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Analysis of the most complicated topics for Italian students of German as a foreign language

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Abstract:

Die Fragen meiner Forschung sind:

- “Gibt es grammatische Themen in der deutschen Sprache, die für Italiener besonders schwierig sind?”
- “Gibt es einen gemeinsamen Grund?”
- “Welche Eigenschaften sollte ein gutes Buch haben, um nützlich zu sein?”
- “Welche Merkmale sollte ein Buch nicht haben?”

Das Ziel ist Lehrer und Studenten von Deutsch als Fremdsprache zu helfen durch die Betonung der Themen, die mehr Beachtung brauchen. Und die Frage zu beantworten was die bessere Techniken um diese Themen zu lernen sind. Ich habe eine Umfrage an Italiener, die Deutsch lernen verteilt. Ich habe Angaben vom 4. Oktober bis zum 10. Oktober gesammelt und ich habe 295 ausgefüllte Umfragen bekommen.

Ich habe Google benutzt um diese Umfrage zu schaffen und ich habe sie in zwei Seiten auf Facebook über die deutsche Sprache für Italiener veröffentlicht.

Die ersten Fragen sind über generelle Auskünfte der Befragten: Alter, Bildungsniveau, wie lange sie Deutsch lernen und wo. Dann gibt es eine Liste von grammatischen Themen und hier wird gefragt welche schwierig sind und welche nicht. Der letzte Teil ist über Bücher, wird gefragt ob die Bücher, die die Befragten benutzen, nützlich oder nicht sind und warum. Wird gefragt die Titels dieser Bücher, das Erscheinungsjahr und die Vorteile und Nachteile. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, daß es eine Unterscheidung zwischen schwierigen Themen und einfachen Themen gibt. Die schwierigen grammatischen Themen der deutschen Sprache für Italiener, die von die Befragten verzeichnet werden, sind: Genus von Nomen, Kasus, Deklination von Adjektiven, von Nomen, von “kein”, und von Pronomen, Präpositionen mit den entsprechenden Kasus, Passiv und Subjunktiv. Es gibt immer dieselben zwei Gründe für die Schwierigkeiten dieser Themen: die verschiedene Struktur zwischen der deutschen und der italienischen Sprache, und es gibt viele Kenntnisse, die man auswendig lernen muss. Ein gutes Buch muss dem Student helfen, diese Themen zu lernen.

Diese Eigenschaften, die die Befragten in diesen Bücher gefunden haben sind: die Anwesenheit von Schemen und Zusammenfassungen, einfache Erklärungen von grammatischen Begriffen, viele Übungen und Beispiele, Themen die brauchbar im Alltag sind, gut strukturierte Kapiteln, Verbindung zwischen Thema, grammatische Erklärung und Übungen, Listen von Wörter und Ausdrücken, die in dem Kapitel benutzt werden.

Die Nachteile, die die Befragten in diesen Büchen gefunden haben sind: zu wenige grammatische Erklärungen, wenige Schemen und Übungen, Beispiele, die nicht wahrscheinlich sind, Themen die unordentlich erklärt werden, Bücher völlig auf Deutsch, die schwierig sind, Cds für Hörverständnis und Lösungen, die nicht vorrätig für alle Studenten sein.

Introduction

Italian students that start learning German have already experience in learning a foreign language because English is studied from the first year of school and it is often studied even before, instead German is generally studied later. This means that English contributes to learn strategic, cognitive and metacognitive skills that can be used in learning another language. Italian students of German as foreign language have already discovered techniques, strategies and styles of learning (Curci, 2008a,p.52). Another difference between German and English as a foreign language is motivation and interest, studies show that while learning English seems a duty, the choice of learning German is linked to the emotional dimension of the student and his interests (cfr. Fischer,2006a; Hoffmann, 2010c; Riemer,2003). The linguistic systems of these two foreign languages: English and German, have common aspects; for Italian mother-tongue, English and German are quite similar each other but totally different from L1.

In my research I'll speak about standard German, that is the variety of German described in grammars and dictionaries, the "official" form of the language. Standard German is the form that is typically used in school in German-speaking countries and the variety that is taught to non-native speakers studying German as a foreign language. German is the national sole official language in Germany, Austria, and Liechtenstein; in Switzerland it is an official language along with French, Italian, and Rhaeto-Romansh; in Luxembourg it shares official status with French and Luxembourgish. German is also an official regional language in Belgium, Alto Adige (Italy), and Denmark, and is spoken in a number of other countries, including the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Poland, and Paraguay. German cannot be limited to the language of one country.

Present-day German is a language which exists in written and spoken form, its main area of use are central Europe. The spoken form comprises a range of varieties from those near the written language to those quite far from it, differentiated from region to region. The written form is comparatively stable and its users can understand texts from far back in time. The codification, that is the recording of which forms and constructions in German are acceptable, is represented by Duden volumes and other grammars and dictionaries. The rules of grammar and style set out in these works have become perceived as a norm which should be followed in teaching in school and when using the written language in general. In the countries where German is used there is no linguistic academy as exists in France to enforce such linguistic norms, nor is there any freedom for publishers to develop a house style as in Britain. Instead, a commercial firm, with the trade name Duden, has been charged with overseeing and propagating the orthographic norm for German which was officially agreed in 1901.

As we can read in the following article: <http://www.eurocomunicazione.com/2015/04/esce-il-nuovo-studio-statistico-sulla-lingua-tedesca-nel-mondo/> 15,4 million people study German around the world. The majority of the students of German are in Europe instead in Italy, German is the most required language by employers after English. This data are found in the research: "Deutsch als Fremdsprache weltweit " (German as foreign language worldwide). This research is the most actual and complete about German in the world and it is led every five years by "Netzwerke Deutsch", initiative organized by the foreign ministry of Germany with Goethe-Institut, DAAD (service for the academic exchange) and ZfA (central German office for foreign schools).

This research affirms German is mostly studied in schools (81%, 13,4 million). 8,8% of these students are university students. People attending courses organized by Goethe-Institut in the world last year were 228,528. Europe has the majority of students of German (with 9,4 million students), and Poland is the European country with the biggest number of students (2,28 million). They study German mostly at school, instead in Europe the two countries with the majority of students attending courses at Goethe-Institut are Spain and Italy (8.345 and 6.398). With 105 million of German mother tongue, German is the most spoken language in Europe and it is also necessary to add 55 million Europeans that speak German as second language. In Italy German has a good position at school, university and in the world of work. After English it is the most required language by employers. People study German for career or to be able to study, work, and live in Germany, Austria or Switzerland. The original research can be found here: www.goethe.de/dafweltweit/2015.

Learning German is often considered difficult. In 1880, Mark Twain called the German language “the awful German language” and wrote:

“Surely there is not another language that is so slipshod and systemless, and so slippery and elusive to the grasp” (Mark Twain, “The awful German language” *The Tramp Abroad*, 1880, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1997, pp. 390–402).

Richard Porson (1759-1808), a famous English classicist quipped instead:

“Life is too short to learn German”

Is it true? We'll see that German presents some aspects that are particularly complicated to assimilate, it's a language with a lot of rules but also with a lot of exceptions.

The teaching of German as a foreign language dates back to the 15th century, when the first book about German as a foreign language was written. It was written in 1424 and it is divided in three parts, there is also a glossary and a list of verbs. It was written by Meister Jörg, known also as Georg von Nürnbergers, he was professor of German in Venice (Glück, 2002, 418), the book presents the most useful notions for foreigners to learn the German grammar. It is written in two languages: Italian and German, it also presents cultural aspects in a contrastive way using examples with stereotypes and clichè.

From the second half of the 16th century other grammar books of German as a foreign language has been published: “Teutsch Grammatick oder Sprachkunst” by Laurentius Albertus (1573), “Der Unterricht der Hoch Teutschen Spraach” by Albert Ölinger (1573/1574) and “Die Grammatica Germanicae Linguae” by Johannes Claius (1578). They were oriented to the direction of the Latin grammar tradition, this is to say that the lessons of German as a foreign language were structured as the lessons of Latin.

Before 1969 there were courses of German as a foreign language but GFL became an academic discipline taught at university in 1969 when Gerhard Helbig got the first chair as teacher of German as a foreign language at Leipzig University. His grammar “Die Deutsche Grammatik” was based on the idea that a grammar for foreigner learners must be different from a grammar for mother-tongue students.

In 1993 Harden and Marsh published their anthology and the central point was the question:

“Wie viel Grammatik braucht der Mensch?”

(How much grammar does a human being need?)

Written in this way, the question is too abstract and there wasn't an answer. Helbig (1993) changed the question:

“ Wie viel Grammatik braucht der Lehrer?”

(How much grammar does the teacher need?)

He answered that the teacher of foreign languages needs a lot of grammar, more than the student because the teacher must have not only communicative skills but also a good knowledge of the language.

Götze (1995) said that grammar books must refer the currently used German language, they have to explain sentences and topics that are most often used, what is important during communication and difficult structures. They must be detailed as grammar books for mother tongue and they must correspond with the learning level of the students, they must be inductive and empirical and there should be a distinction between grammar for students and for teachers.

