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Tesi di Laurea

Early German education in Italy

An overview about German and Germanic
varieties teaching in the Italian nursery schools

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Introduction

The present work deals with the early learning of the German language in Italy. The aim of this dissertation is to give an overview on the current situation in the Italian nursery schools with regards to the learning of the German language and to analyse some specific cases in order to provide models and examples of the current scenario in the country. The central part of this work deals with this.

The paper opens with an overview on early language teaching theories, and explores the motivations that account for foreign language teaching in early infancy also on the basis of European legislation.

It then continues with an analysis of the current situation in Italy both concerning language policy and daily practice, with reference also to practical examples of projects that have been carried out in Italy. The attention focuses on Trentino Alto Adige, where German teaching has been pursued in kindergarten for many years.

The central part of the work, which is the focus of this dissertation, is based on two different research questions. On one hand, the early learning of German minority languages in Italy is discussed. After an introduction into the topic and a description of these communities and their languages, a picture of the teaching of these varieties in schools is offered. The aim is to raise awareness on a variety of school projects that aim at protecting the languages and the cultures of the area. Furthermore, these activities are examples for other linguistic communities and show that there are various ways of preserving local linguistic heritage.

The dissertation also deals with the specific territorial situation of the Valcanale area and, more specifically, of Tarvisio. Its peculiar position, on the border between Italy, Austria and Slovenia, reflects the value bestowed on all the languages and cultures of the territory, which are all taught from early infancy. The focus of interest then becomes the *G. Rodari* nursery school, which is an example of a plurilingual teaching setting, which values and promotes all the languages of the Valcanale territory.

Most of data has been gathered through the collection of materials and examples of the activities carried out in the schools as well as through interviews with the people involved in the daily teaching.

The results are positive and encouraging for all those schools which wish to adopt models of plurilingual teaching, even at nursery school level, in order to exploit young children's learning potential.

What should finally be emphasized is that European documents and studies will often be referred to in the course of this work, which often interpret the concept of early language teaching/ learning as a branch involving children from 3 years of age (or even under) until puberty, while the focus of what follows will exclusively be on the 3-6 year range.

1. Early language education in Europe and Italy

1.1 European policy

The Council of Europe has recognized for years the importance of the creation of a plurilingual Europe. The harmonious co-existence of the European languages is one of the strong points of the European Union. Both the European Commission and the Council of Europe promote all the conditions for favouring a successful multilingualism policy, which can “strengthen life chances of citizens; increase employability, facilitate access to services and rights and contribute to solidarity through enhanced intercultural dialogue and social cohesion”.¹

1.1.1 The aims of European policy

One of the main goals of the European Union is to support the development and improvement of education and training systems with the goal of realising the following aims:

- to guarantee access to appropriate language training for everybody;
- to promote comprehension, tolerance and social cohesion;
- to make mobility and cooperation easier;
- to protect linguistic and cultural variety;
- to ensure that European cooperation leads to a greater convergence as to political measures.

The Committee wishes that European countries “use every available means to implement the measures set out”². The above-mentioned points require action to be taken in the following areas: (cited in Coonan, 2002)

- early teaching of foreign languages;

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Region, 18.09.2008, <http://ec.europa.eu/>

² http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/migrants2_EN.asp

- more than one language at secondary school;
- a higher quality of learning;
- a wider range of languages in the curriculum;
- the teaching of languages for work;
- the protection and promotion of minority regional languages;
- specific objectives and forms of evaluation which need to be valid for all European languages);
- teacher training.

The Council of Europe distinguishes the term “plurilingualism” from “multilingualism” and maintains that the first, rather than the second, should be the final goal of all the strategies and plans that are suggested with regards to language teaching and learning. In fact, whereas multilingualism may be obtained by simply diversifying the languages offered in a particular school or educational system, or by encouraging pupils to learn more than one foreign language, plurilingualism emphasizes the building of a communicative competence in which all knowledge and experience of language converge, and in which languages interrelate and interact.

From this perspective, the aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is not primarily a matter of learning one or more languages, but it is rather matter of building a wider, interconnected linguistic repertoire, which can be achieved by developing broader communicative skills.

1.2 Early language education in Europe

The Barcelona European Council of 2002 stated that it was necessary “to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age”³. Since then, this has become the main objective of EU language education policy, and in fact, many studies have proved that it is important to anticipate contact with another language as early as possible in order to form multilingual individuals as is requested by

³ Barcelona European Council, 15-16.03.2002, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/>

contemporary society and clearly outlined in European law. As expected, the early teaching of foreign languages raises many new and important issues related to young children.

1.2.1 Projects in the European Union

The European education policy supports the teaching of at least two foreign languages from a very early age, as it has been proved that bringing young children into contact with foreign languages may result in faster language learning, and also in improving their mother tongue skills. Furthermore it influences the attitude towards other languages and cultures.

Therefore, the European Union offers therefore a wide range of opportunities of teaching and learning from a very young age, and supports the development of the awareness of its importance. For example, the *Piccolingo* campaign was launched in 2009. Its main aims were:⁴

- to develop language awareness and skills in pre-school children
- to raise awareness among parents on the benefits of early language learning.

All over Europe many projects for early language teaching have been, and are nowadays, suggested and promoted. Many of them have received the “European language label”, which is assigned to initiatives that successfully promote creative and innovative language-learning activities. Among them there are:⁵

- Three hands (Drei Hände / Tri roke / Tre mani): in the three affiliated kindergartens (one in each of these three countries – Austria, Slovenia and Italy⁶), children do activities in their second and third languages once a week.
- Sprachenberatung (Austria, Slovenia and Italy): mobile language consultants support pre-primary teachers in language learning.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/languages/languages-of-europe/early-language-learning_it.htm

⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/>

⁶ See Chapter VI

- Sprog fra vuggen (Denmark): DVDs and CDs of lullabies for children are at disposal in Turkish, Danish, Greek, Czech, English, Italian and Romanian.
- Playgroup Italiano (Ireland): parents and children meet to play and learn. All activities are in Italian.
- Interactive ABC (Latvia): introduction to alphabets in the Latvian, Russian, English and French languages for children from 2 years upwards.
- Tolerance - Get Together (Poland): children become familiar with the sound of foreign languages and come gradually in touch with other cultures.
- Jazz Mataz - Music & Fun (Portugal): acquisition of a new language through music/songs in order to stimulate the development of children.
- A world of books (UK): awareness of other languages through repeating words and actions; through songs, games, puppet shows and plays performed by the children.
- BBC – Cbeebies – Lingo Show: television programme for pre-schoolers to discover and learn other languages through games and other activities. Welsh, French and Spanish words are taught in a playful way.

1.3 Reasons for introducing a foreign language in the nursery schools

The European Union recognises as one of its main objectives that citizens speak at least two European languages. In order to reach this aim, the European Union has invested for many years great sums of money in the promotion of language teaching/learning through different communitarian projects.

These investments have created many contacts between the educational institutions of Europe and have generated many methodological proposals for the teaching of foreign languages. However, as Taeschner notes, these proposals have concerned mostly children in the 8-10 year age-group, while younger children have not been involved in these projects. According to Taeschner⁷, the major difficulties that are encountered in infant school teaching are:

⁷ www.progettolingue.net/convegnoinnovaz/Taeschner

- the number of teachers who can teach in a foreign language is not sufficient;
- the training of teachers is too long and too expensive;
- teachers are not sufficiently motivated to acquire new knowledge which is necessary for this type of teaching;
- nursery school is not compulsory, and therefore not sufficiently considered;
- there is a lack in the methodological tools for the teaching of foreign languages to little children.

In spite of these difficulties, many countries engage themselves in the promotion of early language teaching because the advantages of the introduction of early language learning are many. The European Commission recognizes the following⁸:

- to develop the multilingual potential of every child which in turn enhances individual and social development and increases the capacity to empathize with the others;
- to develop competences such as comprehension, expression, communication and problem-solving; at the same time to increase concentration and to strengthen self-confidence;
- to raise awareness of diversity and of cultural variety in the children, fostering also understanding and respect;
- to improve foreign-language competences of students in order to favor the European mobility;
- to encourage positive attitudes towards language-learning;
- to motivate children to learn foreign languages;
- to establish links between language-learning at first and second level of school.

Different perspectives can be considered in the analysis of the positive factors that promote early foreign language learning. In a political perspective, the aim is to build European citizens and, as it is scientifically proven that a child's social identity is built before the age of ten, it is important to start the process as early as possible. In a social perspective, this

⁸ Taken from Edelenbos P., Johnstone R., Kubanek A., 2006, "The main pedagogical principles underlying the teaching of languages to very young learners", Published Research, Good Practice & Main Principles Final Report of the EAC 89/04, Lot 1 study

accounts for the aim to fix the social basis for an intercultural society. Neurological and the psychological implications will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

In the past years it has been argued that early bilingualism can affect a child's mind negatively. However, it has been proven that bilingualism promotes the acquisition of a third language (or even more) as it helps the acquisition of learning strategies and cognitive flexibility, and the development of metalinguistic competence that can become a crucial resource in the acquisition of all the languages of one's repertoire.

Also Baker (2011), referring to a number of experiments and research in the fields, states that early bilingual education does not lead to any kind of loss or decreased capabilities as far as one's mother tongue is concerned. Not only does simultaneous acquisition not affect children's minds in a negative way, but on the contrary children are biologically able to acquire, store and differentiate two or more languages. What is clear is that there is a difference between formal language learning which pertains to adolescent and adult learning stages, and a more informal acquisition, which is the case of early language education.

1.4 Early language education in Italy

Over the last years, recent reforms and legislative decrees have introduced the possibility to offer multilingual educational programmes from nursery school also in Italy. Many territories, regions and local authorities have decided to introduce foreign language teaching from nursery school age in order to take advantage of the previously discussed advantages of early language learning, and also to guarantee continuity with the upper levels of education.

1.4.1 The Italian Scuola dell'Infanzia

The Italian tradition of nursery school is a long one, even if it is only since 1968 that the State has taken over complete responsibility in the field of pre-school education with the official publication of Law n. 444. With this law, pre-primary school has become part of the educational system education and has gained educational value. Moreover, despite a line of continuity with primary school, it is given full autonomy. Law n. 53 of 28th March 2003 and

the Legislative Decree n. 59 of 19th February 2004 provided for the full introduction of pre-primary education system and set the basis for reforming some aspects of its organization.

Nursery school is not compulsory and lasts three years. It “contributes to the affective, psychomotor, cognitive, moral, religious and social development of children and promotes their potentiality of establishing relationships, of being autonomous, creative, secures equal educational opportunities; it contributes to the integral education of children” (Legislative Decree 59/2004, art. 1).⁹

Ministerial Decree of 3rd June 1991 establishes the new educational guidelines (*Orientamenti educativi*) for state nursery schools. In 2004 the educational guidelines were replaced by the National guidelines (*Indicazioni nazionali*) which introduced a personalized planning of educational activities in nursery schools. This fundamental document establishes:

- the general objectives of the formative process;
- specific learning objectives;
- the criteria for the selection of the formative aims;
- the formulation of personalized plans in educational activities.

Furthermore, the National guidelines introduced the portfolio of competences, which includes a basic description of the path followed and the educational progresses achieved by every child; and offers guidance indications based on the pupils’ resources, their learning pace and methods, interests, aptitudes and aspirations.

Besides the National Guidelines, in school year 2007/08, the Guidelines for the curriculum (*Indicazioni per il curricolo*) were implemented with focus on the following points: ¹⁰

- the curricular partition of teaching into fields of experience;

⁹ Decreto legislativo 59/2004, art 1, “La scuola dell’infanzia, non obbligatoria e di durata triennale, concorre all’educazione e allo sviluppo affettivo, psicomotorio, cognitivo, morale, religioso e sociale delle bambine e dei bambini promuovendone le potenzialità di relazione, autonomia, creatività, apprendimento, e ad assicurare un’effettiva eguaglianza delle opportunità educative; contribuisce alla formazione integrale delle bambine e dei bambini.”

¹⁰ European Commission, Organisation of the education system in Italy, 2009/2010

- the replacement of the specific objectives related to the acquisition of lists of notions with more general goals concerning the development of competences;
- the replacement of specific indications on planning and evaluation models with the proposal of fewer, general methodological criteria.

The nursery school is an educational environment where children “can make real experiences and learn by reflecting, thus integrating the children’s various forms of doing, thinking, expressing and communicating.”¹¹

1.4.2 The Adventures of Hocus and Lotus

The following project is an example of an activity carried out in Italy to support the early approach to foreign languages. Within the European project Socrates Language, the methodological approach of *The Adventures of Hocus and Lotus* opens the way towards the early approach to a foreign language, by supporting the learning and teaching of it through the television medium. The television has the advantage to reach the child directly. Children like cartoons thanks to their colours, sounds, lights and the immediacy of the message.

The cartoon *The Adventures of Hocus e Lotus* was created with the aim of triggering language learning in small children. Psycholinguistic principles on early language acquisition are at the basis of its realisation. Children are naturally attracted by cartoons and, by associating new sounds with images and identifying with the characters, are brought in contact with the foreign language.

This project is not limited to television, since many games and didactic activities can be found on the web site too.¹² The games are linked to, just like all the materials in the course are.

This experimentation aimed at answering the following question: can the cartoon format trigger early foreign language learning at nursery-school level? The project outcomes (reported in Taeschner, Calenda and Arcidiacono, 2001) have shown that, with the support of narrative didactic strategies used by the teachers, this is possible.

¹¹ http://www.infanziaweb.it/scuola/sc_orient4.htm

¹² <http://www.hocus-lotus.edu/>

1.4.3. The L.E.S.I. project

The province of Trento has been investing money for many years in the introduction of foreign languages in the curriculum. In 1997, with Provincial Law 11 regarding foreign language teaching policies, the European guidelines on early plurilinguism were implemented, and have since authorized projects on the introduction of a foreign language from nursery school. Among these projects the *LESI project* and the *PRISMA project* are worth being mentioned. Both of them were extended in the following years. The aims of the *LESI project* are:

- to verify the possibility of introducing a foreign language to children leading them to a natural acquisition of the language;
- to verify whether an early approach to a foreign language has positive consequences on language acquisition when the child arrives in the primary school;
- to verify whether the approach to the foreign language also has positive effects on the acquisition of Italian and if it induces in the child an attitude which is different from the monolingual children as far as concerns the diversity;
- to verify the validity of teacher-training and data-gathering methods within the project.

The project lasted three years (1998-2001), involved three schools and children from 0 to 10 years of age with both native and non-native teachers. The project intended to adopt the best methodology in order to teach a foreign language at pre-school level. The results of the project have been documented and studied thoroughly, and the project then further developed, and came to include more than 70 schools and almost 3000 children learning either English or German. Great attention is also paid to teacher training.

II. Methodological principles for early language teaching

2.1 Definition of early language teaching

“*Early Language Learning (ELL)* at pre-primary level means systematic awareness raising or exposure to more than one language taking place in an early childhood education and care setting in a pre-primary school context.”¹³

The previous definition from the European Commission clearly defines the study branch of this discipline.

Young children’s foreign language acquisition is natural and effortless, very similar to the acquisition of their mother tongue. For this reason all the research of the discipline agree that it is important to start as early as possible the teaching of the foreign languages: in this way these peculiar characteristics of infant foreign language learning (in particular as regards the pronunciation and intonation) are exploited.

