



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree programme

in Language Science

classe LM-39 - Linguistics

Final Thesis

The acquisition of reading and writing skills of
Italian language in illiterate adult people in L1.

Case study of an illiterate woman coming from Syria.

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Graziano Serragiotto

Assistant supervisor

Ch. Prof. Monica Banzato

Graduand

Giacomo Vanin

Matriculation Number 844054

Academic Year

2017 / 2018

“Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories. Literacy is a platform for democratisation, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity. Especially for girls and women, it is an agent of family health and nutrition. For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right.... Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.”

Kofi Annan, 4th of September, 1997.

Table of contents

Abstract	6
Introduction	7
1. Literacy	9
1.1 What is illiteracy?.....	10
1.2 Different types of illiteracy	10
1.3 World Literacy today.....	13
1.4 Adult education in Italy	16
1.4.1 Education for immigrants with low literacy abilities.....	16
1.5 Adults teaching - L2 literacy in adults	19
1.5.1 Motivation in adults	20
1.6 L2 literacy approaches.....	23
1.6.1 Reading and literacy models	25
1.6.2 Priority to oral communication	27
1.6.3 Inside and outside of the class.....	28
1.6.4 One-to-one teaching.....	30
1.6.5 Reading and writing in L2	31
2. Syria's socio-economic and cultural situation	32
2.1 The war	33
2.2 Education during the war in Syria	34
2.3 Literacy situation during wars	35
2.4 Women's education.....	36
2.5 Humanitarian Corridors.....	38
3. The study	40
3.1 Background of the study.....	40

3.1.1 The Masterclass.....	45
3.2 Aims of the study.....	54
3.3 Timing and class environment.....	56
3.4 Instruments for data collection	56
4. The teaching module	58
4.1 Didactic modules and units	58
4.2 Didactic units elaboration.....	60
4.3 The articulation of the lessons	66
4.3.1 Lesson 1	67
4.3.2 Lesson 5	70
4.3.3 Lesson 17	72
4.3.4 Lesson 24	73
4.4 Analysis of the data	75
4.4.1 Time	76
4.4.2 The class activities	77
4.4.3 Results of the questionnaire	78
Conclusion	81

Abstract

The paper will provide some theoretical background about illiteracy, about the learning difficulties of illiterate adult people and methods and tips to speed and simplify the learning process. Then, the situation of literacy in the world focusing on Syria will be analysed, considering also the cultural and socio-economic sphere, and the position of women in the social environment. Subsequently, the research will be presented. The aims of the case study were to test whether a double kind of approach during an Italian language course for an illiterate woman could be effective or not. The study will be carried on following a didactic unit elaborated by the researcher which will alternate classic exercises concerning alphabet, vowels, syllables and words, to authentic activities, in order to improve the reading and writing skills of our subject. The development of oral ability will be the *fil rouge* that underpins all the lessons. Conclusions will show the validity of the research and give space to further studies taking this study as a starting point.

Introduction

The purposes of this dissertation research were to test two different methods and approaches of teaching and learning and to understand if the combination of the two could be favourable for foreign adult people with illiteracy or low literacy problems. Through the following of a prepared teaching module that counted 25 hours of lessons, the researcher wanted to help the subject of the study to increase her reading and writing skills, to create some competence to use in everyday life and to integrate into the society. In order to achieve this objective, the following factors were at the centre of the study:

- a) the role of the syllables in developing reading and writing abilities;
- b) alternating authentic material to exercises focused on words in order to promote learning;
- c) the class environment;
- d) teacher-learner relationship in one-to-one learning.

The study was articulated along four chapters.

In chapter one, the theoretical background was illustrated, concerning the definition of literacy and its differences. Then, current data of world literacy were exposed. It continued with the explanation of the offer of the courses that Italy proposes for adult education, migrants education and integration. Motivation and teaching approaches were also taken into account.

In chapter two, the situation of Syria after the war which is continuing since 2001 was considered. After that, the education before and during the war was examined. The end of the chapter was dedicated to the

association that helped the subject and her family with the journey from Lebanon to Italy.

In chapter three, the background and methodology were taken into account. The Italian language course that previously the researcher carried out with the subject was discussed. It was the basis from where this study started. Then, the Masterclass on teaching Italian language to illiterate students in L1 was exposed. Consequently, the subject, the aims and other components of the study were considered.

In the last chapter, the number four, the teaching module and its parts were analysed, then the focus moved towards the most significative lessons of the course, the time, the class activities and the final questionnaire.

The motivations that drove me to undertake this study were of dual nature:

a) determination, since I wanted to deepen the topic of illiteracy. The little course of Italian language to a migrant couple that I organised at the beginning of 2018 made me face with this issue that I had never seen before;

b) willingness to help the learner with weak abilities in the best possible way. The relationship that was created among me, the subject and her whole family was an element that made me continue what I had started in 2018.

1. Literacy

In this chapter, attempts to define the intricate meaning of literacy will be made, in order to have a broader vision of that idea, trying to include different aspects and explain different faces of the whole. First of all, the definition of the term is looked up on the dictionary where the different types of literacy will be taken into account trying to set out the varieties. The world's situation will be analysed. Moreover, the areas where the issue of illiteracy is more dangerous will be considered. Data and percentage will be explained too. Secondly, the offer of courses for adult people in Italy will be examined as well as the possibilities of education for migrants in Italy, comparing the actual situation with the one that refers to a few years ago, when the problem of migration in Italy was not a problem yet. Educational facilities for adults and their opportunities will be summarised briefly. Thirdly, the adult learner will be taken into consideration: how motivation and the affective filter can influence the learning in an adult for a good or bad outcome. Lastly, the approaches for an excellent L2 literacy course will be explained in detail: in particular reading and writing literacy models of processing and teaching methods for a good learning experience. Special attention will be paid to oral communication for illiterate or low literate people in learning an L2 language and the environment of the learning process. Also, one-to-one teaching will be considered in the following chapter since it will be the didactic method that will be applied by the researcher for his case study.

1.1 What is illiteracy?

It seems that the word "illiteracy" is an easy concept to take on. Encyclopaedia Treccani defines it as a social phenomenon concerning the lack of the ability to read, write and do arithmetic (<http://www.treccani.it>). However, if we analyse the definition in detail, it is more complicated. We can say that reading and writing are not identical skills. They are complementary, and for this reason, associated with the same linguistic macro-ability because it has not been possible to determine which skill generates the other. The writing ability consists in tracing a mark joined to other signs which are then associated with a particular sound and a specific meaning. The reading ability requires to interpret the signs from the same decryption code. Learning to associate meaning and sound to everything is a great effort made by our brains. However, the critical element is the composition and the understanding of a message: efficient communication is a fundamental skill. The text has to be clear for the reader, and it has to carry a clear meaning and intention. In its definition, Treccani includes arithmetic, which is crucial for living in a social context nowadays. All these aspects can be acquired in a process that can take different lengths of time for illiterate people which may possess one ability rather than another, or no ability at all.

1.2 Different types of illiteracy

Analysing the origin of the word, as the online etymology dictionary says, the strict meaning of the word illiterate is: "uneducated, unable to

read and write, from Latin illiteratus: unlearned, unlettered, ignorant; without culture, inelegant" (<https://www.etymonline.com>).

During the past years, different concepts of illiteracy have been proposed, due to political and statistical necessity reasons rather than educational reasons, in a world context where schooling is synonymous with economic development and social equality.

UNESCO - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation - is the primary organisation that promotes a vision of a literate world for all: it is improving and promoting literacy for everyone. In doing this, literacy will enable people to take part consciously in the society, contributing to the development of it. The learning process is related to society. The definition of literacy that the organisation edited in 1959 stated: "a literate person is one who can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on his or her everyday life" but through the years and some conferences, UNESCO, agreed on this new definition: "literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to fully participate in their community and wider society" (UNESCO 2005).

Literacy and illiteracy are concepts which have to be considered as a continuum; there is no line between one and another, but there are thresholds which are set by a social evaluation of the competence of reading and writing.

This definition shows many points of interests:

- a) it establishes a minimum requirement which is higher compared to the old definition that stated: literate is the one who can write its signature;
- b) it requires comprehension over reading;
- c) it refers to everyday life.

The last point is crucial for the definition of functional illiteracy which consists of lacking education such as to make it difficult to fit in an active life. It is becoming more and more articulated socially speaking, in relation also to the development of new technologies. The concept of functional illiteracy takes into account the relation between the expected and needed level of language proficiency in the current social and historical dimension, that is to say industrialised society has high demand for what written language is concerned, so that even those who have a limited knowledge of reading and writing are to be considered functionally illiterate. Moreover, the comprehension of the prose, documents and the processing of numerical data are required elements for literacy. Therefore, literacy is identified as the set of skills aimed at elaborating information.

Another type of illiteracy is literacy relapse or relapse into illiteracy. It appears after the abandoning of reading and writing after school, and it leads to a drop of the alphabetical abilities.

Nowadays we can talk about the idea of Multiliteracy which is due to the social need of learning in a world which is continuously growing and improving. Since the actual meaning of literacy requires the ability to communicate effectively in any form, it implies also mastering other means of communication through interpretation, analysis and evaluation. This is due to the fact that a text is not only a book anymore, but it can be any type of communication such as art paintings,

photographs, articles, books, novels, advertisement and also video-games. Communication is not just reading but interpreting a code which distinguishes multimedia that are becoming more and more complex, and it requires the ability to join in.

The meaning of literacy also changed because of the explosion of so many new ways to communicate which are developed in line with technology.

1.3 World Literacy today

According to UNESCO, the data collected on the previous years showed a number equal to roughly 740 millions of illiterate people; 16,6 % of the world population. The research has been carried out on the occasion of the International Literacy Day 2018 which takes place every year during the 8th of September.

On www.un.org/en/events/literacyday/ a video explains the critical problem and the way the organisation will make its moves on the next years. Here is the transcription of the video made by the researcher:

"Around the world, 740 million adults still cannot read and write, and many of them are young people. This problem is urgent, in an increasingly globalised and digitalised world, literacy is more vital to navigating life and work than ever. The rapidly changing labour markets require that skills are developed throughout life. Today 192 million people in the world are unemployed, and decent livelihoods are difficult to sustain for many. This is a situation that needs for a change by combining literacy learning with skills development, the most vulnerable population can be supported in improving their life. Low skills and a low level of literacy do not have to be a barrier for young people and adults to acquire new and necessary knowledge. Literacy, technical, vocational and digital skills can help people live in dignity and fully participate in society. Integrated approached to

literacy and skills development throughout life allow people to access resources that open doors to decent work opportunities and improved life. On International Literacy Day, Unesco calls on the international community to promote combined approaches to literacy and skills development throughout life. Governments, civil society, academia and private sector, must all act now to fulfil the promise of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development to ensure no-one is left behind."

The Sustainable Development Goals ensure that "by 2030, all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy" (<https://www.un.org>).

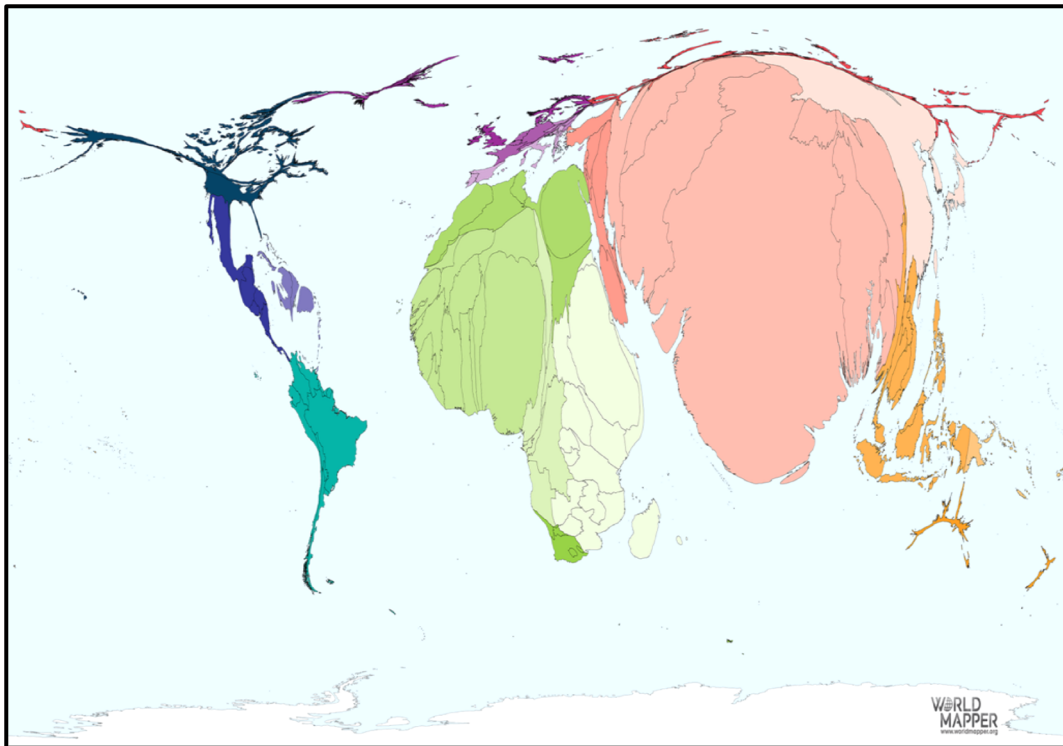


Figure 1: <https://worldmapper.org/maps/illiteracy-adults-2015/>.

