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**A Study on the correlation between Age and the use of
Language Learning Strategies by Adult Foreign
Language Learners**

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Abstract

The field of language learning strategies (LLS) has a long history of studies and research; however, very few scholars have studied the effect of age on the choice and use of language learning strategies. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate language learning strategies used by adult language learners and explore the influence of ageing on LLS choice. Specifically, the objective is to understand whether LLS use is influenced by the more or less young age and, if is so, to identify the most and least used strategies for every age range (from the age of 18 to over-75).

The thesis first provides a theoretical background about Lifelong Learning, adult foreign language education and Language Learning Strategies. In the second part, the research will be presented. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), an individual background questionnaire and several short-answer questions on cognitive and affective issues were administered to 163 adult learners of Italian as a Foreign Language to collect data for the research.

Introduction

In the last decades, adult foreign language learning has been a central topic in the language education field and has raised great interest from scholars, teachers, and learners.

Nonetheless, the role played by age in language learning and the relationship between age and other variables affecting FL learning are still highly debated issues. Among these, scholars and researchers include also language learning strategies (LLS).

The field of language learning strategies has a long history of studies and research and has been approached and investigated from many different angles. As a result, scholars all agree that there is a considerable and still growing number of biological, individual, and situational variables influencing LLS choice, including age. Since adulthood is the longest stage in human life, and undergoes various changes, this thesis assumes that also LLS use differs from one stage of adulthood to another.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine language learning strategies used by adult language learners and explore the influence of age on LLS choice. Specifically, the objective is to understand whether LLS use is influenced by the more or less young age and, if is so, to identify the most and least used LLS categories for every age group. To hold a wider and more comprehensive view on the possible developments that occur within adulthood, the study also takes into account some affective variables – i.e. motivation and anxiety - which have been hypothesised to be partially responsible for the difference between children and adults in foreign language learning.

The subject of the thesis first captured my attention during the experience as Italian language tutor when doing my internship at the Italian Cultural Institute (IIC) in Sydney, Australia. The training experience was the starting point of my research as I had the chance to help small groups of adult students in learning Italian as a foreign language. I found myself dealing with different adult learners featuring various identities, motivations, personalities, attitudes, beliefs, levels of proficiency and autonomy, career orientations, interests, learning styles and strategies, and, most importantly, ages. Driven also by a personal interest in language learning strategies, I decided to involve the students of the Institute in my MA

thesis through an online questionnaire, aimed at exploring their relationships with language learning strategies employed when learning Italian as a foreign language.

This thesis is divided into five chapters.

Chapter One gives a general and historical overview of the concepts of learning society and lifelong learning. It then presents and explores several models, frameworks and theories on adult education, developed in the last decades.

Chapter Two explores adult foreign language learning. It starts illustrating adult learners' peculiar features and analysing the age-related variables that come into play when adults decide to learn a foreign language. It then goes on focusing on the most effective teaching methodologies that can be used in adult foreign language teaching.

Chapter Three first considers the large number of LLS definitions that have been provided in the last 50 years of research and describes the main characteristics of language learning strategies. The second part presents the major LLS classifications, whereas, the last section investigates the relationships between the adult learner's individual variables and the use of language learning strategies.

Chapter Four focuses on the research methodology of this thesis, based on an online questionnaire investigating the use of Language Learning Strategies in adulthood. The chapter first starts listing the aims and research questions of the study and continues describing the questionnaire sample. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to the questionnaire and its design, whereas the final section focuses on data collection and analysis methodologies.

Chapter Five aims at presenting the questionnaire results and discussing the main trends. First, an overview on background information is given. The second part focuses on the SILL questionnaire, presenting data on LLS use. The third and final part discusses qualitative data about adult learners' perceptions on learning Italian as a foreign language in adulthood, the most difficult and easiest language skills to develop as adults, foreign language learning motivation and language learning anxiety.

Finally, the main findings for each age group will be summarised, and suggestions for further research will be provided.