Auer in the book “Deutsch als Fremdsprache-ein internationales Handbook” (2001) says that even if there are a lot of studies about the Italian language and the German language, there are few comparative studies between them. Some example are Figge/De Matteis (1976); Holtus/ Pfister (1985) presented some specific problems, Gislimberti (1989) speaks about nominal phrases. Italian texts are instead written by Schwarze (1888), Renzi (1988), Lepschy&Lepschy (1986) and Ferraresi/Kromber (1994). Auer himself wrote his comparative analysis. He says that the difference between the two languages is the different prosodic structure. German maintains the entirety of the phonological words and has a variable and bad structured syllabic structure. Italian instead maintains the entirety of syllables as first. This phonological difference leads to a phonetic difference: German has got a type of rhythmic linked with the count of the accents, Italian instead counts the syllables. This means that in German the duration of the pause between two rhythmic accents is independent from the number of unstressed syllables instead in Italian the duration of syllables, independently from their position, is the same.

He goes on with a comparison about vowel and consonant system: the Italian vowel system is poorer than the German one because it misses the front vowels (/y, Y, œ, ø,) and the central vowel (/ə/). About consonants the biggest differences are: /ʦ, ʤ/ have a central role in Italian, in German instead they are seldom used. The Italian voiced palatal consonants /ʎ, ɲ/ are not present in German and the German /h/ and /pf/ and /x/ are not present in Italian. About lexicon Auer says both languages build words by derivation and composition but Italian uses more derivation instead German uses more composition (compounding).

As I have already written, there are a lot of researches about German as a foreign language, less studies about a comparison between German and Italian and there is an empty place about a real survey about German grammar topics that are difficult for Italian mother tongue students, the related reasons and the features that these type of students appreciate in an exercise book. The questions of my research are therefore: which are the most difficult grammar topics for Italian students of German as foreign language? Is there a common reason? Which are the features that an exercise book must have to be considered helpful and which are the features that it mustn't have because they're not helpful? The research objectives are: to help Italian students and teachers of German to underline which are the topics that require more attention and which are the learning techniques more appreciated by students.

1.Method

I distributed a questionnaire to Italian mother-tongue people that have been studying German as a foreign language that were enrolled in two main pages on Facebook about German language for Italians. My data collection began on 4th October 2015 and ended on 10th October 2015. During those 7 days I received 295 filled questionnaires. The questionnaire was created using Google, in particular the form suitable for surveys. It follows a description about the subjects of my research, instruments, duration and mode of analysis.

1.1 Subjects

The majority of the interviewees are female (78%), only the 22% are male. The majority is between 20 and 25 years old (45,5%), 20% is between 26 and 30 years old and another 20% is older than 35. The minority (3,8%) is between 14 and 19 years old and the remaining 30,7% is between 31 and 35 years old. The majority of the interviewees has got an academic degree (62,1%) and the 35,2% has got an high school degree, only the 2,8% has got a junior high school degree. The fourth question asks where they have been studying German, the majority answered at university (44,4%), the minority answered at junior high school (0.4%), 6,5% at the high school and 15,1% has been attending a language course. The 33,7% gave other answers, a big part has been studying in Germany, in Switzerland, in Austria attending courses or schools there and sometimes they have been living by a German family. Other interviewees answered that they have been learning German by themselves, sometimes using internet and in particular Babbel. Others specify that they have been attending the Goethe-Institut or private schools where foreign languages are taught and courses organized by the company where they work.

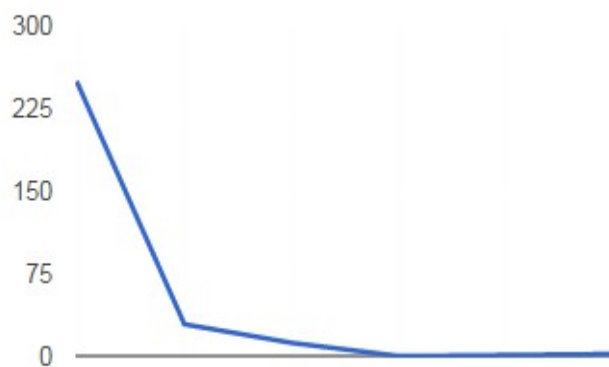
1.2 Instruments

Questionnaires can be classified according to the information they try to find or according to the type of questions (open or close). The structure with close questions is simple to provide and to complete by the interviewee but these type of questions could force the answers. Open questions instead give more freedom to the interviewee. A good questionnaire should have both types of questions. The nature, the structure and the order of questions are really important to obtain reliable results. In the book "Research methods for English language teachers" by Jo Mcdonough and Steven Mcdonough it is said that there are 13 features that characterize a good research and I tried to follow them during the creation of my questionnaire that can be found in the appendix of this work:

1. interest: a good research must be interesting, it could be interesting for personal reasons or because it discovers something new about a topic that has already been discussed in other researches;
2. originality: it could be provide by a new question, new data, a new theory or a modified theory, from the repetition of an old study and then from the comparison of the results;
3. peculiarity: it must observes specific topics to find general principles;
4. publications: it's necessary for future researches;
5. sensitivity: it regards the quality of the data;
6. impartiality: the important thing is the message and not the messenger, what is discovered must be independent from emotions, personality, desires and hopes;
7. validity: to ask themselves if the explanation of data coincide with reality and if the case of one student can be valid even for others;
8. reliability: it's the trust of the researcher about the instrument of analysis. If the same test is given to the same person two times and it produce very different results, the test will not be plausible;
9. falsify: progresses come when there is the proof that a theory is wrong. A theory must be sufficiently precise to find the proof that it's wrong;
10. repetition: if someone reproduces the same research and he/she obtains the same results, the research can be considerate reliable;
11. generalization: all the researches generalize about a problem;
12. usefulness: a research must be useful for an objective;
13. ethics: it's necessary to have the required permissions, guarantee the safety of the interviewees, obtain valid data, have the law about the ownership of data and agreements about the publication.

1.3 Duration

My data collection began on 4th October 2015 and ended on 10th October 2015. During those 7 days I received 295 filled questionnaires. I decided to stop because at the beginning people started to answer copiously, in particular the first and the second day but after the seventh day I received no more answers. Here a diagram about the trend of the amount of answers:



1.4 Mode of analysis

The questionnaire was created using Google, in particular the form suitable for surveys and it was distributed to people enrolled in two main pages on Facebook about German language for Italians: "Tedesco e Italiano- domande e risposte" and "Studiamo il Tedesco: Grammatica-regole-frasi utili". Data were analysed always looking as first at the sentences interviewees wrote to answer to the questions and then I did comparisons and connections. In particular the answers related to grammar topics have been analysed as first with an explanation about how the German language works in order to find where the difficulties lie and then with a comparison between German and Italian to understand the difference between these two languages. The answers related to features of text books that help students and features that don't help student have been instead put together under the feature they refer to.

2. Results about grammar topics

The following diagrams are about specific grammar topics. Some are considered easy to learn by Italian mother-tongue students of German, other are considered difficult. Why this difference? Is there a common explanation? Is it connected with the fact that the interviewees speak Italian? It follows an analysis of the difference between Italian and German focused only on grammar topics that result, by the questionnaire, complicated to learn.

2.1 Pronunciation

La pronuncia



Pronunciation is considered easy to learn, in fact there aren't particular differences between the written form and the pronunciation, especially if we compare the German pronunciation with the English and the French one. In German there are just few exceptions that can be easily memorized, like "v" pronounced "f" at the beginning of the word, "z" is pronounced "ts" and "eu" is pronounced "oi", but generally it's very regular.

2.2 Gender of nouns

Il genere dei sostantivi: der Mond (la luna), die Sonne (il sole), das Mädchen (la ragazza)



The gender of nouns is instead considered difficult from the 70,7 %, they answered that the reason is the need to learn by heart noun and related gender and therefore article. All German nouns belong to one of three genders: masculine, feminine or neuter. This is the same in English, but in English the gender of nouns conforms with their status: things, objects, animals and concepts are neuter ("it"), female persons are feminine ("she") and male persons are masculine ("he"). This way of classifying nouns can be called "biological" gender. Italian is different from both languages, there are only two genders: feminine and masculine and grammatical and biological gender are connected for living beings.

In German, instead, there is no such obvious relationship between biological gender and grammatical gender. The best solution is to learn nouns together with the appropriate definite article (i.e. der, die or das) because they are connected to the three genders, “der” is the definite article for the masculine, “die” for the feminine and “das” for the neuter. This is a very important topic because if you don’t know the gender of a noun you will not, for example, be able to correctly say “the table/door/house”, “a table/door/house”, “a big table/door/house”, “this table/door/house”, “which table/door/house”, or “his table/door/house” as “the”, “a”, “big”, “that”, “this”, “which” and “his” will most likely vary as “table” is masculine, “door” is feminine and “house” is neuter.