Furthermore, research shows that education through a second language has positive benefits also on the communication awareness in the first mother tongue.

From the studies in the field, what emerges is the proposal of the concept of approach rather than a real teaching. In fact, the main aim of early language teaching is the linguistic exposition in a positive and stimulating context, in order to make children aware of the linguistic diversity and the existence of different languages that can be acquired in a pleasant way. In a positive context, in the presence of a variable and qualitatively high input and of a teacher who creates all the favourable conditions, a natural and spontaneous acquisition of the language can be a natural aim.

¹³ http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/ellpwp_en.pdf

2.1.1. The critical period

Experts agree that there is a critical period in which it is possible to acquire a second or a foreign language with easiness and spontaneity as it were the mother tongue; whereas after that period, acquisition is less easy and the quality of learning is less precise.

The existence of the so called “critical period of learning of a foreign language” has been long discussed. The discussion began towards the end of the ‘60s, as Lenneberg, in his book “Biological foundations of language”, wanted to explain why it is easier for children to acquire a foreign language than adults. He hypothesises the existence of a critical period, which he places from the second year of life until the puberty, in which the brain has got a particular malleability. During this period, according to Lenneberg, children can learn a second language as if it were the mother tongue. After puberty the lateralization of brain takes place, and the ability to learn a foreign language decreases rapidly.

The literature on the theme is very extensive, with both supporters of the hypothesis of the critical period and authors who on the contrary deny its existence. Furthermore, also among the former, the definitions, the characteristics and the theories can assume different connotations.

In his essay ¹⁴Titone faces this theme beginning from revisiting some important scholars and their theories about this subject. The author reports in particular the works of Brigit Harley and David Singleton. The first starts from the idea that the optimal age for acquiring a second language is in infancy. Her research shows however that it is not the age factor, but the affective factors, the input and the time of exposition to the L2 which determines the quality of the learning.

Titone resumes then the work of Singleton, who criticises the preceding theories, acclaiming that the existence of a critical period has not really been proved. He argues that there is no proof that younger learners acquire easier and better a foreign language than the

¹⁴ Titone R., 1991, "Il fattore età nell'acquisizione linguistica (L1 e L2): dimensioni di un 'meta-problema'", in *Il Quadrante Scolastico*, n. 51.

adults. The main points of his dissertation can be resumed as following: the stages of linguistic development in children are definable precisely; the difficulties of older learners concern mainly only the audio-oral aspects and memory; the length of exposition to the linguistic input is the most important factor; the theoretical reflections show that there are many causes apart from age which interact in the positive learning process.

Also Penfield gave an important contribution to the debate, asserting the belief of the benefit of an early bilingual learning. He emphasizes the fact that children have got ability to acquire a linguistic competence that the adults do not have. What emerges is that languages should be learned in the period, in order to exploit this huge advantage.

Contemporary research proposes a synthesis of these debates, rejecting the incontrovertibility of the first hypothesis and definitions of the critical period, but recognising different temporal spans in which the different cerebral areas develop their maturation going toward a lower neural plasticity. What can be stated is that there are different temporal windows for language acquisition but that not all the linguistic components are subject to these restrictions.

2.2 Early second/ foreign language acquisition

In his discussion about the theme of early bilingualism, Titone (1972) analyses the main aspects concerning the biological dimension involved in linguistic acquisition, which he recognizes mainly in these two aspects: neurophysiological plasticity and hereditary predisposition. He states that the “almost endless potentiality of the baby towards every language is a fully documented fact”.¹⁵

The child, reports Titone, is endowed with a satisfactory motivation, that can be traced back mainly to verbal curiosity, and a great push to socialization with the others (in particular with the peers).

¹⁵ Titone R., (1972:77): “la virtualità pressoché infinita del neonate di fronte a qualsiasi lingua è un fatto ampiamente constatato”.

These considerations have been worked and developed by much research, picking out such important neurological aspects as:

- the neuro-sensory process, which has a central role during any form of acquisition;
- the specific temporal windows and phenomena which are connected to cerebral plasticity (that is the ability to build learning and reorganize the cerebral functions in a flexible way);
- the memory system of the child, which works in a different way with respect to the adults' one. What is to be kept in mind is that, during infancy, the strategies of memorization are incomplete and imperfect, and that children tend to memorize better if the memorisation strategies are bound to practical activities which make use of the perceptive abilities;
- cerebral lateralisation: this is a process that situates the cognitive functions in specific regions of the cerebral hemispheres.

These considerations have great importance because teaching young children should be built and developed considering the nature of the child and the natural development of his/ her abilities in order to be efficient.

Starting from the observation that an early approach to foreign languages must follow the natural development of language, the input that is offered to children assumes great importance, as it should respect the natural development, enrich and sustain it.

Scientific research has proved that the mother tongue does not influence the acquisition of a second language. On the contrary, it offers instruments, abilities and strategies which belong to the child and which he can use in the acquisition of a second language. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to know how the different linguistic components emerge and develop in children in order to respect their natural course.

a) The lexicon.

Studies in acquisitional linguistics demonstrate that after the eighteenth-month of life there is a great expansion in both the receptive and the productive vocabulary of the child. It has been noticed that the variation among children regards just the quantity of lexicon at disposal of the child, whereas the acquisition steps are always the same. Children acquire in fact firstly a

basic lexicon comprehending for example “social regulators, personal names, concrete names, closed class words, verbs with a concrete meaning”¹⁶ and only later abstract names and verbs which enrich it. At this age it is furthermore very important the relation between verbal lexicon and gestural expressiveness, which can often replace linguistic lacks of the children.

b) Pronunciation

Phonetic stabilization occurs in the first years, when the child “sharpens his ability to discriminate phonetically, as well as stabilizing his phonetic inventory.”¹⁷ Therefore he is able to acquire the correct pronunciation and the sounds of a second language in this phase as if it were its mother tongue.

c) Morphosyntax

Morphosyntactic development occurs gradually and should be respected also in the teaching of the foreign language. Also this competence is very variable from child to child and differences can be found between comprehension or production.

d) Pragmatics.

Also vive pragmatic competence develops gradually. With reference to the communicative functions, the child acquire first the regulative, the personal and interpersonal functions. The imaginative and heuristic functions develop from the fourth year, and only later also the meta-linguistic function emerges.¹⁸

2.3 An overview on methodology

Having outlined the theoretical background of the theme we are dealing with, the following step is to outline the best methodology to follow in the daily teaching. This methodology acquires particular characteristics concerning the young age of the subject of learning.

¹⁶ Daloiso (2007:30): Early Foreign Language Teaching

¹⁷ Daloiso (2007:32): Early Foreign Language Teaching

¹⁸ Freddi G., 1990 a, Il bambino e la lingua. Psicolinguistica e Glottodidattica.

2.3.1 General aims of early language teaching

The foreign language contributes to the child's growth at different levels such as the cultural and intercultural one, the relational and the semiotic ones.

According to contemporary research a formative approach is the best guideline for the didactic methodology. Following a formative approach means that the foreign language teaching proceeds strictly bound to general educational processes; that the emotive dimension of learning gains great importance and that the language teaching aims above all to its pragmatic use: the teaching focuses on the dimension of speaking/ comprehending.

It is important to fix first of all the aims which the early approach to foreign language learning wants to reach. These can be singled out firstly in the general educational aims such as self-realisation, cognitive development, cultural development and socio-relational development (which coincide with the aims of every type of teaching). Next to these general aims, there are also specific language education aims which can be divided traditionally (Balboni, 1998) into communicative and meta-communicative competence and mathetic competence.

All these aims should translate into didactic objectives for the daily teaching. The objectives are numerous and vary according to each context. They include two main categories that are the linguistic and communicative objectives and the formative ones (cognitive, relational, cultural and semiotic).

The right approach to the foreign language should follow the natural acquisition process of the mother tongue of the child, because thanks to this, children can refer to their linguistic and communicative abilities, to the cognitive strategies they know and at the same time they are able to acquire and choose the strategies which best fit with the second language. The linguistic aims can vary according to the context. The way that can be followed to reach them is discussed in the next paragraphs.

2.3.2 Didactic guidelines on methodology

There is not a great tradition in the literature about the way to teach a language to little children, but recently more proposals have appeared and most share the same basic principles.

What is shared is that:

- teaching in infancy should aim at the discovery of the choice;
- the aim is a gradual approach to the foreign language and the creation of conditions that allow the natural acquisition of the language.
- the approach takes place in communicative situations which are familiar to the children; the exposition and the natural linguistic growth of the children is privileged with respect to formal teaching which is too untimely with this age bracket.

Kersten (2010) argues that teachers are ill- prepared. She states that “the challenge for preschool L2 teachers is to find ways and strategies to foster and stimulate children’s development by using the L2 only. Furthermore L2 preschool teachers usually do not receive any kind of formal training in using a language which is not the ambient language outside preschool.”¹⁹ A shared idea is that the children need a great amount of L2 input to develop their L2 competencies and, therefore, the L2 teacher ideally uses (still Kersten, 2010) lexically and structurally rich and varied input and uses repetition, paraphrase, restatement and synonyms to give the children many opportunities to understand the language.

The proposals of the author can be resumed in the following principles: importance of L2 input in quantity and quality; contextualization; multisensory learning; speech intonation; interaction; scaffolding and parental involvement.

The same principles are stated also in the European documents on the theme. It is claimed that in order to produce good results, the child has to have acquired sufficient maturity to assimilate what is done; it is important to focus on communication and to integrate the learning into contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful.

¹⁹ Kersten, 2010, www.elias.bilikita.org

Also the European policy emphasizes the importance of the staff, which has to provide an enriching environment, a structure that supports and extends learning opportunities through scaffolding processes.

2.3.3 The formative-communicative approach

In the field of the language teaching the communicative approach has reigned for years. In this approach the learner enjoys a central role in the linguistic learning dimension. Not only his linguistic needs are considered, but also the psychological and emotional needs of the learners are fundamental in this perspective.

Furthermore, the language gains a new dimension, in that its pragmatic value acquires priority in the learning over the other linguistic dimensions. Language is now considered first of all a communicative and formative tool. In this new vision the role of the teacher changes. He is no longer the centre of the teaching, but guides the learners towards the learning, fostering the development of linguistic and communicative competence.

In fact, the approach which according to many researchers should be adopted for teaching foreign language in the nursery school belongs to this area, with the due adjustments.

The aspects shared with the approach are:

- centrality of the input;
- respect for the learner's rhythm of learning;
- comprehension comes before production and oral competence precedes the written one;
- importance in stimulating the interest of the children;
- importance in creating conditions in order to stimulate communication;
- the teaching of grammar is not explicit.

Language education assumes other aspects in the nursery school, for example many techniques which can be used with older students cannot be used with little ones because they have not yet developed all the cognitive and logical abilities necessary to solve certain types of activities. Therefore the general models should be simplified.

2.3.3.1 Input

The teaching approach should propose linguistic activities which help memorization. These can be:

- nursery rhymes, songs and children's games which can fix by repetition some expressions and linguistic patterns in the mind of the child;
- routines: there are certain situations which guide the school life of the children; specific moments and situations that reoccur regularly every day in the same context (arrival in the morning; movement from one room to another; in the bathroom; in the canteen; while having a snack; preparing to leave; saying good-bye). Therefore the use of the second language during the routines is useful. The repetition of the same patterns in the same context and for a long period will fix some linguistic patterns in the memory of the child.

However there are not only these fixed situations which are based on the concept of repetition. The teacher can introduce the language in many different moments. To encourage interaction is important. The first step is that the child tries to express himself using the foreign language. The teacher can later correct the mistakes reproducing the sentences in a correct way. At the same time the teacher can use the language not only when he offers input, but also when organizing the daily activities (Coonan, 2001).

2.3.3.2 Curricular planning in the nursery school and the learning unit

Coonan (2001) states the importance of a specific curriculum thought for this specific context of teaching. What is proposed is that the syllabus which is adopted in the nursery school must be a process syllabus: a syllabus which develops in the course of teaching. Starting from a general educational programming, it specifies according to the conditions which can change during the school teaching and according to the needs of the children.

In this framework also the concept of the learning unit plays an important role. This concept is used and proposed in general for the teaching of a foreign language, but it acquires even more importance dealing with early foreign language teaching.

Having defined an approach as background, with the general objectives and the way to reach them, the next step is actual teaching, which is divided into didactic units. These can be divided into single learning units, which correspond to a single lesson. A learning unit corresponds to the foreseen activity in a lesson, with its specific objectives and which gives its contribution to the achievement of all the objectives identified in the educational programming.

This is a good and suitable model because the learning units are short, flexible and they respect both the natural sequence of the language acquisition and the acquisition processes of the child. The acquisition units can be interchanged, can be postponed, eliminated, changed and modified according to the didactic needs. The learning unit is proposed and widely discussed by Balboni (2002). He explains that it consists of the following phases in general:

- motivation phase: to create the motivation towards the language and the activity proposed;
- approaching: in this phase the children are guided for a first general contact with the activity (preferring techniques related to the use of the senses and mainly to the practice);
- focusing: obviously in the context we are analysing this phase cannot correspond with a conscious reflection on the language or an elaboration of the text, but the teacher can promote activities for the memorization of some linguistic structures he can select;
- re-use: also this phase is for memorization, but in this case the children test the language by playing such activity as dramatization, game, songs, role-plays, role-making and so on.

In conclusion, what is to be kept in mind is that early language learning activities should be adapted to the age of the children, exposing them to the language in meaningful and if possible authentic settings; in this way “the language is spontaneously acquired rather than consciously learnt.”²⁰ The European Commission also suggests that children should not be formally tested and that pedagogical materials should be made widely available and disseminated also through online tools.

²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/ellpwp_en.pdf

2.3.3.3 Play-like methodology

Many authors agree that for a first approach to a foreign language with little children a play-like approach is a good proposal.

What is meant by this term is a way of teaching. This approach is often regarded with distrust in the upper levels of education because it is associated with the idea of “game”. On the contrary it consists in the building of an atmosphere of playfulness and is excellent with the children.

For the age bracket we are considering play is fundamental in children’s lives and furthermore it increases the level of motivation for the activity that is proposed. In this way the child memorizes easily and with pleasure the aspects the teacher wants to teach him. In play the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional and physical components are integrated (Balboni 2008):

Freddi is one of the most important Italian researchers in the field. According to him the play-like approach is characterized by:

- the use of all the sensorial faculties of the child in approaching the language;
- neurological bimodality;
- semiotic ability;
- creation of relationships, because the language is acquired in order to be used with the peers;
- pragmatics;
- expressivity, because the language is used not only for pragmatic use but also to express the own feelings, fears and wishes;
- authenticity of the situation.

Many techniques that are used to acquire linguistics pattern can be modified and proposed in a play-like way.

2.3.3.4 Experience based methodology

Experiential learning has a long tradition, drawing on the work of important scholars, such as J. Dewey and J. Piaget.

Experiential learning is learning through reflection about what is being done, and realizes through perception, observation, action and interaction.

Experiential learning has the great advantage of involving the child totally in the learning.

