Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree programme in
Language Sciences

Final Thesis

Learning by Playing
Improving Graphemic Competence in Italian as a Second Language through Recreational Linguistics

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Academic Year
2023 / 2024

The mediocre teacher tells.

The good teacher explains.

The superior teacher demonstrates.

The great teacher inspires.

William Arthur Ward

Ringraziamenti

Vorrei esprimere la mia gratitudine alla Prof.ssa Luise per i suoi cari consigli, la disponibilità e il sostegno ricevuto durante la stesura di questa tesi. Senza di Lei tutto questo non sarebbe stato possibile.

Desidero inoltre ringraziare la mia famiglia per il sostegno costante e l'affetto ricevuto in questi anni di studio.

Infine, voglio ringraziare di cuore tutti i miei amici, quelli di una vita e quelli incontrati in questo splendido percorso. La vostra amicizia è stato il motore che mi ha fatto andare avanti anche di fronte agli ostacoli più difficili. Non avrei potuto farcela senza di voi e sono infinitamente grata di potervi considerare una seconda famiglia.
Grazie perché con voi tutto è più leggero, come piace a me.

Abstract

Language learners have always perceived grammar as a tedious obstacle since traditional teaching techniques lack motivation and curiosity.

Recreational Linguistics offers a valid solution to make these techniques stimulating and enjoyable in a way that also allows learners to linguistic reflection. The present thesis intends to verify and demonstrate the effectiveness of recreational activities in improving graphemic competence in young Italian L2 learners, with a specific emphasis on the accurate use of double consonants.

The study is divided into five chapters, beginning with an exploration of play from a historical, philosophical and psychological perspective. In the second chapter, Playful language teaching and play as a strategic language learning tool are presented and discussed, starting from the fundamental principles of the Affective humanistic approach. In the third chapter, Recreational Linguistics is addressed, detailing its definitions and applications at school, before moving into the fourth chapter, where the relation between grammar and play is explored, focusing on graphemic grammar by giving examples of recreational activities aimed at orthography implementation. In the last section, a didactic proposal for Recreational Linguistics Italian L2 Workshop is presented, in which the offered activities may provide valuable insights for future research on the effectiveness of language games in language education, as well as suggestions for Italian L2 classrooms.

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Introduction

Teaching Italian as a second language represents a growing reality within educational institutions, as there is an increasing number of foreign pupils in schools. This phenomenon implies the need to create and guarantee learning paths aimed at learning Italian as a second language that can meet the specific needs of foreign pupils who, unlike their Italian-speaker peers, often face greater language difficulties during their school career.

These didactic interventions ought to be ensured from the first years of primary school to reduce 'social marginalisation' and the level of school drop-out, which usually affects mostly the 'weakest' category of students: the foreign ones.

In this context, linguistic reflection represents a central aspect, which besides being a fundamental part of any language curriculum, plays an even more crucial role in the context of second language teaching, as it supports the foreign pupils to not interpret their language gap as a cognitive problem, but as a linguistic, and therefore momentary, obstacle.

Considering that linguistic reflection should not only involve the implementation of morphosyntactic competence of language, the present thesis highlights the important role played also by graphemic competence. Usually not addressed in language teaching as it is believed that it is indirectly achieved by learners on the basis of input, the few teaching techniques used to work on it are usually demotivating and can even lead to states of anxiety and stress, as in the case of the dictation technique used to test this competence. Nevertheless, the correct use of graphemic competence, that is orthography, represents a fundamental and indispensable aspect in teaching Italian L2, as it is considered the minimum threshold of writing skill. Additionally, in the case of foreign children, the lack of graphemic competence achievement can 'stigmatise' pupils and negatively influence their motivation and future academic valuation, as a sort of halo effect. Therefore, correct use of orthography is a prerequisite for the transition between primary and middle school, and foreign children are at risk of being disadvantaged in facing increasingly complex challenges required by the academic path, creating not only linguistic, but also social barriers.

A valid solution for dealing with graphemic competence is through the implementation of play as a teaching tool, within a playful environment. The playful approach finds its theoretical basis in the playful glottodidactics, which recognises play as a strategic tool for language facilitation. Within a playful teaching methodology that realises the principles of the Affective humanistic approach into operational models and teaching techniques, Recreational linguistics finds its place as a branch of linguistics interesting in play as a linguistic phenomenon. In particular, this discipline, which has as its principal aim the teaching/learning languages, implements paper language games to practice and improve language skills in a dynamic and engaging way, while also stimulating linguistic reflection in a playful and motivating manner. The activities proposed by this discipline make it possible to overcome the traditional grammar conception as a set of static and unquestionable rules to be learnt through passive repetitions and fixations. Therefore, through the implementation of recreational activities, students not only strengthen their linguistic skills but are also inductively led towards a linguistic reflection, developing an awareness of the form through play that amuses and motivates them to continue their second language learning acquisition process. Recreational linguistics results to be a valid solution to the integration of linguistic reflection and the principles of playful glottodidactics, allowing grammar to be consolidated without renouncing the pleasure of discovery and the fun of learning, offering an innovative perspective for linguistic reflection where play and grammar intertwined in a successful binomial.

Considering what has been claimed, the present thesis aims to validate this strategic 'synergy'. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to demonstrate how it is possible to successfully improve graphemic competence for young Italian L2 learners, through the implementation of recreational activities, with the specific aim of the accurate usage of double consonants.

The present thesis is divided into five chapters. The first one deals with an excursion of play from different points of view, beginning with a historical perspective focused on the educational role of play across centuries. Then it continues emphasizing the philosophical perspective through the studies of Huizinga and Caillois, the firsts to have asked themselves what play was, and why mankind had this innate tendency to play. With the former, play becomes a cultural phenomenon; while with the latter, a morphology of play has been realised. Thanks to their studies, which have dissertated a sterile field, a strong awareness of the crucial role of play in human life has been evoked. Especially in

psychology and pedagogy, play becomes the main source of development and begins to be seen as the driving force of child's development, with Piaget's cognitive theory, and also the determining factor that facilitates learning, as it ensures the zone of proximal development, according to Vygotsky's studies.

This combination between play and learning is discussed in detail in the second chapter, dealing with the Playful language teaching methodology. This part begins dealing with the principles and purposes of the Affective humanistic approach to present the theoretical frame of the playful glottodidactics, before presenting the contributions of neurolinguistics and the Second Language Acquisition Theory, the best-known and widespread theory of second language acquisition.

Following that, the main core of the chapter is addressed, namely the concept of play as a language facilitation tool explored through the studies of the Italian scholar Freddi (1990) and later expanded and placed in the context of glottodidactics by Caon and Rutka (2004, 2013) and Caon (2020, 2022). Play, as a promoter of the overall development of pupils due to its global and holistic nature, activates several components that enable language students to learn a second language in a natural way, thus retracing the path like the acquisition of the mother tongue.

The last section of the second chapter deals with the benefits that a playful language methodology brings in the second language classroom, with a specific focus on the foreign child pupil.

Thereafter, the third chapter of the present thesis introduces Recreational linguistics, a branch of linguistics that deals with second language teaching through the implementation of language games with 'paper and pencil'. Although differing from Playful language teaching, Recreational linguistics recognises playfulness as the vital charge that drives the learning path and the strategic role of play as a facilitating tool in language teaching. For these reasons, it exploits the innate human tendency to play and solve word games or puzzles by transforming these activities into language teaching techniques, known under the 'umbrella term' of recreational activities. The chapter starts with the definitions, before going into detail on the distinction between *'ludolinguistica'* and *'enigmistica'*. Then, it continues by clarifying what recreational activities are and how they can be implemented within the school context, presenting the great benefits that they can bring to language pupils, with a main focus on children learners.

The penultimate chapter intends to investigate linguistic reflection and its relationship with play, more specifically language games. Beginning with a general overview of the

concept of linguistic reflection and its importance in language teaching, the chapter carries on by dealing with the pathway to follow in order to achieve this language awareness, which has to be the main aim of any language curriculum along with communicative competence, according to the studies conducted by Luise (2006; 2011; 2020). Afterwards, the fourth chapter emphasises graphemic competence, highlighting the concept of orthography, namely the result of correct graphemic competence, which is developed and implemented by working on graphemic grammar. In particular, this part of the thesis discusses the major spelling challenges for learners of Italian L2 and the crucial role played by this competence in guaranteeing academic success and beyond for foreign children learners, before proceeding to explain the Italian normative and the real situation within Italian primary schools. Furthermore, an empirical study (Bigozzi, et al., 2009) is presented to explore the hidden relationship between orthography improvement and lexical implementation, as it will be the scientific reliability underlying the didactic pathway proposed in the last part of the present thesis. The chapter concludes by emphasising the intrinsic relationship between Recreational linguistics and graphemic competence, a relation defined as a 'successful binomial'. To deeply understand the latter statement, some of the most popular language games aimed at improving orthography are presented, evidencing their insight and pedagogical applications.

The present thesis ends with the fifth chapter that aims to demonstrate the effectiveness of this successful binomial by presenting a didactic proposal that interweaves play, Recreational linguistics and graphemic competence. Before presenting and explaining some clarifications, such as the target pupils and the linguistic aims within the didactic proposal, the context of application is given, namely the Italian L2 workshop. The present proposal, although not based on empirical analysis, intends to develop an Italian L2 learning path with a focus on improving the correct use of double consonants, exploring the effectiveness of language games based on wide empirical research and thesis (see Bigozzi et al., 2009; Pagnoncelli, 2024) and theoretical studies (see Mollica 2019; 2020; 2020a). The proposal represents a potential positive impact if implemented with foreign Italian L2 children pupils and for that reason it may provide valid insight for future research and practical suggestions for Italian L2 classrooms.

Chapter 1. A cross-disciplinary view of play in human existence: a historical, philosophical and psychological perspective

Play has always reflected the cultural and social vision of the time. Over centuries several scholars have ventured into the exploration of the notion and function of play in human life. Nevertheless, play is an ambiguous and complex concept deeply rooted in culture that moves in parallel with social transformations. This aspect has provoked an infinite number of notions which have led to a plurality of different interpretations and perspectives. Consequently, the playful sphere of humane existence has been marginalised in studies for a long time. It was only in the first half of the 20th century with Huizinga that play became a tool for interpreting the process of civilisation and human activities, evoking a strong awareness of the crucial role of play in human life. Especially in psychology and pedagogy, play becomes the main source of development and begins to be seen as the driving force of all human activity. Therefore, historiography has also shown that the educational dimension of play has always accompanied humans across centuries. In the following paragraphs, the path of play will be retraced starting from the ancient practices until the play theories of the last centuries, providing valuable insights into the notion and role of play in our contemporary studies.

1.1 Historical path: the root of play in human development

The path of play in the educational sphere is a long one. Since the earliest times, games for educational purposes have been used in various civilisations, highlighting the strong connection between play and learning. Their discovery leads to the hypothesis that already in ancient Rome or Greek there was an awareness of the potential of play and its games in learning. Although the first official treatise on play appeared in the 1500s (Gori, 2008:11), the period in which the first strong examples of playful didactics can be seen, it has been provided that also ancient populations already were using it. As Staccioli (2013: 202) writes, some learning games have been found in Egyptian tombs, such as necklaces made of cut-out letters to learn the alphabet. Similarly, Latin letters made of candy were given to young Romans with the same purpose as recorded in the literature

of that time (Cambi & Staccioli, 2013:202).[1] In ancient Greece, similar learning games were used; it is the case of ivory or wooden letters used by young Athenians to compose words or sentences. Nevertheless, Hellenic games were also used to physically prepare the warriors and obtain favour with gods, laying the fundamentals for the creation of the Olympic Games, which appeared for the first time in 776 BC. The role of play was therefore institutionalised and took a new significance, namely a social function. In that perspective, the educational and sacred value of play emerges for the first time in human history. With the Roman Empire, the institutional process of play became more established with the development of arenas in which public plays took place. However, the notion of play had a more profound meaning in ancient Rome. Therefore, it was interpreted as beyond entertainment or religious value as seen above: it was a social apprenticeship. The Latin term *ludus* represented the ways and places of Roman citizens in which they carried out their private and civic relations. In the Middle Ages, public plays lost their previous organisational structure due to the strong limitations adopted by the Church. Nevertheless, a playful Middle Age has been discovered; for instance, Sant'Agostino wrote in his *Confessioni* about the pleasure of life, such as playing with walnuts or balls, or how he easily learnt Latin thanks to his nannies who used playful actions and laughs (*Ibid.*:30). Furthermore, despite papal prohibitions, knightly and hunting tournaments were born during this period. These kinds of plays have been the most educationally meaningful play activities of the time; to the point that Geoffroi de Charny, in one of his writings, authorised fathers to bring their sons to watch tournaments since children would have learnt how to fight and hunt.[2] Another author of that period who wrote in his writings about play was Filippo de Novara, affirming the importance of embracing play as a natural human need. Further, he tried to explain to parents and preceptors the crucial role of play in childhood, urging them to adopt a playful didact to facilitate the identification of social roles that children would have to perform in the future.[3] With the new perspective of the figure of 'person' inherited by Humanism, in the European 16th century the notion of play entered in the educational institutions. For instance, the scholar Vittorio da Feltre claimed that the person was constituted of a body, a spirit and a heart; consequently, the aim of the educator was the development of all these entities through physical and playful activities (Gori, 2008:13). Likewise, with the

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[1] The authors refer to two important figures of Roman times, the poet Orazio and the orator Quintiliano.

[2] de Charny, G., *Le Livre de chevalière* (1350), (in Ibid.:36)

[3] de Novara, F., *Les quatres tense de age de l'homme* (half of 13th century)*,* (in Ibid.:41)

emergence of schools of all levels, many essays and treatises on education were written, such as Michel de Montaigne who wrote about play as the most important activity to carry out at school (*Ibid*.:14). Not coincidentally, it was the period where the famous 'game of goose' was born, that from the very beginning has been adapted to a wide variety of educational aims. Geese could also be angels or apostles, and the path could have been the one to Paradise. Therefore, as Staccioli (2013:206) writes:

> *Nel Cinquecento che troviamo i primi veri esempi forti di didattica ludica, con l'utilizzo di carte o di tavolieri in giochi che riguardano soprattutto i giochi misti ed i giochi di intelligenza.*

The first appearance of what today are called flashcards is in this period, indeed. In 1491, for instance, these typologies of educational cards were made in Venice for the Busca family, containing episodes from Roman history and mythological tales. Similarly, the Tarot cards, already used in Florence a few centuries before under the names of *carticellas* or *minchiate,* began to be used for didact purposes. These cards, showing the human walks, theological values and astronomy, became a sort of reference book used to learn the essentials of faith and science of the time (*Ibid*.). As regards intelligence games, an instance is the most famous mathematical game of the 16th century was the *Rithmomachia*[4], in which players competed through additions, multiplications and proportions. Other examples are rebus and riddles of religious mysterious or historical events that began to be used in French colleges to facilitate students to the memorisation of them. With the Modern Age, play experienced a further transformation, becoming a formative paradigm. The Czech educational reformer Comenio fixed the role of play in the learning process, claiming the necessity of a playful didactic as a support for teachers and learners. In his most famous work, *Didactica Magna*, he proposed a method in which the process of learning had to be natural and at the centre of the focus was the learner. In

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[4] 'E' un gioco che poggia su un tavoliere di 8x12 caselle [...] e le pedine sono costituite da tre ranghi diversi, di dimensioni diverse e sono contraddistinte da numeri. I due giocatori che si sovrappongono possono catturare i pezzi avversari per numerazione, per addizione, per moltiplicazione. [...] Un giocatore può anche calcolare i numeri delle pedine avversarie per formare una proporzione. [...] Le caratteristiche strutturali di questi giochi corrispondono a giochi moderni che utilizzano la simulazione (Monopoli) o l'astrazione (Hex)' (*Ibid*.:207)

his incipit, he also claimed that in school there should be more free time and pleasure of learning rather than tedium and useless work.[5]

Nevertheless, the 'Copernican revolution' in pedagogy began with J. J. Rousseau. In his pedagogical reflection, he recognized play as the most natural way through which children discover and learn the world. Play, therefore, received a greater significance and began to be perceived as a resource and as a fundamental factor in child's development (*Ibid.*:70-1):

> *Il gioco, dispositivo formativo, nella sua funzione euristica, e mezzo per l'assimilazione dei ruoli sociali [...] acquisiva sempre più, nel corso dell'Ottocento, un ruolo preminente nel processo di crescita del bambino. Da attività tollerata, in quanto espressione dell'immaturità di un essere ancora non adulto, il gioco diveniva, sul piano pedagogico, risorsa da valorizzare, sulla quale investire, anche materialmente, con l'acquisto di giochi "intelligenti", capaci di sviluppare le abilità cognitive, manuali, relazionali e affettive del bambino.*

1.2 Why humans play: from the foundation of culture to the morphology of play

With the development of ethnology, at the beginning of the 20th century, play has been reinterpreted as a universal and fundamental constant of living beings: a basic model of life. The animal world, therefore, plays exactly like human beings. Following this assumption, even in its most basic animal form, play "goes beyond the confines of purely physical or purely biological activity" (Huizinga, 2004:117). Indeed, according to the Dutch scholar Huizinga, 'if we call the active principle that makes up the essence of play instinct, we explain nothing' (*Ibid.*:117). The question 'What is the fun of playing' finds no explanation in biological analysis, since the nature of play extends beyond human experience; it exists as an independent concept. For our species, play has more profound meanings that differentiate us from the animal world. Play is charged with aesthetic, ethical and cultural meanings, becoming a key element through which we have access to cultural life. As Cambi (2013: 118) writes:

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[5] See http://nuovadidattica.lascuolaconvoi.it/agire-didattico/2-teorie-e-modelli/programma-di-comenio/ last view 4/11/2024

Nella specie Homo sapiens [...] il gioco segna un passaggio preciso: quello dalla natura alla cultura; fissa il discrimine, poiché mette in moto le attività simboliche (post-biologiche o meta-biologiche) e disinteressate (in senso immediato e strumentale); determina l'avvio di quella noosfera che si rifarà sempre più semiosfera e che il Gioco attiva insieme alla nascita del linguaggio e allo sviluppo dei simboli e dei Miti.

Huizinga, with his influential work *Homo Ludens*, deeply investigates play affirming that it is the foundation of culture rather than just a component of it. According to him, 'culture is nothing more than the realm of play' and 'has manifested itself as play since antiquity' (Goggin, Gobbo, Hanssen, 2024:7-8). In the notion of play, he finds elements, such as seriousness and order, that allow it to intervene in the higher manifestations of human life, including jurisprudence, war, philosophy and science. As a consequence, play can not be denied, since even the great archetypical activities of human societies are all permeated within from the start, for instance, language, myth or ritual. Essentially, what he proposes is a definition of play as a primary concept that has always accompanied mankind from its beginning, described as a "voluntary activity or occupation within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself" (*Ibid.*:10).

However, "what is lacking in Huizinga is [...] a rigorous methodological awareness of how one should construct a morphology" (*Ibid.*:6) of play that goes beyond its concept. Some decades later, the French scholar Caillois provided an analysis of the play based on Huizinga's assumptions. Acknowledging his credit for dissecting a sterile field, Caillos nonetheless disagrees with the Dutch scholar's interpretation of the play, separate from human's everyday life. Therefore, in his analysis, he claims that it is a free activity, but well separated within specific times and spaces; characterised by uncertainty, since the performance and the outcome are not known in advance; and, unproductivity, in the sense that there is no production of goods. Further, it is regulated by specific rules, and it is fictitious, that is players share an awareness of a different reality outside the play that does not allow the reproduction of a similar activity in everyday life. As Caillois (1981, in Gily, 2002:27-28) writes:

Innumerevoli sono i giochi e di vario tipo: giochi di società, di destrezza, d'azzardo, giochi all'aperto, giochi di pazienza, giochi di costruzione ecc. Nonostante la quasi infinita varietà e con costanza davvero notevole, la parola gioco richiama sempre i

concetti di svago, di rischio o di destrezza. E soprattutto, implica immancabilmente un'atmosfera di distensione e di divertimento. Il gioco rilassa e diverte. Evoca un'attività non soggetta a costrizioni, ma anche priva di conseguenze per la vita reale. Si contrappone alla serietà di questa e viene perciò qualificato frivolo. Si contrappone al lavoro come il tempo perso al tempo bene impiegato. Il gioco infatti, non produce alcunché: né bene né opere. A ogni nuova partita, giocassero pure tutta la vita, i giocatori si ritroveranno a zero e nelle stesse condizioni che all'inizio. I giochi a base di denaro, scommesse o lotterie, non fanno eccezione: non creano ricchezze, le spostano soltanto.

To those theoretical observations, Caillos elaborates four game categories, respectively competition, chance, simulacra and vertigo (Gily, 2022; Gori, 2008):

- *Agon*: games characterised by competition fall into this category. As Gori (2008:53) writes, it is a rivalry based on a single quality (i.e. speed, memory, strength and so on) so that the winner can appear the best in a certain category of feats. In this perspective, the concept of victory elaborated by Huiznga fails, and a personal victory arises, understood as superiority over the other participants for the sole pleasure of competition.
- *Alea*: these games are based on fate. Defeat or victory does not depend on the player but, for instance, on the dice roll.
- *Mimicry*: these are games in which one assumes a fictitious identity, i.e. masquerading or dressing up. The player can play to make himself believe or make others believe that he is someone else.
- *Ilinx*: this category includes those games that are based on the search for vertigo and consist of an attempt to destroy the stability of perception for a moment.

This morphology elaborated by Caillos also marks the two functions of play: *paida* and *ludus*. The latter is present when play is still characterised by free improvisation, a principle of amusement and turbulence. When *paida* begins to organise itself with rules and goals, the *ludus* appears. In other words, it can be said that the *ludus* function complements the *paida* one; therefore, according to Caillos, within each game category there is usually a transition from *paida* to *ludus*.

Play and its games are therefore explored into a specific morphology, where *paida* e *ludus* 'articulate their diversity in the difficult path between creativity and rule, allowing all aspects to be considered as part of a whole' (Gily, 2002:30).

1.3 Play and Child's development: Piaget's and Vygotskij's theories of play

> *Domandiamoci ora che cos'è il gioco, se una caratteristica temporanea dell'infanzia, oppure un tratto che contrassegna tutto l'arco dell'esistenza umana, pur con differenziazione che variano a seconda delle diverse età. Le numerose indicazioni fornite dall'osservazione e dalla ricerca ci portano in via provvisoria ad affermare che il gioco, pur essendo una funzione preminente e specifica dell'infanzia, si prolunga poi per tutta la vita (Vygotskij in Bruner et Alii, 1981, in Freddi, 1999:47)*

At the beginning of the 20th century, play emerged as a critical point in the study of child development. Approached as an educational, therapeutic and development tool, it becomes seen as a 'training for life' that develops with children and will never leave them for the entire lifetime. The role of play in development is analysed and investigated by the Swiss biologist and psychologist J. Piaget and by the Russian psychologist and pedagogy L.S. Vygotskij. The following paragraphs, therefore, explore their theses which have carried out an intense theorising work on the role of play in child development, enabling the establishment of a structural literature on play that has come down to the present day.

1.3.1 Piaget's Theory of Play: a cognitive development through practice, symbolic and rule games

The role of play in cognitive development and learning is explored in systematic terms by Piaget. According to him, any cognitive action is an equilibrium between assimilation and accommodation. The latter is expressed by imitation, involving mental schemas to match or adjust the external models. Play, in contrast, is a continuum of functional and reproductive assimilation; thus, the process by which children undertake to incorporate new external information into their mental schemas. In his attempt to elaborate a child's cognitive development theory, Piaget hypothesised four fixed stages of mental

development: *sensorimotor stage* (from birth to two years), *pre-operational stage* (from two to seven years), *concrete operational stage* (from seven to eleven), and *formal operational stage* (from eleven onwards years). Parallel to these cognitive stages, the Swiss scholar argued that three categories of games developed within a child's growth: 'practice, symbol and rule [...] which characterised the main classes of games from the point of view of their mental structures' (Piaget, 1962:113).

As claimed by him, the play makes its appearance from the very beginning of life, namely in the sensorimotor stage. Nevertheless, in this first stage, not all autotelic activities can be interpreted as games or playful behaviour. The only autotelic activities which seem to be characterised by play are the ones of purely functional assimilation; that is, 'assimilation which subordinates to itself without earlier accommodations and assimilates the real to the activity itself without effort or limitation' (*Ibid*.:90). It is in the third phase of the sensorimotor stage that the first real sample of play appears; specifically, when children find out that their actions can cause things to happen. Continuing with their cognitive development, children also start to evolve play from simple actions to more complex behaviours, performing without a specific aim but purely for pleasure and enjoyment. Likewise, at the end of the first cognitive developmental stage, children begin to ritualize their familiar actions and gestures by repeating them several times. All these kinds of playful behaviours mentioned above fall into the category elaborated by Piaget under the term of practice games, characterised by being the first form of play in children. They are mere 'exercises' through which children practise their structures 'for no other purpose than the pleasure of functioning', rather than the 'necessary or to learn a new habit' (*Ibid*.:110). Although practice games are essentially sensor-motor, they can become 'fortuitous combinations' in the case of higher functions, i.e. asking questions or combining words (Gori, 2008:42). The greatest example is the 'why-question period'; children, having learnt to ask questions, amuse themselves by asking why-question for the sake of fun and it represents mere practice, without any other aim.

However, these games which are merely 'reproduction of practice' do not characterise only the first years of life. The feeling provoked by the pleasure of 'being the cause' or 'feeling the power' is also present in adulthood; for instance, when someone buys a new car: 'it is difficult to resist the temptation to use [it] for the fun of using one's new powers' (Piaget, 1962:114). Therefore, Freddi (1990:50) writes about it, affirming that:

Pur manifestandosi nello stadio senso-motorio, i giochi di esercizio permarranno oltre questa fase, accompagnando anzi l'uomo per tutto l'arco della sua esistenza.