*e.g. der Tisch/die Tür/das Haus
ein Tisch/eine Tür/ein Haus
ein großer Tisch/eine große Tür/ein großes Haus
dieser Tisch/diese Tür/dieses Haus
welcher Tisch/welche Tür/welches Haus
sein Tisch/seine Tür/sein Haus*

Even if nouns are not preceded by a determiner like der/die/das, you need to know the gender to correctly use the adjective, e.g. frische Milch (fresh milk) and kaltes Bier (cold beer), because the knowledge that “Milch” is feminine and “Bier” is neuter determines the ending on the preceding adjective.

Here the difficulty can be associated both with the fact that this system is completely different from Italian and the necessity to learn each word with the correct article/ gender because there are more exceptions than rules. Here some answers I collected to prove this, note that the difference with Italian and the loss of rules about this topic are mentioned by all people that found this topic difficult, independently from the context where they are learning German and from the duration of their German studies.

1. *“Gli argomenti più complicati per me sono stati: il genere dei nomi, perché oltre la non corrispondenza con il genere della stessa parola in italiano, è anche impossibile a volte dedurlo seguendo una regola. Deve essere acquisito memorizzandolo.”*

(The most complicated topic is the gender of nouns because there isn't correspondence with Italian and it is also impossible to know the gender following a rule. It must be memorized.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 2 years in a school in Germany.

2. *“Il genere dei sostantivi perché non c'è corrispondenza con l'italiano.”*

(The gender of nouns because there isn't correspondence with Italian.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 5 years attending private courses.

3. *“Il genere dei sostantivi perché non c'è una regola e va studiato a memoria per ogni vocabolo.”*

(The gender of nouns because there aren't rules and every noun must be learnt by heart with the associated article.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 5 years attending evening courses.

4. *“Il genere dei sostantivi, perché sono poche le parole riconducibili a regole generali.”*

(The gender of nouns because nouns that can be attributed to general rules are few.)

This interviewee's been learning German for one year during an evening course.

5. *“Genere dei sostantivi, preposizioni, vocaboli mi risultano difficili perché bisogna impararli a memoria ed io ho poca memoria.”*

(Gender of nouns, prepositions and nouns are difficult for me because they must be learnt by heart and I have a poor memory.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 5 years at the university.

6. *“Articoli perché non esistono molte regole fisse.”*

(Articles because there aren't fixed rules.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 18 months in a private school in Germany.

7. *“Genere dei sostantivi: vanno imparati a memoria, tranne per piccole eccezioni (es. parole che finiscono in -ung).”*

(Gender of nouns because they must be learnt by heart, there are just few exceptions like words ending in -ung).

This interviewee's been learning German for 7 years and now he's attending high school.

8. *“Tutto ciò che trovo difficile è legato alla memoria. Per esempio il genere dei sostantivi. Ci sono regole di base ma anche molte eccezioni, quindi l'unica soluzione è imparare i sostantivi a memoria con il proprio articolo.”*

(I find difficult everything that must be learnt by heart. For example the gender of nouns. There are rules but also a lot of exceptions, for this reason the only solution is to learn nouns and the associated article by heart).

This interviewee's been learning German for one year attending a course on Skype

9. *“Articoli: non c'è una regola per ricordali e anche i tedeschi si sbagliano molto (a sentire gli insegnanti).”*

(Articles: there isn't a rule to remember them and also German people make mistakes, according to what teachers say.)
This interviewee's been learning German for 10 months in a German school of language.

10. *“Il genere dei sostantivi: perché non ho avuto voglia di mettermi a imparare le cose a memoria.”*

(The gender of nouns because I've never had the desire to learn things by heart.)
This interviewee's been learning German for one year attending an evening course.

11. *“Il genere dei sostantivi è la cosa più difficile, anche se in realtà nella lingua parlata non si nota molto se uno sbaglia, spesso anche quando mi parlano i tedeschi non si capiscono bene le desinenze delle parole, nè si distinguono gli articoli. “*

(The gender of nouns is the hardest thing, even if in spoken language when someone makes a mistake it's not highlighted and often when German people speak, you can not understand well both desinences of words and articles.)
This interviewee's been learning German for 8 years and now he's learning it at university.

12. *“Das-der-die per me sono difficili perché ragiono in italiano ma non funziona così siccome più delle volte se in italiano una cosa è femminile in tedesco è spesso maschile o neutra.”*

(Das-der- die are difficult for me because I think in Italian but German is different and most of the times if a noun is feminine in Italian, in German the same noun is masculine or neuter.)
This interviewee's been learning German for one year in Austria.

2.3 Plural of nouns

Plurale dei sostantivi: das Haus- die Häuser, der Hund - die Hunde



There's no big difference between the number of people that consider the plural forms a difficult topic and who considers them easy, if we see in details the answers, interviewees say that even here the most complicated skill is to learn by heart the plural suffixes that are attached to each noun:

1. *“Il plurale perché molti nomi sono irregolari.”*

(Plural because a lot of nouns are irregular.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 5 years at the high school.

2. *“Il plurale-tanta memoria!”*

(Plural- you need a good memory!)

This interviewee's been learning German for 5 years at the university.

3. *“Il plurale dei sostantivi perché ogni nome va studiato singolarmente e non esiste una regola.”*

(Plural of nouns because every noun must be learnt singularly and it doesn't exist a rule.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 6 months at the university.

4. *“Genere e plurale dei sostantivi perche bisogna impararli a memoria.”*

(Gender and plural of nouns because you have to learn them by heart.)

The interviewee's been learning German for 2 years by himself.

5. *“Per i plurali, o la n-deklination, danno moltissimi esempi, e in base al finale della parola dovremmo sapere come fa il plurale. Ma imparare a memoria è poco ottimizzato nel momento in cui si deve parlare, e finché non si va a orecchio non si può imparare il tedesco.”*

(For plural and n-declination, they give a lot of examples, and according to the ending we should be able to know the plural form but to learn by heart is not useful at the moment you have to speak. Unless you can speak by hear you can't learn German.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 7 months at the university.

6. *“Plurale dei sostantivi: perché è perlopiù arbitrario.”*

(The plural form of nouns: because it is mostly arbitrary.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 4 years at the university.

2.4 Cases

I casi : nominativo, accusativo, dativo, genitivo



German is a so-called inflectional language. Inflections are grammatical endings. The plural endings of nouns (children, cars) and the endings of the various persons of the verb (I go, he goes) are examples of inflectional endings. Case is another form of inflection. Case could be considered as the distinction between the subject (the nominative case), the direct object (the accusative case), the indirect object (the dative case)

*e.g. Der Vater hat seiner Tochter eine Email geschickt.
The father (nom.) sent an email (acc.) to his daughter (dat.).*

Some people, answering this sentence, mentions Latin, because Latin uses cases and students that know how the Latin language works, are helped in understanding this topic. Other say that it's difficult because the system of cases is very different from Italian and they also think there are a lot of notions to remember. Here some answers that prove that these are the two common reasons underlined by interviewees:

1. *"I 4 casi soprattutto nella lingua parlata, perchè richiedono molto tempo di riflessione che nel parlato non si ha."*

(The four cases especially in the spoken language because they required a long consideration that while speaking you can't do.)

The interviewee's been learning German for five years attending private courses.

2. *"I casi rappresentano la più grande difficoltà per me in quanto non riesco a ricordarmeli."*

(Cases represent the biggest difficulty for me because I can't remember them.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 2 years at the university.

3. *"I casi perché non esistono in italiano."*

(Cases because they don't exist in Italian.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 6 months at the university.

4. *“I casi, ho sempre avuto difficoltà a ricordarmeli e dopo 6 anni finalmente li ho capiti”*

(I have always had difficulties remembering cases and after six years, finally I understand them)

This interviewee's been learning German for 6 year and now he's attending the middle school.

5. *“I casi, perché per ogni situazione la declinazione cambia e bisogna comunque conoscere l'articolo del nome al nominativo e i pronomi.”*

(Cases because the declination changes according to the situation and you need to know each article and pronoun.)

This interviewee's been learning German for two years at university.

6. *“Ho studiato latino, quindi ho dimestichezza con la grammatica. Trovo difficile memorizzare le parole, tendo a dimenticarle dopo un po' che non le uso. In generale però la trovo una lingua molto logica.”*

(I've learnt Latin, I'm familiar with grammar. I find difficult to memorize words, I tend to forget them if I don't use them often. In general I find German a very logic language.)

This interviewee's been learning German on Skype following two lessons (one hour each lesson) per week.

7. *“La cosa più difficile del tedesco sono le parole, la grammatica, per uno che ha un grado di scolarizzazione elevato e ha studiato come me il latino e il greco alle scuole superiori non é particolarmente difficile (certo molto studio é richiesto, ma questo é scontato). Avere un buon vocabolario e saperlo utlilizzarle nei giusti contesti é la vera sfida del tedesco.”*

(The most complicated thing in German are words. For someone with a high educational level that studied Latin and Greek at high school, German isn't particularly difficult (you need to study a lot but this is expected). The real challenge is to achieve a good lexicon and know how to use the correct word in every context.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 10 months in Germany in a school for foreign languages.

2.5 Declensions of articles, pronouns, kein and adjectives

Le declinazioni di articoli, pronomi, kein e degli aggettivi



In German there is a very intricate system of adjectival endings. This could be considered as the best example of German as an inflectional language. Different endings are attached to articles, pronouns, the negation “kein” and attributive adjectives that must agree in gender, number and case with the noun they precede, for example *sein rotes Auto* (neuter, singular, nominative).