Making a synthesis of the whole theme, we can define the main points which characterize experiential learning:

- the central role of experience;
- the language is a learning environment: the foreign language is not confined to a few moments of the lesson but it is inserted in all moments and spaces of the school life;
- language is a vehicle of learning;
- educational integration: between the foreign language and the mother tongue; involving different levels, from the objectives, the methodology, the teachers and the techniques.

2.3.3.5 Evaluation

We have already stated that the aim in the nursery school is to promote the approach towards the foreign language. Coonan (2001) indicates as possible aspects of evaluation the motivation and the attitude of the children towards the foreign language; his ability (oral comprehension and production) and the evaluation of the final syllabus.

The evaluation at this school stage cannot be of course of the same nature of the formal valuation in the upper school. Evaluation should be made constantly in the course of the year, should be made through the use of instruments such as field notes or reports filled in by the teachers and also some easy techniques can be used to check the abilities (for example listening and pragmatic activities for the oral comprehension).

Evaluation is therefore adapted to the context but it is important for the teacher and the school in order to identify any problems in the activities proposed, in the methodology or in any aspect of the didactic planning.

III. Germanic minority languages in Italy

3.1 Germanic minority languages in Italy

The European Union is one of the most complex linguistic communities of the planet, with 23 official languages, 3 different alphabets and more than 60 idioms currently spoken. The definition of minority language can be drawn from the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRMI): “it is a language that differs from the other languages spoken by the population of a state”.²¹ This Charter was adopted in 1992, although it came into action just in 1998 with the aim to protect and favour initiatives for the promotion of minority languages, recognising some fundamental rights, such as the teaching in schools, the use of the language in the public administration and in the local mass media.

The respect for linguistic and cultural diversity represents one of the building elements of the European Union, and in fact Article 22 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights states, “the Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity”.²²

The European Union promotes and sustains regional and minority languages of Europe, through the financial support of initiatives and projects.

The institution that is more active in this field is certainly the European Parliament. Many charters and resolutions have been enacted for the protection of the languages, and also for their teaching and learning.

What concerns Italy, various historical events have seen the settlement on the territory of different minority communities, which were different in language, cultural traditions and socio-economic conditions.

A renewed interest in the minority communities has increased over the last years, causing a development of the specific laws for the protection of the communities, sustaining the recovery and valorisation of the cultural and linguistic variety.

²¹ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/default_en.asp

²² http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf

In Italy the minority communities are settled down mainly in the border regions; in Sardegna and Friuli Venezia Giulia. However, small minority communities can be found in the whole territory.

The main minority communities in Italy are the following:

- Arbëresch/ Albanian
- Catalans
- Croatian
- Greek
- Francophone and Occitan
- Friulan
- Ladin
- Sardi
- Slovene
- German (Walser, Cimbri, Mòcheni, Plodarisch, Carinziani)

The last ones are of specific interest for the present dissertation and therefore are the object of a deeper examination.

The main German communities present on the Italian territory are the Carinziani, Cimbri, Mòcheni, German and Walser and will be discussed in details in the following chapters.

In 1999 the protection of minority languages and communities was regulated by Law 482 of the 15.12.1999.

In addition to the national law, which gives the guidelines for the protection of the different varieties present on the territory, many important regional laws appeared over the years with the aim of protecting the local languages and in promoting initiatives to maintain and valorise them.

Friuli, in Veneto, in Trentino and Valle d'Aosta invest a lot in the protection of the socio-cultural peculiarities of the region.

The National Law 482/99 promotes furthermore the cooperation and the promotion of all languages and favours specific interventions in the field of the school and of the mass media. It offers instruments and financial support; since its enactment almost 1200 projects have been proposed in the last years.

Article 2 of the Law recognises the existence of 12 linguistic minorities, which are defined as “historic” and it states the protection of their languages:

“Carrying out article 6 of the Italian Costituzione and in harmony with the general principles established by the European and international bodies, the Republic protects the language and culture of the Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovene and Croatian populations and of those communities, which speak French, French-Provençal, Friulan, Ladin, Occitan and Sardo”²³.

3.1.1 Walser

In the Valle d’Aosta region the towns of Issime, Gressoney-Saint-Jean and Gressoney-La-Trinitè represent a trilingual zone (Italian, French and German). These cities are inhabited by a population of Walser origin, which is an ethnic-linguistic minority of Norman origin. The rest of the territory is Provençal- French. The three villages lie in the Lys valley, at the foot of the Mount Rosa.

3.1.1.1 Origins and history of the population

The origin of this community belongs to the so called *Walserfrage* (the Walser question), which is still nowadays argument of debate. The most reliable hypothesis is that the Walser were the first inhabitants of the higher part of the valley, descending from the Alemannic. With the passing of the time they came south, until coming in the Italian valley. Still

²³ “In attuazione dell’articolo 6 della Costituzione e in armonia con i princípi generali stabiliti dagli organismi europei e internazionali, la Repubblica tutela la lingua e la cultura delle popolazioni albanesi, catalane, germaniche, greche, slovene e croate e di quelle parlanti il francese, il franco-provenzale, il friulano, il ladino, l’occitano e il sardo.”

nowadays much evidence of their presence is to be found in the architecture of the area, which constitutes a rich historic and cultural heritage to be safeguarded.

3.1.1.2 The language

The Walser population of the Lys Valley has still an active competence in the minority language of Alemannic origin, which is spoken in its varieties Töitschu in Issime and Titsch in Gressoney. The Walser language has maintained its ancient roots distinguishing its speakers from the habitants of the surrounding German area. Töitschu and Titsch are used only orally, there being no written tradition. The speakers of the two varieties cannot understand each other easily and have to use a third language when they have to speak with each other.

Recently, some attempts to make a written codification of the language took place, for example through the publication of a dictionary and two grammars for the Töitschu. The languages are still used daily in conversations, but their use is decreasing rapidly.

The Walser minority of the Lys valley has a strong minority awareness which has translated into the successful fight for the political, cultural and linguistic recognition of the Walser rights. However the culture and above all the language are destined to disappear among the younger generations. The causes are many: immigration of citizens who do not know the minority language; contacts with the exterior (also the mass media); social prestige. All these grounds have caused in the years the choice of many parents to focus on the learning of the Italian language, rather than on German or Walser.

The attitude towards the language is different in the communities: in Gressoney there is not a strong belief that the daily use of the Walser language is the only way to protect the language, whereas in Issime there is a greater awareness of the language, which is widespread also in the young people.

As regards the local traditions the situation is different, as they are strongly felt by the whole population.

The three cities have benefited for many years of the financial support of the Law 482/99, thanks to which many projects aiming to protect Töitschu and Titsch have been approved. The initiatives that have been undertaken in the years are many and involve different areas.

From July 2005 language courses have been organised throughout the territory, with the aim to favour collaboration with the offices of the public administration in the minority language.

Other activities have been realised with the collaboration of external agents and with the involvement of many citizens, also from the younger age bracket, with the aim to transmit and keep alive the Walser culture in the new generations. In particular, seven documentaries have been realised, which depict moments in the lives of the Walser population, bound to their history and way of living, telling their history and traditions. The safeguard of the tradition is assigned to the new generations. Three cartoons have been realised with the objective to put the young people in contact with the use of the minority language. The laboratories, in extra scholastic time, have allowed the children to be the protagonists in all the phases of the cartoon's production, and in this way they had the possibility to work with people who speak and know the peculiarities of the language, deepening their knowledge and improving their pronunciation.

A course of Töitschu has been organised, and the participation of the youngsters has been meaningful. As following, a small staff has been created, which work on the publication of the magazine *Walser Gemeinde*.

Other publications have been realised again with the contribution of children with the collaboration of external experts.

Finally, many international events have taken place in the years (such as the *Walsertreffen*, the meeting of the Walser communities every three years in a Walser spot) and many associations and centres have sprung up:

- the Augusta Association;
- the specialised Walser library.

- the *Walser Kulturzentrum* (cultural centre), established in 1982 in Gressoney-Saint-Jean editing the publication of many works through the years. The centre has organised many exhibitions and conferences and is active in the collaboration with the schools for the teaching and promotion of Walser.

3.1.1.3 The Walser language in schools

“The German speaking populations of the towns in the Lys valley have the right to the safeguard of their own characteristics and their cultural-linguistic tradition. To this population, the teaching of the German language in the schools, through appropriate adjustments to the local needs, is guaranteed.”²⁴

This is what is stated in article n. 40 bis of the Special statute of the Valle d’Aosta.

In fact, German is taught in all school levels, even though in the *scuola media* the hours are greater and therefore the activities and the depth study of the language are meaningful. The pupils are also involved in many projects and in further activities of Walser history and culture. In this school grade it is also possible for the teachers to propose activities of comparisons between German and the Titsch/Töitschu varieties.

The programme of the German language follows a spiral linguistic path (the themes are presented several times and they are investigated thoroughly in the course of the years). The German path ends at the end of the *scuola media* reaching the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference

Projects involving the schools

What emerges is that the schools of the territory are very active in teaching both the German language and the local varieties, even if often the teaching of the Walser history and culture rather than the language is privileged. The schools have participated for years in many projects regarding the valorisation of their culture and language.

²⁴ Statuto speciale della Valle d’Aosta, art. 40bis:” Le popolazioni di lingua tedesca dei comuni della Valle del Lys, individuati con legge regionale, hanno diritto alla salvaguardia delle proprie caratteristiche e tradizioni linguistiche e culturali. Alle popolazioni, di cui al primo comma, è garantito l’insegnamento della lingua tedesca nelle scuole attraverso gli opportuni adattamenti alle necessità locali.”

Since school-year 2000-2011 the project *Meine Deutschmappe* has been working with the three school levels. The main aim is the elaboration of a file-holder (Mappe), which contains all the works made by each student during the activities in the German language.

The Walser minority has been involved also in a national project called *Le piccole stelle del Carro Minore*, (from school-year 2005-2006 it has become the *Lullabies project*), which is a project for the safeguard of the linguistic minorities with the creation of a school network between:

- Valle d'Aosta (Walser minority);
- Friuli (Friulan minority);
- Calabria (Albanian minority);
- Puglia (minority "Griko").

The project involves the three school levels which put into the network the different cultural and linguistic experiences in order to compare and develop them. The main aim is again the safeguard of the linguistic minorities.

3.1.2 Cimbri

The protection and valorisation of the local linguistic communities are among the benefits coming from the special autonomy enjoyed by the region Trentino Alto Adige. These principles are pursued in favour of the Ladin, Mòcheno and Cimbrian minority. The Cimbri are traditionally classified into two different branches: there are the Cimbri of the Seven towns and the Cimbri of Luzern.

3.1.2.1 Origins and history of the population

The Cimbri came from Germany in groups of families and tribes, but their origin is collocated in high Saxony. At the beginning of the 1500 the presence of the Cimbri and their

language is documented as far as the nearby of Vicenza: toponyms, traditions, religious cults and other elements testify these German roots in the whole territory of the province.

In particular, it is in the mountain that many references to the Germanic and Cimbrian culture are to be found. The Cimbrian “phenomena” is still nowadays the object of much research because their origin and its development are not so clear and linear. An important Nordic influence is found, apart from the language, in the fantastic traditions, in their practices and in the customs which link the Cimbrian population with the German ones.

This rich heritage of popular culture has mainly disappeared, and in the same way the use of the language is decreasing gradually. Therefore the Institute of Cimbrian Culture is active, and collaborates with Italian and foreign experts (especially Austrian and German), in trying to widespread the knowledge of this important component of the history and culture of the place.

Cimbri of Luzern

Luzern is a Trentin minority community, on the southern boundary of a high plateau which lies as far as the areas of Folgaria and Lavarone. The surface of the plateau is of 20 kmq², and the settlement is made up of only two centres: Luzern and Tezze.

The place has been inhabited since the prehistoric age, although very little is known about these first populations. It is certain that later the area was colonized by German tribes, which settled down in their large territory. The territory was colonised then by Federico Vanga, prince and bishop of Trento between the 1207 and 1218. It is clear that the German root has been present ever since in the territory. The history of the place is then regular until the World Wars, which destroyed this territory.

In general the territory has been quite isolated from the rest of the country, for all these centuries maintaining its language and culture so alive.

Nowadays Luzern is considered the only remaining island in which Cimbrian is currently spoken.

3.1.2.2 The language

Tyroller (2003) has classified this language as the most ancient peripheral idiom existing in the German linguistic branch. From linguistic analysis it has been found that layers of Bavarian language are mixed with elements of other German dialects and with elements of the ancient German language: it could be said that Cimbrian corresponds to a middle-high German variety with influences from ancient German in its Bavarian version. The period of greatest expansion of the Cimbrian language is at the beginning of the 1700's, when the language was widely spoken, counting circa 20.000 speakers. Since then a gradual decrease of the language has begun, which leads almost to the extinction of it. Nowadays only Luzern preserves the use of its idiom. This is due thanks also to its position: its isolation has allowed the maintenance of this archaic language, which still today maintains its conservative characteristic. The language shows a great richness in vocabulary in specific fields, such as the work in the fields, the weather and the wood. Similarities between Cimbrian and Bavarian are to be found in the phonetic system and into lexicon, whereas, as regards morphology, the language of Luzern has developed its own rules following the German grammar.

Once the prestige and the use of the language were not in danger, because the community also spoke German and so the language enriched, taking on neologisms from its parent language. Nowadays, this process is mainly bound to Italian and more often the Italian words substitute the Cimbrian ones. Other causes for the gradual weakening of the language are to be found in mixed marriages, in new jobs, in the role of the mass-media and in the strong emigrations of recent years from the city. Nowadays, still 80% of the population speaks/understands Cimbrian, but this percentage is gradually decreasing as regard the young generations.

The Kulturinstitut of Luzern

Also in this territory there is an institute that for many years has worked for the protection and the promotion of the Cimbrian culture and language. Its aim is to propose activities which develop knowledge of the local language and support it. In the course of the years many

activities have been proposed, such as the programming of a local weekly news broadcast in Cimbrian, the editing of a Cimbrian magazine and a website. Many initiatives involve young people, such as the publication of the Cimbrian fairy tales and the production of a cartoon in the Cimbrian language. The institute is very active in proposing many activities for the teaching to the very young.

3.1.3 Mòcheni

Nowadays, the valley of the Mòcheni lies just 20 km away from Trento, and the whole area measures just 51 square kilometres in the villages of Frassilongo/Garait, Fierozzo/Varutz and Palù del Fèrsina/Palai en Bersntol.

3.1.3.1 Origins and history of the population

Before the XIII century the territory was an isolated area, exploited mainly for pasture activities and for the woods. The following century saw however a great change, because the areas that once were considered of little interest, became the centre of new settlements of people coming from Bavaria, searching for new and more favourable territories. The later centuries have seen however a progressive increase of emigration from the territory, and the result is that the valley has been suffering a fast reduction of its population.

3.1.3.2 The language

Thanks to historic documents experts have been able to state that Mòcheno was once the German language of the local farmers. What is also noticed is that, due to different origins of the families of the territory, it is not possible to talk just of one language, but of different varieties (although mutual comprehension between the different towns is proved to have not been a problem).

