless, the foreign language teaching in China still has many limitations and problems, which hinder its sustainable development. The main deficiencies of foreign language education in China are as following:

1) *The foreign language education lacks a long-range plan, so it cannot meet the needs of the country.* Firstly, in China there is still no organization specialized in coordinating and supervising the foreign language teaching for different levels or the relevant plans and policies (Hu Wenzhong 2001). China does not yet have a unified standard for the foreign language competence, nor a unified certification authority for it. Secondly, in China there is no medium-term or long-term strategical plan for the foreign language education (Shu Dingfang, Hua Weifen 2009). On the one hand, China needs the definition and the research for the main foreign languages; on the other hand, the distribution of some important foreign languages in the country lacks the macroscopical guidance or arrangement and there is no macro control for the sorts, levels and quantity of the students of foreign language. Thirdly, the development of different foreign languages is vary unbalanced and the foreign language education lacks the necessary levels and regional distribution (Shu Dingfang 2015). On the whole, China lacks the high-end talents in foreign language, especially in the less-developed zones or the border areas. The offer and the distribution of the courses of foreign language are greatly affected by the economic considerations. In the coastal areas and in big cities, the talents in foreign language are superfluous, while in the less-developed zones and in the border areas, the supply of the talents in foreign languages falls short of demand. In the whole country, some important but not popular foreign languages do not have any institutes for teaching nor many talents specialized in research. At the same time, English as a foreign language overflows. Fourthly, the curriculums of the foreign language faculties are severely disaffiliated with the needs of the society nor with the development of the students (Shu Dingfang 2015). Many of the students of foreign language own only the basic skills but lack the specific knowledge. They know little about the history, culture, economy of the country in which the target language is spoken.

2) *The orientation of foreign language education is too vague and the exam-oriented education overflows* (Shu Dingfang 2015)*.* For the time being, only a few universities associate the foreign language teaching with the international courses and the formation of international talents. In most of the universities, the orientation is not clear. Many universities set the exam as a goal of foreign language teaching. For many students, their foreign language learning finishes after they have passed the exam and get a certificate. Their major is not highly related to their future occupation. After graduation, there are not many occasions for them to use the foreign language.

3) The teachers of foreign language are weak in scientific study and the internationalization of the scientific study is at a low degree (Shu Dingfang 2015). Many teachers of foreign language lack the awareness of the necessity of the scientific study and of the correspondent training. Their heavy workload does not allow them to dedicate themselves in studying other than in teaching. In addition, the mechanism of assessment is not reasonable enough and the universities do not orientate the subjects of foreign language out of a long-term consideration. As a result, the direction of study is not clear and the general study level is not high, not to mention the low degree of its internationalization.

1.2 Needs Analysis

Needs analysis means to analyze the status of the students, their motivation and the requisition of the profession in order to design the foreign language teaching in a more scientific way (Xia Jimei, Kong Xian 1999). It has four main functions: 1) guiding the establishment of the policy for the foreign language education; 2) guiding the teaching content, the design and the implementation of the course; 3) guiding the objective and the teaching method of the course; 4) serving as a reference for the evaluation and the assessment of the course (Shu Dingfang 2004). Needs analysis affects directly the design of the syllabus and the standard of the course, as well as the teaching quality of the course. However, though the needs analysis is of great significance to the foreign language teaching, it does not get much attention in China yet. Chen Bingbing, Wang Huan (2009) have listed some problems in the needs analysis in China:

1) There are only very few relevant researches and the development is very slow. In the last 30 years, there are only 32 essays about it, most of which appear after 2001;

2) The range of study is very limited. In China, the faculties of foreign languages are multiple and the courses are rich and varied. However, the study of needs analysis is limited only in English, never in other languages and the courses are limited in English courses at university or some specific English courses.

3) The region and samples are very limited and the coefficient of recovery in the early period was very low. The researches are usually limited in one university or in several faculties, whereas the researches carried out in several universities or in several provinces are very few. The researches with more than 1000 interviewers are even fewer. The coefficient of recovery before the year of 2000 was under 50%.

4) The diachronic researches are very few. Among all the 32 essays, there are only two essays have carried out a diachronic research.

5) The method of study is too unitary. The research of the essays relied too much on the questionnaires and the interviews. In addition, the objectivity, the scope and the representativeness of the study are limited by the unitary research. Questionnaires and interviews cannot show the overall demands of the society.

Nevertheless, the researches in the needs analysis have provided some enlightening results. Ying Huilan, Xu Huifang (2001) have done a research about the reading materials. They found out that the students expected the reading materials which were practical, not too easy nor too hard, interesting, informative and attractive. They also expected more narrations than other sorts of text.

Wang Jinbo (2009) has done a research about translation. He found out that students, especially those of foreign languages other than English, were very interested in translation and had a clear and practical motivation. They expected more courses that were tightly related to their needs, as well as the learner-oriented teaching method and the authenticity of the learning material.

Zhao Qinghong, Lei Lei, Zhang Mei (2009) have done a research about the general situation of the needs of the students in foreign language learning. They found out that the needs of the students were multiple and personal and they differed in some aspects between students in the first-class universities and those in the ordinary universities. What's more, the present foreign language education does not reflect nor satisfy sufficiently the needs of the students, which leads directly to the lack of motivation and the lost of interest in learning.

Shu Dingfang (2015) has done a research among the students of foreign language in five aspects: the situation of the needs analysis carried out by the policy makers, by the textbook writers, by the administrators who draw up the teaching syllabus and by the teachers, as well as the opportunities for the students to express their needs. He found out that the policy makers have done the needs analysis before putting forth an issue. Usually the analysis lasts more than three years. The textbook writers, however, rarely do the needs analysis. They write the textbook mainly according to their experience in teaching or in textbook writing. As for the administrators at university, most of the universities would draw up the teaching syllabus according the actual situation of the university, the opinions of the administration, the opinions of the teachers and the students, as well as the needs of the society, of the students and of the parents. When designing the curriculum, most of the universities would consider the opinions of the students and of the teachers. However, none of the universities does needs analysis when choosing the textbook. Only few universities do needs analysis in teaching, mainly to encourage the teachers to open some new, international courses. Other universities, though do not do needs analysis in teaching, learn the situation in teaching by attending a lesson as auditors or by asking the students to assess the teaching online. As regards the teachers and the students, most of the teachers concern about the students' needs and opinions and they often modify their teaching content and the teaching method according to the students' assessment. Most of the students report that the teachers sometimes concern about their needs and the most common ways to communicate with the teachers are private face-to-face talking and email.

In order to improve the quality of the needs analysis, Shu Dingfang (2015) has given the following recommendations:

   - *to enforce the study of the theory of needs analysis*. The administrators and the teachers should both enforce their study of the theory and apply it to the programming, the syllabus of the course, the design of the course and the teaching, ensuring the combination between theory and practice and the unification among society, university and students;

   - *to pay great attention to the practice of the theory*. Needs analysis, working as the first step in the design of the course, must be carefully carried out. The investigators must learn completely the situation and the needs of the students in multiple ways, at the same time they should learn the demands of the country and of the university, integrating the demands of the country and of the university within the course syllabus. They should on the one hand let the students know and accept the requisitions of the syllabus in multiple ways, on the other hand learn the students' needs and opinions via questionnaires and interviews, adjusting the teaching content and the methods, so to improve the teaching efficiency;

   - *to complete the working mechanism of foreign language teaching*. The administrators and teachers should communicate frequently on the students' learning situation, so that they can draw up a reasonable teaching plan. In addition, they should enrich the teaching materials so to facilitate the teaching.

1.3 Course Design

Course design mainly includes the general presentation of the nature and the feature of the language, of the teaching of language, of the requisition of teaching, as well as the presentation of the teaching method. It differs from the concept of *syllabus* which is a concrete description of the objectives of teaching (White 1988). In the last 20 years, the study in course design of foreign language teaching has increased, which means this area has got some attention, though the study is still at a basic and scattered level. The development of the study can be divided into four phases: from 1990 to 1994, the study was characterized by few results, narrow range of study and single studying method; from 1995 to 1999, the number of the relevant articles has evidently increased; from 2000 to 2004, the number of the relevant articles has sharply increased and the analysis was more profound; from 2005 to now, the number of the relevant articles has not evidently increased but the quality has evidently improved (Shu Dingfang 2015). The studies in the twenty years have some features in common. The topics of the studies are centralized. The model of the course is mostly discussed, followed by the principles of the course and the accomplishment of the course. Other factors of course design are scarce. For example there are very few discussions on the analysis of the environment, the formulation of the teaching objective, the content of the course design and the evaluation of the course (Shu Dingfang 2015).

Among the enlightening studies, Zhang Xiaodong, Yan Rong (2004) point out that the method of discussion works better than the traditional lecture in improving the integral competences of the students. Fang Wenli (2003) analyzed the task-based teaching method and pointed out that the task-based teaching should consider the different linguistic abilities of different learners, with both a certain degree of difficulty and operability. The task-based teaching should include the preparation before the task, the guide and the accomplishment during the task and the reflection after the task. Since there lacks the ideal linguistic environment for the task, the task-based teaching should pay attention to both the significance and the form.

Shu Dingfang (2015) suggests the process of design as following: analyzing the environment of the course → formulating the objectives of the course → organizing the teaching content → setting the mode of the course → establishing the evaluation system. According to this process, the present course design has some deficiencies.

1) The environment analysis is severely ignored. The environment analysis is the most basic dimension of the course design. It includes the dimension of the student, the dimension of the teacher and the dimension of the teaching environment. The dimension of the student includes the age, the linguistic level, the motivation and the preferred learning method. The dimension of the teacher includes the linguistic competence and the confidence, the technological competence and the question of whether they have been trained specifically and whether they have abundant time to prepare the lesson and to correct the homework. The dimension of the teaching environment includes the classroom, the class time, the teaching resources and the multimedia facilities. The environment analysis can also take into consideration of some wide questions, for example the position of foreign language in the country, the number of the people who speaks a foreign language, the frequency of the use of the foreign language, the attitude of the learner towards the use of the foreign language etc. (Shu Dingfang 2015). Only after analyzing all these preconditions can the course design begin. The present articles show the fact that study of the course design still remains to the macro dimension, whereas the study of many other factors is severely scarce.

2) The nature of the course is not considered. The nature of the course includes various aspects, for example, who designs the course? How is the course being designed? How to carry out the decisions? What are the objectives, contents and modes of the course? How is the course supposed to be evaluated (Shu Dingfang 2015)? Taking the objective as an example. There are four main objectives of the language course: the knowledge of the language, the linguistic skills, the ideological objectives and the pragmatic abilities (Macalister 2010). The objectives of the course design can include all the four objectives or emphasize

some of them. Setting the objective is the center of the course design. The more concrete the objectives are, the more operable the course is. In the present course design at the universities, the objectives are rather clear, but it is unknown if the teachers set their own teaching goals after reading the syllabus. The relevant study is too vague.

Neither has the evaluation got much attention. The scholars have already confirmed the functions of evaluation, which include to raise the students interest, to stimulate them to be more active, to improve the teaching quality and to enhance the teaching efficiency. The current discussion on the evaluation still remains to the macro political dimension while that from the scholastic point of view is very few (Shu Dingfang 2009).

3) There lacks the attention to the main character of the course design – the teachers. In all the China, the subjects of the course design are the administrators and the experts. Students and teachers rarely participate. This mode of course design, though assures a unified standard, has deficiencies. The peculiarity of the university, the function of the teacher in course design and the personality of the student are ignored (Han Yanlun 2005). The teachers are normally regarded as the subject of the accomplishment of the course, not of the design of the course. In fact, the working experience of the teacher is of great importance to the course design.

Shu Dingfang (2015) has done a research in course design at different universities. From his report we can discover some general situations in China.

As regards the objectives of the course, the teachers pay much attention to the linguistic skills, the integral competences and the linguistic knowledge. Among these three objectives, the integral competences are the most important, while the linguistic knowledge is not of absolute importance as years ago. Other objectives, such as the independent learning and the learning strategies, do not get enough attention.

As for the environment of the course, most of the universities pay much attention to both of the factors. The two factors are the software (the humanistic environment, the needs of the society and of the students, the status of the university, the status and the mode of the formation of the students) and the hardware (the teaching condition and the facilities). Before setting the goals, many universities will consider the needs and the opinions of all sides. The teaching facilities are greatly meliorated, though many teachers do not use them in class.

When comes to the course design, most of the universities design their courses reasonably according to their own programmes. For instance, Southeast University started a *sandwich program* from 2009 for intensive reading. In every semester three teachers teach the lessons by turns, each taking responsibility for five weeks. The professional courses are divided in business and literature. From the third year open the optional courses. Anhui Normal University offers the professional basic courses and the professional courses. The professional courses start in the third year, divided in linguistics, literature and translation. Foreign teachers take responsibility for the background of the literature, listening, speaking and speech.

As for the accomplishment of the course, He Lianzhen (2003) reported a lesson of English. The lesson was a listening-speaking lesson. The teaching materials were videos and the students were interested, but after watching there was no activity regarding the language. The main teaching method was Grammar-Translation. The teacher explained the meaning of some words. The teacher was at the center of teaching and there was no communication among the students, nor any explanation of the linguistic knowledge. The teaching content was too easy and less informative. From this case study He points out some deficiencies in the realization of the course.

1) The participation of the teacher and the student is scarce. The teacher is one of the main factors for the success of the course design. In most of the foreign language class, teachers still play the role as a

transmitter of the knowledge, not a designer of the course. Teachers have no idea of how the syllabus is drawn up, whether it is modified periodically or what is the basis of the modification. In fact, the course design is a process of reconstituting the teachers' ideas and knowledge. The direct consequence of not participating in the course design is that the teacher does not even know the goals of the course, which leads to the blindness of teaching.

As the other subject of the course, the students have not got much attention. Most universities will not adjust the syllabus and the plan to the students' demands. A few universities take the students' opinions into consideration when designing the course. The only chance that the students' opinions value is in the assessment of the teaching. On the one hand, the universities and the teachers emphasize the student-based teaching, on the other hand the students' needs are ignored.

2) The training of the learning strategies is not sufficient. Since a long time ago the education applies the mode in which the teacher talks and the students listen. This teaching method, in which the teacher is at the center of teaching, does not stimulate the students' interest in learning and fails in developing their competence in language use. Many students lack the motivation, the learning plan and a good learning habit. They are not able to manage, control or evaluate themselves. A profound reason can partly be that the teachers do not have a clear conception of 'independency' and do not know the characteristics of the students. They are afraid that 'independency' will challenge the teachers' authority and they are not capable of assessing the students' ability in 'independency'. In fact, the ability in autonomic learning should be one of the objectives of course design and an important part of the course. With the tendency of communicative language teaching and the transmission from the teacher-based class to the student-based class, the students need to develop their ability in independent learning along with the language learning. They need to learn the language and they need to learn to learn. The students should be responsible for their learning goals, process and results. Independent learning is the precondition and the objective of language learning. Teachers should develop the students' awareness of independent learning, and should stimulate their motivation and help them choose suitable learning strategies.

3) The improvement of the ability in language use is slow. With the reform in education, though the teaching is more active for the time being, many doubt how many things the students can learn from one lesson. In the teaching process, though the teachers know more about the language teaching than before, they lack a systematic and profound study, nor a practical and pointed methodology. Many teachers follow blindly the tendency, but they have ignored the consolidation and the improvement of the students' basic knowledge and skills. Some teachers use some interesting activities to show that their class is communicative, but they forget to combine the activities with the improvement of the language abilities. Students cannot learn from those activities.

Apart from the accomplishment of the course, there are also some deficiencies in course design. Shu Dingfang (2015) proposes four problems. Two are similar with the point 2) and 3) mentioned above. The other two problems are:

4) The objectives of the course are not precise. The teachers give too much emphasis to the realization of the goals, but relatively the training of the linguistic skills does not get much attention. The goals in class normally regards the knowledge. Whether the students have remembered the knowledge becomes the main target of the course. The goal regards the intercultural competence does not get much attention either, which to some extent leads to the lack of the communicative competence of the students.

5) The design of the course is not adequate enough. The courses cannot meet the needs of various sides yet. The needs of the students should be at the first place. The course design should take them into consideration. At the second place is the demands of the market. The course should face the market and hold its demands, investigating which linguistic requisitions are for each profession and which linguistic

abilities they require from the students. We should think how to form the students' ability in application and in innovation through the course. At the same time we should think how to transmit the linguistic knowledge through the course. The course design should aim at training the students' linguistic competences and their professional skills. In the course design system, we should improve the course's quality and enforce the connection between courses, so to enrich the course system and to make it multidimensional.

1.4 Teaching Materials

The teaching materials play an important role in language teaching. Suaréz (2001) reported that 98% of the information in class does not come from the teacher, but from the teaching materials. 90% of the homework is decided by the teaching materials. Thus, the teaching materials are at the center of the teaching process. In the traditional class in China, teachers follow strictly the textbook, which is of great importance to teaching.

Wang Dengfeng (2007) introduced two different definitions of *teaching materials* in China. One defines the teaching material as all the materials that the teacher and the student use in class and out of class, such as textbook, exercise book, copy, video, CD, newspaper, magazine, TV program, card, photo, software and so on. Anyway, all the materials that enable the students to enrich their knowledge or to develop their skills can be regarded as a teaching material. According to this definition, the teaching material contains all the materials. This is a wide definition showing the relationship between teaching materials and the external world. Teaching materials come from the external world and are a medium for getting to know the world. Teaching materials function as recourses and serve for the students' needs in learning. This definition does not mention the concrete nature, content and function of the teaching materials.

The other concept defines the teaching material as an important assurance to realize the teaching objectives proposed by the teaching syllabus. The teaching materials should provide the most standard language and systematic and pointed practicing materials in order to lay the linguistic foundation for the students, to train their ability in using the language and to improve their cultural level. Teaching materials should pay attention to the ideological, scientific, practical and attractive factors and combine the fixed knowledge with the flexible thoughts and the normative standard with the new tendency.

These two definitions differ in four aspects. Firstly, the second definition makes prominent the referential function of the teaching materials, confirming the ideology and the principle of the teaching materials – the nucleus should be the syllabus. Secondly, the second definition shows the nature of the teaching material, including scientificalness, ideologicalness and so on. The nature of the teaching material sets the standards for choosing sources, editing materials and evaluating the teaching materials. Thirdly, the second definition sets the linguistic standard of the teaching materials as 'a best sample of the language', which means the informal language should not be included in the teaching materials. This standard presents the representativeness and the authority of the teaching material. At the same time, it also draws a boundary between the language in class and the language in the real world. Fourthly, the teaching material in the second definition is only a material that the teachers use for organizing the class and guiding the students, while its function of interaction between the teaching material and the student is not mentioned. It pays much attention to the standard of the language and of the content, but does not consider the needs of the students. In this way, this definition still reflects a teaching-based ideology, not a learning-based one.

Cai Jigang (2013) has done a research in the use of the teaching materials. The results show that for foreign language teaching, there are multiple sorts of teaching materials. Most of the universities apply more than

one textbook in teaching and among the universities there is no tendency of using the same materials. The cycle of changing the textbooks is more than five years for most of the universities.

The quality of the teaching materials is good and meets the needs of the students. Most of the students are satisfied with the teaching materials because they can learn a new language through the interesting contents in the textbook and the teachers apply many supplementary materials, which enrich the teaching content and fit the students' personal needs. Teachers, however, do not very much satisfied with the textbooks. They use plenty of supplementary materials because different students have different linguistic basis, structures of information, preferences, interests and personalities. Teachers think that the textbooks are not pointed, flexible or multiple. They believe that the supplementary materials meet better the students' needs.

Generally speaking, the study in teaching materials in China is not profound enough, especially those in the use and in the evaluation of the teaching materials are very few. The present studies are not deep or systematic and lack empirical researches. Teachers rely too much on the teaching materials and pay little attention to the teaching objectives and the principles in the macro dimension (Shu Dingfang 2015).

As for the evaluation of the teaching materials, Cai Jigang (2013) points out that the relevant studies in China are not satisfactory enough. The quantity of such study is not big and the studies in theory and in empirical research are scarce. The universities give little emphasis on the evaluation of the teaching material and the only subject in evaluation is the experts, while the opinions of the teachers and the students are ignored.

In the recent years, the foreign language teaching tends to be more multiple, personal and professional and the resources of various teaching materials are more and more abundant. The various teaching materials require the teacher to be able to assess and to choose. The multiple needs of the students and the rapid development of the society asks for the study in teaching materials, because it can provide the theoretical reference for the edition of the teaching materials and allow the teachers to use the teaching materials more efficiently with a critical view.

1.5 Language Teaching

As the most important node in language education, language teaching receives much concern from the teachers and the researchers. In this paragraph, we will introduce some popular language teaching theories, the teaching syllabus and some researches.

1.5.1 Popular Language Teaching Theories in China

Nowadays educational theory in China comes from the Western; Krashen, Stern and other scholars' theories influence a lot on the Chinese education. Gao Yan (2008) presented the theory of Stern (1992), introducing the three levels of language teaching, namely the basic theoretical level, the strategical level and the practical level. The basic theoretical level is presented by the concepts of language, society, learning and teaching. The knowledge of the nature of the language and of the relationship between language and society is presented in every language course and influences the language teaching approach. Dai Weidong, Hu Wenzhong (2009) introduced some main teaching methods in China. Since the 80's China has gone through the Grammar-Translation Method, the Functional-Notional Approach, the Direct Method,

the Audiolingual Method, the communicative approach, the eclectic method and the task-based teaching, presenting the influence of behaviorism, socialism and humanism.

The strategical level is presented by the formulation of the plans and decisions of teaching, including the teaching content, objectives, procedures and the evaluation. Among these, the procedure is the nucleus of teaching. The strategies of the procedure can be divided into three general sorts: teaching strategies, time distribution strategies and interpersonal strategies. Teaching strategies include the target language referential/ mother language referential strategy, the analytic/empiric strategy, the dominant/recessive strategy. The Grammar-Translation Method represents the mother language referential strategy, referring to the mother language as a medium of the teaching activities and the translation as an effective teaching technique. The Direct Method and the Audiolingual Method represent the target language referential strategy, discouraging the use of the mother language so that the students can get in touch with the target language as much as possible. Both the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audiolingual Method belong to the analytic strategy, by which the students learn the foreign language through practice, while the communicative approach belongs to the empirical strategy, by which the students learn the language unconsciously through meaningful communicative activities and through the use of the language. The dominant strategy makes the students to pay attention to the rules and to generalize them consciously. The Grammar-Audiolingual Method represents this strategy. Correspondently, the recessive strategy comes from the behaviorism and regards the learning as the formation of a habit. Students learn the language intuitively and automatically through the contact with the language. The Audiolingual Method and the communicative approach represent this strategy. Normally, the teacher will not use a single method, but integrates various teaching theories and methods together, so that they can satisfy different teaching circumstances. As a result, in the foreign language teaching appears a tendency of eclecticism. They choose some procedures from one method and some techniques from another, so that they can adapt to various teaching situations and overcome the limitation of a certain teaching method, choosing the most suitable teaching method with a prudent attitude.

The time distribution strategy indicates the quantum and the distribution of the teaching time. It involves the administrators and the course designers. What the teachers can control may be the time organization for one course or for one lesson.

The interpersonal strategy includes the teacher-based/student-based teaching, the pair work/group work/individual work and so on. The teacher cannot decide how many students there are in a class, nor which backgrounds the students have, but can decide in the interpersonal dimension whether the students are guided by the teacher or are independent from the teacher. In this dimension, the foreign language teaching has gone through the teacher-based theory, the student-based theory and the interactive subjects of teacher and students. The teacher-based theory is based on the formal linguistics. It lays emphasis upon the structure of the language. The teacher is the authority to transmit the knowledge, guiding, managing and controlling the teaching activity. The student-based teaching, on the other hand, places emphasis on the positive contributes of the students in teaching. It lets the students to decide the learning content and the learning method on their own and encourage them to be more responsible for their learning. The idea of the interactive subjects of teacher and students argues that the *teaching* and the *learning* in the language class is a process of synthesized interaction. The teacher and the students have the equal rights, position and obligations. The teacher is the helper and the promoter of the constitution of the significates, not the transmitter or the implanter of the knowledge. Anyway, in this personal and complicated learning process which involves multiple factors, the students should monitor, evaluate and control their own learning process effectively and be responsible for themselves. The teacher should organize, control, test, encourage, participate and help the students' learning, especially help them to internalize the knowledge in a best way according to their needs.

The practical level includes a series of teaching activities which are closely connected to the class and affect the learning. In the foreign language teaching, different schools propose different activities, but activities like monologue, dialogue, group work, pair work and role-play are adopted by all the schools. Stern (1992) divides the teaching activities into communicative activities and exercises. The communicative activities include teaching the knowledge using the foreign language, studying the literature and so on, while the exercises include giving and obeying orders, transmitting information, asking and answering questions, solving problems, role-play, dramas and so on. The difference between the practical level and the strategical level is that at the practical level, we care about not only the application of the strategy and the teaching activities, but also the correspondent behavior, the reaction and the result of the students.

Dai Weiding, Hu Wenzhong (2009) introduced other three levels in foreign language teaching proposed by Richards and Rodgers (2001). The first level is the *approach*, involving the ideas towards the object (language the culture) and the subject (teacher and student) in language education. The second level is the *design*, including the objective, syllabus, types of the teaching activities, role of the learners, role of the teacher, role of the teaching material etc. The third level is the *procedure*, indicating the techniques, skills and behaviors in class. The three levels are related to each other and affect each other. The foreign language teaching is a process that the teacher presents the teaching approach to the students and achieves the teaching effects. It is an application of the teaching approach and of the course design in the teaching activities.

Li Li (2008) introduced the non-interface position, the interface position and the variability position proposed by Krashen. The non-interface position argues that *acquisition* is different from *learning*. *Acquisition* is a natural consequence while learning is an intentional consequence, and the comprehensive inputs provided by the teaching in class can accelerate the acquisition. The interface position believes that the implicit knowledge and the explicit knowledge is related to each other and the explicit knowledge can transform into the implicit knowledge through sufficient practices. According to the variability position, different tasks require different knowledge and the teaching process serves directly or indirectly for the internalization of different knowledge. As a result, the learners in class can accomplish more tasks than those learning in a natural situation. Thus, the teaching in class affects and functions to a certain extent on the foreign language learning.

1.5.2 The Current Teaching Syllabus for English Teaching

Since we cannot find a teaching syllabus for Italian teaching, nor a general syllabus for the teaching of all the foreign languages, we introduce here the teaching syllabus for English teaching. We will introduce two syllabuses, one for the English teaching in other faculties at university, the other for the English teaching in the faculty of English, trying to figure out the ideas of the government about foreign language teaching.

1.5.2.1 The Teaching Syllabus for Other Faculties

The present teaching syllabus for the English at university is the *Requisitions for the English Teaching at University*, published in 2007. The *Requisitions* proposes the teaching objectives for the university English as following:

- form the students' integral competences in English, especially their abilities in listening and in speaking;

- enable them to exchange information effectively in oral and in written language;

- enforce their ability in independent learning and improve their integral cultural quality, so to meet the needs of the economic development of China and the needs of the international communication (Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, 2007).

These requisitions pay much attention to the training of the students' abilities of listening and speaking, emphasizing the output of the language. Another important proposition is the reform of the teaching model. The *Requisitions* proposes a teaching model "based on the computer and the classroom". In this model, "the students are the subject of teaching and the teacher is the guide". It emphasizes "the activeness of both the teacher and the students, especially the dominant position of the students and the leading role of the teacher in the teaching process" (Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, 2007). The new model gives prominence to the dominant position of the students both in class and out of class, encouraging the teaching to meet the needs of students of different personalities, styles and levels. It also extents the traditional classroom teaching out of the class (Dai Weidong, Hu Wenzhong 2009).

1.5.2.2 The Teaching Syllabus for the English Major

The current syllabus is published in 2000. The syllabus puts forward the idea of the *inter-disciplinary talent*. The teaching objectives are "*to form the inter-disciplinary talents that are in possession of a solid linguistic basis of English and a wide range of knowledge, as well as competences to use English to do work like translation, teaching, management, research etc. in departments like foreign affairs, education, business, culture, technology, military, etc.*" (*Teaching Syllabus of English for the English Majors in the Higher Education*, 2000). Such teaching objectives require the "complete quality education". Along with the training of the basic linguistic skills, it emphasizes the training of the competence in intercultural communication and the training of the abilities in thinking and in innovation. As for the teaching method, it underlines that "*the classroom teaching should put the students at the dominant position and the teacher at a leading position, change the old teaching model in which the teacher was at the center of teaching and put emphasize upon the training of the students' abilities in learning and in researching. In the teaching process there should be more task-based teaching activities and the activities should be multiple*" (*Teaching Syllabus of English for the English Majors in the Higher Education*, 2000). The syllabus reflects the transformation of the teacher's role in class and the rise of the task-based teaching as a new form of the communicative language teaching.

1.5.3 Chinese Researches in Foreign Language Teaching

Generally speaking, the Chinese researches in language teaching are focused on the theoretical and the strategical level more than on the practical level. Chinese scholars have discussed all the language theories, teaching theories and their significance in language teaching, such as text linguistics, cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics, functional linguistics, pragmatics, stylistics, language acquisition theories, corpus linguistics, multiple intelligences theory, behaviorism, constructivism and so on. The researchers have also done some empirical study in some theories. For example, Wu Peng (2001) has done a research in the Krashen's input theory. He took the words and phrases as the nucleus of input, paid attention to the attractiveness of the reading texts and augmented the reading quantity. After one semester's experience, the students got much better scores than those in the control group.

The discussions of the teaching methods are of great quantity. Researchers have introduced and evaluated all the teaching methods in foreign language teaching, such as the Grammar-Translation Method, the suggestive teaching method, the whole language instruction method, the Audiolingual Method, the communicative teaching approach, the task-based teaching, the content-based instruction, the eclecticism and so on. Based on the evaluation of these teaching methods, Scholars have also discussed the application of these methods in the language teaching.

Scholars have also discussed various teaching models, such as the graded teaching, the intensive teaching, the multimedia teaching, the theme-based teaching, the research-oriented teaching and so on. For example, Chang Junyue (1997) evaluated the 3Ps (Presentation-Practice-Production), the 3Is (Illustration-

Interaction-Induction), the ARC (Authentic-Restricted-Clarification and Focus) and the ESA (Engage-Study-Activate). He came to the conclusion that "*the 3Ps is suitable for the teaching of the rules at a low level; the 3Is is suitable for the students at a high level; some theories in the ARC about applying the authentic language are reasonable; the ESA offers more choices at a macro level. However, there is no teaching model that is suitable for every situation. What the foreign research in the field of the teaching model really contributes to is that it liberates us from the restriction of a single, stiff teaching model and lets us study the foreign language teaching from a new starting point*". Shu Dingfang (2006) proposed a new teaching model, which is not a workable procedure, but a series of new ideas of the basic functions of the language teaching in the classroom. These basic functions include 1) arousing and keeping the students' interest in learning, 2) providing sufficient resources and opportunities for foreign language learning, 3) training the students' learning strategies, 4) helping the students to solve their problems in foreign language learning.

Also the discussions on the teaching activity flourish. Here the teaching activity includes the training of the skills and the formation of the competences, the design and the techniques of teaching, the teaching process, the factors that affect the teaching process etc. In this dimension, the researchers concern more about the design and the techniques of teaching than the teaching process, while the development of the skills and the relevant factors get less concern (Shu Dingfang 2015).

Formation of the Competences

The main objectives of foreign language teaching is to form the overall competences of the students, including not only the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, but also the communicative competence, the pragmatic competence and the ability of thinking. Researchers have studied how to reach the goals in the teaching process. Huang Yueyuan, Gu Yueguo (1996) discussed the relationship between knowledge transmitting and competence forming, arguing that the course must inspire and stimulate the students' consciousness and enthusiasm for learning, paying attention to their development of all kinds of competences such as attention, observation, memory, thinking and independent learning, so that they can discover, analyze and solve the problems independently. In the recent years, the training of the students' critical thinking skills gets more attention. Han Shaojie, Wang Xiaoying (2009) expounded the meaning of the critical thinking and its content and method. They analyzed the importance of the training of critical thinking in the intensive reading and discussed how to link efficiently the intensive reading with the training of critical thinking. They also argued that such combination favors to change the current teaching situation in which the training of linguistic skills is considered more important than the training of the thinking ability. Yuan Pinghua (2010) and Yang Dexiang, Zhao Yongping (2011) discussed the effect of the Content-based Instruction (CBI) on the training of the students' critical thinking ability. Yuan Pinghua (2010) has done a one-year experiment and discovered that the students in the CBI class are stronger in critical thinking than students in normal classes. This fact is presented by their stronger abilities in recognizing the hypothesis, inducing and deducing, which means that the CBI can enhance the students' critical thinking ability. Yang Dexiang, Zhao Yongping (2011) have done a series of empirical researches in dimensions of clarity, relativity, logicality, profundity and flexibility of the critical thinking and came to the conclusion that the CBI does promote the improvement of the students' critical thinking ability.

The Design and the Techniques of Teaching

The inchoate studies in this field concentrate on the concrete activities and teaching skills in class, such as taking notes, debate, role-play, gap-filling, monologue, as well as intensive reading lessons, literature lessons, society and culture lessons, linguistics lessons and so on. After the year of 2000 the focus of study transfers to the application and the effect of various forms of class organization in teaching, such as group work and cooperative learning. Pang Jixian, Wu weiwei (2000) studied the interactive effect of two types of activities – the message exchanging task and the information providing task – and came to the conclusion

that the message exchanging task produces more interactive amendment than the information providing task and the theme of the task plays an important role. Deng Xiue, Zheng Xinmin (2008) studied the effectiveness of the group activity from the aspects of the teacher and of the students and came to the conclusion that the role of the teacher, the choice of the topic, the relations among the group members and the length of time would affect to some extent the motivation of the students and would consequently affect the effectiveness of the activity. On the other hand, the motivation of the students, their differences in personality, learning abilities, self-respect and tolerance of risk will affect to some extent their performance in the activity. Thus, they suggested that the teacher should be aware of the factors which affect the effectiveness of the activity, introducing some communicative strategies and relevant knowledge before doing the group activity. They should choose some interesting themes which are close to the students' life and organize the members and the time reasonably. They should also encourage the communication and cooperation among the group members when doing the activity.

Shu Dingfang (2015) studied the teaching objectives. He found out that the intercultural quality (73.3%) is the most important objective according to the teachers, followed by linguistic skills (72.3%), communication (61.5%), linguistic knowledge (59.0%), independent learning (50.8%) and learning strategies (37.4%).

The Teaching Process

In the study of the teaching process, scholars do many empirical researches. Their study contents include interaction in class, discourse analysis, questions in class, feedback, error analysis and correction and so on. Liu Xuehui, Qian Weiwei (2007) described the features of negotiated interaction in class and the immediate L2 production of the students. They discovered that there are not many negotiated interactions in foreign language classes and the students never launch any such interaction. The quantity of the negotiation for content and for significance is bigger than that of the negotiation for form. The various negotiated interactions launched by the teachers provide more opportunities for the students to produce output, but not all the negotiated interactions can improve the quantity or the quality of the students' output.