While advancing towards the preoperational stage, symbolic games made their appearance, which implies representation of absent objects. As Piaget (1962:118) highlights, the line that traces the passage between symbolic and practice games is 'more than a mere matter of classification and involves the main problems of the interpretation of play in general'. It is possible to hypothesise that it happens when the content of children's play is evoked and considered through the medium of symbolism and not anymore by practical actions. As for the practice games, also the second game category follows different stages. Therefore, at the very beginning, children apply a new symbolic mental schema to objects or people and tend to generalise it. Thereafter, children start to imitate actions that they have observed in others instead of having acquired them by their own actions. This passage represents the first sign of imitation that will be further developed as they begin to use imitation to act out others, and contemporaneous to this stage, children also start to symbolise objects. Going further in the second cognitive stage, Piaget indicates other complex combinations of symbolic games: compensatory and liquidating combinations. For instance, children start to use symbolic games to process emotions, as in the case of compensatory combinations where they try to deal with fear or anxiety by acting out situations. Children can also symbolically replicate an unpleasant situation to distance themselves from it or to understand it in a new manageable way; in this case, they are manifesting liquidating combinations. Nevertheless, symbolic games are characterised by child's egocentrism because symbolism 'begins with individual behaviours which enable imitation to be interiorised' (*Ibid.*:112) As Freddi (1999:51) argues, it is possible to affirm that:

> *Il simbolo che il bambino si è creato (la scatola che "sta per…") appartiene a lui soltanto e non anche ai coetanei o agli adulti. Detto con le parole dei linguisti, questo simbolo non è arbitrario come lo sono, ad esempio, le parole della lingua cui tutti i parlanti riconoscono lo stesso significato. I giochi simbolici fanno la loro comparsa in un contesto evolutivo caratterizzato da molti elementi non ludici, i quali si ricollegano alla dimensione egocentrica del bambino, a quel suo pensiero non ancora capace di tenere conto del punto di vista degli altri.*

In the third stage of cognitive development, thus from seven to eleven years, symbolic games begin to lose their importance aligned with the decline of the egocentrism phase, which provokes the loss of the ludic character of the symbol. Play, therefore, begins to be more organised, realistic and socially interactive, since children start to satisfy their needs through real life and interaction rather than symbolic distortions. This is the period of the appearance of games characterised by orderliness and verisimilitude. Likewise, they are also characterised by collective symbolism, thus children adopt different roles and cooperate to fit a specific scenario, i.e. play family. With the formal operational stage, the definite decline of symbolic games occurs caused by the emergence of games with rules. The latter appear early as the third period but establish themselves permanently from the last stage onward. Indeed, as children engage more in collective games, games with rules earn their predominance, as Piaget (1962:142-4) writes:

> *[they] remain, and even develop throughout life (sports, cards, chess, etc.). The explanation of this late appearance and protracted continuation of games with rules is very simple: they are the ludic activity of the socialised being [...]. The rule replaces the symbol and integrates the practice as soon as certain social relationships are formed, and the question is to discover these relationships [...]. Games with rules, then, are games with sensory-motor combinations (races, marbles, balls games, etc.), or intellectual combinations (cards, chess, etc.), in which there is competition between individuals (otherwise rules would be useless) and which are regulated either by a code handed down from earlier generations, or by temporary agreement.*

Following this assumption, games of rules do not follow the same decline as children's practice and symbolic games; on the contrary, they increase in number with age. Piaget's cognitive developmental theory contributes to the emergence of play as a crucial factor in child's development. Nevertheless, as Ortega (2003:103) states, being interested in explanations of cognitive functions and development, '[Piaget] ignored the influence of the specific content of knowledge and interpersonal factors when one plays'. For that reason, interpersonal contexts, experiences, and particular contents regarding games were not investigated by the Swiss scholar, who perceived them as not relevant to his cognitive theory. According to him, while playing, individuals just want to please themselves rather than 'express a need to adjust their interpretations of play to the external realities'. Consequently, he views play and intelligence as two activities that follow different paths,

offering an 'imprecise view of play from the point of view of what is learned in play' (*Ibid*.:104). The Swiss scholar, thus, unintentionally placed play on a lower level than the cognitive dimension, defining it as a less serious and intellectually stimulating activity, as Piaget (in *Ibid*.:104) states:

> *Games became activities for which little concentration is needed, activities that can be carried out in any fashion and whose final result is relatively unimportant because what is really important in play is having fun.*

However, it is fundamental to highlight the value of Piaget's work on play since it has been explored for the first time through a scientific perspective, becoming a paradigm still valid in contemporary studies. Furthermore, Piaget has been a pioneer in considering play as one of the bases for children's development and as the 'key to [...] entry into the world of thought' (*Ibid*.:103).

1.3.2 Vygotskij and play: a means to child's development of higher psychological functions

The Russian scholar Vygotskij, in contrast with Piaget, recognises the influence of interpersonal and social contexts, personal experiences and emotional elements in play, placing them at the 'very foundation of activity as the motivational force that roots games so deeply in desires and subjective intentions' (Ortega, 2003:105). Therefore, as Vygotskij (1978:92-3) claims:

> *To define play as an activity that gives pleasure to the child is inaccurate. [...] Many activities give the child much keener experiences of pleasure than play,* [and] *there are games in which the activity itself is not pleasurable* [since they] *give pleasure only if the child finds the result interesting. [...] Many theories mistakenly disregard the child's needs [...] but if we ignore the child's needs, and the incentives which are effective in getting* [the child] *to act, we will never be able to understand his advance from one developmental stage to the next, because every advance is connected with a marked change in motives, inclinations, and incentives.* [Consequently], *it is impossible to ignore the fact that the child satisfies certain needs in play.*

According to him, all theories that ignore this point of view fail in the understanding of the uniqueness of play as a form of activity, falling into a 'pedantic intellectualization of play'. In other words, play is not a merely 'fun activity' that requires little intellectual activation, placed below the cognitive dimension, but rather a resource of development throughout children realise their needs and desires. Play emerges during the preschool age when children experience that feeling of frustration at not being able to satisfy desires and needs; and, to satisfy this 'tension' they use imagination by creating an imaginary world, which is 'what we call play'. In that perspective, imagination arises from action, and it is for this reason that, according to the Russian scholar, 'imagination is play without action'. As a result, the child's emotional sphere is crucial in the process of understanding play, since the latter mirrors those unrealizable desires and needs that can not be realisable in reality. When play evolves into more complex symbolic games, such as role-play, children begin to use more abstract thinking and logical processes. For instance, children who play 'the doctor' are not just mimicking the real world, but rather acting out their mental representations of the social world through negotiation of what 'play doctor' means. This represents a crucial aspect that is central to the development of more complex cognitive abilities. Indeed, they are engaging themselves in a discourse, namely sharing, challenging and negotiating meanings behind their actions and roles, that allows to hypothesise the essential role of play in the development of higher psychological functions. Following that perspective, play emerges as a 'unit of opponents' (Ortega, 2003:113) since it involves an impulse-driven force that marks play as a free activity, and at the same time, this freedom pushes children to develop higher psychological functions and cognitive processes, such as problem solving, abstract thinking and the ability to manage emotions. Similarly, as soon as children emerge from their egocentric phase and play becomes more a collective activity, they exercise their social roles through discourse and social interaction, revealing the crucial role of play in sociocultural development. The reason why play allows these developments can be found in the words of Vygotskij (2016:18):

> *In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour. [...] Play contains all developmental tendencies in condensed forms; in play it is as though the child is trying to jump above the level of his normal behaviour. The play-development relationship can be compared with the instruction-development relationship, but play*

provides changes in needs and in consciousness of a much wider nature. [...] It is in this way that play can be termed a leading activity that determines the child's development.

Consequently, Vygotskij states the seriousness of playful activities in child's growth, as it is not just a spontaneous action but rather a medium for development also for higher cognitive functions, all aspects that collocate play 'at the highest level of development' (Gori, 2003:48).

1.3.3 Play and Learning: the zone of proximal development

The advocates of the major theoretical positions about the relationship between learning and development claim that child development is independent from learning. The former, therefore, is seen as an external process not directly involved in the growth, that 'utilises the achievements of development rather than providing an impetus for modifying its course'(Vygotskij, 1978:79). Similarly, another perspective identifies development as the prerequisite for learning. In that sense, if the child has not yet matured certain mental functions that enable him to learn a given subject, any attempt at teaching will be not efficient. Nevertheless, before children begin school their learning process has already started, since 'any learning children encounter in school has a previous history' (*Ibid.*:84). In the questions-period that marks preschool-age children are learning by receiving a variety of information from answers, or by assimilating names of objectives in their environment. From this point of view, it is possible to hypothesise that 'learning and development are interrelated from the child's very first day of life'(*Ibid.*:84). However, learning that occurs in the preschool period is different from the one that occurs during school age, since the latter introduces a fundamental concept in child's development: the zone of proximal development. In order to better understand this concept, it is essential to see the first level of development, called the actual development level, which represents the level of children's intellectual operations that have already matured after a certain completion of a development cycle; basically, what children can do on their own. Characterising cognitive development retrospectively, it has been used for decades as an indication of children's mental abilities. However, as Vygotskij states, scholars have little consideration of the idea that what children can do with external support might be even more indicative of their cognitive level, rather than what they can do alone. Starting from

that position, the Russian scholar elaborates the notion of the zone of proximal development (henceforth ZPD), described as follows (*Ibid*.:86):

> *It is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.*

This characterises development prospectively since it allows to delineate the child's processes that are in a state of 'maturation'. Essentially, those cognitive processes that are in the ZPD, thus in a state of formation, will be the actual development in the future. According to Vygotskij, a child's mental development can be determined only by clarifying these two levels. Furthermore, the ZPD turns out to be an essential aspect of education, as it highlights the potential for child's growth and learning through social interactions and instructions. It permits teachers to delineate the child's 'immediate future development state', allowing to tailor instructions that respect learners' current level to promote a more effective learning. Consequently, one of the main features of learning is its power to reawaken those internal mental processes that can only operate through interaction and cooperation, encapsulated in the concept of the ZPD. In this regard, learning and development do not coincide; it is development that is placed behind learning and this sequence is evident 'in zones of proximal development', which can be ensured by the valid tools that games represent.

Chapter 2. Playful Language Teaching: approach, foundations, definitions and benefits

Play has always accompanied man, and its educational use has ancient origins. As addressed in the first chapter, with Humanism the term 'person' has begun to be understood as its whole, and the concept of 'play' has also started to be spread within educational institutions. It is precisely this combination of learning and play that will be the main core of this chapter. Representing a crucial factor in a child's development, play turns out to be a great resource in learning for children, as Vygotsky claimed. For that reason, in the specific field of glottodidactics,[6] the Playful language teaching methodology is considered optimal to ensure and support the long process of second language acquisition. The following sections will address in detail the role of play in second language learning and the characteristics of this methodology, with a specific focus on foreign children's learners. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Caon and Rutka (2004), any teaching methodology must have a theoretical frame, in order to have scientific reliability. In the case of Playful language teaching, it is represented by all the research known within the Affective humanistic approach, which will be presented before the second part dedicated to the playful methodology.

2.1 Affective humanistic approach to Language Teaching

The term 'humanism', according to the Cambridge Dictionary, is 'a belief system based on human needs and values and not on a god or religion'.[7] This definition prompted an awakening of consciousness in human life and became the very basis of the cultural debate of the 1960'-70' years (Rahman, 2008). The word 'person' emerged as a central focus of several disciplines, and a 'need of humanistic psychology in education came forward in wider discussion' (*Ibid*.:79), provoking a shift of the object of study, namely

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[6] Glottodidactics, or Language teaching, is a science that deals with language education. In this thesis, the distinction given by this discipline between L1 and L2 will be used to indicate the mother tongue (L1) and the second language (L2). The latter means learning a second language through linguistic immersion as the L2 is speaking in the surrounding environments: for instance, the Italian language studied in Italy by a foreign student.

[7] cambridge.org/dictionary/learner-english/humanism?q=Humanism

from the language to the person: the learner. The underlying philosophy linking all these studies came from humanistic psychology, developed by C. Rogers. According to him, a good teacher is one who considers learners' emotions and physical dimensions at the same level as the cognitive one. This 'Copernican revolution', using Balboni's words (2023a:14), marks a fundamental passage in the field of glottodidactics giving rise to the Humanistic language teaching approach. Learning becomes a process that involves the whole person, who is not anymore just a rational being, but first and foremost an individual with feelings and attitudes that condition his relationship with the world and others (Luise, 2006). As a result, this perspective highlights for the first time the individual's affective dimension and personality traits that significantly influence the language learning process. All these assumptions can be encapsulated into key concepts within humanism outlined by the language teacher and researcher E. Stevick, 'who has long been emphasising on humane practice in teaching' (Rahman, 2008:88):

- Feeling;
- Social relations;
- Responsibility;
- Intellect;
- Self actualisation.

Following this perspective, a teacher who wants to adopt a humanistic language teaching approach should consider these five emphases as a guideline since 'all forms of humanism seem to promote at least some of these values' (Johnston, 1993:338).

The central aim of the Affective humanistic language teaching approach is communicative competence (Balboni, 2023a; Caon & Rutka, 2008). Balboni proposes a model (see Figure 1) to better understand the concept of communicative competence: a mental reality (competence) that is realised in the real world (performance); namely in contexts where language is used to achieve a goal. According to him, there are three areas of language competence ('*sapere la lingua*'): linguistic, extralinguistic and contextual abilities. These can become language performance (*Ibid.* '*saper fare lingua*'), i.e. understanding, producing, and transforming texts. However, oral and written texts are communicative events governed by social, pragmatic and cultural rules; for that reason, an individual also must master sociolinguistic, pragma linguistic and intercultural competencies (*Ibid.* '*saper fare con la lingua*'). This specific competence was elaborated

by D. Hymes, highlighting the idea that to use a language effectively and appropriately in a variety of social situations, communicative competence is required, which means '-sapere comunicare in una lingua -; in altri termini, avere competenze nell'uso e non solo conoscenze sull'uso' (*Ibid*:.55). However, any language curriculum must also aim for metalinguistic competence: the ability to reflect upon language. Since this kind of awareness can be developed from an early age, it is important to include explicit language reflections in the language classroom with children too, as they can start building their rational tools to manage their second language performance (see section 2.3.1) (Luise, 2006).

Figure 1: communicative competence (Balboni & Caon, 2015:21)

Considering what has been addressed and taking into consideration the specific context of learning Italian L2 in school by foreign pupils, an Affective humanistic approach results necessary since the primary focus is on the learner, who is accepted in his whole complexity within a free-stress learning environment.

Further, it recognises the complex operation of acquiring a second language: a process that implies the modification of the architecture of the brain (Balboni, 2023; Mollica, 2008) and, as Balboni (2017) highlights, the acceptance of spending hours in a process that has evident results with extreme slowness. For all these reasons, the first and foremost aim of glottodidactics must be the learner within his entirely human complexity by providing a humane environment. Playful language teaching seems to respect all these points; therefore, as Caon and Rutka (2004) state, it transforms the principles of the Affective humanistic approach into practical models.

2.2 An interdisciplinary approach: the contribution of neurolinguistics

Dealing with humanistic language teaching requires an interdisciplinary approach. It means sharing a strong connection with other disciplines to purchase knowledge and integrate insights and tools to elaborate new frameworks and practices while maintaining autonomy (Luise, 2006:13). The field of neurolinguistics has contributed greatly to the Affective humanistic glottodidactics; the fundamental principles of this science that have influenced the field of language education are the bimodality, directionality and modal focusing principle.

2.2.1 Bimodality principle

> *L'acquisizione ha una dimensione neurologica e una psicologica. La macchina neurologica che abbiamo a disposizione è costituita dal cervello, che ha due emisferi le cui funzioni sono differenziate [...], una funziona di percezione olistica, globale, simultanea, analogica ed una percezione analitica, sequenziale, logica; l'interazione tra queste due prospettive nell'elaborazione dell'input segue un percorso che va dal globale all'analitico (Balboni, 2017:12).*

Thanks to neuroscience, it is known how the human brain works during the language acquisition process. The two brain hemispheres, namely right and left, work in a specialised manner indeed. The right one governs the global and emotional perceptions, whereas the left hemisphere is responsible for those tasks of analytical and logical nature, governing also the verbalisation. After a long left hemisphere's dominance in research, as it has always been believed that it was the seat of linguistic processing and so, the place of 'higher forms of cognition' (Mollica, 2008); neuroscience studies have confuted this belief, stating that language acquisition process activates both brain's hemispheres, which collaborate to produce complex thinking (Begotti, 2006). Especially the right hemisphere turns out to be indispensable as it allows the understanding of language input, the fundamental basis of any language learning process. The theory of bimodality, elaborated by Danesi (Mollica, 2008:3), unites 'language learning and language teaching with the

research of brain functions.' It recognises the role of both brain's hemispheres; consequently, if the aim is to teach/learn according to 'nature', it is essential to activate both hemispheres to fully exploit the acquisition potential of the entire human brain (Begotti, 2006). The theory embraces two basic principles: the modal directionality and the modal focusing principle.

2.2.2 Directionality principle

The modal directionality principle states that new input must be presented to students by following the sequence from right (R-Mode) to left (L-Mode) hemisphere; as Danesi (*Ibid*.:7) declares:

> [In] *initial learning stages students need to assimilate new input through observation, induction [...] and various kinds of interactive activities. Unlike many other brain-based approaches, however, bimodality suggests that formal grammatical explanations, drills, and other L-Mode procedures must follow these stages, otherwise the control of structures will not emerge spontaneously. [...] The modal directionality principle thus claims: that experiential forms of tutoring belong to the initial learning stages, and that teaching should move quickly towards a more formal, analytical style.*

Essentially, to ensure that the new input is accessible for the left hemisphere, at the very beginning teachers and pupils should engage in activities that promote the activation of the right hemisphere, i.e. exploration, creativity, spontaneity and induction. Only after having completed this stage, teachers can 'shift' towards the activation of the left hemisphere through techniques that focus on more formal and mechanical instructions. In that sense, the directionality principles can be interpreted as a 'different version of second language teaching - the inductive principle' (*Ibid*.:6), as it encourages pupils to spontaneously discover the mechanisms of language and then proceed towards more accurate reflection guided by the teacher.

The directionality principle has also been investigated by psychology. The well-known presentation-practise-production teaching model, which marked many textbooks of the last century, evolved into a new model of teaching proposed by Gestalt psychology (Balboni, 2023a). It theorised the existence of a sequence of input's perception composed of three phases: 'globalità, analisi e sintesi' (*Ibid*.:66). It means that, by its very nature, the learner's first perception of the communicative event is global, information is then

processed in increasing detail through the mechanism of modal focusing, allowing the left hemisphere to reorganise its knowledge and fix the new input (Della Libera, 2020). Following this theory, Gestalt's model of teaching is the only one that works according to the 'nature', as it moves forward inductively (Begotti, 2006). Nevertheless, it is also important to present some teaching moments addressed to linguistic reflection guided by the teacher and aimed at the development of metalinguistic competence, as Luise (2006:125) highlights:

> *Uno dei valori aggiunti che un insegnamento strutturato, consapevole, in contesto formale e scolastico può dare rispetto ad un processo di acquisizione spontanea di una lingua seconda [risiede] nel dare allo studente gli strumenti e i metodi per riflettere consapevolmente sulla lingua che sta apprendendo e per imparare e scoprire come si imparano le lingue. [...] Anche con i bambini è non solo possibile ma auspicabile programmare ed attuare percorsi di riflessione linguistica.*

Proposing these explicit reflections does not mean returning to traditional and mechanical methods, therefore there is no deductive explanation of the rule, the student instead actively discovers the rule through teacher-led scaffolding. Further, to ensure a beneficial linguistic reflection, it must be the point of 'arrival', never the point of 'departure' as Luise suggests (*Ibid.*).

2.2.3 Modal focusing principles

The modal focusing principle states that students will be focusing on one mode or the other at certain moments in the learning process. For instance, when they want to recall some vocabulary, they use L-Mode; or, at the same time when they have to overcome some error patterns they will resort to the left hemisphere. Indeed, the latter can help them in focusing on formal aspects for accuracy and control, allowing them to overcome the language 'obstacles'. Nevertheless, as Danesi (*Ibid.*:7) highlights, true acquisition occurs when pupils' attempts at 'discourse formulation [that] can be seen to enlist both modes in a cooperative way'.

Suppose bimodality theory is respected; any individual can acquire a second language at any age if the model's directionality and focusing principles are effectively applied in the teaching process.

2.3 Theories of language acquisition

Humanistic language teaching also focuses its attention on the concept of the 'innate mechanism of language acquisition' a theory elaborated by Chomsky. According to the scholar, every person has a Language Acquisition Device (henceforth LAD), thus an innate mechanism for language acquisition that allows people to acquire one or more languages during childhood and beyond (Caon, 2022:10). Nevertheless, in a language teaching context, LAD activates when pupils are surrounded by interactions and positive feedback. The Language Acquisition Support System (henceforth LASS), theorised by Bruner, recognises the importance of LAD but also places a crucial role on all external factors. Teachers, therefore, have to stimulate the activation of learners' LAD through the implementation of a supportive environment, namely LASS. On that subject Luise (2006:101) claims:

> *[...] il valore aggiunto che un progetto di insegnamento formale può dare ad un apprendente di una lingua seconda sta nella messa in pratica di tutte quelle azioni e quelle metodologie in grado di attivare il LASS e che quindi permettono di intervenire sugli orientamenti degli apprendenti, favorendo lo sviluppo dei tratti linguistici e comunicativi che rientrano nella variabilità individuale, tenendo sotto controllo i possibili fattori sociali e psicologici che possono interferire negativamente con l'acquisizione.*

If humans have their development sequence to acquire languages; likewise, does the second language acquisition process (Balboni, 2017). It means that any student who wants to learn a second language has to follow a sequence of interlanguages that characterise the target language. Interlanguage, a term coined by Selinker in 1972, refers to the space between the mother tongue and the target language, an interlingual continuum divided into stages of development (Luise, 2006). In other words, acquisition is ensured by following specific language stages, which differentiate from language to language. The notion has been popularized by Krashen with the 'natural order acquisition' hypothesis in his Second Language Acquisition Theory, the best-known and widespread theory of the mechanism of second language acquisition.

2.3.1 Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory

Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory (henceforth SLAT) (1982) assumes that L2 acquisition is guaranteed when the five hypotheses elaborated by the scholar are respected, which also represent the fundamental concepts related to the humanistic glottodidactics. The set of hypotheses are the following:

- *Acquisition vs. learning and monitor function hypothesis*

One of the most fundamental hypotheses made by Krashen is the distinction between *acquisition* and *learning*. According to him (1982:13), acquisition is a 'process similar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language', in contrast with learning which refers: 'to conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them' (*Ibid*.:14). In addition, learning has a function of monitor: a rational control that is activated by learners to make corrections in their performance and trace their second language progress. Following Krashen's theory, the monitor functional hypothesis implies that formal rules, or conscious learning, play only a limited role in the second language process, the role of 'editor' (Krashen, 1982). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the role of explicit learning, which according to Krashen's theory refers to the concept of *learning*. As claimed by Luise (2006), acquiring a language in a formal context (i.e. school) must seek to reproduce the natural conditions of the mother tongue; however, it also requires an explicit learning process. Consequently, *learning* is fundamental since it activates the monitor function that controls the language acquisition path and permits students to be aware of their second language process.

- *Natural order and comprehensible input hypothesis*

Krashen presupposes the existence of a 'natural order of language acquisition'. In particular, he refers to the existence of a morphological language structure, a path that works for both children and adults and first and second language acquisition. As the scholar (1982) states, although the second language acquisition process does not mirror exactly the mother tongue, some similarities allow it to be called the 'natural order of

SLA'. Nevertheless, this 'natural order' appears only under certain circumstances, that is when the language input is comprehensible; this hypothesis claims the following assumption (*Ibid.*:22):

> *A necessary (but not sufficient) condition to move from stage i+1 is that the acquirer understands input that contains i+1, where 'understand' means that the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not the form of the message. We acquire, in other words, only when we understand language that contains structure that is a 'little beyond' where we are now. How can we understand language that contains structure that we have not yet acquired? The answer is that his apparent paradox is that we use more than our linguistic competence to help us understand. We also use context, our knowledge of the world, our extra-linguistic information to help us understand language directed at us.*

This hypothesis can be symbolised into the formula '*i+1*', where *'i'* stands for the language structure already known, and *'1'* is the new linguistic element to acquire, which is slightly one step ahead of the current language level.

- *Affective Filter hypothesis*

However, providing a comprehensible input in a natural language order is not sufficient to ensure second language acquisition. A third condition is needed, which is the absence of the affective filter: a psychological defence that learners' minds can erect in case of anxiety or fear (Krashen, 1982). Following Krashen's theory, this hypothesis highlights the relationship between affective factors and the process of SLA, since the acquisition process can vary depending on the strength or weakness of the affective filter. The educational implications within this hypothesis are crucial in understanding the importance of not forcing learners to perform something that they do not feel ready to do. As a result, one of the main language teachers' aims should be the development of a classroom environment with low filters, that is those that promote low anxiety among students, for instance by respecting the so-called 'period of silence' (*Ibid.*:31).

2.4 Playful Language Teaching

Playful language teaching represents a practical response to the goals and theoretical principles of Affective humanistic glottodidactics, since a playful environment is, by its very nature, serene and characterised by enjoyment, discovery and playfulness (Begotti, 2007). This ludic methodology places a fundamental value on the concept of play, as the main promoter of the overall development of the pupils. It is precisely through play that every child experiences the world; a privileged mode of discovery that provides 'invaluable opportunity for them to explore, practice basic skills, and experience joy', contributing to 'positive cognitive and physical development and social, and emotional well-being and [supporting] academic skills' (Nesbitt et al., 2023:143). For that reason, a teacher who chooses to use a playful methodology allows students to approach the study of a language in a natural and familiar way, and to involve all their abilities, i.e. cognitive, emotional, social and sensorimotor (Luise, 2006). This statement finds its explanation within the global and holistic nature of play, a feature that engages pupils in a double engagement. On the synchronic level, students are motivated and participate cognitively and emotionally; whereas on the diachronic level, their abilities evolve, and their motivation is renewed as there is a will to achieve new goals (Caon, 2020). Therefore, playful glottodidactics sees in play a strategic dimension for facilitating language learning, as the following components are integrated into the playful experience (Freddi, 1990; Caon, 2022):

- Cognitive: as already pointed out by Piaget (see section 1.3.1), play contributes to children's cognitive development. However, even after childhood, playing continues to activate the player's cognitive dimension, i.e. by learning rules or creating a certain strategy to complete or win a game. Linguistic: the simple reading of the rules allows the language component to be used to its fullest extent during playing, even without being conscious of that (Caon, 2022). In this way, the so-called *Rule of Forgetting* (see section 2.3.1) fully applies and the focus shifts from the form to the meanings of language, allowing the purpose of the game and the use of language to coincide (Luise, 2006).
- Affective: motivation, interest, pleasure and fun are strictly integrated into play that has the potential to activate a pleasure-based motivation. Further, when a recreational activity that is personally meaningful to learners is given, it can help

to raise a feeling of self-efficacy and control of their achievement, as well as provoke positive emotions (Plass et. al., 2014).

- Emotional: the fear of making mistakes or performance anxiety is usually broken down while playing. As addressed in section 2.3.1, one of the aims of second language teaching is avoiding the activation of learners' affective filter (Krashen, 1982), and play turns out to have a special power to reduce this mental barrier. Therefore, the learning process is facilitated if it is associated with positive emotional evaluation, so any recreational activity proposed has to stimulate feelings that act as a stimulus and not as a deterrent (Paciotti, 2018).

- Social: play can encourage social interactions through cooperation between students; many games therefore can be used to teach collaboration, support and respect for others.

- Motor and psychomotor: movement, coordination and balance can be fostered in a playful context since pupils 'act' through language, so language learning is strictly bonded to the movement (*Ibid*.).

- Cultural: the specific rules of a game may mirror the culture of a given place.