This excellent map, found on the net, displays that most of the illiterate people come from South Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan lead the group - <https://www.worldatlas.com>) and Sub-Saharan Africa where Niger, Sudan and Burkina Faso are at the top of the overall list of countries. Fortunately, the literacy rate had a vigorous rise after the middle of the

20th century, when the expansion of basic education became a global priority. Now the situation has been improving year by year. However, while in America and Europe the level of literacy of men and women is quite similar, elsewhere, particularly in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and China there is a large number of women who are not able to read and write compared to the number of men living there. For what the gender gap is concerned, the report n°45 of UNESCO Statistics Office (2017) stated that even though the illiteracy rate is decreasing and female youth illiteracy rate is getting closer to the male's, there are still many places and zones of the world where the difference is significant as Sub-Saharan Africa, Arab States and South Asia. There, funding and investments in literacy programs and the development of elaborating numbers are needed to reach the new aim of literacy by 2030.

Studies reported by United Nation Women (UNWomen) and UNICEF prove that around two-thirds of illiterate people are women and this means nearly 500 million people.

All the surveys conducted on literacy do not consider the notion of functional illiteracy which is a crucial issue that has been emerging in North America and Western Europe during the last decades. Also, the relapse into illiteracy as mentioned earlier, and the immigrant's illiteracy both in L1 (mother tongue) and L2 (the language of the host country) are not taken into account.

However, since it has been thinking for solutions for the issue of relapse into illiteracy, low interest has been shown for immigrant's illiteracy until the recent past years because it was not considered a problem of Italy but the problem of the immigrant's native Countries.

As Francesca Pesce wrote on her study:

"although the problem may be considered of little relevance as far as numbers are concerned, the kind of subjects involved and their possible exclusion from participating as citizens in the country where they live are key aspects that cannot be undervalued. Relapse into illiteracy and immigrant's illiteracy are both linked with the growing necessity of reading and writing skills in different fields of industrialised societies (Literacy and Italian L2 learning in low educated adults 2013)."

1.4 Adult education in Italy

CTP - permanent territorial centre, 1997 - which became CPIA - are provincial centres for adult education and training. They are state school established by the Ministry of public education in 2012. They offer services, programmes and activities for adult education and formation and they are addressed to Italian people and foreign citizen who have a regular visa, over 16 years old. The main areas of interests are language acquisition and social integration for foreigners. The programs are aimed to obtain a diploma of the first cycle of education and functional reading and writing.

1.4.1 Education for immigrants with low literacy abilities

Low schooling is indicative of low literacy skills, and it is one of the main causes of illiteracy, but it is only one of the learning pathway of the adult. It is possible for an illiterate person to become literate without schooling, but it is not possible the other way round. Having a certificate or a qualification does not mean to have the abilities of reading and writing because it does not take into account a possible literacy relapse.

As literate people are difficult to define within the Italian population, it becomes more difficult when the context is extended to the foreign population too. Minuz proposes three variables in her book, trying to divide people with:

- " a) knowledge of a type of writing system;
- b) mastery of written language;
- c) knowledge of Italian language.

Some people do not know the Latin alphabet but know another alphabetic writing system (as Arabic) or non-alphabetic system (as Chinese). Then the mastery of the mother tongue is relevant because it can be helpful or dangerous for the learning of a new system.

The people who already have a little knowledge of the Latin alphabet can be divided into six subgroups:

- a) pre-literate: the mother tongue does not present a writing system yet;
 - b) totally illiterate: the mother tongue has a written form, but the learner has not learnt it for many reasons (low education, social and civil reasons);
 - c) weakly literate: the learner has a little literacy in its mother tongue (two or three years of school);
 - d) literate in non-alphabetic writing system: the learner does not know the Latin alphabet;
 - e) literate in non-Latin alphabet;
 - f) literate in Latin alphabet.
- (Italiano L2 e alfabetizzazione in età adulta, 2005)".

The problem of CPIAs is that they do not follow these diversifications. So, there are heterogeneous groups regarding languages and cultures, levels of competence of Italian language, level of education, the competence of mother tongue etc.

In Italy, after 1997, there has been a change from "compensation of education" to "education throughout life", and from that moment, the courses have started to diversify, but still, there was no difference for immigrant men's and women's educational needs and this created problems in defining curriculum and learning methodologies. Defining

linguistic and educational needs of migrant people related to primary literacy is a frequent topic that is being discussed by other countries where L2 courses are part of adult education, and it is also very much criticised.

As Minuz writes in her book:

"in the USA, professor and sociolinguistic Sandra McKay, focuses on different levels of literacy migrant people have and offers educational programs different from mother tongue alphabetisation and modified for different levels of literacy. Her idea was against those who stated that illiteracy in migrant people was because they did not master the English language. For this reason, she thought that the curriculum had to take into account the learning strategies of L2 language and the time needed to learn and master a new language in both reading and writing. In Italy, we should consider the variety of educational needs of people with different competence of written language, different level of schooling and different ways and technique of writing."

The "corsi di alfabetizzazione in lingua italiana" present heterogeneous groups of people with different needs and ambitions so the training/education facilities have to face these personal necessities. Education facilities use questionnaires or entrance sheets where people are asked to write some biographical data and answer some other simple questions about their mother tongue and schooling, in order to outline a learner's profile. Often, these courses are too generic. "Literacy courses" seem addressed to people who are totally illiterate in that language that they do not know. In this way, people with a high level of schooling and people who do not know how to read and write are considered both illiterate because they do not know Italian language. However, we can assume that even people with a minimum level of schooling know what a grammatical rule is, have an overall knowledge and have a learning method and strategies. Schooling can influence the

development of the skills for the acquisition of a foreign language. The learner can transfer on L2 literacy the abilities acquired in L1. Strategies of reading and text elaboration skills are transferable since they are not dependent of a specific language. In doing this, time and effort in learning the new language are, without any doubt, different than the effort made by people without any previous education/schooling. As an example, low schooling people speaking other languages know that words have a meaning, but this is not the same for total illiterate people. In this case, there is a need for awareness of writing as a sign system which has a meaning, precise order and sequence. Initially, the "literacy courses" were made to help Italian people - who could not finish school in their childhood - with Italian language and not aimed at immigrants. When they were created, in 1997 the issue of immigration was not substantial as it is nowadays. Lately, after the concept of learning throughout life, the courses were not only addressed to weak or low literate Italian people, but it has been interpreting it as a process of adult education. However, there was no differentiation between L2 teaching programmes for immigrants and literacy programmes for Italian people until the first half of 2018. This is due also to the fact that the teachers of CPIAS Italian L2 courses were the same who teach Italian language to Italian speakers. They were selected under no special requirements.

1.5 Adults teaching - L2 literacy in adults

Teaching to children and teaching to adult is different. It has been proved that age is a crucial factor in learning a foreign language. We know that the period from 7 to 17 seems to be the best timeframe for a child to learn with significant ease a language. Nevertheless, the

learning pace of an adult is faster for what syntax and morphology are concerned (grammar), while it is slower from the phonological point of view. This could be probably due to the fact that there are different processes and approaches to learning. Adults use cognitive abilities that they already possess, which are developed more than children's (memorising, elaborating more complex linguistic units etc.).

Moreover, adults have much experience gained from life and from the space they have in the society that influences motivation, needs, and place of use of L2. Space, though, is another relevant element which is useful for using the language outside the class context, to interact in different communicative contexts. It is often related to lifelong learning where the learning process is not limited in school but it is extended to a non-formal (informal) environment where auto-education is performed. Needs trigger motivation which is based on personal situations.

1.5.1 Motivation in adults

The term motivation is used to provide reasons to people in order to act. Balboni points out on his book "Didattica dell'italiano come lingua seconda e straniera" that there is a cognitive dimension as well as an emotional dimension. It is part of the humanistic psycho-didactic of the 80s-90s which includes the emotional sphere: approach over language, the learner-teacher relation, motivation, pleasure, anxiety. All these factors are indicative of success or failure in learning (see more in Balboni, *Didattica dell'italiano come lingua seconda e straniera*, 2014).

Motivation on language learning is fundamental because the learner memorises what he/she wants to memorise. There are two main types of motivation as Balboni defines them:

"a) upstream motivation: learning a foreign language for future integration, for a better job (the case of EL learning (ethnic language: retrieval of the family's language and history);

b) downstream motivation: learning a language with daily efforts in class. It is the case of L2 language learning (second language learning), and it is carried on only if the learner has positive feedbacks coming from:

- results: evidence of progress.

- pleasure: the didactics have to focus on pleasure. No pleasure means no learning. Hostile environment means no learning. There is no acquisition but only temporary learning."

The adult needs to understand the reason why he/she is learning and the purpose and applications on real and working life. The adult is pushed by an intrinsic motivation which is the motivation coming from the inside rather than extrinsic motivation which is the pressure coming from the outside world.

As Krashen stated in his book, every learner has a different temper, needs and ambitions. Also, active participation in class is not the same for everyone. They have to be treated equally, avoiding favouritism of all kinds since this behaviour could affect the collaboration of the others. When a learner refuses to take part to the activity, answer a simple question, working in pair with the classmate, he or she is building an invisible emotional barrier which is dangerous, because it can damage the efforts of the class and the learning process of the individual. It is a sort of psychologic defence mechanism that starts from the inside. Anxiety and fear of making mistakes are the most common emotions that mark this state of mind. Thus, when the learner raises the filter between him/her and the rest of the class, it is as if he or

she was not attending the lessons with the consequence that there will be no learning. The affective filter can be seen as a defence that can be risen or lowered: the barrier rises during hostile, unsafe situations, mistrust towards the teacher or lack of chemistry. On the contrary, during relaxed situations where affection and connection are present, the filter is reduced so that the input can go through. In this case, this emotional situation enhances memorisation.

In order to understand better the people that will make up the class, some variables have to be taken into account:

a) the native country of the learners. Linguistic and cultural differences bring involuntary and sometimes unpleasant misunderstandings. Kindness usually helps to lower any kind of barrier.

b) age. Adults and kids have different reactions towards the activities during the lessons. Kids do not have any problem in getting involved whereas for adults it is harder. However, on the other hand, mature people usually are able to embrace new challenges. Leveraging on those people will simplify the process of getting the other involved.

c) emotionalism. Shyness and delicacy often lead to extreme behaviours. Crying is the most frequent reaction (by female learners). A good help could be going along with this moment and then provoke an opposite reaction that could bring laughter to the class. Play-like activity can be a solution. (read more in Krashen, Second language acquisition and second language learning, 1981).

For what neurobiological consideration is concerned, the studies carried out by Schumann in the book *The Neurobiology of Affect in Language Learning* show that the brain takes inputs that will be successively evaluated and then analysed only if worthy. These inputs are selected

on this kind of basis: new things, attraction, needs, feasibility and psychological and social safety in order to lower the pressure.

According to Fraccaroli (2007), training motivation includes three types of motivations that affect the behaviour of people who start or need to start a learning process. Here are analysed:

a) participating motivation: the decision of starting a learning process, the decision of carrying on and finishing the entire process. Needs and expectations are significant referring to social interaction (sharing a process with others); success (gain results and face a new challenge); achievement (finishing a process); advantages resulted from participation;

b) learning motivation: it has an impact on active participation, on commitment during activities. It is all about the willingness of attending the class, the effort of finishing homework and exercises, passing the exams, working hard;

c) motivation based on using the contents learned during the formation. It is useful for putting into practice what learned in class. Experience.

1.6 L2 literacy approaches

Reading is a fundamental educational experience which helps the learner to foster cognitive functions, emotional and ethic dimensions. The reading ability develops critical thinking contributing to the growth of one's person. Reading means knowing and deepening the surrounding environment/reality. It could be seen as the access to meaning through written words and consequently, understanding what it is written depends on the general ability of comprehension and on the

ability to read words. Goodman, a psycholinguistic of the 60s, defined comprehension as a psychological guessing game on the basis of cognitive processes that form the expectancy grammar (see more in Goodman, Reading: a psycholinguistic guessing game, 1967), which Balboni summarises in:

- a) encyclopaedia: mind maps, lexical maps, environment maps etc.;
- b) logic processes: cause-effect relationships;
- c) textual and syntactic processes: redundancy, letters and words sequences etc.;
- d) narrowing of semantics field: anticipation of a list of word that can show up after some specific words.