The endings of attributive adjectives are considered by interviewees more complex than endings of articles, “kein”, and pronouns. There are three paradigms or sets of adjectival endings that need to be learnt in order to know exactly what the correct ending is for an attributive adjective standing in front of a German noun. There are the endings used after *der/die/das* (also called weak endings), the endings used after *ein/eine/ein* (also called mixed endings) and adjectival endings that don't have anything before the adjective (also called strong endings).

Declensions and in particular the declension of attributive adjectives is not simple for Italians because it is completely different from how the Italian language works. Even in Italian the article, the negation, the pronoun and the adjective must agree with the noun but the correct ending is easier to find because there are few options and we need to know just the gender and if the noun is singular or plural. Here some of the answers of the interviewees that show that independently from how long they have been studying German and where, they all think that declensions are numerous and very different from Italian:

1. *“La declinazione degli aggettivi perché non riuscivo mai a ricordarmela anche studiandola più volte.”*

(The declension of adjectives because I can't remember it even if I study it several times.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 6 years and now he's attending university.

2. *“Le declinazioni - sono molte.”*

(Declensions- they're numerous.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 6 years and now he's attending university.

3. *“Ho trovato difficile la declinazione dell'articolo è degli aggettivi, anche negli aggettivi possessivi (meinem) e del kein, non so perché siano così ostici per quel che mi riguarda. Li dimentico subito.”*

(I found difficult the declension of articles and adjectives but also possessive adjectives (meinem) and “kein” (negation). I don't know why I find them so difficult, I forget them immediately.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 9 months during an evening course.

4. *“Declinazione aggettivi- c'è parecchio da ricordarsi (es. decl. se sono preceduti da articolo o meno) e molti non si usano molto spesso per cui è facile dimenticarsene.”*

(Declensions of adjectives- there is a lot to remember, for example if they're preceded by an article or not, and a lot of them are used rarely and for this reason it is easy to forget them.)

This interviewee has been learning German for 7 years and now he's attending university.

5. *“Declinazione degli aggettivi perché essendoci diversi generi nella lingua tedesca, si devono fare dei ragionamenti che in italiano non si fanno.”*

(Declensions of adjectives because there are different genders in German and you have to think in a way that is different from Italian.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 10 years at university and now he's attending university.

6. *“La declinazione degli aggettivi perché è difficile trovare un metodo di apprendimento che vada oltre il puro studio mnemonico. Nello studio del tedesco trovo che molte volte la memoria debba venire in aiuto di regole grammaticali assenti perché si riferiscono a fenomeni intrinseci alla lingua.”*

(Declensions of adjectives because it is difficult to find a way of learning that goes beyond a pure mnemonic way of study. I find that while you're learning German, memory must help grammar rules that are often absent because they're referred to intrinsic phenomena of language.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 5 years at university

7. *“La declinazione degli aggettivi e degli articoli perché sono tantissime diverse desinenze.”*

(The declensions of adjectives and articles because they're numerous and different.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 8 years and now he's at university.

8. *“Difficile è l'uso corretto delle varie declinazioni, perché risulta impossibile ricordare tutti i sostantivi con i rispettivi articoli.”*

(Difficult is the correct use of all declensions because it's impossible to remember all the nouns with the related articles.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 1 year in Germany.

9. *“Declinazione degli aggettivi: è un aspetto grammaticale non presente in italiano e varia molto in base al genere e al caso del sostantivo.”*

(Declensions of adjectives: it's a grammatical aspect that's not present in Italian and it varies according to gender and case of the noun.)

This interviewee has been learning German for 13 years and now he's at the university.

2.6 Simple tense, compound verbs, reflexive verbs, modal verbs, the order of the elements of the sentence and negation

The following topics are considered very simple as we can see from the percentage: simple tense, compound verbs, reflexive verbs, modal verbs, the order of the elements of the sentence and the negation.

tempo presente: costruzione e usi



verbi composti: separabili (Er kommt heute um 8 Uhr an, Wir sind pünktlich angekommen) e non separabili



verbi riflessivi: Ich habe mich gewaschen, Ich freue mich, ich schade mir)



I modali: können,dürfen, mögen, müssen, sollen e wollen



L'ordine degli elementi della frase: ad es. frasi interrogative con il verbo all'inizio o alla fine, frasi dichiarative con il verbo al secondo posto



La negazione: nicht e kein



The percentage changes when the question asks about prepositions and related cases.

2.7 Prepositions and cases that are held

Le preposizioni e casi che reggono: während + genitivo, bei+dativo, an + accusativo/dativo, in + accusativo/dativo



In German, the case of the prepositional object depends on the preposition itself. There are accusative prepositions, dative prepositions, accusative-dative prepositions, and genitive prepositions.

Accusative Prepositions are: bis (until), gegen (against), durch (through) ohne (without) entlang (along), um (around), für (for). Accusative case pronouns are used with these prepositions. For example:

Es ist ein Geschenk für dich.
It's a gift for you.

Dative Prepositions are instead: aus (from/out) nach (after) außer (except) seit (since) bei (at/by) von (from/of), mit (with) zu (to/for) gegenüber (opposite).

Dative case pronouns are used with these prepositions, for example:

Maria wohnt bei ihnen.
Maria lives at their house.

Some prepositions can use two cases, the accusative and dative. The accusative case with these prepositions usually indicates movement and is generally used with verbs of motion. The dative case is used when the prepositions show location. The prepositions are: an (at) über (over) auf (on/onto), unter (under), hinter (behind) vor (in front of/before) in (in/into) zwischen (between) neben (next to). Here an example:

Ich laufe in den Garten. (movement - accusative case noun)
I run into the garden.
Ich sitze im (in dem) Garten. (location - dative case noun)
I sit in the garden.

Some prepositions take an accusative object and others take a dative object, still others can take objects of either of these cases. However, when one of these prepositions becomes part of a prepositional adverb, case no longer matters. Certain German verbs require the use of a specific preposition with a pronoun or noun phrase that follows.

Those two elements: the preposition and the phrase that follows, are called the prepositional object.

Whether a verb is regular or irregular or whether it requires haben or sein in the perfect tenses has no bearing on the choice of prepositions. Here again there is a topic that requires to be learnt by heart and for this reason interviewees consider it difficult. Here some examples:

teilnehmen an (dat.)

Sie nehmen an der Wahl teil.

They take part in the election.

sich verlassen auf (acc.)

Ich kann mich auf meinen Bruder verlassen.

I can rely on my brother.

warnen vor (dat.)

Sie warnte mich vor dem Taschendieb.

She warned me about the pickpocket.

warten auf (acc.)

Wir haben lange auf dich gewartet.

We waited a long time for you.

wohnen bei

Frau Müller wird bei ihrer Schwester wohnen.

Mrs. Müller is going to live at her sister's house.

There are also verbs that can be followed by different prepositions and it is important to remember which preposition is required by a verb, because the wrong preposition can convey the wrong meaning. For example the following sentences both use the verb "sich freuen".

Ich freue mich auf das Wochenende.

I'm looking forward to the weekend.

Ich freue mich über ihren Brief.

I'm happy about her letter.

When adding a new verb to your German vocabulary, it is wise to identify the preposition required and the case required. As with many verbs, certain adjectives require the use of a specific preposition with a pronoun or noun phrase that follows. It is, therefore, essential to learn a German adjective with the preposition it requires. For example:

abhängig von

Das Resultat ist abhängig von unseren Bemühungen.

The result is dependent on our efforts.

arm an (dat.)

Das kleine Land ist arm an Kohle und Eisen.

The little country is poor in coal and iron.

aufmerksam auf (acc.)
Man muss auf die kleinen Kinder aufmerksam sein.
You have to be attentive to the little children.

It follows a list of answers about prepositions that prove that the difficult is the big quantity of words to learn by heart and the difference with Italian:

1. *“Le preposizioni, tante e utilizzate in modo diverso, tipo auf per i posti aperti, an per posti acquatici, tante cose da memorizzare e tante eccezioni.”*

(Prepositions because they are numerous and used in different ways, for example “auf” for places on open air, “an” for places near water, then there are a lot of things to remember and a lot of exceptions.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 5 years during private courses.

2. *“Preposizioni - mi risultano difficili perché bisogna impararle a memoria- ed io ho poca memoria.”*

(Prepositions- they are difficult because you need to learn them by heart and I have a bad memory.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 5 years and now he's attending university.

3. *“Preposizioni e casi- non trovo una logica”*

(Prepositions and cases. I can't find a logic way of learning them.)

This interviewee's been learning German for one year and a half at university.

4. *“Le preposizioni perché ognuna vuole dativo o accusativo o entrambe in base alla situazione e quelle con il genitivo, bisogna ricordare tanto!”*

(Prepositions because each one requires dative or accusative or both according to the situation, there are also prepositions that requires genitive, you need to remember a lot of things!)

This interviewee's been learning German for 5 years at university.