- Trans-cultural: as Caon (2020:454) notes:

'All children, independently from their geographical and cultural origin, play and share some aspects belonging to a "universal playful grammar". [...] Thus, the game is an experience that creates fraternization, creates contact and establishes an equal relationship among different sets of knowledge and among different competencies.'

Further, playing engages and entertains simultaneously if the autotelic feature is fully perceived by learners, and it is collocated in the ZPD (*Ibid*.). When this happens, the cognitive and physical efforts are less perceived, without being negated, and an intrinsic pleasure within students arises. As a result, the playful experience has several potentials for second language learning, as Caon (2022:54) states:

L'esperienza ludica presenta, dunque, delle evidenti potenzialità per l'apprendimento in generale poiché coinvolge il giocatore in un'esperienza olistica che presenta straordinarie similarità con le condizioni per cui vi possa essere apprendimento significativo (cf. 6.1). Per l'apprendimento linguistico, in particolare, essa può rivelare

di grande valore poiché quasi la totalità dei giochi prevedono l'uso della parola durante il loro svolgimento e per la comunicazione o la negoziazione di regole.

2.4.1 Didactic game: what is it?

It is believed essential to make a distinction between *playful activity* and *play-like activity* to avoid possible misunderstandings and to not increase prejudices around the implementation of play in language education, since it is often contrasted with the concept of 'study'[8]. The distinction considered is elaborated by Visalberghi (Caon, 2020:448), who argues that a playful activity possesses the following characteristics:

- It is exacting: it involves a psycho-physical, cognitive and affective involvement;
- It is continuous: it traces the entire span of life, not just childhood;
- It is progressive: constantly renewed, guaranteeing different developments;
- It is autotelic: namely, it has a purpose-in-itself.

Play-like activity shares all the mentioned characteristics with the exception that it is not autotelic. It means that the purpose is 'beyond the game itself', namely it does not coincide with the completion of the activity (*Ibid.*). Nesbitt et al. (2023), make a similar distinction between *free play* and *guided play*. According to them, the former occurs when there is no explicit learning goal; on the other hand, guided play is when a specific learning object has been set by adults who support children in reaching it. The fundamental aspect of guided play is that children have agency to construct their knowledge, and this type of recreational activity 'encapsulates the science of how human brains learn' leading to a series of benefits (*Ibid.*:143):

> *When the experience is active, engaging, meaningful, socially interactive, iterative, and joyful rather than passive, distracting and non-meaningful, children can best achieve a breadth of outcomes. [...] Benefits of guided play, compared to traditional direct instruction, have been found across subject areas, including mathematics (Fisher et al.,2013), literacy (Han et al., 2010; Toub et al., 2018), and executive functioning skills (Schmitt et al., 2018; see, Zosh, Hassinger-Das, et al., 2022). Guided play is also superior to free play if there is a curriculum goal in mind (K. Fisher et al., 2010)*

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[8] In Italian language the distinction is given between the terms 'gioco libero - attività ludica' and 'gioco didattico - attività ludiforme'. The English translation is given by Caon (2020).

2.4.2 Play and game

The English language allows a distinction between the words *play* and *game*, the two concepts on which Playful didactics is based (Caon, 2020). In the dimension of playful methodology, *play* refers to the term playfulness: 'the vital charge in which strong intrinsic motivational inducements become integrated with affective-emotive, cognitive and social aspects of the learner' (*Ibid*:447). *Game*, on the other hand, refers to the activities with their rules, times and spaces, in which such vital change can be fostered. As a result, it is possible to affirm that what teachers should do is to propose games in a playful context (Nesbitt et. al., 2023). The distinction makes it possible to formulate a principle underlying Playful Language teaching, that is implementing this methodology does not only mean using play-like activities (games), but as Caon (2022) highlights, using all those activities that stimulate intrinsic motivation and facilitate second language learning, even if they do not have the characteristics mentioned in the section above.

> *Il docente, dunque, dovrebbe proporre attività ludiformi, cioè games, in un contesto che sia anch'esso ludico, play. [...] Scopo specifico della glottodidattica ludica è, quindi quello di fornire al docente principi teorici e suggerimenti operativi per programmare, organizzare e gestire determinate attività in modo che siano percepite dagli studenti come ludiche [...] ma che possano anche facilitare il compito di acquisire una lingua. [...] Per far questo è necessario sapere coniugare armonicamente il potenziale totalizzante ed educativo dei comportamenti ludici dell'essere umano con gli obiettivi formativi e linguisti propri della glottodidattica (Ibid.:57).*

2.4.3 Definition and foundations

As Caon and Rutka (2004:22) point out, there is still no common definition of Playful language teaching. Despite the extensive literature and the recognition of the strong educational value of play, there is still much uncertainty among teachers who perceive it suitable only for the youngest pupils, confining it to purely playful moments as opposed to the concept of 'study'(Ghetti, 2022). Consequently, Playful language teaching is one of those teaching methodologies that is often misunderstood, as Luise (2006:181-82) states:

> *Tutti dicono di apprezzarla, ma poi pochi la applicano veramente; in particolare, spesso è vista come un metodo adatto solo ai bambini. [...] In realtà la metodologia ludica è uno*

sfondo sul quale si possono inserire tutte le proposte didattiche e linguistiche, in grado non solo di motivare allo studio, ma di veicolare lingua e contenuti, potenziando l'apprendimento. [...] Bisogna però intendersi su che cosa significa metodologia ludica: essa non va intesa come l'identificazione del tempo della didattica con svago e divertimento, con attività poco impegnative o con l'uso di giocattoli e giochi strutturati, ma come la principale modalità attraverso la quale viene presentato il materiale linguistico e viene fatta esercitare la lingua, attraverso la quale lo studente può osservare, sperimentare, manipolare, impossessarsi di una lingua.

According to Caon and Rutka (2004, 2013), Playful language teaching is a methodology that consistently realises the founding principles of the Affective humanistic approach into operational models and teaching techniques. An attempt at a definition can be summarised in the term 'playfulness', seen as the fundamental principle for promoting learners' global development through ensuring a playful environment, with the aim to ensure the possibility to face the study of a second language without stress or fear through the implementation of recreational activities that involve pupils globally and stimulate their intrinsic motivation (*Ibid.*, 2004:22-3). The Italian scholar Freddi (1990), who has done play a cornerstone of his glottodidactics studies, has identified in the book *Azione, gioco, lingua* some keywords that underlie a playful language teaching for children. In line with Caon and Rutka (2004:23), these fundamentals have value beyond the age of the learner and can therefore be taken as the core principles of the Playful language teaching methodology. The fundamental principles are the following (see Freddi, 1990; Caon & Rutka, 2004; Caon, 2022):

- Sensoriality: it is essential to ensure students with opportunities to involve all sensory channels; for that reason, teaching language should favour multi-sensorial experience to make learning more complete and productive;
- Motricity: movement is fundamental in human life. Dance, music, mime and gesture are essential aspects in human manifestations. From a teaching perspective, motricity contributes to the development of the teaching-learning path, so it should integrate verbal and nonverbal language to ensure meaningful language learning.
- Neurological bimodality: to teach and learn according to 'nature', language teaching has to respect the bimodality principle (see section 2.1.2)

- Semiotic: within a language learning process, the plurality of languages (i.e. sounds, gestures and objectives) must be promoted to ensure meaningful learning; 'the playful methodology offers an optimal context for this purpose' (Caon, 2022:60)
- Relationality: although the existence of a Language Acquisition Device (LAD), language is acquired through a continuum exchange with others. In teaching practice, many games allow language to be used with a communicative purpose that in turn leads learners to interact with others, also improving social skills.
- Pragmatism: language becomes a social action as people can do things with it; while playing it is used to achieve a goal, complete or win the game.
- Expressivity: playing a game allows students also to use their emotional dimension since playing requires imagination and creation, all spheres within their affective dimension.
- Authenticity: games make situations authentic and believable; while playing, learners unconsciously create an authentic communicative situation in which they spontaneously use the second language (Paciotti, 2018).
- Biculturalism: learning a second language also requires learning its culture, since 'il gioco, come la lingua, è anche espressione della cultura che l'ha creato' (Caon & Rutka, 2004:28).
- Naturality: as claimed by Freddi (1990:137), the natural process of L1 acquisition occurs using language where the child focuses more on meaning than form. The aim of second language teaching is, therefore, to recreate this 'unconscious process of acquisition'. The playful methodology seems optimal for recreating that situation of naturalness, as it partly mirrors the learning process of the mother tongue.
- Playfulness: defined as a 'superordinate category' (Freddi, 1990), any language teaching methodology should be built around the concept of playfulness. With a focus on children, play, as a factor of cognitive, emotional, social and cultural development, must represent every moment of teaching activity, as Freddi (*Ibid*.:139) writes:

> [con] *gioco il bambino si esercita, impara, domina e controlla il reale: grazie al gioco, si prepara all'incontro con il futuro, con la vita adulta. Sempre mediante il gioco gestirà poi la propria esistenza anche se esso non avrà la preponderanza*

2.4.4 Games' classification and typologies

Following Piaget's cognitive theory in which play is seen as a fundamental factor in a child's development, the following types of games are presented according to the categories addressed in section 1.3.1: functional, symbolic and rule games. The following categorisation is under a functional perspective, rather than in a chronological one; since play does not end with childhood but continues to influence individuals throughout their entire lives, as Caon and Rutka (2004) highlight. In a school context, functional or exercise games represent all those recreational activities that exercise and fix vocabulary and language structure. From a development perspective, these are those games that allow a child to explore the surrounding reality that he carries out for the pure pleasure of experimenting: 'essi sono finalizzati alla gioia di fare e non ai risultati del fare" (Freddi, 1990:144). From a glottodidactics point of view, the pleasure of experimenting passes on to the level of language, where the learner does not perceive the gap between play and exercise, since the motivation and pleasure derived from these activities are the same as those free play (*Ibid*.). Some examples of teaching techniques that fall under this classification are: inclusion and exclusion, association, completion, fixation (i.e. crosswords or riddles) and problem-solving activities. Symbolic play manifests itself in the child's ability to represent absent objects through all means of expression, not only through verbal language. This is the reason why all those teaching games that require the use of creativity and verbal and non-verbal languages, fall into this category. Some instances include: expressive activities (i.e. music, theatre, rhyming rhymes), transcoding activities, poster making, comics, role play and so on. Rules games, that last throughout all existence, are the games of social living. For this reason, these types of games are the most used in school since learners can acquire language social rules; for instance: complex role play, information gap, traditional board games (i.e. the goose game), card games, tris and so on. All these examples, which do not represent an exhaustive list of playful techniques, make it possible to facilitate L2 learning by placing it in a playful perspective. However, it is important to specify another aspect concerning the playful

language teaching methodology, as Begotti (2006:29) indicated, that is playful methodology does not mean simply implementing games, since:

> *Sono tenute in considerazione ed utilizzate come strumento didattico nella glottodidattica ludica tutte quelle attività che, pur magari non essendo giochi veri e propri, promuovono però un coinvolgimento totale dello studente, motivandolo e facendogli provare piacere.*

The pivotal aim of Playful language teaching is therefore to implicitly drive students to continue the language learning process through the implementation of a cognitively challenging climate (ZPD), in which there is no negative stress, and through the respect for learners' emotional dimension by trying to make them have a positive and enjoyment experiences in such a way that learners are motivated to continue the experience (Caon, 2022).

2.5 The benefits of Playful Language Teaching in the Italian L2 classroom

According to Luise (2006:184), adopting a Playful language teaching means: 'creare un contesto nel quale lavorare con una lingua per impararla sia significativo, autentico e motivante per lo studente'. In the context of learning Italian as a L2, it means presenting the language in the form of activities that are perceived as pleasant, related to the learner's interests and needs, with authentic purposes (Caon & Rutka, 2004). Therefore, play and its games have the powerful capacity to make language usage authentic in a context in which it is usually not: the classroom. This happens since the central goal of the game is the completion of it, so the student does not play to learn the L2, but to complete it without realizing that they are using the Italian language. However, as highlighted by Luise (2006), students have to be made aware of the non-autotelic character of the game, but at times that does not coincide with the game, since it is precisely this specific feature that allows the so-called *Rule of Forgetting* (Krashen,1982) to apply, laying the foundations for a meaningful and lasting second language acquisition. In addition, the relation between play and language creates the prerequisites for fostering the development of an intrinsic motivation that supports students throughout their learning process. Especially for young foreign pupils, a playful context becomes reassuring and welcoming, allowing them to learn in a familiar and natural context and to participate in the classroom

regardless of their L2 language-communication level by exploiting their previous knowledge and becoming active protagonists (Caon & Rutka, 2004). Many playful techniques, such as problem-solving, drive students to the inductive discovery of the second language, promoting a sense of independence in hypothesis-making. The latter is a crucial aspect of why a teacher should propose a second language teaching in a playful context: knowledge is a process of personal elaboration, not restricted to the simple reproduction of content; the implementation of play-like activities can foster Italian L2 learners to this complex process of 'building-knowledge'. The challenge component of some games can also positively contribute to this process, since it has a strong motivational and fun power, and the union between enjoyment and cognitive effort is best realised through it (*Ibid*.). In this regard, also Luise (2006) notes that the most profitable games for language teaching are those that allow the learner to challenge himself or others. Further, group challenge games can encourage peer interaction and collaboration, which are essential for second language learning. Fundamentally, as Caon (2020:456) writes, adopting a playful language teaching methodology in the Italian L2 classroom means:

> *[…] Locate in playfulness the founding principle that promotes the total development of the student and, in consequence, creates learning situations that are complex and rich in stimulations (experiential and creative activities, problem solving activities, and ones that demand multi-sensory involvement) that are followed by moments of linguistic formalization, reflection, and the systemization of grammar.*

2.5.1 The main challenges for foreign learners in Italian school

An increasing reality in Italian schools is the large presence of foreign pupils.[9] Unlike the Italian peers, the latter have to face further challenges that, if not achieved, can negatively affect their future academic success. For that reason, as it is written in '*Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri*' (C.M. n° 24 del 1/03/2006):

> *Uno degli obiettivi prioritari nell'integrazione degli alunni stranieri è quello di promuovere l'acquisizione di una buona competenza nell'italiano scritto e parlato, nelle*

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[9] Foreign learners means both students who were born in countries other than Italy and students who were born in Italy to non-Italian parents.

forme ricettive e produttive, per assicurare uno dei principali fattori di successo scolastico e di inclusione sociale.

Therefore, besides having to learn the Italian language for basic everyday communication, foreign pupils have to read, write and study in the school's language in order to develop the abilities to learn the school's disciplines. This distinction can be highlighted by two aspects elaborated by Cummin within language competence: BICS (*Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills*) and CALP (*Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency*). A native Italian speaker enters school at an age where he has generally already developed BICS, used to interacting with others in everyday situations (i.e. to greet, ask for information and so on). Then, it takes approximately several years to complete the CALP competence during the school years (i.e. being able to summarise, take and produce argumentative texts and so on). It is therefore crucial that before the foreign pupil is exposed to any language teaching action aimed at developing CALP, he or she must first have worked through the language needed to understand and acquire it, namely BICS (Luise, 2006). Consequently, the first step with foreign pupils is to ensure that they develop BICS in a way that promotes equal opportunities with Italian peers to achieve academic success. Nevertheless, it is not always ensured, as Luise (*Ibid.*) notes: the greatest cause of school failure for foreign students is linked to the school itself, which lacks in providing them teaching actions that meet their emotional, cognitive and linguistic needs. An interesting action-research study (Donatiello, 2019) on the facilitation of Italian L2 for foreign pupils underlines the importance of providing Italian courses at school to reduce the 'social marginalisation' and the level of school drop-out, that affects the weakest category of students: the foreign ones. As Donatiello (*Ibid.*:60) highlights:

Una buona organizzazione scolastica che faciliti e predisponga l'apprendimento della lingua italiana per gli alunni stranieri è fondamentale per garantire il successo non solo scolastico, ma anche civile dell'intero paese. [...] Una scuola che investe molte risorse nell'inclusione, nell'accoglienza e nella didattica interculturale si prefigge un obiettivo a lungo termine molto ambizioso: quello dell'integrazione linguistica e culturale di tutti gli alunni iscritti nel proprio istituto.

Italian schools should pay more attention to this aspect to guarantee equal opportunities for all its students since scholastic success comes precisely from the school itself. A valid solution is represented by the playful dimension, a privileged modality of approaching the Italian language for foreign students since it can facilitate the transition from the language of communication (BICS) to the language of study (CALP) (Luise, 2006).

2.5.2 The foreign Italian L2 children learners

> *Il fanciullo deve avere tutte le possibilità di dedicarsi a giochi e ad attività ricreative che devono essere orientati ai fini educativi.*[10]

Children with an immigration background who enter primary Italian schools, besides the drawbacks regarding BICS and CALP, can present some other factors that can negatively affect their L2 acquisition process. According to Tonioli (2021), who investigates the role of teaching Italian L2 within preschool children in multilingual contexts, the main factors that can influence second language learning for foreign children are:

- The quantity and quality of language exposure;
- The cultural representations of families of origin;
- The level of schooling of mothers in their native language;
- The quality and quantity of second language teaching courses offered in Italy.

Consequently, the researcher claims the necessity to pay more attention to the various aspects of language skills (i.e. vocabulary, language expression, grammar and so on) when dealing with foreign children who are attending primary school for the first time, as they could have some disadvantages even before the start of the school program. Ensuring a playful methodology can positively influence their L2 development; indeed, the author (*Ibid.*:3) affirms that any playful language teaching action is a powerful tool to facilitate Italian L2 learning, as the world of children is made up of play. Playful dimension enables young foreign students to discover and learn in harmony with their development, and this is why playfulness must be the foundation of any educational actions aimed at children, as it naturally follows how children develop their cognitive,

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[10] Dichiarazione dei Diritti del Fanciullo (ONU, 1959) in Caon and Rutka (2004:16).

emotional, physical and social dimensions (Caon & Rutka, 2004). Therefore, as Luise (2010) affirms, some fundamental aspects must be respected in any language teaching aimed at young pupils, which are:

- Teaching according to 'nature': children are specific individuals with precise neurological and psychological characteristics. For instance, until the age of eight, children memorise in part still implicitly, by automatisms, and close to the way they learn the first language. Teaching according to nature therefore means knowing and respecting these characteristics by ensuring the sensorial, experiential, and holistic dimensions at the centre of teaching action.
- Playful methodology: play is the privileged modality through which children experience the world; consequently, it allows them to approach the study of Italian L2 in a natural way, and to involve all their cognitive, emotional, social and motor skills in the learning process.

Balboni (2023a) also writes about playfulness as one of the main cornerstones of teaching language to children, specifying that it is not a matter of 'filling' young pupils with games, but rather having a playful attitude, since:

> *Il gioco è la dimensione naturale della vita infantile, in cui si creano situazioni funzionali, in cui si affrontano in ambiente protetto le dinamiche della vita reale, senza pagare gravi conseguenze per gli errori [...]. (Ibid.:35)*

Now, if we try to imagine a child who has just arrived in Italy, a country where he does not know the language at all; the same is true for his parents, who can not help him with the integration in the school community. This child will be left on his first day of school in the hands of unknown people, from whom he does not understand a single word. Anxiety and fear are some of the strongly negative feelings that the child might experience, frightened and confused in a completely new situation. Creating a playful context, characterised by the implementation of games and a stress-free atmosphere, can make a significant difference in supporting the young foreign pupil in this new life experience. Consequently, playfulness must be the driving force behind the foreign children's teaching environment and activities; as it creates a situation of naturalness and allows the foreign child to learn by tracing the mechanism of mother tongue acquisition;

for that reason: '*la ludicità deve costituire la trama e l'ordito di ogni glottodidattica per bambini*' (Freddi, 1990:139). Further, as Balboni (2023a:35) highlights, if it is true that the child is a 'learning machine', the real difference is given by the figure of the teacher, who provides LASS by creating the right condition in which children can learn. In that sense, it is believed the potential of Playful language teaching as an optimal methodology to guarantee LASS in which playful does not refer to a teaching based on games, but rather a privileged modality to learn a language within an environment that engages the child globally in familiar activities.

Chapter 3. Recreational Linguistics and Second Language Teaching

An effective methodological proposal for second language teaching that follows the principles and purposes of the humanistic approach is Recreational linguistics. Besides having some differences from Playful language teaching, as pointed out by Bosc and Zanoni (2021), since the latter focuses on the creative use of language, Recreational linguistics uses language for linguistic, morphosyntactic or lexical activities, proposing language games with 'pencil and paper'. Nevertheless, both disciplines recognise playfulness as the principal core of language students' global development. For that reason, Recreational linguistics falls within the playful language methodologies, since the application of it implies also the maintenance of playfulness as a vital charge, that must animate the environment in which games are implemented as strategic tools to facilitate the second language learning process, driving learners towards the pleasure of meaningful and active language learning (Begotti & Pavan, 2011). Its pioneer, Anthony Mollica, has published large quantities of studies regarding this discipline, creating also a vast production of activities to be applied into the language classroom (see Mollica, 2019; 2020, 2020a)[11]. As Mollica (2015) affirms, language games have existed since antiquity and this assumption has led someone to state 'that perhaps *homo ludens* preceded *homo sapiens'*. Man has always had an innate tendency towards posing and solving puzzles, word games and riddles, as evidenced by the oldest book of games commissioned more than 700 years ago (Danesi & Mollica, 1994). This 'puzzling instinct' reveals that puzzles and games are a fundamental feature of the human mind and are still well alive in the contemporary days (*Ibid*.). In the field of glottodidactics, Mollica proposed recreational activities that can stimulate this problem-solving tendency, and at the same time facilitate the second language learning process. Therefore, these techniques are used to teach, review and reinforce language skills and the reason why can be encapsulated in the following statement: 'puzzles not only bring us pleasure but also help us to work and learn more effectively' (Fixx, 1978:18, in *Ibid*.). Further studies have shown that the best way in which children and teenagers learn is through some forms of recreational mental play; therefore, if the characteristics of this 'mental play' can change from culture to

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[11] As it will be addressed in more detail in section 3.1.2, the word *recreational activity* is to be understood as an 'umbrella term'. For that reason, the terms language or word games are also used in the present thesis to refer to the activities of Recreational linguistics.

culture, 'the need to solve problems constitutes a cognitive, cross-cultural universal' (*Ibid.*:347).

Language itself is a game, as De Mauro (2010:8 in Fornara & Giudici, 2015) writes in the preface of *Ludolinguistica e Glottodidattica*: 'un gioco che facciamo attingendo alle risorse della nostra memoria a lungo termine per prelevarne le parole, per incastrarle […], per sostituirle o spiegarle o avvolgerle'. Following this though, it is evident how the concept of 'play' is intrinsic within language itself, which is why it is not surprising the implementation of word games in language teaching. Recreational linguistics proposes language games with 'pencil and paper' that, according to Rogers (1981, in Mollica, 2019) share five properties of puzzle techniques that mirror current practices in second language teaching (*Ibid.*):

- They are competitive: they can motivate pupils, if well managed by the language teacher;
- They are rule-governed: rules can make the activity easily understandable and manageable, avoiding ambiguity;
- They are goal-defined: there is a language objective;
- They give closure;
- They are engaging: it is a continuous challenge, either to oneself or to others.

Therefore, as Mollica (2019) notes, the use of puzzle techniques, such as crosswords, search words, etc., have long been included in many approaches and teachers use them to review, reinforce and expand grammar, vocabulary and communication skills. For that reason, as the Italian scholar claims (*Ibid.*:13): 'non si può pensare oggi ad una glottodidattica priva della dimensione dei giochi e degli enigmi'. Moreover, the Common European Framework of Reference emphasises the important role of playfulness, highlighting the crucial role of ludic activities in the second language acquisition process and mentioning some types of language games, such as crossword activity, hangman activity, rebus and anagram, but also TV quizzes and word games typical of advertising or newspaper headlines (Begotti, 2006; Fiorentino, 2022).

3.1 Definitions

Ludolinguistica, the Italian term for Recreational Linguistics, is a neologism coined by G. A. Rossi, who refers to the study of a language through lexical combinations of puzzles, word searches and riddles (Bernardini, 2018:299). A concrete definition remains absent in dictionaries until 1998, when the *Vocabolario della lingua italiana* by Nicola Zingarelli first recognises the term as a 'branca della linguistica che si occupa di giochi di parole e combinazioni lessicali' (Mollica, 2019:17). As Bernardini (2018) highlights, these language games that Zingarelli dictionary refers to, Mollica has transformed into a teaching method to motivate students in Italian language acquisition. Nevertheless, the educational value of *Ludolinguistica*, especially in the field of second language teaching, was reached and fully recognised only in 2015, when the *Vocabolario Treccani* online goes further in its definition, highlighting the fact that this discipline can be applied to the process of learning a language, whether mother tongue or second/foreign language:

> *Parte della linguistica che si occupa dei giochi di parole in chiaro, intesi in particolare come strumento di apprendimento o studio della lingua madre o di una lingua seconda; in senso stretto l'attività consiste nell'inventare o risolvere giochi di parole (Mollica, 2019:17).[12]*

However, Mollica (2019) goes far beyond the given definitions, emphasising its value as a language facilitation tool. According to him, any language teacher who wants to apply this method can exploit all those techniques from *enigmistica* and *ludolinguistica*; indeed, in his definition, he combines the two terms and states:

> *Any word game which can motivate students to learn basic vocabulary, grammar, encourage them to write or acquire knowledge and appreciate the culture of the target language is fair game (Bernardini, 2018:302).*

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[12] The *Vocabolario Treccani* inserts the *Ludolinguistica* term after an interview by Tamara Baris with Anthony Mollica, who emphasises the facilitator value of this discipline in the learning process of first or second language (see Mollica, 2019).

Not surprisingly, Mollica's answer to the question 'what three words best summarise Recreational linguistics?', he replies: 'motivate, amuse, teach' (*Ibid*.:306). So, according to its pioneer, any activity that can stimulate cognitive efforts of a logical, linguistic or creative nature can support language pupils to learn the target language, under the condition that they must be fun and rewarding.