However, when the subject is not able to recognise the written word, he or she does not know the meaning, and it is the case of learners with low alphabetic competences. This is the level of literacy which is cut off from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages since the first level - the A1 - says that:

"in the A1 level, the learners:
understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type;
can introduce themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where they live, people they know and things they have;
can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. The tables of levels of the Council of Europe take into account the able readers in mother tongue if adults."
(www.coe.int)

1.6.1 Reading and literacy models

Two models of processing involved in reading have been distinguished by psychologists during the years. These are:

a) top-top-down processing: the text is the mean that leads to understanding. It is a deductive model which proceeds through conceptual maps, general rules, expectations and configuration of different worlds. Comprehension is seen as a progressive relation between text and reader where the reader makes assumption/hypothesis on words and foresees meanings that will be confirmed or denied from the following reading of the text. It can be said that the reader uses his knowledge to understand the text.

b) bottom-up processing: it is an inductive type of processing which proceeds from assimilation, analysis and decoding of information. Comprehension is seen as a process powered/fuelled by progressive reconstruction of meaning that the text provides word after word, with the concept of linearity. It can be stated that the reader extracts information from the text.

Effective comprehension arises when there is a combination of the two models that coexist and foster one another to ensure a faster performance. Reading is a two-way process that goes on continuously from the text to the mind of the reader and the other way round from the reader's mind to the text. This combination is the preferred one for the initial literacy for both children and adults, together with the global, alphabetic, and Freire methods:

a) the global method is based on two phases: the first phase is a global presentation of the entire word without any interests about letters and syllables the word is composed of. The second phase is more analytic, where sounds are examined with the help of supporting imaging of objects with the same initial letter, in order to simplify the memorisation of the sound (without images, all the exercises are meaningless for illiterate learners). Then the word has to be put back together with the sound previously analysed. This process is based on the analysis of easy keywords, and it is one of the most suitable strategies for foreign adults since it concentrates on concrete units; words can be selected by learners' needs, and this is useful to keep the motivation high;

b) the alphabetic-syllabic method is the most traditional one in which the single letter is the initial input that is then linked to words that start with the same sound. Letters and then syllables are given much important rather than meaning that loses relevance at the beginning of the process. Usually, the vowels are presented, then consonants and syllables. This method presents the main fonts as "stampato maiuscolo" "stampato minuscolo" "corsivo" even if adults have some problems in memorising more fonts at once and this may lead to a loss of motivation, amplified by the affective filter;

c) the Freire method - which was thought for illiterate people and tested for many years in Brazil and other zones of South America - fosters a different effort compared to the visual and mechanical memorisation of strings of sentences, words or syllables, supporting the creation of a creative environment. So the first thing the teachers has to do is do talk with the learners highlighting concrete situations as a literacy input. In this way, learning becomes the answer to relevant and "generative" question being the result of the relation "teacher-learner-class" which is mutual learning. Quoting Freire, he said: "no one educates nobody, no

one educates oneself, but men educate each other in a real context". He considers the dialogue the essential aspect of an educational and social emancipation process. With the term "generative" he means words or sentences linked to the immediate use and knowledge of the learner as work, school, family, which are easy elements that can help the learner getting an overall meaning (see <http://www.laricerca.loescher.it> - Paulo Freire - for more information).

Sure that none of these psycholinguistic techniques is perfect for everyone, it is thought that a mixture of these three methods is the ideal method. They are in a sense complementary. What is essential is to develop communicative skill on the learner: oral above all, then reading and writing with the support of images.

1.6.2 Priority to oral communication

Knowing the language is fundamental in order to read and write. The illiterate learner is not able to understand the meaning of words if he/she is not able to recognise words unless he or she has built up a significant oral vocabulary in L2.

During literacy activities, the didactic material has to be suitable for the level of verbal ability of the learners. It has to be emphasised the fact that oral language has a dominant position over written language that is presented as a specific skill language. In order to make learners understand the communicative value of written language, it is necessary to guide the teaching process towards authentic communication. Moreover, written language has to be linked to oral: in this way, the learner could understand the function of a written text.

In an immigration context, the second language (L2) is often acquired without formal education programmes or language courses. It is only possible when some specific conditions occur:

- a) first of all the learner is motivated to use L2 to solve real everyday life issues. The primary objective is to convey messages no matter the linguistic elaboration or accuracy. They need to be understood;
- b) then, they are widely exposed to the language in different contexts and situation. They have the possibility to encounter various linguistic structures.

This is the case of natural learning, and it is what should be re-created in the class environment. Only after that, focus on form can be gradually proposed because teaching grammatical rules, out of context, is not appropriate for illiterate learners. It is not useful because they do not understand the relation between the language they are working on and the language used for communication. As Minuz states in her book: "teaching writing to illiterate people should aim at two key targets for the mastery of a language:

- a) developing a linguistic, textual, lexical and morphosyntactic competence which is oral first.
- b) strengthening the ability of language codification."

1.6.3 Inside and outside of the class

The class is not just something artificial where the learner trains through a simulation of the outside world, but it is a communicative

environment. The language is the tool of learning and the object of learning. This communicative space wants to focus on contents of communication rather than linguistic form. Learners bring problems and real issues in class, and these problems can be taken as input for an activity or part of the lesson. There is a need to link the teaching process made in class with out-of-the-class situations. A bit of attention has to be paid for what authenticity means: authenticity loses his meaning when it is used to create exercises on grammatical functions and lexical structures.

Reading and writing weave together for an initial or functional literacy for adults and it is based on autobiographical approach. Activities and exercises are built on stories of personal experience of the learners and are easily understandable from everyone in the class, in that precise moment. This approach has substantial advantages being a great tool of personal valorisation, a demonstration that the writing form is a transcription of the thoughts or the speech of a person and it is an excellent alternative text, which is significant and suitable for the actual abilities of the class. It is important that the teacher proposes suitable conversations which could not be too hard for the ability of the learners. There can be a risk of intercultural communication: autobiographical stories are linked to rules that refer to cultural habits and private or public limits so the approach can result useful but not with every type of learner.

The last thing, for a successful outcome, the educational process has to be clear. The learner needs to understand what he/she is doing and why he/she is doing so, and if it is decided together with the teacher, the objective results more transparent.

1.6.4 One-to-one teaching

Another didactic that can be useful for this kind of teaching/learning is the so-called one-to-one where the teacher interacts personally with the learner. This type of teaching has very ancient roots. In fact, it goes back to the ancient Greek and Rome when the figure of the teacher was created: he was the one who was placed side by side to the student. Nowadays, it is the case of personalised learning, supporting disadvantages situations of all kinds and also e-learning, which is excellent since there is a vast offer of technology.

There are two types of one-to-one methodologies:

a) vertical: the role of the teacher is central. He is responsible for preparing the activities as a thorough guide in which the students find clear directions and not rigid and unquestionable impositions. Bruner uses term "scaffolding" in an article written in 1976 with D. Wood and G. Ross, to indicate the metaphor of the expert (or tutor) who helps the learner during the solution of a difficult problem that could not be solved without any assistance. Also, this works in the same way with education in general. Between the educative actions, coaching and tutoring stand out. The vertical methodology can be realised through many techniques as the case study, the answer and question, short writing, job aids etc.;

b) horizontal: the learners promote learning to each other being under the guidance of a teacher. Every student becomes a facilitator. Mutual learning is the basis of the horizontal methodology. "Peer learning and "reciprocal teaching" are the main techniques.

1.6.5 Reading and writing in L2

As already mentioned, the level of literacy within immigrants is different given that there are pre-literate, total illiterate and low-literate (divided into different writing systems). In the case of people with previous schooling periods, the reading and writing process in L2 is accelerated or slowed down depending on the writing system in the mother tongue. Instead, in the case of low literate people in an alphabetic language, we can talk about strengthening the basic skills. The subject is helped by the mother tongue because he or she can foresee the sequence of probable letters in relation to his/her language and Italian language. As Minuz says: "higher is the knowledge of Italian language, higher is the speed of reading. This leads to the opportunity to read longer and more complex texts and so learning faster the language."

The learner with low literacy in non-Latin alphabetic writing system uses the same strategies based on sign-sound mapping and predictions on the following letters. Some problematic issues can emerge as the new graphemes and, especially for Arabic language speakers, the direction of the writing.

The problems of low literate people in languages with non-alphabetic writing systems are different. For example, Chinese speakers do not have grapheme-phoneme mapping, so they do not use phonological decoding strategies.

2. Syria's socio-economic and cultural situation

In this second chapter, the condition of Syria after many years of war will be taken into consideration. The economic aspect is followed by the cultural factor which is critical at the moment. Education will be analysed under many faces:

- a) the period prior to the war when education was really one of the main interest of the government, it was one of the elements in which the nation counted on, where many funds and money were invested;
- b) the period during the war, when the armed group reversed the teaching ideal completely, imposing their own and only vision of the world made by religious dogma and the elimination of the sciences;
- c) data of illiteracy that rose critically during the years of the war. How the crisis on education will affect the future of the Country and what it has been doing now to reduce the problem.
- d) women's education that has been decreasing significantly since 2011. How the strategy of the government was bringing more and more children and especially girls to school before the war will be exposed.

The chapter will conclude with a paragraph dedicated to the associations that helped the subject of the study - that will be analysed later on in this paper - to reach Italy, in particular the association “Nuovi Ponti”, which I am part of, and their project called “Humanitarian Corridors” realised in collaboration with bigger associations.

2.1 The war

Ruins and devastation: this is the recap of the last seven/eight years after the war started in 2011. It has destroyed Syria in humanitarian terms (UN stated that over 400 thousand people had been killed) and in economic terms, coming back about 30 years. The economy had collapsed, and poverty has risen dramatically. The economic situation is comparable to the one that there was back in the 80s. The major losses have been registered in the oil sector. The oil production decreased from almost 400 thousands to 20 thousand oil barrels. Also, inflation is another result of the crisis: difficulty in providing food, fuel medicines and the shut-down of public companies of electricity and water supply made the price soaring sky-high increasing 7-8 times more. According to a report of UN of 2015 Syrian families invest all they have in food. 80% of Syria's population live below the poverty line, and almost seven people out of ten are living in extreme poverty situation, not being able to cover the basic needs. Life expectancy has decreased from 70 years old to 55 years old due to the rising of the mortality rate (www.agi.it). Even the government boosted inflation with the devaluation of the currency in order to try to fill the budget deficit. The summary is negative. For these reasons, the economy is dependent on imports where Russia is the leader.

The following map shows the factions that control the territory of the nation during the second half of 2018.