Hu Qingqiu (2007) analyzed the discourse of the Chinese teachers and of the foreign teachers in class and came to the conclusion that the Chinese teachers and the foreign teachers have the following similarities and differences: 1) the total quantities of the discourse of both teachers are more or less the same, but the quantity of the discourse of foreign teachers in class is much bigger than that of the students; 2) the quantity of the interrogation of the Chinese teachers in class is four times bigger than that of foreign teachers, and the types of their questions are different; 3) the structures of the discourse of both teachers are similar; 4) the ways of feedback of both teachers are the same.

Liang Wenxia (2007) discussed the phenomenon of co-constitution of the discourse by collecting and analyzing the discourse of the students in groups. She found out that co-constitution is a common phenomenon in the discourse of the students in group. It includes asking for help, carrying over the discourse, correcting others, self-correction and encouraging. Among these, asking for help and carrying over the discourse are most common and are the particular features of the students' discourse in group.

Zhen Fengchao (2010) analyzed the feedback language in the discourse of the students. He discovered that the students use few feedback languages in discourse, especially the feedback languages that require good linguistic abilities, such as helping the speaker to finish the discourse or summarizing briefly what the speaker has said. Females use languages indicating understanding, agreement or appreciation more often compared to males. Xie Xiaoyan (2011) studied the function and the effectiveness of the feedback of the teachers and found out that 1) teachers like using strategies such as repetition, changing the expression and extension; 2) teachers rarely ask the students to describe more in detail; 3) some teachers use

feedback to correct the students' errors, while some teachers offer the students the chance of self-correction, though they cannot guide the students efficiently.

Shi Guang, Liu Xuehui (2008) discussed the students' and the teachers' opinions on error correction and on the efficiency of correction. They found out that 1) compared with the teachers, the students have a more positive attitude towards error and error correction; 2) teachers and students have different ideas on how to correct errors; 3) as for the efficiency of different ways of correction, negotiation, which is agreed by both teachers and students, is the most effective; pointing out the errors directly, which is agreed by the students but not by the teachers, has an ordinary efficiency; recasting, which is agreed by the teachers but not by the students, is the least effective.

Other Factors

Besides the teaching skills and the teaching process, scholars have also studied other factors that may affect the teaching efficiency, such as the emotion of the students, the environment of the class, the quality of the teacher and so on. Sun Yunmei (2010) studied the socio-psychological environment for the students, such as the relations between the students, the support from the teacher, the participation in class, the cooperation among the students, the responsibility of the students, the innovation of the teacher etc. and gave several recommendations. For example, we should promote the support from the teacher to the individual student and promote the participation of the students in every teaching activity in class. We should also let the students know the goal of the tasks in class. Moreover, we should take the gender into consideration when designing the tasks and distinguish students of different levels. Tan Chun (2009) believes that the foreign language class is a micro ecological environment. The constitution of this ecological environment should establish the ideology of student-based teaching, the equal and harmonic teaching atmosphere, the relaxed and independent learning environment and the reciprocal relationship between teacher and student.

Wang Lingkun (1997) discovered that the independent students have a better learning efficiency. He put forward some principles for the teaching out of the classroom, such as quality education, teacher-guided learning, teaching according to the students' aptitude, multiple and interesting learning, flexible time using etc.

Though there are numerous researches in the field of language teaching, some factors have not got much attention, for example the quality of the teacher. Stevick (1998) holds the opinion that the teacher has five functions in classroom teaching: cognizing, managing the classroom, achieving the goal, building the interpersonal atmosphere and stimulating the students' enthusiasm to accomplish the task in class. The teacher plays a significant role in classroom teaching and only when the teacher's quality is improved can he/she realize these functions and guarantee the efficiency of teaching. Thus, we should pay more attention to the improvement of the teacher's quality.

1.6 Evaluation

The evaluation of the foreign language course indicates the overall assessment of a certain course. It includes collecting data, measuring value and making decision. The evaluation means to set the goals for the assessment and design the correspondent assessing model according to the needs of the students under a certain theory. The evaluator needs to collect the data in a certain situation and analyze and measure the collected information. It is a systematic, objective and scientific process in which the evaluators measure and decide whether the course has reached its' goals, how is the progress, whether it is

efficient and whether it needs to be modified (Wang Binhua 2004). The evaluation involves various aspects, for example whether the goal is reasonable, whether the breadth, the depth and the style of the teaching material is suitable for the students, the ability of the teacher in preparing the lesson and in teaching, whether the syllabus and the teaching material is practical, the efficiency of the teaching process, the model of testing, the use of the teaching equipment and so on (Xia Jimei 2003).

The development of evaluation reflects the development of the education theory. The behaviorism believes that the repetitive practice can enforce the students' learning process. Evaluation under this theory is a test focused on the knowledge, in which the teacher tests the students' learning result. Evaluation under the cognitivism, on the other hand, tries to learn the overall competence of the students. It does not limited in the mastery of the knowledge. The humanism calls for the attention to the students' needs, giving emphasis on the development of their personalities. The teaching is based on the students and the goal is to stimulate their interest and to improve their skills. Moreover, students can evaluate the teacher (Cai Yonghong 2007). From the transferring of the focus of the evaluation, we can see that the evaluation is changing from generalization, standardization, quantification to individualization, humanization and qualification.

1.6.1 The Chinese Evaluation System of Foreign Language Teaching at University

Since we cannot find an evaluation standard for Italian teaching, nor a general evaluation standard for foreign language teaching, we introduce here the evaluation standard for English teaching at university, which also reflects the evaluation standard for the teaching of other foreign languages. The current standard of evaluation for English teaching is published in the *Requisitions for the English teaching at University* in 2007. The standard puts forward two types of evaluation – the formative evaluation and the conclusive evaluation. The formative evaluation is during the teaching process. It includes the self-assessment of the students, the reciprocal evaluation between the students, the assessment from the teacher and the assessment from the administrator. The formative evaluation can take place in various ways, such as record for the activities in class and out of class, record for the learning online, record for the learning documents, interview, informal discussion and so on. It favors the teacher and the administrator to observe, evaluate and supervise the students' learning process and urges the students to learn efficiently. The conclusive evaluation is at the end of a teaching period. It mainly includes the examination at the end of the semester or the proficiency test.

Besides the evaluation of the students, the *Requisitions* also contains the evaluation of the teachers, namely the evaluation of their teaching process and the teaching efficiency. The evaluation of the teachers cannot only rely on the results of the examination the students, but should take into consideration also the teaching attitude of the teachers, their teaching approach, teaching method, teaching content, class organization, teaching efficiency and so on.

These standards of evaluation proposed in the *Requisitions* imply that the evaluation system of English teaching at university is developing in pluralism.

1.6.2 Chinese Researches in Evaluation

According to the object of evaluation, the researches can be divided into evaluation of the teachers and evaluation of the students.

1.6.2.1 The Evaluation of the Teachers

Sun Dating (2009) has done a research in the evaluation system in foreign language teaching at different universities. The result shows that since the universities have adopted or are adopting the performance management system and have set various quantified evaluating indicators, evaluating the teachers by their dominant achievements in teaching and in researching, the teachers of foreign language at the universities are under the pressure of teaching and of researching. As a result, at some universities the evaluation of the teachers still pays too much attention to researching and cares less about teaching.

The result of the research by Sun Dating (2009) shows that for the present the evaluating systems established by different universities are more or less the same, including the similar standards of the teaching attitude, the teaching approach, the teaching method, the teaching content, the class organization and the teaching efficiency. The evaluation for the teachers in teaching has a tendency of networking. The universities or the faculties would cooperate with software companies to build course platforms.

The subjects of evaluation for the teachers in teaching include experts, supervisors, other teachers and students. In most of the universities there are supervisors to attend and to evaluate the lessons termly. The supervisors are generally the retired senior teachers or some reputable professors. On the other hand, the colleagues do not attend to each other's lessons that often. In the meanwhile, students in all the universities have the opportunity to evaluate the teachers' teaching, though some students do not have a clear idea on the evaluating system. Only 35.6% of the students get the idea of evaluation and take it seriously. 38.9% of the students think that the evaluation remains only superefficient and they evaluate the teachers casually. 22.4% of the students do not care the evaluating indicators and evaluate the teachers in their own ways. More than half of the teachers think that the students' assessments are valuable to a certain extent and will adjust the teaching according to the students' opinions.

1.6.2.2 The Evaluation of the Students

The evaluation of the students can be divided into two types: evaluation by test and evaluation by other means. In the last 30 years, the evaluation by test has been developing steadily, while the evaluation by other means is still in a starting stage (Shu Dingfang 2015).

Wang Shouren, Wang Haixiao (2011) mentioned that in most of the universities, the courses of foreign language are mainly evaluated by the conclusive evaluation. The exam at the end of the semester occupies 70% in the evaluation. As for the content of the exam, Wang reported that the exam mainly tests the students' mastery of the linguistic knowledge. The questions are still of the traditional type (vocabulary, reading, composition, cloze, listening, some universities have translation) and are generally close questions, which cannot reflect the students' communicative competences and their abilities in language use. Only a few universities have organized a group of testing, designing the test questions to test the students' overall competences.

As regarding the evaluation by other means, students are supposed to participate in the evaluation. Also students themselves have expressed their willingness to evaluate themselves or their classmates. However, Wang's observation shows that in the foreign language class there is rarely a section of self-assessment or reciprocal assessment. Though the teachers give much emphasis on the formation of the students' communicative competence, in 80% of the observed lessons, the teacher's talking time occupies more than half of the class time. In half of the lessons the students have the opportunity to do presentations, but only two teachers have let the students to evaluate each other after the presentation. The interaction between teacher and students remains in the model of "teacher asking – students responding – teacher reflecting".

The results of the researches show that the foreign language teaching in most of the universities is more or less affected by the conclusive evaluation, while the formative evaluation does not call into fullplay yet. The students rarely participate in the evaluation and do not work as a subject of evaluation, but they hope that the teacher would pay attention to the learning process and they are willing to participate in evaluation.

1.6.3 Problems in Evaluation

Evaluation plays an important role in foreign language teaching. Though it manifests already a tendency of pluralism, there are still some problems in evaluation.

1) The content of the relevant research is limited. According to Nunan (1988), the evaluating system of the country, the evaluating mechanism of the school and the evaluating mechanism of the course can all be the objects of the research. However, Yin Gende (2008) points out that in China there lacks the research in the evaluating system and in the standard of the foreign language. There also lacks the research in the evaluation of the teacher. The current researches are mainly focused on the conclusive evaluation, especially on the final exams. It reflects that the examination has a direct or indirect influence on the language teaching. Fortunately, in the recent years, the formative evaluation is getting more and more attention and researches in this field is growing.

2) The effectiveness of the evaluation by the Ministry of Education is somewhat dissatisfactory. Shu Dingfang (2015) points out that the evaluation by the Ministry of Education is an external, objective evaluation. It promotes the standardization of teaching, but from the point of view of input-output ratio, it is not satisfactory enough, because the universities take too much time to prepare for the evaluation but the evaluation does not improve evidently the teaching quality. In other words, the evaluation has a tendency of formalization.

3) The evaluation of the teachers pays more attention to researching than to teaching. Wang Shouren, Wang Haixiao (2011) point out that though the evaluation has a tendency of pluralism, 30% of the teachers do not agree with the evaluation system. The universities does not consider the differences between different subjects when establishing the evaluation system and the methods and the standards of the evaluation remain to a mere formality. There lacks feedback and communication and does not really help the teachers to improve their competence in teaching. The pressure and demands in researching hinder the teachers' professional development. The current evaluating system of the teachers pays too much attention to the supervising function of the evaluation and does not manifest a humanistic aspect.

1.6.4 Recommendations

To direct at the problems mentioned above, scholars have put forward some suggestions.

1) Since the goal of evaluation is to promote the improvement of the teaching quality, we should set different evaluating goals, specific evaluating standards and different evaluating methods for different objects (Wang Shouren, Wang Haixiao 2011).

2) Considering that the conclusive evaluation still dominates in the foreign language teaching at the universities, we should syncretize linguistics and the results of language teaching with evaluation, so that the evaluation can reflect effectively the teaching content and the students' communicative competences. We should also pay attention to the effectiveness of the evaluation and make the evaluation serve for the language teaching (Yang Huizhong, 2011).

3) We should promote the formative evaluation to stimulate and to form the students' awareness and competence of independent learning. For example, we can build an independent learning center, using the network of the university to follow and test the students' independent learning. We can also let the students evaluate themselves and evaluate each other (Shu Dingfang 2015).

4) We should meliorate the indicators and the procedure of the evaluation for the teachers. We should learn from other countries, letting the teachers to participate actively in evaluation. Not only the teachers, but also the Teaching and Research Section, the dean of the department and the dean of the college should be responsible for the teaching quality. The professional committee of evaluation should give suggestions to the department and help them set the plan and the questionnaire of evaluation. Students, colleagues and supervisors should evaluate the teachers regularly and the committee should collect the relevant data and give the report to the college (Zhao Jushan 2007).

1.7 Direction for Development

Having analyzed the situation and the popular theories of foreign language education in China, we can foresee the direction toward which it will develop.

1) The foreign language education should serve for the development of the country. With the acceleration of the globalization and the more and more frequent communication and cooperation between China and other countries in the world, China needs a great amount of people who are capable of working internationally. In order to meet the needs of the country, the foreign language education should take into consideration the distribution of the teaching institutes, the formation of the competent students, the strategies of foreign language teaching and so on. We need to study from other countries and learn from their experience. We need to do researches, studying the actual situations of the foreign language learning, teaching and using. We also need to know the demand of the country, programming and adjusting the foreign language educational structure, so that the formation and the employment of the students of foreign language can satisfy the development of the country.

2) The foreign language education should reinforce the study of the theory, so to improve the teaching quality. The study of the theory should firstly concentrate on the reform of the foreign language teaching at the primary level, improving the teachers' teaching ability in middle schools and in high schools. The goal of teaching should be the use of the language, not the exam. We should solve the problem of jointing the foreign language teaching in high school and the foreign language teaching at university and set a unified mechanism and standard for the evaluation. As for the foreign language teaching at university, we should think about how the foreign language teaching can serve for the internationalization of the higher education and improve the students' ability in learning specific knowledge in foreign language and their competence in communicating in the international academic exchange. The main topics should be:

   - age: for example the differences between Chinese people of different ages in foreign language learning;

   - influence of the mother language: for example the role the mother language plays in the learning process;

   - learning strategy: for example the functions of the learning strategy and of the communicative strategy in foreign language learning;

   - practice: for example what kind of practice favors the acquisition;

   - culture: for example to which extent the cultural factor influences the acquisition (Zheng Dahu, Dai Weihua, 2013).

Moreover, we should also study the teaching material. We should establish a resource bank, study the nice materials, establish an evaluation system, study the efficiency in class and encourage the innovation of teaching.

3) The foreign language education should promote the interdisciplinary studying and the innovation of the studying methods. Linguistics, literature, language teaching and translation are the basic studying areas for the foreign language education. We should encourage the combination and the interpenetration between these basic areas and other subjects (Shu Dingfang 2015). In the linguistic area, we should follow the international tendency of its development, compare Chinese with foreign languages and study the neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics, experimental linguistics, cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics and so on. In the area of literature, we should study the literature of different countries, the comparative literature and the literature theory, combining the studying of literature with that of culture. We should also study the spread of the Chinese literature abroad and that of the foreign literature in China. In the area of the language teaching theory, we should establish a Chinese theoretical system, which is the base of the foreign language teaching. We should establish a bank of the learning material for the students and at the same time concern about the development of the teachers. In the area of translation, we should pay attention on the basic theory, as well as on the practical use. We should study the history of translation, the relationship between translation and the spread of culture, the relationship between translation and artificial intelligence, the translation of classic work etc.

4) The foreign language education should be practical and serve for the society. With the internationalization of many cities in China, there are more and more signs and instructions in foreign language in the public place. However, many of these signs are not correct. We should standardize the use of foreign language in the public place and study the translation, service and training of foreign language. We should also study how to improve the quality of linguistic service in the big international events.

2

Main Differences Between the Chinese Language and the Italian Language

In order to assess whether a teaching method is suitable or not, we should firstly analyze the differences between Italian and Chinese. The similarities and the differences between the target language and the

mother language decide to a certain extent the teaching method in language learning. The method for teaching Italian to the Mandarin speakers is different from the method for teaching Cantonese to the Mandarin speakers, because Cantonese is too similar to Mandarin and the focus of teaching is on the global comprehension, while Italian is too different from Mandarin and grammar weighs a lot in the teaching process. Thus, to know how the target language is different from or similar to the mother language is necessary for assessing the teaching method. In this chapter we are going to analyze briefly the main differences between Italian and Chinese. What needs to be clarify here is that by 'Chinese' we intend Mandarin.

2.1 Brief Introduction

The Chinese language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. Containing Tibetan, many other languages in China, Thai, Lao, many languages spoken in east India and many other languages in Asia (Goddard 2005), the Sino-Tibetan family is the second largest language family in the world, preceded only by the Indo-European language family. The Italian language, on the other hand, belongs to the Indo-European language family, together with languages such as German, Spanish, Russian and Nepali. As the biggest language family in the world, the Indo-European language family occupies a very large zone extended from the Western Europe to India.

The Chinese language shows some features that many Sino-Tibetan languages share in common. The most distinct feature is the **lack of inflection** (Thurgood, Lapolla 2003). In Indo-European languages, the same word will change form to indicate different situations (tenses, genders, numbers). This will not happen in many Sino-Tibetan languages. In Thai, as well as in Chinese, the form of the word never changes. In order to indicate tenses, a temporal adverb will be added on the infinitive verb which always remains unchanged.

Another distinct feature of the Sino-Tibetan languages is the **tone** (Thurgood, Lapolla 2003). The same syllable can bring totally different meanings with different tones. The tone is integral to the word and a word without tone is unimaginable. This does not happen in Indo-European languages.

Another distinct feature of the Sino-Tibetan languages lies in the **classifier constructions** (Albanese 1989). In Thai, Cantonese and Chinese for example, the speaker should categorize the thing he/she is speaking about with a classifier. There are many classifiers in the language and the misuse of the classifier may make the phrase laughable. In the Indo-European languages, no classifier can be found.

Other features of the Sino-Tibetan languages are for example the monosyllable word, the same word order in the declarative sentence and the interrogative sentence, the multiple pronouns etc. (Thurgood, Lapolla 2003). These features distinguish the Sino-Tibetan languages from the I do-European languages, and distinguish the Chinese language from the Italian language. Now we are going to see some main characteristics of the Chinese language, which make Chinese different from Italian, and in the fourth chapter we will see how these differences confuse the Chinese learners.

2.2 Phonology

A syllable in the Chinese language consists of an initial, a final and a tone (Gao 2000). The initial is always a consonant and is not a necessary part for a syllable. The final contains at least a nucleus, which is a vowel,

and can also be preceded by a medial or be followed by a tail. The following table gives an example of each cases:

	Initial	Final		
		Medial	Nucleus	Tail
ā 'actinium'			ā	
wá 'kind'		u	á	
wán 'play'		u	á	n
kuān 'wide'	k	u	ā	n

A syllable in the Italian language consists of a head (consonant), a nuclear (vowel), and sometimes a tail (consonant). When a syllable has no tail, it is an *open syllable*, otherwise it is a *closed syllable*. There are monosyllable words, but most of the words make up of more than one syllables.

2.2.1 Consonants

In Chinese there are 22 consonants, 21 of which are initials and only one is a tail. The Chinese consonants are listed in the table below, along with the correspondent International Phonetic Alphabets (Wiedenhof 2015, Gao 2000):

	Labial	Dental	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar
Unaspirated plosion	b- /p/	d- /t/			g- /k/
Aspirated plosion	p- /pʰ/	t- /tʰ/			k- /kʰ/
Unaspirated fricative	f- /f/	s- /s/	sh- /ʂ/	x- /ç/	h- /x/
Aspirated fricative			r- /ʐ/		
Unaspirated affricate		z- /ts/	zh- /ʈʂ/	j- /tç/	
Aspirated affricate		c- /tsʰ/	ch- /ʈʂʰ/	q- /tçʰ/	
Nasal	m- /m/	n- /n/			-ng /ŋ/
Lateral		l- /l/			

In Italian there are 21 consonants and are listed below (Bonomi 2014):

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar
Voiceless occlusive	p		t			k
Voiced occlusive	b		d			g
Voiceless fricative		f		s	ʃ	
Voiced fricative		v		z		
Voiceless affricate				ts	tʃ	

Voiced affricate				dz	dʒ	
Nasal	m		n		ɲ	
Lateral				l	ʎ	
Vibrant				r		

2.2.2 Vowels

The vowels and semivowels in Chinese are represented by the finals. In Chinese there are totally 35 finals, each of which contains a vowel (Gao 2000). The vowels can be single or composite. They are listed below (Wiedenhof 2015, Gao 2000):

a sounds: -a, -ai, -an, -ang, -ao   /ɐ aɪ an ɑŋ ɑɔ/

e sounds: -e, -ei, -en, -eng   /ə eɪ ən ʌŋ/

i sounds: -i, -in, -ing, -ia, -ian, -iang, -iao, -ie, -iu, -iong   /i in ɪŋ jɐ jɛn jɐŋ jɑɔ jɛ joʊ ɥʊŋ/

o sounds: -o, -ou, -ong   /ɔ oʊ ʊŋ/

u sounds: -u, -un, weng, -ua, -uai, -uan, -uang, -ui, -uo   /u wən wʌŋ wɐ waɪ wɛn wɑŋ weɪ wɔ/

ü sounds: -ü, -üan, -üe, -ün   /y yɛn yɛ yn/

On the other hand, the vowels in Italian are rather simple. In the Italian phonetic system there are seven vowels, namely /i e ɛ a ɔ o u/. The letter *a, i, u* are pronounced simply as /a/, /i/, /u/, while the *e* and the *o* are distinguished between open and closed, namely è (open)/é (closed) and ò(open)/ó (closed). The letters *a, i, o* are pronounced in the same way as those in Chinese, while the *e* and *o*, though pronounced differently, are not difficult for the Chinese to pronounce. Besides, in Italian the diphthongs follow a simple rule – they are not pronounced as a single long vowel, but as a combination of two vowels, which is just like in Chinese.

2.2.3 Tones

Chinese is a tone language. The tone is the change of the pitch in a syllable to indicate a meaning. In other words, Chinese uses different pitches to indicate different meanings of the same syllable. It is one of the most important features of the Chinese language. Most of the languages in the world, including Italian, are non-tone languages, while Japanese, the Sino-Tibetan languages and few African languages have tones (Li, Thompson 1989). One of the traditional ways to mark the tone is to divide the pitches into five grades – high (marked as 5), half-high (marked as 4), middle (marked as 3), half-low (marked as 2) and low (marked as 1). For instance, the syllable *ma*, when marked as 55, it is a high even tone. It corresponds the 'mā' in the modern Pinyin system. When *ma* is marked as 35, it is a high rising tone, corresponding to the 'má' in Pinyin. The 214 is a low falling-rising tone, which corresponds to 'mǎ'. The 51, being a high falling tone, corresponds to 'mà'. These are the four tones in the Chinese phonological system (Thurgood, Lapolla 2003). Besides the four marked tones, there also exists a neutral tone, which is not marked. It rarely appears in a single syllable, but more in words where the last syllable is very fast and lightly spoken (Li, Thompson 1989). For example, the word *hái zi* ('kind') consists of two syllables (hái and zi). When *zi* has actually a 214 tone (zǐ), it is neutral in the word, following naturally with the flow of speech. This phenomenon is mainly due to the convenience of the pronunciation.

Italian on the other hand, is an intonation language. In the intonation languages, different pitches can be put on a same syllable, but it doesn't make the syllable another word, though different pitches can carry different meanings (Wiedenhof 2015). For example, in the sentences *Devi andare alla scuola. / Devi andare alla scuola?* we apply different pitches to the word *scuola* to express different meanings. In the first sentence, *scuola* has an even intonation to express a declaration. In the second sentence, *scuola* has a rising intonation to express an interrogation. However, with both of the intonations, the meaning of the word *scuola* remains the same – it indicates always the place where pupils go study. However, in Chinese, when a syllable is spoken with different pitches, perhaps more than forty different words can be derived.

2.2.4 Homophones

The phenomenon of homophone rarely exists in Italian. In Chinese, on the other hand, it is a very common phenomenon. The core of the phonological material of the Chinese lexical system is constituted of 1.273 units of syllables, among which 330 syllables are at the first tone, 247 at the second tone, 312 at the third tone, 353 at the fourth tone and 31 at the neutral tone (Banfi 2010). As a result of the limited number of syllables, homophones are very frequent at the oral level. According to Banfi (2010: 21), 80% of the Chinese syllables are ambiguous and 55% of them have five or six homophones. Consequently, the recognition of a Chinese morph is highly depended on the context of the speech. In the case of the lack of the context, one may also recognize morph by the so-called 'natural speech lexicon'. For example, in the speaking Chinese, one will easily recognize that the morph /tu/ *tú* 图 'image' in the word *túpiàn* 图片 'picture' is similar with the morph in the word *túténg* 图腾 'totem' but is different from the homophone *tú* 途 'route' in the word *lùtú* 路途 'way'.

2.3 Morphology

An Italian word can be made of two parts: the root and the desinence. The root presents the fundamental meaning of the word and is invariable. The desinence is the mobile element added to the root to specify or to modify the meaning of the word, or to indicate the grammatical function of the word. In the simplest case a word is composed of a root and a desinence. In Italian the desinence serves for specifying the gender and the number of a noun or an adjective, or the tense and the person of a verb. The following table shows some simple cases of how desinence works in Italian nouns and verbs:

	Root	Desinence				
		Gender	Number			
Noun	**ragazz**	**o**	**i**			ragazzo/ragazzi
		a	**e**			ragazza/ragazze
				Tense	Person	
Verb	**cant**			**av**	**o**	cantavo
					i	cantavi
					a	cantava
					amo	cantavamo
					ate	cantavate
					ano	cantavano

In the Chinese language all these inflections do not exist. Like in English, in Chinese, there is no such idea of gender. The word *xué shēng* can indicate either *studente* or *studentessa*. When it is necessary to distinguish male and female students, the morpheme *nán* 'male' and *nǚ* 'female' will be added and the word will become *nán xué shēng* ('studente') and *nǚ xué shēng* ('studentessa'). The word *xué shēng* itself never changes.

Neither does the idea of number exist in the Chinese language. Nouns, adjectives and verbs do not distinguish between single and plural. They have only one form for both of the numbers.

Also verbs in China never change their form. When Italian verbs conjugate, Chinese verbs will just be added with different pronouns to indicate different persons. The six personal forms of the verb *cantare* (canto, canti etc.) become one unique form in Chinese (*chàng*), accompanied with six personal pronouns (wǒ chàng, nǐ chàng etc.). The same mechanism is used to explicit tenses and models. In Chinese, different adverbs or function words will be combined with the unchanged verbs to indicate the Past, Present and Future, as well as the conditional, subjunctive and imperative. The following sentences show how simple Chinese verbs are:

1) 他　昨天　　去　　超市。

   Tā　zuó tiān　**qù**　　chāo shì.

   lui　ieri　　　andare　supermercato

   'Ieri è andato al supermercato.'

2) 我　　去　　超市。

   wǒ　**qù**　　chāo shì.

   io　　andare　supermercato

   'Vado al supermercato.'

3) 我们　　明年　　　　去　　欧洲。

   Wǒ mén　míng nián　　**qù**　　ōu zhōu.

   noi　　　prossimo anno　andare　Europa

   'Anno prossimo andremo in Europa.'

4) 你 会　　　　　　　　　　　　去　　欧洲。

   Nǐ　huì　　　　　　　　　　　　**qù**　ōu zhōu.

   tu [function word indicating conditional or subjunctive] andare Europa

   'Tu vada/Andresti in Europa.'

5) 去　　超市！

   Qù　　chāo shì!

   andare　supermercato

   'Va al supermercato!'

As we can see, in all these sentence, regardless of their tense or model, the verb remains unchanged.

Apart from the inflection, the concept of morphemes also distinguishes Chinese between Italian. Chinese is an isolating language in which the words are not made of a series of morphemes, but a single morpheme. Italian, on the other hand, is a fusional language, in which the words are made of a series of morphemes. Morpheme is the smallest unit of the language that conveys its own meaning. In Italian, the word *incredibile* is made of three morphemes: *in-*, *cred-* and *-ibile*. Each morpheme has its own meaning. *In-* means 'not', *cred-* means 'to believe' and *-ibile* means 'to have the potential to be'. The three morphemes get together to form the compound word *incredibile*, meaning 'unbelievable, to have no potential to be believed'. These morphemes are called *bound morphemes* because they cannot appear by themselves (Wiedenhof 2015). They must be combined with other morphemes to form a word. On the other hand, the word *se* has only one morpheme, because there is no smaller meaningful unit. Such morphemes are called *free morphemes*, because they can form a word by themselves, without being combined with other morphemes. However, both in Italian and (especially) in Chinese, whether a morpheme is free or bound is not fixed. The morpheme *se* in Italian is a free morpheme, but it becomes bound morpheme in the word *sebbene*. In Chinese the change is more obvious. All of the free morphemes can become bound morphemes, but not vice versa. For example, the noun *chuáng* 床 'bed' is a free morpheme; it becomes bound morpheme in the noun *chuáng dān* 床单 'sheet'. The morpheme *hòu* 候 is a bound morpheme and can form the words only when combined with other morphemes, such as *qì hòu* 气候 'climate' and *shí hòu* 时候 'time'. It has no exact meaning when occurring by itself. In fact, in Chinese there is no concept of 'morpheme'. Instead, there is a concept corresponding to 'morpheme' – *zì* 字 'character'. It is the zì that are separated one from another, not the words.

2.4 Syntax

In the dimension of syntax, Chinese and Italian do not have many huge differences. They are both SVO languages and the same word order facilitates the Chinese students to learn Italian comparing with learning other SOV languages like German or Japanese. Nevertheless, there are many slight differences in the dimension of syntax between Italian and Chinese, but those differences do not cause big problems for the Chinese students to learn Italian, though at the beginning they do have some confusions. Since the differences do not hinder the Chinese students too much, we will skip them in this part and mention them in the fourth chapter, to see directly how those tiny differences confuse the Chinese beginners.

3

The Study

Introduction

With the more and more frequent communication and cooperation between Italy and China, the number of Chinese people who learn Italian grows every year. According to the statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Education, by the year of 2015, among the 2751 universities and colleges in China, there are 15 universities offer Italian as a major. Besides the universities, there are also hundreds of linguistic institutes and millions of webpages offering various courses of Italian. However, not all the learners have a good efficiency on their Italian learning. Some learners will speak Italian well in a few years, while some still have problems with the language after long years' learning. The learning efficiency, apart from many other factors, depends on one side on the teaching method. The person who carries out the teaching method, namely the teacher, along with the learner and the target language, makes up the so-called "space of didactic action" (Balboni 2014). These three elements must keep balance in language teaching:
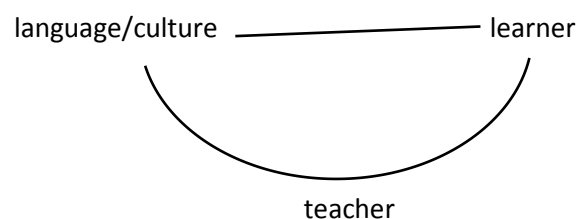
Origin: Balboni P. E., 2014, *Didattica dell'italiano come lingua seconda e straniera*, Bonacci-Loescher, Torino, p.28

As we can see in the figure, the teacher plays a key role in keeping the balance. The teacher must work out a way to transport the information from one pole to the other, considering both the two elements so that the axes won't incline toward one side or the other. Thus, in language teaching, the teacher has to deal with two things: one is the language and the culture, the other is the learner. In this study, we are going to see how these three elements interact with each other and to discuss whether the teacher deals with the other two elements in a suitable way.

Objective

The study aims to figure out whether the methods of Italian teaching at the Chinese universities and in the Chinese language institutes are suitable for the Chinese students, especially for the young adult beginners.

Research Questions

In order to accomplish the objective, we need to find out the answers of the following questions:

1) How Italian is taught at the Chinese universities?

And in the Chinese language institutes?

In detail: - How do they design the course and organize the lessons?

- What teaching methods do they adopt?

- Which teaching materials do they utilize?

- How are the teachers?

- How is the students' performance in the exam?

2) Which are the linguistic difficulties for the Chinese students?

3) Which are the general characteristics of the Chinese students?

In detail: - Which are the learning styles of the Chinese students?

- How do they distribute their time to each skills?

- What do they think about a good teacher and a good student?

Instruments used

The instruments for study are simple and traditional. Pen, paper and cellphone are utilized to take notes in class, to record the lessons and to operate the data. I observed the performance of the learners in class and took notes. After class I often interviewed some of the learners about their performance or behavior in class that I have noticed. I also asked them to fill out two questionnaires regarding their learning style and learning strategy. All the questionnaires are anonymous. Interviews have been conducted among the students and the teachers to find out their ideas and to gather information. A chat software is utilized when interviewing students at long distance.

Subjects involved/ Materials

The main subjects of the study are 27 learners in a language institute in Nanjing. Most of them are pre-university students with an intention to study in Italy; few are just interested in some aspects of the Italian culture (opera, painting etc.) and only one learner learns Italian because his family has some business with the Italians. Not all of these students are going to be specialized in foreign language, but at this moment, they are concentrating on the learning of Italian. The age of the learners ranges from 18 to 24. Besides Italian, all the learners speak some English but only a few of them can speak English well. One learner also speaks very well German. The teachers are all under 40 years old. Most of them are Chineses, only one is Italian and speaks some Chinese. Eight students majored in Italian at other universities have also been involved, in order to offer some information about their Italian learning. Their information is considered only as a reference.

The materials are the textbooks, the exam paper and other teaching materials distributed by the teachers in class. Besides the teaching materials, I also recorded 18 lessons with the allowance of the teachers. Also questionnaires, notes of the interview and notes of the lessons are applied as study materials.

Procedure

Before starting the study, I searched on the Internet all the language institutes in Nanjing that offer the course of the Italian language and I found three institutes in total. I chose one that was nearest to my home and talked to the secretaries, asking if I could attend the course as an observer, to find out how Italian was taught in the institute, namely the design and the organization of the course, the teaching materials, the quality of the teachers and the performance of the students. Got their permission, at the beginning of June, when the course in the language institute started, I attended the course together with other learners. On the lessons, I did not participate in the learning activities, but paid attention to the teachers' teaching behaviors and to the learners' learning behaviors. After class, I organized my notes or interviewed the learners.

Since the study was carried out during the summer vocation, it is impossible for me to attend any courses at the university nor to get in touch with many university students. Fortunately, all the teachers in the institute work also at the university, so that I could get information about the Italian teaching at university from them. I did not attend all the lessons of the course, but only 70% of them. When I was not on the lessons, I interviewed the teachers and asked them to do two questionnaires to get the information about Italian teaching at university.