Chapter One

Adult education in the Learning Society

The idea of an education process continuing throughout the whole life of an individual originated in Greek and Roman societies, where it was perceived as a human need, beneficial to both the single person and society (Begotti 2019). However, in the early 1970s, the background for dealing with, and understanding, lifelong learning changed dramatically as a result of the transformation in Western societies of the labour market, which required higher levels of education of the labour force. Therefore, a new agenda of learning as a necessity for all gradually became the frame of reference for both learning and teaching theory and practice (Alberici 2002).

The reasons behind the emphasis placed on lifelong learning can be understood through an examination of the social context in which it has developed - i.e. the learning society.

The following chapter gives a general and historical overview of the concepts of learning society and lifelong learning. It then presents and explores several models, frameworks and theories on adult education, each of which contributes to our understanding of adults.

1.1 The Learning Society

Learning is always intimately related to the world in which the learner lives, and it is affected by it. To a large extent, the nature of the society always determines what one wants or needs to learn, which learning opportunities are available, and the ways of learning (Merriam & Caffarella 2007).

The so-called Learning Society, in which «learning is the whole of life and the whole of life is learning» (Jackson 2012, 23), is the result of a series of rapid, complex and closely entwined changes that have occurred in our society in the last thirty years.

In the Learning Society

ciascuno è in grado, motivato ed incoraggiato, ad imparare lungo tutto il percorso esistenziale con gli obiettivi di incentivare lo sviluppo personale, consolidare i valori democratici e la coesione sociale, promuovere l'innovazione, la produttività e la crescita economica (Serragiotto 2004, 106)

Knowles (1970) states that, up to the early 20th century, the time-span of changes such as technological innovation, development of political and economic systems, and population mobility, extended over generations, allowing people to learn what they needed to know for the rest of their life during traditional formal schooling. However, after World War II, the pace of sociocultural changes accelerated dramatically. The switch from industrial to post-industrial societies was characterised by the increasing development of the tertiary sector, the rise of globalisation, demographic changes with more adults and a population continuing to age, the spread of information technology, and the diversified and increasing demand of new knowledge and skills (Merriam & Caffarella 2007).

Consequently, knowledge and skills acquired at any point of life were becoming obsolete and out-of-date within few years, revealing the urge to develop and improve skills and competences constantly, even during adulthood (Knowles 1970; Alberici 2002; Merriam & Caffarella 2007).

Therefore, the concept of learning expanded itself, going beyond the dimension of specific education and training pathways associated with childhood and adolescence: learning can be realized throughout life and in a plurality of situations, with adults becoming the new protagonists of it. Hence, the affirmation of new concepts and key words such as *Lifelong Learning* and *Lifewide Learning* (Alberici 2002).

1.2 Lifelong learning

1.2.1 Definition

Lifelong learning literally means that learning happens at all stages of human life; it is the continuous building of skills, knowledge and competences during one's life, ensuring a

second chance to update basic skills and offering learning opportunities at more advanced levels (Begotti 2019).

The concept of lifelong learning was promoted for the first time as *lifelong education* between the 1960s and 1970s by UNESCO, with the publication of the report *Learning to Be - The world of education today and tomorrow* (1972), edited by French Edgar Faure. According to the report, lifelong education is necessary for everyone; it is a *whole*, which includes education in childhood and youth, as well as adult education. It is also seen as a personal and social enrichment and a basis for and part of democratic societies.

In 1996, following the publication from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) titled *Learning for All*, the term *education* was replaced with *learning*. The OECD report highlights the importance of lifelong learning according to an economic perspective, claiming that learning throughout whole life is essential to the continuous renewal of knowledge and skills required by the contemporary society. In addition, it also acknowledges the importance of lifelong learning for personal and social development of individuals (Merriam & Caffarella 2007).

The 1996 OECD approach to lifelong learning influenced the following reports from the European Union and the World Bank. During the International Conference held in Hamburg in 1997, the EU Member States defined the goals of lifelong learning and recognised two fundamental rights:

- The *right to adult literacy*;
- The *right to lifelong learning and education*.

Four years later, on the occasion of the Lisbon European Council, the European Commission (EC) and the Member States defined Lifelong Learning as «all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence» (EC 2000, 9). In addition, the European Commission report focuses on the importance of nonformal and informal learning contexts, and the dual nature of lifelong learning as both individual right of being an active citizen, and collective responsibility (Merriam & Caffarella 2007; Serragiotto 2004).