For centuries the language has been stable, as the contacts with external population were very rare. However, since the XXVII century other languages (in particular the Trentino

dialect) have begun to influence the local language strongly. The profound changes in economy and in society and the mass media are leading to a great decrease in the prestige of the local language. Roveda and Palù are at the moment the towns in which Mòcheno is still the mother tongue language of the population, even among young people and children, but in general, there has been a great decrease in its use.

The Regional Law of 1987 is an important step, since the whole region, the provinces and the local institution began to sustain the protection and enhancement of the Mòcheno minority, favouring specific interventions. Thanks to these steps the Mòcheno language has obtained a precise role in the nursery school education, whereas in primary and secondary school its position inside the curriculum is of more difficult actuation.

The Kulturinstitut

Bersntol Luzern is the result of Regional Law of 31st 8.1987 about the safeguard and enhancement of the German culture in the towns of Palù, Fierozzo, Frassilongo and Luzern; in 2004 the original institute was divided into two different entities: the Cimbrian Institute in Luzern and the Mòcheno Institute in Palù. As for the other cultural institutes, the main aim of the Bersntol Institute is to protect and emphasize the local cultural heritage, with particular attention to linguistic aspects. The activities of the institute in this direction favour the knowledge of German inside the Mòcheno community, in particular among young people.

3.1.3.3 The Mòcheno language in schools

The regulation of the Region invests a lot in the teaching of both German and Mòcheno, starting from the nursery schools until the upper school levels.

All the primary schools of the area, and in particular the school of Fierozzo have invested for years in the realisation of projects for the CLIL teaching (with German as the vehicular language) and for the appreciation of the Mòcheno language and culture.

Vehicular teaching through German involves all the disciplines; German is furthermore used in the routines of daily school life. The teaching of Mòcheno takes place instead in precise

moments of the school activity; the realisation of such projects is possible thanks to the collaboration with the Bernstoler Kultur Institute.

3.1.4 Plodarisch

Plodarisch is the language spoken in the territory of Sappada, in the province of Belluno. Regional Law 73/94 recognised it as a minority language.

3.1.4.1 Origins and history of the population

The first settlements in the valley of Sappada go back to the X century, when some tribes from the eastern Tirol arrived there, on the boundary with Austria. There is however no written evidence which proves the origin of this linguistic Germanic island.

The history of the territory sees the passage from the dominion of the Republic of Venice to the Napoleonic dominion in 1797 and finally to the Hapsburg dominion until 1866. The Italian Union coincides with a period of great progress, interrupted by the First World War. In the course of the centuries Sappada has been quite isolated from the nearby towns, jealously preserving its German culture and language, although in the last years it has opened up to the exterior.

Nowadays, tourism is the area's first source of revenue. At the same time the influences from the exterior are to be noticed also in the language. However, the culture has still an important role and is strongly protected with both holy and profane festivities, which mark the moments of the year.

3.1.4.2 The language

Plodarisch is classified as an Austrian-Bavarian variety, relic of medieval German, whose period is set around the XI-XII century: this variety resisted until the XX century, when it began to suffer influences from Friulan, Ladin and the Veneto dialect. Plodarisch grammar is very similar to the German one, although speakers have simplified some rules, unifying for

example some exceptions. Among the German minorities is Plodarisch one of the more faithful to the Germanic root.

Until 1940 the local dialect was currently spoken, but in the last years influences from Italian have become more and more significant, and Plodarisch has suffered a process of weakening. The causes are different: tourism, television, migrations and marriages between people from different territories, a general increase in the exchanges with the exterior and the higher level of education. Therefore, nowadays there are few children who speak their local dialects; even though it has been noticed that many show a new interest in the history, traditions and in the language of their territory.

For this reason local administration has fostered for years the protection of the local dialect: in the '80s Plodarisch was recognized as a linguistic minority. It started to receive the funds on the basis of the law 73/94. Since 2004 the first courses of the Plodarisch language have been offered, finding great success among the population and for ten years Plodarisch has been regularly taught in the primary schools through various projects.

3.1.4.3 The Plodar Association

This association was set up in 1995 with the aim to contribute to the maintenance and development of the local culture in all its forms, with particular attention to language, traditions and customs.

It organises many initiatives concerning the protection, enhancement and preservation of history of the local community, through funds coming from the Regional Law 73/94.

The association and the municipality have favoured many initiatives and produced different works in Plodarisch. Since 2010 it has organised Plodarisch lessons in nursery school and supports the teaching Plodarisch to older pupils.

3.1.5 The context of the Valcanale

Valcanale represents a peculiar case in the context of the Germanic linguistic communities in North Italy, as it is a sort of cultural-linguistic peninsula, bordering with Austria and

Slovenia. Its history has been strictly connected with Austria for centuries, becoming part of Italy only in 1919. The valley lies between the Carniche and Giulie Alps for 25 km, from the border Austria-Italy (Coccau) as far as the old border of Pontebba. In Tarvisio, two more lateral valleys (the valley of Fusine-Ratece and that of Cave-Passo Pedil) develop along the border with Slovenia.

3.1.5.1 Historic background of the territory

As documented in works about the territory, Valcanale has always been the easier passage over the eastern Alps for all the migratory peoples. The first populations that settled in the area came from the north and the north-east; then the Illiri and Paleoveneti prevailed over them around year 1000 B.C. Around 400 B. C. also the Celts came (divided into four different tribes).

Thanks to its geographic configuration and to the historic events, Valcanale has become the cradle of different cultural traditions; the most prevalent being the German one. As an example it is sufficient to mention that on the occasion of the last Austrian census the population was defined as the following: 10 Italians, 6397 Germans and 1682 Slovenes.²⁵

Later, the annexation of the valley to Italy led to an unavoidable gradual ethnic- linguistic change, connected with the immigration of Italian and Friulan population in the valley.

The new political, administrative, cultural and religious reality caused a gradual integration and assimilation of the German component. In the period of the Second World War 8139 people emigrated from Valcanale.²⁶ This has strongly decreased the number of the autochthonous people together with a second Friulan immigrant movement.

With the restructuring of the municipalities in 1928 only three municipalities were left in the Valcanale: Tarvisio (with the country hamlets of Cave del Predil, Fusine, Caporosso and Coccau), Malborghetto-Valbruna (with Valbruna, Ugovizza, S.Caterina, Bagni di Lusnizza) and Pontebba (with S. Leopoldo, Aupa, Pietratagliata, Studena and Frattis). The last

²⁵ <http://www.isolelinguistiche.it/valcanale.page>

²⁶ <http://www.isolelinguistiche.it/valcanale.page>

population survey (2001) shows that the total population of Valcanale is of 7862 habitants; the population trend also influences of course the scholastic population.

3.1.5.2 Linguistic situation of the Valcanale

The Valcanale territory is characterised by the coexistence of languages belonging to three different language groups: the Slavic, the German and the Romance. The first one has been present on the territory since the end of the VI- beginning of the VII century. It presents different characteristics according to the different towns. Constant contacts with the German linguistic area have produced however a lexical evolution with strong Romance and German influences. The German varieties have been documented since the XIV century, and they belong to the Austrian-Bavarian group. All the original documents of the Valcanale area, (which are preserved in the different territorial offices), are written in German, which has been long the official language of the whole place. Also in this case, an interference is found, but more with the Romance than with the Slavic element. Nowadays, almost 20% of the population is recognized as having German origins.

As far as concerns the Romance group, Friulan and Italian came into the area only in recent times, with a strong increase from 1919, when the entire valley became part of Italy.

As regards the teaching in school, German has always been present in the scholastic system. It was the language of education until 1923-24 (reform Gentile) and then:

- from 1940 until 1972 it was offered as an afternoon optional course;
- 1973: there are courses open to all the pupils of the territory prior to the family's request (which was due to both sentimental and commercial reasons). Development of German is significant;
- from 1979 additional time has been introduced in the morning as an experimentation in the primary school whereas in the other schools afternoon courses have continued;
- 1990: German teaching is carried out by specialised teachers and is introduced inside specific modules, becoming part of the curriculum. This year the first didactic twinning between the primary schools of the two countries started. The aim is to “favour the

knowledge of the two cultures, developing feelings of friendship and collaboration over the boundary” ;²⁷

- 1993: first experiment of a bilingual path Italian-German in the nursery school of Malborghetto;
- 1995: *Arcobaleno Project* in the nursery school: an approach to German for 5 year-old children;
- 1996: three-year experimental project of German in the nursery schools;
- 1998: five-year project *Multiculture - Interculture- Plurilingualism* in the nursery school of Tarvisio Centrale “Gianni Rodari”;
- 2000: *Progetto continuità* between the nursery and the primary school.

Also Slovene has a long tradition in the teaching of the area, having being introduced in 1970 in afternoon extra scholastic courses for children. From 1997 it has been present in the primary schools through the *Progetto multiculturala* with the use of mother tongue teachers. In 1998 it was also introduced in the nursery school of Tarvisio Centrale.

Finally, Friulan language has recently been introduced in the school. In fact, since 1997 it has been taught in the primary schools, and since 1998 in the Rodari nursery school inside the multicultural project.

For many years, as Domenig (1997) blames in his essay “Oltre i confini della propria cultura”, the problem of the different cultures has been unexplored in the scholastic system, which left the culture of every ethnic component outside the school system. Therefore, since the '70s, the first contacts (firstly with the Austrian schools) have been made through to personal initiative of the teachers, in order to exploit the richness of the territory.

3.1.5.3 Territorial associations

The development of German in the Valcanale area has been possible thanks to personal engagement outside legislation. In fact, the few optional languages hours in the curriculum

²⁷ Kravina (1991:86): “a favorire la conoscenza delle rispettive culture, a sviluppare sentimenti di amicizia e di collaborazione oltre i confini...”

and the slow regulation, was not sufficient for the protection of the German minority language in the territory.

For this reason, in 1976 the cultural association “Kanaltaler Kulturverein” started its work, with the aim to propose and support social, cultural and educational initiatives to the promotion of the culture and values of the Valcanale, in the respect of all the linguistic-ethnic minorities. This association is apolitical and does not work for profit. The activities of the association aim to protect the linguistic and cultural heritage of the territory. It promotes many activities, among which editorial publications, and it cooperates with the schools, supporting projects involving German.

3.2 The actual situation of the German teaching in Italy

Eurydice (2011) shows that the state of German language teaching in Europe is more than positive. German is the most widely spoken language in Europe; German schools and universities are among the best in Europe and therefore have great appeal for foreign students and the German work market have great appeal for the foreigners. These are, according Eurydice, the reasons that account for an even greater interest and investment in the teaching of German in many European schools.

In Italy early language teaching has develop in the last years and English the language that is generally introduced at this stage. In the region Trentino Alto Adige, due to their geographical position, German has been taught in the nursery schools for many years.

Ricci Garotti²⁸ gives an important contribution stressing how often German is classified as a “difficult language” and therefore is not considered suitable for teaching in a nursery schools. Ricci Garotti states that the principle of the language at the service of educational and didactic activities does not change according to the language chosen. The expert explains that also German, like all languages and so without any discrimination, can be music, play, movement and joy in the context of the nursery school.

²⁸ Garotti Ricci, 2001, *Lingue straniere nella scuola dell’infanzia*.

In another work Ricci Garotti²⁹ states that the difficulties are inside the adult's mind, not in the child. Keywords in early teaching are *authenticity* (which implies also the presence of variety, authentic context and input redundant) and *interaction*, which makes the input understandable in the context. Other important factors are involvement, creativity and spontaneity; all these factors make the early teaching of every language possible.

3.3 The teaching of German in South Tyrol

Early education is a phenomenon on the increase, as has emerged in this dissertation. I have deeply searched in books, articles and in web materials that could indicate the state of early German teaching in Italy, and in fact it represents an important part of the educational system above all in the North Italy and more precisely in the region Trentino Alto Adige.

The Italian school in South Tyrol emerges as a specific reality: exploiting its position and the opportunities offered by its geographic and cultural reality, the school in the province of Bolzano proposes the ambitious aim of building of European identities into citizens.

The South Tyrolean school is defined in article 19 of the second statute of autonomy (D.P.R. 670/1972), in which as a system built up of three schools, one for every linguistic group which is present in the province is sketched. The same article establishes the right of the citizens to receive teaching in their own mother tongue and the duty of the teaching of the second language. The Italian school has been working to take initiatives for improving the teaching and learning of German as a second language, first of all with the elaboration of suitable programmes. Since the end of the '80s it has been clear that both the European scene and the local reality are rapidly changing. Therefore, families have asked for and obtained a law that guarantees an earlier and more intensive teaching of German as second language.

²⁹ Lucietto (a cura di), 2008, *Plurilinguismo e innovazione di sistema. Sfide e ricerche in ambito nazionale e internazionale*, IPRASE del Trentino, Trento.

The Italian nursery school does not provide for teaching of German, but as reported in the *Annali della pubblica istruzione*³⁰ some family associations obtained the setting up of projects for the familiarization with German; projects which were conducted outside the school timetable and which were managed by private agencies.

The *Linee Guida* of 1997 (D.G.P. n. 5053/1997) regularized this kind of approach to the German language and culture, fixing the teaching methodology and organizational criteria. For the first time “the elaboration of an experimental programme finalized to the approach of the second language in nursery school which involves children at the age of 5”³¹ was authorized.

After this, a new experimentation was introduced in the school year 1998/99. This was the *Progetto Pilota L2*, which involved more than 400 children, 10 schools of the province and 18 teachers.

3.3.1 The Progetto Pilota L2 (the L2 pilot project)

The *Progetto Pilota L2* was set up for the development of the approach to the German language and culture in the Italian nursery school. The project was introduced by the scholastic intendency of Bolzano with the following aims:³²

- definition of an approach to the German language and culture;
- definition of the methodological approach;
- definition of the didactic model;
- definition of the teachers’ professional profile.

Thanks to this project it was possible to outline the professional profile of the L2 teacher for the nursery school, the methodological approach and the linguistic-didactic model to follow in daily teaching. As described in detail in the description of the project³³ the teaching

³⁰ <http://www.annaliistruzione.it/> , 2006, “Le minoranze linguistiche in Italia nella prospettiva dell’educazione plurilingue”.

³¹ D.G.P. n. 5053/1997: “l’elaborazione di un programma sperimentale finalizzato all’approccio della seconda lingua nelle scuole materne in lingua italiana che coinvolga i bambini di 5 anni di età”.

³² <http://www.emscuola.org>

³³ <http://www.emscuola.org>

approach is based on the concept of “open curriculum”, which requires that children introduce their experiences and abilities in the activities. Contact with the other language should become a normal, daily phenomenon. In fact, the L2 teacher is present the whole day.

Contact with the children is divided between structured and opened units. In the former, the teacher works with small groups of 10-12 children in a specific room in order to favour the identity's building through the components language, person and space. During the open units, on the contrary, the teacher is with all children, in order to establish a personal relationship with them.

By the end of the *Progetto Pilota* in 2001, this teaching approach has been extended gradually to all schools of the province.

3.3.2 The school system in the province of Bolzano

The school system in the province of Bolzano is new because in this territory three school systems, which differ in terms of the linguistic-cultural profile and the administrative-operational one, interact.

In order to understand the local scholastic system better, a brief reflection on the history of this territory is useful.

The Tyrol belonged to the Habsburg Dynasty from the 1363 until the First World War. The historic Tyrol includes the areas of the current Austrian Tyrol, of the current South Tyrol (Bolzano's province) and of the current province of Trento.