The observation of the course also helped me to solve the second research question, namely the linguistic difficulties of the learners. I have not asked the learners about the difficulties, but listened and looked carefully while they answering the questions of the teachers or talking in class. I took notes when they made a mistake and in the end I grouped the mistakes together and found some typical, most common mistakes. These mistakes reflect the linguistic difficulties of the learners. Without the permission of the learners, I have not collected their test papers to analyze their mistakes, but I got from the teachers the results of the tests and interviewed five learners about their performance in the tests.

As for the characteristics of the learners, I gave a questionnaire to 11 learners to figure out their learning style, another questionnaire to 20 learners to find out their time distribution, and conducted an interview among 11 students and 3 teachers to work out their ideas on good teacher and good student.

Since the time limitation, I did not wait until the course finishes to leave the institute. The course finished in the middle of September and I finished my observation in the end of August. Nevertheless, I kept in touch with some teachers and some students in order to follow their performance in the final exam. Before leaving the institute, I got from the teachers the test paper and two weeks later, by asking them via the chat software I got the results of the students in the exam.

Method of Analysis

This study is a mixture of quantitative research and qualitative research and involves three types of data: objective information got from interviews (can be either quantitative or qualitative), opinions got from interviews (qualitative data) and subjective information got from questionnaires (can be either quantitative or qualitative). The objective information got from interviews is inserted directly into the report, considering that it conveys only objective facts which function only as a recuperation of the lacking information. The opinions got from interviews were transcribed in a table so that I could group the similarities together and compare the opinions. I picked the most common ideas to discuss in the following chapters. The subjective information got from questionnaires was also been transcribed in tables so that I could calculate the total number, the mean value or the standard deviation of the data. After analyzing the data, I discussed the results and drew conclusions. The results of the study, the discussion and the conclusion will be presented in the following chapters.

Time Frame

The study lasts altogether three months and a half, from the beginning of June to the middle of September. The observation begins at the beginning of June and ends in the end of August. The analysis of the data lasts from the beginning of July to the middle of September.

4

How Italian Is Being Taught in China: Courses in the Institute and at the University

An important observation before judging whether the teaching methods are suitable is of course the Italian lessons. Our researching object is the teaching of Italian to the young adults. For this group of people there are two main channels to get in touch with the Italian language: the university and the language institute. In this chapter, we will mainly take a course of Italian offered by a linguistic institute in Nanjing as an example. This institute collaborates with the Nanjing Normal University and the teachers from this institute all work at this university at the same time. By analyzing the course of this institute we can both discover the teaching method applied by the institute and get some information of Italian teaching at the university.

4.1 Italian Teaching in the Institute

The course is an intensive course that lasts four months. Learners have to attend the course six hours per day from 9:00 to 12:00 in the morning and from 14:00 to 17:00 in the afternoon. At the end of the course learners are supposed to reach the A2 level. The atmosphere is relaxed though the course is intensive. The relation between learners and teachers is more like friends.

The course is divided into five parts: grammar, reading, listening, speaking and culture/society. There are four lessons everyday, each focused on one skill and lasts 80 minutes. The learning materials are two textbooks, an exercise book, some copies and videos offered by the teachers. One textbook is the *Nuovo progetto italiano: corso multimediale di lingua e civiltà italiana, livello elementare* («新视线意大利语•初级») edited by T. Marin, S. Magnelli and Wen Zheng, published in 2014 in Beijing. This textbook is aimed to bring the students from zero to the A2 level, following the communicative approach and the standards set by the CEFR. In this textbook, the contents are divided into 12 units, each concerning a theme, for example *Come passi il tempo libero* (unit 2), *Al cinema* (unit 7). Each unit is divided into several sections. The first section is a section of preparation. In this section, the textbook presents the students the theme of the unit with several questions and some exercises of listening, stimulating the students and leading them to think. After the preparation, the textbook offers the students a text, followed by several questions. Then there are some exercises of grammar, followed by the observation and the deduction of the rules. After the students have learnt the grammar, the textbook offers the students another text, asking them to read the text and to make dialogues imitating the given text. Then there is a third and a fourth text accompanied with exercises such as combining the sentences with pictures, gap-filling, putting the disordered sentences in order and so on. After the fourth text, there is another section specialized for rules and exercises. Then there is a section of pragmatic, in which students learn how to react in a communicative event and practice to use the language. The last section is a section of vocabulary and ability. Students firstly learn some vocabulary through various simple exercises, then they will do some exercises of listening, writing and reading, in order to consolidate their knowledge learnt in this unit and put it in use. At the end of every two units there is a small test of auto-assessment. The textbook is full of pictures and is accompanied with a CD and an exercise book. The exercise book offers more exercises to train the students' grammatical knowledge, as well as their ability of listening and of language use.
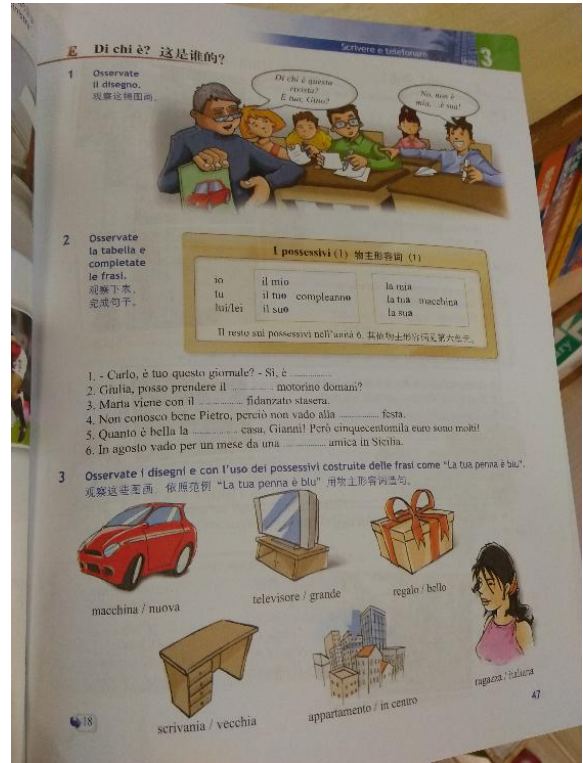
Figure 4-1 & 4-2: Two pages from the textbook *Nuovo progetto italiano: corso multimediale di lingua e civiltà italiana, livello elementare*

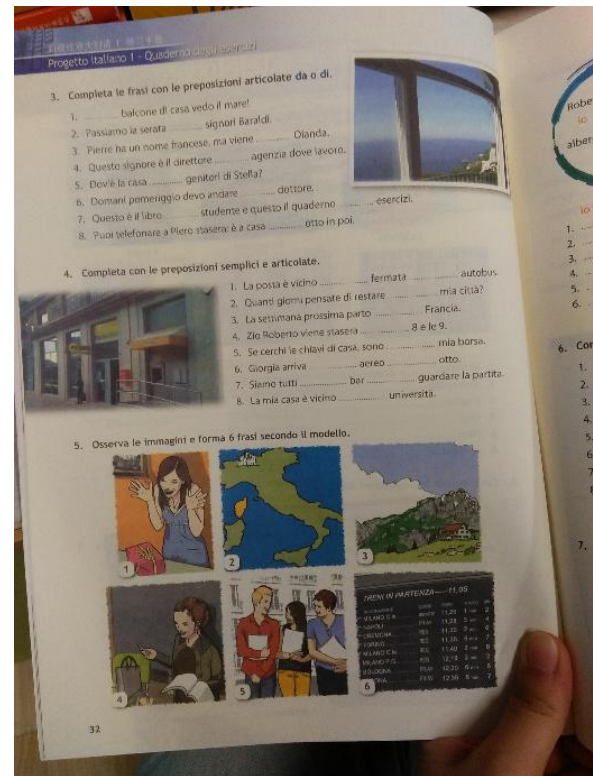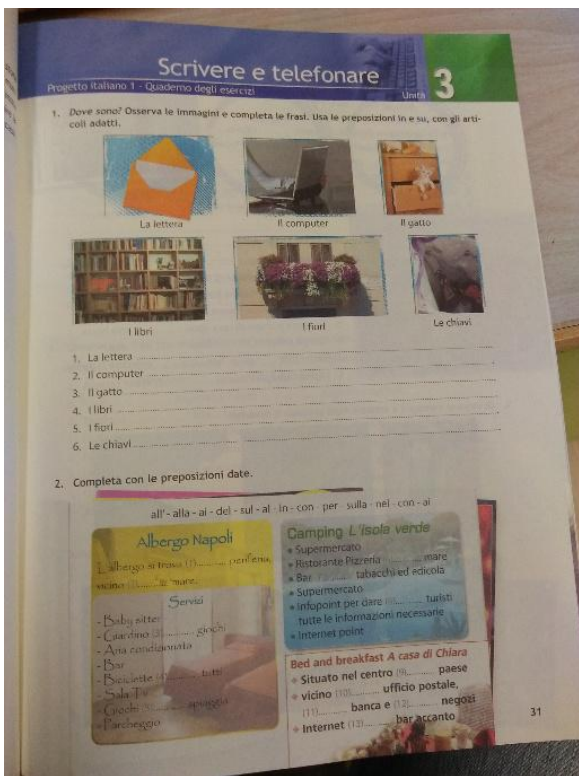Origin: «新视线意大利语·初级», Marin T., Magnelli S., Wen Zheng, 2014, Beijing Language and Culture University Press, Beijing

Figure 4-3 & 4-4: Two pages from the correspondent exercise book

The other textbook applied in the grammar lessons is the *Grammatica italiana* («意大利语语法»), edited by Wang Jun, published in the 2009 in Beijing. This textbook is a complete book of grammar, without any text or picture. This book offers the students a clear grammatical system of Italian with explanation in Chinese and example sentences.
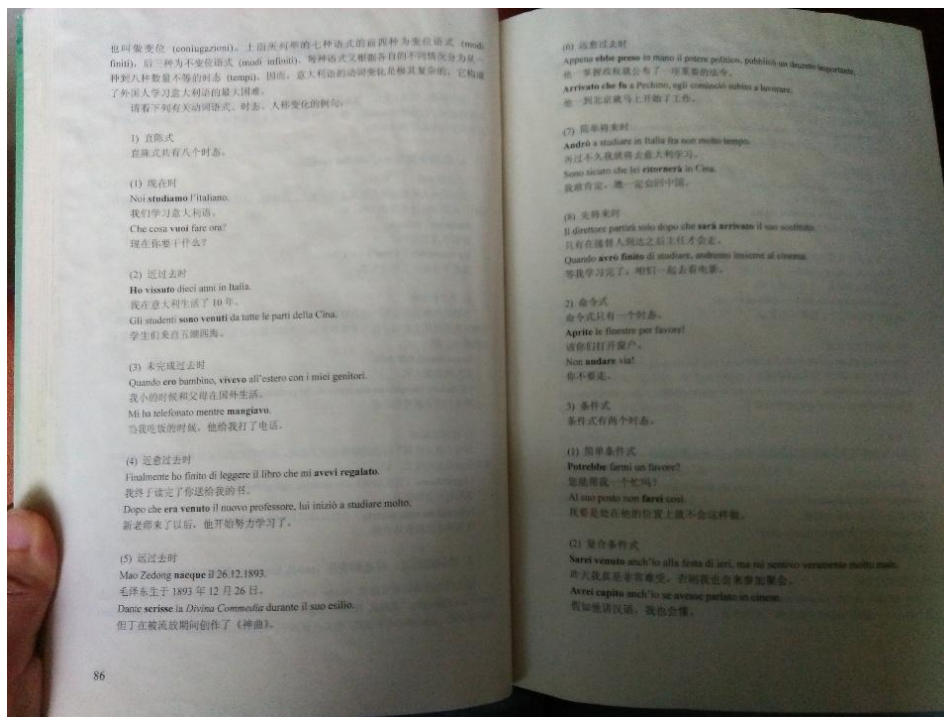
Figure 4-5: Two pages of the textbook *Grammatica italiana*

Since the course is divided into five sections and five teachers take responsibility for each section, the contents in the textbooks are also divided in different parts. Each teacher refers only to some parts of the books rather than using the whole book. In this chapter, we are going to report how these teachers teach their section to the students.

4.1.1 Grammar

In the section of grammar there are three main aspects: phonology, rules and vocabulary. The teacher of grammar teaches phonology in the first two lessons before moving to the rules. Vocabulary is not taught in particular, but is inserted in the teaching of phonology and rules.

In the lessons of grammar, the teacher teaches the grammar following the didactical units of *Grammatica italiana* and uses the other two books only for texts and exercises, skipping most of the contents in *Nuovo progetto italiano*, which will be taught in other parts of the course by other teachers.

The lessons begin with the Italian letters. The students first learn the alphabets of Italian, then they pass to the accent and the consonants and vowels. For teaching the phonology, the teacher gives the students a

copy, in which all the letters and combinations, as well as their pronunciations in words are presented, accompanied by some example words. A sample is as following:

Vowels

    *a /ɑ/   mel**a**   t**a**volo   penn**a***

    *e /æ/   l**e**i   i**e**ri   li**e**to*

     */e/   s**e**   cap**e**llo   p**e**so*

Consonants

    *b /b/   **b**ue   **b**uono   **b**orsa*

Combinations

    *sc /sk/   **sc**arpa   **sc**occo   **sc**uola*

     */ʃ/   **sc**immia   **sc**ena*

While the teacher is explaining the rules of the pronunciation and the example words, the students are taking notes. When a certain number of pronunciations are introduced, the students are asked to read the words one by one. Every student has to read five or six words so that the teacher can know if the student has understood and can correct the student's pronunciation. After all the students have read correctly the words, the teacher moves to the next sounds.

As for the structural rules, the teacher firstly explains the rules, writing the rules and the examples on the blackboard. Then she asks the students to do some exercises in the exercise book and to read their answers in class one by one. When a student makes a mistake, she corrects this student. Only after the explanation does the teacher let the students read the text. Having the structural rules in mind, the students can read the text quickly. Thus, in a lesson of grammar, the first 75% of the class time is distributed to the structural rules and only the last 25% of the class time is distributed to the text. The teaching of rules follows the sequence substantive → article → adjective → numeral → adverb → pronoun → preposition → verb → complement → composite sentence. The whole teaching of grammar is mainly concentrated on the verbs, since the other rules are relatively easy for the students.

The teaching of vocabulary is not a single part, but inserted in the teaching of other skills. It is mainly inserted in grammar and in reading, when the teachers explain the texts. On the grammar lessons, when the students come across a new word in the text, the teacher will explain the meaning of the word, sometimes also the gender (e.g. *il problema*), the number (e.g. *la gente + 3.Sg*), the plural form (e.g. *il labbro – le labbra*), the collocation (e.g. *in piedi* vs. *a piedi*) and so on. The students have to memorize all these words after class. The teacher has once created an activity on vocabulary. It was when the students have finished the unit of 'house'. The teacher drew a house on the blackboard and asked every student to come to the blackboard by turns. When a student came to the blackboard, she asked another student to say an object in the house and its position without making reference to the textbook. The student in front of the blackboard should draw this object in the right position.

In the last week of the course, students get a long list of vocabulary from the teachers. About 300 basic words are listed and students should memorize all these words. It should not be hard for the students if they have studied during the course. Teachers will not control this work. Students need to memorize these words by themselves.

After four months' studying, some students have grasped all these words and can use them in communication. However, this is not the case for the majority of the students. Since the teachers do not

check their learning of lexicon, many students have not studied the vocabulary well. They can only use the simplest words and use the hypernyms to indicate the hyponyms. This phenomenon is also reported by some other students majored in Italian at other universities: the lexicon is important because there are often dictations. In other words, they memorize the words for passing the test.

Above all, as a tradition of the China's foreign language education, the grammar is regarded as the most important part. Students sometimes skip other lessons, but normally they do not skip the lessons of grammar because since the course is intensive, everyday there is a new rule being taught on the lesson of grammar. Skipping a lesson of grammar means that they can probably not understand the next contents. Since the grammar of Italian is very different from that of Chinese and of English, and out of curiosity, the students all listen carefully. The teacher teaches strictly following the projection of the textbook *Grammatica italiana*. It is perhaps because of the limited course time, the teacher had no time to induce the students or to take into consideration of each student's receptivity, motivation or need. She had to go ahead with every lesson in order to finish the teaching programme in time. Nevertheless, because of her patient and explicit explanation, the teaching appeared to be highly efficient. Moreover, this teacher becomes the students' favorite teacher because she is tender and patient, and always smiles when teaching. She is willing to chat with the students after class and at the end of the course she became friend with many of the students.

4.1.2 Reading

The other important section, according to the students, is the lessons of reading, because the section of reading is closely related to the section of grammar, recuperating their doubts and weak points gathered from the lessons of grammar. The main work on the lessons of reading is to consolidate the comprehension of vocabulary and grammar by intensive reading. The main reading material is the textbook *Nuovo progetto italiano*. Since on the lessons of grammar the teacher has skipped most parts of the book, on the lessons of reading the teacher guides the students to recuperate the book, though she does not strictly follow the book either. The focus of the reading lessons is on the texts of the book, while the other contents of the book are not involved.

At the beginning of every lesson there is usually a dictation of words. The dictation lasts about 10 to 15 minutes. By the dictation the teacher tests the students' mastery of the newly-learnt words. When the dictation is finished, the teacher lets the students refer to the vocabulary on the textbook and check their work together with others, so that they do not need to hand up their work and can correct their words by themselves. After the dictation begins the lesson of reading. The teacher firstly asks two or three students to read the text for several times, then she explains every single sentence in the text. The explanation contains the review of the new words and the new phrases, the review of the grammar and the translation of the sentence. When finishes the explanation of the whole text, the teacher asks several students to read again the text, correcting their pronunciation. This time the students should try to read the text more fluently.

When the teacher has finished the text on the textbook, she gives the students another text that she found somewhere else. The texts are usually not long and easy to understand, considering the level of the students. The texts are for example self-introduction, dialogue at school, description of a house, daily routine and so on. Students should read the text and underline all the unknown words. After the students have finished reading, the teacher explains the meaning of all the new words underlined. For some words, in particular some verbs, she also explains the form. Then she asks some questions about the text, for example if A agrees with B, or why is C unhappy etc. Students read again the text and try to answer these questions. Then the teacher explains and translates the sentences of the text as she does with the text on

the textbook. After that, she asks some students to answer the questions. When the student makes a mistake, the teacher corrects the student and explains the right answer.

The lessons of reading, though intensive, are not given in a serious atmosphere. When explaining, the teacher sometimes adds some jokes or her personal opinions. She is also willing to share her own experience about Italian learning or about travelling in Italy. Sometimes she even takes 2 or 3 minutes to chat with the students about things totally unrelated to Italian or to Italy. Students like her because she has a good sense of humor and a strong character, and she always adds some interesting things to attract the students' attention, so that they will not get bored.

4.1.3 Speaking

The lessons of speaking are held by an Italian teacher who speaks also some Chinese. The lessons are held in Italian. Only when the teacher has to explain something that the students find hard to understand will she repeat in Chinese. The teaching material is the *Nuovo progetto italiano*, though the teaching does not rely much on the textbook. This time the focus is on the use of language. The teacher lets the students do practices of dialogues offered by the textbook and adds some supplementary practices. On the lessons of speaking, the teacher's talking time is evidently reduced, while the students' talking time is increased. Students practice to communicate with others in various situations to reach certain goals.

On the first lessons of the course, the teacher asks the students to read the vocabulary taught on the grammar lessons one by one and corrects their pronunciation. Then she teaches each student to produce some simplest sentences (*Mi chiamo… Ho … anni*). After the students have learnt the phrases, she asks the students one by one questions like *Come ti chiami? Quanti anni hai?* The students answer her questions using the phrases learnt before. In this way, the teacher gets to know some basic information of each student and gets a primary impression of their pronunciation.

After a few lessons, when the students have acquired a basic vocabulary, the teacher asks some students to read the text on the textbook for several times. After reading, she asks the students to respond her questions. The questions are repetitive, such as – *Hai un libro? – Sì, ce l'ho / No, non ce l'ho*. By answering these questions the students develop their metalinguistic competence. Every student should respond one such question by turns. When a student cannot come up with the answer, she lets him/her think or lets other students to help him/her.

After another several lessons, the students are familiar with some basic phrases and sentences, and are capable of doing some simple dialogues. At this time, the teacher asks the students to work in pairs to produce a short dialogue on a topic. Some of the topics correspond to the theme of the unit, while other topics are offered by the teacher. The students have several minutes to prepare, then the teacher chooses some students to act out their dialogues in class and corrects their errors if they have produced any, though the teacher never interrupts during the dialogue, but corrects the students after they have finished.

At the end of the course, the students are supposed to be able to do some basic monologues (e.g. to introduce themselves, to describe an environment or to talk about an experience etc.) and some dialogues (e.g. to explain the reason why they are late for an appointment, to tell a friend how to take care of their pet before they go travelling or to ask the professor how to prepare for an exam etc.).

4.1.4 Listening

The lessons of listening are held in the laboratory. Each student has a computer in front so they normally do not see the teacher face to face. In these lessons, students use rarely the textbook. Though the textbook *Nuovo progetto italiano* is accompanied with a CD, it is not utilized in class. More often, the teacher distributes paper with exercises on each lesson. Normally, the teacher asks the students to listen to a radio or to watch a video in their computers first, then they should do the exercises on the paper listening again the material. The exercises are generally simple questions, choice questions or gap-filling. After the students have finished, the teacher asks some students to answer the questions.

Generally, the lessons of listening follow the same routine and utilize the similar sort of material, only for twice the teacher has shown the students two films. One is *Dopo mezzanotte* (2004). The occasion in which the students watched this film is a 'festival of Italian films' held by the university. The organizers of the festival had shown various Italian films and the institute organized the students to watch one of them. In the next lessons, the teacher showed the film again in class. This time she did not let the students watch the whole movie, but several pieces. These pieces were repeated several times so that the teacher could explain the lines lexically, grammatically and socio-pragmatically. She has also introduced some cultural aspects of Italy through the film.

The other film is *La finestra di fronte* (2003). Unlike the other film, this film was chosen by the teacher herself and she did not let the students watch the whole film before analyzing the pieces. The lessons were held in the way that she showed the class the film from the beginning, when came to some pieces, she stopped the film and explained the language or the plot showing again these pieces. After the explanation, she continued the film. It took her three lessons to analyze this film.

The film lessons were held in the last month of the course, when the students have already got some capacities of the Italian language. On the film lessons the students do not have any other activities. They only watch the film, trying to understand what the characters say in the film and listen to the explanation of the teacher.

4.1.5 Culture and Society

Since most of the learners in this course have an intention to study in Italy, the institute separates the dimension of culture and society as a single part of teaching, without mixing it with the teaching of other skills, so that the students will not be too confused when they arrive in Italy. The lessons of culture and society take place once a week. On these lessons, students do not use the textbook, though the teacher sometimes talks about some cultural aspects introduced in *Nuovo progetto italiano*. The teacher talks about different cultural and social aspects of Italy to the students, accompanied with many her own experiences and interesting stories. The teacher talks a lot and rarely uses any technologies, only sometimes she shows the students pictures or songs. The teaching language is Chinese. The main task for the students is to listen to the teacher. On these lessons, they usually do not have to concentrate or to do exercises. They just listen to some interesting and exotic things, which attract their attention automatically. Since the teaching content is very attractive and the teacher teaches as if she was chatting with the students, the atmosphere is very relaxed.

There was only once that the students were asked to do an exercise. It was at the second half of the course, when the teacher introduced the Italian song *Volare*. That lesson was almost a lesson of listening. The teacher distributed a copy of the text of the song to the students. The text was not complete and had many gaps to fill. She first introduced the background of the song to the students, then showed them the song. After the first listening, she asked the students to read the text. Then she showed the students the song for another two times and asked them to fill the missing words while listening. When the students have

finished, she showed the students the song for another time sentence by sentence and explained the text, giving them the missing words. After explaining the whole text, she played the whole song for another time, letting the students read the text while listening. At that moment, the students had listened the song for several times, so at last the teacher asked them to learn to sing the song. When the lesson finished, the students could almost sing the refrain of the song.

4.1.6 Examination

During the course, there are two tests. One is at the halfway of the course, the other is at the end of the course. The two tests are of different types: the first one is a complete test of grammar, without any exercises of reading or listening, while the second test can be seen as a final exam, checking the students' linguistic and socio-pragmatic competences.

At the time of the first test, the students have already learnt the simple Past and the Future tense of the verb. On the test paper there are some exercises of cloze, gap-filling and choosing the right answer to the questions, in order to test the students' knowledge in form and vocabulary. There are also exercises of translation, with which the students need to translate some simple sentences from Chinese to Italian. There is also an exercise of writing. Students have to write a simple text with 5 to 10 sentences, describing a day in the past. The test paper has two pages and the students are supposed to finish it in forty minutes. The total mark of the test is 100. The result of the test showed that among the 30 students, only three got a mark higher than 90, most of the others got a mark between 73 to 85. According to the teachers and the above-90 students, the test paper is not hard and they could have done better if they had done it more carefully. According to the beneath-90 students, the test paper is difficult because the grammar is too complicated. They said they could not remember all the rules and they always confounded one rule with another. They also admitted that they had not dedicate much time to learning before the test.

The second test is an exam imitating the CELI. It requires the students' grammatical competences in the Present, Past, Imperfect and Future tenses of the indicative mood, as well as a relatively wide vocabulary in different thematic situations. The exam lasts 2 hours and is concentrated on reading and writing. Listening and speaking are not included in the exam. The exam paper is extracted from a book that serves for the preparation of CILS, CELI and PLIDA. The part of reading is composed of five exercises, including choosing a picture for the text, combining the texts with pictures, combining the segments of the sentences and choosing the right answer to the questions. The part of writing is composed of gap-filling and writing a short text.
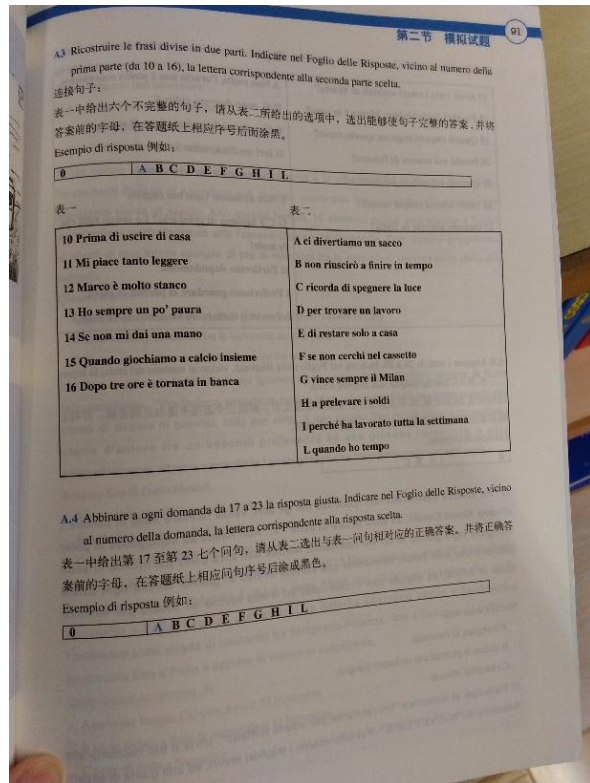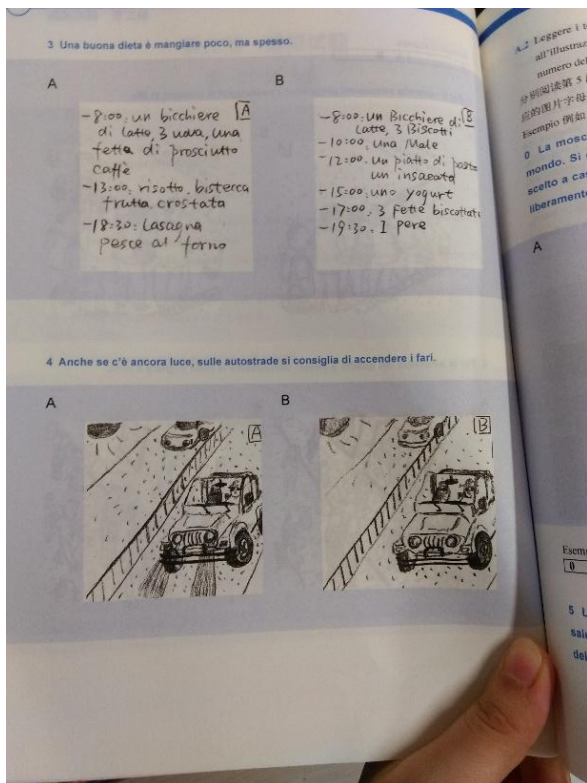
Figure 4-6 & 4-7 Two pages of the exam paper

Origin: «意大利语 A2 考前冲刺模拟试题», S. Scolaro, A. Burro, S. Miranda, 2008, 外语教学与研究出版社, Beijing

Before the exam, the teachers have taken one week to help the students to review the whole course. However, the result of this exam is not any better than the first one, before which there was no review at all. Two students got marks higher than 90, while almost half of the students got a mark less than 80. Most of the students think this exam is more difficult than the first one, because the type of the exam is very different from the traditional exam and they are not used to such type. Some students reported that they had learnt the rules and the vocabulary before the exam and if the exam were of the type the first test, they would do better.

4.2 Italian Teaching at the University

From the teachers of the institute and some other university students majored in Italian, we get some information about the teaching of Italian at university. Generally speaking, the Italian teaching at university is not divided in different skills. The course of Italian is normally composed of four big parts: language, literature, speaking and translation. The part of speaking is in the charge of an Italian teacher, while other parts are in the charge of different Chinese teachers. The skills of reading, listening and writing are included in the part of 'language'. Since for the young students aimed at the A2 level the focus of teaching is on 'language', in this paragraph we will concentrate only on this part. Also 'speaking' is of great importance to the first-year students, but since the teaching method is similar as that in the institute, we will not mention it again in this paragraph. Apart from the skills, also grammar belongs to this part. In this paragraph, we will see briefly how grammar, reading, writing and listening are taught at university.

Before introducing the classroom teaching, we will firstly set eyes on some other aspects which are necessary for the evaluation. Three inevitable elements are the situation of the implementation of the needs analysis, the teaching objectives and the teaching materials. Since it is not convenient for me to do researches among the teachers of Italian at the universities, I only carried out two surveys among the teachers in the institute, who also teach Italian at the university. Considering that there are only six teachers in total, the results may not ne representative for all the universities in China, but they represent at least the situation of one university, which can also be a reference.

For the needs analysis I asked the teachers two questions: 1) Would you try to find out the students' needs and ideas during the teaching process; 2) Would you adjust the teaching content and method according to the students' opinions. The results are as following:
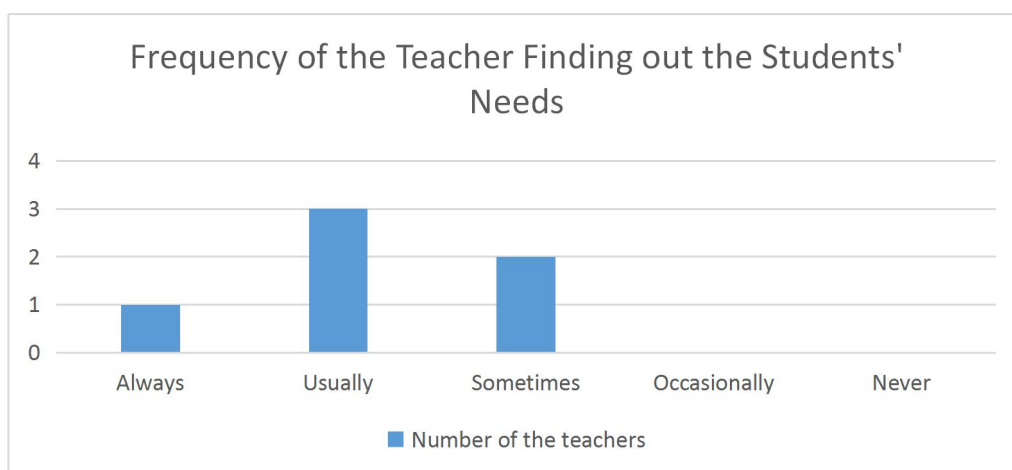
Figure 4-8 Frequency of the teacher finding out the students' needs
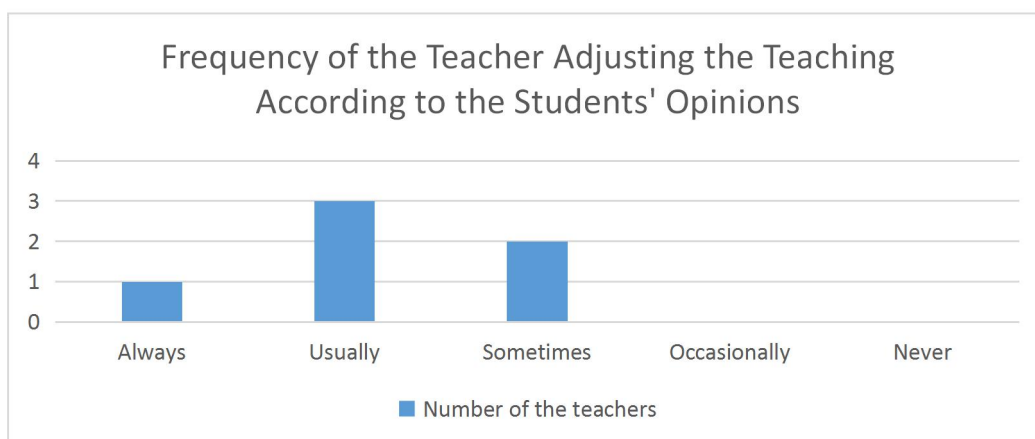
Figure 4-9 Frequency of the teacher adjusting the teaching according to the students' opinions

Figure 4-8 shows that 16.7% of the teachers always try to find out the students' needs and ideas, 50% of the teachers usually do this, 33.3% of the teachers sometimes do this. Totally speaking, 66.7% of the teachers often care about the students' needs and ideas. This result shows that the majority of the teachers do care about the students' needs.

Figure 4-9 shows that 16.7% of the teachers always adjust their teaching according to the students' opinions, 50% of the teachers usually do this, 33.3% of the teachers sometimes do this. The data shows

that more than half of the teachers will adjust their teaching content and method according to the students' needs.

For the teaching objectives, I listed some goals and asked the teachers to choose the ones they think the most important. The results are as following:

Which do you think are the most important goals for teaching?	
Linguistic knowledge	50.0%
Linguistic skill	66.7%
Communicative competence	66.7%
Independent learning	50.0%
Integral competence	66.7%
Learning strategy	33.3%

Table 4-10 Objectives for the teaching of Italian

The result shows that according to the teachers, the linguistic skill, the communicative competence and the integral competence are the most important goals for Italian teaching. The learning strategy, on the other hand, does not get much attention from the teachers. This result agrees with the research carried out by Shu Dingfang (2015) for the foreign language teaching at different universities mentioned in the chapter 1.4.