3.1.1 'Ludolinguistica' and 'Enigmistica': a matter of purposes

Although there is a strong connection between traditional puzzle and Recreational linguistics since sometimes the materials can coincide, they should not be confused as they are two different disciplines with different purposes. Begotti (2007:7), in her attempt to distinguish them, emphasises how *Ludolinguistica* uses the language for playful activities based on the concept of a linguistic, syntactic or grammatical 'obstacle'. In addition, in the language games proposed by Recreational linguistics not always there is only one solution, as in the classic puzzle, but a more alternative solution as the aim is to foster creativity and discovery. Fornara and Giudici (2015), besides recognising the relationship between these two disciplines, state that Recreational linguistics does not simply use classic puzzle techniques in the L2 classroom; rather, it takes some elements of 'pure' puzzle and transforms them into more playful and engaging activities with a language learning objective, since there is the underlying belief is that they can stimulate the cognitive process involved in language learning in a more fun way, without denying the mental effort required hidden behind the game. However, the best explanation of this differentiation is given by Mollica, who interviewed by Bernardini (2018), emphasises the primary aim of *Ludolinguistica*, namely language teaching/learning. According to him, *enigmistica* uses word games to play on words 'for the sake of language fun, and their puns on words are to elicit humour, whereas:

> *I use Recreational Linguistics to teach vocabulary, grammar and culture. In other words, I focus my suggested activities to emphasize a topic which teachers are teaching and try to make that topic more 'palatable'. [...] My purpose is ludus gratia docent/discendi (playing for the sake of teaching/learning).*

3.1.2 Recreational activities: language-teaching puzzles and language-teaching games

It is necessary to differentiate language-teaching puzzles from language-teaching games since the former are problem-solving texts that require the individual learner to come up with a solution within the rules of the text; and the latter, on the other hand, represent problem-solving activities that involve group interaction, and therefore are more focused on context (Mollica, 2019). Further to this distinction, there is a differentiation in the implementation of these two glottodidactics techniques, as Danesi and Mollica (1994:350) note: 'language-teaching puzzles are usable primarily for form-based and meaning-based language tasks, and language-teaching games for more communication-based and group interaction tasks.'

An interesting study on language-teaching puzzle techniques and grammar has been conducted by Addazi (2020), who states that puzzle games share the same characteristics of language text in which certain grammatical structures must be observed. The hidden word to be discovered in a crossword mirrors the linguistic structure to be found in a text, and the identification of it is guided by a set of rules, namely the rules of the crossword and the grammar rules in the text, that the student is implicitly learning. Following this thought, the author (*Ibid.*) claims that it is possible to outline a parallelism between the structure of a puzzle game and language text.

Nevertheless, the central aim of language-teaching puzzles is motivating language pupils and the same is true for language-teaching games. Both are effective means for challenging the students' innate tendency to be creative towards some specific learning goal, making the language acquisition process more enjoyable and meaningful. Furthermore, both techniques involve learners cognitively as they require the usage of problem-solving strategy, or a great activation of creativity, all aspects that foster pupils to shift from a spontaneous to a more structured and elaborated thought. For that reason, as Mollica states (see section 3.1), any activity whether of a puzzle or playful nature that stimulates and motivates learners to continue language learning is valid and efficient, and places them under the 'umbrella term' of recreational activity. These, whatever their nature, can be proposed to be carried out in pairs or groups since the level the child reaches in solving problems in collaboration with others determines the area of proximal development (Vygotskij 1990:269 in Carsano, 2021; see section 1.3.3). In this way, even the least competent pupil can benefit from the activity being guided by a peer, who

explaining and motivating the other indirectly improves and gains greater awareness of his/her thinking.

A further distinction is provided by Begotti (2007) in her study on affective humanistic glottodidactics in teaching Italian L2 to adults. The scholar proposes a classification of games in which ludolinguistics and enigmatic games are distinguished. The former are characterised by the prevalence of the creative element of language, while in the latter it is the solution of an *enigma* through language to prevail. Those activities of ludolinguistic nature, such as acrostic, tautograms and alliteration, are more appropriate for students with a medium to high language level, as a good command of the language is required to complete the activity. On the contrary, activities from *enigmismistica*, such as crossword, riddle and so on, can be used and adapted to any language level. However, as Begotti (*Ibid.*) notes, Anthony Mollica has created innumerable ludolingustics games for any language level proficiency, confirming their effectiveness at any stage of the second language process and any age of students.

3.2 Recreational linguistics at school

Although the strategic value of recreational activities as language facilitation is well established, there are still prejudices that target the credibility of those activities; that, consequently, leads to a kind of exclusion of their use in schools (Fornara & Giudici, 2015). These games with 'pencil and paper' are seen as the realm of 'language teaching anarchy' due to the mistaken belief that creativity and imagination manifest themselves best when free of any constraints. On the contrary, as the two scholars (*Ibid.*) point out, the greatness of creativity lies precisely in being able to move within pre-established constraints. Also Ghetti (2022) affirms that the rules in word games carry a natural fruitfulness, and young pupils, already at an early stage, know this well and accept the rule as indispensable for the continuity of play.

Consequently, it is evident how recreational activities, far from being mere 'anarchic' teaching time-fillers, allow pupils to construct their own language learning process through discovery and play, under the guidance of the teacher who is a facilitator. In any case, as Fornara and Guidici (2015) highlight, it is important to use language games as it

is an effective language teaching strategy, but under the condition that it is implemented with full awareness and flexibility.

3.2.1 Benefits of recreational activities

Pavan and Begotti (2011) state that the benefits of Recreational linguistics activities are innumerable. Firstly, they allow the same linguistic objective to be pursued through different modalities, favouring all cognitive and learning learners' styles in the classroom. Secondly, the activities are very flexible, meaning that they can easily be adopted and adapted by the teacher according to the language goals. Another aspect to consider is that many of language-teaching puzzles and games are activities that support language acquisition processes, as Danesi (2008, in Pavan & Begotti, 2011) notes, since they allow the bimodality theory to apply, setting all areas of the brain in motion (see section 2.2.1). The invitation to use recreational activities in the second language classroom as crucial elements for motivation, language learning and challenge, is given by Mollica (2019) himself, who describes them as versatile techniques that can be used for both specific tasks, such as grammar reinforcement or vocabulary knowledge, or interactive tasks, for foster communication and functions. The field of glottodidatics can therefore only benefit from recreational activities, and one of the greater advantages that Recreational linguistics offers is the possibility of creating a successful atmosphere in the language classroom and bringing to pupils – especially the weaker ones – great language learning benefits, as Fornara and Giudici (2015:12) highlight:

Giocare con le parole significa dunque avere qualche carta in più per raggiungere un uso consapevole e critico della lingua, o comunque per aprire nuovi spiragli di consapevolezza anche a chi ne resta abitualmente (cioè con un approccio scolastico tradizionale) escluso.

3.2.2 How to implement recreational activities

The implementation of Recreational linguistics within a second language classroom can bring great benefits to all students, from the youngest to the oldest, under the condition that the teacher applies the activities of this discipline in an appropriate manner (Bosc &

Zenoni, 2021), as they 'must be synchronized to the learner's age and level of competence' (Danesi and Mollica, 1994). For instance, as Mollica (2019) notes, children may have some difficulties in logic-based puzzles or rebuses, whereas they can easily handle simplified forms of language-teaching puzzles such as crossword, search word puzzles, etc. The invitation to the teacher is therefore to adapt the activity always keeping in mind his/her target students, as it can define the success or failure of the second language learning. Mollica (2019) urges language teachers to consider five aspects to ensure the effectiveness of recreational activities:

- Linguistic area
- Language skills
- Language level
- Choice of activity: the teacher has to choose which modality he/she wants to implement to make the second language learning more 'appetising'. This implies a knowledge of the innumerable language-teaching techniques of this discipline, which the teacher must carefully select;
- Instructions: they must be clear and simple to avoid misunderstanding. This is an essential aspect since, as Mollica (*Ibid*.:21) highlights, even the choice of the verb is decisive in instructions:

'i verbi abbinare, accoppiare, associare, collegare, tirare, unire' indicano che si tratta di un'attività di abbinamento; trovare, cercare = crucipuzzle; 'inserire' = cruciverba; 'scegliere' = scelta multipla ecc.

3.2 Recreational Linguistics and Italian L2 children learners

Any second language teaching action addressed to children must be built around the concept of playfulness (Freddi, 1990). Recreational linguistics, besides respecting playfulness as the core principle for child's global development, adds the creative usage of language to the L2 acquisition process, which motivates and amuses at the same time, fostering discovery and exploration of language. Ghetti (2022), a primary school teacher

and university professor who is involved in Recreational linguistics for years, emphasises how this creative use of language develops attention to the form as it permits language to separate from its utilitarian role. This contributes not only to a lexical enrichment but also to a 'taste' for words that is indispensable for implementing interest and curiosity even for those language aspects that are usually 'boring' and 'mechanical', such as grammar. All these aspects are also indicated in the *Indicazioni nazionali* of Italian primary school curriculum, which invites the primary language teacher to:

> *Favorire l'esplorazione e la scoperta, al fine di promuovere il gusto per la ricerca di nuove conoscenze. In questa prospettiva, la problematizzazione svolge una funzione insostituibile: sollecita gli alunni a individuare problemi, a sollevare domande, a mettere in discussione le conoscenze già elaborate, a trovare appropriate piste d'indagine, a cercare soluzioni originali (MIUR, 2012:26-7).[13]*

As Mollica (2020) notes, children like to solve complex problems as the success of solving gratifies them, and the final solution is intended as a kind of reward, an aspect that fosters the learning process motivating pupils to continue to learn. According to Bosc and Zenoni (2021), recreational activities from *Ludolinguisitca* can be used as a means for facilitating second language learning as early as primary school and, for some techniques, can be brought forward to the last year of preschool. In support of their thesis, practical examples for young learners are presented, such as tautogram and crossword. The former, according to the authors, can be implemented for reviewing alphabetical order at early stage, while the latter, defined as the 'multifaceted language game par excellence', can be employed with different didactic purposes: 'cruciverba ortografici, lessicali, per la comprensione dei testi narrative, dedicati ai suoni simili, all'uso dei verbi, alle coniugazioni e molto altro' (*Ibid*.:379).

From same though are Fornara and Giudici (2015), who have compiled a long list of recreational linguistics proposals 'born among primary school desks' aimed at discovering the Italian language through play and fun:

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[13] https://www.mim.gov.it/documents/20182/51310/DM%20254_2012.pdf/1f967360-0ca6-48fb-95e9-c15d49f18831?version=1.0&t=1480418494262 (last view 11/01/2025)

Siamo [...] sì convinti che il gioco linguistico (anche quello abbastanza difficile) possa essere avviato con buon profitto già nei primi anni di scolarità non tanto per veicolare apprendimenti mirati, quanto per far nascere nel bambino l'amore per la parola e per le sue mille trasformazioni (Ibid.:9).

Therefore, the language game is defined by the two authors as a valuable 'ally' to induce young learners to discover what usually remains hidden, what they call 'il complicato e sorprendente meccanismo che regge il linguaggio' (*Ibid*.:12). Furthermore, activities proposed by *Ludolinguistica* are based on the cornerstone of current Italian language teaching, which according to them (*Ibid*.) are the role of textuality and the metalinguistic reflection, the re-evaluation of the error and the development of vocabulary. Indeed, communicative life is governed by textual dimension and for this reason any Italian L2 teaching action should use text as a starting point, and then proceed towards a reflection on the language within the text. Nevertheless, to access written/oral texts and to guarantee metalinguistic reflection, it is essential to know and master elements that compose the text, namely words and letters. Recreational activities can facilitate this passage and support young learners in the first steps of the Italian L2 language acquisition process. Additionally, these kinds of activities can facilitate the transition from a more spontaneous and natural use to a deeper linguistic awareness. Therefore, when pupils are engaged in completing these recreational activities, their attention is on the hidden mechanism of the Italian language without realising it, as the *Rule of Forgetting* (see 2.3.1) is fully applied. Working and reflecting on words and letters implicitly allows pupils to expand their vocabulary, which according to Fornara and Giudici (*Ibid*.), should be one of the main aims of language teaching as it allows the child to develop articulate thinking and construct effective texts. This aspect enables foreign children to develop their BICS and construct efficient and accurate CALP competence in due time. Further, as Ghetti (2022:17) highlights, working on vocabulary has innumerable benefits overall second language acquisition process, for instance, it also has a positive effect on graphemic competence:

Il lavoro sul lessico [è] *profondamente connesso a tutte le altre dimensioni della lingua, perché un approccio che favorisca l'arricchimento del lessico ha ricadute positive anche sull'ortografia delle parole: 'il consolidamento del legame tra il significato delle parole e la loro forma grafica e fonologica può favorire uno sviluppo armonico delle abilità linguistiche di tutti gli allievi. […] (Ardassino, 2017:150).*

Chapter. 4 Teaching grammar today between linguistic reflection and play

Over the last few centuries, teaching grammar has undergone several changes in methods and in the interpretations of the concept itself. For instance, until the 1950s-60s, there was a strong conception that grammar should be taught through rigorous grammatical and logical analysis (Balboni, 2023a), whereas in recent decades, as Luise (2011) notes, languages have been taught according to the principles of the communicative approach, in which grammar was only a component. In this latter approach, the functional dimension of language was accentuated at the expense of explicit reflection, thus prioritising competence *of* use over competence *on* the use of language. Nowadays, after decades of language teaching based on communicative principles, grammar based on the concept of linguistic reflection is returning, distinguishing the teaching grammar from those approaches and methods that considered it as a rigid and mechanical system to be assimilated deductively. Therefore, as Luise (*Ibid*.) affirms, the intention is to overcome the glottodidactics tradition that sees language grammar teaching as merely the explicit teaching of morphosyntactic rules. Teaching grammar, far from being only a matter of morphosyntactic rules and a choice of the teacher, is a 'parte fondamentale di un qualsiasi curricolo di lingua, sia essa materna, seconda o straniera*' (Ibid.*:3); or to use Balboni's words (2023a: 66), it is 'l'impalcatura formale della competenza comunicativa'.

But what does it mean 'grammar'? According to Balboni (2023a), nowadays the term does not refer to one grammar but several ones:

> *Si usa grammatica per indicare morfologia e sintassi, in realtà sono grammatiche tutti quei complessi di meccanismi (di solito detti regole che rimandano a regolarità, cioè meccanismi che ricorrono regolarmente, e non a norme) che governano i vari assi di strutturazione della lingua (Ibid.:61).*

Following this statement, it is possible to affirm that grammar is a set of rules governing one of the various systems of language. Consequently, morphology and syntax are not the only grammars that drive a language system, but also lexical, graphemic, phonological, textual, sociolinguistic, pragmatic and extra-linguistic grammar (see *Ibid*:61-3).

4.1 An empirical grammar: the overcome of traditional language teaching grammar

Linguistic reflection is relatively a recent term that has been introduced for the first time in the Italian ministerial school curricula since 1979, referring to grammar teaching, as it is written in the *Nuovi programmi per la scuola media* (Addazi, 2020)*:*

> *L'apprendimento linguistico comporta la riflessione sulla lingua in atto: è il problema della grammatica, non come proposta di astratte e aride cognizioni teoriche e terminologiche, ma come riflessione suoi caratteri essenziali dell'organizzazione della lingua nella realtà dei suoi usi. Tale studio deve coinvolgere l'impegno operativo dell'allievo, condotto a riflettere sulle strutture grammaticali come si presentano nei testi di ogni tipo ed a sperimentarle nel proprio parlare e nelle proprie espressioni scritte. Le 'regole' della grammatica non sono che uno strumento di analisi della lingua solo approssimativo (Programmi 1979: 49 in Ibid:21).*

This formulation is the result of a strong willingness to change the language teaching implemented by GISCEL (*Gruppo di Intervento e Studio nel Campo dell'Educazione Linguistica*), which began a strong criticism towards the traditional teaching method around the 1970s. The latter, therefore, advocated grammar teaching consisting exclusively of grammatical and logical analysis, condemning any linguistic production that 'clashed' with the norm, as an approach based on a normative conception of grammar.[14] The criticism culminated in 1975 with the *Dieci tesi per l'educazione linguistica democratica*, a fundamental text of the of S*ocietà linguistica italiana* headed by Mario De Tullio, in which they attacked the traditional language teaching as highly inefficient for teaching Italian L1. The text aimed at democratic language education in which it is the language to prevail; for that reason, the group of scholars proposed a new language pedagogy more open to the use of new and different modalities, as it is written in the eighth thesis (GISCEL, 1975 in Ghetti, 2020):

> *In ogni caso e in ogni modo occorre sviluppare il senso della funzionalità di ogni possibile tipo di forme linguistiche note e ignote. La vecchia pedagogia linguistica era*

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[14] 'La pedagogia linguistica tradizionale si è largamente fondata sulla fiducia nell'utilità di insegnare analisi grammaticale e logica, paradigmi grammaticali e regole sintattiche. La riflessione scolastica tradizionale sui fatti linguistici si riduce a questi quattro punti' (Dieci Tesi: tesi VII. *Limiti della pedagogia linguistica tradizionale* in https://giscel.it/dieci-tesi-per-leducazione-linguistica-democratica/#sei, last view 28/12/24)

imitativa, prescrittiva ed esclusiva. Diceva: 'Devi dire sempre e solo così. Il resto è errore'. La nuova educazione linguistica (più ardua) dice: 'Puoi dire così, e anche così e anche questo che pare errore o stranezza può dirsi e si dice; e questo è il risultato che ottieni nel dire così o così' (GISCEL, 1975).

For this reason, as Maria Luisa Altieri Biagi (1984:38; in Addazi, 2020:22) stated 'non è la grammatica ad essere sciocca, ma il modo di insegnarla'. A method, the traditional one, that disables pupils from critical thinking towards linguistic aspects, even at the highest levels of education, as any deep cognitive reflections leading to discovering exceptions or creative use of language was banned and students were seen as passive subjects to fill with 'unquestionable' grammar rules. With the overcoming of traditional grammar, the necessity of an 'empirical grammar' was born and began to consolidate within the field of language education. Empirical, as it should have mirrored the scientific method, and for that reason, a grammar teaching methodology in which the mechanisms of the language are discovered by pupils in an inductive way, made up of observations, hypotheses and verifications (Addazi, 2020). From this moment onward, that part of the curriculum that deals with the rules of language functioning begins to be addressed with the term linguistic reflection, and not anymore as grammar teaching (Luise, 2011).

4.2 Linguistic reflection: a consciousness-raising

Linguistic reflection, as Luise (2011) highlights, refers to a process of analysing language in search of regularities and patterns that diverges from the memorization and passive application of rules. Nonetheless, this term is not intended to diminish the central role of communicative competence, which has language use as its priority; rather, it intends to complement the role of communication with that of metacommunication competence. For that reason, any language curriculum must also include the goal of developing metalinguistic competence: 'cioè il passaggio dalla capacità di usare le regole [...] alla capacità di descrivere e ragionare esplicitamente sulla regole stesse, dalla competenza d'uso alla competenza sull'uso' (*Ibid.*:5).

In order to linguistic reflection to take place, it is necessary first to possess the rules and then to know and reflect on them; consequently, this means that linguistic and metalinguistic competence are two distinct skills that should not be addressed at the same

time and in the same way since, as Luise (*Ibid*.:5-6) writes: 'la funzione di monitor si applica alla lingua acquisita' and for that reason 'la competenza sull'uso non può precedere la competenza d'uso' (see section 2.3.1). In this sense, linguistic reflection is translated into a true 'itinerary of discovery', a maieutic methodology that drives pupils to discover that they already implicitly know. It is therefore a proposal for a logical and scientific grammar that upholds the cognitive value of reflection on language, as also the *Indicazioni Nazionale* (MIUR 2012:39 in Addazi, 2020:23) states:

> *La riflessione sulla lingua, se condotta in modo induttivo e senza un'introduzione troppo precoce della terminologia specifica, contribuisce a una maggiore duttilità nel capire i testi e riflettere e discutere sulle proprie produzioni. Essa, inoltre, si intreccia con la riflessione sulle altre lingue del repertorio dell'allievo, in una prospettiva plurilingue e interculturale. Ma il ruolo probabilmente più significativo della riflessione sulla lingua è quello metacognitivo: la riflessione concorre infatti a sviluppare le capacità di categorizzare, di connettere, di analizzare, di indurre e dedurre, utilizzando di fatto un metodo scientifico (MIUR 2012:39).*

Essentially, the purpose of the education is to move towards an empirical grammar teaching that aims at cognitive development as much as linguistic one, namely towards consciousness-raising. Explicit consciousness of grammar is, according to Lo Duca (2004 in *Ibid*.:24), the ultimate goal of the educational action of grammar teaching. Bialystok (1988 in *Ibid*.) identifies it in the third level of linguistic knowledge, the explicit stage that raises the implicit knowledge (awareness) to full consciousness. Therefore, in the field of second language teaching, the English language allows the distinction between awareness (implicit knowledge) and consciousness (explicit knowledge). According to this reasoning, implicit knowledge is also internal, that is a form that has not yet undergone metalinguistic 'testing'. The ultimate aim of linguistic reflection is therefore to support and drive pupils in the discovery of grammatical mechanisms of a language through an inductive way, which leads to the maturation of implicit-internal knowledge, awakening the metalinguistic awareness.

4.2.1 Differences between teaching grammar and linguistic reflection

It is common to find the terms 'teaching grammar' and 'linguistic reflection' in opposition, as they represent *'due modi opposti di proporre allo studente percorsi sulle regole che governano una lingua'* (Luise, 2020). The most significant differences are already evident in the role of the students, who in the first case play a passive role - a kind of *tabula rasa*. On the contrary, in the second case, they are at the centre of the learning process, playing an active role at the centre of the learning process. Further, linguistic reflection represents the 'point of arrival', that is the conceptual tool is an empty schema that pupils, stimulated and guided by the teacher, have to complete. Teaching grammar, on the other hand, represents the 'starting point' of the language learning process, that is the learner receives a full schema to memorise and apply. Considering what has been claimed, it is evident how linguistic reflection promotes an inductive learning process, that is, from the particular to the general. This type of process differs from the deductive one, which works from the general to the particular. In this regard, Luise (2011:11) writes:

> *Oggi tutta la didattica, non solo quella delle lingue, propende a dare la priorità ai processi induttivi, perchè sono basati sulla scoperta da parte del discente, favoriscono l'autonomia dello studente che diviene il protagonista del processo di acquisizione, rispetto ad una impostazione centrata sull'intervento diretto dell'insegnante.*

Following these assumptions, linguistic reflection brings students a motivation based on the pleasure of discovery, solving a problem or winning a challenge, deferring from the 'traditional' teaching grammar perceived as an obligation, boring and sometimes even anxious, which has a scholastic, and therefore only temporary, motivation (Luise, 2020).

4.2.2 Why promote linguistic reflection at school with Italian L2 learners?

As pointed out by Luise (2006), one of the main values that formal educational context can add to a second language learning process is the opportunity to develop metalinguistic competence, by providing learners with tools and methods to consciously reflect on the language. In the context of Italian L2, allowing pupils to develop this competence is essential for the following reasons (Luise, 2011; 2020):

- Correction of wrong hypotheses: during the second language process, the learner creates hypotheses about how the language works, often through simplifying or overgeneralization strategies, and sometimes ending up applying incorrect suppositions. Linguistic reflection can support him/her to correct the wrong ones through an explicit reflection on the use of language.

- Monitor function: linguistic reflection can help students build a rational mechanism for 'checking' their language production step by step, by being more conscious of their second language learning process (see section 2.3.1).

- Provide the construction of mental representations: when the second language is not only used for communicative purposes, but it is also the object of analysis, pupils are driven to create well-organised and systematic mental representations of the mechanisms of language, in which they can insert new information. Consequently, students do not have to always rely on their memory to recall grammatical rules or vocabulary, as it sometimes can 'abandon' them, but rather they can rely on these mental 'grids' that are easily accessible since they have been 'metalinguistic' tested.

School therefore has a responsibility to ensure language reflection, especially in L2 contexts. Indeed, the foreign pupil who is learning Italian as a second language may face some linguistic 'obstacles' that he/she can mistakenly associate with some cognitive problems. For that reason, driving foreign students towards metalinguistic competence means helping them to not interpret their language gap as an intellectual problem, since this could lead them to frustration and a sense of inability (Balboni in Aa. Vv., 2000 in Luise, 2006). Supporting foreign pupils in understanding this aspect through linguistic reflection can be crucial in motivating them to continue their Italian second language learning process.

4.2.3 The path of language acquisition: the sequence leading to linguistic reflection
Driving students toward inductively linguistic reflection, and thus promoting the active role of the students, requires the following of a series of sequences in which the explicit reflection is at the end, as the competence *of* use precedes the competence *on* the use (Luise, 2020). The explicit reflection is thus stimulated through the following sequence (*Ibid.*:104-5):

a. Observation: at the beginning of the language acquisition process, texts or activities are given to the students with the purpose of inviting them to notice some specific rules (morphosyntactic, graphemic, phonological and so on); this phase intends to provide examples from which pupils can inductively discover the rule by themselves, before any formal explanation.

b. Hypotheses making and verification: once the linguistic phenomenon has been observed, students are led to create hypotheses about what has been noticed; for instance, through group comparison and discussion. After that, the students are driven to verify the validity through other texts or activities.

c. Fixation: this stage requires activities of repetitive nature since the purpose is to memorise and automate the rule observed, hypothesized and verified.

d. Reuse of the rule: free composition or simulation techniques can be used in this stage, thus prompting autonomous use of the rule as the ultimate goal is to foster mastery at the communicative level.

e. Explicit language reflection with the formalisation of the rule: this phase allows pupils to systematise and formalise the rule by consciously reflecting on it. It represents the 'final destination' that aims to the development of metalinguistic competence.[15]

4.2.4 The fixation phase: a central role in the second language acquisition process

Language teachers dwell a great deal in the phase of fixation (see section above, point c). The reason lies on the fact that fixation-teaching techniques, based on repetition and manipulation, are perfect stimuli for language reflection and play a crucial role in the second language acquisition process, but have the drawback of being unmotivated for students, as Balboni (2023a:65) claims:

> *La fase della fissazione, cioè della creazione di automatismi che intervengono nell'esecuzione (comprensione, produzione e interazione), è quella a cui si dedica tradizionalmente più tempo nelle lingue non materne, con esercizi fondati sulla*

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[15] It is important to point out, as Luise (2020) states, that in specific teaching contexts the last phase, namely the explicit reflection, can be shifted in the middle of the process; as well as it could be necessary to alternate the inductive method with the deductive one, especially with adult students. For furher detaisl see Luise (*Ibid*.:103, paragraph: *Insegnare la grammatica agli adulti*).

ripetizione - che gli studi sui neuroni specchio ci indicano come fondamentale per l'acquisizione, ma che per gli studenti sono l'apoteosi della noia.

In the specific field of glottodidactics, there are two kinds of activities that can foster the creation of automatism: manipulation exercises, such as 'write the following sentences in the future tense', and the so-called pattern drills, born from the neo-behaviorism psychology of the 1950s-60s in which the learners must provide a response based on an external stimulus. These exercises were mostly banned by the communicative approach; however, if proposed in a playful perspective and made them 'appealing' to learners, they can bring great benefits to the second language classroom. Therefore, with the studies on mirror neurons and their role in language learning, reiteration is seen as an active and dynamic process: 'attiva perché i neuroni specchio sono fortemente attivati in questa azione; dinamica perché implica una risistemazione continua dell'architettura della propria conoscenza' (*Ibid*.:68). Further, when it is not a 'parroting' repetition, the mirror neurons strengthen the connection between the meaning and the form, facilitating language learning. These typologies of exercise, that give an immediate language reinforcement, have the great advantage that they can be easily adapted and modified (Luise, 2011). Most of the recreational activities proposed by Mollica (2019, 2020, 2020a) represent a valid solution to transform these 'boring and unmotivated', but necessary, exercises into a challenging and stimulating fixation activities; for that reason, it is evident how the Recreational Linguistic represent an 'ideal ground' for overcoming the 'parrot' repetitiveness and rigidity of these fundamental exercises.