In 1586 a *Tiroler Schulordnung* was issued for the regulation of the educational system and during the Enlightenment compulsory schooling was established.

Statistics³⁴ show that at the beginning of the 20th century, the literacy rate was of 98% in Tyrol, which is a very high percentage for that period. After 1918, with the fall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the situation changed drastically.

With the Treaty of San Germain (1919) the Brennero's border was assigned to Italy, without any condition about the protection of the German minority. Tyrol was divided into two parts. Fascist policy aimed to assimilate the German citizens to the Italian from the

³⁴ <http://www.emscuola.org/>

linguistic and cultural point of view, through massive Italian settlements; with the imposition of an Italian monolingual toponymy; with the prohibition of the use of German in public administration and above all the prohibition of its use and teaching in the schools.

The reaction of the Tyrolese population was to try to safeguard their mother tongue. Private schools for the teaching of and in German were created. However, these schools were forbidden and persecuted; therefore the teaching became hidden. With the end of the war the school system was modified. The first step towards reconstruction was the reinstatement of German into the school. A year later an international agreement was signed in Paris which protected the German minority. Among its principal points, it states that:

“German mother tongue citizens of the province of Bolzano and of Trento will enjoy the complete rights’ equality as Italian mother tongue inhabitants (...) to German speaking citizens the primary and secondary teaching in their mother tongue will be guaranteed (...)”³⁵

In this period a specific scholastic system for German schools was realized, which established the use of German in all disciplines and the compulsory teaching of Italian as a second language. During this period many laws and norms were promulgated by the Italian Govern and by the Parliament in order to restore the German school.

The strengthening and organization of both compulsory education and high schools happened with the coming into force of the new statute of autonomy, called the *Pacchetto*. This document contains norms directing the institutional relationship between the State and the Trentino Alto Adige region, giving to the region and to the provinces of Trento and Bolzano specific competences and autonomy. Article 19 of the statute states:

“In the province of Bolzano teaching in nursery schools, in the primary and secondary schools is carried on in the mother tongue (Italian or German) of the pupils by teachers who share the same mother tongue”.³⁶ The same article also specifies norms for the Ladin schools.

³⁵ “Gli abitanti di lingua tedesca della provincia di Bolzano e quelli dei vicini comuni bilingui della provincia di Trento, godranno di completa uguaglianza di diritti rispetto agli abitanti di lingua italiana(...) ai cittadini di lingua tedesca sarà specialmente concesso:

a) l’insegnamento primario e secondario nella loro lingua materna(...)”

³⁶ “Nella Provincia di Bolzano l’insegnamento nelle scuole materne, elementari e secondarie è impartito nella lingua materna italiana o tedesca degli alunni da docenti per i quali tale lingua sia ugualmente quella materna.”

Nowadays, the national school reforms are followed but the province can exercise its powers both in the field of the primary and the secondary legislation.

IV. The research

After this general overview, my attention focuses on two specific arguments which represent the research questions of this paper: the early teaching of German minority languages and the early German teaching in Tarvisian schools. The choice of this precise place is due to its exceptional geographical position, which has favoured since the '70s a particular attention to the teaching of the language and also to the collaboration among the three states which meet on the boundary.

4.1 Aims

The general aim of this research is to explore the situation of early German teaching in Italy. This focus has been then narrowed to consider Northern Italy and in particular the Trentino Alto Adige region, being its historic and linguistic situation strictly bound with German since ever. The last step of this research is to consider the specific aspects of early German teaching following two different research lines.

The aims of the research are:

- For German minority languages: to analyse a teaching situation that is not widespread and well known in our country. In particular, we want to understand if and how German minority languages are promoted and protected in schools and what their teaching's aims are since nursery school. Interesting is to discover how they are taught and if positive results have been noticed through the projects.
- For the Tarvisian schools: to collect data concerning the experience of the area, focusing in particular on a specific nursery school, which works every day for the promotion of plurilingualism and which is also part of an exchange project with Austria and Slovenia. This last project is analysed with the aim to understand precisely in what the project consists of and to investigate the methodology used in language teaching and the reaction of children towards the projects.

4.2 Research questions

The research questions at the basis of this research are differentiated according the two different situations analysed.

For the Germanic minority languages the questions are:

- why are German minority languages taught in nursery schools?;
- how are German minority languages taught in nursery schools? (methodology and nature of the proposed projects);
- what are the aims of these projects and have they been reached?

The answers have been collected starting from a general analysis of the situation, concentrating then on the specific project characteristics of the area.

The questions for the “Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis” project in Tarvisio are:

- how does the project develop?;
- which methodology is used in the teaching of the foreign languages? (German, Slovenian);
- in what way does the didactic behaviour of the teachers change when they teach in the other countries participating in the project?;
- what are the children’s reactions towards a plurilingual teaching approach?

4.3 Data collection

The data requested for this analysis are of diverse nature. In order to offer a contextualisation of the projects I have searched for data concerning the historic, geographical, linguistic and scholastic background of the considered territories.

I searched then for specific data concerning the schools where projects interesting for my purpose were promoted. In this case, I needed data regarding the school organisation and then

in specific regarding the nature of the projects, their organisation, the methodology used and also the reaction of the subjects involved.

4.4 The tools required for data collection

The data were collected through:

- research of material both in paper format and on line;
- telephone interviews;
- written interviews;
- face to face interviews with the subjects involved.

I spent a whole day in *G. Rodari* nursery school in Tarvisio, in order to collect material and to interview the teachers taking part in the projects.

I prepared a questionnaire, which was followed as a guide for the interviews. The same questionnaire was sent via e-mail to the teachers absent at the moment of my visit.

The questionnaire is reported in the appendix together with the one used for the interviews for the collection of materials for German minority languages.

4.5 Analysing data and materials

The analysis of the data aims to understand how the various projects are articulated, whether they can be an example for other school initiatives, if they reached the initial objectives, what methodology is used and what the reaction are of these involved subjects.

The analysis was made:

- For Germanic minority languages: the historic and linguistic situation and a picture about the school situation have been already given in the previous chapter; now the single projects involving nursery schools are proposed, based on the material found and on the answers given to the interviews, with the aim to answer the research questions.

- For the Tarvisian schools: the background of the whole territory (the Valcanale) has already been offered. Now, the school situation is analysed (on the base of the collected material) and at the end a great part is given up to *G. Rodari* school, to its work and the *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis* project. The organisation of the school is delineated from the material offered by the teachers and from the interviews with them. The running of the “Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis” project is delineated from the printed material and from written and personal interviews. I am not going to give back every single answer to every question, but I have made together the various answers. In the description, examples of school activities are introduced, given by and with the consensus of the teachers.

4.6 Subjects involved in the research

As regards the part concerning the minority languages, I have contacted many people and institutions; schools in the towns where the minority languages are spoken and the Culture Institutes which represent, protect and promote the own minority language. Therefore, the collected data are the results of written or telephonic interviews with people who have been answered the above reported questions.

The data have been gathered in this way for the Walser, Cimbrian and Plodarisch minority, whereas for the Mòcheno the data have mainly been taken from publications and other material.

As far as concerns the project in Tarvisio, the subjects involved are mainly the teachers, who kindly answered through personal or written interviews. The children are indirectly subjects of the analysis, as their role, their reactions and their results have been communicated and described by the teachers and shown through the auxiliary of the works produced during the lessons.

V. The teaching of minority Germanic languages in Italy: Research outcomes (I)

This chapter deals with the Germanic minority languages. The research and the interviews with experts of the language teaching aim to answer the research questions, which are the following:

- why are German minority languages taught in nursery schools?;
- how are German minority languages taught in nursery schools? (methodology and nature of the proposed projects);
- what are the aims of these projects and have they been reached?

The outcomes are presented in the following way: we answer each research questions classifying the answer in sub-categories, which correspond to each minority language considered in the research (Walser, Cimbrian, Mòcheno and Plodarisch).

5.1 Why are Germanic minority languages taught in nursery schools?

The analysis of the data that respond to our research question are introduced from the description of the current situation of language teaching in nursery schools in the towns we are considering in our analysis. The information is taken from written material, but the majority is the result of the interviews with the local cultural institutes and schools.

5.1.1 Walser in nursery school

Many projects involving the German and the Walser language take place most of all in continuity between the nursery and the primary school. An example is the project *Colori Carta e Cartoni*, which emphasise the Walser minority through the production of a cartoon.

Another project is *Die kleine Raupe Nimmersatt*; again a project in continuity between the nursery, primary and secondary school. This project regards the German language and consists in the comprehension and analysis of a book, chosen by the teacher. Comprehension is guided through different activities according to the school level.

I interviewed via telephone the teacher of German and Walser in the nursery schools of Issime, Gressoney-Saint-Jean and Gressoney-La-Trinitè (and also in the primary school of Gressoney). She is mother tongue and belongs to the extra staff of the school.

The region invests a lot in the dialect minority; the teacher had in fact first the task to teach the Walser minorities, but the single school decided that it was better to teach German. The original idea (proposed by the region) was a sort of team teaching in which a translation Titsch- Italian had to take place. The teachers did not agree and therefore another solution has been found. In this way, the expert assigned by the region has been moved to the nursery schools and more hours were at disposal in the *scuola media* for German lessons.

Resuming, this teacher teaches German in all the nursery schools; but in Gressoney she also teaches in Titsch, whereas in Issime only German is taught, as the teacher does not know the local Walser minority language. In fact, the dialects are different and it is difficult for its speakers to understand each other; German is in these cases preferred.

The interviewee finds that it is better to teach German, because the children can learn their own dialect at home with their parents and families in a natural way; while German is less spoken in daily life and it is good if it is taught from the infancy.

In Saint-Jean coordination is even more difficult, as the interviewee explains, as here also Patois is an important part of the local heritage and many hours in the school are dedicated to the study of French. The financing coming from Law 482/99 are assigned to the administration of Issime, and being a sort of competition and rivalry between the local communities, there is not much collaboration to exploit to the best this support.

5.1.2 Cimbri in nursery school

Emigration has had a great impact on the school. At the beginning of the XX century, in fact, two schools were present in this small community (in one Italian was the medium language and in the other German), while nowadays there are few pupils going in the local nursery and primary schools.

The statute of autonomy allows for the teaching of German culture and language and the Cimbrian minority benefits from the rights coming from the Legislative Decree 321/97. In nursery schools, the use of Cimbrian is guaranteed by the L.P. 18/87 and many projects are financed and supported. The nursery and the primary schools are situated in the town and therefore children have at least a passive competence of the language. The *scuola media* is instead outside the town, and so it is attended by many pupils who do not have any competence in the language. As a consequence it is more difficult to propose the minority language at this school level. Finally, German has been taught for many years in the primary school as a medium teaching.

5.1.3 Mòcheni in nursery school

The regional Law assures and invests in Mòcheno teaching beginning at nursery school level, with the aim to preserve the local language and transmit it to the new generations. The presence of a mother tongue teacher is guaranteed and the educational programming aims at the plurilingual development of the children. At the same time, there is also an important investment in the German language, which is in fact present in the nursery schools through lessons held during the year. The information which I am going to discuss are taken mainly from written material about the current teaching situation regarding Mòcheno and also from experimentation made directly in the nursery school.

5.1.4 Plodarisch in nursery school

In accordance with the municipality of Sappada and the institute “S. Stefano di Cadore”, since 2010 the Plodar association has organised Plodarisch lessons in nursery schools, assigning this task to a mother-tongue expert (who is however not a teacher). The lessons are financed with Regional Law 73/94. The teaching involves four-and five year-old children, whose families have expressed their favour through the filling of a questionnaire.

The aim pursued is the need to let children know their original culture, support the families in the teaching of the local varieties and at the same time to widen the formative offer of the

school. The projects aim to spread through language aspects of the local culture; to make the children acquire words and sentences in Plodarisch and to build a link between school and the local linguistic reality.

5.2 How are Germanic minority languages taught in nursery schools? (methodology and nature of the proposed projects)

5.2.1 Walser

The following information has been collected through the auxiliary of much written material and through interviews with the Walser and German teacher of the local schools.

German is taught 2 hours per week and the educational programming corresponds to that one of the first class in primary school (numbers, colour, animals, and body). The instruments used are cds, music, visual material, games, nursery rhymes and songs. The teacher tries to make children speak in German as much as possible; the activities are mainly play-like ones. Grammar is not introduced in the nursery school, even though the teacher explains that she tries to approach the children gradually to it.

Every year a personage is chosen, which is present for the whole scholastic year: this year it was the personage of Heidi.

Some activities are made in Titsch, for example children have been guided in the creation of a book. Most of the activities in Titsch are however made on occasion of festivities or particular events; although some topics such as numbers or colours are done every year also in this language. Other examples of activities are nursery rhymes or songs translated by the teacher from German. What has to be stressed is that these activities are occasional and that in general teaching is conducted in German.

5.2.2 Cimbri

The following information has been collected through the auxiliary of much written material and through interviews with the director of the Cimbrian institute, who is also a Cimbrian teacher.

Teaching of Cimbrian in the nursery school has been a reality for years and it is spreading also through a continuity project with the crèche (this project applies to children in the age group 0-6 years). There are few children (5 for the crèche, 3 for the nursery school); therefore the working together is fostered.

The provincial committee gave € 16.650,00 in 2011 to the Kulturinstitut Lusérn for its project *Integration of activities in the nursery school for the teaching of the Cimbrian language*. This initiative has the aim of introducing children to the comprehension of the language. The project has been active since 2005.

For both the regular teaching in the nursery school and the teaching inside the *Continuity Project* a mother tongue expert is available (from the Cimbrian institute) 3 hours per day, working together with an Italian teacher, who can also understand Cimbrian, supporting the activity. The teachers collaborate in the children's work, with the children sometimes divided in groups according to their age and sometimes working all together. What emerges from this picture is that the exposure to the language is very natural. In some activities the children are totally absorbed by Cimbrian, for example in the realisation of theatre plays.

The approach used is a play-like one and the activities aim to generate interest and the involvement of the children, guiding them in the acquisition of the language. The reactions are positive and according to the interviewee there are no difficulties: Cimbrian is still part of the daily life of children, who are therefore accustomed to the sound of the language and to its use.

Other activities involve children outside the school:

- every Saturday (for the whole year) an expert of the Cimbrian Institute helps the children with their homework and proposes play-like activities involving all the children (always using the Cimbrian language);
- during the summer two activities are proposed involving the children according their age:
 - 2 experts of the centre propose to children from 3 to 6 years activities in the language (6weeks in the period July-August)
 - Children 7-13 years participate in the *colonia estiva* (4 weeks between July and August), where there is a natural exposition to the language and at the same time the possibility for the children to socialize with their peers.

5.2.3 Mòcheni

Mòcheno is present mainly in the nursery school of Fierozzo. Here it is not bound to the realization of a single project; on the contrary it is a constant throughout the whole year.

Mòcheno is always used at the moment of the arrival at school, for the calling of the register, after which nursery rhymes or songs in Mòcheno take place. Mòcheno is then used in the moments of the snack and the lunch by the teacher in order to give indications to children and to present the menu of the day. What emerges is that in these situations Mòcheno is present mainly in a passive way, since spontaneous production by children is rarely noticed. Mòcheno is then present in more specific situations of the school activity, represented by laboratories in which children are divided in groups and work with the mother tongue teacher. The methodology used is game-like; children approach the language through songs, nursery rhymes, fairy tales and game activities.