As for the teaching materials, the main teaching materials are four textbooks. They are «大学意大利语教程 1» *Studiamo l'italiano all'università 1* and «大学意大利语教程 2» *Studiamo l'italiano all'università 2*, edited by Wang Jun, published in 2012 in Beijing; «大学意大利语：阅读教程 1» *Studiamo l'italiano all'università: per il corso di lettura 1* and «大学意大利语：阅读教程 2» *Studiamo l'italiano all'università: per il corso di lettura 2,* edited by Zhang Yujing and Liu Xiaoli, published in 2013 in Beijing. These books introduce the Italian language and culture to the students from different aspects. The first textbook is focused on the life in the campus and the second on the daily life, while the other two textbooks offer the students many short texts.

The textbooks *Studiamo l'italiano all'università* are a series of textbooks that train the students' integral competences in Italian. They aim to train the students' linguistic competences, as well as their grammatical knowledge and cultural competences, preparing them for an advanced development in the Italian language in the future.

The *Studiamo l'italiano 1* has 16 lessons. The first four lessons are phonological lessons, composed of 'learn to speak', phonetics and grammar. The other 12 lessons are composed of 'learn to speak' and grammar. The part of 'learn to speak' includes a dialogue or more dialogues, a text, a narration, a text about culture and custom, vocabularies, notes and exercises. The dialogues and texts are focused on the life in the campus. They are not too difficult and aim to enrich the students' vocabulary, enabling them to express the articles for daily use in a short time. The part of grammar includes the introduction of grammar and exercises. It follows the sequence preposition → adjective → numeral → pronoun → verb (indicative mood) → comparative and superlative → verb (imperative mood). The textbook is full of pictures and is accompanied with a CD.

After studying this textbook, the students are supposed to grasp 1300-1500 words and to develop their metalinguistic competence. They are also supposed to express the common life in campus and in family, using the tenses of indicative. Besides, they will know some basic Italian culture, as well as write correctly the words and the simple sentences.
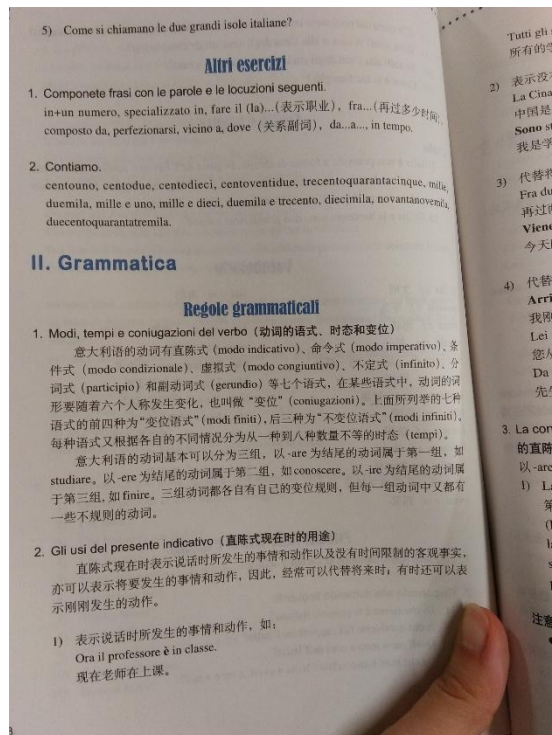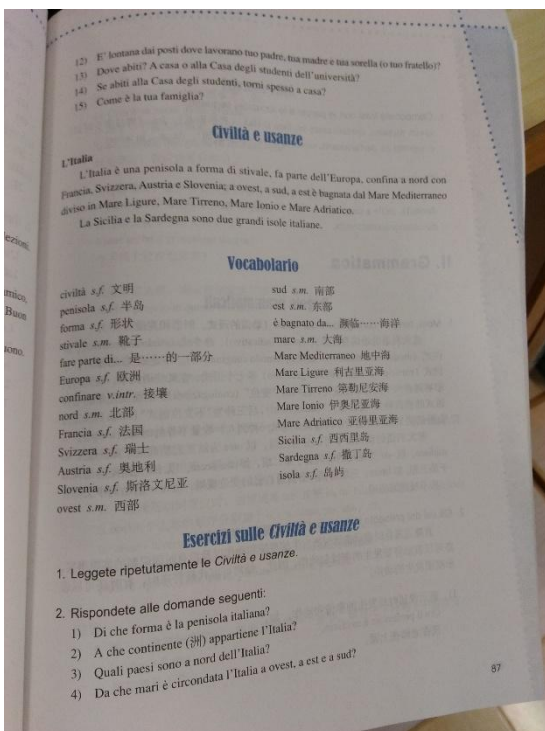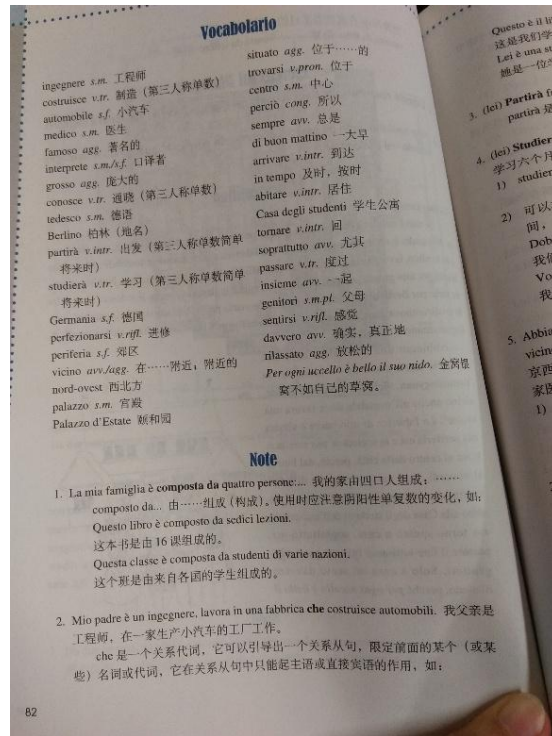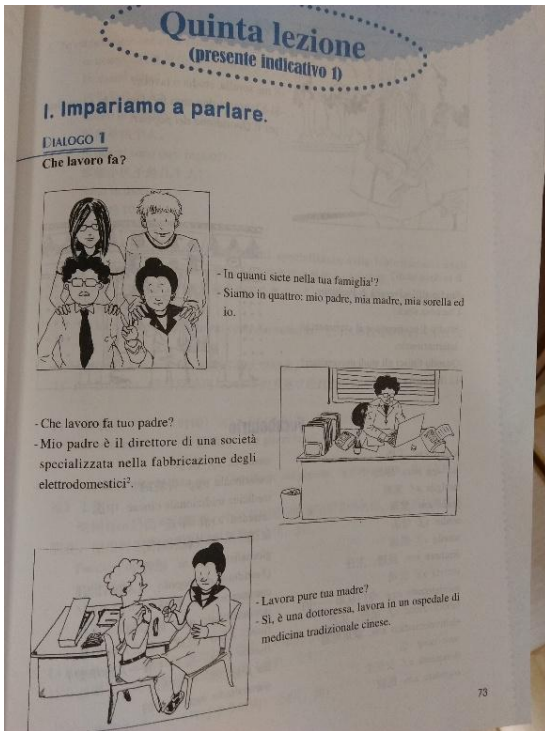
Figure 4-11 & 4-12 & 4-13 & 4-14 Four pages in the textbook *Studiamo l'italiano 1*

Origin: «大学意大利语教程 1» *Studiamo l'italiano all'università 1*, Wang Jun, 2012, 外语教学与研究出版社, Beijing

The *Studiamo l'italiano 2* also has 16 lessons. It has the same lesson system as the first textbook – dialogues and texts, notes, exercises, culture, grammar etc. The dialogues and texts are focused on the daily life. The teaching of grammar follows the sequence verb (remote Past) → relative pronoun and adverb → verb (conditional, passive, conjunctive, gerund, infinitive) → participle → substantive (gender and number). After studying this book, the students are supposed to grasp 1300 words and to develop their

metalinguistic competence. They are also supposed to express orally things related to the daily life, using different moods and tenses. In addition, they are supposed to know some basic Italian culture, as well as to write correctly simple sentences and short texts.

The textbooks for reading, together with other two books for reading, make a series of reading material. These four books serve for the students in the second and third year, after they have learned almost all the grammatical rules. They aim to train the students' skill of reading, broaden their knowledge, enrich their vocabulary and improve their ability of expression. Students in the second year use the first two books.

Each of the reading textbooks has 18 units. Each unit has 2 texts and the correspondent vocabulary, notes and exercises. The *Lettura 1* offers short stories, motivating the students' interest in reading and learning. The Lettura 2 introduces the history and the geography of Italy.
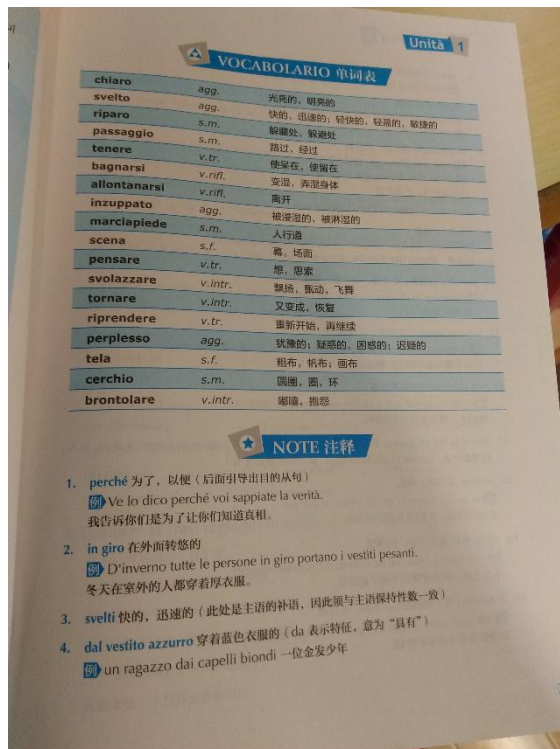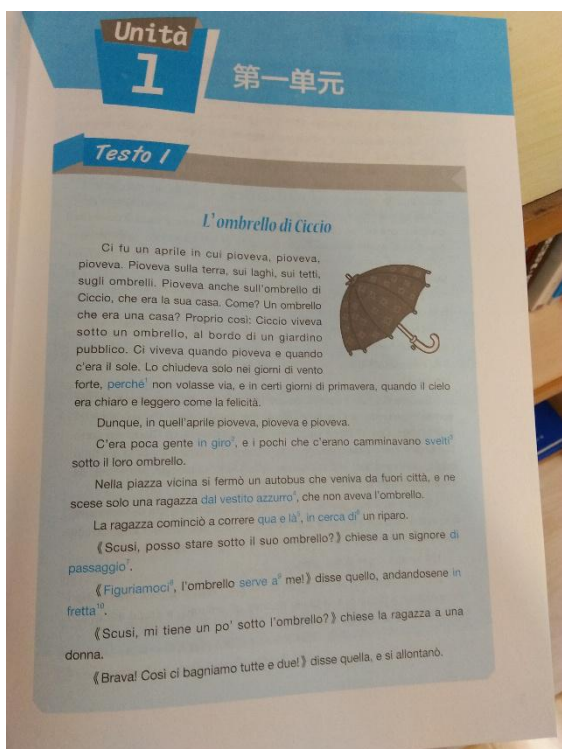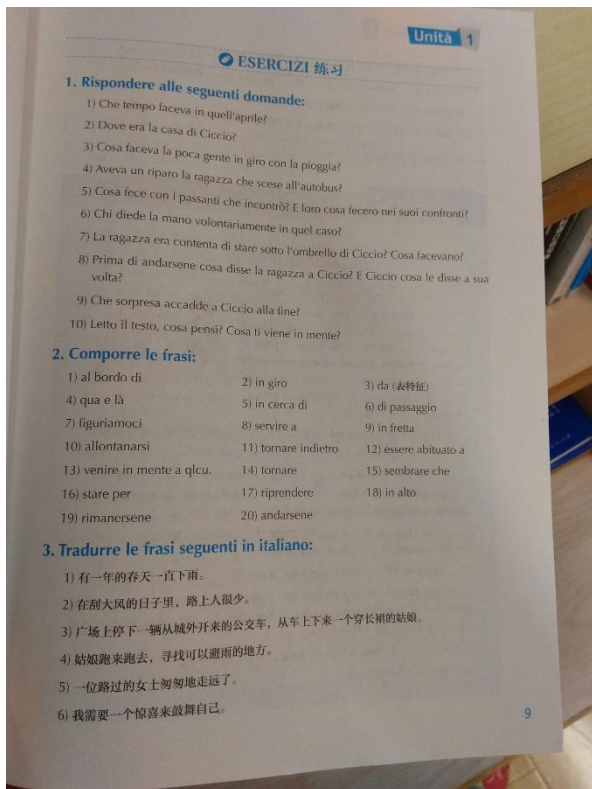
Figure 4-15 & 4-16 & 4-17 Three pages in the textbook of reading

Origin: «大学意大利语：阅读教程 1» *Studiamo l'italiano all'università: per il corso di lettura 1,* Zhang Yujing and Liu Xiaoli, 2013, 外语教学与研究出版社, Beijing

4.2.1 Grammar and Reading

The teachers teach the *Studiamo l'italiano* following the routine as following:

1) Dialogue 1 – vocabulary

The teacher explains the vocabulary and asks the students to read the words with her for several times. After class the students have to read them until they memorize them.

2) Grammar – explanation

After learning the vocabulary in the first dialogue, the teacher leaves aside the rest of the content for a moment and skips directly to the grammar. The teacher explains the rules to the students.

3) Dialogue 1 – explanation and exercise

The teacher teaches the dialogue 1 with the pictures, then guides the students to talk about the pictures until they can read the dialogue and talk about the pictures in their own words fluently. Then the teacher asks questions about the dialogue and the students answer the questions looking at the pictures.

4) Dialogue 2

The teaching of the dialogue 2 is the same as that of the dialogue 1, except that there is no teaching of grammar.

5) Narration

The teaching of narration is the same as that of the dialogue 1, except that there is an exercise of speaking after answering the questions. Students try to narrate imitating the text and the teacher corrects their mistakes. The teacher does not correct the students too often to interrupt their speaking, but only corrects when necessary.

6) Culture and custom

The teacher firstly guides the students to read the text without referring to the vocabulary, then asks the students to tell the main ideas of the text. Then the teacher teaches the students the vocabulary and asks them to read again the text, helping then to comprehend the text. Since the text is very short, the teacher asks the students to memorize the text after class.

7) Other exercises

The teacher guides the students to do other exercises offered in the unit.

8) Grammar – exercises

The teacher guides the students to do grammatical exercises and clarify their doubts.

9) Dictation

The teacher asks the students to do a dictation of a short text, then shows them the text and lets them correct automatically.

This teaching method is mainly the method for grammar teaching. The teaching of reading, which uses the book *Lettura,* follows the same routine: vocabulary → global comprehension of the text → explanation of the text → exercises. The teacher teaches one text every lesson. There is hardly any other interaction between the teacher and the students besides the teaching activities mentioned above. Sometimes there is pair work or group work, but such kind of activity does not often happen and the students normally do not need to cooperate with each other.

4.2.2 Writing

In the last paragraph, when introducing the course in the institute, I have skipped the teaching of writing. The skill of writing is not included in the course offered by the institute. For the course organizers, writing is not a skill as important and practical as other skills like reading, listening or speaking for the pre-university students who have an intention to study abroad and who aim to reach only the A2 level after four months' studying. Moreover, the limited course time does not allow the institute to teach too many things at the same time. Having weighed up the possible use of each skills, the institute had decided to lay aside the teaching of writing for the time being. Learners who want to develop their writing skills can enroll in other courses of the institute, or they can learn during their further residency in Italy.

Nevertheless, writing is included in the course at university. Teachers of the institute – who teach also at the university – report that at university students do have to develop their ability in writing. Since writing is an important skill in language learning, though it is not included in our observed course, I will turn shortly to this skill to see how students in the first two years of university develop their ability in writing.

In the first year, the teaching of writing is mainly focused on description. Students have to use a few sentences to describe their daily routine, their family, their house, themselves etc. Description is ideal for

the first-year students who know only the present and past tense and have a very limited vocabulary. By correcting their composition, the teacher should pay particular attention to their spelling and verb inflection.

In the second year, the writing activity passes to express opinions. Students should use a few sentences to express if they agree or do not agree with an argument and list their reasons. In this period, students learn connectives like *prima di tutto, inoltre, per di più, infine* to organize their discourse. Taking into consideration of their linguistic level, their arguments do not need to be long and meaningful. It is important that their opinions are clear and are put in order with the connectives, and are grammatically correct.

These writing activities rarely take place in class. They appear in the form of homework. Usually the teacher asks the students to write a composition after school and to hand them up on the next lesson. The teacher will correct their compositions and give them back to the students. In the first year of university, there are not too many writing activities. Only from the second year the students are asked to write more compositions. The activity, however, still remains to the form of homework.

4.2.3 Listening

Unlike in the institute, the training of listening at the university is carried out independently by the students. There are no lessons of listening and the lessons of 'language' do not contain any content of listening. In order to develop the students' ability in listening, the university develops a computer program. The program contains 24 units. In each unit there are various exercises of listening. The exercises include listen and choose, listen and match, listen and fill, listen and tick etc. The exercises correspond to the relevant grammar in the textbook and follow the development of the students' linguistic level. The program marks the students' mistakes automatically. When the student makes a mistake, the program will mark the mistake for the student immediately and ask the student to do the exercise again. If the student cannot give the right answer after three times, the program will show the student the right answer. Only when the student get the right answer can he/she move to the next exercise. Generally speaking, it takes about 40 minutes for the students to finish a unit if they do not make too many mistakes. The students should go to the laboratory to do the exercises in the program. Theoretically, the university recommends the students to do two units each week, but actually, the students are free to decide when to do the exercises. It is only important that they finish all the 24 units before the semester ends. The teachers do not follow the students' progress in listening. They will only check if the students have finished their work at the end of the semester. Totally, there are three such programs, serving the students in the first year and in the first semester of the second year.

4.2.4 Examination

In the first year at the university, there are two examinations during a semester, one is at the halfway of the semester, the other is in the end of the semester. Other than the two examinations, there are no other test or exam during the semester, only every so often the teacher lets the students' do dictations. The objects of dictations can be words or texts. Sometimes the teacher collects the students' paper and corrects for them, sometimes the teacher lets the students correct their own work. The results of the dictation will not be counted into the assessment of the students.

The form and the exercises of the exam at the halfway of the semester is similar with that in the institute. The exam is almost a test of grammar, without examining the students' ability in writing, listening and

speaking. There is only a short text to test the students' ability in reading. The text is generally a story. Under the text there are several questions about the details and the global comprehension of the story. The students' do not need to write the answer but only to choose the right one among four choices under each question. Anyway, reading does not weigh much in the exam. The emphasis of the whole exam is on the students' knowledge in rules and in vocabulary. Like that of the institute, the exam contains cloze, gap-filling, choosing and match. There is no exercise of translation. The test paper has four pages and the students are supposed to finish it in ninety minutes, though most of the students can finish in an hour. The total mark of the exam is 100. The teacher reports that the exam is not hard and the majority of the students can get a positive mark (above 80).

The final exam is very different from that of the institute, but similar with the mid-term exam. The focus is always on the linguistic competence of the students, while other competences, such as the intercultural competence and the socio-pragmatic competence are not tested in the exam. The exam is composed of two parts – written and oral. The written exam tests the students' knowledge of grammar and their abilities in reading and writing. There are exercises of choosing, gap-filling and translation. There are also four short texts for reading. For writing, the students need to write a short text, the topic of which can be various. The total mark is 100 and the students have to finish the exam in two hours. The oral exam takes place in the next day in the laboratory. There is no text paper for the oral exam. Each student has a computer with which they listen the question and record what they respond. The university develops a program for the exam, in which a man asks the students to express their opinions or to give suggestions on some events. The teacher, using a central computer, decides whether to repeat the questions and when to move to the next question. There are four questions in the exam. The oral exam lasts one hour. It tests the students' abilities both in listening and in speaking.

The final mark of the students in the first year is composed of two parts: the mid-term exam occupies 30% and the final exam 70%. If a student have not finished the listening program, he/she will not get a final mark until he/she finishes the program. The teacher reports that from this exam, the results are not concentrated any more. Different students show different levels of receptivity. Some students get high marks while some others are not able to pass the exam. The most problematic part is speaking.

5

The Difficulties for the Chinese Learners and the Formation of the 'Chinese Italian'

Before learning Italian, the learners all have studied English[1]. During their English learning, the students have established their own methods for foreign language learning. Besides their experience, their knowledge of English helps them to a certain extent in Italian learning as well. Some linguistic phenomena in the Italian language become easier to grasp thanks to the learners' knowledge of English. Nevertheless, there are many linguistic phenomena in Italian which do not exist in English and remain difficult for the Chinese students, especially for the beginners. These difficulties, caused by the differences between Italian and Chinese, may give the young learners an impression that Italian is not easy to learn.

Along with the difficulties, the learners' mother language will also affect their Italian learning. The effect of the mother language mainly manifests in the productive abilities of the learners, here we intend especially the pronunciation in speaking and the structure in writing. In this chapter, we are going to focus on these difficulties in the Italian language for the Chinese students and the influence of Chinese, discussing how these difficulties and the mother language reflect on the students' learning of Italian.

5.1 Phonology

The vowels in Italian are not a problem for the Chinese learners to learn. The main problems for the Chinese learners lie in the consonants. Comparing the consonants in Italian with those in Chinese, we can find four consonants that exist in Italian but not in China – the /r/, /v/, /ɲ/ and /ʎ/. The combinations of *gn* and *gl* are pronounced as /ɲ/ and /ʎ/, which do not exist in Chinese, though it is not hard for a Chinese learner to learn these sounds. The /v/ in the same way, is not hard for most of the Chinese students to learn, though in some extremely rare cases some learners would confound it with the semivowel /w/. The most difficult sound, however, is the /r/. Since in the Chinese phonetic system this sound does not exist, nor in the English phonetic system which many Chinese students today learn at a very young age, almost no Chinese learner can produce this sound at the beginning, because their organs of phonatory articulations are not accustomed to produce this vibrant sound. Even some Chinese teachers are not able to produce this sound. For some of the students, it is unbelievable that all the Italian people can produce this sound easily. In general, it takes the Chinese students months or even years to produce the /r/.

The inability to produce the sound /r/ also raises some misunderstandings in listening. Some students would confound /r/ with /l/. In Banfi (2010: 34) there is an example of a Chinese student failing to figure out the sound /r/ and failing to understand the sentence:

> *Teacher (T): senti, se non sbaglio, Shanghai si trova sul mare?*

---

[1] Certainly, not all the Chinese learners of Italian have already learned English, but since our researching object is young adult students at about 20 years old, we assume that they all have studied English before.

Student (S): [doesn't understand] (mare)?

T: sul &mare&?

S: [perplexed] male?

T: cioè, vicino (al) mare?

S: sì, vicino mare […]

In this case, the student failed to perceive the sound /r/ and confounded it with the sound /l/.

Besides the specific sounds in Italian, the pronunciation of a Chinese learner can also be affected by his/her mother language, namely Chinese Mandarin or the dialect. Another interesting example in Banfi shows the interference of the L1 in producing the FS:

S: sì + mparare danza, vedere film ++ sentire +++ ehm +++ litizia

T: sentire?=

S: = letizia?

T: cos'è "letizia"?

S: ogni giorno + cosa successo

T: ah, notizia!

S: notizia, sì

In this case, the student confounded the consonant /n/ with /l/. This is a typical South Chinese accent, in which people do not distinguish /l/ from /n/. This characteristic of the South dialects interferes also their Chinese. When speaking Mandarin, many people from the South have a strong accent that they do not distinguish these two sounds. The word *niú nǎi* 'milk' would be spoken as *liú lǎi*. In the example above, the student may have very probably brought this accent in his/her FS.

The phenomena of tones and homophones in the Chinese language explain the reason why the /l/-/n/ accent makes no or few confusion in China but confuses the Italian listeners. Since there are many homophones in Chinese, the Chinese people are very accustomed to distinguish different characters and meanings of a same syllable in different contexts. Due to the natural speech lexicon, the word *liú lǎi* cannot be any other word other than *niú nǎi* 'milk'. In addition, in Chinese, the syllable *lai* does not have a third tone. This is also the case of many other words. Thus, the /l/-/n/ accent is not a problem in Chinese communication and people would therefore not make efforts to correct it. However, Italian words have no tones nor such natural speech lexicon. In Italian dialects, the sounds /l/ and /n/ are never confounded together. The words *notte* and *lotte* indicate absolutely two different things. This makes the distinguishment between /l/ and /n/ very necessary in Italian. If a Chinese learner speaks Italian with such accent, the communication would be hard.

Another difficulty for the Chinese students is the double consonants. In Italian there are thousands of words with double consonants, such as the *mm* in *mamma* or the *ll* in *gallo*. In Chinese such words do not exist. In Italian the double consonants are showed by the rhythm and the length of the pause between the two syllables. Chinese learners do not have such conception in mind. They are confused about the single consonant and the double consonants and confound them in speaking, producing words like **mama* or **galo*.

5.2 Morphology

As mentioned in the second chapter, a main characteristic of the Italian language is that the words – no matter nouns, adjectives or verbs – inflect according to gender, number and case. This linguistic phenomenon becomes a great difficulty for the Chinese learners – they always forget to inflect the final vowels. These inflections, though seem very easy, are in fact very hard for the Chinese beginners to remember. Chinese learners are confused why a noun like 'sky' should have a gender, since it has no importance at all. Thus, a Chinese learner may find him/herself confused about if the word should be *pozzanghero* or *pozzanghera* because he/she could not remember which gender this word has. More confusing are the words like *mano* and *problema*, whose desinence does not correspond to their gender. Even more difficult are the words like *braccio* and *dito*, which are male in the single form but become female in the plural form, not to mention the desinence of their plural form is an *-a*, not the regular *-e*.

Thanks to English, Chinese students have no problem with the idea of number. What are difficult for them, are the verbs. The tenses and models are one of the biggest problem for the Chinese learners. Some Chinese learners would therefore say (being tortured by the Italian inflections) that 'the Chinese language is better because it does not have a grammar'. For many Chinese learners, some tenses and models (e.g. remote Past, conditional, subjunctive) only exist in the classroom. When they are really talking with an Italian, these tenses and models are rarely used and would thus be soon forgotten. Though some learners would study hard to remember these inflections, when in a real pragmatic context, due to the anxiety and the uncertainty, they would still choose to use the simple tenses of indicative to communicate.

5.2.1 Morphemes or Words?

In Chinese primary school, one of the most conventional and important exercises in the Chinese class is to 'compose the characters into words' (*zǔ cí* 组词). In this exercise, pupils have to combine the characters (morphemes) given with other characters (morphemes) to form meaningful words. The characters given can either be free morphemes or be bound morphemes.

The concept of *character* instead of *morpheme* raises a problem in the Chinese students – not only the beginners, but also those who have learnt Italian for years. With six years' exercises of *zǔ cí* in the primary school and without any idea of morpheme – even in English, the only foreign language they have learnt before learning Italian, the inflection is very limited with respect to the Italian language – they tend to express an idea with a set of words rather than simply inflect a word. They are tend to use the phrase *fare diventare sereno* instead of the word *rasserenare*. Sometimes, even though they do know this word, the expression that first comes into their mind is the phrase, not the word. Since the phrase is understandable and works all the time, they tend to ignore the existence of the word and make little effort to remember and to use it.

5.2.2 Adjectives = Nouns?

The lack of inflection endures many Chinese words with more than one categories. A verb can at the same time be a noun, or a preposition can at the same time be a verb. Recently, in the Chinese language there is a new tendency that a noun can at the same time be a verb, which was uncommon in the past. In the shift of the part of speech, the most common case is between adjectives and nouns. Any adjective can function as a noun without changing the form. The word *měi* 美 means either 'beautiful' or 'beauty'; *lèi* 累 means either 'stanco' or 'stanchezza' etc. In Italian the adjectives can also become a noun, changing however its form. The word *bello* is only an adjective; to become a noun it must get a desinence -ezza that indicates the

nominali part of speech of the word. In this way the word *bello* becomes *bellazza*, changing from an adjective into a noun. In the same way the adjective *stanco* becomes the noun *stanchezza*.

This phenomenon confuses some of the Chinese learners. They tend to forget to change the form of an adjective and use it directly as a noun. In English is the same discourse – they often use an adjective to indicate a noun. In the productions of the students of A1 or A2 level – even some of B1 or B2 level – it is not rare to see phrases like *il bello di Cina* or *suo sporco mi dà fastidio*. This phenomenon does not appear vice versa – the learners never use nouns to indicate adjectives – because the adjectival form is more frequent used and is earlier taught to the learners than the substantival form, leaving a deeper impression in the mind of the learners.

5.2.3 Lexicon

From primary school to university, from English to Italian, lexicon is always a big problem to the Chinese students. Some Chinese teachers of English in high school make great effort to ask the students to memorize the dictionary. However, lexicon is still the biggest problem of the students in a real communication. Students cannot understand the sentence the Italian speaker says even very slowly and tend to use simplest words to communicate no matter how many words they have memorized before. Banfi (2010: 35) gives a piece of speech of a Chinese learner. From this piece we can see this learner's opinion on the Italian words:

S: parola italiano ++ se/sempre tropo lungo +++ cinese parola, più facile, sempre corto +++

vuore dire, subito c'è +++ italià/ itariàno parola tropo lungo ++ che cosa vuò/ vuole dire

+ dificile, io no so subito

From this piece of speech we can see that this learner finds Italian words very difficult because they are too long. Unlike Chinese that has only one or two syllables in each word, most of the Italian words are multisyllable, which makes it hard for some Chinese learners to memorize.

Another interesting phenomenon in this speech is that in the output of this learner all of the double consonants are replaced by single consonants, e.g. *tropo* instead of *troppo*, *dificile* instead of *difficile*. The lack of the idea of 'double consonants' has its root in the characters of the Chinese language. In Chinese, under no circumstances will two same consonants appear together. In addition, since all Chinese characters are monosyllable, the word 'difficile' for some students is not a whole word but four single syllables. They tend to memorize the four syllables *di-, -fi-, -ci-* and *-le* instead of memorizing the word *difficile*. Since they have no idea of 'double consonants', they would think there is no difference between *diffi-* and *difi-*. Also in listening, they are not able to distinguish the word *pane* from *panne* produced by a native Italian speaker.

Some main problems of Chinese students regarding the lexicon are:

1) *ignorance of the synonyms*. Many Chinese students once have learnt a word (e.g. *lavoro*), they would be satisfied and make no effort to learn other words that have a similar meaning with this word (e.g. *mestiere, impegno, occupazione, attività*). In their opinion, the word *lavoro* would be sufficient for them to express what they want to say. However, they have ignored the fact that the Italian speakers would not use only this word. In a communication any synonyms of this word could appear in the output of the Italian speakers and the lack of synonyms would hinder the Chinese students from understanding the input.

2) *attention only on the first meaning of the word in the dictionary*. It is not rare among the Chinese students that when they are learning a word, many of them learn only the first meaning they see of the word in the dictionary. For example, in a text they have learnt the word *agiato*, which means 'comfortable'

in the text; though in the vocabulary attached at the end of the textbook has written two meanings of the word ('comfortable; rich'), the students would remember only the first one and ignore the other meanings of the word. In the communication this would cause misunderstanding and confusion.

3) *syllables instead of the whole word*. One of the features of the Chinese characters is that each character has only one syllable. Chinese students, when learning a new character, only need to remember one syllable. However, most of the Italian words have more than one syllable and some Chinese students tend to decompose unconsciously the word into syllables. In some cases, they could remember only some syllables of the word instead of remembering the word as a whole. This also leads to confusion because they would confound some words with other words since they all have the same or similar beginning, e.g. *maschera* vs. *maschio*, *libero* vs. *libro*, *albergo* vs. *albero* etc.

4) *hypernyms instead of hyponyms*. Using a genetic word to generalize all the words under this category is absolutely not a specialty of the Chinese students. Students from all over the word prefer hypernyms. These are the words they learn at the beginning and the students feel assured to use them. According to the students, hypernym + periphrasis = hyponym. The word *squalo* can be substituted by 'the big fish that eats other fishes'. The word *tavolo* would be used to indicate *tavolo*, *scrivania* and *banco*. Though this problem causes least confusion among the four listed problems, it makes the language less professional and the idea that 'everyone understands what I'm saying so I don't need to learn the hyponyms' would demotivate the student to learn more.

In such cases, when a Chinese student cannot understand a word or cannot come up with a word, they would use some strategies of compensation. The first is to smile and ignore what they have just heard. This strategy is widely used among not only Chinese students, but also many students all over the world. When a student cannot understand what he has heard, he would just smile, hoping the speaker to continue so that he might be able to understand something from the following sentences. Asking the speaker to repeat is not the first choice of most of the Chinese students, not mainly because feeling embarrassed, but because if they ask too much, it will interrupt the coherence of the conversation. Actually, when a student feels it necessary to ask, they will ask what a word means. The problem is, many students feel it unnecessary to ask because they think they would figure out the main idea of the speaker by the next sentences, but in fact they cannot figure out anything at all and are totally lost. The more they do not understand, the less they would like to ask. In this way, they would repeat smiling and continue to ignore what they have heard.

When they do not know the word they want to express, they would sometimes use gestures. For example, when the Chinese student did not know the word *scollatura*, he would make a gesture to indicate it. However, gestures do not work all the time because some gestures do not exist in Italian or have another meaning. Taking the numbers for example, the gesture for Chinese 'nine' does not exist in Italian; the Chinese gesture for 'eight' is the Italian gesture for 'two'; the Chinese gesture for 'seven' is a reversed Italian gesture for 'what do you want'. Thus, even though gestures are very useful in some cases, in some other cases they could still not resolve the question and new confusions would arise.
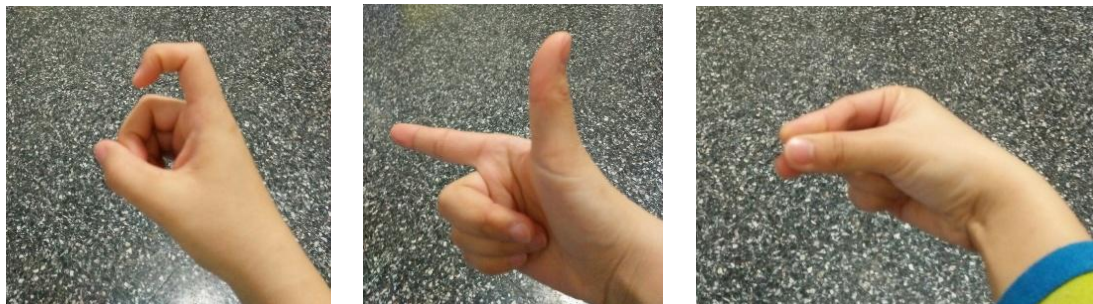
Figure 5-1 & 5-2 & 5-3 Chinese gestures for 'nine', 'eight' and 'seven'

On the other hand, not all the words can be realized by gestures. Abstract concepts like *mathematics, history, geography* can not be indicated by a gesture. In this case, students would use periphrases to describe the words and the description is in some simple words and has no grammatical logic. In Banfi (2011: 37) is presented a dialogue between a student and a teacher, showing how a Chinese student would use periphrases to describe abstract concepts:

S: poi natro libro fare conto

T: sì

S: questo + no so come si chiama=

T: =&la matematica&?