5. *“Il caso da legare ad una particolare preposizione perché esistono numerose possibilità per la stessa preposizione in contesti diversi.”*

(The case that is connected with the preposition because there exist a lot of possibilities for the same preposition.)

This interviewee's been learning German for one year and a half during an evening course.

6. *“Preposizioni rette dai verbi - difficoltà di memorizzazione.”*

(Prepositions carried by verbs- difficult to remember.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 5 years at Goethe Institut.

7. *“Le preposizioni e i casi che reggono: perché non c'è corrispondenza con l'italiano, che non ha i casi grammaticali.”*

(Prepositions and cases that are held, because there isn't any correspondence with Italian that doesn't have grammar cases)

This interviewee has been learning German for 4 years at university.

8. *“Preposizioni e casi: la difficoltà sta nell'imparare il numero vastissimo di preposizioni e associare il caso corretto. Per fortuna sono individuabili delle "regole" che aiutano nella memorizzazione, ad esempio le preposizioni che indicano moto a luogo reggono il caso accusativo, mentre quelle che indicano stato in luogo reggono il dativo.”*

(Prepositions and cases: the difficulty is to learn the huge number of prepositions and to know how correctly associate the case. Luckily there are “rules” that help memorizing, for example prepositions that express motion hold accusative case instead prepositions that express state hold dative case.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 13 years and now he's attending university.

2.8 Imperative tense, comparative and superlative forms, past tenses ,future and conjunctions

Imperative tense, comparative and superlative forms, past tenses ,future and conjunctions are considered quite easy, for this reason I'll just report the diagram with the percentages.

imperativo



Il comparativo e il superlativo



difficile	36	12.8%
non difficile	230	81.9%
non l'ho ancora studiato	15	5.3%

tempi passati: costruzione e usi



difficile	92	33%
non difficile	172	61.6%
non l'ho ancora studiato	15	5.4%

futuro



difficile	36	12.8%
non difficile	223	79.4%
non l'ho ancora studiato	22	7.8%

congiunzioni e posizione del verbo: weil- verbo alla fine, trotzdem-invesione (verbo - soggetto)

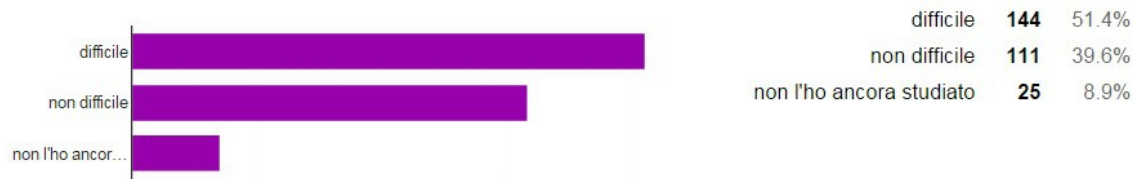


difficile	93	33.3%
non difficile	170	60.9%
non l'ho ancora studiato	16	5.7%

Passive, conjunctive and indirect speech are topics that the majority of interviewees consider not easy, let's see why.

2.9 Passive

passivo



In German there are two forms of the passive voice. The first consists of a conjugation of the verb “werden” and a past participle. Here the various tenses of the passive voice in the third person singular with the verb “lesen”:

Present: wird gelesen (is read)

Past: wurde gelesen (was read)

Present perfect: ist gelesen worden (has been read)

Past perfect: war gelesen worden (had been read)

Future: wird gelesen werden (will be read)

If the active voice sentence has got an accusative direct object, the passive voice sentence uses the direct object as its subject, which must be in the nominative case. The tense of the verb in the active sentence becomes the tense of the verb “werden” in the passive sentence. The active voice subject becomes the object of the preposition “von” in the passive sentence. And the verb in the active sentence is formed as a past participle in the passive sentence. For example:

Er stört den Richter. (He disturbs the judge.)

Der Richter wird von ihm gestört. (The judge is disturbed by him.)

There is a second type of passive. It consists of a conjugation of the verb “sein” and a past participle. This second passive offers the past participle as an adjective. The difference between “werden” in the passive and “sein” in the passive is perhaps more clearly illustrated in English.

Consider the following pair of sentences in the present tense:

The old clock is being repaired.

The old clock is repaired.

The first sentence shows an action that is in progress and the most important element is the action and not who does the action. The second sentence describes the clock has already been repaired. In German, the difference is marked by the use of the two different auxiliaries:

Die alte Uhr wird repariert.

Die alte Uhr ist repariert.

In Italian, passive is formed using the auxiliary “to be” (conjugated with the right tense) followed by the verb at the past participle tense. After the section about subjunctive and indirect speech we will see that the biggest difficulties related to passive are: the different structure compared to Italian, the difficulty to remember the order of the elements of the sentence and to remember the difference between “vorgangspassiv” e “zustandpassiv” that is to say to understand when to use the form with “sein” and when instead the form with “werden” .

Here some answers the interviewees gave about Passive:

1. *“Passivo- perché la distinzione iniziale tra Vorgangspassiv e Zustandspassiv spesso confonde lo studio iniziale.”*

(Passive and conjunctive because the difference between Vorgangspassiv e Zustandspassiv is confused.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 4 years at university.

2. *“Il passivo perché la differenza concettuale tra “ist” e “wird” per esempio non trova corrispondenza in italiano; il discorso indiretto in frasi molto lunghe in cui tendo a perdere la concezione dell'ordine degli elementi.”*

(Passive because the difference between “ist” and “wird” doesn't correspond to Italian; the direct speech when there are long sentences because I loose the conception of the order of elements.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 3 years at university.

3. *“Il passivo perché mi confondo sempre con il verbo werden che ha molte funzioni in tedesco.”*

(Passive because I mix up the several function of the verb werden.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 2 years during an evening course.

4. *“Il passivo perché ha diverse forme che possono sembrare simili, ma danno un senso totalmente diverso alla frase.”*

(Passive because there are different forms that are similar but give a complete different meaning to the sentence.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 10 years and now he's attending university.

2.10 Subjunctive and indirect speech

congiuntivo



discorso indiretto



In German subjunctive and indirect speech are connected, because you need to use the subjunctive tense to express an indirect speech.

There are two ways of forming the subjunctive in German: subjunctive I and subjunctive II. The use of the subjunctive I is fading away, now being found mostly in formal, literary German. In spoken German it is generally only used with the *er/sie/es* form, because this form is clearly different from the indicative.

In spoken German, there is a tendency to use a subjunctive II conjugation in indirect speech:

Er sagte, dass Frau Schmidt krank wäre.
(He said that Ms. Schmidt was sick.)

But in written German, sentences in indirect speech more frequently conjugate verbs in subjunctive I:

Er sagte, dass Frau Schmidt krank sei.
(He said that Ms. Schmidt was sick.)

It is important to consider the tense of a verb in direct speech. The past tense form of the subjunctive I in indirect speech is not identical to the indicative past tense form.

For example:

Present tense: "Er singt sehr gut."

Indirect discourse: Sabine sagte, dass er sehr gut singe.

(Sabine said that he sang very well.)

Past tense: "Er sang sehr gut."

or

Present perfect tense: "Er hat sehr gut gesungen."

Indirect discourse: Sabine sagte, dass er sehr gut gesungen habe.

(Sabine said that he had sung very well.)

Future tense: "Er wird sehr gut singen."

Indirect discourse: Sabine sagte, dass er sehr gut singen werde.

(Sabine said that he would sing very well.)

Also in Italian when the the verb of the main sentence is in the past tense the tense of the indirect sentence must change:

Marco ha detto: "Non mi piace questo posto." (discorso diretto)

(Marco said: "I don't like this place")

Marco ha detto che non gli piaceva quel posto. (discorso indiretto)

(Marco said that he didn't like that place)

Maria ha risposto: "Non dirò niente a Giulia." (discorso diretto)

(Maria answered: "I will not tell anything to Giulia")

Maria ha risposto che non avrebbe detto niente a Giulia. (discorso indiretto)

(Maria answered she wouldn't tell anything to Giulia)

It follows a list of answers given by interviewees that prove that the big difficulty is the difference between German and Italian but also there's a new kind of answer, where before the difficult was about memorizing by heart a lot of notion now the problem is the complicated structure of German, and the quantity of things to keep in mind to produce a correct sentence:

1. *"Il passivo e il Konjunktiv I sono completamente diversi dall'italiano."*

(Passive and subjunctive because they're totally different from Italian.)

This interviewee's been studying German for 8 years and now he's studying at university.

2. *“L'uso e la costruzione del Konjunktiv 2 con i verbi modali e forma passiva insieme, in quanto non sempre corrisponde all'italiano e nel momento in cui si presenta un'inversione diventa complicato per un parlante di lingua italiana.”*

(The use and the construction of subjunctive II with modal verbs and passive form together because it doesn't correspond to Italian and when there is inversion it becomes too complicated for an Italian speaker.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 6 years and now he's attending university.

3. *“Congiuntivo difficile e di conseguenza discorso indiretto. Difficoltà a capire differenze tra KI e KII.”*

(Subjunctive is difficult and as consequence the indirect speech. It's difficult to understand the difference between subjunctive 1 and subjunctive 2.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 7 years and now he's attending high school.