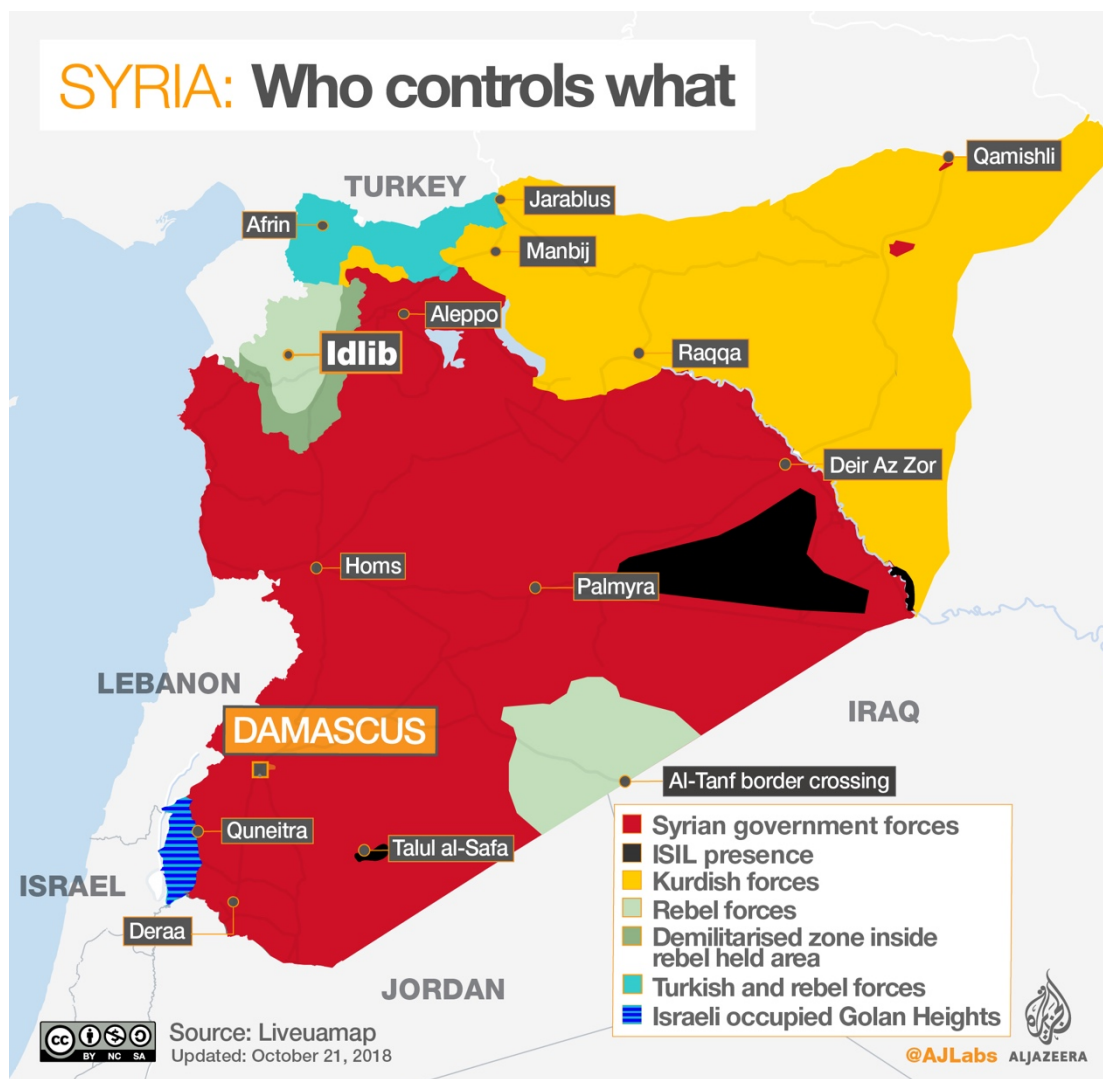


Figure 2: <https://www.aljazeera.com/mritems/Images/2018>.

2.2 Education during the war in Syria

The actual situation is dramatic as well as the future of young generations. According to the United Nations, less than half of the children regularly go to school. The condition in Damascus after the first years of war was critical: there was a new concept of school which was imposed by terrorists. As the other government institutions, also the education system has been modified. Many armed opposition groups saw the public institution as a part of the regime, and

consequently, they tried to destroy all of them. Education institutes were being overturned and a "new education system" had been introduced. This new programme was about religion sermons based on the idea that science is heresy and it should be banned from schools. It was perceived as a danger to values and a risk for fundamentalist Islamist ideology. The teaching had been partially stopped during protests, and when fights had been started in the streets, so it was impossible for students and teachers to reach schools. At the beginning of the war, schools were starting points for anti-regime protests. After that, going to school was denied with the excuse that it was not safe for children. They used to say: "do not bring your children to regime schools". Their ideals were poor, based on the deny of the school institutions because nationalism was taught and there were books and pictures of the president al-Assad. However, they did not take into account that mathematics, sciences, literature and many other fundamental subjects were also taught in schools. The most worrying thing was that the new education project was being imposed on students. "The rebels are destroying future's minds". Children were taught in mosques where they listened to speeches about revolution described with their perspective.

2.3 Literacy situation during wars

UNICEF, during the first half of 2018 stated that "in war zones, one teenager out of three is illiterate". Around the 30% of teenagers between 15 and 24 years old living in a Country where a war is being fighting, is illiterate. The numbers reach 60 millions of teenagers. UNICEF reminds us that in Africa, where conflict and war continue

(Chad, Sudan, Niger) and poverty and political instability are at extreme levels, there is the higher illiteracy rate between young people which is around 60% and 70%. The director of UNICEF, Fore, said that "these numbers remind us of the dramatic consequences that crisis has on young people education and formation, on their future and consequently on the future of the society. An illiterate child becoming an illiterate adult could be denied from many possibilities."

According to Save The Children, the association is monitoring Syria's situation which is worsening: around 43% of the school is not in function. Many schools have been hit by bombings. Some schools open and close on the daily situation of "safety", and this has inevitable consequences on the learning of an entire generation of children.

Fortunately, No Lost Generation and its partners, are working hard to provide easier access to certified quality education to Syria's children affected by the crisis, giving them an opportunity to study in the nearby host countries. The association gives humanitarian helps for Syria's and Iraq's crises and to the host countries Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The project is addressed to children and young people, and it has three main programmes such as education, child protection and adolescents and youth.

2.4 Women's education

Till 2011, the literacy plan created by the government was reaping the rewards/results, and it was done with dedication on the subject. Schooling was an obliged process. It was free and free for everyone no matter the gender since legal actions were taken against parents that refused to take their daughters to school. With this method, almost

every child was attending school before they had to pay a toll and the war started. Syria had one of the higher rate of education in the Middle East.

"If parents refused to educate their daughters, the government could take legal action against them. Almost 100% of children were enrolled in school before the conflict began and started to take its toll on education in Syria. Syria used to be one of the most educated countries in the Middle East."

(www.borgenmagazine.com/barriers-to-female-education-in-syria/).

After the war has started and the Country's situation got worse, with the destroying of schools and children not attending classes or forced to run away to find a safer place, young boy joining armed groups, a meagre rate of children and teenagers were enrolled in school. Based on what the United Nations stated, the civil war taking place in Syria has also been a framework of the assault of women. The organisation talks about rape as a war weapon.

For this reason, sexual enslavement is an actual danger for women but also girls in the territory. Gender gap, as already said, is still high. UNICEF declared that girls living in a conflict zone are 2.5 times more likely not to attend classes compared to boys (<https://data.unicef.org>). Gender-based fears of violence and slavery were fewer in girls who received an education. One of the big issues is child marriage which is common. Child marriage is one of the reasons why girls are unlikely to get an education in Syria. These data on Syria's education are worrying, and they will be a severe problem for the whole future of the new generations and the Country. Having said that, education could be the starting point for the regrowth of Syria, hopeful that war will finish as soon as possible and a brighter future will come.

2.5 Humanitarian Corridors

It is a project realised by the Community of Sant'Egidio (a Christian community) with the collaboration of different organisations such as Federation of Evangelical Churches, Waldesian round table, Nuovi Ponti association and others and it is entirely self-financed. Main objectives of the project are:

- a) preventing deadly illegal boat journeys that already count a significant number of deaths, including many children;
- b) stopping the human traffickers who deal with human lives;
- c) giving people in difficult situations like families with children, old, disabled, or persecuted people legal accesses to Italy with the humanitarian visa and with the following possibility of applying for asylum.

It is a safer process for everyone because the issue of the documents has to go under official controls by Italian authorities.

Once they are in Italy, people are welcomed with the economic aid of the associations above mentioned, in houses or specific structures. The Italian language is taught to them and children are sent to school promoting a social integration on our Country. Moreover, they are helped to find a job.

When the role of Humanitarian Corridors is complete, the association "Nuovi Ponti" takes over. It is a group of voluntary people who act for humanitarian hosting, promotion of a culture of legality, help for disadvantaged people, encouraging mutual assistance actions. The association's ideal is to create something that could help and sustain one

of the Syrian family arrived here in Mestre. The association represents a point of arrival. In particular, we were involved in knowing our new friends trying to assist them with material help and first hospitality, but at the same time, it is a starting point, carrying on what we were doing, trying to strengthen the relationships that were created and promoting the integration. "Nuovi Ponti" literally means new bridges and as Laura Tagliabue, one of the members of the Board of Directors of the association, writes on her article:

"a bridge has two directions. It allows people from the other side to reach you, and it allows you to go through it and meet people on the other side, continuing the journey together. You go towards people; you meet people, and you make friends. It is a mutual give-and-take relationship although you receive more than what you give. You discover that surprise, gratitude, appreciation, trust and affection are the same feelings for everyone, feelings that go beyond the borders. The greatest purpose of the association is to promote peace and integration among nations and populations.

[...] I do not think we are going to save the world, at least not alone, but we have the occasion to make it better for us, for our people, for our brothers that fortunately have found a bridge that took them away from bombings."

3. The study

Background and methodology

In this chapter, the background of the main study will be exposed. The previous course of Italian language that the researcher carried out with the subject will be shown as well as the report and the analysis of it. Crucial was the participation of a Masterclass in order to understand the world of illiteracy, which was an unknown subject for the researcher. After that, the aims of the study, timing, class environment and tools used in order to perform the study will be shown.

The research presents a case study of a woman with a weak literacy level and reduced schooling time. The woman will be named S. for privacy reasons.

She arrived in Italy in August 2017 with her husband, their three daughters and two sons. They arrived here in Italy through the help of Humanitarian Corridors after a long journey to reach Lebanon, crossing the border through the mountains by feet.

3.1 Background of the study.

Since she has arrived, she completed a first Italian language course at the Mestre CPIA during the school year 2017/2018 with low participation due to also external factors. At the beginning of 2018, one of my university colleague Cristina and I, decided to ask if the Syrian couple needed a little extra course of Italian language since we knew that she was attending classes occasionally and the husband was busy

at working and maybe he needed some help too. They accepted willing to start as soon as possible and we agreed on having lessons twice a week during Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings.

At the end of the course, a report of the course has been written. It helped for summarising what has been done, what should have been done better, what was useful and what was not. That report was presented at the university exam as additional work for the course of *Didattica dell'italiano L1, L2, LS* headed by Professor Balboni and it was useful to understand how the course of the studies of S started with me. Here is a recap:

Lesson 1: The help of the book that Prof Balboni suggested *L'italiano non è difficile - Italiano per Arabi*, has been fundamental. He has more competence than her, but we decide to start from the beginning with both.

First of all, the difference between sounds that Arabic speakers tend to confuse was analysed such as *B* and *P*, *V* and *F*, *CE*, *CI*, the sound of *H*. The interest and the dedication were great, but a first issue emerged immediately for what *stampatello minuscolo* was concerned (especially for her), so a step back was done the Italian alphabet was introduced. It was better understood if compared with the *stampatello maiuscolo*, a font that they already knew. Some easy homework has been assigned to S. because O. was well familiar with the topic. It has to be told that O. works in a group environment where Italian language and Venetian dialect is spoken every day, and once a week he attends a mini-course of *italiano lingua tecnica*, and he is more advantaged than her.

Lesson 2: a correction of the homework is done. The homework was about the transcription of a list of words from *stampatello minuscolo* to

stampatello maiuscolo, and it was well done. Then the definite article was introduced as well as the distinction of a male and female name, plural and singular. A summary scheme was constructed together, some examples were provided, and they built some examples with our help. It was difficult especially for her. We then discover that she is illiterate.

Lesson 3: continuing with the articles, making examples and doing many exercises. We wanted it to become automatic so they could use it in the speaking process. After that, the verb to be was introduced. It was read and repeated together. Then, the verb had to be found in short sentences. The result was: confusion and misunderstanding. We discovered that the verb “to be” does not have an equivalent in the Arabic language. It does not exist, especially at the present tense. We tried, though, to make them understand with straightforward examples, reading it again, writing it down and then writing through dictation. It will be analysed again in the next lesson.

Homework: memorise the verb “to be”.

Lesson 4: starting with the verb “to be”, we noticed she did not memorise it so it was repeated together a few times and it was put in short sentences and exercises. In this way, everything gets better, and it becomes more understandable with practice. We started the exercises where they had the conjugated verb chart at hand with the objective of reducing the use of it gradually. It will be complicated for her while he was good at it (is he more motivated? Or maybe just more used at it?). Some sentences were left for them to do as homework for the next lesson.

Lesson 6: changing approach: addressed by professor Caon (Ca Foscari university researcher and teacher of literature didactics and intercultural communication), I had the chance to talk with Annalisa Bricchese who collaborates with the “LabCom”, a laboratory of intercultural communication and didactics. Annalisa Bricchese explained that the approach I was using with S. who has low literacy, was wrong and I would not see any results. The approach should be mainly oral, to promote communication and focusing on words with meaning rather than grammar. Only after an oral oriented path, we could return to the previous words, sound analysis and syllables.

So, in this lesson, the starting point was the printed image of a park (given that I know that their children like to go playing there and they often go there). A little talk has been fostered focusing on essential lexicon as *erba, albero, persone, bambini* and so on. During the final writing phase, I noticed that she had still some difficulties. He was making significant progress due to the interaction he had during the days at work, which were more than hers in out-of-family situations. Professor Caon advised me to go to a Masterclass on “didactics to students who are illiterate in L1”. In the meantime, I tried to put into practice what Annalisa explained to me how to organise the lessons in a suitable way both for her and for him.