S: la matematica, la matematica, sì + poi piano piano imparare di più + impartato ++ prima Cina

*   cosa fa + tanti anni, così così=*

T: = storia, storia cinese

S: sì + piano piano + prima chi è ++ cosa fa gente + cosa vivere + quelo lì, no? + sempre scrivere

*   scrivere + tropo lungo + tanti anni + fin(ito) (a)desso + poi +tinpo + c'è tanti libro + piano piano*

*   xxx*

T: cos'è "tinpo"?

S: tinpo + belo + natunale + cosa fa montagna a &lago& + fiumi, sì &lago, fiumi&

T: ah, ho capito + sì, sì

S: mare + piante

[…]

T: la geografia della Cina + quindi, lingua, storia, geografia

In this dialogue, the student interestingly showed almost all the problems we have mentioned until now: no distinguishment between /n/ and /l/ (assuming that the student is from the South China); infinitives at the place of inflected verbs; single consonant at the place of double consonant; no accordance between the final vowels.

Another strategy to compensate the lacked word is to make up a word. This strategy does not work all the time because the words made up by the students usually do not exist and may be similar to another word. For example, a Chinese student would use *asiani* to indicate *asiatici*. The word *asiani* does not exist and is similar to the word *aziani* in the speaking Italian. The Italian listener would thus misunderstand what the Chinese speaker intends to say. In the dialogue above the student made up a word "tinpo", which the teacher did not understand.

For those students who know another foreign language (for example English), this foreign language would also be a way to compensate. A student who does not know the word *suonare* would first think about the word in English (*play*), then translate it into Italian (*giocare*). In this way the phrase *suonare il pianoforte* becomes *giocare il pianoforte* because in English it is PLAY the piano. Though this strategy sometimes do works well, especially in the specific scientific disciplines, because in these specific disciplines the English

words almost always correspond to the Italian words, for example in linguistics *periphrasis – paraphrase*, *pragmatics – pragmatica*, *syllable – sillaba* etc.

5.3 Syntax

Thanks to the similarity between the syntax of the Chinese language and that of the Italian language, and thanks to the knowledge of the English language, the Italian syntax does not make a great mess of the Chinese learners. Though there are still some difficulties on which the learners, especially the beginners, are easy to make errors.

5.3.1 Subjects and Verbs

Even though Italian and Chinese have the same SVO word order, Chinese students have some problems with the production of sentences. One is to keep the personal pronouns as the subject. In Italian the personal pronouns are usually omitted when function as a subject because the inflection of the verb will indicate indirectly the subject. In Chinese the personal pronouns should always be presented because there is no verb inflection to tell the recipient who the subject is. Also in English the subject is necessary. As a result, the Chinese students are used to adding a personal pronoun before the verb. Thus, in the sentences produced by Chinese students it is very frequent to see sentences like *Io vado a scuola* or *Loro parlano inglese* instead of *Vado a scuola* o *Parlano inglese*. This problem appears more often in the speaking language, when the students are nervous and do not have much time to organize their sentences. Personal pronouns come out spontaneously before that a verb is produced and the students are usually unconscious of the fact that the personal pronouns they have added are unnecessary.

Another difficulty in learning Italian regarding the SVO structure is the intransitive verbs. The majority of Chinese verbs is transitive, while the Italian verbs are generally accompanied with a preposition. For example the verb 'learn' (*xué*) – it doesn't matter the thing being learnt is a noun or a verb, *xué* is always transitive, while *imparare* can only be directly followed by a noun, never by a verb:

学　英语

xué　yīng yǔ

learn English　　　　*(imparare l'inglese)*

学　游泳

xué　yóu yǒng

learn swim　　　　*(imparare **a** nuotare)*

Some students would therefore forget the preposition in the phrase *imparare a nuotare* and would produce phrases like *imparare nuotare.

The collocation of verbs and prepositions is sometimes also a problem. Different verbs should be followed by different prepositions (e.g. *imparare a, pensare di* etc.) and sometimes a same verb can be followed by different prepositions (e.g. *andare alla scuola, andare in palestra*). Some students would be confused by the collocations, wondering which verbs should be accompanied with which prepositions.

5.3.2 Nominal Phrase and Verb Phrase

Though Italian and Chinese have the same SVO word order in the sentence, in some phrases they have different orders of the constituents. Typically are the nominal phrase and the verb phrase. In Italian the components within a nominal phrase follow the order 'head + modifier', with the adjectives after the nouns, for example *i pantaloni neri*. In China, like in English, the order can only be 'modifier + head', namely the adjectives must before the nouns, for example *hēi* ('black') *kù zi* ('trousers') 'the black trousers'. This is the reason why many Chinese students are very unused to putting the nouns before the adjectives and would often produce phrases like **i neri pantanloni*.

The same 'head + modifier' order appears also in the Italian verb phrase, in which the adverbs tend to follow the verb (e.g. *vado direttamente in biblioteca*). In Chinese the order is always 'modifier + head', with adverbs before the verb:

我　直接　　去　图书馆。

wǒ ***zhí jiē*** *qù* *tú shū guǎn*

I directly go library

'I go directly to the library.'

Interestingly, in the verb phrase Chinese students make less errors with the reversed order (like **direttamente vado in biblioteca*) as they do in the nominal phrase. This is mainly because in English, like in Italian, most adverbs follow the verbs. The students are already accustomed to this order and are used to putting the adverbs after the verbs.

5.3.3 Subordination

The subordination in Chinese is mainly presented by the use of the parataxis, which means to define the relations between the sentences through the juxtaposition of the propositions. For example,

我 回　　家　　吃饭。

wǒ huí *jiā* *chī fàn*

I return home eat.

'I go home for eating.'

In Italian this sentence should be *Torno a casa **per** mangiare*. In the Chinese sentence the preposition *per* does not exist and the syntactic relations are deduced by the context. The same phenomenon can be observed also in the sentences where the nouns or the adjectives function as the predicate:

桌　上　　就　一本　　　书

zhuō shàng jiù *yì běn* *shū*

desk on only a [classifier] book

'There is only a book on the desk.'　　　　　　　　　*(Sulla scrivania **c'è** solo un libro.)*

她　很　开心

tā *hěn* *kāi xīn*

she very happy

'She is very happy.'   (*È molto contenta.)*

In Italian, the predicates of the sentences can never be omitted. The parataxis as a characteristic of the Chinese language makes the students to have the tendency to juxtapose simply the constituents of the sentence without using any causal, temporal, final o other conjunctions which are required in Italian. The sentences *Sulla scrivania c'è solo un libro* and *È molto contenta* might become *Sulla scrivania solo un libro* and *Lei molto contenta* in the production of a Chinese student. This kind of error appears mostly in the speaking language. In the written language, even in a text produced by an advanced student, one can still observe the fact that the simple sentences and the compound sentences appear more frequently than the complex sentences.

5.4 The Formation of the 'Chinese Italian'

For most of the Chinese students, no matter since how many years they learn Italian, their Italian is always obviously different from a native Italian speaker. The 'Chinese Italian' is caused by the fossilization of the way of thinking of the Chinese students and the influence of their L1, that they apply the rules and usual practices of the Chinese language to Italian, which is not in harmony with the Italian language. The typical manifestations of the 'Chinese Italian' are for example the accent, the inappropriate words and collocation, the expression, the redundancy of the adjunct words and so on. The reasons for the formation of the Chinese Italian, apart from the negative influence of the L1 mentioned above, lies in several aspects.

Ways of Thinking

The first is the way of thinking. This is the most important reason for the formation of the Chinese Italian. People in the world have formed different ways of thinking due to their different culture, history, philosophy and cognitive style. On the whole, the expression produced by the Italian people is more straightforward while the expression of the Chinese people is more implicit. Italian people tend to put the information before the background, while Chinese people tend to put the background before the information (Li 2005). For instance,

1)   Italian   *Sono molto contento che lui viene.*

      Chinese   他   能   来   我   感 到   很   高 兴。

                   tā   néng lái   wǒ   gǎn dào hěn gāo xìng

                   he   can   come I   feel   very happy

2)   Italian   *Sono andato da un amico verso le 14.*

      Chinese   下 午   两 点   我   去   找   了   个   朋友。

                   xià wǔ   liǎng diǎn   wǒ   qù   zhǎo le   ge   péng you.

                   afternoon   two o'clock   I   go   find   [functional word indicating the
accomplishment of an activity]   [classifier]   friend

The first example shows that in Italian, the comment is at the beginning of the sentence while in Chinese, it is at the end. The second example shows that the focus of the sentence is at the beginning in Italian while at the end in Chinese. Theoretically, the student learns a new language and the correspondent culture on the basis of his/her L1. The L1 and the culture which the student belongs to influence the way of thinking of the student. When the student speaks Italian, he/she tends to think with his/her L1. As a result, the student speaks a nonstandard Italian, with Italian outside and Chinese inside. In this way, even though the sentences produced are correct with a perfect grammar, his/her Italian still appears strange and exotic. Therefore, when speaking Italian, students should 'forget' about their L1 and imagine themselves to be real Italians, imaging what a real Italian would say in the situation and trying to adjust the expression in accordance with the feature of the Italian language in order to make the sentences fluent and natural.

Literal translation

A second reason for the 'Chinese Italian' can be the inappropriate way of translation. This happens mostly in writing. For many of the students, the process of producing a written composition is a process of translation, that is to say, they will firstly think in Chinese in mind and then translate it into Italian on paper. However, many students cannot get rid of the literal restrict of the Chinese language. They tend to translate their sentences literally, or to collocate the sentences following the usual practice of the Chinese language. In this way, from their productions are exposed various traces of Chinese, leading to a mistransmission of the information or an inaccurate expression of the intention. For example, the Chinese word *xiǎng* 想 ('think') has several meanings and every meaning has correspondent words in Italian. Normally, we would first come up with the word 'pensare'. However, 'pensare' corresponds to only one meaning of the word *xiǎng*, indicating the thinking activity in the mind. *Xiǎng* has some other meanings, which cannot be translated literally using the word 'pensare'.

1) When indicating the emergence of an idea, it is more commonly to use 'venire in mente':

我　想　　不　出来。

wǒ ***xiǎng*** *bù chū lái.*

I　think　no　out.

'Non **mi viene**.'

2) When indicating the recalling activity, either 'venire in mente' or 'ricordare' can be correct:

我　想　起来　我　曾　经　见　过　　　　　　　　　　　　　　他。

wǒ ***xiǎng*** *qǐ lái wǒ céng jīng jiàn guò* 　　　　　　*tā*

I　think of　I　once　　meet [functional word indicating the activity in the past] him

'**Mi ricordo di** averlo visto prima.' / '**Mi è venuto in mente che** l'ho visto prima.'

3) When indicating the intention, besides 'pensare di', there are many other ways of expression:

我　想　　　回家。

wǒ ***xiǎng*** 　*huí jiā.*

I　want　　go home.

'**Voglio/Vorrei** tornare a casa.'

我　不　想　　惹　　你。

*wǒ bù **xiǎng** rě nǐ.*

I　no　intend　annoy　you

'Non **intendo** di romperti la scatola.'

4) When indicating the nostalgia, the more used word is 'mancare':

我　想　　你。

*wǒ **xiǎng** nǐ.*

I　miss　you

'Mi **manchi**.'

Students, especially beginners, tend to use the same Italian word to express different meanings of the same Chinese word and produce sentences like *Non penso di un'idea* or *Penso di te*. Some of these sentences are not wrong, but they do not agree with the Italian way of expressing, or they do not express exactly the real intention of the speaker. The negligence of the existence of polysemy both in Chinese and in Italian leads to an incorrect or inexact choice of the word, which endows their Italian with a Chinese imprint.

The negligence of the accumulation and the avoidance of new expressions

The above mentioned ideology of passing the exam as the objective of studying and the lack of communicative awareness makes many students feel satisfied with the limited ways of expression they learnt. For some phrases, since there is a correspondent expression in Chinese, students tend to use them in every case without using other forms to enrich their vocabulary. For example, students would use the sentence *Lui ha bevuto troppo*, but will never use sentences such as *Lui è ubriaco fradicio / Beveva come una spugna / Si è inzuppato* in the spoken Italian to express the same meaning. For them, one sentence is enough. This is because in the English class in the high school, teachers asked the students to remember a 'model' sentence and to use it in every situation in the exam to make sure that students would not make errors. In the exam, the richness of the expression was not at all important; what carried weight was the correctness. The abundant expressions would not bring more marks to the students, on the contrary, it brought the risk of errors and of losing points. This custom is brought to Italian learning. On the other hand, the students do have awareness of the acculturation, but acculturation for them means to get to know the food, the customs, the people rather than the linguistic aspect. They regard the language indeed as a tool, but not as a carrier of the culture. Language is language; culture is culture. They admit that learning a language helps them to learn the culture, but their goals are limited to read the instructions in a museum, to understand the recipe of a dish or to exchange information with a native speaker. They do not notice that culture also lies inside the language itself. In consequence, they are satisfied with one single expression and do not care about its alternatives. What they have forgotten is that the Italian speakers would use other expressions and if they do not know those expressions, they would fail to understand and to respond in the conversation.

6

The Learning Preferences of the Chinese Students

Having analyzed the language in the second and in the fourth chapter, in this chapter we are going to analyze the Chinese students, in particular their strategies and ideas of learning.

6.1 Learning Style of the Chinese Students

Cortazzi and Jin (1996) have mentioned in their paper the opinions of 15 Western teachers of English working in Chinese universities on the learning styles of the Chinese students. On the positive side, all the teachers agreed that the Chinese students were diligent, persistent, thorough and friendly, not to mention their ability of memorizing and their desire to learn. On the negative side, the teachers mentioned that the Chinese students were good at grammar, vocabulary and reading, but weak in oral communication and in writing. The students were not adapted to the communicative methods and were not active in class. They assumed that their task was only to listen and were unwilling to participate, especially in pair or group work. Cortazzi and Jin attributed this phenomenon to the students' desire to concentrate on learning tasks without the distraction of talking to their peers. They said that students paid great attention to grades and exams but not to the processes of learning.

This conclusion was of 20 years ago. It is quite different from the situation nowadays. With the reform of the educational system and the new ideology conveyed in the policy, Chinese students are becoming more active and open-minded, willing to participate more actively in class. The humanistic teaching approach allows the students to show their different personalities and the learner-based teaching approach requires the teacher to know the students' learning styles, so that the teacher can draw up a teaching plan suitable for at least the majority of the students.

In order to figure out the learning styles of the Chinese students, a survey has been carried out among 11 students in the institute. The data were collected using a questionnaire offered by the Professor Coonan C. M. in the year of 2014 in class in order to identify the ways the students prefer to learn. There are 30 statements and students should respond to the statements as they apply to their learning of foreign language and decide whether they agree or disagree with each statement. They should tick strongly agree (SA), agree (A), undecided (U), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD) for each statement.

The result of the survey is astonishing, quite different from expectancy. In order to give a direct viewing idea, the result is listed below:

	Major Learning Style Preference	Minor Learning Style Preference	Negligible Learning Preference
Auditory	5	6	/
Visual	7	4	/

Kinesthetic	9	2	/
Tactile	7	4	/
Group	6	4	1
Individual	3	6	2

From the collected data we can discover some unexpected characters of the Chinese students. In Csizér and Magid (2014), Bailey and Nunan (1996), Rastelli (2010) and many other literatures, we seem to get the impression that Chinese students are not very participative in class and are more individual learners than group learners. However, the result of the survey shows a total different fact.

The most distinct item is the kinesthetic learning style. The high percentage of the students who take it as a major learning style preference suggests that the students are not passive recipients as 20 years ago; they are willing and may even hope to participate. The result shows that the students all agree or strongly agree that they enjoy learning in class by doing something; what they are not sure is whether they could learn better by doing things. That is to say, they are sure about their interest in activities, but unsure about the effectiveness of the activities. There may be two reasons for such a result. Their interest in activities must not be caused by their awareness of participation, but by a natural preference coming from the fact that the traditional class of teacher explaining and students listening is too boring and an activity in class would activate the atmosphere and stimulate their brains. The students welcome all the exciting activities that make the class interesting and the time passing faster. The reason why they are uncertain about the effectiveness of the activities can be attributed to the rareness of the activities that the students do not have many opportunities to observe themselves whether they could learn better by doing things in class. The reason why in many of the literatures Chinese students appear to be more or less passive to a certain extent can be attributed to the fact that all of the observers were foreign teachers and many Chinese students, when facing a foreign teacher, do not feel as at ease as when they face a Chinese teacher. This anxiety, can again be attributed to two facts. One is that when facing a foreign teacher, their main task becomes to understand what the teacher says, in other words listening becomes a prevalent activity in class. In this way the students become more or less passive recipients because they firstly need to understand before reacting. The other reason might be the lack of communicative competence. Even though the government has modified their policy and the communicative competence is getting more and more attention, as we mentioned above, it has not been totally carried through. Many students have not yet got used to communicating with foreign teachers. If the teacher is a Chinese one, many would be more active.

Another unexpected character regards the auditory learning style. As a basic traditional style, the percentage of the auditory as a major learning style preference is low. The other receptional learning style – the visual one gets a result as high as the tactile one. The unbalance between audition and vision is also manifested in the tests – students have more problem with listening than with reading. The reason could be the fact that the students tend to use more frequently their eyes than their ears in the daily life – staring at the cellphone, reading a book, playing a game etc. Their ears are more used to talk to others or listen to the music. From these occasions we can find out that the visual occasions are more intensive and the auditory occasions are usually superficial. This habit from a long time makes it easier for the students to concentrate and extract information by vision than by audition. In addition, the visual information is usually repeatable, while the auditory information is sometimes not. Things written on the whiteboard, the visual media, instructions, textbooks – all of these materials are available for the students to read or watch many times when they have not understood. Instructions and information told by others are not always available to listen many times. Certainly, students can record the lecture or ask the teacher to repeat, but first, recording a lecture is not a very popular method among the students – only few students would do this and the majority would take notes with a pen; second, to ask the teacher to repeat in class is not common

among most of the Chinese students – they prefer asking the teacher after class, others would choose to ask their classmates; third, it is not very convenient to repeat a piece of the recording than to repeat a piece of what is written. As a result, the auditory learning style does not get much preference by the students.

Another distinct item is the extremely low percentage of the students who have a preference to the individual learning style. The positive side of this result is that the students are willing to communicate and cooperate with others. They think they learn better in a group, discussing or making a project together with others. This is very different from 20 years ago and is not paradoxical with the observation in Csizér and Magid (2014), Bailey and Nunan (1996), Rastelli (2010). Communicating and cooperating with the classmates is a start. Chinese students are developing towards a direction in which they will gradually be willing and be able to communicate also with the teachers, including foreign teachers. The negative side, however, is that the students lack the ability of independent thinking. Two students (19%) have marked the individual learning style as their negligible learning preference. This does not happen to other learning styles. When working in group they can discuss with others, being inspired by others' opinions, and sometimes they can rely on others to solve a question. When working alone they have to do everything by themselves, without anyone else to rely on nor anyone to share the work. Interestingly, there are two similar statements that have got totally opposite results. For the statement '*In class, I work better when I work alone*', 6 students have marked 'agree', 3 have marked 'undecided' and 2 have marked 'disagree'; on the other hand, for the statement '*I prefer working on projects by myself*', 6 students have marked 'disagree' (with one have marked 'strongly disagree'), 3 have marked 'undecided' and 2 have marked 'agree' (with one have marked 'strongly agree'). The difference should lie between 'work in class' and 'projects (after class)'. Under the circumstances of China, classwork refers to some exercises regarding reading, writing or grammar etc. Students have to concentrate on the exercises, so they think they work better when they work alone. In addition, it is a universal discipline that students should not discuss when doing exercises in class, so that they would not disturb others and the exercise can reveal whether they have really understand. Students have got used to work alone in class and they agree on its efficiency. Projects, on the other hand, are usually part of the homework that the students should do them after class. They prefer doing homework together because it helps them expand their thread and reduce their individual burden. The difference on these two statements explains also another statement – 'I prefer to work by myself', in which 7 students have marked undecided, 2 have marked 'agree' and 2 have marked 'disagree'. This is the statement that got most 'undecided' among all of the 30 statements. Undecided because it depends on whether the work is an exercise or a project, in class or after class.

In conclusion, from the survey we find out that most of the Chinese students are kinesthetic learners. Additionally, they are also tactile and visual learners. This result enlightens that projects and media should be inserted in the teaching process to appeal to the students' learning preference and to activate a more efficient language class.

6.2 Time Distribution of the Students to Different Activities

Apart from the learning style, another important element in the leaning strategy is the students' time distribution on different activities. Since writing is not included in the observed course and almost none of the students practices speaking after class, here by the 'activity' we intend the receptive ones. Knowing this aspect helps us to know whether the course organization is reasonable. In order to figure out the time distribution, a survey has been carried out among 20 students in the institute, investigating how much time they distribute to each activity after class per day. The results are listed below:

Activity	Average Time (Hour)	Standard Deviation
Reading the texts	0.42	0.16
Remembering the vocabulary	0.51	0.35
Listening to the CD or to other listening materials	0.41	0.22
Reading other materials	0.50	0.49
Doing written exercises	0.50	0.36

The table shows us that the students distribute most of their time to reading (altogether 0.92 hour). The time distributed to the vocabulary (0.51 hour) is a little longer than to other activities. Closely follow the time distributed to other reading materials (newspaper, texts in other books, texts online etc.) and to exercises (half an hour for both of the activities). Less time is distributed to reading the texts in the textbook (0.42 hour) and to listening (0.41 hour).

These results are not astonishing. For the students at a low level, the most important element in the communication is the lexicon. Students at A level may come across many new words when reading and listening. The new words may hinder them from understanding the meaning of the sentence, or even of the whole text. On the other hand, it may be difficult for the beginners to produce a whole, grammatically correct sentence when speaking. When the students are not able to express what they would like to say, they would usually look for the single words to substitute the sentence. Thus, to the beginners, the accumulation of the vocabulary is extremely significant both for understanding and for producing. Considering this aspect, it is no wonder that the students distribute most of the time to memorizing the vocabulary.

In the same way, it is expected that students distribute more time to reading than to listening. Compared with listening, reading is more convenient to practice. Listening asks for a quiet environment, any noise can hinder the students from listen clearly and carefully to the listening material. Reading, on the other hand, though in need of a relatively environment as well, does not reject the noise so strongly as listening. The comprehension of the text will not be hindered if the students can concentrate themselves. In addition, reading is easier than listening for its possibility to repetition. When the students cannot understand a sentence or a word while reading, they can just read it for several times and analyze the structure and the context to figure out the possible meaning. While listening, however, the students cannot keep listening to one sentence or to one word. The sentence passes and the students have to leave it alone or to guess its meaning with few clues. Even though when doing exercises the students can repeat the listening material for many times, it is still hard for them to figure out the whole sentence if they do not familiar with the structure and the words. Reading gives the students a more intuitionistic contact with the unfamiliar words and structures.

An interesting phenomenon is manifested by the standard deviation, which is considerable in numerical value. It shows that the time distribution is very different from individual to individual. Except for "reading the texts", the standard deviations of other activities all outstrip the half of the mean. The most critical item is "reading other materials", in which the standard deviation is almost equal to the mean. Unlike other items, reading other materials requires the students to look for reading materials by themselves. It is very difficult for the teacher to control or to supervise this learning activity. It totally depends on the students' interest and consciousness to carry out this activity. Other two items with high standard deviation are "doing written exercises" (0.36) and "remembering the vocabulary" (0.35). Unlike at the university, in the institute the teachers do not follow the students' learning progress that much. They normally do not assign homework to the students, nor control the performance of the students in the dictation of vocabulary. Students in the institute are under no pressure to learn. It is on the one side good to the students, because they do not trigger their affective filter. On the other side, however, it does not encourage the students to

make efforts if the students themselves do not have any interest in learning Italian. As we mentioned before, not all the students in the institute are majored in Italian. Some of them are interested in other subjects though they aim to go study in Italy. To the students with less interest, the moderate pressure is a good way to urge them to learn. However, in the institute, they are free to choose whether to keep learning after class or not. The considerable numbers in the standard deviation of these items imply that the individuals differ to a large extent in making efforts. The unique item with relatively low standard deviation is "reading the texts" (0.16). It can be due to two factors. One is that reading the texts is the most fundamental activity among all the listed activities. The teachers have already taught the text in class and the students should be able to read the text fluently if they have grasped the text. Reading the text is the first step to review and to consolidate their knowledge. The second factor is that reading the text is relatively easy compared with other activities. When doing this activity the students do not need to search the rules or the words actively in their mind. They just receive the information. In this condition the students do not to need to be highly concentrated. Further, they do not need to look for the reading materials. The texts are in the textbook and the students do not need to assess whether a text is suitable for them to read or is too difficult yet. Since the teacher has explained the text in class, the students do not need to analyze the structure or to look for the unknown words in the dictionary. They will not come across any difficulties while reading. Taking these factors into account, most of the students would like to do this activity after class.

On balance, the investigation manifests that the students are willing to dedicate themselves in learning after class, but their time distributed to each activities varies a lot. The teachers are supposed to give the students some guidance and resources for learning after class, so that the students will have a clearer idea of what and how they should do after class. This also helps the students to develop their ability in independent learning, which is emphasized by many students in the next paragraph.

6.3 Ideas of the Chinese Students on 'Good Teacher' and 'Good Student'

Under a high selective educational system and a less humanistic learning approach[2], as well as being immerged in a tradition of Confucianism for thousands of years, Chinese students have formed their own ideology of teaching and learning. To be accepted by the students, teachers must know what a good teacher is according to the students and whether the students agree with them on what a good student should be. In order to get their opinions, an interview has been carried out.

The interview has asked 11 students in the institute and 3 university teachers about their opinions on what a 'good teacher' and a 'good student' means. The main interviewing objects are the students, while the opinions of the teachers are considered for comparison. Their responses are as following:

	Good Teacher	Good Student
Student 1	love the students; teach carefully;	work hard; respect the teachers

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[2] We are glad to see that the learning and teaching approach has changed a lot in the recent twenty years, but actually, the change of the teaching approach is a long and hard process. Students, before learning Italian, have gone through a hard time in the school, learning for getting a good mark in the exams. The humanistic teaching approach, though accepted and adopted in the school, has not been totally implemented.

	be patient	
Student 2	pay attention to the students' aptitudes; enlighten the students with their ability of thinking and interest in studying	be respectful and cautious; be willing to learn; think independently
Student 3	be of high virtue; have wide and profound knowledge; have a teaching programme on his/her own which is suitable for the students	be self-disciplined and autonomic; be able to interact with the teacher; learn independently
Student 4	teach the student the methods of learning	learn independently
Student 5	help each student to discover their interest; assure the teaching efficiency; teach the students knowledge and philosophy of life; be fair to each student	know what his/her aptitude is; word hard; assure the learning efficiency; have a reasonable view of life
Student 6	make the students like what is being taught (professional knowledge, philosophy of life etc.); love the students	be willing to learn and have a desire to learn more
Student 7	pay attention to the students' aptitudes; have no prejudice against the students; care about the psychological health of the students; induct and enlighten instead of implant	have a good learning efficiency; be able and willing to learn permanently; have a systematic learning method; give emphasis to the integrity of the knowledge instead of fragmentary pieces of knowledge; take advantage of all available resources
Student 8	simplify the knowledge; be patient	be self-disciplined; not necessarily have top grades but try the best
Student 9	make friends with the students; arouse the students' interest in learning	apply the knowledge in a real situation
Student 10	make the lessons interesting; be responsible; be available to answer the students' questions in detail with patience; love the students	think independently; have a serious, precise attitude; be able to find out a suitable learning method for himself/herself; be willing to discuss scholastic questions with others
Student 11	be responsible; have a profound knowledge in the specialized field; be willing to communicate with the students; have correct ideas on the philosophy of world, life and value	behave well; have ambitions; be positive
Teacher 1	love the students; be responsible; pay attention to the students' aptitudes; arouse the students' interest; enable the students to apply their knowledge in real life	work hard; have a serious attitude
Teacher 2	induct the students;	comprehend the learning content;

	make the students willing to learn actively what is being taught; be willing to search for materials relative to the teaching content; love the students	be willing to discover unknown knowledge; be able to infer the whole from a single instance
Teacher 3	love the students; be patient; induct instead of implant; have a profound knowledge in the specialized field	be diligent; have a strong desire to learn; learn out of interest, not out of utilitarianism; be persevere; be self-disciplined

Analyzing the answers it is easy to find out that there is no conflict between opinions of students and those of teachers. That is to say, students and teachers share the same idea of what a good teacher or a good student should be. It is important that teachers and students have the same standard.

From this interview we can find some main points in common. Firstly, twelve of the interviewees (86%) have mentioned morality and professional ethics of the teacher (to love the students, to be patient, to be responsible, to be fair etc.). It is a typical tradition in the Chinese education that the morality of the teacher is more important than his/her professional knowledge or specialized skills. Regarded as a model of the teachers, Confucius has mentioned time and time again in the *Analects* that the most important quality of a person, being a teacher or a learner, is his/her virtue. Teachers, in particular, must have highest virtues so that others would be convinced and willing to follow them. After morality comes knowledge, the teaching method etc., but morality must come first. This idea has influenced Chinese society so deeply in the following 2000 years that every Chinese knows that "before learning the skill, learn first morals". Thus, morality, specialized as professional ethics, become a main point in the interviewees' responses.

Secondly, nine interviewees (64%) have mentioned the teaching ideology (to enable the students to apply their knowledge in real life, to induce instead of implanting, to have their own adaptable teaching programmes, to simplify the knowledge etc.). The inductive teaching method, in which the teacher acts as an assistant, as well as the reasonable programming, give emphasis to "how to learn" other than "what to learn". It is pleasant to see that most of the interviewees have a plausible idea of in what direction teaching should go.

Thirdly, seven interviewees (50%) have mentioned the interest of the students. It is the most mentioned point among the interviewees that a good teacher should make the students interested in what he/she teaches. Indeed, the current Chinese education system has expunged the interest of learning of most of the students. Students study mechanically many disciplines without showing any interest (Wang Libing 2011). Interest is a big problem. It is, on the one hand, due to the educational system but on the other hand, linked to the teaching style of the teachers. In many schools, their high teaching efficiency comes from their strict atmosphere and the 'strategy of oceans of exercises'. In such schools, interest is no where to be found. Students may have desire to learn, but their desire does not come from their interest, but from their sense of duty or their unwilling to lose or whatever. Thus, according to the interviewees, a good teacher should arouse the students' interest, letting them learn actively. There are several ways a teacher can arouse the students' interest. Firstly, the teacher him/herself should be well-learned, as mentioned by two interviewees. Students are easy to be attracted by the knowledge out of the textbook. If the teacher can add some additional knowledge, the students would feel interesting. Secondly, the teacher should use multiple technologies in class. Students are very excited when a video or something like that is being played in class. The traditional classroom is boring and when a new technology is used, students tend to be more concentrated. Thirdly, teachers should use multiple activities to activate the atmosphere. The brain tends

to remember the most exciting experiences in the long-term memory. To let the students learn through an exciting activity is a good way to interest them and to help them stimulate their long-term memory. Fourthly, the teacher should communicate with the students in class. Students tend to understand the things explained by their friends better than by the teachers because on the one hand, the friends stand on the side of the students, on the other hand, students would participate actively in the conversation with their friends. Teachers should change their role into a friend of the students, as two of the interviewees mentioned. If the teacher has a sense of humor, the positive effect would be obvious.

Further, four interviewees (29%) have mentioned the idea of "pay attention to the students' aptitudes". By propounding this idea, the interviewees, might also unconsciously, put the students at the center of learning. The humanistic teaching approach requires the teacher to pay attention to the personalities of the students, the different cognitive and learning styles of different students, as well as their multiple aptitudes. Not all the students can do well in the same discipline (in the case of China the two most problematic disciplines in the school are mathematics and English) even though they have a suitable learning method or try hard. Students have different aptitudes and interests and can do especially well in some subjects while be banal in some others. Many Chinese students feel distressed because they are interested in and good at for example history, but they cannot distribute much time in it to deepen their knowledge because they are blocked by mathematics. Therefore, they think that a good teacher should encourage them to do better in disciplines which they have an aptitude in and do not force them to learn something which they really have no feeling for. However, it is not a problem of the teachers but a problem of the Chinese educational system. Teachers actually know that their teaching should in accordance with the students' aptitudes but it is hard to put this idea into practice because in a high selective educational system, multiple aptitudes cannot be fully encouraged since they are not linked to the exam or account for very little percentages in the exam. Aptitude may exist only at the university.

The same Chinese word 'aptitude' *cai* 材 can also be comprehended as 'learning style'. In this way, it also makes sense that teachers should teach the students using different teaching methods in accordance with their different learning styles. This is also correct but difficult to realize due to the situation of China. In a class of forty a teacher cannot take care of every student in the limited class time. Certainly, each teacher would like to help the students find a most suitable learning method to improve their learning efficiency, but this could only happen after class when the teacher is having a private conversation with the student to give some guidance of how he/she should learn after class. In class the teacher must consider the whole class instead of the individuals and a student's personal preferable learning style is not as important as the receptive level of the whole class.

As for 'good students', three most common points are "be willing to learn" (6 interviewees, 43%), "work hard" (5 interviewees, 38%) and "learn independently" (4 interviewees, 31%). Being willing to learn is an attitude. If we count other attitudes mentioned by the interviewees (serious, precise, ambitious, positive etc.), then the percentage of the interviewees offering answers regarding 'attitude' reaches 54%. Working hard can be seen as an attitude or a methodology. These two factors (attitude and diligence) are regarded by the Chinese people as the two most important factors that lead a student to success.

Besides these two factors, Chinese people also give strong emphasis to the learning approach and method. Seven interviewees (50%) have mentioned the learning approach. Apart from learning or thinking independently, other approaches or methods mentioned are for example "to infer the whole from a single instance", having a suitable learning method, "to apply the knowledge in a real situation", "to give emphasis to the integrity of the knowledge instead of fragmentary pieces of knowledge", "to take advantage of all available resources" etc.

Interestingly, when assessing a good teacher, almost all the interviewees have mentioned the relationship between teacher and students, but when assessing a good student, only one interviewee has mentioned

the relationship between student and teacher, another has mentioned the relationship between the student and other students. It seems that for most of the interviewees, studying remains in the dimension of 'I and myself', namely the self-promotion. The other two dimensions, namely 'I and you' and 'I and the world' have not come to the awareness of most of the interviewees. In other words, the ability of communication is not seen as an important aspect of the students. When asked if the communicative competence is important, they have said yes, but they did not come up automatically with this idea. It is not good for the foreign language acquisition in which the self-promotion is only one third of the objective. Socialization and acculturation weigh more. Their basis is communication. Therefore, it is not exact to say that Chinese students are shy – in many of the cases, they are just not aware of the necessity of communication.