4. *“Trovo difficili le frasi in cui si usa il congiuntivo con i verbi modali al passato o al passivo in determinate costruzioni tipo "als dass" perché è difficile ricordare i vari verbi coniugati e la loro posizione.”*

(I find difficult sentences where there is subjunctive tense and modals verbs in a past tense or passive in some construction like “als, dass” because it's difficult to remember all the conjugated verbs and their position.)

This interviewee's been learning German for 11 years at university.

5. *“Il discorso indiretto poiché non c'è corrispondenza con l'italiano.”*

(The indirect speech because there isn't correspondence with Italian.)

This interviewee has been learning German for 6 years and now he's attending university.

Some interviewees gave other answers that aren't related with the question I made, they're very interesting because they're spontaneous, here what they wrote about difficulties they have with the German language:

1. *“La logica usata nella lingua tedesca è molto lontana da quella su cui si basa quella italiana.”*

(The logic used in the German language is very different from the one used in the Italian language.)

2. *“Manca spesso una corrispondenza con la mia lingua madre e trovo difficile smettere di pensare secondo gli schemi che conosco per applicarne di nuovi.”*

(It often misses a correspondence with my mother tongue and I find difficult to stop thinking according to the methods that I know to start applying new ones.)
This interviewee 's been learning German for 3 years at Goethe Institut.

3. *“Molto da imparare a memoria senza spiegazione logica.”*

(There's a lot to learn by heart without a logic explanation.)
This interviewee's been learning German for 11 months during and intensive course.

4. *“Per me la cosa piú difficile non é un argomento specifico. La mia Lehrerin diceva sempre “quando studiate in tedesco, pensate in tedesco. Il vostro problema é che pensate in italiano e poi traducete”.*

(For me there isn't one specific topic that is particularly difficult. My teacher told me “when you study German you need to think in German, your problem is that you think in Italian and then you translate.)
This interviewee has been learning German for 13 years.

5. *“Sono regole che per i parlanti lingue latine risultano di difficile apprendimento per via della diversa struttura linguistica che utilizzano.”*

(German grammar rules are difficult to learn for speakers of Latin origin languages because of a different linguistic structure.)
This interviewee's been learning German for 1 year during an intensive course.

6. *“Perché non c'è corrispettivo in italiano e perché c'è bisogno di veramente molta memoria.”*

(There isn't any correspondences in Italian and you need to have a really good memory.)
This interviewee's been learning German for 4 years at university.

7. *“La grammatica richiede molta memoria, come nel caso del genere dei sostantivi o dei verbi che accompagnano determinate preposizioni (ich warte auf dich). Le maggiori difficoltà sono legate agli argomenti che non corrispondono all'italiano.”*

(Grammar requires a good memory like in case of genders of nouns and verbs binded with prepositions (ich warte auf dich). The biggest difficulties are connected with topics that don't correspond to Italian.)
This interviewee's been learning German for 10 years at university.

8. *“Non c'entra niente con la nostra lingua. Quello che non ci aiuta per niente è pensare in italiano e parlare in tedesco. A partire dai numeri che si leggono al contrario. È una lingua davvero molto difficile. Per la grammatica e per i verbi un anno e mezzo corso serale”*

(It's very different from our language. To think in Italian and to speak German doesn't help at all. Starting from the fact that numbers in German are read contrary. It's a very difficult language. For grammar and for verbs.)

9. *“Il tedesco è una lingua a se, totalmente differente dall italianoa mio parere difficile soprattutto nella pronuncia.”*

(German is a language that stands on its own, totally different from Italian... in my opinion difficult in particular for pronunciation.)

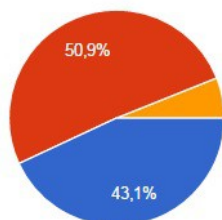
10. *“Bisognerebbe dimenticare l' italiano per imparare il tedesco...”*

(We should forget Italian to learn German...)

This interviewee's been learning German for 4 years in Switzerland.

3. Results about text books

This second part is about text books used by interviewees. I've asked them if the books they're using are helping them in learning German. The majority answered that not all the books are helpful (50,9%), a quite similar percentage (43,5%) answered that the books they're using are helping them and only 6% answered that they're not helped by the books they're using.



si	121	43.1%
non tutti	143	50.9%
no	17	6%

3.1 Helpful textbooks

Let's see some features that a book must have to be considered helpful, after the feature there are some sentences the interviewees wrote in the questionnaire to give the proof of the truthfulness of what I'm saying and there is also the year of publication of the book where they found the related feature:

1. the presence of charts, images and summaries;

- *“Immagini, schematico, chiaro.”*

(There are a lot of images, it's schematic and clear-2003)

- *“Molti schemi.”*

(There are a lot of schemes - 2006)

- *“Chiaro e schematico”*

(Clear and schematic-1998)

- *“Spiegazioni chiare con riquadri riepilogativi che favoriscono la memoria visiva. Ad ogni argomento viene abbinata la teoria a una decina di esercizi (cosa positiva perché in molti libri gli esercizi vengono messi alla fine del testo)”*

(Explanations are clear and there are boxes that summarize and help the visual memory . Every topic is bind to theory plus ten exercises (this is the positive thing because in a lot of books exercises are put at the end of the book-2009)

2. easy and simple explanations of grammar notions;

- *“Spiegazioni semplici e chiare con molti esempi.”*

(Explanations are simple and clear with a lot of examples-2001)

- *“Spiegazioni brevi ed esercizi a fianco della spiegazione”*

(Clear explanations and exercises next to them-2011)

- *“Spiegazioni chiare e molti esercizi”*

(Clear explanations and a lot of exercises - 2004)

- *“Le spiegazioni sono chiare e sintetiche.”*

(Explanations are clear and concise-2004)

- *“Semplice e chiaro”*
(Easy and clear – 2006)
- *“Esercizi e spiegazioni chiare, precise e di facile intuizione!”*
(Exercises and explanations are clear, precise and easy to realize!-2008)
- *“Ha una grammatica spiegata veramente bene in modo molto chiaro con esercizi anche divertenti.”*
(Its grammar is good explained, in a clear way with exercises that are funny-2014)
- *“le spiegazioni sono chiare e ricche di esempi, per ogni argomento sono presenti esercizi che presentano difficoltà crescente e aiutano a metabolizzare bene i concetti. inoltre contribuisce anche ad arricchire il lessico”*
(Explanations are clear and full of examples, for every topic there are exercises that present increasing difficulties and help to remember the concepts, it also help to enrich the lexicon-1998)
- *“Buone spiegazioni di linguistica tedesca che aiutano a riflettere.”*
(Good explanations about German linguistics that make you think-2004)
- *“Spiegazioni chiare e approfondite.”*
(Explanations are clear and detailed-1998)
- *“Le spiegazioni sono chiare ed esaustive.”*
(Explanations are clear and complete-2004)

3. a big number of exercises and examples;

- *“E' il libro con il quale ho iniziato a studiare tedesco, ci sono molte letture ed anche tanti esercizi invece di avere due, tre o più libri insieme.”*

(It's the first book I used when I started studying German, there are a lot of readings and exercises together, instead of using two or three different books you can use only this one- 2006)

- *“Ha molti esercizi a disposizione e la grammatica viene spiegata brevemente ma in modo efficace”*

(There are a lot of exercises, grammar is explained briefly but efficiently - 2004)

- *“Le spiegazioni sono chiare, ci sono molti esempi ed esercizi.”*

(Explanations are clear, there a lot of examples and exercises-2001)

- *“È utile poiché le spiegazioni sono molto semplici e contiene molti esempi. In più si possono trovare degli approfondimenti”*

(It's useful because explanations are simple and it includes a lot of examples. There are also detailed studies-2006)

- *“Lo usano sia al liceo che all'università. Io lo sto usando a livello universitario e mi piace tanto perché spiega la grammatica per bene, con varie eccezioni e i vari contesti. Ha un lato negativo, mette parole anche troppo complesse negli esercizi. E chi è principiante trova serie difficoltà a ricordare tutte quelle parole.”*

(It's used at university and at high school. I'm using it at university and I really like it because it explains grammar in a complete way, with exceptions and different contexts. There is a negative side, there are words that are too complicated in exercises and for beginners it's difficult to remember all those words-2006”

- *“è ottimo perchè completo di cd con molti testi audio,molti esercizi e testi interessanti.”*

(It is great because it's completed with a cd with a lot of listening comprehensions , exercises and interesting texts-2014)

4. well structured chapters;

- *“Le spiegazioni sono brevi e chiare, l'impianto del libro è regolare e di facile consultazione.”*

(Explanations are short and clear, the structure of the book is regular and easy to consult-2004)

- *“Gli argomenti sono organizzati e spiegati bene.”*

(Topics are well organized and explained-2014)

- *“E' organizzato bene, ci sono esercizi ed è completo di ogni spiegazione”*

(It's well organized, there are exercises and explanations-2009)

5. connection between topic, grammar explanations and exercises;

- *“Ci sono esercizi di grammatica mirati per ogni argomento e le spiegazioni sono chiare e dettagliate.”*