Lesson 7: it was decided to have a conversation during the whole lesson to check if things would be stuck in mind better. Talks go through weekend plans, and the parts and objects of the house helped to maintain the interest of the conversation.

Lesson 8: the lexicon of the house was resumed, chatting a bit more and starting the written phase. (only after the Masterclass, it will be

discovered that low literacy learners can acquire only a few words at time but, at that moment, too many words were taken into account).

Lesson 9: conversation based on the topic of the food: making comparisons between the two Countries - Italy and Syria - finding similar plates and recurring ingredients, referring to products that are sold in markets and supermarkets. The writing part followed the oral part, but still, it was wrong since too many words were proposed.

Lesson 10: resuming food lexicon trying to increase it with other plates, and dividing foodstuff into categories (meat, fish, fruits and vegetables).

Lesson 11: change of topic. The city and its parts were introduced, trying to talk about what they already knew and providing some new ones. A short conversation based on a map of a city was carried out. The lesson finished with the writing phase.

Lesson 12: finally, after having attended the Masterclass I could refine the teaching method. From that moment the lesson was so organised: 2/3 of the time speaking and 1/3 writing. The topic was something that had been already analysed during a previous lesson. So, a conversation on fruits and vegetables was engaged. They remembered some names from the other lessons. After that, a picture of a fruit and vegetable market stall was described together, trying to match name and figure to foster the visual input. The writing part consisted of writing six names of fruits: *melone, fragola, banana, pera, limone, ananas*.

Quality improvement has been noticed after the use of this didactic approach implementing the verbal activity.

3.1.1 *The Masterclass*

On May 12 2018, took place the Masterclass *Didattica dell'italiano a studenti non alfabetizzati in L1 insegnare a leggere e a scrivere. Riferimenti teorici e pratiche didattiche*. The course was organised by Ca' Foscari Challenge School in collaboration with LabCom in Venice – Fondamenta delle Romite 1223, and the director of the class was Professor Caon. The course faced the following themes:

- a) the analysis of the needs and motivation of learners who are illiterate in their mother tongue (L1);
- b) how to teach reading and writing in Italian to illiterate students: theories, reference models and practice.

The programme was designed to provide a basic but also solid theoretical framework to participants for what teaching to illiterate people is concerned. The speech of the principal expert of this subject, Professor F. Minuz, brought an added value and a masterclass and a professional vision of the whole. Then, a series of active workshops, typical of LabCom, have been proposed where the scientific bases have been put into practice such as linguistic abilities and the presence of literate classmates in the composition of multilingual and multilevel classes. The direct experience gained by the trainers in teaching foreign illiterate people together with their theoretical studies helped the attendance of the masterclass in getting original and authentic material made purposely for fostering the acquisition of specific skills in learners.

The speech of the expert covered the Italian language L2 in migrant backgrounds: some men and women live and take part in social and civic life who are subject to rights and duties. For this reason, a linguistic certificate is required for a process of integration in the host Country. First of all, they learn the language in a natural context, in everyday life, through the interactions with Italian speakers, in specific situations which are distant to traditional teaching procedure, in a multilingual and multicultural society. They also are heterogeneous for age, origin, life conditions, culture, work conditions, migratory project, level of literacy and different languages spoken. Many different types of language are spoken, and someone has a very low level of schooling. The differentiation of the definition of illiteracy also has been presented between literacy and functional literacy, trying to sort out doubts on the issue.

Different types of learners have been taken into account:

a) learner with previous schooling: didactic methodologies are based on them, and it comes more natural if they speak languages which are near to Italian and come from similar culture nations because they have the possibility to use linguistic, communicative and study strategies, they already have linguistic, socio-cultural and encyclopaedic knowledge and they have linguistic and communicative competencies;

b) vulnerable learners: learner with a low level of literacy who do not have enough schooling. They have to compute:

- at a linguistic level: awareness of the language as the subject of the study and analysis, that can be used, compared and manipulated. Textual competence, and socio-cultural competencies;

- at communicative level: recognition of sign and codes;

- at a cultural level: information and Italian culture relationships.
(see more in Kurvers J, "Discovering feature of language: metalinguistic awareness of adult illiterates", 2006).

“Literacy is not the acquisition of a technique, but it is the acquisition of linguistic and communicative competence in order to interact with the world ” as Cardona wrote on his book *Antropologia della scrittura*, 1981. The goals of literacy are:

- a) semiotics: written language brings a message with meaning;
- b) linguistic awareness: notions of letter, word, sentence, text and language as a system build to communicate;
- c) instrumental: analytic/global reading, writing syllables and word composition. Spelling and punctuation;
- d) strategic: strategies for reading and writing. Strategies for studying.

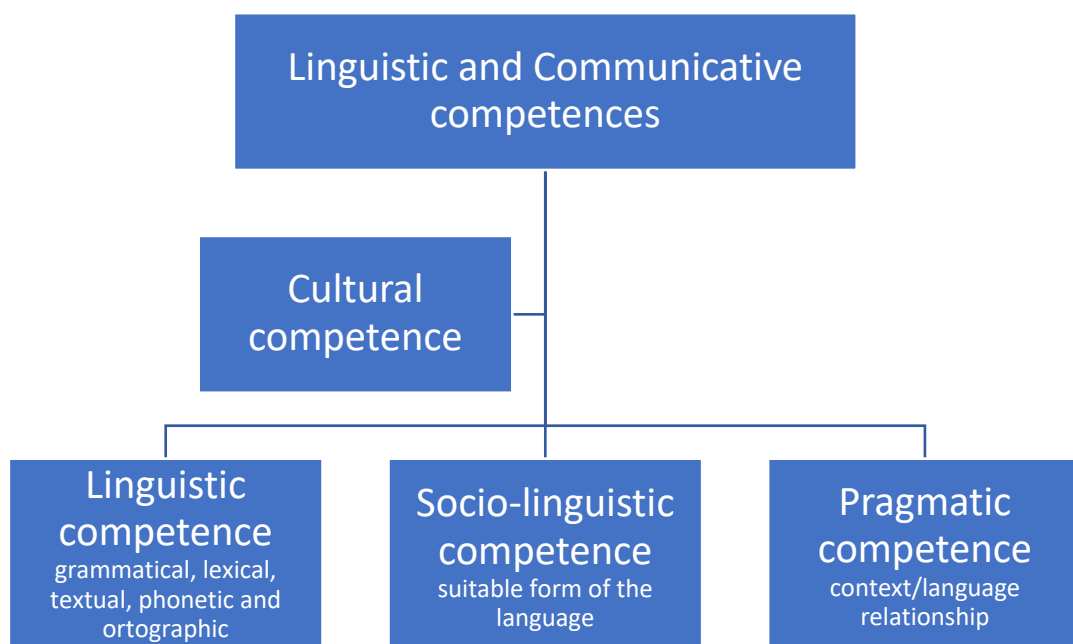
Then the levels of literacy were introduced by the Professor:

- a) pre-literate: adults with absent previous schooling. Their mother tongue maybe not written or it is not taught in their native Country;
- b) illiterate: adults that cannot read and write in their mother tongue and they have never been to school;
- c) weakly literate: adults who did not receive enough schooling in her mother tongue or have lost their competence due to the lack of the use of reading and writing.
- d) literate: a vast field: adults who went to school. This factor has to be analysed in relation to mother tongue, age, motivation and other variables such as other types of writing and alphabet.

The purpose of the teaching is to enhance the development of the linguistic and communicative competence of men and women in an L2 context with a multilingual society where the language of immigrants is a matter of law.

Some of the principles of adult education were explained briefly such as autonomy, usefulness, problem-solving teaching, motivation related to turning points and previous experiences.

The vision of the approach for an illiterate learner is action-oriented: the use of the language, including the learning of that language, incorporates the action made by the people who become actors and develop from general to linguistic and communicative competences. The learners use their competence in different contexts and different conditions with various constraints in order to carry out linguistic activities. These, consequently, imply a linguistic process to produce texts on specific themes and topics, with the trigger of strategies that seem to be suitable to perform the given tasks.



(see more in: Minuz, Borri, Rocca Progettare percorsi di I2 per adulti stranieri, 2016)

This chart summarises the notion of the linguistic and communicative competence given by Professor Muniz. The lesson continued with the presentation of methodologic principles and didactic techniques:

- a) communicative competence means acting with the language and not only knowing the linguistic system or the grammar;
- b) learning and teaching are oriented to the world which is outside of the class. It is aimed at the solution of real problems and to the autonomy of the learners;
- c) language is acquired when used. The classroom is one of the communication environment that enhances the communication outside the class;
- d) language didactics developed techniques to build linguistic skills and literacy which are coherent with the methodologic principles and based on the knowledge of cognitive mechanisms;
- e) didactic programming is a crucial moment, and the ongoing evaluation is part of it.

The analysis of the learners' needs is essential. It is a complicated procedure that takes into account:

- a) the profile of the learner, his or her needs transformed in Italian language together with the linguistic biography and the conditions of his linguistic process;
- b) the context of the use of the language, the type of communication and the conversation created.

The tools that are used to analyse the needs of the learner are a sociolinguistic chart, a portfolio and an entrance sheet together with a socio-linguistic interview.

The levels of literacy were displayed as follows:

a) pre-literacy: the adult starts to comprehend the alphabetic principles and starts understanding the idea of “word”;

b) literacy: the adult understands the idea of “word” and starts understanding the idea of “sentence”. Moreover, he or she starts dividing words into shorter sound units, the syllables, and elaborating morphemes. Finally, the learner starts using writing and oral conventions, still with errors;

c) weak literacy: the adult understands the idea of the sentence and the idea of the text. He or she is able to divide words into shorter sounds and recognises the sounds that are at the beginning and in the middle of the word, even if with some errors in more strange and irregular sounds and in recognising similar sounds.

Teaching to write to an illiterate adult requires attention to:

a) primary cognitive processes such as conception, ideas retrieval and association, comparisons and design of the writing plan, text and form choice, point of view, drafting, transcription, evaluation of the text related to the context, and final review;

b) secondary cognitive processes such as the decoding of the sign of the language, spelling, mastery of punctuation and morphology.

Instrumental abilities are the final objective, and to achieve them, a progression of capacities has to be defined. Here is the list:

- a) core competencies and necessary strategies in order to read (analysis and synthesis): dividing sentence, word, syllable, phoneme;
- b) a list of the lexicon which is read globally and written automatically;
- c) reading and writing strategies (similarity);
- d) conventions and direction: the space of the page;
- e) fine writing ability;
- f) studying strategies and abilities: having a notebook, completing different types of exercises and abilities, working in groups, understanding the importance of individual practice and memorisation techniques.

This progression takes into account the different levels of language competence.

On “pre alfa A1” the learner recognises:

- a) a limited number of words which are familiar to the sphere already considered;
- b) the familiar elements in documents and exercises;
- c) names and words of personal interests organised in signs, indications, comparing them with others.

On “alfa A1” the learner is able:

- a) to read familiar words isolated or inserted in short text concerning familiar context;
- b) to read familiar words in personal documents;

- c) to observe and documents and recognise some data, logos, abbreviation;
- d) to read words of personal interests comparing it with previous works;
- e) to get some information from a text.

On “pre A1” the subject:

- a) starts reading single sentences, getting known words and easy expressions seen in the studied material;
- b) starts reading simple words of everyday usage;
- c) starts recognising frequent collocation of the language;
- d) starts reading short and easy directions.

On A1 level the learner is able:

- a) to read concise text made of single sentences, getting known words and simple expressions seen in the studied material;
- b) to read brief indications;
- c) to select different modes of reading.

Finally, the directions for a didactic program were explained. The entire process is divided into:

- a) lesson: the smaller unit which is the collaboration between teacher/facilitator and learner in the context of an educational project;
- b) learning unit which is a little guided educational path;
- c) didactic unit which made up of two or three lessons connected with a series of activities;

d) didactic module which is the organisation of the didactic units connected with a specific theme or a learning goal.

The second part of the Masterclass focused on the class situation, and the activities carried out with the help of a video.

It is important to create a didactic environment where the mutual exchange of thoughts is fundamental. One example is collaborative writing: the objective of the activity is to make them write an expressive text and develop writing strategies such as finding an idea before getting into writing, choosing the form outlining the structure. That is a crucial part, especially for adults. This type of activity leads to the cohesion of the class which starts to become a group. In this way, the characters are built together, it is the result of a thing that was thought together with the group, and it can be the starting point for the reading of the final story.