Last, six interviewees (43%) have mentioned the self-controlling. It corresponds to the morality of the teachers covered earlier. The morality of the students lies in behaving themselves in class. It explains why many students are not active in participation – according to the long tradition, students are passive recipients and are not supposed to interrupt the teaching process by asking questions or expressing different opinions. This idea, though is changing slowly, still predominates in the Chinese classes. Communicating in class with the teacher is sometimes dangerous because when misleaded, it may be regarded as "challenging the authority of the teacher" – teacher still has authority. Discussing with other students in class without the teacher's permission is even more dangerous because the teacher would think you are chatting.

Above all, the Chinese ideology of good teacher and good student is influenced by the Chinese tradition and the worldwide tendency. They have absorbed some good points from the tradition and their ideas are in accordance with the modern theory. It is not possible that in the people with such brilliant ideas the Italian teaching will not get a better development, though there is still a long way to go.

Appendix

Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ)

(Modified from Reid's PLSPQ, 1987)

1. When the teacher tells me the instructions, I understand better.
2. I prefer to learn by doing something in class.
3. I get more work done when I work with others.
4. I learn more when I study with a group.
5. In class, I learn best when I work with others.
6. I learn better by reading what is written on the whiteboard.
7. When someone tells me how to do something in class, I learn it better.
8. When I do things in class, I learn better.
9. I remember things I have heard in class better than things I have read.
10. I learn better via the visual media (video, DVDs, power point slides etc.)
11. I learn more when I can make a model of something.
12. I understand better when I read instructions.

13 When I study alone, I remember things better.
14 I learn more when I make something for a class project.
15 I enjoy learning in class by doing experiments.
16 I learn better when I make drawings as I study.
17 I learn better in class when the teacher gives a lecture.
18 When I work alone, I learn better.
19 I understand things better in class when I participate in role-playing.
20 I learn better via auditory media (radio, CDs, audio cassettes etc.).
21 I enjoy working on an assignment with two or three classmates.
22 When I build something, I remember what I have learned better.
23 I prefer to study with others.
24 I learn better by reading than by listening to someone.
25 I enjoy making something for a class project.
26 I learn best in class when I can participate in related activities.
27 In class, I work better when I work alone.
28 I prefer working on projects by myself.
29 I learn more by reading textbooks than by listening to lecture.
30 I prefer to work by myself.

Scoring Sheet for Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire

Instructions: There are 5 statements for each learning category in this questionnaire. The questions are grouped below according to each learning style. Each question you answer has a numerical value:

strongly agree (SA)   agree (A)   undecided (U)   disagree (D)   strongly disagree (SD)

           5   4   3   2   1

Fill in the blanks below with the numerical value of each answer. For example, if you answered strongly agree for statement 6 (a visual question), write the number 5 (SA) on the blank next to question 6.

Visual

6 – 5

When you have completed all the numerical values for Visual, add the numbers together. Multiply the answer by 2, and put the total in the appropriate blank. Follow this process for each of the learning style categories. When you are finished, look at the scale that follows. It will help you determine your major learning style preference(s), minor learning style preference(s) and negligible learning style preferences(s).

Scoring sheet

Visual		Auditory		Kinesthetic	
6	____	1	____	2	____
10	____	7	____	8	____

12 ____	9 ____	15 ____
24 ____	17 ____	19 ____
29 ____	20 ____	26 ____
Total ____ x 2 = ____	Total ____ x 2 = ____	Total ____ x 2 = ____
(Score)	(Score)	(Score)

Tactile	**Group**	**Individual**
11 ____	3 ____	13 ____
14 ____	4 ____	18 ____
16 ____	5 ____	27 ____
22 ____	21 ____	28 ____
25 ____	23 ____	30 ____
Total ____ x 2 = ____	Total ____ x 2 = ____	Total ____ x 2 = ____
(Score)	(Score)	(Score)

Major learning style preference(s)   38-50

Minor learning style preference(s)   25-37

Negligible learning style preference(s)   0-24

74

7

Evaluation of the Observed Italian Teaching in China and Some Recommendations

Having analyzed the teaching methods, the linguistic difficulties and the characteristics of the students, now we are going to move to the most important part of the thesis, namely the question whether the teaching methods are suitable for the Chinese students or not. We will firstly have an overall view of the course observed in the institute and at the university, referring to the theories introduced in the first chapter, then we will analyze in detail the teaching method of each skill and give some recommendations.

7.1 Course in the Institute

In the main, the teaching of Italian in the institute can be regarded as satisfactory. Firstly, when designing the course, the course organizers have taken full consideration of the status of the students. The students do not differ much in many aspects, for example they all young adults and begin to learn Italian from zero; their competence in other foreign language (namely English) is limited; most of them learn Italian in order to study in Italy etc. Considering these, the course organizers have outfitted young teachers who are able to communicate with the students more easily and who are good at using computer technologies for the course. The course organizers have also added a section in particular for the Italian culture and society, of which the students who intend to study in Italy are in great need. Besides the status of the students, also the objectives of the course are clear. The introduction of the course has pointed out clearly that the course aims to enable the students to reach the A2 level and to be able to live in Italy without many linguistic and cultural problems. The course design is closely around these objectives.

As for the teaching strategies, the course manifests an eclectic teaching strategy. In the teaching of grammar and reading, the mother language referential strategy, the analytic strategy and the dominant strategy occupy a leading position, while in the teaching of speaking and listening, the target language referential strategy, the empiric strategy and the recessive strategy work as main teaching strategies. The eclecticism favors the students to get in touch with different teaching strategies and the different teaching strategies complement reciprocally and work together to enable the students to gain a more comprehensive knowledge. Especially the abundant exercises in class help the students to transfer the explicit knowledge into implicit knowledge.

In addition, the teaching materials are various. The first textbook, the *Nuovo progetto italiano*, is specialized for the young adult beginners. It offers easy and clear instructions and is full of stimulant pictures. It provides the users an ordered and detailed grammar with examples, many exercises to consolidate the grammatical knowledge and many other activities to develop the students' abilities in reading, writing, speaking and listening. On the pages of preparation, it attracts the users' interest with easy and stimulating exercises. The exercises show the key words of the unit and lead the learners to enter in the relevant cultural aspect. On the same page it also tells the users directly what they are going to learn in this unit, so that they will have an explicit goal when learning the unit. The texts are not authentic but very practical. The main type of the texts – the dialogue – puts the users in various communicative

situations. The exercises in the textbook are of different types. They are not too many and are closely around the topic and the grammatical knowledge of each unit. Among the exercises there are many pair works, so the learners learn to cooperate with others. There is no specific section for the lexicon, which means that the learners learn the lexicon unconsciously when learning other things. At the end of the book, though, there is an index of the vocabulary, listing all the words in the textbook for the learner to check if they have mastered all the words. The textbook is also accompanied with an exercise book and a CD, which enables the learners to consolidate and to recuperate their knowledge after class. All in all, the textbook is motivating and the multiple activities in the textbook satisfy different learning styles.

The other textbook, the *Grammatica italiana*, though is a book of grammar without any texts, exercises or pictures, offers the users an explicit explanation of the grammatical rules. It is more like a summary of the grammar, with which the learners have a clear idea of how the rules are. When they have any confusions, it is easy for them to look for the relevant knowledge in the book.

Another plausible point of the course regards the teachers and the teaching atmosphere. The teachers are all open-minded and responsible. Most of them are able to manage the classroom and reach their teaching objectives in the end of the course. They are patient and friendly, all willing to talk with the students and are available to help the students solve their problems in learning. They often tell the students some anecdotes and interesting experiences to stimulate the students' interest. The teaching atmosphere and the relationship between the teachers and the students is very relaxed and harmonic. By and large, the teachers are in line with what the students think are "good teachers" in many aspects and the students like all these teachers. In such environment, it is easy for the students to keep their enthusiasm and learn more actively.

Nevertheless, the Italian teaching in the institute is not perfect without any shortages. First of all, the teaching is more teacher-based than learner-based. In each section, except for speaking, the teacher is at the center of the teaching process and the students are passive recipients. The main form of teaching is the lecture and there are few pair works or group works. As mentioned in the first chapter, the Chinese teaching syllabus for the foreign language teaching requires the teaching to 1) form the students' integral competences, especially their abilities in listening and speaking; 2) enforce their ability in independent learning; 3) improve their integral cultural quality; 4) teach on the basis of compute and the classroom; 5) motivate the activeness of both the teacher and the students. In the observed course, none of the requisitions is got fully fulfilled. Though the course organizers give emphasis to the integral competences of the students, their abilities in listening and speaking do not draw as much attention as the grammar does. Listening and speaking form a part of the course but their importance has not been highlightened. Secondly, there lacks a process of self-control and self-assessment of the students on their learning process. Teachers have not introduced any strategies or resources for independent learning and the students do not seem to be responsible for their own learning. Further, though there is a section of culture and society, the integral cultural quality does not contain only the superficial cultural aspects. It contains much more, for example their attitudes toward the Italian culture, their opinions on the cultural differences, their way of thinking etc. The introduction of the culture is only the first step and the teaching of culture should not remain partially on this dimension, but go deeper and wider. Last but not least, except for listening, the teaching rarely uses any computer technology. The traditional blackboard does not meet the needs of the students in the information age, who ask for an omnidirectional and multimedia input.

Moreover, the teachers and the course organizers have never asked the students about their needs and opinions on the teaching. Though the teachers are very willing to chat with the students in class and after class, they have never discussed with the students about their confusions in learning, their suggestions for the course, their opinions on the teachers, on the teaching methods, on the teaching contents, or on the course organization. Nor have the organizers done any investigation among the students about their

degree of satisfaction and suggestion to the course. The teachers teach according to their own ideas and experience, while the needs and opinions of the students are ignored. An obvious evidence is manifested in the course organization. In the paragraph 5.2 we mentioned that the students distribute the most time to the vocabulary after class, which means that they pay much attention to the vocabulary. However, in the course, vocabulary does not get enough weight in teaching. This aspect will be discussed more in detail in the paragraph 6.1.3. Also listening does not get enough attention in the course. From the investigation in the paragraph 5.2 we know that the time distributed to reading and to listening is very unbalanced. On average, students distribute nearly one hour for reading, whereas the average time distributed to listening is less than half an hour. In the course organization, listening and reading get the same weight. However, since listening does not take part in the exams, it receives less attention both from the students and from the teachers. Students are actually in great need of the training of listening, because listening is important and students are weak at it. However, the importance of listening is not manifested in the course organization, nor in the teaching process.

Another shortage is that the objectives of the course are not balanced. From the observation introduced in the last chapter we can see that the main objectives of this course is focused on the knowledge, the linguistic skills and the communicative competence, while the learning strategy and the independent learning are not included in the objectives. However, as we know, the learning at the university, especially at the university in Europe, manifests a high degree of independency. Chinese students are not accustomed to independent learning. If the students are going to study in Italy, the learning strategy is an important element to train. In the design of the course we do not see any teaching activity regarding the development of the independent learning.

On balance, we have to admit that every course has its shortages and there is no perfect course which satisfies every student. The course in the institute has done a good job in course design and in choosing the teaching material, whereas in classroom teaching it still has a way to go. Now we are going to analyze the classroom teaching in detail, analyzing the teaching of each skill, to see whether the teaching is suitable for the Chinese students.

7.1.1 Phonology

The teaching of the phonology is the starting line of the language teaching. Phonology is the outward manifestation of the language and the base of the oral language. It affects directly the learner's capacity in speaking and when testing a learner's linguistic level, phonology is one of the key factors. In Italian, phonology is also linked to vocabulary. The pronunciation of the word relates directly to its spelling. Once the accent is formed, it is very hard to remold. Thus, the teaching of phonology is not less important than the teaching of any other parts.

In the last twenty years, the objective of phonology teaching is focused on whether the learners' pronunciation should be "the same precise and fluent as native speakers" or should be "understandable" (Xiao Liquan 2014). Chinese scholars divide the phonology teaching into different phases and each phase has its own objective. "Understandable" is the basic objective. In the intermedia phase, the objectives are "correct → effective → fluent → natural → beautiful". The highest objective of phonology teaching is the "standard accent" (Wang Qiang, Cheng Xiaotang 2000). From this point of view, the phonology teaching in the course can be considered to have reached at maximum the third objective, namely the "effective" one, though this objective has not been totally reached yet. After the teaching of phonology, the students know the phonological rules of Italian and are able to pronounce more or less correctly an unknown word, though sometimes some students need several seconds to think. The foreign teacher can understand most

of the words and sentences produced by the students and in the end of the course, they can communicate with only few phonological problems.

The main contents of phonology teaching include the knowledge of pronunciation, phonemes, letters, the flow of speech and the intonation (Hu Chundong 1990). The knowledge of pronunciation indicates the knowledge relates to the pronunciation and to the speech organs, for example the position of the tongue, the shape of the mouth, the vibration of the vocal cord etc. A little teaching of such knowledge can help the students to establish a rational cognition of the phonological system. In the observed course, the teacher skips this part. Considering that the students are not specialized in language and at last they do not have any severe problems in pronouncing, the skipping of this part can be considered as a reasonable decision in order to maintain the students' enthusiasm, without annoying them with complex, abstract knowledge already at the beginning.

Phonemes and letters are taught carefully. The teacher explains clearly each rule and the students do not find phonology very difficult, apart from the difficulties we have mentioned in the fifth chapter. The main difficulties in phonology mentioned in the fifth chapter are the /r/, the /n/ - /l/ and the double consonants. In the course, except for the Italian teacher, only the teacher of reading and the teacher of culture can produce the sound /r/, while the teacher of grammar and the teacher of listening are not able to produce the sound standardly. They do not think this sound is of great importance. Since there is no way to teach this sound, the teachers just ask the students to keep practicing. The sound remains to be a problem for all the students in the end of the course. The other two problems are handled more positively. Since the dialect of Nanjing also has the problem of /n/ and /l/, the teachers pay much attention to these sounds and correct the students every time when they confound them. In the end of the course this problem has almost distinguished. As for the double consonants, since they are a universal difficulty for the Chinese students, the teachers are fully aware of them and emphasis them to the students every time they come across any. The teacher of grammar also provides some exercises to let the students distinguish the double consonants and the single consonant. However, the attention only lasts two lessons. After the teaching of phonology, as soon as moving to the part of rules, the phonological problem gets less attention. In the end of the course, only about half of the students are able to distinguish the double consonants and to produce them correctly. Totally speaking, apart from the nature of the language, the difficulties mentioned above can also be attributed to two deficiencies in phonology teaching. One is that according to the programming of the course, the teacher is supposed to finish phonology and move on to other grammatical aspects after two or three lessons. In the lessons of phonology, the teacher pays attention to the students' pronunciation and keeps correcting them. Once moved to other grammatical aspects, the teacher has to pay attention to other things and the pronunciation of the students are no more as important as at the beginning. Due to the ignorance of the mistakes, students develop their habitual errors mentioned in the fourth chapter. The other deficiency is that the teacher herself has a Chinese accent when speaking Italian. Students learn phonology imitating the pronunciation of the teacher. In this way they also 'inherit' the Chinese accent. Strictly speaking, the teacher acts as a bringer of Italian language to the Chinese students, taking great responsibility in the way that she shapes the first image of 'Italian' to the students. If the teacher herself cannot speak a standard Italian, it is no wonder that students cannot speak a standard Italian as native speakers do.

What lacks in the phonology teaching is the teaching of the flow of speech and the teaching of intonation. Though in this course, each teacher takes responsibility for their own part, the division is not absolute. The Italian teacher should take responsibility for the flow of speech and for the intonation, but she rarely does it. The teachers only correct the students' pronunciation of the single word. Thus, though many students can pronounce the words correctly, they do not care about the accent, the tempo and the intonation. Ignoring these important elements, the students cannot speak a natural, beautiful and standard Italian.

As for the teaching method, in the nowadays foreign language teaching in China, listening and practice are the most utilized (Xiao Liquan 2014). "Listening" means to let the students expose to the standard Italian produced by native speakers. There are three kinds of listening: listening for imitation, listening for discrimination and listening for exposure (Hu Chundong 1990). In the observed course, listening is obviously insufficient. Students are not exposed to the STANDARD Italian for a sufficient time when learning the phonology. They only pay attention to phonology in the first few lessons and they do not have enough standard input even though they have an Italian teacher and lessons of listening. On the lessons of phonology, students listen for imitation, but what they imitate is the pronunciation of the Chinese teacher, whose Italian is not standard. On other lessons, students have few chances to listen for discrimination. Sometimes teachers ask the students to distinguish *d* from *t*, or *t* from *tt*, but such kind of listening does not happen often. There is almost no listening for exposure during the course. Considering the limited course time, it is reasonable that the teachers do not let the students listen extensively in class, but they should at least tell the students the importance of extensive listening for phonology. Students need to get in touch with the language and form the standard pronunciation and intonation being imperceptibly influenced. Teachers should tell the students the learning method and give them resources for extensive listening. On the other hand, "practice" means to imitate the standard Italian until they can pronounce the standard Italian naturally. In this respect the teacher have paid enough attention. Students have many chances to practice and to correct their pronunciation. However, since in most cases the Italian the students imitate is not the standard Italian but the Italian produced by the Chinese teachers with a Chinese accent, the Italian produced by the students has been marked with a Chinese accent from the beginning. Nevertheless, the Chinese accent should not be seen as a big problem if it does not obstruct the understanding.

From the observation of the lessons of phonology we see that the students participate a lot in the teaching activity. The teacher asks the students to practice and the students are willing to practice. They are simulated by the new language and by the atmosphere in class, and they are eager to learn more. From the performance of the students in class and the effectiveness of teaching, the teaching method agrees with the needs and the learning styles of the students, and can be seen as suitable. The only deficiency is that the authentic input is too limited. Nevertheless, considering the general situation in China – phonology is rarely taught by a foreign teacher, - and the fact that the students' accent does not block them from communication, we cannot deny that the teaching of phonology is acceptable.

7.1.2 Structural Rules

Regarded as the most important part in grammar teaching, structural rules are paid much attention both by the teachers and by the students. From the lessons of the rules we can discover two goals of the teaching. One is to transmit the linguistic KNOWLEDGE to the students, the other is to train the students' ABILITY in using the language. From 'knowing' to 'using', the teacher asks the students to PRACTICE. Under the guidance of such teaching approach, in the observed course, we can find the teacher dedicate most of the class time to the explanation and to the practice of the rules, while the text does not get much attention on the lessons of grammar.

However, though 'using the language' is the highest goal in the teaching of grammar, it does not seem that students have to go through the primary goal, namely the 'knowing the language', to reach the highest goal. In other words, it is possible that students can be able to use the language even though they do not possess the linguistic knowledge. Taking the mother language as an example, almost all of the people are able to use their mother language, but only very few people possess a systematic knowledge of its grammar. This fact seems to prove that a systematic knowledge of grammar is not the necessary condition for being able to use a language correctly. Some scholars argue that all the people possess a complete knowledge system for their mother language. Most of the people cannot express the knowledge because they do not possess

the correspondent vocabulary and conception to express it (Wang Duqin 2002). This opinion is reasonable, but personally speaking, the so-called 'inexpressible knowledge' can be seen as a language intuition. Such language intuition is gained from the long and natural process of using the language in the correspondent culture and environment. This process cannot be copied by the foreign language learning, but can be reconstructed. The reconstructed foreign language learning is not only language learning, but also language acquisition (Ma Xiangming 2001). Under such model, the teaching objectives of grammar teaching should be as following:
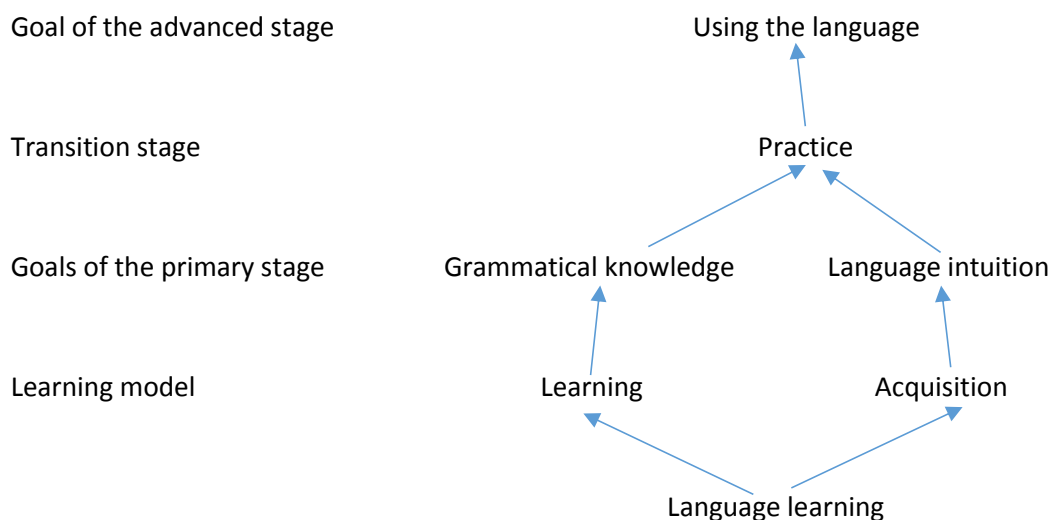
Goal of the advanced stage	Using the language
Transition stage	Practice
Goals of the primary stage	Grammatical knowledge Language intuition
Learning model	Learning Acquisition
	Language learning

Figure 7-1 The Objectives of Grammar Teaching

Origin: Ma Xiangming, 2001, «现代外语教学方法研究», 经济管理出版社, Beijing, p.52

From this figure we can see that the grammar teaching in the observed course is focused on the language learning, but has ignored the language acquisition. The teacher gives great emphasis to the structural rules and the texts only function as an auxiliary tool. Taking a panoramic view of the whole course, since there lacks the extensive reading and listening, the students do not have many chances to ACQUIRE the language or to form their language intuition. The poor result of the second exam suggests that students are not able to use the language yet. It is partly due to the unilateral teaching objective, that the students have gained the grammatical knowledge but have not formed their language intuition. As we know, the brain has its working model. The right hemisphere firstly comprehend the information globally, then the left hemisphere analyze the information rationally. Thus, the global comprehension of the text should precede the analytical explanation of the structure rules. From this point of view, the teaching of grammar has its deficiency not only in setting the goals, but also in organizing the teaching content.

As for the teaching method, the teaching of the rules is obviously the deductive method. The teacher explains systematically the structural rules and corrects the students' mistakes. This method corresponds to the traditional Grammar-Translation Method. Though the communicative approach is becoming the main stream in foreign language teaching, the Grammar-Translation Method has its advantages. For example it emphasizes the accuracy of the output of the students and offers a precise instruction to the students who are weak in inducing. When the class time is very limited, teachers tend to use the deductive method which is more direct and efficient. However, this method expropriates the students' opportunity to discover and to solve the problems by themselves and forms them a negative attitude towards learning. Students tend to get used to REMEMBERING what the teacher teaches rather than THINK. Furthermore, from the research we have done in the last chapter, we know that nowadays Chinese students are more active than before. Most of them are kinesthetic learners. They prefer learning a thing by participating in an activity rather

than passively listen to the teacher. In this respect, the traditional Grammar-Translation Method seems not very suitable for the students.

Also the error correction influences the teaching efficiency. Different ways of correcting the error lead to different results. Stern (1992) mentions a comparison made by Celce-Murcia (1985), listing the lowly effective ways of error correction, which include the explanation of the rules, the direct correction, the mechanical exercises around the error and the continuous correction. The highly effective ways of error correction include the induction from the teacher, the correction from other students or the auto correction, the concrete, pointed clues, the exercises around the error but focused on the significance and the selective correction. On the observed lessons, most of the error correction belongs to the lowly effective ways. The teacher corrects the students directly when they make a mistake and the exercises are concentrated on the form, not on the significance. This also explains why many of the students keep making the same mistakes. The correction does not intrigue their long-term memory.

What is plausible in the grammar teaching is the teaching sequence. Chini (2000) mentions two acquisition sequences of Italian as foreign language. In her book she offers two fixed order in learning Italian, regardless of the student's first language. The first sequence regards to tenses. The order is:

present/infinitive > past participle (also with auxiliary) > imperfect > future > conditional > conjunctive

The second sequence regards the nominal morphology. Chini points that the category of number has a more precocious development than the gender does:

anaphoric pronouns of 3rd sg. > definite article > indefinite article > attributive adjective > predicative adjective > past participle

Explanations of these two sequences can be on the one hand, the frequency of use; on the other hand, the internal accordance of the syntagma develops earlier than the external accordance. On the observed lessons, the teacher follows the order offered by the textbook, which agrees with the acquisition sequence, so that the students can understand the content more easily. Moreover, the teaching has its focus. To the relatively easy rules, the teacher does not dedicate too much time, while to the relatively hard rules, for example the verbs, the teacher dedicates much time, so that the students have sufficient time to understand and to practice.

Another plausible point is that the teacher is in full aware of the language difficulties mentioned in the fifth chapter. In the fifth chapter we have mentioned the main difficulties, which are the redundant personal pronouns, the intransitive verbs and their collocations, the 'head + modifier' order and the subordination. In the teaching the teacher explains clearly the correspondent rules and asks the students to do many exercises. She keeps reminding the students to notice the differences between Italian and Chinese and keeps correcting them patiently until the students can produce the phrases and sentences correctly. In the end of the course only a few students still make a few mistakes on these points.

All in all, from the lessons of structural rules, we see several problems. The lessons give too much emphasis to the transmission of knowledge, to the explanation, to the analyze of the rules and to the written exercises. Correspondently, the lessons pay little attention to the training of the skills, to the repetitive exercises, to the use of the rules and to the oral exercises. Nevertheless, to take an overall view of the whole course, the teaching of other parts recuperates the deficiency of the teaching of the rules. Thus, if we see the teaching of the rules as a single part, it has a lot to improve, but if we see the teaching together with other parts, we can say that though it has some deficiencies, it offers the students a clear introduction of how the rules work in the Italian language and leaves the students an intuitive, logical impression of how the language is. From this point of view, the teaching of structural rules may not be very suitable, but at least acceptable.

7.1.3 Vocabulary

The teaching of vocabulary is very limited in the observed course. In the teaching of all the skills, the teachers regard the vocabulary as a supplementary content, which functions as a tool to help the students understand other teaching contents. Only on lessons of reading does the teacher dedicate some time to vocabulary teaching. On other lessons, vocabulary is never a main character. The limitation in the vocabulary teaching leads to the result that all the difficulties mentioned in the fourth chapter – the morphemes and the words, the adjectives and the nouns, the memorization of the lexicon, the choosing of the suitable word – remain to be difficulties for the students after the course ends. The teaching of the vocabulary does not solve these problems. In fact, vocabulary is as important as structural rules. Harmer (1991) likens the rules to the bone of the language and the vocabulary to the organ of the language, and argues that without using the vocabulary, we cannot express any meaningful things knowing only the rules. Thus, in the observed course, the teaching of vocabulary should not only limited on the lessons of reading, but should get more attention on other lessons, especially on lessons of grammar. Since most of the students do not have an idea of how to learn the vocabulary, the teacher should dedicate more time to vocabulary, particularly to introduce the learning method.

The teaching content is not satisfactory enough as well. According to the *Lexical Approach*, there are four typologies of lexicon: 1) word and polyword; 2) collocation; 3) institutionalized utterances; 4) sentence frames or heads (Cardona 2000). The first two category regard the referential meaning while the other two categories regard the pragmatic meaning of the lexicon. From the observation of the course, it is not hard to discover that the teaching of the vocabulary remains only on the first category.

Among these four categories, words are of great importance to the Chinese teachers and students. Generally, to teach the lexicon means to teach the single words. The lexical competence lies in the memorization of the possibly greatest number of the words. Polywords are at the second place. They are locutions composed by more than one words. Some mostly used polywords are also listed in the vocabulary so that students would not forget to memorize them. However, it is far from enough that the teaching of vocabulary remains only on this dimension. Memorizing the words is only the base of vocabulary learning. Students with a whole dictionary in mind may not be able to communicate freely. In order to communicate, other categories of lexicon are necessary.

The category of collocations indicates the co-occurrences of high frequency that they lie in the syntagmatic dimension without specific syntactic relations. For example, the adjective *castano* refers to the colour of the hairs and in Italian people say "*i capelli castani*", but they never say "**i capelli marroni*" (Cardona 2000: 91). The dimension of collocation is very important because on the one hand, it helps develop the metalinguistic competence of the students, on the other hand, it offers the students not only the key word, but also the closely related word, facilitating the memorization and the recovery afterwards in the communication.

The category of institutionalized utterances includes the linguistic routines and formulas that are utilized very frequently in the language. Expressions like '*se fossi in te*' or '*se fossi al tuo posto*' belong to this category. This kind of expressions are usually taught in the part of grammatical rules, not as vocabulary. Generally speaking, before introducing the expression 'se fossi in te', the teacher must have already introduced the conjunctive and the conditional model, so that she can explain the grammatical aspects of this expression. But according to the *Lexical Approach*, the teaching of such expressions need not to be based on their level of difficulty, but on their frequency of use. That is to say, it is possible that the teacher introduce these expressions to the students in a context where these expressions appear, without explaining the grammatical aspects. Students remember and use these expressions as wholes. Then the explanation of the grammar can come in a second moment.

The category of sentence frames or heads contains expressions used to produce a text. Typical expressions are for example "*in primo luogo… in secondo luogo… in fine*". Normally, these expressions are not taught in the part of grammar, but in writing.

The unbalanced weight of the four categories is very common in China, as well as in the observed course. Teachers give too much emphasis to the category of word while other categories are ignored. But since this is a course of A2 level, the focus only on the words is reasonable. But still, it will be better if the teachers introduce the other categories to the students already from a starting level, because the earlier the students learn to use these lexical, the easier they form their metalinguistic competence.

As regards the teaching method, scholars generalize the methods into three dimensions: the direct vocabulary teaching, the appendant vocabulary learning and the independent development (Gai Shuhua 2003). The direct vocabulary teaching is the teaching focused on the vocabulary, explaining and exercising the pronunciation, the meaning, the structure and the usage of the words. The appendant vocabulary learning indicates the natural learning of vocabulary during other learning activities, such as when listening to a song, watching a film or talking with others. The independent development means to utilize and to optimize the vocabulary learning strategy, in order to enrich the vocabulary. All the three dimensions are very important to the vocabulary teaching. The teaching method adopted by the teacher of grammar may belong to the direct vocabulary teaching, while the method adopted by other teachers belongs to the appendant vocabulary learning. Generally speaking, the direct vocabulary teaching is more suitable for the beginners. With the enrichment of the students' vocabulary, the appendant vocabulary learning and the independent development become the main channels of vocabulary learning. It is suitable that in the observed course, since the students all begin from zero, the teacher teaches directly the vocabulary to the students, so that the students get a direct, precise knowledge of the new words. Along with the direct teaching, other teachers also teach the new words during other activities to enrich the students' vocabulary. The only deficiency is that there lacks an independent development of the strategy, by which the teacher encourages and guides the students to enrich actively their vocabulary by themselves, using their own preferable learning strategy. Actually, from the investigation in the last chapter, we find out that many of the students are aware of the importance of independent thinking and learning, but from the teaching of vocabulary, it is obvious that the teachers have ignored to form the students' ability in independent learning.

What is plausible in the teaching method is the perfect combination between teaching vocabulary within the text and teaching vocabulary with the list of words. In the vocabulary teaching there are two opinions. One is the isolated teaching, namely to teach the aspects of the words without relying on any text. The other is the associated teaching, which believes that the isolated words do not have any significance. The significance of the words all comes from the context, so the vocabulary should be taught within a context (Xiao Liquan 2014). These two opinions supplement each other and should both be utilized in vocabulary teaching. In the observed course, we see that on the first few lessons, the teacher introduced some simple words to the students and let them remember some of them. At the end of the course, the teachers offered the students a list of words which were necessary to remember. During the lessons of grammar, the teacher explained the pronunciation, the form, the meaning and the usage of the words without relying on the text. These actions imply the isolated teaching of vocabulary. In this way, the students can get a clear idea of the basic aspects of the words. On the lessons of reading, listening and speaking, on the other hand, the teachers introduced the words along with the text. Since with the context the students tend to remember the meaning of the words more easily and they can have a more intuitionistic idea of how the words are being used, to remember the single words without a context has been long rejected. In fact, it is also necessary to remember the single words. Certainly, to comprehend the words within a meaningful context helps the students to memorize the words, but comprehension cannot replace memorization. Vocabulary learning requires both comprehension and memorization. For some students, to remember the

words is far more difficult than to comprehend the words. The repetitive memorization of the single words helps the students to remember them. Further, vocabulary learning is a combined system of knowledge and skill. If comprehending the words belongs to the dimension of knowledge, then remembering and using the words belongs to the dimension of skill. The improvement of the skill asks for the repetitive practice. To remember the single words is a simple and effective way of repetition. In addition, to remember the words within a context is an ideal condition, but students cannot always wait for the ideal conditions. They will choose the most convenient and practical way. For the majority of the students, to remember the single words is such a way. On balance, in the learning of vocabulary, the context factors and the non-context factors can both function positively. The task of the teachers is to introduce the positive factors into vocabulary teaching and to improve the teaching efficiency as much as possible. Context is important, but to different learners, the list of words may also be very important. Teachers in the institutes normally do not follow the learners' progress in the memorization of vocabulary, but they still emphasize the importance of the memorization of the words. In the observed course, it is already rather appreciable that teachers do dictations and give the students a list of words. In this course the teachers take full advantage of both methods and enable the students to gain an overall understanding of the vocabulary.

In fact, dictation is not the only way the teachers could help the students to memorize the lexicon. In the field of language teaching, we distinguish two types of memories of the human-being: the short-term memory and the long-term memory. In the short-term memory only a very limited quantity of information can be stored. The duration of the storage goes from several seconds to several minutes. A typical form of short-term memory is the **working memory**, indicating the system that holds and manipulates the information with a very limited capacity. The long-term memory is consisted of various systems and processes. A relevant form is the **declaratory memory**. The declaratory memory is related to the **explicit knowledge**, knowledge that can be acquired through explanation and conscious learning. The materials we learn at school, such as mathematics, geography and history are all explicit knowledge. Declaratory memory can be distinguished as semantic memory and episodic memory. The **semantic memory** indicates the encyclopedic knowledge of the world, while the episodic memory regards to the experience in the past. The memory of explicit information will raise when the person focalizes his attention on the information or a strong emotional stimulus is involved (Aglioti, Fabbro 2006). A positive or negative event will be memorized more easily than a neutral event. Thus, the affection plays an important role in the selection of which information will be memorized and how deeply it will be impressed. In the foreign language learning, the declaratory memory handles the lexical information and the grammatical information (Diadori, Palermo, Troncarelli 2015).