Finally, the economic aim of lifelong learning is also pursued in the 2003 World Bank Report which states that lifelong learning is fundamental to the creation of a workforce able to compete in the global economy.

According to Serragiotto

Il *lifelong learning* ha assunto nelle politiche dell'Unione Europea il ruolo di una nuova strategia volta ad assicurare risposte adeguate alle domande di sviluppo dell'occupabilità, dell'imprenditorialità, della competitività in una economia della conoscenza ed in una società dell'informazione, all'interno di un più ampio contesto di realizzazione dei diritti di cittadinanza (2004, 106)

1.2.2 Lifewide learning: a complementary concept

Most people are familiar with the idea of Lifelong Learning to represent the individual's learning throughout the whole of his lifespan. However, its complementary term – *lifewide learning* - is still not well known (Jackson 2012). The concept of lifewide learning has been developed and applied by educators such as Lindeman, Knowles, Freire and Reischmann. In particular, the latter explicitly used the actual term *lifewide learning* for the first time in 1986 to indicate a type of learning that includes a variety of different situations and environments, in which everything becomes an opportunity for learning (Begotti 2019; Jackson 2012).

Therefore, lifelong learning and lifewide learning can be considered as complementary processes:

L'estensione diacronica e continua (*lifelong*) e l'estensione sincronica e ad ampio spettro (*lifewide*) sono la testimonianza del rapporto di ogni individuo adulto con il tempo e con lo spazio, della possibilità di arrivare a un maggiore equilibrio tra apprendimento e professione (Begotti 2019, 18)

1.2.3 Learning environments

Learning opportunities for adults can be found in a wide range of settings, from formal institutions to one's workplace or home (Merriam & Caffarella 2007). In the 1980s, Coombs (1985) has classified lifelong learning settings according to three main broad categories:

- 1- *Formal learning*, which is highly institutionalised, curriculum driven and formally recognised with diplomas, grades or certificates;
- 2- *Non formal learning*, which includes all the organized learning opportunities outside the formal education system. It is usually community-based (e.g. programs offered by museums, libraries, clubs, ect.);

- 3- *Informal learning*, namely «the spontaneous, unstructured learning that goes on daily in the home and neighbourhood, behind the school, on the playing field, in the workplace, marketplace library and museum and through the various mass media» (Coombs 1985, 92). It is the most prevalent form of adult learning and takes place without the externally imposed curriculum or educative programs.

1.3 Adult education theory

1.3.1 Defining adulthood

The adult age is the longest in human life, intertwined with the developmental age of childhood and adolescence and with what is usually called Third Age (Begotti 2019). The transition to this stage of life has become a thriving area of research in the education field, and since the first studies, many educators and scholars have attempted to provide a comprehensive definition of adult and adulthood.

However, Alberici (2002) affirms that providing an official and comprehensive definition is difficult, if not impossible, because the term “adult” refers to a plurality of meanings and therefore implies multiple definitions.

Teachers and scholars agree in saying that the growth that goes on during the entire life is a complex and multidimensional process as it affects all aspects of personality – i.e. cognitive, affective and expressive. It is also multidirectional as it concerns several paths of development – i.e. personal, relational and professional (Begotti 2019; Alberici 2002).

1.3.2 Theories and models on adult learning

There is no doubt that the relationship between adults and education is very complex, and that the new lifelong learning perspective within the learning society implies a new way of looking at adult learning processes, and even a greater focus on adult learners (Alberici 2002).

In *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (1973), Malcom Knowles affirms that initial considerations on adult learning and learners began to appear after World War II, when

teachers of adults started experiencing several problems with the pedagogical model, which, until then, was the only model about teaching.

During the 1960s, Knowles began studying adult learning, collecting data from scientific researches and related disciplines such as clinical psychology, developmental psychology, gerontology, sociology and anthropology. As a result of his studies, Knowles elaborated the theory of Andragogy, which is the best-known set of principles or assumptions to guide adult learning practice (Merriam & Caffarella 2007).