Instead, the video, is used to develop verbal skills and it is useful to introduce a lesson, to activate foreknowledge and to deepen a specific subject. It is a complicated input since it includes a diversity of codes and meanings. It allows you to work on the basis of more input (sound, video, text) and it is authentic material. The video has to be selected thinking about cultural aspects and personal relationships (familiar context). The length of the video should not exceed five minutes, but also thirty seconds or one minute could be enough for a good job.

The video shown in class was created by Pixar and it helped the attendance to form a didactic plan: what we are going to do with the video and why are we watching it. The answer is simple: the video is made for the development of the verbal skills and consequently the development of reading and writing. Motivation is also enhanced. During the vision of the video, some questions have to be presented in

order to make the learners pay attention such as: who are the characters and what is one doing. After the vision, the oral, reading and writing abilities are required.

Then, the development of reading and writing has been explained and divided into four abilities: written and oral production, sound and count. The literacy process takes into account the technical competence of reading and writing, functional competencies (reading a leaflet, schedules...), socio-cultural and pragmatic competences (reading road sign, banners, shop signs...). The development of reading happens through the global method: starting from the word with meaning on the context; or through the analytic-synthetic method where the ability to decode phonemes and graphic signs is the principal task.

It is important to perform activities of comprehension through videos and music taking into consideration the sound.

Moreover, empathetic techniques, used with illiterate learners have a significant impact on them since it triggers emotions and the bodies in movement

The participation in this masterclass has been fundamental in order to carry out my course in the best and the most effective way possible.

3.2 Aims of the study

The aims of the case study were:

a) to analyse whether two didactic approaches - the traditional and the one suitable for illiterate people - could be a valid mixture for a valuable language learning for illiterate or low literate people;

- b) to help a woman with low literacy level with the process of acquiring the Italian language as a second language;
- c) to test the effects of one-to-one teaching/learning.

The research focused on exercises and activities that could vary throughout the course, from traditional exercised to authentic topics. The words used during the course were based on the subject's needs and preferences.

In doing this, the researcher wanted to analyse the following factors:

- a) whether the knowledge of syllables could affect the subject's reading and writing skills;
- b) whether it was useful or not using authentic material to promote learning;
- c) whether not being in a class could affect the learning process;
- d) whether being in a two-people relationship could enhance the learning process.

Final objectives: the subject, at the end of the module, will be able to answer questions on her daily routine, understand information on the sphere of the city and in particular about shopping, hours, free time, children, housework and the language courses, orally or in written form. She will be able to answer questions on her degree of satisfaction of facts and actions; recognise signs and banner about shops and places of the city; going shopping on her own; orient throughout the city; write syllables; write and read bi-syllabic and tri-syllabic words composed by the syllables seen during the course, with some errors and sometimes insecurity; understand better what people tell her.

3.3 Timing and class environment

From the report mentioned above, a new study has started, which was directed exclusively to her. The lessons have been carried on between the 11th of October till the 20th of January. The length of the lesson was between one hour and one hour and fifteen minutes for a total of 25 hours. The frequency of the lesson was twice a week during Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings. The class environment was her house. For this reason, occasional interruptions were probable and expectable.

3.4 Instruments for data collection

Three main types of instruments were used in the case study in order to collect data:

- a) the researcher observed the subject of the study directly, writing a diary lesson by lesson based on the activities and the exercises. Direct feedbacks were provided in class. Moreover, some notes were taken during the lessons;
- b) the exercises were meant to collect data observing how the exercises were carried out, and they were useful to analyse progression and difficulty;
- c) a questionnaire has been proposed to her, asking opinions about the development of the course, the usefulness of exercises and her relationship between the course and her everyday life.

The questionnaire that has been presented was complicated, and for this reason, it has been analysed with the researcher. It was composed of 12 questions where one question was a multiple choice, and eleven were 1 to 5 bipolar scale where 1=very little, 2=little 3=sufficient, 4=much and 5=very much. The questions were written in capital letters. Each question had its number and was neatly organised with the relative answer. The questions were read together and explained if necessary. The subject added some other additional comments and information at the moment of the compilation of the questionnaire.

4. The teaching module

Subdivision and analysis

In this chapter, the division of the module will be inspected with particular attention to the lessons. The development and the performance of four significant lessons were analysed in detail. After that, the data will be discussed taking into account the timing, the activities conducted in class and the questionnaire.

The objective of the activities, designed by the researcher, was to assist the subject with the first steps into the acquisition of reading and writing abilities. The entire process of acquisition takes a long time, but the fact of laying the foundations was stimulating and useful for both researcher and subject of the study.

Two main techniques were put into practice as a combination: the alphabetic-syllabic method joined with the method that Minuz proposes in her book based on images and verbal production. The use of authentic material was integrated into the project.

4.1 Didactic modules and units

The activities were realised to perform the correct word reading and the respective writing, and in doing so, the module was divided into two parts:

a) the first part concerned the acquisition of the letters. Thus the alphabet was analysed focusing on vowels, consonants and then going

through the sounds of the letters that Arabic people find confusing and ambiguous;

b) the second part concerned the formation of syllables and words.

All of these phases were integrated with images and photos with the support of technology.

The didactic units were created for the acquisition of the following abilities:

a) recognise the letters;

b) identify the letters in a word;

c) understand the sound of letters;

d) recognise the sound with the respective symbols;

e) distinguish the similar sounds of letters;

f) build the syllables from the consonants;

g) make words starting from that syllable;

h) understand the function of the syllables;

i) know how to use what has been acquired in real life - authentic topic.

In creating this programme, each topic is divided into the presentation moment, the memorisation moment, the reflection moment and the consolidation, taking into consideration the oral phase, which is decisive for this type of learning.

It has to be remembered that even if the study is a subsequent work of the previous course that the researcher started with the subject, the pre-reading and pre-writing competences were not entirely acquired. For this reason, the author of the study decided to restart from the

beginning, convinced by the fact that a revision of things, could only but strengthen the knowledge she already had.

The topic for all the activities was everything that could be near to the subject needs. So, the author of the study opted for words and examples that were in the town, family and house sphere. The didactic module was divided into learning units that lasted for one or two lessons. Moreover, in the following lessons, a brief recap of the previous one was done.

4.2 Didactic units elaboration

The elaboration of the units was divided into lessons. The lessons have been structured with exercises and activities which were displayed as follows:

Lesson 1: the first activity was about the revision of the alphabet. It was useful as it introduced the first phase of the didactic module, which was based on single letters.

The lesson carried on with the reading of the alphabet together with the researcher focusing on vowels. Then, some exercises took place.

The subject was asked to:

- a) reproduce the sound of the vowels which were written in the notebook and performed by the researcher;
- b) circle the vowel A on a string of vowels. Then do the same for the vowels E, I, O, U.

- c) identify the vowels from a series of letters containing consonants and vowels which are written in capital letters and in *stampatello minuscolo*;
- d) underline the words that start with the letter A;
- e) identify all the vowels on the same words of the previous exercise;
- f) form words with the missing vowels;
- g) final dictation and writing of a list of vowels.

Lesson 2: a recap of the vowels was done, stressing the topic.

The exercises conducted were:

- a) oral and written recap;
- b) insert the vowels on a list of words that missed vowels;
- c) rewrite the words completely with the vowels;
- d) identify and write all the vowels from a list of words, repeating them while writing;
- e) identify and write the vowels that are not present on the words taken from a list.

All the words presented were accompanied by an image provided by the researcher through the support of the smartphone.

Lesson 3: the exercises dealt with the vowel as a determinant of the gender of the noun (he or she word) and its number. The practice aimed to prove that letters have the power to modify a word and, at this is fundamental for a good consistency and a good understanding.

The activities required:

- a) changing the last letter of the noun to transform it from singular to plural (only regular words were presented);
- b) changing the last letter of a name to convert it from feminine to masculine (only regular words were given);
- c) recognising vowels and consonants from a list of words deconstructing every word into vowels on one side, and consonants on the other side.

Still, every word was represented by its image.

Lesson 4: after having consolidated vowels during the previous classes, consonants were taken into account, with specific attention to the couple of letters that sound similar, especially for Arabic speakers.

The tasks were the following:

- a) which letter? D or B? From a list of words, circle the initial letter and write it down saying it out loud;
- b) write the words that start with the letter B or D in the respective column. Those words were previously read together with the researcher;
- c) make a distinction from words that start with C or G and differentiate them;
- d) the same has been done for the letters M and N.

Lesson 5: continuing the work on ambiguous letters, these were the activities:

- a) from a list of words that start with S or Z, circle the initial letter and rewrite the entire words after reading it with the researcher;

- b) write the list of words with the initial S or Z under the correspondent column;
- c) pay attention to the sound of V and F: why are they similar?
After the explication of the author of the study, read the letters;
- d) write the word that contains the letter V or F in the respective column;
- e) write the letters under dictation.

From this point, the second part of the module started. Syllables were taken into account, so the exercises focused on the production of syllables that will be used to form new words.

Lesson 6 was an introduction to make the subject understand what syllable are and why they are essential. The process was relatively mechanical, but it was supported by the creation of a word, starting from that initial syllable. The exercises were:

- a) pick a consonant and match it with all the vowels we have seen in the previous lessons. For example, select the letter M and add the vowel A, then E, I, O, U. (the result should be M+A=MA and so on);
- b) try to think of words that start with those syllables with the researcher;
- c) now, with the help of the researcher, write them down as it follows:
 - m+a=ma – mamma, maestra;
 - m+e=me – Mestre;
 - m+i=mi – minestra;
 - m+o=mo – mondo;
 - m+u=mu – musica, mucca.

Lesson 7, 8 and 9 continued with the syllables creation process and the relative word that contains the syllable. Precisely the progression was:

- a) b+a, b+e, b+i, b+o, b+u;
- b) d+a, d+e, d+i, d+o, d+u;
- c) f+a, f+e, f+i, f+o, f+u;
- d) l+a, l+e, l+i, l+o, l+u;
- e) n+a, n+e, n+i, n+o, n+u;
- f) p+a, p+e, p+i, p+o, p+u;
- g) r+a, r+e, r+i, r+o, r+u;
- h) s+a, s+e, s+i, s+o, s+u;
- i) t+a, t+e, t+i, t+o, t+u;
- l) v+a, v+e, v+i, v+o, v+u;
- m) z+a, z+e, z+i, z+o, z+u

Lesson 10: a conversation concerning the city of Mestre and its places. Something had already been done during the previous course, but it was useful to clarify the things and strengthen the writing skills since the syllables had been acquired.

Lesson 11 introduced the issue of different sounds and writing of some syllables. It is the case of *CHE*, *CHI*. After the explication of the role of the H with some examples and having seen the difference with the sound *CE*, *CI*, the activity was so conducted:

- a) circle the syllable *CHE* or *CHI* in the text;
- b) write the entire words under the *CHE* column or the *CHI* column;
- c) out of a list of words containing *CHE* or *CHI*, circle the syllable reading it out loud and rewrite the words under the respective column.

The relative picture/image accompanied all the words (town, family and house sphere).

The researcher noticed that there were remarkable problems with the reading of the letter E and I, which are known to be a hard issue for Arabic speakers since they do not have the sound of the Italian E, and so, it will follow an intensive revision for the two vowels.

Lesson 12 continued the previous lesson:

- a) complete the exercise c);
- b) insert the missing syllable on the list of words then read them and rewrite them alongside.
- c) again, revision of vowel E and I with a dictation.

Lesson 13 faced the syllable *SCI* and *SCE*:

Lucky enough to have a similar sound for /ʃ/ in the Arabic alphabet the exercises were the following:

- a) identify, underline and read the syllable in the text;
- b) write the whole words in the right column;

From lesson 14 to lesson 23, the process continued for the Italian sounds *SCA, SCO, SCU, GIA GIO GIU, GHI GHE, NIA NIE NIO, GNA GNE GNI GNO GNU, NA NE NI NO NU, LI, LIA, LIE, LIO, GLI, GLIE GLIO* except for lesson 17 where a conversation was carried out. The topic was: supermarkets. The researcher brought the brochure of a grocery store, and it was analysed together. The subject was asked to:

- a) to recognise the catalogue;
- b) explain what the use of a brochure is;
- c) tell if she knew some words;

Lesson 24: test day: the tasks were:

- a) write some biographical information
- b) answer some anecdotal data
- c) write down the sentences which were dictated by the researcher.

Lesson 25: the subject compiled the questionnaire. The researcher helped her with the reading of the question and the instructions for the reply.