Therefore, the memorization of vocabulary is a process that involves both the short-term memory and the long-term memory. According to the memory theory, the short-term memory has a capacity of 7 +/- 2 elements. Nevertheless, the 7 elements that occupy the span of memory should not be considered as single elements. Cardona (2000) mentioned in his paper that the memorization of information does not depend on the number of the words, but on the morphosyntactic and semantic structure. That is to say, the short-term memory has a limited capacity of conserving the vocabulary *chunk*, but the quantity of information is in relation to the possibility of organizing the input. If we group the elements together into a vocabulary chunk, the capacity of the short-term memory increases noticeably. Therefore, when the words are organized into accomplished phrases or sentences, they occupy less space. This characteristic of the short-term memory illuminates the teaching of Italian. If the teacher offers the students a list of words which are not semantically connected among each other, the students will find difficulties to remember more than a certain number. If the words are connected together into phrases or sentences, the memorizing is much easier. This teaching methodology has appeared years ago in the English teaching in the linguistic institutes, while in the teaching of Italian, the memorization of lexicon still remains to the dimension of single words. The only way to encourage the students to remember the words is the dictation. However, to memorize

the words only for passing the dictation does not favor the words to get into the long-term memory. Students can review the words several minutes before the dictation and get a very good result in the dictation. In this way the words remain in the short-term memory and students may forget those words soon after the dictation. Nevertheless, an advantage of the dictation is that it urges the students to remember the words consciously, which agrees with the idea put forward by Han Yongchang (2011) that the conscious memorization is more effective than the unconscious memorization. Anyway, to find a way to help the students remember the vocabulary is an urgent problem in front of the teachers. The vocabulary teaching in the institute obviously does not solve this problem.

7.1.4 Reading

The method used on the reading lessons is the reading method. Comprehension of written text and acquisition of vocabulary are the two focuses of this method. The only slight difference lies in the fact that in the reading method the process of translation is excluded, whereas on the reading lessons of the course translation is necessary, considering the students' linguistic level.

The comprehension of written text is realized by translation and questions. The teacher talks during the whole process of translation, while students only listen. In such case students are passive recipients. It is hard to say whether they are concentrating or not. In fact, the work of translation can be carried out by pair work or group work. The teacher does not have to talk all the time, but assign this work to the students, giving them an opportunity to think and to develop the ability of transferring between two languages. Or better, the process of translation can be ruled out. Translation may be necessary for the total beginners, but this process does not have to last four months. In the half of the course, the teacher can try to ask the students to read the text without translating it from Italian to Chinese, so that they comprehend directly the text and lay the foundation for their later bilingual competence.

The other activity for comprehension is the questions. It involves two critical points. One is that the questions are normally focused on some details of the text. In order to answer these questions students do not have to understand the whole text, but only the single sentence in which the question is oriented. Thus, this activity is more intensive than extensive. However, Chinese students are weak at global comprehension. They are generally accustomed to pay attention to the details, sometimes also excessively. Questions like "What is this story about?" or "Do you like this story? Why (or why not)?" have never appeared among the questions below the text. Students can even answer correctly all the questions without understanding the whole text. Some students of Italian of B level from other universities have shared their experience in reading. In their reading method, they do not read the text first, but the questions. They pay attention on some key words of the questions, then skim the text with these key words in mind. When come across the key words, they underline them and read the correspondent sentences carefully. In this way, they can answer 90% of the questions correctly. This is a typical exam-oriented method and do not favor the students' competence in global comprehension. This method on the one hand is due to the wrong teaching approach (such 'experience' for reading was taught by their teachers), on the other hand comes from the too detailed questions. Students at university or in linguistic institutes should not orient themselves to a certain exam, but to the integral foreign language competence. Reading is one dimension of this competence and some 'extensive' questions or exercises help the students to get a better understanding of the whole text.

The other critical point is that the teacher always asks the questions after the reading and the explanation of the text. Generally, we agree that the questions should be given out before the students read the text, so to guide the students to catch the useful information in the text and to help them to understand the text. However, in the observed course, the teacher lets the students to read first the text, then she explains the

text, only after that asks she the questions. This can be seen as an unfavorable order. The questions should be given out before the text reading and especially before the explanation. After the explanation the questions do not make any sense because the students have already understood the text.

Apart from comprehension of the text, the acquisition of vocabulary is another important task on the lessons of reading. The activities for vocabulary are dictation of acquired words and explanation of new words. Dictation is necessary, and the auto correction after the dictation avoids the students' affective filter. Students do not take the dictation as a test so they do not feel afraid or anxious. In this situation students show their real level and discover the words that they have not remembered. The teaching of new words along with a text is also good for the students' vocabulary learning, because it puts the words in a context. Students know immediately how the word is used as soon as they know the form and the meaning of it. It favors the students to analyze new words in the semantic level, transferring them from short-term memory to long-term memory. However, as mentioned above, the teaching of vocabulary is very limited. In fact, there are two dimensions of a learner's vocabulary knowledge, namely breadth and depth. Breadth indicates how many words a learner knows on the dimension of form, meaning and use (Li, Kirby 2012), whereas depth indicates how well a learner knows a word, taking into consideration of its synonym, antonym, collocation, multiple meanings and so on. The teaching of vocabulary is more concentrated on the breadth of the vocabulary, while the dimension of depth is ignored.

As a whole, the teaching activities on the lessons of reading are too monotonous. The dictation – reading – explanation – exercise model is typically a teacher → student teaching model and there lacks the participation of the students and the communication among the students. In fact, there are many teaching activities for reading, such as read and predict, read and draw, read and tick etc. As mentioned above, the majority of the Chinese students are kinesthetic learners. They prefer participating in activities and they think they learn better by doing things together with others. The one-directional teacher → student teaching method does not meet the needs of the students and does not stimulate them to learn. Thus, from this aspect, the teaching method cannot be seen as suitable, or at least has much to improve.

As for the reading material, the biggest question is, which material can be used as material for reading? According to Dong Yafen (2003), the reading materials can be divided into original text/non-original text, literal text/non literal text, scholastic text/quotidian text, standard text/popular text or classic text/modern text. In general, the reading materials in China is passing from non-original text to original text, from literal text to non-literal text, from scholastic text to quotidian text, from standard text to popular text, from classic text to modern text. In the observed course, the texts in the textbook and the texts chosen by the teacher show these tendencies, except that almost none of the texts is original text. In fact, the teacher can introduce some easy, original short stories, such as the fairy tales written for the children. These stories are interesting to read and are not difficult from the linguistic aspect. What's more, these stories are not concentrated on one theme; they can talk about anything. From the fairy tales the students can learn the vocabulary for many other aspects of life. Since the fairy tales are for the children, the vocabulary will not be too profound. The students can learn the right use of the vocabulary and will soon have no difficulty to read such texts. Furthermore, the fairy tales normally show the value orientation of a culture. They usually convey the cultural deposits and the education orientation of the society. From the fairy tales the students can learn the culture and the way of thinking of the Italian society. They will enjoy the reading activity through discovering the same and the different value orientation between China and Italy by reading some easy but interesting stories. We see that in the teaching at university there are many such texts, but in the institute, the teacher has not thought about this kind of text yet. Surely, this institute cannot stand for all the institutes, but as an influential, representative linguistic institute, it declares at least one thing, that is the fairy tales, or the short stories as a reading material have not diffused yet.

Having the whole world in view, the texts as teaching materials have passed from a succession of linguistic units to different communicative units. That is to say, the texts are not any more supposed to teach the students only the language structure, but to form the students' communicative competence. The focus of the texts has changed from the relationship of codification/decodification to the asymmetric conditions between the issuer and the receiver (Borello 2005), which means, in a text the recipients do not receive single messages but a textual set. In such informational model, the main activity is to interpret the messages in the text on the base of the codes. It is not the messages who convey the communication, but the communicative relationship which is built by a set of textual practices. The function of the recipient have changed as well. Nowadays, the recipient plays an important role in the construction and in the communicative operation of the text (Borello 2005). The text is a device that requires the participation of the reader. On one hand, the text prefigures its possible interpretations; on the other hand, the readers can produce an interpretation of the text which is not expected by the author.

The passage from the sentence-based didactic to the text-based didactic brings the attention on the communication and therefore on the *language for use*, the essence of which lies in the spontaneous conversations among native speakers. The language for use is a real, authentic language, characterized by the use of idiomatic and colloquial expressions. The texts – the authentic materials usually destined to a public of native speakers – bring the culture to the learner, and teaching the culture has become a very important way to share a common cultural background in order to avoid misunderstandings and confusions.

7.1.5 Speaking

Like other linguistic skills, the skill of speaking is an important part in the language learning. Levelt (1989) believes that the oral production of the language goes through four sections: intention → language organization → articulation → self-control. Intention means to plan what to say, namely which goal the speaker would like to reach. The failure of this section would lead to the embarrassing situation of having nothing to say. Language organization means to find the suitable linguistic materials, including words, phrases, sentences, structure, intonation and so on. The failure of this section leads to stammer, or the situation in which the words fail to express the meaning. Articulation means to bring the thoughts into sounds with the vocal organs. The failure of this section leads to the exotic accent. Self-control means to observe, adjust and correct the production. The failure of this section may lead to two situations. One is the lack of control, which means that the speaker cannot discover his/her incorrect production; the other is the excessive control, leading to the disfluency, the unnatural expression, the slow word speed, the wooden expression etc.

The division by Levelt plays an important role in the teaching of speaking. A successful teaching should concern about the whole process of the language production. All the four sections are important to the skill of speaking and the ignorance of any section may lead to the failure of the whole production. In the main, the teaching of speaking in China pays more attention to the last three sections (Xiao Liquan 2014), whereas the first section, the section of intention, does not get much attention. In the observed course, the teaching of vocabulary serves directly for the section of language organization, while the teaching of phonology serves directly for the section of articulation. The teaching of structural rules serves not only for the language organization, but also for the self-control. On the other hand, the section of intention can be seen as a combination of the cultural information. The teaching of culture makes up for the deficiency of most of the language teaching in China and serves for the combination of language and culture. In the teaching of speaking, the teacher concentrates on all the four sections and offers the students a good chance to practice their spoken Italian. Thus, from the point of language production, the teaching of speaking can be considered as plausible.

The teaching method in the teaching of speaking is more inclined to the communicative language teaching (CLT). By the definition of 'communicative', Piva (2000: 194) listed five sorts of activity proposed by Savignon (1982) that should be carried out in class:

  - one sort of activity is focused on the form and the structure of the language;

  - the *language for a goal* expects the fluent use of FL as a language for communication in class;

  - the *personal use of FL* is focused on the affective-emotional aspects of the use of FL;

  - the *dramatization* is focused on the importance of the roles in the language interaction;

  - *beyond the class* indicates the direct contact among the FL students.

From the suggested activities we can see that the CLT is learner-oriented. The students' participation and their experience in class is of great importance. The communicative activities suggest a pair or a group work, in which the students get more time to speak. In CLT, the student is the main character of the learning progress, while the teacher only acts as an adviser or an organizer of the class. The communicative feature of CLT requires the class to offer a culturally meaningful context. The communicative competence of student must be exhibited in a cultural background, because communication is closely connected to culture. Offering a meaningful, as authentic as possible context helps the student to understand faster and more easily the contents. The CLT also requires the teaching materials to be communication-based. All the topics, texts and tasks in the textbook should be concentrated on communication. The topics should be around everyday matters that the students are familiar with, accompanied with interesting texts and tasks oriented to language use (communication). In order to interact in a foreign language, the student should not only possess a linguistic competence that allows them to understand what other people say and to express themselves correctly, but also develop a socio-pragmatic competence that helps them to choose the appropriate form according to the context of the communicative event and to organize the discourse in a more efficient way to reach their goals (Angelino 2000). Communication-based materials help the students to get more close to the culture, as well as make it easier for the students to grasp, remember and use the language. What's more, an exciting activity based on a meaningful context makes the contents to enter more easily in the long-term memory.

The lessons of speaking favor the students to develop their communicative competence. On the lessons, the teacher leaves much time for the students to talk and always organizes pair work in class. She guides the learning activities and cares about the pronunciation and the expression of every student. The teacher asks the students to read the text and asks them to make the dialogue shows the fact that the lessons are highly participative. The teaching activities correspond to at least three of the sub mentioned suggestions: the activities focused on the texts (explanation and exercises) concentrate on the form and on the structure of the language, while the extended activities (dialogue and self-introduction) concentrate on the fluent use of the language and the roles in the interaction. In this way, the lessons are not held in the traditional teacher → student direction, but the modern teacher ↔ student direction. It requires the students to participate in the activities so that the teacher can get an instant feedback. Once the teacher knows the strong and the weak points of the students, she can adjust her teaching methodology to meet the requirements of the students.

As regards the teacher, she is a native Italian speaker, which means the students can get through her a direct contact with the Italian language and the Italian people. The students, when communicating with the teacher, can get an authentic and standard input (it doesn't matter whether the teacher from Rome has an accent or not – the Rome accent is definitely much better than the Chinese accent). They have the possibility to imitate the prosody and the intonation of the teacher, which would help them to form a correct pronunciation and accent already from the beginning. Moreover, the teacher also speaks some

Chinese, so that when the students cannot understand what she explains, she can repeat it in the mother language of the students. This surely facilitates the learning process (Balboni 2014) and conforms the students' comprehension because it may happen that sometimes the students thought they have understood but actually they have misunderstood. A repetition in Chinese will eliminate the doubt and the misunderstanding.

Though the lessons of speaking are already plausible enough, there are still two critical points. One is that the activities are always of the same sort. On each lessons the students do the same thing – reading the text, doing the exercises and making dialogues. The explanation is not very frequent because it takes place more on the lessons of grammar. The teacher of speaking does not have much to explain. The activities of monologue are also very rare. The activities are a little repetitive though they have different themes on each lesson.

The other critical point regards the attendance of the students. Besides the lessons of listening, which we will discuss later, the lessons of speaking are mostly skipped by the students. Unlike other lessons (grammar, reading, culture), the attendance of speaking is normally around 75%. Students skip these lessons because they think the teacher is not teaching and the lessons are not useful to them. According to them, 'teaching' equals to 'explaining'; when the students should talk more than the teacher, the teacher is not 'teaching'. When the teacher is not 'teaching', the students cannot be 'learning'. As a result, they skip the lessons for 'not wasting the time'.

Another reason that some students skip the speaking lessons can be put down to the teacher. As introduced above, the teacher is Italian and speaks some Chinese and is no more than thirty years old. As reported by herself, she is not yet certificated and is actually a Master student at this university, teaching at the same time a few lessons of speaking to the first-grade students at the university. In the university there are other qualified Italian teachers, so she does not have many lessons to teach. Since she is a young, introverted foreigner without much experience, though she is very brilliant in teaching, she seems not have the same reputation among the students in the institute as other teachers do. On the other hand, though she has Chinese at her Bachelor's degree, her Chinese is not good enough to explain all the linguistic difficulties to the students or to communicate with them. In very few cases she needs to use English to explain some things. Sometimes she also asks the students how to express a thing in Chinese. Students like her, not as a teacher, but as a 'classmate'.

In the main, the teacher of speaking has done a very good job in teaching, though she lacks some experience and authority. She is patient and friendly, and offers the students many opportunities to participate in class and to communicate with her and with other students, developing their speaking skill as well as their socio-pragmatic competence.

7.1.6 Listening

In the acquisition of the mother language, the first language activity of the human-being is listening. After several months the baby begins to speak, then after several years the baby begins to read, then to write. It is possible that the foreign language learning should go through the same process, though most of the learners begin with reading. In the foreign language teaching, as the most basic and important skill, listening has always been put in the first position. In nowadays China, the demand of the spoken foreign language is much more greater than the demand of the written foreign language (Liu Runqing 2002). In order to meet the needs of the society, the focus of foreign language teaching is transferring from reading and writing to listening and speaking. However, from the organization and the attendance rate of the observed course, we see that listening has not got enough attention. Unlike grammar, reading and speaking, the part of listening does not get many class hours in a week. Many students skip some lessons of listening

and the attendance rate rarely gets 100%. The students have several reasons to skip the lessons. Firstly, since there are computers in front of them and the teacher does not see them face to face, it is 'safe' for them to skip the lesson, anyway the teacher does not know who they are. Secondly, they cannot understand the listening material and they think it is a waste of time sitting in the classroom. Thirdly, since listening is not included in the test, they think listening is not important, at least for the time being. Fourthly, the listening material is too easy for some students and they would like to listen to some materials more challenging by themselves. In consequence, almost all the students have skipped the lesson of listening for a few times. Among these four reasons, the first three reasons all involve more or less the negligence of the importance of listening. Students have problems to understand the listening material and they quit. They do not think that listening is important and they should recuperate it. The negligence is on the one hand caused by the environment and by themselves, on the other hand is caused by the teacher, who did not show them the importance of listening and did not take her part seriously. It seems that nor the teacher herself regards listening as important as other skills. Nor the course organizers.

The second and the fourth reason involve the selection of the listening material. Some students find the materials too difficult, while some others find the materials less challenging. From the different feedback of the students, it is reasonable to say that the listening material is not suitable for all the students. Some students find the materials too easy means that the teacher does not making progress. She always offers the students the materials of the same level even though the students have learnt many new things on the lessons of other parts. Some other students find the materials too difficult implies that even though the teacher always repeats the materials of the same level, she does not facilitate the students' learning process by guiding them how to learn or by indicating them how to overcome the obstacles. In fact, it will be much better if the teacher offers reciprocally easy materials and challenging materials to the students, so that she can stimulate and encourage all the students to keep their interest. Though we know that it is difficult to meet the needs of all the students, the teacher actually has many things to do to try to satisfy all of them.

Another point lies in the fact that all the listening materials are unrepeatable. The teacher do not use the CD attached on the textbook, but find listening materials from somewhere else. The students do not know where the material comes from and have no way to listen again the things they have not understood in class. The unknown origin of the resources makes it almost impossible for the students to review the learning content after class. Certainly, the students need some new listening materials to stimulate their interest and to challenge themselves, but these new materials should be possible for the students to review. Otherwise, if the students always leave alone the things they do not understand, it is very hard for them to improve their skill of listening.

The different feedbacks also imply the unsatisfactory teaching method. Some students gave up listening after several lessons because they had difficulties. Though the teacher must not slow down the teaching progress for these students, she should at least tell them how to recuperate and catch up with others. Students report that the teacher has never introduced any learning method for listening, not to mention to induce or to encourage the students. The repetitive exercises on the lessons evidently do not adapt to the students learning style and the students' interest and motivation is easily reduced through the process of unsuccessful listening. On the other hand, the feedback of the students who think the listening material is too easy shows that the teaching progress does not follow their development. The teacher has not considered the different levels of the students and has adopted the unified teaching method to all the students.

In addition, the teaching activity is too monotonic. On most of the lessons, the only activity is to do exercises. Students have never been organized together to do any task. Actually, there are various activities for listening. There are activities before listening, during listening and after listening; there are activities for

the whole class, in groups, in pairs and on the own; there are activities concentrated on the language form and on the information etc. However, on the lessons of listening, we see only a few kinds of such activities. On the contrary, on other lessons, the various activities for listening appear more often. Since it is difficult for the teacher to monitor the degree of participation of the students in the listening activity, it is very important to stimulate the students, to keep their interest in listening and to eliminate their weariness towards listening. Apart from the attractive listening material, the multiple tasks are of great importance. The teacher should design different activities of different difficulty according to the goals of teaching and avoid adopting the same teaching activity for a long time. The teacher should organize different tasks, following different orders, so that the students can keep their interest. Unfortunately, in the observed course, the teacher did not bother to design her course and the motivation of the students got less and less.

As for the films, the teaching of the first film is better than the second because students have watched the whole film before the teacher analyzing it. As we all know, in our brain, the left hemisphere handles the analytic activities and the right hemisphere deals with holistic activities. Both hemispheres take part in language learning, in a direction from the holistic activities to the analytic ones. That is to say, when we learn a foreign language, our right hemisphere first gives us a global perception to the language, then our left hemisphere begins to analyze the language structure. In the teaching of the first film, the teaching method follows the ideal order, namely from global perception to rational analysis. In the teaching of the second film, however, the teacher has chosen another method of teaching. This teaching method can be seen as an intermediate method, by which the students do not watch the whole film, but part of it before analyzing the language. This method is also acceptable because at least the students have got some knowledge about the background of the situation in which the language is being used before analyzing the language. At the same time, the immediate explanation from the teacher clarifies their confusions and facilitates their further comprehension of the film both linguistically and culturally, which also favors them to understand the following plots. The deficiency of this method, however, is that the language analysis interrupts the coherence of the plot and it annoys the students every time when the teacher stops the film. In fact, the film must not be showed for only once. The teacher can show the students the whole film for the first time, then analyze the film piece by piece in the second watching. In this way, the students can have a general knowledge of the plot and will have a more pointed attention to the explanation of the teacher.

In the main, the teaching of listening have some space to improve. The weak points stay in the selection of the teaching material and the teaching method. The teacher should take more time to get to know her students and set up a more effective teaching plan for them.

7.1.7 Culture and Society

The insertion of the part of culture and society is undoubtedly a plausible action. It puts the culture in a conspicuous position and raises the students' attention on the cultural differences. However, it would be better if the teaching content were more profound. The teaching of the culture should not remain superficially on the cultural phenomena, but should go deeper to the dimension of value. The teacher should guide the students to find the cultural differences between China and Italy and induce them to express their opinions on the cultural differences. For example, regarding one cultural aspect, according the students, the Chinese one is better or the Italian one is better. The teacher should guide the students to observe the cultural differences from a critical view. At the same time, she should teach the students to accept the cultural differences and to avoid the cultural conflicts, telling them that the critical points remain only culturally but nor morally.

The teaching activity can also be multiple. There is actually no boundary among the different parts of the course and the teacher of cultural can also create various teaching activities by letting the students read, listen, speak and write. In fact, the lessons of culture offer a good chance for the students to transfer their interlanguage to Italian. As mentioned in the fourth chapter, the main aspects of the students' Chinese Italian lie in the way of thinking, the literal translation and the negligence of the accumulation of the new expressions. On the lessons of culture, the teacher can absolutely help the students overcome these influences. For example, the way of thinking is formed in the depositing of the hundreds-years' culture, history, philosophy and cognitive style. The teacher can introduce profoundly all these aspects to the students and let them discuss these aspects in form of debate or monologue, so that the students will think over and analyze these aspects. Once received the culture and the Italian cognitive style, the students would slowly change their way of thinking under a subtle influence.

Also the habit of literal translation can be removed by the lessons of culture. Though for the beginners the course organizers do not offer any lessons for translation considering the learners' scarce linguistic capacity, on the lessons of culture the teacher can train the students this skill by introducing some Italian novels that have also a Chinese version. In this way, the students not only get in touch with the Italian literature and the Italian cultural tradition, but also learn some translation skills by contrasting the original Italian version with the Chinese version.

As regards the accumulation of the new expressions, we cannot deny that the lessons of culture offer a very good chance for the students to learn the expressions that they will not learn in the textbook. For example the sayings. Behind each saying there is a cultural background. The teacher can introduce some usual sayings to the students, telling them under which circumstances the saying appeared and in which condition people will use it. Other than the sayings, the network catchwords reveal the hot topics of the society. By introducing the network catchwords the teacher presents the popular social phenomena to the students and teaches them some new expressions popular among the young people.

As we see, the teaching of culture and society can mean much more than just introducing some cultural aspects. To add a part specialized for culture and society is a brilliant idea, but the teaching content must be enlarged. It requires the teacher to keep enriching her own knowledge and to follow closely the development of the Italian society.

7.1.8 Conclusion

In the last paragraph of the fourth chapter we have mentioned the problem of 'Chinese Italian'. The 'Chinese Italian' is in fact a phenomenon of interlanguage. The interlanguage indicates the language possessed imperfectly in our mind, in order to produce a norm of the target language. In other words, the interlanguage is a normal and inevitable phenomenon in foreign language learning, a cognitive phase of transition that leads the student to get on towards the target language. It is a reduced competence and produces errors. The development of the interlanguage is accompanied with the phenomenon of 'fossilization', namely the resistance of the false structures. There are five phases in the development of the interlanguage: 1) the influence of the L1 on the interlanguage; 2) errors in the FL learning; 3) the second language acquisition strategies; 4) the second language communication strategies; 5) the overgeneralization of the linguistic materials of the foreign language (Chini 2000). What characterizes the interlanguage is its possibility of fossilization, its incomplete and unstable state and the permeability of L1. Though it is an incorrect, malformed language, it cannot be rejected. The interlanguage theory suggests that an error is not a sin, but a stage of acquisition that reflects the learning in the mind, since the mind tends to learn the easiest things first and develops the interlanguage according to the acquired mechanisms. Thus in front of an error the teacher should explain it, repeat the corrected answer and let the student

practice. When guided properly, the students would overcome their errors in language learning and pass from Chinese Italian to the real Italian. In this dimension, the teachers have done very well. What matters, apart from the methodology, is the students' desire. Whether a student can pass from his/her Chinese Italian to the pure Italian depends partly on whether the student wants to speak a perfect Italian or whether he/she is satisfied with the Italian he/she speaks. If the student is satisfied with his/her Italian, unless he/she really speaks a very good Italian, his/her Italian will remains to be a Chinese Italian. This cognitive dimension affects the student's learning method. Teachers of Italian should explain the interlanguage theory to the students, helping them to establish a rational opinion on the Chinese Italian and on language learning, and at the same time introduce some proper methodologies to the students to help them overstride the barrier of the Chinese Italian and finally speak a standard Italian. In the observed course in the institute we see that the teachers are working hard to develop the learners' various abilities, but they have not made much efforts to help the students transfer their interlanguage to the standard Italian, or more precisely, the question of interlanguage have not gained enough attention. The teachers keep correcting the students' mistakes patiently, but they have never told the students anything about the interlanguage or helped them to establish a right attitude towards it. Since there lacks a good learning strategy, though the teachers are very responsible, the results of the students in the exam are not satisfactory. Though almost all the students have passed the exam, we can imagine them having many linguistic difficulties when coming to Italy. Therefore, though the Italian teaching in the institute has many achievements, it still has much to meliorate.

7.2 Italian Teaching at the University

From the information we gathered, the teaching of Italian at the university can be seen as satisfactory on the whole. Firstly, the investigation in the paragraph 4.2 indicates that most of the teachers care about the students' needs and will adjust their teaching according to the needs, which reflects the humanistic teaching approach. Not only the teachers, but also the university pays attention to the students' needs. For instance, the investigation in the paragraph 6.2 shows that vocabulary is the most concerned issue by the students. In the Italian teaching at the university, vocabulary gets much emphasis. Also the problem of listening has been solved by the computer program, which ensures the students to dedicate some time to listening after class and the time is guaranteed at around 40 minutes.

Secondly, the teaching objectives agree with the requirement of the syllabus for English (foreign language) teaching published by the government in the year of 2000. The syllabus requires to "*form the inter-disciplinary talents that are in possession of a solid linguistic basis of English and a wide range of knowledge, as well as competences to use English*…" This syllabus, though being the syllabus for English teaching, transfers some common ideas in foreign language teaching. The three most important objectives in Italian teaching chosen by the teachers of Italian are the linguistic skills, the integral competences and the communicative competences. Taking the syllabus for English teaching as a reference, the chosen objectives agree with the current requirements for foreign language teaching. However, one deficiency is that the objective of 'learning strategies' gets a relatively low attention. Teachers may think that compared with other objectives, the objective of 'learning strategies' is less important. Actually, in the learner-based teaching, the teacher should not ignore the training of the learning strategies. Teachers should introduce the experience of the successful learners to the students and help them to find their own learning methods that suit them the best.

The teaching materials are motivating. The textbooks *Studiamo l'italiano 1* & *2* offer the students useful texts, plenty of exercises and clear explanations of grammar. The different sections of a unit introduce

different knowledge to the students and train their different abilities. In the section of *impariamo a parlare*, the students learn to make dialogues and monologues. They learn also some grammatical and cultural knowledge. Though the texts in the textbooks are not authentic, the great space distributed to *impariamo a parlare* implies that the book editors give much emphasis to the ability in speaking, putting the students' communicative competence at the first place. What's more, the vocabulary and the notes immediately following the text make it more convenient for the students to review the knowledge after class. In the section of *grammatica*, the textbooks offer an ordered and detailed explanation of the grammar in Chinese, accompanied with many examples and exercises. The types of the exercises are not multiple though, most of which are limited in answering the questions and filling the sentences, but it is the few types of exercises that leaves the teacher large space to create activities according to the teaching progress. Also lack of authentic pictures is a deficiency of these books. Though the books are full of pictures, most of the pictures are not photos, but drawn by the book editors. These pictures do not show the real environment in Italy. Nevertheless, being not colorful, these textbooks motivate the students with their intellectuality. The interesting content and the detailed explanation stimulates the students' curiosity and keeps their desire in learning.

The reading material *Lettura 1* & *2* are also sufficient for the training of reading. Though there is only one picture in each text, the interesting texts and the detailed explanation makes it easy for the students to concentrate. The most plausible point is that in every text, there are some key words and phrases which are underlined. These underlined words and phrases are new to the students and the book editors think they are necessary for the students to grasp. In this way, the students can find easily these words and phrases in the text and know in which condition they can be used. Putting the key words and phrases in a prominent place can also draw the students' attention and makes them more impressive to the students, so that they can remember them more easily.

Apart from the books, the university also makes a computer program for listening. Using the computer program as a teaching material is becoming more and more popular in the recent years. This material shows that the university is willing to follow the nowadays tendency, using the new technologies to cater for the students' needs.

In total, the university does a good job in course design. We should remember that language is only part of the course. Together with other parts – literature and translation, the students can gradually develop their overall competences. The teaching objectives are reasonable, though the attention on the independent learning is far from enough. Also the teaching materials are nice and keep pace with the times. Now we are going to analyzing the classroom teaching, seeing whether the teaching is suitable for the students.

7.2.1 Grammar and Reading

For the teaching of grammar, the teacher uses different methods. For the dialogues and for the narration, the teacher firstly lets the students be acquainted with the vocabulary and the structural rules, so that the students will not be confused by the unknown words or the unfamiliar grammar when reading the text. For the culture and custom, since the students have already got some knowledge of the relative vocabulary and grammar, the teacher lets the students read the text before explaining the vocabulary. For the teaching of reading, the teacher puts the global comprehension of the text before the explanation of the text. The combination of the two teaching methods, namely the combination of learning and acquisition, favors the students to gain both the grammatical knowledge and the language intuition. The two teaching models, together with other teaching activities (doing grammar exercises, telling the idea of a text, narrating, dictating, memorizing the texts etc.), which offer the students good opportunities to practice, enable the students to use the language as soon as possible. This teaching method takes full consideration of the

Chinese students' learning habit and the requisition of the nowadays theory of foreign language teaching. Putting both the knowledge and the ability in the center of the teaching objective, this teaching method is highly plausible.

Also the teaching of vocabulary is sufficient. In the teaching of each text, the teacher dedicates much time to the vocabulary, explaining the form and the significance and asking the students to read and to remember them. The teaching of vocabulary puts the vocabulary in a prominent position and the students are fully aware of its importance. In addition, since many students do not have an idea of how to learn the vocabulary, the guidance of the teacher gives the students a good instruction. Following the guidance of the teacher, the students learn not only the vocabulary, but also the strategy of vocabulary learning. What's more, by browsing the textbooks we discover that the lexicon does not limited in the words and polywords. Collocations, institutionalized utterances and sentence frames are all included in the vocabulary teaching, especially in the teaching of reading. Though words and polywords weigh more, the other categories are not neglected. Students get an overall knowledge about the vocabulary, which will definitely enforce their competence in language using.

The evident shortage in the teaching of grammar and of reading lies in the form of the activities. As mentioned in the third chapter, there is hardly any pair work or group work either in class or after class. Students participate individually in the learning activities. This obviously does not agree with the students' learning styles, in which group learning gets a much higher preference than individual learning.

7.2.2 Writing

From the course design of the institute and the teaching approach at university, as well as the attitude of the students, it is not hard to find out that the importance of writing does not get enough attention. The skill of writing is seen as the least important skill in the Italian teaching in China. In fact, writing is as significant as other skills. The reasons are evident:

1) Writing is the only practical way to practice the productive competence in China. The productive competences include only writing and speaking. Since Italian is a foreign language in China, there are relatively less opportunities for speaking. Nor the teaching of Italian offers sufficient environment and conditions for a great deal of oral practice. The practice of speaking between two Chinese students out of class is regarded as awkward and the psychological burden may affect the effectiveness and the enjoyment of the practice. As a result, Chinese students tend to avoid practicing speaking Italian with another Chinese, but prefer practicing with an Italian. However, the majority of the students do not have the chance. Thus, writing becomes the only practical way for many of the students to practice their productive competence.

2) The practice of writing is convenient and the students can control the practice by themselves. The student does not need to look for any other materials other than a pen and a piece of paper. It is up to the student when to start, when to finish, what to write and in which form to write without being interrupted or limited by other factors. The convenience of practice makes writing become one of the best ways to learn to use the language.

3) Writing can improve effectively the students' abilities in vocabulary and in grammar. The vehicle of writing is the written language, which requires the clear and precise expression, as well as the correct and fine structure. Therefore, the practice of writing favors the students to grasp the meaning and the usage of the vocabulary and to grasp the grammatical rules more precisely.

4) The practice of writing also favors the development of other linguistic skills. Writing is a productive competence, a process of coding. This process of coding shares the same nature with speaking. Thus, the

practice of writing favors definitely the improvement of speaking. In the meanwhile, writing improves the abilities in using the vocabulary and the grammar, and the improvement of such abilities drives the improvement of other linguistic skills, as well as the whole linguistic competence.

5) Writing is a practical ability. With the increase of the communication between China and Italy, the use of Italian is more and more extensive. It is necessary for the students to learn to write e-mails, CVs, reports and so on. Especially for the students with an intention to study in Italy, it is inevitable to learn to write essays in Italian.

On the whole, writing is of great significance to Italian teaching. The attention on writing is far from sufficient. It makes no sense that the course designers are not aware of the significance of writing. However, the importance of writing has not been presented in the course organization and it seems that the idea of how important writing is has not been transmitted to the students. Thus, universities, teachers and students should give more emphasis to writing and take more time to practice it.

For many of the students, writing is boring. This negative impression is on the one hand due to the uninteresting writing content, on the other hand due to the non-communicative teaching method. In fact, among the teaching of all the skills, writing is the least communicative. It remains on the traditional teaching method where the skill, rather than the learner, is at the center of the learning process. Students are asked to write things less enjoyable and they regard it as a task that will soon set them free once they have finished. The writing exercise is always an individual work without any cooperation in group or any communication among the students. The only communication between students and teacher lies in the teacher's correction on their paper. This method is obvious unprogressive and does not agree with the nowadays students' learning style. Students nowadays need to learn by doing things together with others, and they hope their interest and emotion would not be ignored. However, the teaching method in writing is more an assistant tool for grammar learning rather than a tool for developing the students' communicative competence.