The teaching of German follows the same line, through the use of songs, nursery rhymes and games. The lessons take place two times per week in small groups of children.

5.2.4 Plodarisch

The information has been collected through a questionnaire that was sent to both the school and the association; the answer came by the councillor for the culture of the town, being the responsible of teaching in nursery school.

Derzeilmer ana geschichte project (2009-2010)

This first project consisted in the teaching of Plodarisch 1 hour per week from January until May, and the educational programming organised lessons in which stories and fairy tales have been told in Plodarisch. The programme was then modified, as children did not easily understand and as a consequence they got easily distracted. The change consisted in approaching general arguments such as family, body, clothes, house, animals and environment, weather, day-months-seasons, food and cooking, numbers and colours in the local language. Children were divided into small groups and the approach generally used was play-like, through the use of games, nursery rhymes and songs.

Learner Plodarisch project (2010-2011)

The project consisted also in this school year in an hour of the teaching of Plodarisch per week for five month. Children were divided into two groups dealing topics such as: how to introduce themselves, colours, animals, months and seasons, the main festivities, body, clothes and the town; typical Plodarisch songs and nursery rhymes. The approach was still game-like, and more attention was paid to the structure of the lessons: the first step is observation and listening, then repetition and finally some games in order to reward children and at the same time to test their comprehension.

Learner Plodarisch project (2011-2012)

As for the previous school-years the project consists in the teaching of Plodarisch 1 hour per week in a period lasting four months. Children are divided in two groups:

- the first (beginners) deals with themes such as numbers, colours, days of the week, seasons, hours, animals and clothes;
- the second (advanced) deals with themes such as the ways to introduce yourself and others; they learn how to speak about their family, to count and finally they deal with some festivities, introducing customs, nursery rhymes and recipes.

The activities are always proposed following the play-like approach in order to capture the attention and the interest of children and in order to make them interact through verbal re-elaboration of the received input, through games and activities.

5.3 What are the aims of these projects and have they been reached?

5.3.1 Walser

What emerges from the interview and the material is that the teaching of German is favoured over the teaching of Walser, although many initiatives and projects focus on the protection and promotion of the local varieties. The aim is to avoid the loss of an important heritage of the territory and to keep the language alive in the new generations. In the nursery schools of the towns, the aim is to encourage children to the teaching of Walser, to not feel ashamed to use their dialect and at the same time to encourage and start as early as possible the approach to German in order to guarantee school continuity between the school levels.

The reaction of children is positive towards the teaching of German. They do not complain and they are not afraid of the activities. Also parents and the other teachers react positively. Children do not have any negative reaction towards Titsch. However, the teacher finds that, as German and Titsch are very similar, children tend to have some difficulties and to create

confusion between them. For this reason, she just promotes the teaching of German in the school, leaving the task of teaching Titsch to the family environment.

5.3.2 *Cimbri*

The aims of the projects involving the Cimbrian are to strengthen the knowledge and the use of Cimbrian and to strengthen the personal and collective identity of children to be part of the community of Luzern. The institute is very active in promoting the publication of works, grammars and magazines in Cimbrian, in organizing courses for all ages and in promoting the improvement and the learning of the German language, collaborating with the branches of the Goethe Institute in Germany.

The results in these years have been positive; the children have always reacted positively and with curiosity towards the use of the second language. The aims have been reached, although it is difficult to guarantee a learning continuity with the upper school levels.

5.3.3. *Mòcheno*

The reactions of children are in general positive towards the use of the language. However, what emerges from a study hold in a nursery school³⁷ is that the results of the Mòcheno teaching are quite disappointing. In fact, the development of the language is more passive than active; furthermore the use of the language is not constant and does not move from the situation of the routines. The expert believes that there should be more place for Mòcheno in order to ensure the children a gradual acquisition of the language; the condition for this is a new organization in the school activity.

³⁷ Cognola F., 2010, “L’acquisizione della sintassi della lingua mòchena”

5.3.4 *Plodarisch*

The aims of the projects are to valorise and protect the local language and to widen it among the more young. The outcomes show that in the first year of experimentation children who already could speak/understand the Plodarisch variety had no difficulty, whereas the others were easily distracted and showed little interest; this was also due to the fact that lessons were in the afternoon, when the children were tired.

In the second year the reactions were quite positive, as a good level of learning took place. However some difficulty was encountered, such as the fact that the group was not homogenous as regards both the knowledge and the interest shown in the activities.

In the third experience the reactions were positive and what has been noticed in the course of the years is that the previous experiences had helped to improve and to obtain better achievements in the following years.

VI. German teaching in Tarvisio and the case of “G. Rodari” nursery school: research outcomes (II)

Before reporting the results of the research and analysis of the *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis project*, I propose an introduction and contextualisation of this project. The information has been gathered through data in books and on-line materials, but is in great part the result of the meeting with the teachers of the nursery school, who explained the organisation of their school in details.

6.1. The current situation of language teaching in schools

The presence on the territory of languages of Romance, Slavic and German origins allows for the realisation of a project to emphasize the multilingual composition of Valcanale. The cultural and linguistic peculiarities of the territory have favoured the establishment of experiences coming from intercultural pedagogy and the teaching of modern languages, which focus on the comparison between different languages and cultures, through teacher training and attention to a teaching methodology which aims at the development of the child's competence in the language. Therefore, the school context aims to create teaching units which follow a horizontal continuity with the territory and a vertical one with the different school levels that follow.

Law n. 59 of 1999 opened new perspectives to promote regional and territorial peculiarities. For many years Tarvisian schools have chosen multiculturalism, interculturality and plurilingualism as a territorial value.

The projects followed by the schools of this area want to enhance the cultural, ethnic and linguistic heritage and variety of the territory, preventing one cultural reality prevailing over the others. As is highlighted in the essay “Educazione plurilingue precoce: l'esperienza della Valcanale”³⁸, the schools want to open “multicultural sceneries starting from the daily

³⁸ In *Utilizzo di codici materni in comunità multilingue*, Atti del Seminario di Studi di Cortina d'Ampezzo, 2000.

environment, in order to get the pupils to know, recover and use the territorial values and in order not to lose the historic identities of the children.”³⁹

All this is pursued by the nursery school, which contributes, together with primary school, to the building of the child’s personality. Not only are the acquisition of abilities and communicative, expressive, logical and operative competences pursued, but also the development of the cognitive, emotional, social and moral components of the personality, in the perspective of “the building of free people, responsible and actively participant to the community's life, such as to the national and international one.”⁴⁰

It has already been emphasized that the realisation of an experimental project for the teaching of German language in Tarvisian nursery schools appears like an educational answer to the Valcanale's needs. In fact, for almost 10% of the children, German is the mother tongue, whereas for the others it is a second language.

German teaching involves all the pupils of the six nursery schools of the territory. The organisation in the schools is different, and therefore the activities are customised to the various needs.

The group of children shows interest for the activities proposed by the German teacher, and is gaining good results as regards pronunciation, the repetition and dramatization of easy stories, nursery rhymes, songs and poems. The positive results are obtained also thanks to the collaboration of the entire teacher, as during the week also the Italian teacher gets the children to repeat the activities in German. The children show enjoyment, curiosity but sometimes also puzzlement, especially the youngest.

The educational programming by the German teacher integrates to the planning of each school.

³⁹ Atti del Seminario di Studi di Cortina d’Ampezzo, 2000 (page 75): “aprire gli scenari multiculturali partendo dall’ambiente quotidiano di vita, per far conoscere, recuperare e utilizzare le ricchezze territoriali e familiari e per non disperdere l’identità storica dei bambini che vivono in questo territorio”.

⁴⁰ Atti del Seminario di Studi di Cortina d’Ampezzo, 2000 (page 76): “Nella prospettiva della formazione di soggetti liberi, responsabili e attivamente partecipi alla vita della comunità locale, nazionale ed internazionale”

The activities proposed range from short dramatizations to nursery rhymes and from songs and poems to plays, which are thought up, adapted or chosen according to the syllabus of each nursery school, trying not to repeat what has been already done by the colleagues in the children's mother tongue, but rather complementing their work.

The approach to German aims not only for language acquisition, but also for "the general education of the child, promoting the development of his/her communicative, social, emotional skills and the ability to collaborate, by helping the child in this way to gain awareness of his/her personal and cultural identity".⁴¹

Tributsch stresses the "body and movement" field of experience as fundamental. In fact, Bruner (1968) states that children must pass through sensorial perceptions and a complete representation, in which they themselves act, in order to reach a symbolic representation. Therefore, both linguistic and action tasks are carried out entirely in German with the help of such mediators as rhythm, intonation and mimicry. These activities are repeated in the course of the year, in order to stabilize language acquisition. Other materials include audio-visual media, materials built by the children, objects belonging to the German culture which become linguistic vehicles, and reports aiming at evaluating the work.

6.2 Language teaching in this territory

The idea of a shared educational project between the three neighbouring territories goes back more than thirty years, when some teachers shared the belief of the importance of exploiting the characteristics of the territory where they lived. The first initiatives were in fact spontaneous, unpaid, and took place beyond school time. Since the first approach, teachers noticed that children were able to decode the other languages from the context, and that they had an amazing skill in adapting themselves to the use of the different languages. These initial, spontaneous interventions followed the first ministerial projects, *ASCANIO* and *ALICE projects*. The first one led to school reorganization, allowing the maximum exploitation of

⁴¹ Tributsch, A. (1997:155) : "cerca di educare il bambino nella sua globalità, favorendo lo sviluppo di capacità comunicative e socializzanti, affettive, di comprensione dell'altro e di capacità collaborative, avviando il bambino stesso a prendere coscienza della propria identità personale e culturale".

team teaching (with the aim to use both languages at the same time). The principle was not that of the language class, but that languages should characterize the whole school activities and become part of everyday life.

An important project, which also included Friulan, is the *Sentieri project*.

6.2.1 The Rete Sentieri project

The *Sentieri network* is one of the most active and important project deriving from Law 482/99. From the first year of activation (2001-2002) the schools participating in the project presented numerous proposals. The network includes eleven schools and many minority languages (Friulan, Resiano, Slovene, German, Ladin, Plodarich, Saurano and Timavese). The decision of how to invest the financial support coming from the state was taken collaboratively. These funds are invested in: ⁴²

- teacher upskilling;
- employment of mother tongue teachers;
- employment of external experts;
- documentation of the activities;
- meetings, exchanges of experiences among teachers and the classrooms;
- production of materials;
- creation of the website “www.retesentieri.org”, in which it is possible to share the experiences;
- purchase of materials.

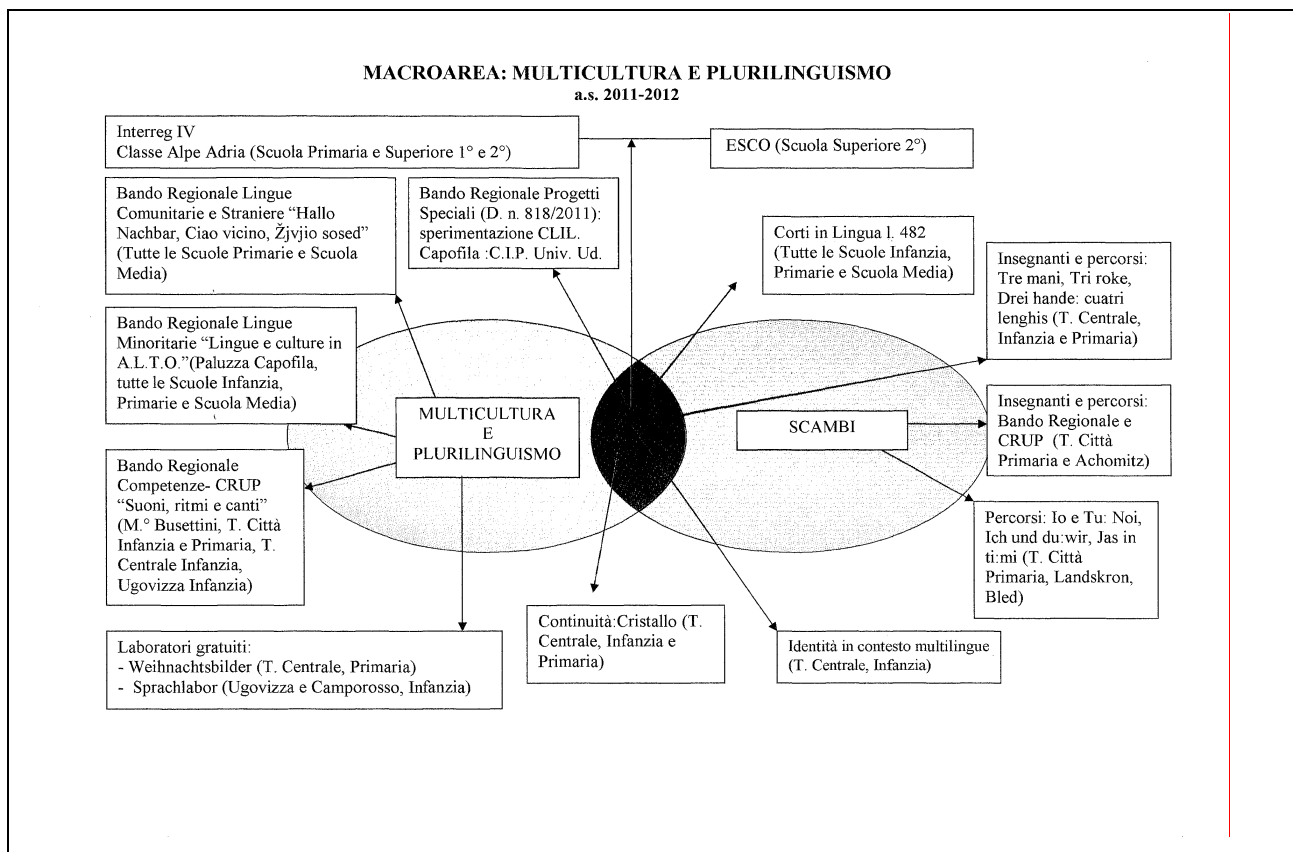
For many years Tarvisio has been the lead school of the network, whereas at the moment it is the school of Gemona. In the “Quaderni della Direzione Generale per gli Ordinamenti Scolastici e per l'Autonomia Scolastica” it is reported that in the first year the projects proposed focused more on culture than on language, that the projects had not been clearly outlined, and that the connections among the various schools of the network were not clearly defined. But from school-year 2004-2005 the quality of the projects has improved, and they

⁴² In *Lingue di minoranza e scuola a dieci anni dalla Legge 482/99*, 2010

have begun to focus more on the linguistic area. Also the network of connections, the role of each school and of its tasks has now become more clearly defined. From the experiences of these years, and the project documentation about it, it is clear that the evaluation of the Sentieri project is very positive. Two main reasons are indicated as positive contributions of the network. One central office manages the projects, and therefore the administrative work is reduced and there is more space for didactic planning. The second one is that the network strengthens the unity between the schools and promotes the value of the working together.