4.3 The articulation of the lessons

The articulation of a few lessons will be shown especially lesson 1, 5, 17 and 24. Some explanations were already given to the subject before the course started, but the researcher wanted to make it clear. So, the topics of the course were decided together, and the subject agreed on some proposals made by the researcher. She understood that the little project the researcher had in mind would have helped her with the learning process we were carrying on. This course was made with the awareness to strengthen the language not interfering with the course she was attending during the mornings. It was intended to strengthen the reading and writing skills taking into consideration everyday topics in order not to leave out the oral and pragmatic ability. They agreed on revising the vowels on the first part of the course and then on facing the

syllables to consolidate the reading and the writing of the words. In this way, there was not the risk of tackling the morning language course.

4.3.1 Lesson 1

Lesson 1 was the first lesson of the course. First of all, as the researcher stepped into the house of the subject, greetings took place, especially the little sons that wanted to play. He was interested in everyone's health and progress with the school of the children. After a little time of chatting, the lesson started and the attention was drawn to the subject. A conversation about our lives and especially about our days were engaged. The researcher wanted to investigate the level of her oral language and, moreover, he transformed the initial conversation in a kind of a ritual which has been done every lesson. In this way, he could analyse the improvement of what was seen during the lessons. After that, the vowels were inspected. The subject was asked if she remembered the vowel from the course she had already attended, but a revision was done together with the result that she already had them in mind. Then, after a brief view of the alphabet the exercises started:

a) exercise 1 asked to reproduce the sound of the vowels after the researcher. Initially, he started with the right order (A, E, I, O, U) and then with no order at all. The performance was right, and she was confident in what she was doing. That confidence continued for all the lesson, and it was the reason that let us go on with the course.

b) exercise 2 asks the subject to circle the letter A out of a list of words. Before that, the concepts of circle and underline were clarified so she could perform the exercises in the better way possible.

Then, the same task was asked for letter E, I, O, U and no problems emerged.

c) exercise 3 consisted in identifying the vowels in a column where both consonants and vowel were displayed. Then the subject had to put a cross whether it was a consonant or a vowel. The letters were written in capital letters and with *stampatello minuscolo*, but this was not a problem for her since, having already dealt with books she was used to it, so the exercise was performed without any efforts.

d) exercise 4 asked to underline the words that start with the vowel A. There were six words joined to the relative image of: “*albero*”, “*disco*”, “*armadio*”, “*naso*”, “*arancia*”, “*ape*”.

e) exercise 5 asked to do identify the vowels E, I, O, U in the previous words, circle them repeating out loud.

f) exercise 6 asked to insert the missing vowels in the words and rewrite the correct word with all the letters. The subject was asked to read those words with the help of the researcher. The exercise was organised as it follows: the words were divided into groups with the missing vowel:

- group with missing A:

- c_s_ : casa;
- p_st_ : pasta;
- b_n_n_ : banana;
- l_m_ : lama;
- t_sc_a : tasca.

- group with missing E:

- d_nt_ : dente;
- s_tt_ : sette;
- c_n_ : cene;

- l_tt_r_ : lettere;
 - m_l_ : mele;
 - cr_m_ : creme.
- group with missing I:
- l_br_ : libri;
 - fr_tt_ : fritti;
 - f_l_ : fili;
 - d_ff_c_l_ : difficili;
 - b_c_ : bici.
- group with missing O:
- f_rn_ : forno;
 - p_m_d_r_ : pomodoro;
 - t_nn_ : tonno;
 - r_ss_ : rosso;
 - n_nn_ : nonno.
- group with missing U:
- bl_ : blu;
 - s_ : su;
 - t_ : tu;
 - gr_ : gru.

Every time a new word was encountered, the researcher provided the image through the help of the smartphone and with a brief explanation.

f) exercise 7 was a dictation of a list of vowels. The researcher dictated the vowel, and the subject wrote them down in her notebook.

From the dictation emerged that some problems with the E and the I were present and sometimes also with the O and the U.

The lesson ended with a little recap of what had been done and what will be faced during the next lesson.

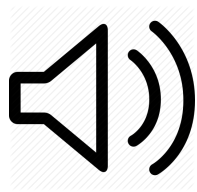
4.3.2 Lesson 5

As during the previous lessons happened, after the greetings and the playing, a little chatting started. The conversation continued talking about the day and then turned towards the homework that the teacher of the morning Italian language course had given to the class. An explanation was requested from the subject to the researcher, in order to perform the given exercise. The researcher took the opportunity to make her reason on the topic and reach a conclusion together. If it was too difficult for her, an interpretation was given by the researcher. After that, our lesson started. We were working on the different and ambiguous sound of letters, and it was the turn of S, Z, V and F. The activities were pretty mechanical and repetitive, but necessary for the understanding of the sounds. The exercises were aimed to differentiate the ambiguous sound through the repetition of it. A list of words was presented, and the task was to circle the initial consonant and write it on the side. The words were previously read together with the researcher and those were: *zucchero, sogno, sabbia, zanzara, zero, salame, zaino, sorella, sole, zucca, sasso, sale, sapone, zia, semaforo, suono, zuppa, spazzola, scala, zitto.*

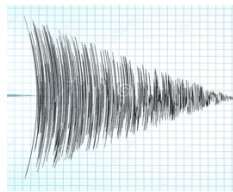
After having read the words and circled the initial letter, the entire words were written down and read one more time. Noticing that there

were no issue on that matter we decided to face V and F. The explication of the researcher concerned the sound of the two letters, which often are confused: the F makes no sound, but just a whisper, while the V has sound and the throat vibrates during the performance. To make it more transparent, the subject was asked to touch her throat with the hand while performing the two letters, and to compare the results. After this little play-like activity, some exercises were proposed to the subject.

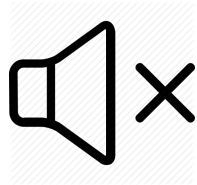
a) exercise 1: underline with the red pen the words that contain the letter V, and with the blue pen the words that contain the letter F. before that, a draw that reminded the sound of the letter was drawn near the letters.



and



near the V, which meant the audible sound and the vibration of the throat;



near the F, which meant that there is no sound.

The drawings helped the subject with the recognition of the sounds. When she was reading the words, she put the hand on her throat to perform the letter accurately.

The words were: *vaso, vasca, vicino, parola, voto, foto, nave, via, frigo, vento, palla, vendere, fragole, freno, vela, foglia, lettera, facile, difficile;*

b) exercise 2: read and write the following list of words in the right column:

forza, uva, avere, chiave, vetro, nave, africa, forno, ferro, fuoco, fontana, vasca, felice, foto.

The subject conducted the exercise in the order of the words, gradually inserting them into the column of V or F;

c) exercise 3 was a dictation of syllables containing V or F and a vowel. With this task, a consolidation of the sounds and signs of the two consonants were made together with a revision of the vowels (especially for E and I).

First of all, the syllables were dictated with the following order: VA, VE, VI, VO, VU, FA, FE, FI, FO, FU. After that, the researcher started to dictate the syllable randomly. This exercise took more time because we wanted it to become automatic.

4.3.3 Lesson 17

This lesson was mainly oral. The researcher knew, from the initial conversations they used to have at the beginning of each lesson, that the subject had some difficulties when she had to go shopping, so the lesson was aimed to gain some competence in order to complete some everyday actions with relative self-sufficiency. The topic of the day was shopping in a supermarket. A grocery store brochure was brought in class, and it was opened, handled and analysed together. They started with the name of the store which has been identified at the top of every page of the brochure. They noticed together that it was divided by different foodstuff. There were pages dedicated to fruits and vegetables,

pages with every type of meat, pages with fishes, canned goods, kitchen products and objects. Then, the subject was asked to explain the utility of the brochure. An overall meaning has been conveyed together with the researcher. The activity carried on examining the products, pausing where she knew the name of some products and reading the ones she was interested in that she did not know already.

After the attention on products, the focus moved towards prices. The factor of the prices was unclear for the subject, and the understanding of it overturned her vision of the shopping sphere. It followed the explication of the words *sconto* and *offerta* which were crucial for her. We concentrated on the page with the meat, so the different types were analysed together comparing what is sold in Italy's supermarkets with the products sold in Syria and food she likes or does not like.

Finally, a quick revision of the whole brochure has been done, talking about prices and products that we would include in a shopping list.

4.3.4 Lesson 24

The second-to-last lesson was an implicit test day. After all the lessons carried out during the last three months, the subject should be able to complete a task which was scheduled by the researcher at the beginning of this course. The test contained three exercises which were asked to complete on her own but with the availability of some hints given by the researcher. All the exercises were explained carefully, and all types of doubts solved before the starting.

Exercise 1 dealt with the biographical data of the subject. The subject was asked to fill a table with:

- a) first name;
- b) surname;
- c) age of birth;
- d) place of birth;
- e) sex;
- f) nationality;
- g) address;
- h) marital status.

No particular issues have arisen during the filling of the sheet.

Exercise 2 still focused on some anecdotal data such as:

- a) hair colour and eyes colour;
- b) telephone number;
- c) e-mail;
- d) how long have you been in Italy?;
- e) how many people there are in your family?;
- f) describe your family (oral activity);
- g) employment;
- h) employment of your husband.

The point f) consisted of an oral task. Speaking about her family made her secure of what she was saying. This, helped her to lower the affective filter which allowed her to be spontaneous and fearless of making mistakes. For this reason, that part of the test had a positive outcome.

Exercise 3 was a dictation of sentences, which the researcher read. A first reading of all the sentences were made, and subsequently the slower dictation started. The Italian sentences were:

- a) la mamma cuce i pantaloni con l'ago;
- b) sabato siamo andati a cena a Favaro con gli amici;
- c) quando fa freddo accendo il termosifone;
- d) in estate, quando fa caldo vado al mare;
- e) Venezia è la città più bella del mondo;
- f) io e Cristina abbiamo mangiato la pizza;
- g) il frigo è vuoto quindi vado a fare la spesa al supermercato;
- h) cucino il pranzo per la mia famiglia;
- i) dopo compro il pane a Mestre in panificio;
- l) mi diverto a studiare italiano con Giacomo.

The development of this exercise was slower than the previous. It was more complicated, and it required more attention and concentration. What was asked to the subject was to retrieve all the things seen and acquired during the entire process of the course and to apply them into the exercise. The final result surprised the researcher. The subject demonstrated to remember the topics that were analysed lesson by lesson.

4.4 Analysis of the data

The study, as it has been already said, involved a woman, aged 31, with weak schooling and literacy. It focused on the basis of the processes of reading and writing. The environment, where the classes were taken, was the living room of the house of the subject. Both the researcher and the subject were seated on the same side of the table, one next to the other so the researcher could see what the subject was doing and it was

the perfect setting for a one-to-one approach. The material was presented gradually on the table, and the topic was introduced clearly by the teacher. The lesson started five or ten minutes after the arrival of the teacher since there were always the greetings of the entire family. The children were the same who sometimes interrupted the lessons. Despite the young age of the two sons aged 2 and 5, it was not a problem for her concentration. Fortunately, no papers were torn, nor pens were stolen during the lessons. Occasionally, the daughters, aged 7, 8 and 10 came to listen carefully to the lesson and try to do what their mom was doing, but after a few seconds, they were addressed to their room to play or do their homework. Sometimes, the smartphone was an element of disturb, when there were too many calls. In spite of these two elements, the concentration of the subject was always rather high, and the course of the lessons was quite regular due to the willingness of the subject and her determination of learning the Italian language in the better way possible.

In fact, she showed integrative and instrumental motivation in order to be able to perform everyday activities interacting with Italian speakers.

4.4.1 Time

A relevant issue was time. During the days, the subject attended the course of Italian language of A1 level. The course was addressed to migrants in general. She told the researcher that often she wrote down the things at the blackboard without understanding because the teacher of that course used to erase quickly what was written. Although the transcription could be a good exercise for illiterate people, the context was not the ideal one due to the fact that the course was not a course for

illiterate people and the time for doing an activity or exercise was the time given for A1 level learners. The course of the researcher instead, aimed at the development of the abilities that do not belong to a level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It was situated before the A1, between Casi's levels definitions ALF3: "the learner knows how to read words with three syllables and simple sentences"; and ALF4: "the learner is able to read words with three or four syllables of medium complexity without orthographic difficulties and is able to read an easy text concerning the daily life with slow fluency".

(<http://www.italianoperme.it/documents/LIVELLI%20ALF%20nov%202015%20sito.pdf>).

The researcher created a teaching module divided into two parts and in different learning units in order to be able to observe the process in a direct way. Every unit contained activities focused on the development of writing and reading and oral skills.

Another important factor was the time when the lesson was taken: real differences have been noticed between the evening lessons on Wednesdays and the morning lessons on Saturdays. During the evenings the subject was often tired while during the mornings she was mentally more active and the lesson could go on a few more minutes.