4.3 Children and linguistic reflection

Linguistic reflection is a fundamental aspect that must be also included in curricula aimed at children, under the condition that a playful methodology is applied. In this regard, there are different opinions on whether language reflection should be done with children, as Luise (2006, 2011, 2020) notes. On one hand, there are those who argue that a child is not sufficiently cognitively developed, and he/she is therefore not ready for linguistic reflection. On the other hand, some advocates make the mistake of proposing the same methodology of the mother tongue for linguistic reflection on the second language teaching. In this case, the foreign pupils, having not yet fully developed the

communicative competence of the second language will find themselves carrying out a 'useless' reflection that can provoke a lowering of motivation. This happens because foreign pupils have to go through all the phases of the path to linguistic reflection (see section 4.2.3), while their Italian peers have generally already done the first fourth steps and have to reflect on a language that they know how to use after years of practice and exposure.

For these reasons, it is essential to propose specific language reflection paths for L2 languages and for foreign children, as the age factor, despite prejudices, does not represent an obstacle as Luise (2006:127) writes:

> *Per quanto il fattore età sia stato visto da diversi studiosi come determinante per la qualità e la quantità dell'acquisizione linguistica (per una sintetica ma completa rassegna delle varie posizioni in merito, si veda Pichiassi, 1999, pp. 241 e ss.) e la competenza metalinguistica sia stata a lungo ritenuta una competenza che si crea con la maturità linguistica e cognitiva, probabilmente a causa delle difficoltà connesse alla sua verifica in soggetti molto giovani, oggi sempre più è dimostrato che ogni soggetto, a qualsiasi età, esposto ad una lingua usa le sue capacità innate per comprenderne e ipotizzarne le regole ed usarla non solo ripetendo gli stimoli che ha ricevuto, ma in modo nuovo e creativo (si vedano i risultati del TAM, Test di Abilità Metalinguistiche elaborate già negli anni Ottanta da Titone e Pinto, in Titone, 1989b), e che la consapevolezza metalinguistica si instaura nel parlante fin dall'età della materna: il richiamo è all'apporto della teoria mentalistica di Chomsky e del suo LAD, meccanismo naturale di apprendimento delle lingue.*

Nevertheless, when designing a language reflection path for children learning Italian as a second language, it is important to ensure an inductive and concrete approach. Further, this kind of reflection has to be proposed in the form of games or problem-solving tasks, in order to engage pupils actively. Whenever possible, teachers should use contrastive analysis to highlight the common errors and support children in correcting their wrong hypotheses; further, peer interaction should be encouraged to foster collaborative learning and deeper reflection on language (Luise, 2011; 2020).

4.4 Graphemic competence

Graphemic competence, according to Balboni (2023a) is the skill to translate into written form the phonemes of a language, that become graphemes.[16] Orthography is the result of correct graphemic competence, which does not concern the aesthetic quality of handwriting, namely calligraphy, but rather the so-called spelling rules, that is graphemic correctness. The latter does not only include the letters of the alphabet, i.e. the graphical symbols used to create graphemes, but also the correct use of punctuation and diacritical marks. In order to transform this skill into a performance, namely the correct use of orthography, students have to work on graphemic grammar, one of the many grammars of languages.[17] As Balboni (2023) notes, in Italian L1 it is the primary teacher's task to work on this type of grammar and to develop good graphemic competence in pupils at the end of the primary school cycle. In foreign language teaching, on the other hand, usually teachers work on this category of grammar only through the technique of dictation or recopying, letting pupils acquire it on the basis of input, e.g. by reading. In Italian L2, the situation is even more complex as there are students who are literate in other alphabets or not literate at all.

4.4.1 The main challenges in Italian orthography for children L1/L2 learners

Quintarelli (2015) finds in her extensive work on Italian orthography four most critical areas in children: diagrams and trigrams; similar phonemes; consonant groups; consonant doubling, accent and apostrophe. The consonant doubling is also found in studies conducted by Tressoldi and Cornoldi (1991, in *Ibid*.) as the third major category committed in Italian language. Therefore, the studies conducted by the latter scholars are among the first to have provided a classification of orthography errors in the context of Italian language, proposing a categorisation that validates a tool for assessing writing skill

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[16] As Balboni (2023:111) notes, the English language allows the dichotomous between the words *ability* and *skill*. The former deals with the cognitive dimension; while the latter with the procedures, i.e. the 'practical' realisation of the ability. On the contrary, the Italian language does not have this differentiation and uses the general word 'abilità'.
The aim of the school is to develop skills/competencies; however, it is also necessary to include cognitive development, hence the ability to be aware of how the acquired skills work.

[17] The competence/performance dichotomy can often lead to misunderstandings by thinking of the two as similar notions. On the contrary, competencies are the skills, i.e. the assimilated cognitive abilities, that become the basis for performance: the realisation in the real world of the skills. This refers to *'saper fare (con) la lingua'* according to Balboni's communicative competence model (Balboni, 2023:8-9), which does not only refer to the four basic skills (writing, reading, listening and speaking) but also to the skills such as summarising, writing under dictation, translating, note-taking and so on.

and orthography correctness (Tressoldi & Cornoldi, 2000, in Stefanelli, 2020). Their proposal considers the following three types of errors: phonological, non-phonological and phonetic errors. The first typology of errors, as Stefanelli (*Ibid*.:63-4) states, are produced by the inaccuracies between phoneme-grapheme relationships, and can be revealed under different forms, as the following example taken from Stefanelli (*Ibid*.) and Quintarelli (2015):

    i.   grapheme addition (i.e. gattato/gatto, tavolovo/tavolo)

    ii.   grapheme inversion (i.e. diavno/divano, bamblabo, bambola)

    iii.   grapheme omission (i.e. tavlo/tavolo, pese/pesce)

    iv.   incorrect use of diagrams and trigrams (i.e. conilio, coniglio)

    v.   chance of consonant (i.e. folpe/volpe, brina/prima

The second category, namely the non-phonological ones, represents these errors in which the sound of the word remains unaltered in the written form, but errors are present at the orthography level. Therefore, it includes all those inaccuracies in orthographic representations that do not modify the sound of the word, or modify it to barely perceptible, as in the following instances:

    i.   illegal merging (i.e. lago/l'ago, lacqua/l'acqua)

    ii.   illegal separation (i.e in sieme/insieme, par lo/ parlo)

    iii.   exchange of homophone grapeheme (i.e. squola/scuola, qucina/cucina)

    iv.   omission or addition of the letter h (i.e. un hanno fa/un anno fa, ha casa/a casa)

The last category proposed by Tressoldi and Cornoldi (1991; 2000, Stefanelli, 2020; Quintarelli, 2015:) includes all errors that cannot be attributed to the above-mentioned types, and they are the phonetic errors, which can be of two types:

    i.   omission or addition of the double (i.e. gato/gatto, pala/palla)

    ii.   omission or addition of the accent (i.e. piu/più, perche/ perché)

Further categorisation of orthography errors in the context of the Italian language is proposed by Pinto et al. (Pinto, Bigozzi, Gamannossi, & Vezzani, 2012, in Stefanelli,

2020), who propose a dichotomous classification, dividing them into homophones and non-homophones errors. In the first case, the pronunciation of the word remains unchanged, they are therefore morphologically incorrect, not phonologically, as in the following cases (*Ibid*.:65):

    i.   illegal separation or merges (i.e. innanzi tutto/innanzitutto)
    ii.   homophone grapheme exchange (i.e. quore/cuore)
    iii.   apostrophe or capital letter omission (i.e. un ora/un'ora)
    iv.   addition or omission of the accent in cases where the sound does not change (i.e. si/ sì)
    v.   incorrect syllabication (i.e. pa-lla/pal-la)

The category of non-homophonic is the one in which it is possible to 'hear' the errors since there is a change in the sound of the word they represent. This can happen because there is no correct conversation of the phoneme to grapheme, or the order of the graphemes may be incorrect, as in the following examples (*Ibid*.:65):

    i.   grapheme exchange (i.e. fino/vino)
    ii.   omission or addition of grapheme or syllable (tavo/tavolo)
    iii.   grapheme inversion (i.e. mecrato/mercato)
    iv.   omission or addition of doubles (i.e. tuto/tutto)
    v.   omission or addition of the accent, in cases where the sound of the word change (i.e. citta/città)

Considering what has been addressed, it is fundamental to work on the correct use of doubles as they belong to the categories of spelling errors most commonly made by child learners. Creating language learning paths that make it possible to approach this aspect of the Italian language in a stimulating and enjoyable way is essential to consolidate graphemic competence to improve the children's graphemic performance.

4.4.2 The crucial role of graphemic competence in academic success for foreign children

Mastering a good graphemic competence represents an indispensable goal to achieve during the years of primary school due to the fact that, if not achieved, it becomes an 'invalidate obstacle' for successful completion of the school career and beyond (Bigozzi et al., 2009), as it is also written in the *Indicazioni nazioniali* (MIUR:30): 'è fondamentale che essa sia acquisita e automatizzata in modo sicuro nei primi anni di scuola, in quanto diventa difficile apprenderla più in là con gli anni'. In the same line of thought is Bigozzi et al. (2000), who highlight that if spelling errors are not overcome at an early age, they then persist into adulthood, when it will be more difficult to remedy.

Therefore, the inability to correctly automate spelling rules has negative effects on children as these typologies of errors, besides interfering with writing skills, can 'stigmatise' pupils, especially in the passage between primary school and middle one. As Carsano (2021) writes about the secondary school teachers, who complain that pupils 'commettono ancora tanti errori di ortografia e non riescono più a recuperare tutto ciò che non è stato acquisito negli anni precedenti' (*Ibid*.:222). Therefore, when students enter secondary school, among the skills that are presumed fully acquired, there is graphemic competence, as 'soglia minima di apprendimento della scrittura' (Bigozzi et al., 2009:8). Consequently, orthography errors are not only perceived by secondary teachers as a lack of attention but also as indicative of incomplete writing skills, a factor that can negatively affect, besides pupils' school performance, their motivation and self- imagine (Palladino et al., 2000, in *Ibid*.). In fact, spelling mistakes, if numerous and recurrent, can generate in pupils a perception of inadequacy in relation to their peers, undermining self-confidence and self-efficacy towards oneself, since 'fare errori ortografici si presta ad essere considerato dall'insegnante negativamente in modo pervasivo su grande parte del rendimento scolastico, dando luogo ad un effetto alone nella valutazione' (*Ibid*.:8). For these reasons mentioned above, it is evident how the development of graphemic competence is essential to guarantee academic and private success, emphasizing the strong need to build targeted learning pathways in the development and reinforcement of this competence. In the specific case of foreign children, the need is even greater, as they may have initial disadvantages compared to their Italian-speaking peers (see sections 2.5.1; 2.5.2). Therefore, as Carsano (2021) points out, although the Italian language presents a 'transparent' writing system, it can

conceal many insidious cases that can lead to errors even for native speakers.[18] Consequently, write in an orthographically correct manner 'non è per niente semplice poiché l'acquisizione di una regola si basa su un'operazione cognitiva profonda' (*Ibid*.:223). For that reason, educational pathways aimed at the improvement of graphemic competence, such as the case of Carsano's (*Ibid*.) *OrtograMia*, a collection of all the materials produced over years of teaching Italian orthography in primary schools, are highly useful for all those foreign children struggling with the acquisition of Italian L2, as the scholar herself has tested.

4.4.3 Orthography at Italian primary school between reality and normative

The *Indicazioni Nazioni per il curriculo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo d'istruzione* (MIUR 2012) suggests general principles on how to deal with the orthography during the first years of primary school. According to the ministerial document, in the first three years of school children should be induced to pay attention to the spelling of words on texts, concentrating the teaching of graphemic grammar towards the development of spelling skill in their own written production, as it is written in the section 'elementi di grammatica esplicita e riflessione sugli usi della lingua (Ibid.:32): 'prestare attenzione alla grafia delle parole nei testi e applicare le conoscenze ortografiche nella propria produzione scritta'. At the end of the last year of primary school, the ministerial document generally states that students should know the fundamental rules of orthography, having therefore acquired solid graphemic skill and be able to use this competence to self-correct: 'conoscere le fondamentali convenzioni ortografiche e servirsi di questa conoscenza per rivedere la propria produzione scritta e correggere eventuali errori' (*Ibid*.:33). Nevertheless, as Carsano (2021) notes, the guidelines remain generic and do not specify the individual orthography rules that should be taught, nor the best time within the five years of school, generating some ambiguity among primary teachers. Consequently, as Lo Duca (in *Ibid*.) notes:

> *Non tutti i fatti ortografici saranno acquisti e padroneggiati da un bambino in uscita*
> *dalla scuola primaria. Non è semplicemente possibile che ciò accada. Forse potrebbe*

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[18] In this regard, Balboni (2023a) writes that the problem of orthography varies according to the target language; Italian presents good correspondence between phonemes and graphemes, falling within the 'transparent' group language. However, the insidious cases are numerous, as the example proposed by the scholar (*Ibid*.:75) of the phoneme /k/ that can occur with c,ch,q.

essere di grande utilità provare a rendere più esplicite le lapidarie formulazioni ministeriali, approntando, per esempio, un sillabo che disponga i fatti ortografici in scala, dai più facili e intuitivi ai più complessi, in modo da dare agli insegnanti una bussola credibile (Maria G. Lo Duca, s.d., in Ibid.:222)

In addition to these 'ambiguous' directions, there is also the problem of introducing children to orthography in a playful and interesting way, in order to create a motivating learning environment, since teachers often fall into the prejudice of seeing orthography as something 'mechanical' (Balboni, 2023). When this happens, the kind of exercises implemented to improve spelling are usually made up of repetition, without any linguistic reflection. These typologies have not led to any improvements, as Quintarelli (2015:222) states: 'le esercitazioni standardizzate e la reiterazione di esercizi non danno quindi risultati soddisfacenti'. Instead, it is essential to create activities where children have the opportunity to activate spelling decision processes, error awareness and linguistic reflection, and Recreational linguistics presents all the potential for what has been stated to occur within the Italian L2 classroom.

4.4.4 'Lessico e Ortografia': the hidden relation between lexical expansion and graphemic competence improvement

In light of the fundamental importance of graphemic skill, the negative consequences that difficulties in correct spelling have on children, and the ineffectiveness of mechanical exercises often proposed to improve this competence, a series of educational reinforcements have been elaborated by Bigozzi et al. (2009) demonstrating its validity through empirical evidence. The educational treatment, called *Lessico e Ortografia*, is presented in two volumes. The first is aimed at children from the first to the second year of primary school (Boschi, et al., 1999, in Stefanelli, 2020), while the second volume (Bigozzi et al., 2009) is developed for children between the third and fifth year of school. Both achieve a significant decrease in orthography errors, promoting the prevention and recovery of reading and writing learning difficulties and disorders through the stimulation of the vocabulary learning process, without the use of repetitive spelling exercises.[19]

As reported by the results on spelling errors (Bigozzi & Biggeri, 2000; *Ibid*.), this approach is very effective in reducing all typologies of orthographic errors (see section

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[19] The decrease in orthographic errors also has statistically positive effects on the population composed of children with specific learning disorders.

4.4.1), both in dictation and spontaneous writing. The positive results are provoked by an 'indirect' effect, that is the implementation of vocabulary, according to the lexical route of the Dual Route Model elaborated by Coltheart and collaborators (1993; 2001; in *Ibid*.:19):

> *I risultati relativi all'esistenza di un effetto indiretto del trattamento sulla correttezza ortografica ci sembrano molto interessanti. […] il fatto che l'ortografia migliori lavorando sulla competenza lessicale va letto, tenendo di conto della distinzione proposta dal modello a due vie (Coltheart et al., 1993; 2001), come effetto del trattamento didattico sul potenziamento della via semantico-lessicale o diretta di lettura e di scrittura, quindi strettamente connesso a una migliore efficienza del 'buffer grafemico' o magazzino grafemico, il quale ha il compito di ritenere temporaneamente le rappresentazioni ortografiche prima che questa vengano convertite in lingua scritta (Miceli, 1992)*

The model theorised the existence of two processes underlying the recognition and production of a written word: the phonological or indirect way, and the lexical or direct way. Regarding the first way, word recognition occurs through three operations: decomposition of its graphemes, association of them with the corresponding phonemes, and reassembly in the phonological form of the word; the operation follows the reverse sequence in the case of written production. The lexical route, on the other hand, involves long-term memory since the word is already present in the individual's lexical 'store' and is made available in its orthographic and phonological form, as well as in its semantic value. As a consequence, strengthening the vocabulary through qualifying learning work, and improving the efficiency of the direct route of the Model, children are accompanied towards an increase in the number of known words that consequently enable them to assimilate the correct written forms, since 'la parola completamente conosciuta è conosciuta profondamente, sia nei suoi molteplici significati che nella sua forma esteriore o ortografica, e questo impedisce di scriverla scorrettamente*'* (Bigozzi et al., 2009:10-11). The Dual Route Model, therefore, emphasises the coexistence of three components underlying the process of acquiring reading and writing skills: a phonological, orthographic and lexical component, which are evolutionarily interconnected (Frith, 1985; Pinto, Bogizzi, Accorti e Vezzani, 2008; in *Ibid*.). For that reason, strengthening the vocabulary also means accompanying the child to a deep encoding of the words themselves. In fact, storing words in their triple component (phonological, orthographic

and semantic form) allows children to assimilate the correct graphemic forms 'unconsciously'. Indeed, when encountering a new word, it is not easy to notice a possible error in its written form because we know it less and have to resort to the indirect route, so phoneme-grapheme correspondence, to check for correctness. The latter mechanism predominates the early stages of schooling, whereas, around the age of eight, the phonological and visual-orthographic vocabulary begin to consolidate in children, learning to recognise written words without having to decode them each time. In that way, they become more and more 'expert' readers and writers, since their lexical-semantic mental store increases, both in terms of word meaning and encoding-decoding orthography (Mazzotta, Barca, Marcolini, Stella e Burani, 2005; Pinto, 2003; in *Ibid*.:10). It is therefore evident that lexical competence plays a central role in the processes of graphemic competence development, as the increase in the number of known words implies the process of storing their orthographic forms.

4.5 Recreational Linguistics and orthography: a successful binomial

As Fiorentino and Citrano (2021; in Pagnoncelli, 2024) emphasise, Recreational linguistics drives pupils towards a deep reflection on words and their graphemic forms, as it challenges their intelligence while playing recreational activities. Following this reasoning, it is evident how the activities from this discipline can be useful teaching tools to facilitate the improvement and consolidation of graphemic competence, also by laying orthography under a different perspective, that is one filled with motivation and involvement due to the enjoyable and challenging nature of the language games. Indeed, this discipline allows the creation of a playful and stimulating learning environment that promotes the learning process of orthography, which becomes more involved and less static and demotivating. Moreover, encouraging creative use of language and promoting the concept of 'challenge' towards oneself or others, leads students to an increase in the number of words known, and consequently to their correct graphemic forms, according to the lexical route of the Dual Route Model (see section 4.4.4). Another important aspect that this discipline gives to the field of second language teaching is the mechanism of repetition that most of the language-teaching puzzle techniques allow to be implemented in the language classroom, transforming the 'boring' classic fixation exercises into more 'palatable' language activities. Indeed, by repeating the spelling of words pupils are

supported to automate the correct form, a fundamental and indispensable process in the second language learning process (see section 4.2.4). Therefore, language games play a key role in the automation of orthography as the students involved in the solution of the 'linguistic obstacle' do not realise that they are practising orthography (see section 2.3.1). Mollica (2012) points out that every recreational activity can become an opportunity to reflect and improve graphemic competence, for instance by asking pupils to rewrite certain words/sentences in order to complete the language game, without actually perceiving the tedious act of copying. Consequently, even the simple image-word matching activity can become a useful practice time for spelling, as it is possible to ask children to write down the words to the corresponding image. 'Attività facilissima, mi direte', writes Mollica (*Ibid.*), 'no, invece, il 'copiato' è molto importante nell'apprendimento di una lingua, e ha anche l'obiettivo di aiutare i discenti nel caso di errori ortografici'.

Further, Cazzaniga and Baldi (2016), the authors of the *'Mini gialli dell'ortografia: l'enigmistica per lo sviluppo delle competenze ortografiche'*, point out that the structure of activities such the crossword puzzle and its derivatives, allow for self-monitoring and reflection (see section 2.3.1) that is rarely found in standard spelling exercise. When there is an error in the spelling of letters, this is immediately visible to the child who can not complete the activity, leading him to reflect on what has been produced. This 'obligatory' moment of revision and reflection is hardly activated independently in younger pupils, but if guided by the teacher or the activity itself, it can bring enormous benefits:

> *Le attività enigmistiche obbligano il bambino ad analizzare la sequenza grafemica direttamente in fase di produzione, consentendo un aumento dei processi di automonitoraggio che non vengono solitamente attivati nella scrittura spontanea o sotto dettatura (Ibid.:55).*

For all these reasons, innumerable studies have been conducted to confirm the validity and effectiveness of Recreational linguistics in the teaching/learning Italian (L1, L2, LS), as well as many learning paths have been designed that can be taken by teachers to implement recreational activities in elementary school to facilitate the development of lexical and writing skills, and therefore also the graphemic competence (see Baccanelli, 2021; Bigozzi et al. 2009; Carsano, 2021; Cazzaniga & Baldi, 2016; Fiorentino, 2022; Fornara & Giudici, 2015; Ghetti, 2022; Meregalli, 2021; Pagnoncelli, 2024; Lotti, 2023;

Taddeo & Zollo, 2022) The common thread of these studies, among empirical research, thesis and books, is the improvement of graphemic competence in the Italian language. Although many of these have lexical development or writing skill improvement as the principal aim, at the same time they contribute to a greater development of graphemic competence, according to the Dual Route Model (see 4.4.4), as both phonological and lexical route are stimulated by the language games proposed by Recreational linguistics (Bigozzi et al. 2009).

4.6 Recreational activities for orthography improvement: insights and pedagogical applications of the most popular word games with 'pencil and paper'

In this section, some of the most famous and widespread word games with 'pencil and paper' from Mollica's (2019, 2020, 2020a) studies will be presented and analysed with the intention of highlighting the successful binomial between Recreational linguistics and graphemic competence.[20] They are 'traditional' glottodidactic techniques (see 3.4.6, 3.4.7) and puzzle games (see 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.4.3, 3.4.4, 3.4.5, 3.4.8, 3.4.9) transformed by the Italo-Canadian scholar into recreational activities. A detailed description is given, and how they can be adapted and implemented in the Italian second language classroom context, with a focus on the usage of double consonants. The language games have been selected and adapted considering the foreign Italian L2 child learner as the target pupil, who is aged seven and upwards, as assimilation of the alphabetic principles is required in order to complete the language games.[21]

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[20] The recreational activities addressed do not represent an exhaustive list, rather it is a brief mention of the most popular games. For further details see Mollica (2019, 2020, 2020a), who in his three volumes has presented innumerable recreational activities that language teachers can take as a starting point.

[21]Indicatively, the following recreational activities are designed for children from 7-11 (Piaget's concrete operational stage, see section 1.3). There are therefore activities that aim to implement and reinforce the orthography difficulties, which implies that pupils have already mastered basic reading and writing skills. However, there are cognitively and linguistically more difficult activities, such as riddles, that are suitable for children from eight years of age and upwards, since until that age, words and reality are the same thing and the structure of riddle might be too ambiguous and difficult to comprehend (Bigozzi et al., 2009). On the other hand, recreational activities such as the dot-to-dot, tic-tac-toe, matching and maze can be implemented also with under 7 age children, if properly adapted.

4.6.1 Crossword puzzle

As Mollica (2008a) writes, besides the short history of crossword, there is no doubt that it is the most popular word game and the favoured one by language teachers. Defined as an effective didactic tool (Mollica, 2019), it represents a game of everyday sphere outside the classroom, which is why it can be used by teachers as a tool for reflecting on language, especially concerning the graphemic and lexical aspects of the target language (Luise, 2011). This word game 'usually consists of chequered diagrams in which the solver has to write words guessed from clues' (Augarde, 1984 in Mollica, 2008a). Crossword puzzle was introduced in language teaching in the 1970s and it is generally found in language textbooks as an activity of reinforcement, review or valuation (Torresan, 2004). Nevertheless, its benefits can also be obtained in the motivation phase with the aim of eliciting familiar vocabulary. In this case, crosswords promote the *expectancy grammar*: an essential mechanism of the comprehension process that underlies the language learning acquisition process (*Ibid.*).

In the neuro-linguistic field, it has been observed how the crossword activates the learners' minds, involving and making them the main character of their own learning process, as it constantly utilises imaginative channels of the cognitive dimension (Mollica, 2019). Therefore, as Mollica (2008a:18) highlights: 'the way into learners' mind and personality is not through mechanistic, repetitive training techniques, but through those that allow us to enter into the mind's 'imaginative' channels', suggesting that language teacher should also use techniques that evoke an image or imagistic eliciting procedures', and one didactic tool that most enables learners' imaginative channels is precisely the crossword puzzle. Further, as the scholar (2019) claims, in the early stages of language acquisition, the 'illustrate crossword' represents a value alternative to definitions and descriptions by establishing an association between language and images. It is exactly this direct association that, according to Mollica (2008a), facilitates language learning; as Cardone (Torresan, 2004) states: 'questa tecnica [...] permette quindi una presentazione completa delle caratteristiche lessicali dell'item, creando i presupposti per un ricordo stabile nella memoria semantica'.

In addition, this type of crossword with picture clues can also be presented to the classroom when the familiarity with the topic is low, as only image recognition is required; therefore, students who may not know the meaning of the image can 'quite ingeniously discover it by counting the letters of the answer and inserting it in the proper

spaces' (Mollica, 2008a:19), and the activity becomes an exercise to learn new vocabulary. On the other hand, in case of familiarity with the lexicon, students may be given only visual stimuli crossword puzzles without words. In this case, the activity becomes a sort of 'test' where students can verify by themselves or in groups their knowledge about the topic.

This valid pedagogical tool was introduced into the Italian school curriculum by the Ministry of Education in a Memorandum, dated July 16, 1999, although Mollica (*Ibid*.) had already suggested its implementation in Italian second language teaching many years earlier, as he stated:

> [crossword puzzle] *is the most useful and multifaceted tool to teach, learn, recall as well as expand one's knowledge of vocabulary. [...] it is very useful in language teaching/learning, for its complements the students' learning styles: kinaesthetic, auditory or visual:*
>
> - *The kinaesthetic learner needs to write down words to determine if they 'feel right.*
> - *The auditory learner may mouth the words silently while reading.*
> - *The visual learner recognized words by their configurations (Ibid.:20)*

Following these reflections, it is essential to integrate these specific word games into daily school practice, which is why the teacher has the task of training and raising awareness in this regard in order to offer increasingly stimulating and creative crossword puzzles, to ensure cumulative and enjoyable language learning acquisition.