6.2.2 Bachmann's school educational offer (POF)

The "POF" is the identity card of a school and contains all the information about the school organisation and the guidelines for the teaching activities. It is divided in macro areas concerning the different aspects of teaching, and in a specific point of the document the list of all the school projects is proposed. For our discussion the macro area "Multiculture" is important. Under this label all the projects concerning this theme are listed, together with all the technical information regarding them and a brief description. The list includes all the projects for all school levels. A distinction is made between the projects financed by the region, and those projects included in the exchanges among the three countries. The following is the map produced by the teachers which collects the projects, clarifying also the above mentioned distinction.



Taken from the POF of "I. Bachmann" – school year 2011-2012

The different projects share the same background: the importance of intercultural and multiculturalism, the promotion of the local languages, and of cultural exchanges. They involve all the school levels, from nursery to secondary school, where many projects sponsored by the European Union take place.

Also in the crèche, language learning has been introduced over the last few years. In this case formal teaching is not involved, but rather an approach to the different sounds. In fact, it has been noticed that two and three-year-old children begin to reproduce the acquired sounds.

The most significant projects carried out in each school level are listed below:

Nursery school:

- *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis project;*

- exchanges with the school of Arnoldstein. It is not a project and it is not supported by the state, but it is supported by the two schools;
- workshops with the experts available from the local language associations.

Primary school:

- *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis project*;
- exchanges;
- workshops.

Scuola media:

- *Alpeadria*: activities and exchanges between the region Friuli Venezia Giulia, Austria and Slovenia;
- exchanges;
- workshops.

At secondary school (*scuola media*) level the organisation is different because there is less flexibility. Nevertheless, language teaching is pursued also through the realisation of CLIL modules in German, and over the last few years also the Slovene is taught within a COMENIUS project.

High school:

- *ESCO project*: It is a new project, which intends to create an international educational offer between Austria, Italy and Slovenia. The project is financed by the programme of European territorial cooperation Interreg IV Italy- Austria 2007-2013. The main aim of the activities is to create an experimental teaching curriculum across borders for a future “Alpe-Adria” class. In this way students will be able to spend some time and attend some modules in the three states, thus enriching their linguistic, cultural, personal and cognitive competence.

The project includes the involvement not only of the schools but of the whole social, cultural and economic contexts, in order to build a real European region. It also includes numerous training activities for the teachers of the three countries, in order to promote common modules, involving the fields of language, science and technology, mathematics, human sciences, sport and arts.

- exchanges;
- workshops.

6.3 G. Rodari nursery school

All the nursery schools of Valcanale deal with the safeguard of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the territory, suggesting various projects from early infancy. The peculiarity of the *Rodari* nursery school in Tarvisio Centrale is that the first exchanges and the first attempts at shared educational programming began between the '70s and the '80s, firstly with the colleagues of the Austrian kindergartens and later also with the Slovenian ones. The school does not participate in one sole project, but has created its own projects over the years, which guide its daily educational offer. The innovation is represented by the use of the territorial languages in the daily teaching with the aim to create a multilingual curriculum. The teachers believe in the potentiality of the context in which the school lies and in the importance of exploiting it.

6.3.1 The school educational programme

The educational programme of the school is the following:

1. “*L’identità in un contesto multilingue*” (duration: three-years.)

It is the project which has characterised the school for many years. It includes the territorial, linguistic, traditional and environmental aspects, which are determined every year in collaboration with experts, local associations and the children's parents. As the Ministry of Education does not assign foreign language teaching posts at nursery school level, the realisation of these projects is related to the *Multiculture Macroarea* of the POF.

Other sub-projects belong to the project described above:

- a) the annual school project, which declines the precedent one during the specific school year.
- b) *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis* project. It is the project based on teachers' exchanges among the schools of the three countries which will be discussed later in detail.

The links to the POF concerning the area “Multiculture” are the following:

2. *Corti in lingua* according to Law 482/99 (the former *Sentieri* project);
3. *Bandi regionali* for a broader educational offer which can promote different projects involving languages, such as the sharing of traditions and the building of a plurilingual choir.
4. Exchanges projects with the private kindergarten of Arnoldstein.

There are also projects involving the exchange of young trainee teachers (students from the Pedagogic Academy and the University of Klagenfurt, from the Superior Institute of Linz, from the University of Lubiana and from the faculty of “Scienze della formazione primaria” of Udine).

6.3.1.1 L'identità in un contesto multiculturale

This project is the core of the school and represents further research for the valorisation of the local cultural heritage and for the building of the children's identity within the socio-linguistic and environmental context of Tarvisio. What is meant with the expression “identity building” for the teachers is the process that leads children to the development of their own talents and to self-expression, first through self-identification and then through a process of differentiation from the s which allows the development of personal abilities. This three-year-long project involves all the children, teachers and all the staff of the nursery school, the parents, the experts, the associations, the administrations and all the institutions of the Italian, Slovenian and German territories.

The educational programming of the school includes the knowledge and sharing of languages and cultures. The educational projects of the various schools have been programmed through the analysis of their organizational models. Interculture and plurilinguism are the qualifying characteristic of the project.

6.3.1.2 *The school project*⁴³

The educational programming of *G. Rodari* school starts from the choice of a concept which will guide the whole school year. Around this concept a conceptual map is drawn, in which teachers explain what that concept means for each of them, on the basis of a certain field of experience and its corresponding developmental aims (cognitive and relational aspects). For example, the aims of the field of experience “knowledge of the world” are the acquisition of the concept of quantity, the ability of observation, classification and recognition, making comparisons and orientation in daily life. The field of experience “words and discourses” deals with the phonological, lexical, articulatory and morphosyntactic aspects.

All these cognitive, social, relational and linguistic aims can be reached through an educational path built around every theme.

The questions which the teachers ask themselves before the planning and which guide the didactic approach are:

1. How is it possible to introduce at nursery school the linguistic components which allow the exchange of different points of view, the comparison of interpretations and their negotiation?
2. How can the individual and collective process of knowledge building be supported?
3. How can the components of the fields of experience be contextualized in the school reality? Which experiences could be put into action?

⁴³ The following information are taken from the material given by the teachers of the school, which includes the educational programming, maps and schemes of the organization, examples of the activities made.

The concept chosen for the last school-year (2011- 2012) was exploration, which was outlined following Popper's theories and which was contextualized in the everyday didactic practice through the single fields of experience. The aims were:

- planning motivating language learning paths in a view of learning continuity;
- helping children approach the anthropological, linguistic, historic and cultural aspects of their area, starting from their own experiences and letting them explore the context and surrounding environment.

The single specific aims are then determined in each field of experience.

6.3.1.3 The Cristallo project

The building of a model of continuity between nursery and primary school which tends to plurilinguism follows a didactic approach based on the children's experiences in their daily life and on the sharing of experiences between the two school grades. The innovation of the Tarvisian nursery school (in addition to the use of all languages of the area in the daily relational and didactic context) is the realisation of this didactic continuity for the elaboration of a multilingual curriculum.

The objectives are:

- the singling out of shared curricular and organizational strategies;
- the realisation of multilingual units;
- the building of a common planning and of common evaluation criteria, curricula, materials for the children, reflection and research paths and the promotion of teacher exchanges.

The didactic organisation is flexible, and teaching is divided in modules. The content and cognitive aspects of the fields of experience and of the disciplinary areas are conveyed through the different languages. The *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis* project involves the two school grades which also share many experiences in the course of the year.

6.3.2 *The school organisation*

The project team is made up of:

- 4 Italian mother tongue teachers (one for twelve and a half hours per week and three for twenty-five hours per week);
- 2 Friulan mother tongue teachers (one for twelve and a half hours per week and three for twenty-five hours per week);
- 1 Slovene mother tongue teacher (for four hours per week with the youngest group of children – “piccoli”);
- 1 Slovene mother tongue teacher (for six hours per week in the *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis* project);
- 1 German mother tongue teacher (for four hours per week with the youngest group of children – “piccoli”);
- 1 German mother tongue teacher (for six hours per week in the *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis* project).

The teacher organization is very clear and structured, as the educational programming is. The teachers have a timetable that is defined as follows in order to guarantee the team teaching and to guarantee simultaneous work in different workshops:

- two teachers from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m.
- four teachers from 10 a.m. to 12
- two teachers from 12 to 4 p.m.

A typical school day is organised as follows:

8-9 am: reception; calendar.

Every day begins with the “calendario”, which is done in the four languages (one language per day). This activity is important because it involves the constant repetition of language items linked to week days, seasons, weather, weekly activities and numbers (the children count themselves too).

9.30 am: song or play (in the four languages), snack.

10.00 am: the children take part in the workshops. The workshops correspond to the fields of experience. Every group participates in a different workshop every week in order to work in the different fields of experience. The mother tongue teachers (whose teaching hours are 9-11.30 a.m.) work with the groups of children in the various workshops. The mother tongue teachers never work alone, but the class teacher is always present (as a reference for the children and in order to mediate in case of necessity). What is important is that the class teacher does not translate what the mother tongue teacher says, but the fact that she participates and intervenes is important because it motivates the children, who follow the example of their teacher.

Afternoon activities are the same for all the children.

This organization is planned in detail, but it is highly flexible and adaptable to the schools' and children's needs.

Educational programming is planned through regular staff meetings in which the general planning and the specific activities are defined. A meeting among the schools of the *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hande...cuatri lenghis project* takes place every two months.

Children are divided into small groups (12-15 children), which gives them the possibility to have an active role in the learning process. For the teachers it is important to establish a stable relationship with the pupils, by explaining clearly all the activities proposed and leading the children to think independently. The school also offers numerous extra-curricular activities which are always related to local languages, and range from sport activities to many outings which are proposed in the course of the year. Many of these outings are possible thanks also to the parents' collaboration, who drive their children to various places (when transport is a problem) because they strongly believe in these initiatives.

Great attention is given to the sharing of traditions and festivities, which are celebrated together with the Austrian and Slovene schools. For example, an important tradition of the territory is the "Festa di San Nicolo' e i Krampus", which is celebrated in the three countries.

Exchanges with the kindergarten of Arnoldstein also occur on the day of “San Martino” and at Carnival time. These occasions are very important as they allow a constant linguistic exchange besides the sharing of common cultural traditions. It has been noticed that in these situations children do not fear the comparison with a different school, where children do not share their mother tongue. On the contrary, they are able to adapt easily to the situation and to communicate with the Austrian children without any problems.

6.4 The Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis project

The *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis project* is a particular project of G. Rodari school. In order to investigate all its aspects in detail I prepared a questionnaire and submitted it to the school teachers, in order to answer the research questions, which I remember are the following ones:

- how does the project develop?;
- which methodology is used in the teaching of the foreign languages? (German, Slovenian);
- in what way does the didactic behaviour of the teachers change when they teach in the other countries participating in the project?;
- what are the children’s reactions towards a plurilingual teaching approach?

Some of the teachers answered in an interview which I personally did with them in Tarvisio, while the ones who were absent at the moment of the interview answered to some of the questions via e-mail.

6.4.1 How does the project develop?

The first part of the questionnaire wanted to offer a clear overview of the project in question. The following considerations emerged from the teachers’ answers.

First of all the teachers wanted to stress that they do not find it correct to speak of a single project, because all the activities of the school revolve around the languages of the territory.

The school does not belong to one project, but has created a whole network of projects over of the years, which centres around identity in a multilingual context.

Furthermore, the nursery school of Tarvisio Centrale hosts everyday children coming from Austria or Slovenia, whose parents do not speak Italian. For the teachers it is amazing how the parents rely on the Tarvisian system, and how these children learn quickly to speak Italian and to become an interpreter for their parents.

The teachers involved in the project regularly move from one school to another. Two Italian teachers go to Slovenia and one expert (he's not a teacher, but an external mother tongue person) to Austria, while one mother tongue teacher from Austria and one from Slovenia come to Italy twice a week, working with the groups of "medi" and "grandi" (the two groups of eldest children). An Austrian and a Slovene expert also come to Italy to work with the "piccoli" (the youngest group of children which is divided in two smaller groups).

The leading topic of the last school year was the garden. The common work is in fact based on a shared argument rather than on educational objectives because of the different school systems. The schools choose a topic which is then adapted to the different didactic approaches (for example, in the Tarvisian school, it is integrated in the school planning and in this case became "exploring the garden"). Children know that the teachers coming from the other countries do not speak their language (Italian), and therefore they force themselves try to communicate in the teacher's language.

Despite only few hours available for language teaching, the results in language acquisition are remarkable. The teachers' aim is to create as many communicative situations as possible in which the children are obliged not only to sing songs or repeat nursery rhymes, but also to think in the various languages. The teachers choose tasks in which the children are obliged to activate their knowledge. It is of the utmost importance for the children to follow reassuring routines, and know that the lessons have a predictable structure.

The funds come from the local council, the region, the state (Law 482/99), and the European Union (the *COMENIUS* project and Interreg). Part of the money also comes from

the parents and other forms of self-financing, and from the cultural associations of the area, which contribute by providing the schools with their language experts.

6.4.2 Which methodology is used in the teaching of the foreign languages (German and Slovenian)?

The teachers want to stress that in this territory it is not appropriate to speak of foreign languages. Italian, Friulan, German and Slovene are the languages of the territory. They are local, not foreign, languages. At school, a foreign language is considered for example English, but not those languages which are in fact present in the daily life of the pupils, also outside the school.

A range of songs, nursery rhymes, and motion activities were used from the beginning, while more specific language activities aiming at the acquisition and reproduction of sounds were introduced later. The strategies focussed on speaking slowly and articulating words clearly, on repeating the same sounds and words a number of times, and associating words to actions.

All the teachers agreed on the significant role of the senses in learning. In particular, activities involving sight and handling were considered important, and the game-like approach was identified by all as the best one. The shared and basic idea is that learning should be natural, never forced.

One teacher proposed the method *Hocus and Lotus* to promote learning through pleasant and motivating activities (motion and musical activities). This method is recognised as very positive since it allows children to enter inside imaginary worlds via the second language, leaving the mother tongue aside. The stories and characters help the children first understand sounds and words, and then memorise them.

Another teacher also mentioned the use of a mediator (the figure of an animal for example) in order to motivate the children and make the activity more enjoyable. The whole system of procedures, techniques and activities are chosen together by the teachers and followed as guidelines, as no method is the only, correct answer to the complexity of the learning process.

In the essay “Educazione plurilingue precoce: l'esperienza della Valcanale” the authors want to emphasize that the ludic approach requires a careful observation of children and the elaboration of syllabi suitable for the cognitive, communicative and collaborative competence of children. The following activities are commented in the essay:

- Circle games. They are perfect for establishing a first communicative relationship between children and teachers. They can be associated with songs or oral activities. Songs and dances are important in nursery schools because they allow the younger or shyer children to interact in the different languages without them feeling exposed.
- Motion games. Through the repetition of contextualized structures, these activities promote spontaneous learning. Theatre and dramatization. In the first phases all children interpret all roles; for this reason it is fundamental in the learning process.
- Made-up stories, nursery rhymes or traditional songs. They are very motivating for children.
- Fairy tales. They introduce the children into imaginary worlds where they can live the characters' adventures and create an emotional link with them through action, play and language

In all these activities, the languages are used as vehicles: the attention is focused on the activities but at the same time language acquisition takes place spontaneously.