4.4.2 The class activities

All the activities were carried on with the teacher seated next to the learner. The interaction between the two was pretty regular. It was a succession of reasoning, explications and practice. During the activities, she showed satisfaction when she realised she did the

exercise in a good way. More satisfaction was due to the fact that she understood the things she was doing.

Sometimes, the help of the daughter was fundamental. Since the researcher had no experience with the Arabic language, the interaction of the subject with one of her daughter helped her when the communication with the learner was unclear. Some other times, when she did not understand and asked for help in her mother tongue, the researcher stopped the conversation between them and tried to explain the issue in a clearer way and tried to make her get the message with easier words and concepts.

So, the facilitator is a key element. The knowledge of the mother tongue of the learners is a factor that provides added value to the teaching and learning process, but as it will be shown, it is not essential for the learner.

The activities were always performed with passion, by the subject. Many problems had been seen with the reading and writing of the vowels E, I and O, U and they had not been solved for the entire duration of the course. Maybe a different technique needed to be taken into account for the resolution of this issue.

4.4.3 Results of the questionnaire

From the questionnaire, it emerged that the exercises were useful and pleasant even if sometimes they turned out to be a bit repetitive. The images that were shown, joined to the words, were crucial for a good understanding of the subject. Sometimes the researcher did not show the image for the words that had already been seen. The results of the

questionnaire showed that images should have been displayed always, for a more lucid explanation.

For what the difficulty of the exercises was concerned, on one hand, the first part of the module regarding single letters (see 4.1) was considered quite tricky (3 out of 5 on the scale). One of the critical factors for her was the sound of every letter taken singularly.

On the other hand, the second part of the module was judged as very difficult (4 out of 5), but the understanding of it was remarkably helpful for the understanding of the whole. For example, the analysis of the syllables has been fundamental, since, after that, the subject could write words quicker during the Italian course attended during the mornings, read words clearer, detect better what the teacher explained in class and produce oral language in order to be more effective.

The most relevant element that came up was that she found useful that words used during the course were sometimes employed for out-of-the-class activities, but more importantly she could understand them. Moreover, she could reinforce her vocabulary, words and sentence structure for online messaging.

The development of authentic material during the lessons had the goal of improving literacy in every-day contexts. In one of S. comments about the questionnaire, she stated that after the lessons she managed to go shopping by herself and to go to the post office. Moreover, the activity about the city helped her in getting around the town easily. Also, some conversations were engaged by her with Italian speakers. The researcher noticed that during that type of activities the attention paid was more considerable in respect to the standard exercises and the motivation was higher probably because she did not feel like being in class with the intent to learn things since the process of learning was more implicit. Having said that, even if the process is still underway,

and the subject has not acquired the ability to read and write perfectly, we can assume that the path that had been undertaken has borne many fruits. The three exercises have been well executed. The comprehension of the task was clear, and it was completed in the given time. Some errors were corrected and then revised together. The correction was a fundamental passage for learning because it was taken as a mean to revise the mistake and not as a mistake itself.

Conclusion

The whole study and the development of it, showed significant improvement by the subject. The test, which was presented in lesson 24, was completed on time and the answers were right. Also, the oral part was well articulated. From the results observed and from the progress seen through the learning path, it can be stated that the proposal and the project elaborated by the researcher paid off. Oral activities with the inclusion of authentic material and writing and reading tasks are advisable for maintaining a high wave of motivation for good language learning. This process is recommended to learners with a weak level of literacy with the objective of becoming more and more independent in carrying out everyday activities and in enhancing the process of integration in this society where the knowledge of the Italian language is crucial and where their language is not spoken. The choice of significant material and topic alternated to the learning of the syllables, the sounds differentiation, the transcription and word formation, is a great compromise solution in order to try to accelerate the process of language learning which is slower in adult illiterate people, but which is also required to live in the society that is developing quickly.

It is known that reaching full literacy in adult age is difficult and it requires longer time than children, but the willingness and the strength that the subject showed on sitting down near the desk, and opening the student's book at this age was significant. It was both amazing and surprising the gratitude shown towards the researcher at the end of each lesson. Also, in one of the final lessons, she stated that the lessons of

the researcher helped her understanding the lessons of the morning course and completing tasks faster.

One thing has to be mentioned about the class issue. The study had a positive outcome and the one-to-one learning had a great impact on conversation, comfort, relationship and interaction with the teacher. Rousseau underlined the fact that in a one-to-one situation, the relationship between teacher and learner become in a sense intimate, and this help people to grow up faster. But at the same time, the ideas of education as teaching in a context with teacher and group of learners were rising. These gave the possibility of interactions between learners and in this way fostering socialisation. One-to-one teaching/learning method is valid, but what is lacking is the interaction with other learners with same situations, similar interests, and the chance of engaging conversation with different people with different points of view. That is to say that maybe, the isolated one-to-one teaching could alienate the subject from the world, which is the opposite of the relationship teacher/group of learners that is an essential factor for illiterate people learning a foreign language.

Moreover, the group class is the ideal environment for play-like activities which help students to lower the affective filter, and this was another missing aspect. It could be interesting re-creating the study, analysing a heterogeneous group of illiterate people in a class context to find out if the results of this research could be similar.

References:

- BALBONI P., 2014, *Didattica dell'Italiano come lingua seconda e straniera*, Loescher, Torino.
- BALBONI P., 2002, *Le sfide di Babele: insegnare le lingue nelle società complesse*, Utet, Torino.
- BALBONI P., 2008, *Fare educazione linguistica: attività didattiche per l'italiano L1 e L2, lingue straniere e lingue classiche*, De Agostini, Novara.
- BARKI P. et al., 2003, *Valutare e certificare l'italiano di stranieri. I livelli iniziali*, Guerra, Perugia.
- BENUCCI A. (a cura di), 2008, *Sillabo di italiano per stranieri*, Guerra, Perugia.
- BERNARDELLI A., PELLERAY R., 1999, *Il parlato e lo scritto*, Bompiani, Milano.
- BRIGHETTI C., MINUZ F., 2001, *Abilità del parlato*, Mondadori, Milano.
- BYGATE M., 1987, *Speaking*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- CAON F., 2010, *Facilitare l'apprendimento dell'italiano L2 e delle lingue straniere*, Utet, Torino. CAON F., 2008, *Tra lingue e culture. Coniugare educazione linguistica e educazione interculturale*, Mondadori, Milano.
- CARDONA G. R., 1981, *Antropologia della scrittura*, Utet, Torino.
- CASI P., 2008, *L'italiano per me vol I*, Eli, Loreto.
- CENTRE FOR CANADIAN LANGUAGE BENCHMARKS, 2000, *Canadian Language Benchmarks*, Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, Ottawa.

- CEYLAN N, O, 2015, “Fostering Learner Autonomy”, Elsevier Ltd.
- CICALESE A., 2001, *Imparare a scrivere. Una guida teorico-pratica*, Carocci, Roma.
- COLOMBO A., 2002, *Leggere: capire e non capire*. Zanichelli, Bologna.
- COPE B., KALANTZIS M., 2000, *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*, Routledge, London.
- COPE B., KALANTZIS M., 2012, *Literacies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- DE FINA A., BIZZONI F., 2003, *Italiano e italiani fuori d'Italia*, Guerra, Perugia.
- DELLA PUPPA F., 2006, *Lo studente di origine araba*, Guerra, Perugia.
- DIADORI P., 2001, *Insegnare italiano a stranieri*, Le Monnier, Firenze.
- DÖRNYEI Z., 2001, *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- FAVARO G., *Insegnare l'italiano agli alunni stranieri* , La Nuova Italia, Firenze 2002.
- FERRÁNDEZ A., PEIRO J., 1992, *Métodos y Técnicas en la Educación de Adultos. Serie didáctica y organización escolar*. Universidad Popular & Editorial Humanitas, Barcelona.
- FRANKEN R., 2006, *Human motivation*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont – California.
- FREIRE P., 1970, *Educação como prática de liberdade*, Italian translation: *La pedagogia degli oppressi*, Torino, Ega, 2002.

- GARDNER R. C., LAMBERT W. E., 1972, "Attitudes and Motivaton in Second language Learning, Rowley", Newbury House Publishers.
- GIACALONE RAMAT A. (a cura di), 2003, *Verso l'italiano. Percorsi e strategie di acquisizione*, Carocci, Roma
- GOODMAN K., 1967, "Reading: a Psycholinguistic Guessing Game", *Journal of the Reading Specialist* – Vol 6.
- GOODMAN K., 1996, *On Reading*, Einemann, Portsmouth.
- KRASHEN S., 1981, *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*, Pergamon, Oxford.
- KRASHEN S., 1985, *The input hypothesis: issues and implications*, Longman, London.
- KRUIDENIER J., 2002, *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education. Reading instruction*, National Institute for Literacy, Portsmouth.
- KURVERS J., 2006, "Discovering feature of language: metalinguistic awareness of adult illiterates" *Babylon*, Tilburg University .
- LINDEMAN E., 1926, *The Meaning of Adult Education*, New Republic, New York.
- LUISE M. C., 2006, *Italiano come lingua seconda*, Torino, Utet.
- MCKAY S., 1993, *Agendas for second language literacy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- MINUZ F., 2005, *Italiano L2 e alfabetizzazione in età adulta*, Carocci, Roma.
- MINUZ F., JAFRANCESCO E (a cura di), "Bisogno di lingua, bisogni di lingua. L'italiano L2 per adulti immigrati", *Intercultura e insegnamento dell'italiano a immigrati: oltre*

l'emergenza. Atti del IX Convegno ILSA – Firenze, 2-3 giugno 2000.

- MINUZ F., BORRI A., ROCCA L., 2016, *Progettare percorsi di L2 per adulti stranieri*, Loescher, Torino.
- NUNAN D., 1989, *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- OACKHILL J., BEARD R., 1999, *Reading development and the teaching of reading*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- PENNINI A., 2012, “La formazione: apprendimento e motivazione”.
- PESCI F., 2012/13, “Literacy and Italian L2 Learning in Low Educated Adults”, Venezia.
- PICHIASSI M., 2007, *Apprendere l'italiano L2 nell'era digitale. Le nuove tecnologie nell'insegnamento e nell'apprendimento dell'italiano per stranieri*, Guerra, Perugia.
- RAGNOLI M., 2010, *Divertirsi con l'ortografia - schede per l'apprendimento di vocali, consonanti e parole*, Erikson, Trento.
- SCHUMANN J., 1999, *The Neurobiology of Affect in Language Learning*, Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, New Jersey.
- SERRAGIOTTO G., 2003, *Apprendere insieme una lingua e contenuti non linguistici*, Guerra, Perugia.
- SERRAGIOTTO G., 2009, *La facilitazione e la mediazione linguistica nell'italiano L2*, La Toletta, Venezia.
- UNESCO, 1976, *The experimental world literacy programme: a critical assessment*, UNESCO, Paris.
- WISNIEWSKA I., 2010, *Learning one-to-one*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- WOOD D., BRUNER J., ROSS G., Vol 17, 1976, “The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving”, Pergamon Press, Oxford.

Online sources:

- <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/analfabetismo/>
- <https://www.etymonline.com>
- <https://www.youget.it/leggere-e-scrivere/>
- <https://www.highperformancelearning.com/the-importance-of-multiple-literacies/>
- <https://ourworldindata.org/literacy>
- <http://www.un.org/en/events/literacyday/>
- http://www.opam.it/1/dati_e_statistiche_4493097.html
- <https://worldmapper.org/maps/illiteracy-adults-2015/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/oct/20/two-thirds-of-worlds-illiterate-adults-are-women-report-finds>
- <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/commission-on-the-status-of-women-2012/facts-and-figures>
- https://books.google.it/books?id=dqtkZ829tooC&pg=PA144&lpg=PA144&dq=Sandra+mckay+educational+programs+for+migrants&source=bl&ots=YjW27VXPGB&sig=ACfU3U1BoEcWyXaGFud0NfqMl5VSimps9g&hl=it&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiHoN_rmVXfAhUDJBoKHWjfAHcQ6AEwA3oECAUQAQ#v=onepage&q=Sandra%20mckay%20educational%20programs%20for%20migrants&f=false Sandra Lee McKay - agendas for second language literacy
- <http://www.annalisapennini.it/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/01-2014-Pennini.pdf>
- https://www.agi.it/estero/come_ridotta_leconomia_siriana_dopo_sei_anni_di_guerra-1664228/news/2017-04-09/

- <https://www.papaboys.org/siria-la-nuova-educazione-scolastica-imposta-dai-terroristi/?pdf=9596>
- <https://www.avvenire.it/mondo/pagine/analfabetismo-da-conflitto>
- <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/barriers-to-female-education-in-syria/>
- <https://italianoxstranieri.com>