- *Pedagogical applications*

As Balboni (2008:82) notes, Italian orthography 'può essere rafforzata con tutt'una serie di tecniche di natura ludica basate su varianti del cruciverba'. Some examples of adapting crossword puzzles for foreign children to implement their Italian L2 spelling are given:

i) Illustrate crossword: definitions are expressed by images, the stimulus is visual;

ii) Reverse crossword: students work in pairs, and each receives the same half-complete crossword (i.e. student X has the horizontal grids already resolved, and student Y the vertical ones). Student X has to give the definitions of the horizontal words to student Y to complete his missing part and vice versa. As well as being collaborative, the activity generates positive interdependence by involving even those learners who are not very attracted to language games (Torresan, 2004).

iii) Mimed or drawn crossword: students work in pairs or small groups; in turn, each student must mine or draw the definition of the term given by the teacher or 'fished by chance'. This variant allows all cognitive and learning styles to be involved (*Ibid.*);

The crossword puzzle tool is crucial for implementing Italian graphemic competence, especially for those words with a doubling consonant. Therefore, while writing the vocabulary inside the squares, in the case of a missing double consonant children will notice it immediately and can adjust it by self-correction, an aspect that also fosters metalinguistic competence. For instance, if after writing a word, the young pupil notes a missing letter, he will have to arouse suspicion and apply cognitive processes to find out where the error lies (Addazi, 2020).

4.6.2 Word search puzzle

An alternative to the crossword puzzle, although less popular but equally beneficial for educational purposes, is the word search puzzle, in which the visual learner benefits most. Therefore, students are asked to search for words, vertically, horizontally or diagonally, within a pattern in which there are alphabetical letters. This kind of recreational activity that falls into the category of exercise games (Caon and Rutka, 2013) can have various alternatives and can be adapted according to the age, needs and language level of pupils (see Mollica, 2019).

- Pedagogical applications

i) Traditional word search puzzle: a list of words is given to search for within the grid. There is usually a hidden phrase that is only obtained once the word game has been correctly completed.

ii) Word search puzzle with images and words: this type of word game can also be used in case of unfamiliarity with the topic, and it is aimed at the expansion of vocabulary.

iii) Illustrate word search puzzle: only pictures are given as clues to the search of words, in this case, the vocabulary has already been known by students.

In all these different typologies, it is important to highlight the implicit language reflection that pupils are asked to do on the spelling of words; indeed, while searching for the word they must think about the written form of the word and implicitly think about the orthography, which is confirmed when they find the words on the grid. In that sense, word search activity can be implemented by the language teacher to foster metalinguistic competence and to practise double consonants; for instance, in the first phase of the lesson when the teacher wants students to note a specific vocabulary.

A further alternative to focus deeply on orthography can be the one in which the teacher asks students to mark with some colour the double consonants in each word they have found and then start a discussion on plenum while checking altogether. Another version of this recreation activity could be a search word activity without a word list but just telling pupils that the words that they have to find are only the ones with double consonants; in this case, it can be proposed as a review activity of the vocabulary seen together so that students already know the words to search in the grid.

4.6.3 Acrostic

Acrostic is a language game that consists of writing terms from vertical letters of a chosen word. Mollica (2019) defines it as follows:

> *Composizione poetica che dà luogo a un nome, a una frase o a un messaggio cui le lettere iniziali del verso si leggono verticalmente l'una dopo l'altra. Se il nome, il termine o la frase sta al centro, questo si definisce mesostico, se invece sta alla fine, si dice telestico (Ibid.:43).*

In glottodidactics, acrostic is usually implemented as a mnemonic activity. An interesting example is given by the word WEDDINGS, which can be used in the to recall the uses of subjunctive as Knop (1971: 340, in Mollica, 2019: 47) notes:

Will (verbi di volontà, preferenze, ecc): preferisco che venga lui.

Emotion (verbi e espressioni di emozione come, mi dispiace, sono contento, ecc): sono contento che sia venuta a festeggiare il mio compleanno.

Desire (verbi di desiderio: desiderare, ecc.): desidero che lo faccia lui.

Doubt (verbi come dubitare, ecc.): Dubito che piova domani.

Impersonal expressions (espressioni impersonali): è possibile che si sia molta gente.

Negative (proposizioni con antecedenti negative come, nessuno, niente, ecc.): non c'è nessuno che mi sappia indicare la strada.

Generalized characteristics (proposizioni subordinate con antecedenti non specificate): c'è qualcuno che mi sappia indicare la strada?

Superlative (superlativo): è il miglior film che abbia visto.

This type of language game can also be useful for working on learning adjectives, as one of the most popular acrostics is the one with the first name, in which pupils are asked to describe themselves through qualifying adjectives. Nonetheless, acrostic can be adapted to different subject areas to expand and enrich vocabulary, as well as to fix grammar rules, due to its flexibility (*Ibid*.:61). Although this word game falls into the category of exercise games (see Freddi, 1990), Caon and Rutka (2013) also place it in the category of creative games which are part of the symbolic games, and on the same thought is Begotti (2007) who includes this language game into the category of '*giochi di ludolinguistica*'.

- *Pedagogical application*

In the context of Italian L2 with foreign pupils, this kind of activity can be used to memorise some specific Italian double consonants vocabulary, besides as a creative activity where young pupils are asked to use language creativity to make up their own acrostic. For instance, the language teacher can take some 'famous' acrostics and use them as an exercise to learn by heart with the implicit aim to better remember words with double consonants, i.e. *gatto = grande amico tanto tanto onorato*.

Once presented with acrostics already made by the class, perhaps using Italian words with consonant doubling, the teacher can get children to create an acrostic with the help of a dictionary or an alphabetic list of words that they know. However, it is recommended to propose it when pupils feel ready to do it, as in negative cases this kind of activity can demoralise them and lower their motivation.

4.6.4 The dot-to-dot activity

The dot-to-dot activity is very simple and for that reason is usually found in children's textbooks as it fits well with younger pupils. As Mollica (2008b:22) states, there is 'practically no instruction: the child is to join the dots in chronological order from 1 to the last [number]' and once completed 'the result will be a picture or a scene'. Therefore, it is not a game that requires special intellectual skills; however, as Mollica (2020, 2008a) highlights, by modifying it could be transformed into a creative language activity and a test of second language teaching.

- *Pedagogical application*

The traditional version of this language game is used to review numbers or the letters of the alphabet. However, it is possible to adapt it for the purpose of improving reading competence or listening comprehension skills, as the following examples (Mollica, 2008b):

i) Reading skill: pupils have to read the written form of numbers and then proceed by searching for the corresponding Arabic number.

ii) Listening skill: students can complete the activity by correctly understanding the number order dictated by the teacher.

iii) Foster second language thinking: students can solve the dot-to-dot activity by resolving a series of arithmetical operations.

Nevertheless, this language game is extremely flexible, as Mollica (2008b) reminds us and proposes a selection of different combinations to complete the dot-to-dot activity. A further alternative to this activity is the version with multiple choice or a true-false to use as a stimulus for the completion of it. Through this modification, it is possible to create questions aimed at improving different competence and language aspects, which in the present thesis is the graphemic one. For instance, a multiple-choice activity can be created with short sentences containing words with double consonants already addressed to the pupils, who have to choose the correct one as one of them has an error, namely the missing double consonant. Through the completion of the multiple choice, the learners obtain a sequence of numbers that they must follow to complete the game. In case of an error in the multiple-choice activity, the child will understand it on his own as the final drawing will not be correct.

Its flexibility is so great that this kind of activity can be used in different moments of the lesson. For instance, at the beginning after having given a text to pupils, they can be asked to complete a dot-to-dot activity with questions true/false on the text to check their comprehension or to foster pupils to note some specific grammar aspect in the text. At the same time, it can be used as a language-teaching technique to fix some specific language aspect; in that sense, it can be used as pattern drills but in a playful manner, and with the purpose of completing the hidden drawing. The activity can be implemented also at the end of the lesson, as a competition game with the implicit language aim in the questions or problems to solve in order to gain the correct order of numbers to complete it with a time-limit.

4.6.5 Tic-tac-toe game

The game of tic-tic-toe is one of the rule games linked to the development of reflective intelligence and falls into the category of exercise games (Caon & Rutka, 2013). This simple game is usually played by two people who take turns drawing tokens (X or O) in a 3x3 grid; the victory is achieved by placing three tokens horizontally, vertically or diagonally. It is easily adaptable to language teaching, as stated by Mollica (2019), and it is one of the most famous 'pencil and paper' games ever. At a low language level, it is advisable to create a set of tic-tac-toe games with images and words; going up a level, the types range from the most diverse, for instance with questions, synonymous, historical dates etc.

As Mollica (*Ibid*.) advises, this kind of recreational activity is advisable with a thematic approach and is very good for revising vocabulary and grammar.

- *Pedagogical implication*

i) Illustrate tic-tac-toe: inside the nine squares, there are hidden images linked to specific vocabulary (previously addressed in the classroom) that the foreign child must turn over to discover the picture. Once observed the pictures, the pupil has to correctly write down the word that will contain double letters. If correct, the child can insert X or O.

This activity can be implemented to practice and foster graphemic competence, as pupils are asked to write the correct written form of the given image, allowing them to practice orthography while playing. In order to create a more free-stress environment, this language game can be done in groups, where children can discuss all together before writing the word; in that sense also the 'shyer' child can participate without being asked to write words in front of the peers.

4.6.6 Odd man out

Another activity that is extremely present in language teaching textbooks is the odd man out. The learner is asked to identify within a given group of words that term which for some reasons does not belong to the group. The real aim of this type of game is not to identify the 'foreign' word but to provide a logical explanation why that term does not belong to the given list of words (Mollica, 2019). The implicit objective allows the so-called *Rule of Forgetting* (see section 2.3) to occur in its entirety, as the focus shifts from language to language use (*Ibid*.:129). It is usually recommended to have this activity carried out in pairs or small groups so that each student can enrich the common reflection with their own reasoning and according to their own logic (Bassani & Perello, 2021).

- *Pedagogical implication*

At the initial stage and with children, it is recommended to create this game with visual stimuli to facilitate the activity. The following instance aimed to develop graphemic competence in the Italian L2 language: four images (i.e. horse, cow, cat, and dog) are provided to pupils who, divided into groups, must first write the written Italian equivalent of the words on a sheet of paper; after a check by the teacher to verify correctness, they are asked to find the intruder, which in this case will be the Italian word '*cane'* as the only one without a double consonant.

At a more advanced language level, Balboni (2008:96) proposes a reworking of the game. The learner is given a text with some errors that can be of various kinds, 'dall'ortografia alle scelte socio-linguistiche'. Pupils have to spot them and correct them individually, after which a discussion in plenum is initiated that allows for reflection on the various corrections, and as Balboni (*Ibid*.:96) writes: 'in una classe di solito ce ne sono!'.

Following Balboni's (2008) suggestion, in the case of foreign children an alternative is to give them a text, and after having obtained a general comprehension, ask them to highlight the vocabulary regarding the topic of the lesson (for instance 'food', so *zucchero, pizza, caffè, mozzarella, latte, biscotti* etc.). Once checked that they have found all the target words, some of which will be written with one less double, pupils are asked to find errors by themselves, individually or in pairs.

4.6.7 Matching activity

Activities that require the pupil to connect two parts that have something in common, or that generate a sentence, are called 'di abbinamento o accoppiamento, ma anche incastro (Balboni, 1998, in Mollica, 2020:137). Students who benefit more from this typology of activity are the ones with more analytical thinking, as the activity allows for grammatical reflection (Balboni, 2008). However, as Mollica (2020) notes, they remain valuable recreational activities for presenting the life and culture of the second language, as well as its grammar. For this reason, it is considered important to implement them in the second language classroom to stimulate foreign students.

-Pedagogical application

i)Term-illustration matching activity: pupils are asked to match the term corresponding to the illustration. To develop writing skills and graphemic competence, students can be asked to copy the terms under the picture in order to practice (Mollica, 2020).

The activity of copying, although tedious and demotivating, serves to focus attention on handwriting, an essential activity to implement graphemic competence. A solution to its tedious side can be self-correction that allows students to identify their weaknesses, as suggested by Balboni (2008:119):

> *[…] il compito di ricopiatura, infatti va svolto leggendo una frase del testo modello e scrivendola affidandosi alla memoria sia semantica sia ortografica, in una sorta di ri-produzione del testo stesso. È possibile organizzare attività che non richiedono ufficialmente la ricopiatura ma che possono implicarla, addirittura dando allo studente il piacere di sentirsi più furbo del docente: ad esempio, si può preparare una versione di un dialogo ascoltato in precedenza in cui si presenta solo la parte iniziale delle battute e si chiede agli studenti di completarle, testando in tal modo la propria memoria. L'esecuzione parte come una piacevole sfida con sé stessi, ma ogni volta che lo studente è in difficoltà – e non può non esserlo – egli tende a barare, andando a copiare dall'originale.*

Following this assumption, the teacher can propose a matching activity with recopying in order to develop graphemic competence, as the following example:

i)Reconstruction of a sentence from individual words given in random order: initially, pupils are asked to reconstruct the sentence by joining the words in the correct position with lines. Afterwards, the completed sentence is asked to be rewritten allowing pupils to practice the written form. To turn this activity into a more motivated and stimulated one, it is possible to ask to rewritten the completed sentence on the back of the sheet of paper with the invitation not to 'peek', and it is here that students may 'cheat' by trying to read the sentence several times, going 'unintentionally' to perform a recopying activity that was the implicit language teaching aim.

4.6.8 Maze activity

A labyrinth or maze activity is a puzzle in the form of a complex branching passage through which the player must find the exit. The labyrinth has a very ancient history and the most famous structure dates back to ancient Greece with the myth of the Minotaur. In educational practice this activity plays an important role in the language learning process, as Mollica (2010:20) states: 'the solving of labyrinths sharpens the learner's visual acuity, is useful for hand-eye coordination and sharpens the student's logical skills'. Especially for the young pupils who are still developing their motor skills, training their hand-eye coordination is an essential aspect to consider as a primary teacher, since children can benefit most from this type of activity, that is cognitive, language and motor development.

Usually, classic mazes include a single entrance and exit, but Mollica's invitation is to 'expand' the traditional definition and propose creative maze activities with more than one solution to challenge and stimulate students and at the same time, teach/learn lexical, grammatical and cultural elements of the language (see Mollica, 2020). Especially for teaching grammar, which as Mollica (2020) states, can often represent boring moments for pupils, the maze activity can prove to be a useful tool to make language grammar learning more interesting and fun.

- *Pedagogical implication*

A maze activity can be created with grammar-oriented questions to guide students to the resolution; or using for instance questions with a thematic approach to review or recall vocabularies, as well as cultural information. However, the activity is very flexible and can be integrated with other teaching techniques such as multiple choice, true or false etc. A visual maze can also be created using images, allowing young pupils to make a direct image-word association, and it is the 'most useful at the early stages of language learning' (Mollica, 2010:20). The following practical examples are aimed at the implementation of the correct usage of double consonants:

i)Maze with illustrations and terms: a list of images is given; to find the exit of the labyrinth children follow only the corresponding written terms and cross out the terms not associated with illustration. No practice, such as writing or copying, is required and

for that reason this kind of activity can be used in the motivation phase to introduce the topic to the class.

ii) Maze with only words: to get the exit, the children have to follow the correctly spelled words and cross out the wrong ones. Also in this typology practice is not required, but the activity requires careful reflection and for that reason has to be presented to the classroom when there is familiarity with the topic.

ii) Maze with riddles and solutions or nursery rhymes: a further alternative to stimulate Italian L2 learning is the maze consisting of riddles given to students who have to follow the matching solutions to get out. It is important to calibrate riddles to the age of pupils so as not to demotivate them in case riddles are too difficult, which is why with children it is recommended to use as input simple riddles that have perhaps already been addressed in the classroom. The same activity can be created with uncompleted nursery rhymes, ideal for children who have to find and follow the final parts of the nursery rhymes to finish the maze.

4.6.9 Riddle activity

Riddle is probably the oldest and most diffuse word game ever. Its origins can be found in ancient Greece with the famous riddle of the Sphinx that only Oedipus was able to solve. The Greek word means 'to speak in a complex and obscure way', while the *Vocabolario Zingarelli* offers the following definition: 'breve componimento […] in cui ambiguamente e allusivamente si propone una parola o un concetto da indovinare' (2003, in cd-rom, in Mollica,2020a:121). Rossi (2002 in Danesi, 2019:332-3) defines it as 'breve componimento che allude a un concetto da indovinare tramite pensiero associative-metaforico'. Types of riddles are innumerable, there are some with the solution inside, the riddles in verse or the ones that are simply a statement. Often it is a paradox that can also lead to absurdity and has elements that confuse the solver, and many are based on proverbs and require cultural knowledge. From a second language teaching perspective, the riddle is an effective teaching tool for facilitating the learning of idiomatic and cultural expressions of the target language, as Danesi (*Ibid*.) writes: 'una chiave d'accesso alla civiltà e alla cultura della seconda lingua, classica e attuale'. However, as the scholar (*Ibid*.) notes, riddle is among one of the least teaching techniques studied in education although it is an authentic and effective language material in stimulating the metaphoric

thinking. The invitation to implement the riddle in the second language classroom is summed up in the following words by Danesi (*Ibid*.:338) who states:

> *Rispondere all'indovinello è istintivo e perciò non è nemmeno necessario insegnare a "leggerlo". Si tratta dell'uso di una logica esplorativa che è innata in tutti. Si tratta dell'attivazione di lògos, e quindi di una bimodalità di pensiero che sottostà alla gran parte degli atti discorsivi di ogni giorno. Forse nessun altro testo, o materiale autentico, possiede questa caratteristica olistica, la quale, come menzionato, costituirebbe l'input naturale più idoneo per attivare l'acquisizione (Krashen 1982; 1985).*

The choice and the difficulty of the riddle must be made according to the teaching requirements and the age of the learner since young pupils do not have a sense of humour as strong as adults and a medium-high L2 language level. Nevertheless, as Mollica (2020a:141) states, adapted and simplified riddles can be used also with young students with a low language level since they are language techniques useful for learning vocabulary and can be implemented also to focus attention on the characteristic of a particular word, as in the example below:

> *Il cammello ne ha due, il dromedario una sola. Cosa?*
> *La lettera m.*
> *(Zanoncelli, 2000, 15; Zanoni 2001:69; in Mollica 2020b:138)*

- *Pedagogical implication*

Mollica (2020a) suggests the alternative which is having pupils work in pairs or small groups to create a riddle. In this case, the teacher is responsible for providing them with specific guidelines on how to create a riddle, such as: identifying an answer, working in groups and brainstorming by examining the characteristics of the word (definitions, use in idiomatic expressions, use in proverbs). Once these directions have been followed, the students will have enough information to create a riddle using synonyms, characteristics, personifications, etc. This activity encourages pupils to look up definitions and the usage of words to guess; therefore, it turns out to be a good language tool to introduce foreign

children to the use of vocabulary. For these reasons, the riddle activity should not discourage the primary teacher and the children can be asked to create a riddle based, for instance, on synonyms and antonyms, so that in addition to learning/recalling the specific word by looking up the definition in the dictionary, they have the opportunity to practice the synonyms and antonyms while expanding their vocabulary and graphemic competence, as they have to write it and check the correct spelling form of words. However, with young pupils, Mollica (*Ibid*.) suggests getting the children into the riddle mechanism by providing them riddles with possible answers from which to choose the right one; further, this typology of activity also facilitates language acquisition in the initial stages. The riddle activity can be used both at the beginning or at the end of the lesson, under the condition that it is relevant to the known vocabulary or the lesson of the day.

Chapter 5. A didactic proposal of a Recreational Linguistics workshop to improve the use of double consonants in Italian L2 for young pupils: *'Otto, il bassotto poliziotto, e il furto del Leone di Venezia'*

Having validated the successful binomial between graphemic competence and Recreational linguistics, the last chapter of the present thesis intends to demonstrate how this 'synergy' can be converted into 'reality' by proposing a Recreational Linguistics pathway aimed at improving the Italian orthography, with a specific focus on the correct use of double consonants. The following didactic proposal is organised within a narrative framework of the story of Otto, '*il bassotto poliziotto*', who must find the thief of Venice's Lion statue. To do so, Otto asks children for help collecting clues, which are achieved by solving the various language games. The project has been created considering four hypothetical meetings, each lasting two hours, aimed at children aged between 7-11 years old. Further, it has been developed with the prospective to be applied within an Italian L2 workshop, as the latter is considered extremely beneficial and the 'ideal' context for a heterogeneous class with different ages and levels of L2 competence.

5.1. The context of application: the Italian L2 workshop

It is believed appropriate to briefly explain what is meant by the Italian L2 workshop to better understand the proposed educational pathway. As Caon (2016) points out, it is a space within the school where various groups of non-Italian speaking learners of different ages, cultural backgrounds, mother tongues and L2 competence levels share to learn and reinforce the Italian language during school or extracurricular hours. Within the workshop, foreign learners usually feel more comfortable socialising and actively participating in the lesson, as the linguistic and cultural differences are less significant than in the class with their Italian-speaker peers. There are two macro-areas that the Italian L2 workshop can address: the language of basic communication (*ItalBase*), and the language of study (*Italstudio*), the distinction can be compared with BICS and CALP competence (see section 2.5.1). While *ItalBase* is more suitable for newly arrived pupils and therefore aimed at the development of first communication, *ItalStudio* is addressed to those pupils who need to solve specific language learning problems such as the

complexity of CALP and linguistic-cognitive skills (*Ibid*.). In any case, a student does not go from BICS to CALP from one step to another, but rather it is a long and demanding process, and the acquisition of *ItalBase* does not guarantee the acquisition of *ItalStudio*, as the latter does not provide all the tools to deal with the language of study (Bortolon Guidolin, 2016). It is therefore essential to work on the so-called '*fase ponte'* to ensure the development of CALP, which is indispensable for academic success and beyond. The 'bridge phase' is an essential access phase to the Italian language for the development of CALP, and according to Bortolon Guidolin (in *Ibid*.), in this phase, it is appropriate to work on the consolidation of skills related to the language of communication and to go on to develop, step by step, cognitive and metacognitive skills to enable foreign pupils to participate in the common learning with their Italian peers. In this stage teachers work on strengthening and implementing vocabulary, by proposing activities that are still linked to the context (BICS) but gradually move towards more cognitive and metalanguage processes, closely to school requirements (CALP) (Luise, 2006).

5.1.1 Variety of recreational activities and different levels of difficulty as tools for heterogeneous classroom management

To ensure language learning within a group of pupils with different ages, linguistic levels and also different personal factors, Caon (2016) identifies two strategies to apply for greater classroom management: *'la differenziazione'* and *'la stratificazione del compito'*. The latter aims to differentiate the linguistic input to ensure each student opportunity to activate the cognitive strategy most suitable to his/her style, while the former refers to the presentation of activities that should follow the sequence from the easiest to the most difficult. A further strategy highlighted by Caon (*Ibid*.) is to propose problem-solving activities, as it allows different skill levels to be managed simultaneously. Considering all these points, the following proposal is structured respecting the differentiation of the input's presentation using recreational activities of various types and varying their implementation within the five language acquisition sequences (see section 4.2.3), as well as presenting simpler activities and then gradually advancing in complexity, both linguistically and cognitively. For instance, the crossword puzzle, initially always presented with the illustration as an aid, becomes more cognitively demanding at the end of the path where also written questions are presented

to children. Moreover, its variation, the search word puzzle, is used in different phases of the lessons: as a tool for linguistic reflection or to fix vocabulary, but also as a language game to use in the initial phase, to motivate and engage pupils about the lessons and recall known vocabulary. The maze activity is also implemented for different purposes; for instance, to fix and reuse the vocabulary observed, or to recall knowledge and vocabulary already known; the same for the dot-to-dot activity, extremely suitable for the skimming process to check the comprehension of a text but also as a tool to allow pupils to verify the hypotheses made.

5.2 Clarifications

It is believed fundamental to give some clarifications in order to accompany the reader towards a greater understanding of the Recreational Linguistics Italian L2 workshop presented and to facilitate hypothetical applications in the classroom.

5.2.1 Target pupils

Considering what has been stated, the present proposal is aimed at foreign children who have already completed BICS but have yet to fully develop those linguistic-cognitive skills required by the language of study (CALP) to enable them to access the study of school subjects. For these reasons, the following proposal deals with different semantic areas, which the children should already be familiar with, but through more demanding cognitive and metacognitive activities. The foreign children to whom the present proposal is aimed are in the age range of 7-11, since in order to be able to complete and solve the language games presented, it is required to know and have fully assimilated the basic principles of the Italian alphabet. Therefore, the present Recreational Linguistics learning pathway is suitable for an *ItalStudio* workshop, as children must already have practised the spelling of the Italian language during school hours with their Italian peers and need a specific course to reinforce their graphemic competence. Indicatively, their language level of L2 varies between A2-B1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference. The lexical topics have been chosen following these levels, and therefore the foreign children are familiar with vocabulary related to school, family, leisure and jobs, parts of the body, animals and so on.

5.2.2 Linguistic aims

Further clarification is required in order to better understand the aim of the present proposal, which is structured to differentially meet the needs of students between A2 and B1 language levels, and has as main linguistic aim the consolidation of the correct use of Italian doubles. In order to do that, the Recreational Linguistics proposal intends to work on two levels. The first is the explicit one, visible and perceived by pupils who approach it with awareness, which is organised into four different linguistic aims. The latters, which follow the order of the four meetings, are the following:

- Fixing jobs vocabulary, and masculine-feminine transformation of professions, with a focus on irregular transformations,
- Fixing family and home vocabulary, and semantic association of everyday actions with home objects;
- Fixing vocabulary of the parts of the body and a main focus on irregular plurals,
- Fixing animals' vocabulary and idiomatic expressions with them.

On the other hand, the implicit level, in the sense that it is quite 'imperceptible' to children, represents the main objective of the present proposal: the improvement of the correct use of Italian double consonants. While the young learners focus on the explicit objectives of the recreational activities, they practice indirectly on the double consonants. Therefore, the principal aim is to drive children to improve spelling without asking them to explicitly focus on doubles as an isolated language objective to avoid traditional and unmotivated exercises. Through repetition, practice and habit in dealing with vocabulary, students can absorb the graphemic forms without the need for isolated and mechanical activities or explanations, as the lexical route of the Dual Route Model assumes (see section 4.4.4). Considering what has been claimed, A2 pupils can achieve the implicit aim without encountering possible obstacles, as they are indirectly led to repeat and practice the graphemic form of words chosen according to known semantic areas, and with a greater presence of double consonants. As far as the explicit objectives are concerned, there are no difficulties with the further fixing of vocabulary, as these are semantic areas already addressed at the A2 level. Nevertheless, they may encounter some difficulties with certain irregularities and idiomatic expressions found across the practical proposal. On the other hand, students with a higher language level can easily achieve the explicit linguistics aims and benefit from the linguistic challenge provided by the more

cognitive effort recreational activities, which have been chosen with the intention of not demotivating them by presenting activities that are too simple and exclusively aimed at lexical reinforcement. Therefore, B1 pupils are also fostered to develop and strengthen their metalinguistic competence, since they are called to 'tutoring' their linguistic 'weaker' peers. Driving and supporting their peers by consolidating what they already know, B1 students have the opportunity to develop a greater linguistic awareness which enables them to foster a deeper and more lasting language learning. For instance, they are called to recognize spelling errors or to solve activities that require problem solving, making inferences, giving reasoning, or the use of divergent thinking. In this perspective, a collaborative and playful language learning environment is ensured, where also the A2 learners benefit as they are gradually driven by their peers towards metalinguistic reflection, allowing them to lay the first basis for CALP development, while the others strengthen and practice their cognitive and metacognitive skills.