6.4.3 In what way does the didactic behaviour of the teachers change when they teach in the other countries participating in the project?

From the interviews it emerged that teachers change their teaching methods adapting them to the countries' different didactic approaches. These changes concern:

- The natural selection of the linguistic contents and of the contents of the fields of experience;
- The language used with children. It must be concise, straight to the point, direct and concrete. It is important to be empathetic with children in order to understand whether they like the activities or not, if they understand, if they feel bored and so on. It is important for the teacher to create rituality, routines, the use of gestures, facial expressions and body movement, and also to know the basic lexicon of the other languages in case of necessity;
- Organization. Teachers must plan everything out clearly. However, all should be very flexible to the children's needs.
- Assumption of the teachers' professional responsibility. Not only are teachers there to teach, but they are responsible for creating their own materials.

6.4.3.1 Triggers for didactic changes

The collected data show that, as far as the didactic side is concerned, the main aspects requiring a change are:

- Time. Teachers have to allow more time for the activities
- The way of delivering messages. It must be clear and precise;
- The activities. They should involve the use of manual skills and there should be no contradictions;
- Clarity. It is important to take nothing for granted, but repeat, show things, use body language;
- Professional awareness. Teachers should be able to find quick solutions to problems and never show the children if they lose control of the situation;

- Planning. All should be prepared and organised before (especially the materials) and teachers must have clear in mind what they want to do;
- Materials. They need to be interesting, never banal, appealing and planned in detail;
- Routine. Teachers need to follow phases and routines. They should always respect the same lesson structure as this is reassuring for children. In this way, children will know what they have to wait for in a precise position, what follows a precise activity, and what the teacher wants from them.

6.4.3.2 How does the didactic behaviour of the teachers change?

The answers to the question “How do the teachers become aware of this/these change/s and manage it/them?” have been the following:

- through a deeper reflection on their work;
- through data collection;
- through regular meetings (for the *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis* project they are every two months. The meetings develop in two phases. In the first part there are only the teachers, who organize their work, while in the second one there is a talk/presentation by a project staff member, who has the task to mediate and analyse the complex aspects of the work, and help solve possible problems);
- through the rearrangement of materials;
- through comparisons;
- through good time management;
- in the preparation of materials;

6.4.3.3 Project difficulties and concerns

Also in this case the answers have been almost homogeneous. However, a distinction is to be made between the teachers who recognised the main difficulties in the organization rather than in the teaching or learning, and others who claimed there are difficulties both in the organisation and in the methodology.

The reasons are to be found in the fact that every country has its own methodology, and therefore it is important to reach an agreement when working together. The school idea and consequently its organisation changes according to the country.

For example, in Austria the Kindergarten is not considered a real school, whereas in Italy the *scuola dell'infanzia* is a real school, regulated also by law. The Italian school system requires a precise quality in the school planning, follows ministerial indications, and focuses on competences, objectives, methodology, didactic approach and evaluation criteria. All this is missing in the Austrian context. The solution found in Tarvisio is that teachers decide the topics and contents rather than linguistic objectives, as they would instead normally do with their Italian colleagues. The German teachers are not used to preparing the methodological background, but are recognised by the Italian teachers as being very strong in the methodology (i.e. in putting into practice the theoretical guidelines, and in creating the right atmosphere with the children).

The matter (the teachers prefer not to define these situations in terms of ‘difficulties’ or ‘problems’) is represented by the different school systems and consequently by the organisation of the materials. However, the teachers manage to overcome these differences by coming to an agreement in the meetings.

Another difficulty is found in the first instances of communication of teachers with children, but it is solved with the help of the class teacher’s mediation and with the support of visual materials.

Some interviewees also thought that teachers should be better trained for this type of teaching.

All is all, this project was defined by the teachers as stimulating, but also really hard to organise and follow up. Preparation needs to be very accurate, and all the materials should be ready beforehand so as not to waste any time. Being in agreement with the local teacher is also of crucial importance for working in harmony. The different initiatives and experiences involve the whole area so the contribution of the region, the municipality, of local language associations, all the school staff and of parents is necessary.

6.4.4 Action research

There is much constant action research in the Tarvisian school, which is carried out through data collection, observation reports, photos, drawings and the educational programming.

For the *Tre mani, Tri Roke, Drei Hände...cuatri lenghis* project, research has been carried out through questionnaires, which have been given out to the parents and which have checked the positive attitude towards the project and the willingness for it to continue in the following years.

Also through the *Sentieri* project much action research has been documented, and a web site has been created (a network with the ministry) in order to share experiences, materials, problems and activities. The same can be said for the *Local Lingue Infanzia* project (related to Law 482/99) which has now ended. There are also many publications, both on paper and online, which document activities and projects of this kind on the territory. On the web the projects *Casa, Cjase, Hiška, Haus* and *Cittadino al 100%* can be found, just to mention a few.

6.4.4.1. Casa, Cjase, Hiška, Haus

Casa, Cjase, Hiška, Haus was the plurilingual project organised at *G. Rodari* school and was advertised on the website www.tarvisiomeaula.org in 2008.

The first part of the paper on the website explains the context of the school and the organisational and methodological choices. The language teachers integrated their work in the

school contents, aims, activities and general organisation. They worked with the children from three to five times per week, and the spaces used ranged from the school rooms to the houses that have been visited in the different countries (trips organised by the teachers with the children in the course of the school year). The whole school team was involved in the project.

As for German, the project syllabus touched upon the following points:

- language sounds – rhythm and intonation;
- getting to know a fantasy character from the “Bi-Ba-Butzemann” house;
- visit (the houses in the three countries);
- experience recollection.

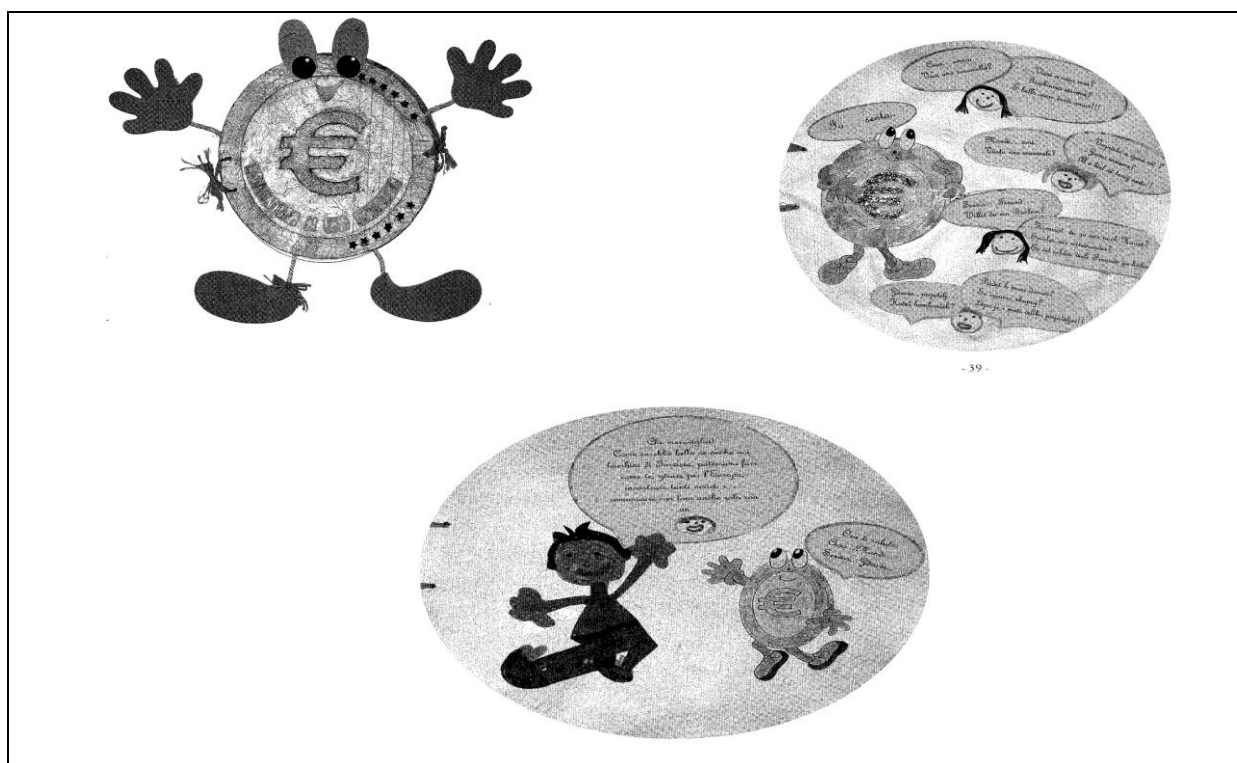
6.4.4.2 *Eins, Zwei, Drei, Rische, Rasche, rei...*

Eins, Zwei, Drei, Rische, Rasche, rei... is a publication from the Tarvisian printing house, born thanks to Tributsch’s contribution, which exemplifies an experience involving the teaching of numbers in German in a process of continuity between nursery and primary school.

In the nursery school of Tarvisio, numbers are presented inside meaningful contexts: circle games, nursery rhymes, counting rhymes, and dances, which are constantly repeated during the school year and are also included in a final show. The approach is therefore spontaneous and not forced. Knowledge is conveyed gradually to the children who acquire actively through handling activities which are guided by the teacher’s words.

6.4.4.3 Other publications

Tarvis is another publication which collects those works which have won the international competition organized by the city. This competition is organized every year from the Cultural Office of the Tarvisian municipality and involves all the school levels. The pupils participate proposing their works built around a specific topic. The following example, by the nursery school of Tarvisio Centrale, is entitled “The adventure of a coin” and dates back to school year 2006-2007.



6.4.5 What are the children’s reactions towards a plurilingual teaching approach?

The teachers want to stress that not only the presence of the mother tongue teacher is important, but also of all the teachers of the school. Mother tongue teachers are important because they are able to convey both the language with all its non-linguistic aspects

(proxemics and all aspects that the child is able to capture) and the teachers' love for their language.

The children's reactions are natural, thanks both to the presence of the other teacher who mediates, participates and influences the positive attitude of children, and to the fact that the presence of the mother tongue is regular. Also the other teachers play an important role in the course of the German or Slovenian lesson. They cannot be passive spectators, because there will be children that will act in the same way. On the contrary, if they participate by trying to say something and follow the activities of the mother tongue teacher, all children will try to participate too.

The reaction towards the language is positive and natural because these languages are not considered to be foreign languages, as they are part of the territory, and they are part of everyday life. Children find the language also outside school, in their free-time, in sport, in the celebration of the local tradition, and also in the catechism. They also have Austrian mates with which to share the languages. Therefore the reaction is positive, of interest and participation.

As a consequence, positive results have been collected over the years. Austrian children acquire the Italian language perfectly. Of course, this is due to the fact that they are immersed in the Italian context; it is not the same situation for their Italian classmates as regards the German learning. At the end of the three years of school, children show they have acquired a solid basis that will help them reach better knowledge of the languages in the transition to the upper school levels.

Conclusion

The idea for the present dissertation came from the belief that early language teaching should be pursued and promoted by all the Italian infant schools. The aim of the paper was to support this claim by offering examples of early language teaching in our country, focusing the attention on the German language. What emerged from the research is that different situations are present on our territory and that, in the case of German, it is taught with greater attention by nursery schools in northern Italy, and more specifically in Trentino Alto Adige. However, this research also shed light on other situations of early language teaching in those areas where Germanic minority languages are spoken. My intention has been that of analysing more in detail the teaching of German and the teaching and valorisation of Germanic varieties in some regions of our country.

What can be stated from the analysis is that the early teaching of German is still nowadays not widespread; it involves mainly only some regions and provinces of the territory. Germanic varieties such as Walser, Cimbri, Mòcheno and Sappadino have been proved to be still safeguarded by their communities, although their teaching is decreasing gradually. Many projects take place from nursery school, in order to make the children aware of the linguistic and cultural richness of their territory; the teaching of local varieties is often supported by the teaching of German, but it is common for the former to be supplanted by the teaching of latter.

The projects presented are the result of local pride and willingness to preserve its own culture and language; all these projects have been positive experiences and the outcomes have been highly rewarding, although sometimes the aim to generate language acquisition in the children was not fully reached. However, the children react positively towards the use of the second language. The projects have always been documented, as they are often proposed again over the years with the due adjustments. It is also significant that the State continues to finance and support the projects, although the means are never sufficient and contributions from various sources on the territory are needed.

Finally, the work with the school of Tarvisio has been very positive and stimulating. What has emerged from the interviews and the analysis of the collected materials is the teachers' love towards their local languages and their desire to create an effective plurilingual school, offering the children the possibility to get acquainted with all the languages of their territory from early infancy. In this area the whole community is very active in supporting and helping to achieve this aim and it is encouraging to see how all the local authorities and institutions collaborate to reach this common objective.

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Appendix I

The two questionnaires are here reported, which have been used for the interviews with language teachers and experts of the language associations. In particular, the first one is the questionnaire used with the teachers of the Tarvisian area, whereas the second one is the questionnaire used for the interviews about the Germanic minority languages.

1. NATURE OF THE PROJECT
a) What projects does your school take part in?
b) Who organises and promotes this project?
c) Who supports the project economically?
d) Who is involved in the project? (people, structures, institutions)
e) What is your role in the project?
f) How does the project develop?
2. METHODOLOGY
a) How does your teaching style change when you are teaching outside Italy?
b) Which aspects require this change and why?
c) How do you operate these changes?
d) What difficulties do you mainly find in the teaching?
3. ABOUT THE PROJECT
a) Is it a action-research project?
b) Are there any published results and/or any didactic materials at your disposal and consultable?
c) What benefits can be derived from the project?
d) What is your personal evaluation?
4. CHILDREN'S REACTIONS
a) What is the reaction of children towards plurilingual teaching and the use of all languages of the territory?
b) What is the reaction of children towards the presence of both the mother tongue and the non-mother tongue teachers?

1. NATURE OF THE PROJECT
a) Which are the projects in nursery schools of your territory involving Germanic minority language and/or the German one?
b) Who created and finances this project?
c) How does the project link to the territory (other initiatives of language's protection, other projects, etc.)
d) Who is involved in the project?
e) What are the project's aims?
2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT
a) How long does the project last?
b) How does it articulate?
c) What materials have been used?
d) Have the objectives been reached?
e) Were any difficulties in the course of the activities? If yes, how were they solved?
3. THE LANGUAGE
a) If the project involves the two languages, what is the relationship in the use between them? Has the project obtained results in both languages?
b) What are the aspects of the language that have been mostly object of the teaching? How is the language proposed to children?
4. CHILDREN'S REACTION
a) Have the children been interested in the project? How was their reaction towards the use of the minority language?

Appendix II

The following pictures represent works done by children of *Rodari* nursery school. The works are in all the four languages taught in the school.





Appendix III

Example of an activity bound with the festivity of the Carnival, in which the theme of the numbers is inserted.



FASCHING BRENNT:

Fasching brennt, Fasching brennt,

Fasching, Fasching, Fasching, Fasching,

Fasching brennt, Fasching brennt.

Dario macht Feuer:

Feuer ,Feuer,Feuer,Feuer, Feuer,Feuer,Feuer,Feuer.

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10, pum !

Der Fasching ist kaputt!