(There are grammar exercises for each topic and explanations are clear and detailed-2009)

- *“tematico e efficace”*

(thematic and efficient-2005)

- *“Spiegazioni molto chiare, inserisce gli argomenti gradualmente e a seconda del livello di difficoltà, spiegazioni sulla pagina sinistra ed esercizi corrispondenti sulla pagina sinistra”*

(Very clear explanations, topics are present step by step according to the level of difficulty, there are explanations on the left page and related exercises on the right page-2004)

6. useful topics from real life;

- *“La struttura del libro basata su immagini e dialoghi riguardanti la vita quotidiana ed esempi di situazioni reali aiuta a conoscere molti termini che userai nella vita di tutti i giorni.”*

(The structure of the book is based on images and dialogues regarding everyday life and examples of real situations. They help to learn a lot of terms that I'd used in real life-2010)

- *“Gli argomenti sono relativamente interessanti con articoli autentici presi da quotidiani o riviste. Ogni capitolo presenta all'inizio una lista di vocaboli espressioni, locuzioni che si incontrano nella lettura degli articoli del corrispondente capitolo.”*

(Topics are quite interesting with authentic articles taken from newspapers or magazines. Every chapter presents at the beginning a list of nouns, expressions and phrases that will be found during the related chapter – 2008)

7. lists of words and expressions that are used in the chapter;

- *“Le spiegazioni sono brevi e chiare, oltre che per lo studio le trovo adatte anche per la consultazione in caso di dubbi. Gli esercizi sono mirati e alcuni argomenti particolarmente complessi (es. decl. aggettivo e konjunktiv) vengono ripresi due volte. é il libro che usavamo a scuola, c'erano anche molti testi con comprensioni orale e testi con spunti di discussione in classe. Le lezioni nel libro sono ben strutturate, per ogni unità c'è una regola grammaticale applicata a una situazione con relativo vocabolario (es. nella stessa unità abbigliamento + decl. aggettivo)”*

(Explanations are short and clear, they are useful not only for the study of the language but also to consult in case of doubts. Exercises are focused and some topics that are particularly complicated (for example adjective and subjunctive) are explained two times. It was the book we used at school, there were also a lot of texts for listening comprehensions and texts with starting points for discussions in the classroom. Lessons are well structured, for every unit there is a grammar rule applied to a situation with the related lexicon (for example in the same unit cloths + declension of the adjective-2008)

8. Comparisons between German and Italian

- *“perché è una grammatica contrastiva, specifica per i madrelingua italiani”*
(because it's a contrastive grammar, specific for Italian mother-tongue-2004)
- *“Spiegazioni chiare, concise con esempi e molti esercizi. Sono presenti anche confronti con l'italiano.”*

(Clear explanations with examples and exercises. There are also comparisons with Italian-2004)

3.2 Textbooks that are considered not very helpful

The following features are instead connected with books that are considered not very helpful by interviewees:

1. too less grammar explanations that for a logic language like German are essential;

- *“Poco chiaro, poche spiegazioni, è troppo intuitivo mentre per lo studio del tedesco c'è bisogno di regole e spiegazioni chiare.”*

(It's not clear, there are few explanations, it is too intuitive instead the study of German requires rules and clear explanations-1999)

- *“Il libro è poco chiaro, si passa la maggior parte del tempo ad interpretare le immagini. Un altro aspetto negativo è la mancanza di spiegazioni grammatiche per svolgere gli esercizi.”*

(The book is not very clear, often you spend the majority of the times interpreting images. Another negative aspect is the loss of grammar explanations to solve the exercises-2003)

2. useless exercises;

- *“Contiene esercizi inutili o stupidi. La spiegazione della grammatica non è affatto strutturata”*

(It contains useless and stupid exercises. The way of explain the grammar is not structured at all-2005)

3. bad structured chapter;

- *“Non è schematico ed è dispersivo e non da alcuna spiegazione in merito a ciò che si sta studiando”*

(It's not schematic and it is dispersive . It doesn't give you any explanation about what you're learning-2011)

4. few charts, tables, and exercises;

- *“Poche spiegazioni di grammatica e i cd per l'audio sono estremamente poco sintetici, difficile trovare un esercizio se non ascoltando tutta la registrazione che per un A1 diventa difficile nel momento in cui la lingua è completamente sconosciuta. Dovrebbero schematizzare meglio e mettere anche in italiano almeno la traccia che spiega l'esercizio.”*

(Few grammar explanations and listening comprehensions are not coincide, you can find an exercise only if you listen to the entire recording, this is difficult for someone with an A1 level because the language is completely unknown. They should schematise better and write in Italian at least the trace that explain the exercise-2013)

- *“Troppo elementare, poche letture, pochi esercizi davvero utili.”*

(Too elementary, very few lectures, few exercises that can be considered really useful-2009)

- *“È un semplice eserciziario, manca di spiegazione delle regole grammaticali introduttive di ogni capitolo, altri libri vanno comprati a parte.”*

(It's a simple exercise book, there aren't explanations of grammar rules at the beginning of each chapter, other books must be bought separately-2013)

- *“Utilizzato in una scuola che ho frequentato qui a Berlino solo per un mese, per me ha troppa poca grammatica.”*

(I've used it in a school that I've attended in Berlin for a month, in my opinion it has got too little grammar-2012)

5. examples that are unlikely in real life;

- *“Poco schematico, zero grammatica ed esempi semplici e poco probabili nel linguaggio quotidiano”*

(Not schematic, zero grammar and there are examples that aren't probable in real life-2013)

6. topic explained in a confused way;

- *“È poco schematico e gli argomenti sono spiegati in modo confusionale”*

(It is not schematic and topics are explained in a confused way-2009)

- *“Grammatica spiegata in modo davvero poco chiaro talvolta, spesso senza un reale filo logico tra gli argomenti che si succedevano nelle unità. Ottimo per formarsi il lessico, ma lo sconsiglierei a chiunque non parta già da una conoscenza A1/A2”*

(Grammar is explained in a way that sometimes is not clear, often without a real logical thread between topics. It is perfect to learn lexicon but I'd suggest it only to student that have already an A1/A2 level-2013)

- *Le fonti dai siti internet mi sono state d'aiuto maggiore rispetto ai libri perché spesso le grammatiche tedesche sono articolate male. Ad esempio una tabella con tutte le declinazioni dei casi degli aggettivi costituirebbe un'utilissima fonte di studio, ma non la ho trovata in nessun libro di grammatica, mentre ammontano su internet! Le grammatiche tendono a frammentare le spiegazioni sulle declinazioni, questo crea solo confusione. Schemi e grafici completi invece sono utili nell'apprendimento in quanto stimolano la memoria visiva.”*

(Sources from the internet helped me more than books because German grammar books are often badly structured. For example the chart with all the declensions of adjectives would be a very useful source but I haven't found it in any grammar books, instead there are a lot of them in the internet. Grammar books tend to fragment explanations about declensions, this creates confusion. Tables and charts are useful in learning because they stimulate the visual memory-2012)

7. cds for listening comprehensions and keys should be available for all the students;

- *“I testi sono noiosi pochi esercizi di grammatica non ci sono le soluzioni degli esercizi e i cd audio sono solo a disposizione degli insegnanti.”*

(Texts are boring, there are few grammar exercises and there aren't keys for exercises. Cds for listening comprehensions are at disposal only for teachers-2010)

8. some books are boring and repetitive;

- *“A lungo andare risulta un po' noioso e ripetitivo. Gli specchietti grammaticali sono sparsi per tutto il libro senza un'organizzazione facile da consultare”*

(It results a bit boring and repetitive. Grammar footnotes are scattered in the book without a structure easy to consult-2013)

- *“E' solo in lingua tedesca, per un principiante può essere problematico specie nello studio individuale; ci sono delle spiegazioni di grammatica ma queste sono molto "all'acqua di rose", praticamente inutili (bisogna associargli un buon libro di grammatica). Le situazioni che vengono presentate sono inoltre noiose e poco (se non affatto) stimolanti.”*

(It's entirely written in German, it could be complicated especially during the individual study, there are grammar explanations that are shallow, useless, you have to associate a good grammar book. Situations that are displayed are boring and not stimulating at all-2011)

4. Discussion about the question of research

I created a questionnaire to find out which are the most difficult topics for Italian students of German as a foreign language, and if there is a common reason. The answers show that these topics are: gender of nouns, because they're different from Italian and you have to learn them by heart; cases, because it's a different system compared to Italian and there is a lot to remember; declensions of articles, pronouns, "kein" and adjectives are difficult for the same previous reason: the difference with Italian and the numerous features to remember. About prepositions and cases that they held, it's difficult to learn them by heart; instead about passive the fact that the structure is different from Italian, the complicated order of the elements of the sentence and the presence of two different ways to create a passive sentence put this topic among the most complicated topics to assimilate. The last topic is subjunctive, here again there is a difference with Italian and the structure is complicated.