5.2.3 The underlying principal core: learning by playing

The main objective of this proposal is to improve the correct use of double consonants in foreign children learners. However, the proposal does not present any direct explications of orthography rules focused on double consonants. The reasons behind this choice are several. Firstly, the Italian language presents very few rules to apply concerning consonant doubling, and despite this they are not presented as the intention is to adopt an inductive approach, ensuring a more natural second language acquisition process within an educational environment that allows learning within the zone of proximal development (see section 1.3.3). Further, the goal of spelling improvement is achieved by considering the concept of the lexical route of the Dual Route of Model (see section 4.4.4), through which children assimilate the correct graphemic form of words through lexical reinforcement, which takes place through the act of reading and writing the words that are fixed, consequently the act of repetition takes place without noticing it. Finally, the principal core of the following proposal is driven by the underlying concept of facilitating language learning through a playful attitude and the implementation of recreational activities, in which play is seen as the 'vital charge' that gives pupils 'energy' and a sense of joy while learning, as it is perceived as playing. By activating students, who become curious and motivated to move forward with their language process, learning itself becomes deeper and more authentic in which the child does not perceive the second

language acquisition process as imposed and made of 'building blocks' to be assimilated, but as an enjoyable and motivating time in which the hypothesis of *Rule of Forgetting* (see section 2.3.1) is fully applied.

5.2.4 The narrative framework

The following Recreational Linguistics Italian L2 workshop proposal follows the story of Otto, '*il bassotto poliziotto*', who has to solve a case of theft within the city of Venice.[22] Although this narrative framework is the *leitmotif* of the activities, it only has the function of motivating and involving the pupils more within the educational pathway; it does not represent a constraint for teachers who want to implement some of the proposed recreational activities in their Italian L2 classroom. However, in order to make the proposal even more motivating for children, there are some specific language games closely related to the storyline, aimed at testing comprehension of the written texts, consequently, these can not be taken individually, as well as those that their completion gives pupils a clue, and therefore the narrative framework is required to make sense. These specific activities are marked with a double asterisk (**).

5.2.5 The sources of recreational activities

All the present recreational activities are being taken from Mollica's studies, specifically, the following volumes have been taken as references: 2019, 2020, 2020a. Two typologies of language games, on the other hand, have been taken from the work of Cazzaniga and Baldi (2016), which are:*'scarto ortografico',* which has been called *'lettere nascoste',* and *'scelta ortografica',* which has been left with the same name. Nevertheless, all the recreational activities have been adapted and modified according to the target students and the language objective: implementation of the correct use of double consonants.

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[22] The idea of creating a storyline in which a case of theft has to be solved was taken from the volumes of *Mini gialli dell'ortografia* of Cazzaniga Susi and Silvia Baldi, in which the inspector Ortografoni has to solve different cases through the solutions of language games.
The volumes are five, the present proposal has taken into account the last one, number five: *L'ispettore Ortografoni e il sabotaggio del Big Ben* by Cazzaniga, S. and Baldi, S. (2016).

5.3 *'Otto, il bassotto poliziotto, e il furto del Leone di Venezia'*

In the following paragraphs, the project is presented in four parts respectively. Each of which deals with a different semantic area with 'explicit' linguistic objectives, meaning that they are perceived by the students carrying out the activities; while the improvement and reinforcement of the correct use of doubles is defined as an implicit objective, as the students are not aware of it, and which represents the principle aim of the present Recreational Linguistics Italian L2 Workshop proposal (see section 5.2.2).

Each of the following paragraphs explains the application of the proposed recreational activities to guide the teacher who intends to apply the following teaching sheets in the Italian L2 classroom. The indicative time that each activity requires is given, including some minutes to dedicate to the end-activity feedback. Furthermore, most language games proposed are recommended to be done individually to allow a deeper focus on the written form; however, it is advisable to spend some minutes allowing children to check the activity in pairs or small groups before giving the feedback to the entire class.

5.3.1 Application first part and recreational activities (see appendix 1)

For the first part, it is recommended to spend about 10 minutes presenting the project, specifying to pupils what their job will be, namely solving a theft and finding the thief. Images of Venice and the Lion statue are recommended as visual support, in order to further contextualise the story that will accompany the children in the meetings. This is the moment when any questions can be answered.

Recreational activity 1)

Reading text and search words puzzle (20 minutes - individually)[23]

After having read the text which introduces children to the story and explained to them what their 'job' is going to be, a search word puzzle is presented with the aim of bringing the children further into the narrative framework. It does not require any written production; the children are asked to search for and observe specific words.

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[23] All the recreational activities such as crossword, search word puzzles, maze and dot-to–dot (drawings) are made through the following website: https://ohmydots.com. With the exception of the last proposed crossword activity, which contains a hidden sentence and has been created through the following website: https://www.papirata.com.
Furthermore, all the didactic worksheets in the appendix are created through the graphic design tool Canva.

Recreational activity 2)**

Dot-to-dot activity to test text comprehension (20 minutes, in pairs or small groups).

In order to find the hidden picture, children have to answer questions that adhere to the text choosing between true or false, implicitly allowing them to reflect on the graphemic forms of words. For further test comprehension, it is possible to ask children to correct the false answers. This activity gives a clue, which is the picture of a paintbrush. It is recommended to spend some minutes talking about this tool; for instance, in plenum: what is a paintbrush? Who uses it? By doing these children should orally recollect some job vocabulary to connect with the next activity.

Recreational activity 3)

Matching activity (15 minutes, individually).

The activity indirectly allows students to make hypotheses on the written form of words and verify them through the visual and written aids. Furthermore, they are asked to rewrite words once they have made matches to practice graphemic forms.

Recreational activity 4)**

'Lettere nascoste' (20 minutes, first individually, then pairs of small groups for check)

This recreational activity aims to fix the verified words in the previous language games through guided production of single words. Since these types of activities are often boring and not stimulating, a clue has been hidden inside to make them more' acceptable'. Children have to find the letters in a random sequence of letters to compose the written form of the given illustration; once done, they have to create a sentence with the letters excluded. Some words related to jobs are deliberately in the female genre. Once the activity is over, it is advisable to check if it has been noticed and reflect on it together to link to the next language game.

Recreational activity 5)

Crossword illustrated with words (15 minutes, pairs or small group).

The crossword is given to reuse and reflect on the words with the double consonants addressed. The female gender is required to complete the game and some of them change; the linguistic effort is therefore slightly higher, but pupils with a higher language level should have no problems and support the more linguistically 'weak' ones.

Recreational activity 6)**

'Scelta ortografica' (20 minutes, first individually, then in pairs or small groups for check)

To self-test what has been done, children are asked to choose between two words. Once found the correct one they must count the letters and find the one indicated by the given number (written on the side) and transcribe it in the little square next to the words; the letters will form the hidden word, which is the topic of the next meeting. This activity leads to great attention to the single graphemes, and allows self-correction, as in the case of wrong choice, the hidden word will not be revealed.

5.3.2 Application second part and recreational activities (see appendix 2)

At the beginning, it is advisable to spend a few minutes reconnecting with the previous meeting, where the last language game has revealed the main topic of the session.

Recreational activity 1)

Search words puzzle (10 minutes, individually)

To clarify and recall the known vocabulary adhered to the family topic, children are asked to carry out a search words puzzle. This activity is proposed to start the work on what they already know, Krashen's hypothesis formula *i+1* (see section 2.3).

Recreational activity 2)**

Text reading (short riddle and nursery rhyme) and matching activity (cloze) to check comprehension (25 minutes, individually reading and pairs or small groups for cloze activity)

To enter into the narrative framework, the reading of a mysterious relative of the thief is given. This activity asks pupils to solve a short riddle in which the solution is easily found by phonological assonance. A second short text is given, a nursery rhyme that aims to introduce the semantic area of 'house and its objects'. The proposed activity to test comprehension, a cloze activity, requires inserting synonyms of words found in the texts within sentences.

*Recreational activity 3)***

Matching activity (20 minutes, individually)

Once connected to the topic of the house and its objects, children are asked to make associations using inferences, therefore they have to associate everyday actions in the house with the corresponding objects. The vocabulary of objects should already be known. The activity allows students to make assumptions about the written forms of the illustrations as they are not given. Individually they are asked to match and write down the correct graphemic forms, then to verify it in pairs or small groups.

Recreational activity 4)

Maze activity (20 minutes, in pairs or small groups)

The following language game aims at the fixation of the observed and verified vocabulary, as it requests children to follow only the correct words to get out of the labyrinth, and implicitly fix the vocabulary. Once out of the maze, a linguistic reflection is gradually introduced as pupils are asked to correct some of the misspelt words, going again to fix and reuse the correct form.

Recreational activity 5)

Crossword challenge (30 minutes, two different groups, each student must have the corresponding crossword sheet to fix words by writing the written forms)

This activity is used to reflect on what has been done, requesting children to complete the crossword puzzle through visual clues (actions or objects that should be linked to the corresponding action). The class is divided into two groups, group A has horizontal clues and group B the vertical ones. Only by collaborating, they will be able to complete the language game; furthermore, since each group can not show the illustrations to the other team, the children are also invited to use their bodies to mine the action to guess.

*Recreational activity 6)***

Tic-tac-toe activity   (15 minutes, in groups of three) To ensure a moment of self-evaluation, a tic-tac-toe game is proposed to be played in groups of three. The nine boxes contain illustrations of which children have to write the written forms; if correct, they get a point and can put an X or O plus the syllable written inside the box; if wrong, it is the opponent's turn. At the end, they have to collect and reconstruct all the syllables to form the clue: the semantic area of the next meeting. A

third child is called upon to act as a judge, thus checking that the written words are correct in order to give a greater sense of autonomy and collaboration among peers. All this must be done under the supervision of the teacher.

5.3.3 Application third part and recreational activities (see appendix 3)

In order to recall the main topic of the meeting, it is advisable to remember what has been done during the last session with the implicit aim of reconnecting with the last recreational activity that has revealed the main semantic area of the third meeting.

Recreational activity 1)

Maze activity (5 minutes, individually)

To recall vocabulary and motivate pupils, a maze activity is proposed in which they have to follow only words regarding the parts of the body, a semantic area that A2/B1 students should already know. The vocabularies given in this activity also have their respective determinative articles with the intention to recall the feminine, masculine, plural and singular body parts, including the irregular forms.

Recreational activity 2)

Reading text and matching activity to check comprehension (20 minutes, first individually, then in pairs to check comprehension)

A short text is given where a global reading is first required. Thereafter, to develop scanning skills and check reading comprehension, children are asked to complete the table matching where they must enter the traits of the thief described by the witness. Within the text an idiomatic expression with the body is also presented, it is suggested to orally check that it has been noticed and spend some minutes asking if they know other expressions about the human body.

Recreational activity 3)

Search word puzzle (10 minutes, individually)

The following activity aims to shift the focus to the plural forms of the human body even more, as the Italian language has a few irregularities that can confuse the learners. The search words puzzle implicitly does not require any production, as it asks pupils to search

for and circle the plural forms of the given words. Pupils who may have some difficulties with the irregular plural forms are supported by the game itself. As soon as they have found the first letter of the word, they can easily obtain the whole word, allowing for observation and verification of the assumptions made.

Recreational activity 4)**

Dot-to-dot activity (15 minutes, in pairs or small groups)

The activity is completed through multiple choices. Each choice gives a specific sequence of letters to follow in order to complete the hidden drawing, which in turn reveals a clue. In this language game, the observed and verified words are reused and fixed within different contexts, and within certain idiomatic expressions, including the one observed in the initial text.

Recreational activity 5)

Crossword illustrated (20 minutes, in pairs but with two worksheets to allow each pupil to write and fix the words)

To allow children to reflect on what has been addressed, they are asked to solve an illustrated crossword puzzle without word clues. The children have to write down the plural of the given images, the difficulty lies in the fact that they also have to enter the corresponding definite articles. This is required with the intention to foster an explicit language reflection on some special cases of the Italian language, such as *'la mano - le mani'* or '*il ginocchio - le ginocchia*'.

Recreational activity 6)

Odd man out (30 minutes, in pairs or small groups)

This exclusion teaching language technique is a powerful language game that allows pupils to reason and deeply reflect on the language. Therefore, the following activity is proposed with the intention of fostering a deeper language reflection. To be done in pairs, or small groups, pupils must justify their choices, and, since some list words have more than one solution, a discussion at the end will arise. The focus is on the presence or absence of double consonants; however, learners have to pay attention also to singular/plural and feminine/masculine forms.

Recreational activity 7)**

'Scelta ortografica' (20 minutes, individually)

Children are asked to self-test by an activity that requires great focus on the single graphemes and allows for self-correction since in case of a wrong choice word, the letter to be entered in the next box will also be wrong, not revealing the hidden word.

5.3.4 Application fourth part and recreational activities (see appendix 4)

At the beginning, it is advisable to spend a few minutes reconnecting to the previous meeting, in which the last activity has revealed a clue linked to the present session.

Recreational activity 1)

Search word puzzle with illustrations and words (10 minutes, individually)

The following activity is proposed to recall the known vocabulary to start the session by working on what children already know.

Recreational activity 2)**

Text reading and dot-to-dot activity to check comprehension (15 minutes, in pairs)

A short text is given to reconnect to the narrative framework. Within it, there is also an example of idiomatic expression with animals. To check the comprehension a dot-to-dot activity is introduced, where in addition to testing text comprehension, children are required to make some inferences as they are tested in understanding the implicit elements of the text, which are important for the success of the lesson, and for that reason, it is advisable to do it in pairs.

Recreational activity 3)

Matching activity (20 minutes, first individually, second part in pairs)

To allow pupils to make assumptions and verify them, a matching activity with words and illustrations is proposed, in which they have to rewrite the words to reuse and fix them. The following activity presents a second part, where children are fostered to reflect through guided questions about certain animal characteristics, such as strength or cunning, that pupils have to associate with some animals according to their point of view. The objective is to create a 'bridge' for the next activity, and to introduce children to idiomatic expressions with animals by extrapolating certain animal characteristics; for

instance, since a lion is strong, if a person is compared to a lion, it could mean that he/she is strong and has courage (i.e. *coraggioso come un leone*). In doing so, children can foster their divergent thinking by making associations based on their imagination and creativity, but they are also called to create inferences between the common familiar traits of animals and more abstract and complex concepts through a process based on analogical thinking used to find parallelisms.

At the end of the activity, children are required to recollect the last clue obtained by the text and circle all the animals that have tails and whiskers: one of them is the thief.

Recreational activity 4)

Maze (15 minutes, in pairs)

A multiple-choice maze is introduced to enable children to deeper reflection. Therefore, to get out of the labyrinth, they have to choose the right animal to correctly complete the idiomatic expression. In case of a wrong choice, children can easily deduce it for themselves as they will not be able to finish the language game. In this activity there are no spelling errors, the choice is between two animals as the main objective is to drive them to understand the inference through familiar traits of animals that can be associated with people.

*Recreational activity 5)***

Crossword challenge (30 minutes, in small groups)

To foster a linguistic reflection on what has been done during the four meetings, a puzzle challenge is proposed that contains also the vocabulary of previous meetings. Clues to solve the following language game are made up of words, illustrations or both, and children are encouraged to use body movements to make others understand the hidden word. A secret sentence is hidden inside the crossword, representing the last clue that allows children to find out the thief. Once the clue has been obtained, pupils are asked to return to activity 3 (matching activity), in which they have to find and circle the animal that has tails, whiskers and a double letter within their name (last clue), turning out to be the animal *'gatto'*. The challenge component is given by the time, as the first team to solve the crossword puzzle discovers the thief first and wins the game.

Recreational activity 6) ** *To do only with all the clues*

Jigsaw activity (30 minutes, small groups)

As a last game to promote problem-solving and cooperation, a jigsaw activity is proposed to reconstruct the story of the theft. Firstly, children are asked to take the clues collected during the lessons and to follow them to reconstruct the story. To make the activity more challenging, it is possible to ask them to cut the five parts of the story and give one to each group, they will have to collaborate with other groups to reconstruct the story. Therefore, each group has to first find out which part of the story could be their worksheet, and with which clue it could be associated. Then, each group explains to the class which part of the story they have, and all together work to reconstruct it.

5.3.5 The end: 'attestato di partecipazione'

It is suggested that each student receive the 'certificate' attesting to their participation in the Lion Theft of Venice investigation, intending to reward and motivate them for possible future Italian L2 workshops. Therefore, the aim is to generate a positive final evaluation by children, even for those who may have cooperated or worked less, allowing the creation of a positive memory to foster a willingness to repeat these kinds of learning experiences in the future.

Conclusions

The principal aim of the present thesis is to demonstrate how, through the implementation of recreational activities, the accurate use of double consonants can be improved in Italian as a second language. To verify it, the study seeks to support the successful synergy between linguistic reflection and Recreational linguistics, by discussing the strategic dimension of play in second language teaching, with a particular focus on language games from Recreational linguistics. The latter allows overcoming traditional teaching grammar techniques to give space for motivating and challenging language activities. Following this assumption, this discipline has been revealed as a great second language methodology for ensuring teaching grammar without the renouncement of the pleasure of learning by playing.

To validate the beneficial union between grammar and play, this thesis has begun with an excursion of play's educational value across centuries; emphasising its involvement in child's development, and its role as a learning resource, as it ensures the zone of proximal development. In the specific context of second language education, the Playful language teaching methodology evidences the role of play as the most strategic tool for facilitating language learning. Following this assumption, I focused my study on Recreational linguistics, a branch of linguistics that recognises the potential of play in second language teaching. The activities from this discipline aim to motivate and facilitate language learning by stimulating cognitive engagement through language games. Relying on the human tendency to problem-solving, they allow for practising and improving language skills without perceived language learning effort, and foster pupils to exploit their cognitive and metacognitive resources to solve the game, promoting a deeper attention to the form, without the implementation of unmotivated and repetitive teaching techniques. Consequently, nowadays it is impossible to imagine a second language teaching without word games, and this can be deduced from the analysis conducted on the evolution of grammar teaching, which has highlighted the fundamental role of linguistic reflection and the need for a more engaging and motivating teaching activity to foster metalinguistic competence.

In consideration of all these assumptions, the didactic proposal is based on established theoretical and empirical studies to support its validity. For that reason, I expect to obtain positive results in the case of an Italian L2 Workshop future application, and also an improvement in the metalinguistic competence due to the cognitive and metacognitive effort required by recreational activities. In support of these assertions, there are several considerations. Firstly, regarding the improvement of the correct use of double consonants, the positive reinforcement generated by word games fosters children to practise more and more, fixing the correct graphemic form of words. Therefore, to keep motivation up and ensure a greater sense of satisfaction that encourages students to continue their second language acquisition process, a hidden clue has been inserted in some activities. Moreover, a positive result is expected as almost all of the proposed recreational activities require children to recopy, and therefore fix the specific words, according to the studies that highlight the crucial role of the fixation process in second language acquisition, a role that is even more essential in case of graphemic competence improvement. Further support for the proposal's validity lies in the role of lexical reinforcement, investigated by several empirical research, that highlights the interconnection with the implementation of graphemic competence. With the basis of this evidence, the present didactic proposal addressed different semantic areas already known by the children. The intention is to reinforce the knowledge and frequency of these vocabularies, since if children have a deep understanding of words and their meanings, they are less likely to make spelling errors, according to the lexical route of the Dual Route Model.

The recreational activities deal with vocabulary still connected to the contexts and familiar words but gradually move towards more cognitive and metacognitive processes, close to school requirements. Following this reasoning, an improvement of metalinguistic competence and the development of an awareness of orthography is expected, since language reflection is supposed to occur naturally as it is intrinsically rooted in the nature of the language game itself. Unlike traditional teaching spelling techniques, such as manipulation exercises or pattern drills, that can be perceived as forced and unnatural activities, language games foster children to use and reflect on language more spontaneously and enjoyably. Moreover, children with a higher language level, who are called upon to tutor their 'weakest' peers, are driven towards a deeper explicit language reflection. They have the task of explaining and making their spelling choices understood by their peers, consolidating and reflecting on what they already know that fosters a

deeper and more lasting second language learning process. Nevertheless, the different degrees of difficulty of the proposed recreational activities do not represent any obstacle to successful future applications in the mixed abilities classroom. Therefore, through collaboration, children achieve greater objectives and can easily overcome their issues through reciprocal support. According to this assumption, I also assume the verification of positive results for the linguistic 'weakest' pupils who, through the exploitation of collaboration and play, achieve and expand their zone of proximal development.

The present didactics proposal represents a valid insight for future research that will be necessary to confirm the concrete implementation of the correct use of double consonants. I suggest using pre- and post-tests on children to obtain data to analyse and confirm at the end of the application. Dictation is one of the assessment tools most used for spelling competence, but it has the downside of generating anxiety and stress, and therefore the data could be compromised. The advice is to transform it into a recreational activity. For instance, researchers or teachers can take a short story and divide it into separated paragraphs and then dictate them in random order and ask children to reconstruct the story. Play components are given by the limited time and the challenge against oneself or peers. As an alternative, it is possible to use the tic-tac-toe game with images on specific semantic areas that you want to investigate, and children are asked to write the correct written forms.

Furthermore, it is also possible to broaden the research question on more aspects dealing with orthography, as the didactic proposal focuses on the correct use of double consonants improvement through lexical reinforcement and expansion. This implies that there are not targeted activities, as the language aim of double consonants is implicit and not perceived by the pupils. For that reason, future researchers may focus their investigation on other aspects of orthography according to the main Italian spelling errors, maintaining the same recreational activities proposed. For instance, concerning the category of phonological errors: the addition of graphemes (i.e. gatto - gattato), the omission (i.e. tavolo - tavlo) or the inversions (i.e. divano - diavno).

Also, with regard to non-phonological errors: the homophone grapheme exchange (i.e. cucina - qucina) or illegal separation (i.e. insieme, in sieme) could be investigated.

In conclusion, adopting Recreational linguistics in a second language mixed abilities classroom appears to be a valid and effective solution for improving both pupils'

linguistic and metalinguistic competencies. By overcoming the traditional and monotonous teaching grammar techniques into more 'attractive' recreational activities, this discipline evolves the second language learning process into a more intellectually stimulating and enjoyable experience. Language games not only facilitate the development of linguistic skills but also foster a more authentic and lasting second language acquisition, as they lead pupils to metalinguistic reflection and a more natural language learning path by exploiting play's potential.

OTTO, IL BASSATTO POLIZIOTTO, E IL FURTO DEL LEONE DI VENEZIA

In una tranquilla mattina di settembre, un misterioso furto ha luogo nella città di Venezia.

La famosa statua del Leone di piazza San Marco è scomparsa e la città è messa a soqquadro nel tentativo di trovare il colpevole!

La notizia inizia a circolare rapidamente, lasciando i cittadini senza parole. Chi potrebbe aver rubato un simbolo tanto amato?

Cittadini di Venezia! Non preoccupatevi, c'è Otto il bassotto poliziotto, famoso per il suo fiuto investigativo e la sua valigetta che non abbandona mai. Con la sua lente d'ingrandimento e un cappello da detective che gli calza a pennello, Otto si mette subito al lavoro per trovare il ladro!

Ma per risolvere il furto più grande della città di Venezia ci sarà bisogno di indizi e questi si ottengono attraverso giochi di parole, e Otto, che arriva direttamente dalla Germania, non può farcela da solo perché non conosce molto bene la lingua Italiana. Solo con il tuo aiuto sarà possibile trovare il colpevole e riportare la statua del Leone di Venezia al suo posto, in cima alla colonna di Piazza San Marco. Allora, sei disposto ad aiutarlo?

CERCA E CERCHIA GLI OGGETTI DENTRO LA VALIGETTA DI OTTO, POSSONO ESSERE IN VERTICALE O IN ORIZZONTALE

- MAPPA
- OCCHIALI
- TACCUINO
- CAPPELLO
- FISCHIETTO
- PENNA
- BUSSOLA

```
P I L A I H C C O J
W O N I U C C A T T
P L R L V B I D T G
E L O R E U F N E I
N E P D F S A O I D
N P A X L S P R H V
A P W L F O P Q C T
L A C A A L A G S V
Q C B F N A M O I G
Z P O K P A P Q F D
```

SECONDO TE, COSA SUCCEDE SE TOGLI UNA LETTERA A QUESTA PAROLA:
- CAPPELLO = ...

UNISCI I PUNTINI

PER TROVARE IL PRIMO INDIZIO DEVI SCEGLIERE SE LE SEGUENTI AFFERMAZIONI SONO **VERE** O **FALSE**.
AD OGNI RISPOSTA SEGUI LA LETTERA ACCANTO PER COMPLETARE L'IMMAGINE NASCOSTA: E' L'INDIZIO
CHE SERVE AD OTTO! SEGUI I PRIMI DUE ESEMPI PER AIUTARTI.

INDIZIO!
COSA RAPPRESENTA IL DISEGNO?
_____

1) Otto, il cane poliziotto, è a Venezia per risolvere
il caso del furto del Leopardo di Venezia
VERO (G-Q) ; FALSO (G-F)

2) Otto, è conosciuto per avere un potentissimo fiuto
che lo aiuta a trovare i colpevoli.
VERO (F – A) ; FALSO (F – O)

3)Otto parla molto bene l'italiano e per questo non ha bisogno
del tuo aiuto per trovare gli indizi
VERO (I – J); FALSO (A – M)

4)Gli indizi sono degli elementi che aiutano a risolvere il caso e
si trovano facendo dei giochi linguistici.
VERO (M-W) ; FALSO (M – E)

5)Otto ha sempre con sé uno zaino.
VERO (W – K); FALSO (W – J)

6) La città di Venezia è nel caos per cercare il colpevole
VERO (J – P); FALSO (J – N)

7) La notizia del furto non si diffonde velocemente in
città.
VERO (P – H) ; FALSO (P– C)

8) Otto ha un cappello da detective che gli sta
perfettamente in testa.
VERO (C – G) ; FALSO (C – A)

FALSO (G – F)

LE PROFESSIONI

INSERISCI IL TERMINE SOTTO L'ILLUSTRAZIONE GIUSTA, COME NELL'ESEMPIO

Pittore - Meccanico - Poliziotto - Parrucchiere - Dottore - Commesso - Pasticciere - Scrittore - Professore

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Pittore

LETTERE NASCOSTE

CERCHIA LE LETTERE CHE COMPONGNO LA PAROLA ILLUSTRATA, POI SCRIVILA NELLA CASELLA ACCANTO. GUARDA L'ESEMPIO PER AIUTARTI!