The sub mentioned teaching method is focused on the product of writing. There exists also another method focused on the writing process. The method focused on the product does not care about the process of writing. Generally speaking, the teaching method for writing adopted in China is typically focused on the product (Wang Lifei, Sun Xiaokun 2005). On the contrary, the method focused on the process is more popular in the world. This method underlines the importance of the process and believes that writing should be the product of the collective work. This opinion reflects the communicative approach. Brown (1994) listed nine characteristics of this method: 1) focused on the writing process; 2) helping the students to comprehend their writing process; 3) helping the students to learn all the strategies of conception, writing and amendment; 4) offering the students sufficient time to write and to rewrite; 5) giving great emphasis to the process of amending the first draft; 6) letting the students to discover by themselves the content they would like to write; 7) urging the teacher to send feedback to the students during the whole writing process so that the students can express their ideas more properly; 8) urging both the teacher and the students to bring forward their opinions; 9) promoting the individual communication between the teacher and every student during the whole writing process. Personally speaking, both of the methods have their advantages and disadvantages. For example the method focused on the product does not care about the writing process, which does not favor the development of the students' ability in the cooperative working and does not meet the students' demands. The method focused on the process, on the other hand, relies too much on the group work, which may lead the students to lose their ability in independent writing. Considering the current situation of the teaching of writing in China – being more or less ignored and focused too much on the product - and the learning styles of the students, the teacher should combine the two methods together, making use of their advantages and avoiding their disadvantages.

Above all, though the students at the end of the second year can 'produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest' and 'describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans'[3] as what defines the CEFRL for the B1 level, from the point of view of humanistic and cooperative teaching approach, the teaching of writing is not satisfactory enough.

7.2.3 Listening

The ability in listening is put in a prominent position at the university. Though the teachers do not carry out any listening activities in class, the computer program assures the students the training of listening and offers them an opportunity to learn independently. Since the accomplishment of the program is necessary for being qualified for participating in the exam, students do not dare to overlook it. They always have this task in mind and once they have time, they go to the laboratory to finish one or two units. The content of each unit of the program is relevant to each of the units in the textbook, so that on the one hand, the students will not find the listening material too hard, on the other hand, the students can consolidate and broaden their knowledge by doing the listening exercises. Thanks to the automatic correction, the students get an immediate feedback of their answers. They will know and correct their errors immediately. In this way, the students can discover their weak points in listening and in grammar, as well as their weakness in the whole linguistic competence. Moreover, the average time for the students to finish a unit is about 40 minutes, which is not too long nor too short. Students can maintain their concentration during the forty minutes without getting tired. In this way, the quality of the listening activity can be guaranteed. There is also no problem for the repetition. If the student gets the right answer by the first time of listening, in general he/she does not need to listen to the material again. If the student gets a wrong answer, the program will ask the student to listen again automatically, so that the students can recuperate the missed information and try again to answer the question. Since the listening material can be repeated three times in total, and since the content of the material is related to the textbook, if the student cannot get the right answer after three times of listening, it is not the listening material that should be repeated, but the correspondent linguistic knowledge that should be recuperated. The only deficiency of this methodology is that the teacher cannot get feedback from the students. The teacher can only know whether a student has finished the program in the end of the semester or not, but she will not know if this student got the right answer by the first time or by the third time. The only way that she checks the students' ability in listening is in the exam, but by that time it will be too late for the recuperation.

7.2.4 Conclusion

By interviewing the teachers we find some bright spots in the Italian teaching at the university. First of all, the university cares about the students opinions and needs. Teachers will adjust their teaching according to the students' ideas and the university will create different teaching activities to meet the students' needs. Secondly, the course design is reasonable. The organization of the course takes account of the development of every skill of the students, though writing does not get much attention as other skills do. The teaching objective is focused on the students' communicative competences and their integral competences, though the formation of their competence of learning, namely the learning strategies, are more less neglected in the teaching objective. Moreover, the teaching methods are multiple, catering for the needs and preferences of different students, though there lacks a method of cooperation. Totally speaking, the Italian teaching at the university can be considered as suitable for the Chinese students.

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[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_European_Framework_of_Reference_for_Languages

7.3 Recommendations

From the discussion above, we find out that the main weakness in the Italian teaching in China lies in the classroom teaching, in which the training of the learning strategies does not get much attention. In this paragraph, directing at the results of the research and the conclusions of the discussion, I would like to give some recommendations for the Italian teaching in China, especially the classroom teaching.

7.3.1 Phonology

Generally speaking, as a foreign language in China, the students learn the Italian phonology in an artificial environment. Keeping this in mind, we propose several recommendations for the phonology teaching of Italian in China.

Firstly, we should be fully aware of the characteristics of phonology learning. The learning of phonology is easy to become fossilized and hard to correct. One of the basic functions of language is to communicate, and the determinant factor of communication is the semanteme, while the main factors to determine the semanteme are vocabulary and rules (Xiao Liquan 2014). In the communication, the mistakes in vocabulary or in rules may directly lead to the failure of communication. The failure of communication will naturally react up on the correction of vocabulary and rules, in order to recuperate the communication. Thus, it is not common for the vocabulary and the rules to become fossilized. On the contrary, generally speaking, the inaccuracy of phonology will not lead to the failure of communication if the pronunciation and the intonation does not hinder the right comprehension of vocabulary. Compared with vocabulary and rules, the language bares a higher degree of tolerance for mistakes and errors in phonology. In consequence, the learners tend to pay less attention on the phonology. The success of communication may lead the students to think that their phonology learning is also successful and then to ignore the advanced learning and the improvement of phonology. The imperfect pronunciation and intonation will be repeated and will soon become fossilized. Unfortunately, the fossilized phonology is hard to correct. Unlike vocabulary and rules, the application of phonology involves not only the mind of the speaker, but also the physiological mechanism. Thus, the application of phonology is a combination of the speaker's psychological activity and physiological activity. To alter a formed pronunciation means to alter both psychologically and physiologically. As a result, the phonology, when fossilized, is hard to correct. These characteristics of phonology learning decide the importance of the following suggestions.

Secondly, with regard to the first deficiency mentioned in the last chapter, it is important that the teacher should pay attention to the correct and standard pronunciation of the students during the whole course. At the beginning, the teaching should be completely around the phonology, but later, though the focus of teaching can transfer to other aspects, the teaching of phonology should still get enough attention. Phonology teaching should be at the very beginning of the whole teaching process in order to avoid the unprecise pronunciation and intonation, as well as the fossilization of the phonology. Giving emphasis to the phonology during the whole teaching process helps the learners to lay the foundation for the correct pronunciation and avoid the influence of the unprecise pronunciation, as well as get rid of the accustomed wrong pronunciation. Thus, the teacher should not be satisfied just with the fact that she can understand what the student produces. During the whole language course the teacher should keep correcting the students' pronunciation, as well as to point out the rhythm, the prosody and the intonation, until the students speak a very standard Italian.

Thirdly, in the earlier stage of phonology teaching, listening should be predominant. The students should firstly be sufficiently immerged into the standard language, getting in touch with the correct pronunciation, prosody and intonation before they begin to speak. In this way, the students accumulate some preliminary

phonological intuition. While listening, the teacher should guide the students to discriminate the phonemes and to observe the rhythm and the prosody. The more they listen, the more they accumulate their phonological intuition. After sufficient listening, the pronunciation of the students may possibly be more close to the standard pronunciation.

Fourthly, it is of great significance that the phonology is better be taught by an Italian teacher or a Chinese teacher who speaks standard Italian. The sub mentioned 'listening' surely indicates to listen to the standard Italian. The Italian the students listen now influents to a large extent what Italian they will speak in the future. Thus, the students need to listen to the standard Italian, especially at the beginning. Nevertheless, not every native Italian speaker is competent for this work because he/she may not be aware of the importance of phonology. Some of them will ignore the students' unprecise pronunciation if they can understand what the students are trying to express. Only qualified teachers know that a standard pronunciation helps the students not only to speak, but also to spell correctly in writing. Thus, when employing an Italian teacher, the university should not only looks at the teacher's linguistic competence, but also consider his/her opinion and competence in teaching.

7.3.2 Grammatical Rules

Since the grammatical rules play an important role in the language learning and are of great importance according to the Chinese students, the teaching of grammatical rules is particularly significant. The complexity of the rules and how they differ from the Chinese language decides whether the language is 'difficult' to the Chinese student. In order to facilitate the understanding of the rules, as well as to eliminate the students' fear and anxiety, the teaching of grammatical rules should pay attention to the following suggestions.

Firstly, the teaching should begin with some easy rules without many exceptional cases. For the beginners, the first impression of the grammar may decide their attitude toward the language. Once the first impression is formed, it is hard to get changed. If the rules are simple and easy to understand, they may be stimulated and encouraged. On the contrary, if the rules are too complicated or with too many exceptional cases, the beginners would find the language too difficult and are easily get defeated. In order to maintain the students' confidence, the rules should not be too irregular at the beginning.

Secondly, the rules should be taught within the context. To learn simply the rules is difficult and boring, and the students are easy to forget or to get confused. Learning the rules within the context on the one hand favors the students to understand the rules and to remember the rules more easily, on the other hand allows the students to learn how to apply the rules in a certain situation.

Thirdly, the explanation of the rules is better be accompanied with tables or figures, which facilitate the students to comprehend. Tables and figures offer the students a more intuitionistic view of the rules. Through comparison and analysis, students can deepen the impression and the knowledge of a certain rule, without confounding it with other rules. Tables and figures also favor the students' memorization.

Fourthly, the teacher should leave more time for the students to practice. According to the theory of memory, repetition is a good way to memorize. In the grammar teaching, practicing the rules through exercises is actually a process of repetition. It helps the students to repeat the rules again and again until the students have remembered them. Besides, practice means not only simply to repeat the rules, but also to use the rules. With different exercises and activities the students learn to apply the rules in various situations. The exercises are the best examples for the students to comprehend the rules and the activities are the best chances for the students to use the rules.

As for the negative influence of the Chinese L1, the teachers should help the students to get rid of it as early as possible. It is not hard to correct all the errors for the beginners, because the negative influence of the Chinese L1 does not appear or affects only slightly at the beginning. It is only at a certain phase, when the students have gained certain basic abilities of Italian does the Chinese L1 start to have great influence on their Italian. Teachers of Italian have different tasks in different phases. At the beginning they should teach the students a correct, standard pronunciation and a correct structure of the language. They should correct the students' errors as soon as possible, in order to eliminate the students' confusion and uncertainty about the language. At a second phase, the teachers should induct the students to a standard Italian, changing their way of thinking and learning methodology, in order to learn more actively and globally.

7.3.3 Vocabulary

As mentioned above, a form of the short-term memory is the working memory. Thus, apart from the temporal memorization, another function of the short-term memory is to elaborate the input. The operative system of the working memory encodes the lexical input on the phonological level, but cooperates with the long-term memory for a profound elaboration of the input, encoding the information on the semantic level. Thus, for a stable acquisition in the long-term memory, it is necessary to encode the lexicon in the semantic level.

For an efficient transfer of the vocabulary from the short-term memory to the long-term memory, two principles should be followed: one is the depth of the vocabulary, the other is the repetition. Repetition has been given much emphasis in the Italian teaching, while the depth of the vocabulary has not got much attention. The depth of the vocabulary means a more profound elaboration. It gives rise to a more stable memory because it is connected to the semantic level. The teacher should offer sentences, collocations and institutionalized phrases instead of single words, or ask the students to compose isolated words into sentences to make for example a short story. The story must not to be logic, but serves for organizing the words. Students write and read out their unnecessarily logic, funny story in class. In this way, on the one hand, more lexical information has entered in their short-term memory and on the other hand, the interesting story would stimulate their long-term memory.

Other than the two principles for memorization, there are also many strategies to present the vocabulary, for example to introduce the words with the aid of the diagram, the comparison, the outline, the image etc. A practical work in class is the *diagram of spider*. It serves for the polysemy, namely the depth of the word. Balboni (2013) gives an example of how it works:
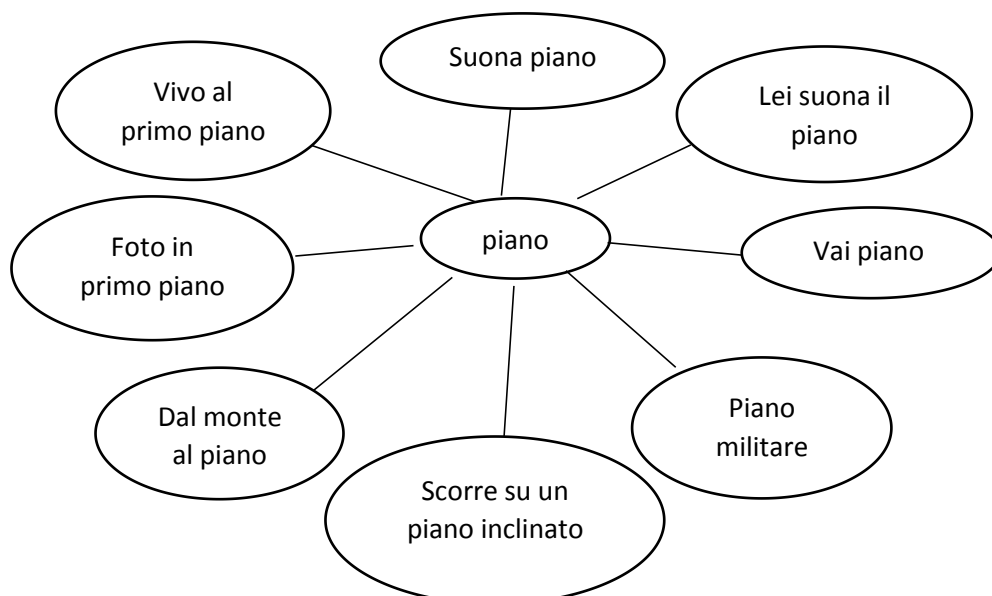
This diagram, though very useful, has never been introduced in class. It may be on the one hand due to the limited class time and the plenty learning content, that the teacher could not dedicate much time to the vocabulary; on the other hand due to the scarce linguistic level of the students, that polysemy is too difficult for them. But on the observed B level lessons, where the students are ready for a deeper comprehension of the lexicon, there is still no such diagram for vocabulary. It is highly recommended that such *diagrams of spider* should be introduced to the lessons of Italian, so that the students can receive a profound comprehension of the vocabulary, as well as a deep memory of each meaning.

Another way to teach the vocabulary is the common saying. When finish a unit (for example the body of the human), the teacher can introduce some common sayings regard the vocabulary. For instance,

la testa : Gianni non ascolta il consiglio di nessuno: *vuol fare sempre di testa propria*.

l'occhio : Ho parlato con lei *a quattr'occhi* e le ho spiegato tutto.

la mano : Carla non fa mai niente: sta sempre *con le mani in mano*.

la gamba : Bisogna *fare il passo secondo la gamba*.

The teacher should prepare the relevant common sayings and introduce them in class. She should explain all the sentences and ask the students to remember them, so that they can use these common sayings in speaking. The common sayings favor not only the comprehension and the acquisition of the vocabulary, but also the way of thinking of the students. The idiomatic expression is a best way to change the learners' way of thinking. In order to understand the saying, the students need to think in an Italian way, otherwise they could not understand and remember it. Since the way of thinking plays an important role in speaking a good Italian, the teacher should not ignore the power of idiom and should take advantage of them.

7.3.4 Reading

As mentioned above, a weak point of the Chinese students is the global comprehension. To direct at the recovery of this weak point, the teaching of reading should firstly focus on the global comprehension of the text, especially for the beginners who are not capable of understanding immediately a whole text. In such case, the comprehension of the text should start from extensive to intensive, penetrating progressively in the text. The extensive comprehension contains the paratext, *skimming* and *scanning*. The paratext includes titles, subtitles, photos, captions, graphics etc., giving the students a rough idea of what the text is about. The skimming is a first reading of the text, looking for information like who, when, where, what happened and why. The scanning is to look for some specific information without reading the text analytically, for example some details of a story. Only after having a global comprehension of the text can the learning pass to intensive reading.

Activities of extensive comprehension can be various. Following are some typical activities.

• *Collocation* between titles and texts. The teacher gives the students several texts without title. Under the texts are listed disorderedly the titles of the texts. Students should read the texts and find each text a suitable title from the listed titles. It requires the students to grasp the mean idea of the text and to have an ability of summarizing. It also develops the ability of analyzing, because there may be two similar titles and the students should decide which one fits the best.

• *Extensive gap-filling*. This activity can be carried out in two ways:

- The teacher gives the students a text that is lack of several sentences. Under the text there are the sentences extracted from the original text, put not in the right order. The students should choose one sentence to fill each of the gaps in the text.

- The teacher gives the students a dialogue that is lack of several sentences. The students should fill in the gaps by themselves. Then the teacher gives the students the original dialogue. The students read the original dialogue, discover the differences between the original version and their answers, try to understand why the interlocutor in the original version says that sentence and decide if they prefer their version or the original.

• *Jigsaw*. There are various levels of jigsaw:

- *jigsaw of the words*. The learners should put in order the words to make a sentence. This exercise activates the syntactic mechanisms and also the semantic dimension plays an important role;

- *jigsaw of the fragments of sentence*. The learners should recompose the sentences which are broken and placed disordered in two columns. It activates the semantic and/or the morphosyntactic mechanism;

- *jigsaw of the sentences*. The learners should compose a group of sentences to make a whole text. It activates the textual mechanism;

- *jigsaw of the dialogue*. In one column there are lines of one interlocutor, placed in correct order. In the other column there are disordered lines of the other interlocutor. The learners should order the lines of this interlocutor to make a whole dialogue. This exercise activates the learners' pragmatic competence. The learners should identify the goals of the interlocutor and individual the lines with which the goals are pursued;
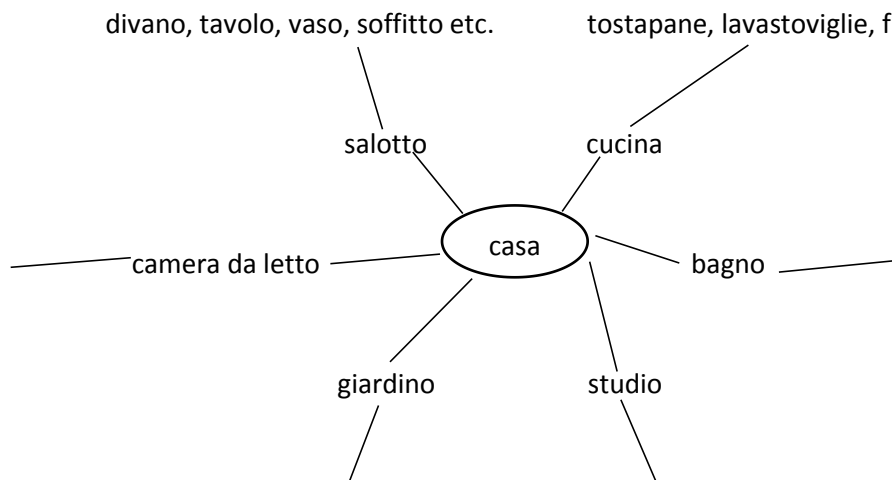
- *jigsaw of the pieces of text*. The learners are offered some disordered pieces of a text and should read the pieces and then put them in order. This exercise activate the complex competence. The learner should have an encyclopedic knowledge, as well as the attention on the details that may guide the solution of the problem.

• *Language-image coupling*. This activity can be carried out for example giving the learners several images of persons. Under the images there are short texts describe each person. The learners should observe the images, read the texts and match each text with an image.

All these activities help the students to practice their global comprehension. Cloze and jigsaw in particular, push the students not to stick on a single detail but go ahead reading also what comes next to the obstacle. However, it is strange that all these activities are more or less common in the English teaching, while in the teaching of Italian they are not popular yet. Only the cloze is a familiar exercise to the students of Italian, while other activities appear rarely. Obviously, not all these activities are suitable for the students of A level, but I list them here because they are very uncommon in the teaching of B-level-students as well, though the students of B level already have a capacity to fulfill all these exercises.

The reading goes from the extensive comprehension to the intensive comprehension. A main tool to facilitate the intensive comprehension id the vocabulary. The teacher of grammar has explained the form and the meaning of the words, now what the teacher of reading can do is to broaden and deepen the students' vocabulary. As mentioned above, Chinese teachers and students give great emphasis to the vocabulary, but their method of vocabulary acquisition is hidebound. In fact, there are various ways that learners can learn vocabulary more efficiently. Here we suggest only a few of them.

In order to broaden the vocabulary, the diagram of spider is a very direct viewing tool. In the center is a key word. Around the key word there are words directly associated with it. Around these words there are still associated words. For instance:

divano, tavolo, vaso, soffitto etc.   tostapane, lavastoviglie, frigorifero, piatto etc.

salotto   cucina

casa

camera da letto   bagno

giardino   studio

For deepening the vocabulary, the idiom is a very interesting way. It not only deepen the learners' knowledge of vocabulary, but also brings the culture. For example, when the students have learned the color on the grammar lessons, the teacher of reading can introduce some idioms regarding the colors, such as *essere d'umore nero, conto bancario in rosso, giornata grigia* etc. The activity can be carried out as an exercise of *cosa significa?*. The students should choose one correspond meaning out of three meanings under the idiom. For example,

> *Conto bancario in rosso*
>
> a) conto in attivo   b) conto in passivo   c) conto a zero

Students should first try to figure out the meaning of the idiom by themselves. After they have finished, the teacher tells them the right meaning. The process of choosing is based on the knowledge of vocabulary, the knowledge of the Italian culture and sometimes the knowledge of the Chinese culture. This exercise deepens the students' knowledge of vocabulary, but more importantly, it shows the students the similarity and the differences between the Chinese culture and the Italian culture, favoring their later profound reading of the Italian literature.

Another interesting activity that can be applied in teaching is the *ranking*. The teacher gives a starting word and asks the students to write all the synonyms that they can come up with and put these words in order according to a given parameter. Then the students work in pairs and discuss their results, combining their two lists into one. Then two pairs work together to produce a unique list. At last the teacher asks each group to write their sequence of words on the blackboard and eventually the whole class makes a final list.

As we can see, there are many interesting activities in the teaching of reading. Chinese students are no longer serious learners as twenty years ago. They are now active and cooperative, preferring the kinesthetic learning style. They learn from doing things. The teacher should create multiple activities in which the students can participate, so that their learning can be more quick and efficient.

7.3.5 Speaking

In the comment we have discussed two main problems of the class. One is that the activities always follows the same routine, the other is that some students think the teacher is not teaching. The second one regards

an incorrect idea of the students and is actually not a problem of the class, whereas the first one can be ameliorated through the enrichment of the activities.

Actually, apart from dialogue and role-play, there are many other activities suitable for the elementary students. One is the dramatization. The teacher can offer the students a piece of video that is not hard to understand. After explaining the lines of the protagonists, the students should try to speak out the lines simultaneously with the protagonists, so that they imitate the intonation, the rhythm and the speed of the speaker. Repeating this for several times, after that the students are familiar with the lines, the teacher can turn off the sound and ask the students to dub. Since this activity is a little difficult for the A level students, it is important that the video is easy and short. This activity can be done by turns. Each student reads or dubs one sentence and when a student fails to follow the speaker in the video, the whole class restarts from the beginning. This activity forces the students to concentrate and to pay attention to the way of speaking; it also shows the students how the Italian people react when speaking with others, helping them to form an Italian way of thinking.

Apart from dramatization, the teacher can also ask the students to retell a text, namely to summarize it or to transform it from the first person to the third person, from the present tense to the past tense. It seems a simple exercise but actually trains the integral competence of the student. In order to retell the text, the student needs first to comprehend it. Then the student needs to have an ability of summarizing, knowing how he/she should retell the text. The student should certainly have a knowledge of grammar as well, so that he/she can retell the story in a correct form.

Another activity is the 'I remember'. Provezano (2002) suggests this for the learning of a literal text, but in fact this activity is also ideal for speaking. The teacher distributes a paper with a list of key words such as a house, an animal, a city, a film or a person. The students work in pairs. Each pair choose a key word on the list and tell one the other their memories on it. This activity is more suggested in writing but I put it here because it is actually more required in speaking. The communication among students and friends is more common in the oral form than in the written form and when the students are talking with their Italian friends, it is very common that they talk about some events or experiences in the past. In writing the students have much time to think and to organize their sentences, but in speaking they do not have much time to think. This activity in oral form forces the students to think as quickly as possible. They need to tell their story using understandable sentences as fluently as possible in a short time.

All in all, the activities for speaking should train the students' competence of communication and their capacity to respond. The main objective of these lessons should be to create different situations in which the students can USE their newly acquired language. The activities in class should give the students the opportunity to transfer the knowledge from the short-term memory to the long-term memory through practicing them in a semantic dimension. The activities should also be multiple so to attract the students' attention. They cannot be too hard so that would discourage the students, nor too intense so to avoid the students' affective filter.

7.3.6 Listening

Listening, the same as reading, is a receptive capacity which requires the process of comprehension. Comprehension is the consequence of the interaction of several factors: the communicative competence, the knowledge of the world and the cognitive process. This interaction activates the **Expectancy Grammar**, which works on the basis of the situational awareness, gathering supplementary information from the context (Ballarin 2000).

Unlike the other receptive ability – reading, one of the characteristics of listening is that it happens simultaneously with speaking. There is no listening without speaking. Speaking is the precondition of

listening. This characteristic determines that the teaching of listening must pay attention to speaking, including the content and the manner of speaking. Thus, the listening material plays an important role in the teaching of listening. In this information era, there are millions of materials in the Internet. In order to find the suitable listening material, the teacher should follow several principles.

The first is that the listening material should not be too hard nor too easy. As mentioned in the last chapter, the difficult materials make the students feel defeated. The students may get disappointed and lose their interest in Italian and even their confidence in themselves. The easy materials are less challenging and the students may also lose their interest and the confidence in the teacher. According to Krashen and Terrel (1983), the difficulty of the teaching material should be at the level of Interlanguage + 1, namely one level more advanced than the students' present level.

The second is the principle of quantity. The learning of listening is a long process of accumulation. Accumulation asks for a large amount of listening. Only by abundant listening can the student accumulate sufficient linguistic knowledge and master enough linguistic skills, in order to form a strong linguistic intuition and finally to reach a certain level of language use. The abundant listening requires the listening material to be comprehensible and numerous.

The third principle regards the content of the listening material. The listening material should fit in with the interest and the needs of the students. The students will listen carefully only when the listening material is interesting or caters for the students' needs at the present or in the future. Too many unrelated or boring contents may kill the students' interest in learning. From this aspect, the teacher should utilize some attractive or useful materials, such as some songs or short TV series, news regarding China or the Chinese immigrants, propaganda films of the universities and so on. In addition, the CD attached on the textbook is also important because on the one hand, the content of the CD is closely related to the textbook. Already being more or less familiar with the content, the students will be more confident when listening and are not easy to get bored. On the other hand, the students can repeat the CD for many times if they have not understood. Thus, the CD of the textbook should not be put on the shelf, but be well utilized as an ideal material for listening.

The fourth principle is the variety. Various should be both the form and the content. In a real situation, the listening activity may be in any form, so the activities in class should reflect the language activities in the real life. The listening material should include monologue, dialogue, formal talking, informal talking, talking by the young speaker, talking by the old speaker, talking in a quite environment, talking in a noisy environment etc.

Another characteristic of listening is that the words are transitory, which means, the listener must hear and understand what the speaker says immediately, otherwise, the words disappear and the listener cannot listen again unless the speaker repeats – in a real situation, it is not common to record what the speaker is saying. This characteristic requires the students to concentrate when listening and to use suitable strategies, for example do not stick on the word that they have not understood, but keep listening and try to understand the successive content. The formation of the suitable strategies depends on the teacher's teaching method. On one hand, the teacher should introduce the useful strategies to the students, on the other hand, the teacher should offer the students abundant activities so that they can practice the strategies. In fact, the class activities for listening are numerous, such as listen and predict, listen and write, listen and draw, listen and do, listen for the gist, jigsaw listening etc. The quantity of the exercises needs to be guaranteed by the multiple activities. The variety of the activities assures that the students will not get bored and will maintain their attention in the oceans of exercises.

7.3.7 Writing

For many students, writing is hard to improve. Many teachers have the same confusion as well. It is not because writing is a difficult thing, but because they have not found a right way. In fact, in order to improve the Chinese students' ability in writing, three principles should be taken account. The first is to read. Reading a large quantity of relevant materials before writing helps the students to collect the relevant information and to learn the relevant expression. The second principle is to write carefully. To write carefully means to give emphasis to the quality. The quantity and the speed of writing is not important at the beginning. What is important is to form a serious attitude. When comes across an uncertain word, the student should refer to the dictionary; when comes across an uncertain structure, the student should refer to the textbook. Only after laying a good foundation can the student increase the quantity and the speed. The third principle is the realness, which means to write according to the student's true feelings and needs. The topic and the form of writing should as true to life as possible. Keeping the three principles in mind, writing can also be enjoyable if the teaching method changes a little bit. From the survey reported in the second chapter, we find out that most of the students are kinesthetic and group learners, so our teaching activity should cater to their needs and learning styles. There are two main ways to make the writing activity enjoyable: one is to change the writing content, the other is to guide the writing process.

From many years (counting also the students' English learning in school), topics of writing are always concentrated on opinions or experiences. There is nothing new on the writing topics for the Chinese students. In fact, texts should not be limited on these two types. There are various types of text with different targets:

   - to write for expressing or for communicating (**personal** writing): diary, story, letter, e-mail…

   - to write for a specific goal (**functional** writing): rule, short description and explanation, note, announcement, minute, questionnaire, card…

   - to write for documenting, for organizing experience and knowledge, for expressing and evaluating, for inventing and producing (**curricular** writing): note, outline, minute, description, narration, paraphrase, summary, comment, tale, poem… (Cicardi 2005)

Of course, not all these types are suitable for the A2-B1 students, but from these types we can find some possible types for the students, for example diary, short story, letter, e-mail, short description and explanation, announcement etc. These writing contents are not very difficult or can be simplified for the students, and are new to them. The simpleness and the freshness of the writing content will motivate the students and stimulate them to participate willingly in the writing activity.

In concrete, some exercises have never appeared in the writing activity but are highly recommended. For example the recipe. It is recommended because on the one hand, Chinese students are keen on food and in the writing activity they can choose their own favourable recipes; on the other hand, there are millions of recipes in Italian on the Internet, so that they can refer to authentic models, learning vocabulary and expressions in cooking. In addition, various exercises can derive from the recipes, for example drawing up a recipe, gap-filling or cloze. Further, students can learn the Italian cooking culture through the recipes.

Another exercise is the diary. People keep diary to record their daily experience and thoughts. Diary is the text most close to people's life. When students write diary in Italian, on the one hand they can accumulate vocabulary that most relevant to their own life and thought, on the other hand they establish an intimate communication with the teacher who reads and corrects grammatically their diaries. In this way, it is not necessary that they keep diary everyday. They can write one per week. The diary does not need to be long, considering the students' linguistic level. It is only important that students reflect their true life in the diary, writing their true experiences and thoughts, so that they know which fields they usually touch upon and which vocabulary and expressions they need to chat later with their Italian friends. Moreover, the teacher

can know the students better by reading their diaries, working out how to help them better in Italian learning.

Another exercise can be carried out in pairs. The teacher offers the students a series of words and phrases. Students should write a short story, using all these offered words and phrases. In order to simplify the exercise, the teacher should offer the students many terms and ask them to use as few new terms as possible. It trains the students' ability to organize the text without being hindered by their limited vocabulary. In this exercise, the main work is to join the words and phrases together, adding some necessary connective elements. Students produce the text following the clues given by the teacher and they do not need to refer too much to the dictionary.

The second way to make writing less annoying regards the writing process. Working on the writing process is especially useful for the students at a junior level. The writing process can be divided into three phases. The first phase is to gather the lexicon. This pre-writing phase is useful for the students at the A1 level. It regards the lexical *brainstorming*. Students work in pairs or in small groups to think about lexicon that may be useful for producing a certain text. Then they share their lexicon with the class, writing them on the blackboard.

After that all the pairs or groups have written their vocabulary on the blackboard, the second phase is to produce sentences with these words. The sentences should be relevant to the given theme. When produced a certain number of sentences, the students should reorganize the sentences in schemes for composing a text.

From the A2 level the students can work on the third phase, namely to compose sentences into texts. If we insist on the two typical types of text mentioned before – description and argumentation – we have to pay attention to different points. For the description, the teacher should make the students to pay attention to the tense, the temporal indicators, as well as the anaphoric expressions. A comparison between the texts produced by the students and by the Italians is useful, as that the students can learn from their differences, noticing how the Italians use those words and how they organize the sentences. Cloze of words or phrases or even sentences is also a good way to develop the students' writing skill, because it allows the students to participate in the production of an already well organized text, guiding them to write with the Italian way of thinking.

For the argumentation, the first step in the third phase is to ask the students to list their opinion and arguments in a scheme. After discussing their opinions and arguments in class, the teacher can give the students a short text of argumentation, letting them to find all the connectives and to make a short list of the connectives according to their function (e.g. connectives for putting the arguments in order, for adding new arguments, for indicating the cause-effect relationship etc.). Then the students can write their own texts. After finished, the teacher collect their texts and correct for them.

As we can see, the writing activity is not necessarily a piece of homework. It can be carried out in class, together with the teacher and other classmates. It is neither necessarily an individual work. Students can work in pairs or in groups to produce together a composition. The writing topics are nor necessarily limited to description and opinion. There are various things that students can write. Thus, it is absolutely possible that the teacher dedicates some acquisition units to writing when programming, and it is highly possible that the class of writing is enjoyable. If this happens, the development of the students' skill of writing will be faster and more global.

7.4 Summary

Comparing the Italian teaching in the institute and at the university we discover that they share some features in common. For example, they all have a reasonable course design and course organization. The communicative competences are at the centre of the objectives of the both courses. The teaching materials are various and motivating. The teaching methods are multiple and suitable for the students. The teachers have a nice relationship with the students. Besides the advantages, the two courses also share some disadvantages in common. They both neglect the training of the learning strategies and the developments of different skills are not balanced. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that the teaching of Italian is fruitful in China.

This result is not absolute though, because the research has many limitations. Firstly, the scope of the research is very small. It is limited in the Italian teaching in one city and is focused on one institute and one university. In consequence, the samples of the surveys and the interviews are very few. As a result, the research cannot represent the whole situation of Italian teaching in China, but it can at least be regarded as a typical case and represents the situation in a city, or even in a large zone, considering that there very few institutes and universities offering courses of Italian in the whole China. Secondly, all the information we got about the Italian teaching at the university is from the teachers. Since the research has been done during the summer vacation, all the universities are closed and it is almost impossible to attend the course or to investigate the university students. Therefore, we have almost no first-hand information about the situation at the university. This may lead to the inaccuracy of the result. Thirdly, we cannot find any literature regarding the teaching of Italian. All the literatures regard only the foreign language teaching and 'foreign language' almost equals to 'English'. We can only find with arduousness some literatures regarding the teaching of the general foreign language, but there is no literature specialized for Italian. This manifests from another aspect that Italian is very unpopular yet in China.

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