The second part underlines some features that help Italian students in learning German, the presence or absence of these features determines if a book is helpful or not. The positive features that are present in these books are: the presence of charts and summaries, easy and simple explanations of grammar notions, a big number of exercises and examples, well structured chapters, connection between topic, grammar explanations and exercises, useful topics from real life, lists of words and expressions that are used in the chapter. Between useless books, there are different titles, almost each interviewee speaks of a different book but all these text books have common negative features: too less grammar explanations that for a logic language like German are essential, useless exercises, bad structured chapters, few charts, tables, and exercises, examples that are unlikely in real life, topic explained in a confused way, books that are entirely written in German resulted a bit difficult, cds for listening comprehensions and keys should be available for all the students, some books are boring and repetitive.

Interviewees answered that a good text book must be well structured and the information must be clear, Gisella Paoletti in her book " Saper studiare" (2001) speaks about how important is that texts in books for students understandable are. The bad relationship with the book could be caused by the features of the texts that are present and it's important to do a suitable selection of texts to use in the classroom. The formulas of readability are quantitative instruments that measure the text to find the average length of the sentences

and the non familiarity of words. They are based on the fact that these formulas reflect the complexity of the language. By calculating the length of words and sentences, formulas try to find how many information the student must keep in his working memory before to archive the information. By considering the frequency of use of a word, they find the probabilities that the student will find difficulties in understanding the text. The analysis of a sample of texts present in the textbook in order to find how many unusual words are there and the length of sentences could be a first step to understand the readability of the textbook. To underline possible problems about the comprehension of what is written in the book, it's important to pay attention to the way the material is or is not connected and organised. If the student reads a text with unusual words and long sentences, he will need more time to elaborate the meaning of the sentences but this doesn't mean that the comprehension will be wrong. Instead if the antecedent of a pronoun is not easy to find, because the connection is unclear or if the reader must complete the text with an excessive number of information, the time required to elaborate the text will be much longer and in a lot of cases it will not be understood.

In some cases the request to produce an integration, limits the process of comprehension: when we find an obstacle during this process, the automatic way of reading stops working, and the capable reader applies strategies to solve the problem. In other cases, the difficulty in the text prevents comprehension. Lucia Lumbelli says that a not very capable reader not always understand where there is a gap to fill, he interprets the text but the meaning of the text is different from what he understands. It's based on the expectation of the reader instead on an analysis of the textual elements. When we analyse the structure of the text, we should find clues that help us to reconstruct its structure. If these clues are not present or inadequate (anaphoric relationships, connectives) the text could result difficult.

Another aspect that was underlined by interviewee was the support given by the presence of charts and summaries in the textbook. Our memory has got limits, but they can be overtaken if what we study is well organised. Information organised in a schematic way render more visible relationships that in the written text could result less clear. Of course they must be well structured, with a form suitable to represent the information. It is said that a diagram is worth more than one hundred words, for example about the declension of German attributive adjectives, with a single chart we can explain what could be explained only with a long text.

It follows an example of chart to memorize and understand the declensions of German attributive adjectives, there are three little charts, the first one is used when the adjective is preceded by the determinate article, the second is used when it is preceded by the indeterminate article and the third is used when it is preceded by nothing, each table is divided in 4 lines, each line determines a case and 4 columns, each column determines the gender of the noun, when we have a noun we need to know its case and its gender to determine the correct suffix that will be applied to the related adjective. Here we have also a system based on colours that help in memorising where the endings are the same and where they are different from the others:

DER -				
	M	N	F	Pl
Nom.	e	e	e	en
Acc.	en	e	e	en
Dat.	en	en	en	en
Gen.	en	en	en	en

EIN -				
	M	N	F	Pl
Nom.	er	es	e	en
Acc.	en	es	e	en
Dat.	en	en	en	en
Gen.	en	en	en	en

--

	M	N	F	Pl
Nom.	er	es	e	e
Acc.	en	es	e	e
Dat.	em	em	er	en
Gen.	en	en	er	er

Conclusion

Summing up, the question of my research are :

- which are the most difficult grammar topics for Italian students of German as foreign language?
- Is there a common reason?
- Which are the features that an exercise book must have to be considered helpful and which are the features that it mustn't have because they're not helpful?

To answer to these questions I elaborated a questionnaire with open and closed questions for Italian mother-tongue students of German as a foreign language. I created an online survey using Google and I distributed it to people enrolled in two main pages on Facebook about German language for Italians: "Tedesco e Italiano- domande e risposte" and "Studiamo il Tedesco: Grammatica-regole-frasi utili". I received almost all the filled questionnaires in the first days, but it would had been possible to go on with the data collection if I had found other groups of people interested in this topic.

The results are clear, about the first question of research I can say that there is a distinction between difficult topics and easy topics. The difficult ones, therefore topics that require more attention, are: gender of nouns, cases, declensions of articles, pronouns, "kein" and adjectives, prepositions and cases that they held, passive and conjunctive. About the second question the answer is again positive, there is a common reason, or better, there are always the same common reasons that are: the difference structure of the language between German and Italian and the fact that you need to memorize a lot of notions, like the gender and the plural forms of nouns and the declension of adjectives.

So, how can the student be helped to assimilate these topics? Which are the features that a good book must have? The interviewees answered that the presence of charts and summaries helps a lot, like easy and simple explanations of grammar notions, a big number of exercises and examples, well structured chapters, connection between topic, grammar explanations and exercises, useful topics from real life, lists of words and expressions that are used in the chapter. The negative features that have been underlined are instead: too less grammar explanations that for a logic language like German are essential, useless exercises, bad structured chapter, few charts, tables, and exercises, examples that are unlikely in real life, topics that are explained in a confused way, books that are entirely written in German resulted a bit difficult, cds for listening comprehensions and keys should be available for all the students, some books are boring and repetitive.

My research could be deepened by analysing if there is a connection between the classification of topics and the age of the interviewees or their educational level or the duration of their German studies. About the issue of textbooks, it could be examined if there is a trend about the year of publication, maybe the majority of books printed in the last 5 years are considered better than books printed previously. Unfortunately not all the interviewees answered to these questions and looking at the answers I received, it hasn't been possible to underline a trend.

Appendix

It follows the full questionnaire I distributed to the interviewees to elaborate my analysis:

Questionario per gli studenti di tedesco (lingua straniera) madrelingua italiana

Ciao,

Mi chiamo Sara, sono una studentessa dell'università Ca' Foscari di Venezia e sto lavorando alla mia tesi di Laurea Magistrale.

Vorrei chiedervi di rispondere a queste poche domande che mi serviranno nella mia tesi di laurea. Sono domande riguardanti le vostre difficoltà durante l'apprendimento del tedesco come lingua straniera. Grazie.

Sei maschio o femmina?

- maschio
- femmina

Quanti anni hai?

- 14-19
- 20-25
- 26-30
- 31-35

Qual è il tuo livello di scolarizzazione?

- scuola media
- scuola superiore
- laurea

Dove stai studiando tedesco?

- alle scuole medie
- alle superiori
- all'università
- in un corso serale

Altro:

Da quanto studi tedesco?

Che grado di difficoltà daresti all'apprendimento del tedesco?

0 1 2 3 4 5

molto semplice da apprendere difficile da apprendere

Quali di questi aspetti grammaticali della lingua tedesca ti sono risultati difficili?

	difficile	non difficile	non l'ho ancora studiato
La pronuncia	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il genere dei sostantivi: der Mond (la luna), die Sonne (il sole), das Mädchen (la ragazza)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Plurale dei sostantivi: das Haus- die Häuser, der Hund - die Hunde	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I casi : nominativo, accusativo, dativo, genitivo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Le declinazioni di articoli, pronomi, kein e degli aggettivi	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
tempo presente: costruzione e usi	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
verbi composti: separabili (Er kommt heute um 8 Uhr an, Wir sind pünktlich angekommen) e non separabili	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
verbi riflessivi: Ich habe mich gewaschen, Ich freue mich, ich schade mir)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I modali: können, dürfen, mögen, müssen, sollen e wollen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
L'ordine degli elementi della frase: ad es. frasi interrogative con il verbo all'inizio o alla fine, frasi dichiarative con il verbo al secondo posto	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

La negazione: nicht e kein	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Le preposizioni e casi che reggono: während + genitivo, bei+dativo, an + accusativo/dativo, in + accusativo/dativo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
imperativo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Il comparativo e il superlativo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
tempi passati: costruzione e usi	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
coniunzioni e posizione del verbo: weil- verbo alla fine, trotzdem-inversione (verbo - soggetto)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
passivo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
futuro	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
congiuntivo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
discorso indiretto	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Altro

Perchè alcuni argomenti sono stati difficili? Scrivi gli argomenti che ti hanno creato difficoltà e accanto il perchè. Es. il genere dei sostantivi- perchè non c'è corrispondenza con l'italiano

I libri che usi sono d'aiuto?

- si
- non tutti
- no

Se si, qual è il titolo del libro di testo che ti sta aiutando di più e qual è il suo anno di pubblicazione?

Perché è d'aiuto? Es. le spiegazioni sono brevi e chiare.

Se no, qual è il titolo del libro di testo che ti sta aiutato di meno e qual è il suo anno di pubblicazione?

Perché non ti è d'aiuto? Es. era poco schematico.

C'è qualcosa che vuoi aggiungere?

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