P A R S R U C O C H I E N R E O   PARRUCCHIERE

B U S U S O N L A O

T A C S C U I T N O U

P A D S T I C E C I E N R A

V A T L I G E T E T A

P E N D N A I

M E C P C A I N I T C O

F I T S C H I E T U T O

S T U R D E N A T E S S A

OTTIMO! ADESSO TRASCRIVI QUA SOTTO LE LETTERE SCARTATE, TROVERAI IL SECONDO INDIZIO PER TROVARE IL LADRO!

S O N O ....

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CRUCIVERBA ILLUSTRATO

VOLGI AL FEMMINILE SEGUENTI PROFESSIONI PER COMPLETARE IL CRUCIVERBA, COME NELL'ESEMPIO

1) PASTICCIERE

2) POLIZIOTTO

3) PITTORE

4) COMMESSO

5) PROFESSORE

6) SCRITTORE

7) PARRUCCHIERE

8) DOTTORE

SCELTA ORTOGRAFICA

PER OGNI COPPIA SCEGLI LA PAROLA SCRITTA CORRETTAMENTE, POI CERCA
LA LETTERA INDICATA DAL NUMERO E SCRIVILA NELLA TABELLA ACCANTO.
ALLA FINE SCOPRIRAI L'ARGOMENTO DEL PROSSIMO INCONTRO.
SEGUI L'ESEMPIO PER AIUTARTI!

Coppia	Numero
BUSOLA – B U S S O L A	6
POLIZIOTTA – POLIZIOTA	10
FISCHIETTO – FISCHIETO	1
SOCQUADRO – SOQQUADRO	6
COMMESSO – COMESSO	4
TACCUINO – TACUINO	6
VALIGETTA – VALIGETA	5
OCHIALI – OCCHIALI	7
PASTICCIERE – PASTICIERE	8
DOTORESSA – DOTTORESSA	10

L

SCRIVI QUA LA PAROLA TROVATA

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LA FAMIGLIA DEL COLPEVOLE

CONTINUANO LE RICERCHE DEL LADRO DEL LEONE DI VENEZIA.
DAI UNA MANO AD OTTO A CERCARE I MEMBRI DELLA FAMIGLIA DEL LADRO...

CERCA E CERCHIA LE SEGUENTI PAROLE; POSSONO TROVARSI IN
ORIZZONTALE, VERTICALE E DIAGONALE

MAMMA – PAPA' – GENITORI – NONNO – NONNA – ZIO – ZIA
FRATELLO – SORELLA – GEMELLI – NIPOTE – CUGINO – CUGINA

S	O	F	R	A	T	E	L	L	O	G
O	R	I	I	S	A	O	C	D	P	E
R	C	Z	Z	I	B	N	U	A	I	N
E	U	R	M	T	Z	N	N	L	P	I
L	G	F	E	S	N	C	L	O	D	T
L	I	U	O	I	U	E	M	L	N	O
A	N	I	P	G	M	A	R	N	A	R
Y	O	O	I	E	M	S	H	M	P	I
A	T	N	G	M	L	E	I	G	A	N
E	A	A	A	C	P	R	H	Q	P	T
F	N	O	N	N	O	A	P	I	B	C

LETTERA DEL PARENTE MISTERIO

Otto ha ricevuto una lettera anonima!
Si tratta di un *indovinello* per scoprire chi sia il parente misterioso, puoi aiutare Otto a risolverlo?

IL MIO NOME FA
RIMA CON ELLA,
MA ATTENZIONE,
NON SONO SOLO
SUA SORELLA,
IO SONO LA _____

E NON VOGLIO MIO FRATELLO IN CELLA,
NOI GEMELLI STIAMO BENE INSIEME,
SU POLTRONE COLOR MIELE,
A NOI PIACE LA COMODITÀ,
E STARE ORE INTERE SUL SOFÀ,
IL NOSTRO SOGNO NEL CASSETTO
È STARE TUTTO IL GIORNO SU UN COMODO LETTO.

INSERISCI LA PAROLA GIUSTA:

DIVANO - PRIGIONE - GEMELLA - DESIDERIO - NOME

- OTTO HA RICEVUTO UNA LETTERA SENZA _____
- IL PARENTE MISTERIOSO È LA _____ DEL LADRO
- LA GEMELLA DEL LADRO NON VUOLE CHE SUO FRATELLO FINISCA IN _____
- AI DUE GEMELLI PIACE TANTO PASSARE ORE SOPRA IL _____
- IL LORO _____ PIÙ GRANDE È PASSARE GIORNATE INTERE SUL LETTO.

IL LADRO È UN GRAN PIGRO A CUI PIACE PASSARE
TUTTO IL GIORNO IN CASA.
OTTO SUGGERISCE DI INDAGARE TRA LE AZIONI
QUOTIDIANE CHE SI FANNO IN CASA.... MAGARI
TRA QUESTE C'È UN INDIZIO!

COLLEGA LE AZIONI ALL'OGGETTO DELLA CASA CORRISPONDENTE.
POI SCRIVI L'OGGETTO NELLA CASELLA ACCANTO.
AIUTATI CON L'ESEMPIO:

- AGGIUSTARE
- METTERE A POSTO
- SPAZZARE
- FARE
- ACCENDERE
- ANNAFFIARE
- PASSARE
- SBATTERE
- LEGGERE

CASSETTO

OTTIMO LAVORO!
HAI VISTO CHE UN
OGGETTO DELLA
CASA È RIMASTO
VUOTO? QUELLO È
L'INDIZIO!
SCRIVILO QUA

QUALI AZIONI TI
VENGONO IN
MENTE CON
QUESTA PAROLA?

IL LABIRINTO DELLA CASA DEL LADRO

COME USCIRE DAL LABIRINTO?

SEGUI LE PAROLE SCRITTE CORRETTAMENTE E TROVERAI LA STRADA GIUSTA!

HAI FINITO IL LABIRINTO?
OTTIMO LAVORO!

ADESSO SCEGLI 5 PAROLE SBAGLIATE ALL'INTERNO DEL LABIRINTO E SCRIVI INSIEME AL TUO COMPAGNO LA FORMA CORRETTA

CRUCIVERBA A SQUADRE

INSERISCI NEL CRUCIVERBA LE AZIONI COLLEGATE ALLE ILLUSTRAZIONI DATE
CONSIGLIO DI OTTO: USA IL CORPO PER MIMARE LE AZIONI DA INSERIRE NEL CRUCIVERBA

PAROLE ORIZZONTALI

3)

4)

5)

7)

11)

12)

PAROLE VERTICALI

1)

2)

6)

8)

9)

10)

TRIS

SFIDA A COLPI DI TRIS

INSIEME AL TUO COMPAGNO RITAGLIA I QUADRATINI,
PUOI METTERE X O O SOLO SE SCRIVI CORRETTAMENTE LA PAROLA
DELL'IMMAGINE.
UNA VOLTA FINITO, PROVATE INSIEME A RICOSTRUZIONE LA FRASE
NASCOSTA E SCRIVETELA QUA.
SARÀ L'ARGOMENTO DELLA PROSSIMA LEZIONE !

LE	PO	TI
DEL	PAR	COR

✂ - - - - - - - - - - - - - ✂ - - - - - - - - - - - - -

PO	TI	DEL
PAR	COR	LE

IL LABIRINTO DEL CORPO UMANO

COME USCIRE DAL LABIRINTO?
SEGUI LE PAROLE CHE FANNO PARTE DEL CORPO UMANO E NON TI PERDERAI!

CACCIA ALL'UOMO MISTERIOSO

LEGGI L'ARTICOLO PER SCOPRIRE IL VOLTO DEL LADRO DEL LEONE DI VENEZIA

Sabato 12 settembre 2024

GIORNALE DI VENEZIA

Le indagini vanno avanti per il furto del Leone di Venezia!
Un testimone, di bassa statura e di carnagione pallida, afferma di aver visto il ladro e di metterci la mano sul fuoco, come ha detto in TV:
'Sono sicurissimo che fosse il ladro! L'ho visto! È alto e snello, la sua pelle è rosea e i suoi capelli sono biondi. Ha gli occhi azzurri e grandi sopracciglia chiare, niente barba, labbra sottili, naso e mento appuntiti.'
È caccia all'uomo misterioso, chi sa parli!

COMPLETA LA TABELLA

INSERISCI LE CARATTERISTICHE DEL LADRO COME DESCRITTE DAL TESTIMONE

CORPORATURA	CARNAGIONE	OCCHI E SOPRACCIGLIA	NASO	CAPELLI E BARBA	LABBRA	MENTO

CRUCIPUZZLE

CERCA E CERCHIA IL **PLURALE** DELLE SEGUENTI PAROLE NEL CRUCIPUZZLE COME NELL'ESEMPIO

LE PAROLE POSSONO ESSERE IN VERTICALE, ORIZZONTALE E IN DIAGONALE

orecchio
labbro
occhio
gamba
ginocchio

piede
caviglia
braccio
mano

I	O	R	E	C	C	H	I	E	N
C	C	A	E	T	B	O	N	A	I
D	E	A	A	G	R	L	I	I	P
W	T	G	V	C	A	H	Z	P	L
O	N	L	O	I	C	M	I	P	A
C	A	E	A	C	G	E	B	R	B
C	L	T	O	M	D	L	M	E	B
H	G	N	I	I	E	A	I	A	R
I	I	D	O	D	N	U	G	E	A
G	E	H	T	I	R	O	F	S	N
I	E	A	I	C	C	A	R	B	R

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Scegli la parte del corpo giusta per completare il disegno nascosto.
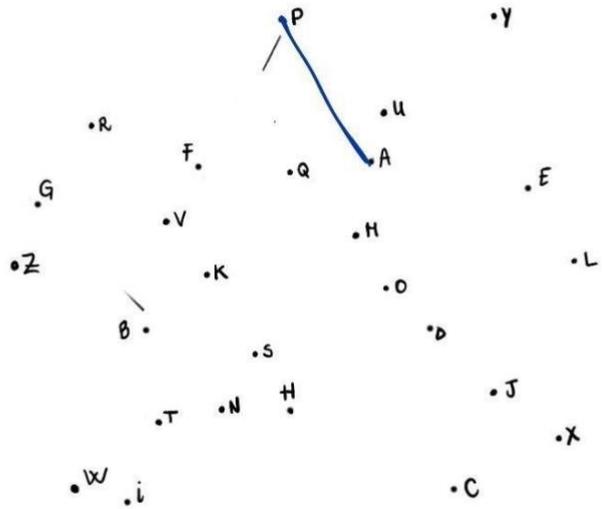Segui l'esempio !

Attenzione: scoprirai se il testimone ha detto la verità oppure ha mentito in base al disegno che uscirà:

♥ =ha detto la verità
★ =ha mentito

1) Sara ha gli............ azzurri come il ladro!
OCCHI (P – A); OCHI (P– Y)

2) Le ....di Sofia sono molto lunghe e sottili.
DITO (A – L); DITA (A – E)

3) Anna ha delle .... muscolose, infatti è la più forte della classe.
BRACCI (E – X); BRACCIA (E – D)

4) Ci metto .... sul fuoco che Paolo ha detto la verità.
IL PIEDE (D – H); LA MANO (D – C)

5) Ad Alessio fanno male le .... perché ha corso due ore.
GAMBE (C– H); BRACCIA (C–Q)

6) Silvia è molto intelligente, si vede propria che è una ragazza ....
IN GAMBA (H – I); IN MANO (H –Z)

7) Metti questa crema sulle ...., le proteggerà dal freddo!
LABBRA (I – B); LABRA (I – S)

8) Gianni è caduto e si è rotto entrambe le ....
GINOCCHIA (B – G); GINOCCHI (V – Z)

9) Maria è stanchissima, stanotte non ha chiuso ....
OCCHIO (G – F); OCCHI (F – V)

10) Giada ha i .... sempre ben raccolti in una coda.
CAPPELLI (F – Q); CAPELLI (F – P)

OCCHI (P – A)

IL TESTIMONE HA:

CRUCIVERBA ILLUSTRATO

INSERISCI NEL CRUCIVERBA IL <u>PLURALE</u> DELLE SEGUENTI ILLUSTRAZIONI!

ATTENZIONE: RICORDATI DI SCRIVERE ANCHE I RISPETTIVI <u>ARTICOLI DETERMINATIVI!</u>

2)   7)

3)   10)

4)   11)

PAROLE VERTICALI

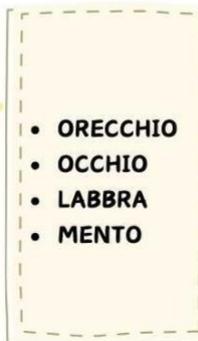1)   6)

2)   8)

5)   9)

CACCIA ALL'INTRUSO

ALL'INTERNO DI OGNI LISTA DI PAROLE C'È UN INTURSO: <u>TROVALO</u> E GIUSTIFICA LA TUA SCELTA.
CONSIGLIO DI OTTO: ATTENZIONE ALLE LETTERE DOPPIE, MA ANCHE AL SINGOLARE – PLURALE!

- CAVIGLIA
- MANO
- BOCCA
- TESTA

La parola intrusa è BOCCA perchè <u>l'unica</u> con la doppia !

- ORECCHIO
- OCCHIO
- LABBRA
- MENTO

- BRACCIO
- BOCCA
- OCCHIO
- NASO

- DITA
- GINOCCHIO
- GAMBA
- GOMITO

SCELTA ORTOGRAFICA

PER OGNI COPPIA **SCEGLI** LA PAROLA SCRITTA CORRETTAMENTE, POI **CONTA** LA LETTERA INDICATA DAL NUMERO E SCRIVILA NELLA TABELLA ACCANTO. ALLA FINE SCOPRIRAI UN IMPORTANTE **INDIZIO SUL LADRO!** SEGUI L'ESEMPIO PER AIUTARTI!

OCCHIO – OCHIO   4   H

LABRA – LABBRA   6

CAVILIA– CAVIGLIA   6

BOCCA – BOCA   5

SOPRACCIGLIA – SOPRACIGLIA   7

ORECHIO– ORECCHIO   8

DITA – DITI   1

BRACCIA – BRACIA   7

OTTIMO, GRAZIE AL TUO AIUTO OTTO È SEMPRE PIÙ VICINO AL COLPEVOLE!

SECONDO TE, COSA SIGNIFICA QUESTO INDIZIO? PENSACI CON IL TUO COMPAGNO E SCRIVETE QUA LA VOSTRA OPINIONE

GLI ANIMALI

CERCA E CERCHIA LE PAROLE ELENCATE ALL'INTERNO DEL CRUCIPUZZLE.
RICORDA: POSSONO TROVARSI IN
ORIZZONTALE, VERTICALE E ANCHE IN DIAGONALE

```
Z N A A I A H C R P N F
S C E C L T D P C L I S
O O R V A L A O M L E T
L C S I I M A S U O G X
L C E S C L U F H L T A
A O P N O C O L R L G G
G D I L A R I T C A O I
A R S N B V E O T V F R
P I E T G D P C S A C A
P L E L R A F C S C G F
A L T A L P A P O E H F
P O L E O N E A E L P A
A L L E N I C C O C T F
```

LEONE

TALPA

PESCE ROSSO

CANE

FARFALLA

COCCINELLA

LUMACA

PAPPAGALLO

RICCIO

GIRAFFA

COCCODRILLO

GATTO

UNISCI I PUNTI

Caro poliziotto Otto, io conosco l'identità del ladro della statua del Leone di Venezia, e sì, ha proprio la coda e pure i baffi! Sono disposto a rivelare il suo nome solo se in cambio avrò 10kg di formaggio gratuiti, altrimenti sarò muto come un pesce.

Anonimo

1) Otto ha ricevuto una lettera anonima
VERO (D – I); FALSA (D – Q)

VERO (D – I)

2) Chi ha scritto la lettera non conosce il ladro
VERO (I – T); FALSO (I – E)

3) Il ladro, oltre alla coda, ha anche i baffi.
VERO (E – O); (E–U)

4) Chi ha scritto la lettera anonima è disposto a dire il nome senza avere niente in cambio.
VERO (U – H); FALSO (O – W)

5) Chi scrive è un topolino della città di Venezia.
VERO (W– K); FALSO (W – H)

6) Se non riceverà 10 Kg di formaggio, il topolino resterà zitto.
VERO (K – M); FALSO (M – R)

QUALE ALTRO INDIZIO HAI SCOPERTO?
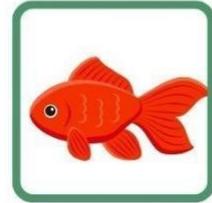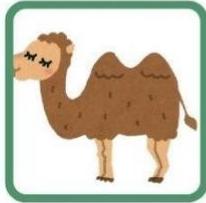SCRIVILO QUA:

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QUALE ANIMALE SARÀ IL LADRO?

ASSOCIA LA PAROLA ALL'ANIMALE CORRISPONDERE

Pappagallo – pesce rosso – volpe – cavallo – leone – cammello
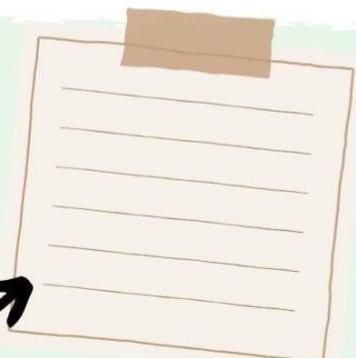gatto – coccinella – giraffa – talpa – lumaca – riccio

Leone

CERCHIA GLI ANIMALI CON CODA E BAFFI.
UNO DI LORO È IL LADRO!

SECONDO TE, QUALE TRA QUESTI ANIMALI:

- È IL PIÙ CORAGGIOSO?
- È IL PIÙ LENTO?
- È IL PIÙ CIECO?
- È IL PIÙ FURBO?
- È IL PIÙ MATTO?

CONDIVIDI CON I TUOI COMPAGNI LE TUE SCELTE E PROVA A SPIEGARE IL MOTIVO.

LABIRINTO

COME USCIRE DAL LABIRINTO?

SCEGLI LA RISPOSTA GIUSTA E SEGUI IL COLORE OTTENUTO, IN QUESTO MODO NON TI PERDERAI DENTRO IL LABIRINTO!

1) Essere lento come una
LUMACA 🟢 - FARFALLA 🟠

2) Essere muto come un ....
PAPPAGALLO 🔴 - PESCE 🟡

3) ESSERE matto come un....
CAVALLO 🔵 - VOLPE 🩷

4) Essere furbo come una...
LUMACA 🩷 - VOLPE 🟢

5) Essere cieco come una ....
TALPA 🟤 - GIRAFFA 🟣

6) Essere coraggiosi come un ....
LEONE 🔵 COCCINELLA 🔴

Scegli due modi di dire con gli animali e scrivi un esempio per ognuno:
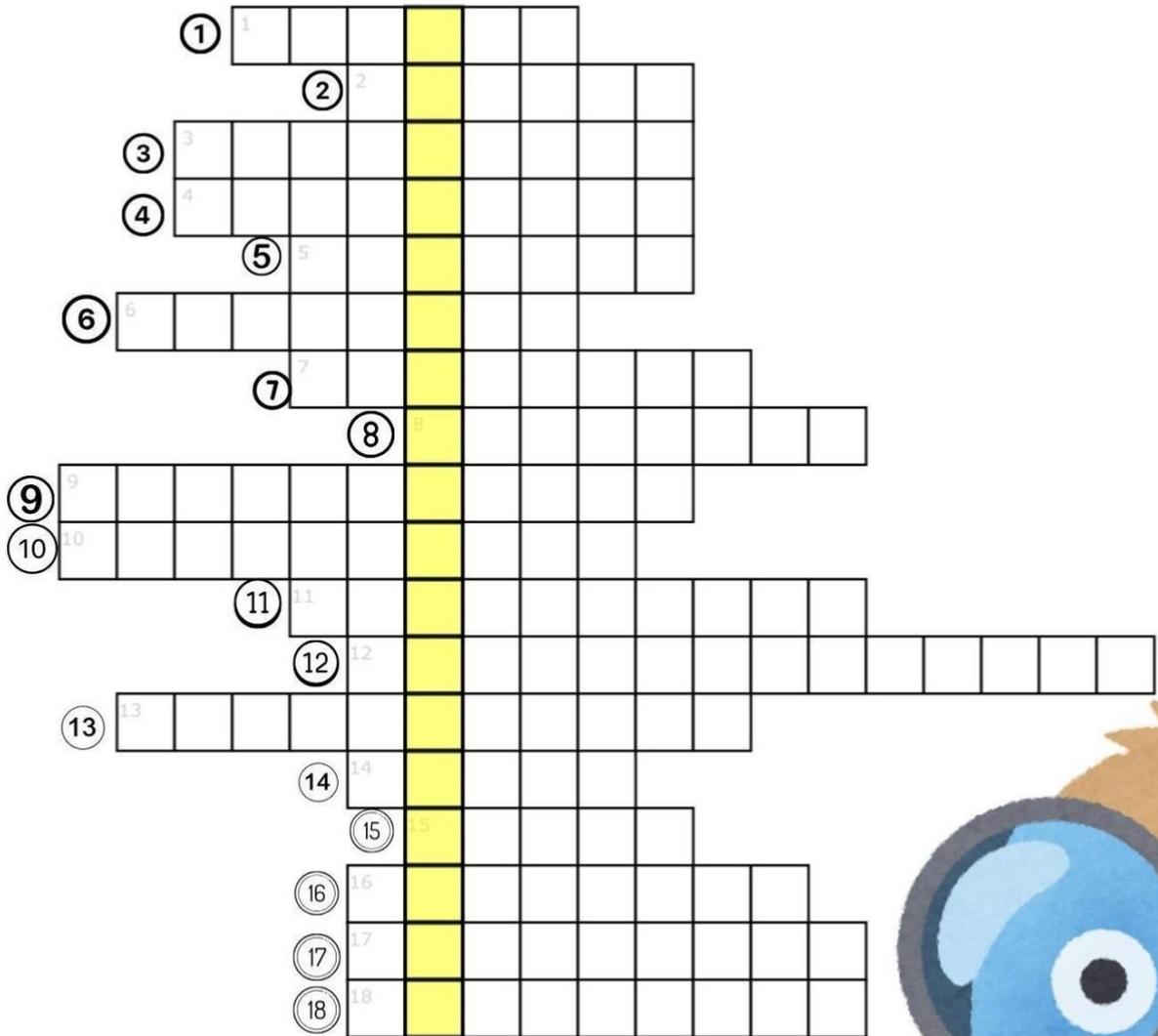
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CRUCIVERBA

INSERISCI NEL CRUCIVERBA LE PAROLE GIUSTE, ALLA FINE OTTERRAI L'ULTIMO INDIZIO PER TROVARE IL LADRO.

CONSIGLIO DI OTTO: GIOCARE A SQUADRE E UTILIZZARE ANCHE IL CORPO PER MIMARE LE PAROLE DA INDOVINARE

SCRIVI QUA L'ULTIMO INDIZIO!

OTTIMO! CI SIAMO QUASI:
VAI ALL'ATTIVITA' 'QUALE ANIMALE SARA' IL LADRO?' E
CERCHIA GLI ANIMALI CHE CONTENGONO L'ULTIMO INDIZIO,
TROVERAI IL LADRO MISTERIOSO!

1) lo dice chi non ha dormito bene: 'stanotte non ho chiuso ...

3) Sinonimo di grande disordine, si usa per esprimere qualcosa sotto sopra, nel caos.

5) Le incroci quando sei arrabbiato.
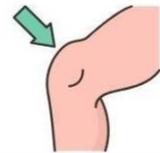
7) Volgi al plurale:

9) Studente ma al femminile.

11) Termina l'espressione idiomatica: ....come un leone!

13) Che animale è?

15) Quando una persona non parla, si può dire che è muta come un ......
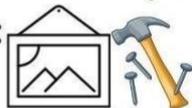
17) Volgi al plurale

✂ -------------

✂ -------------

2) Volgi al plurale

4) Azione che si può associare al quadro:

6) Animale con due grandi gobbe sulla schiena.

8) Cos'è?

10)

12) Essere molto sicuri di qualcosa: 'mettere ...'

14) I genitori dei tuoi genitori sono i tuoi ...

16) Azione che associ all'immagine.

18) Otto non viaggia mai senza la sua ....

1 Napoleone, un giovane gatto rosso con un grande futuro da pittore, ha deciso di compiere un gesto audace: rubare la statua del Leone di Venezia! A scuola di pittura, i professori hanno assegnato il compito di dipingere questo simbolo tanto amato dai cittadini di Venezia, e chi realizzerà il quadro più bello vincerà il premio del Pennello d'Oro.
Così, Napoleone ha pensato di rubare in segreto la statua del Leone, in modo che i suoi compagni di classe non possano dipingerla. Ma come ha fatto?

Mentre dipinge, Napoleone si accorge che un topolino lo osserva dalla sua finestra. Incuriosito, mette giù il pennello e si avvicina alla finestra. Il topolino, con il coraggio di un leone, gli dice: 'non è giusto quello che hai fatto! La statua appartiene ai cittadini di Venezia! Andrò subito dalla polizia!'.

Ma il topolino, invece di andare dalla polizia, decide di mandare una lettera anonima ad Otto sperando di ricevere del formaggio. Grazie a questa lettera, il bassotto poliziotto scopre che il ladro ha pure i baffi e questo indizio lo porta a cercare il colpevole tra gli animali…

Alla fine Otto, il bassotto poliziotto, grazie al vostro aiuto è riuscito a scoprire il ladro e metterlo dritto dentro una cella! La statua sarà rimessa al suo posto e i cittadini di Venezia potranno festeggiare insieme a voi!

Per rubare la statua in Piazza San Marco, Napoleone si arrampica fino in cima alla colonna e stacca la statua grattando con le sue unghie da gatto. Ad un certo punto la statua sta per cadere, ma il ladro riesce a salvarla prendendola per la coda!

Una volta rubata la statua del Leone, Napoleone l'ha porta subito nella sua casa e l'ha posizionata nella sua cameretta piena di quadri e pennelli. Con un grade sorriso, e la statua alla sua destra, Napoleone inizia a dipingerla…

FOTOGRAFIA DELL'ARRESTO DEL LADRO PUBBLICATA NEL GIORNALE DI VENEZIA

DATA: _____

ATTESTATO DI PARTECIPAZIONE

OTTO , IL BASSATTO POLIZIOTTO, ATTESTA CHE L'ALUNNO _____
HA PARTECIPATO CON SUCCESSO AL LABORATORIO DI ITALIANO L2 PER RISOLVERE IL CASO DEL FURTO DEL LEONE DI VENEZIA.

FIRMA DI OTTO

FIRMA ALUNNO PARTECIPE

_____

_____

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