After Knowles, many other scholars and researchers have proposed their theories and models on adult learning and education. However, no prevailing or dominant theory has emerged and still today we have several frameworks, or models, each of which contributes to our understanding of adults as learners (Merriam & Caffarella 2007).

1.3.3 Malcom Knowles' Andragogy

Andragogy is the best known theory of adult learning, developed by Malcom Knowles in the late 1960s. Originally, in *The Modern Practice of adult education* (1970), Knowles delineated andragogy as «the art and science of helping adults learn» (Knowles 1970, 40), in opposition to pedagogy, intended as «the art and science of teaching children» (ibid.). However, during the 1980s he revised his position following criticism.

Knowles's Andragogy is based on six assumptions (Knowles 1973; Merriam & Caffarella 2007, 84), which claim that the adult learner:

- 1- Has a personal *Self-concept*. As a person matures, he becomes a self-directed and autonomous human being. The self-concept «moves from one of total dependency (as in the reality of the infant) to one of increasing self-directedness» (Knowles 1973, 45).
- 2- Has a *past experience* (or *foundation*). Past experiences become «a resource for learning» (Knowles 1973, 45) which the adult learner compares to new knowledge.
- 3- Is *ready to learn*. In contrast with children, who learn what they *have to* learn, the adult learns what he *wants* or *needs* and is always ready for it (Knowles 1973, 47).
- 4- Is *oriented to learn*. The adult is more problem-centered than subject-centered and tends to learn what he feels he needs in the immediate future (Knowles 1973, 47-48).

As explained by Merriam & Caffarella (2007, 84), Knowles added the fifth and sixth assumptions in later publications during the 1980s. Thus, in addition, the adult learner:

- 5- Is *motivated*. Normally, the adult learner is more intrinsically motivated than extrinsically and chooses his educational path from the very beginning to the end in order to achieve his personal goals (Knowles & Associates 1984, cited in Merriam & Caffarella 2007).
- 6- *Needs to Know*. The adult needs to know the reasons *why* he needs to learn something and *how* what he is learning can be useful in his daily life (Knowles 1984, cited in Merriam & Caffarella 2007).

Over the years, the theory of andragogy has been adopted by scholars and researchers in the education field as a theoretical framework to distinguish adult education from other types of education, such as children education (Merriam & Caffarella 2007). Nonetheless, at the same time, numerous and considerable critical debates and controversies have developed around Knowles' theory (*ibid.*).

Merriam and Caffarella (2007, 85) affirm that most scholars and researchers' main criticism was whether andragogy could be recognized as a general theoretical approach to adult learning or simply a set of «principles of good practice» (Merriam & Caffarella 2007, 86): many researchers cited by the two authors (2007) - e.g. Elias 1979; Davenport and Davenport 1985; Hartree 1984 - observed that it was unclear if Knowles had presented a theory of learning, or a theory of teaching, or both. Controversies towards andragogy were silenced by Knowles himself, who claimed that he prefers to think about andragogy as «a model of assumptions about learning or a conceptual framework that serves as a basis for an emergent theory» (Merriam & Caffarella 2007, 87).

As stated at the beginning of the paragraph, Knowles's original idea that andragogy characterised exclusively adult education whereas pedagogy characterised only childhood education was also frequently criticised. At the beginning of the 1980s, Knowles reviewed his position, interpreting the pedagogy-andragogy dichotomy as «a continuum ranging from teacher-directed to student-directed learning» (Merriam & Caffarella 2007, 87) and that depends on the specific situation. The theory of andragogy is therefore applicable to both adult and children education, depending on the context (Merriam & Caffarella 2007).

1.3.4 Illeris' tridimensional model of learning

In 2002, Danish scientist and professor Knud Illeris published *The Three Dimensions of Learning* in which he illustrated his general theory of learning. According to Illeris, learning can be defined as «any process that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing» (Illeris 2009, 7).

In his theoretical approach

All learning implies the integration of two very different processes, namely an external interaction process between the learner and his or her social, cultural or material environment, and an internal psychological process of elaboration and acquisition (Illeris 2009, 8)

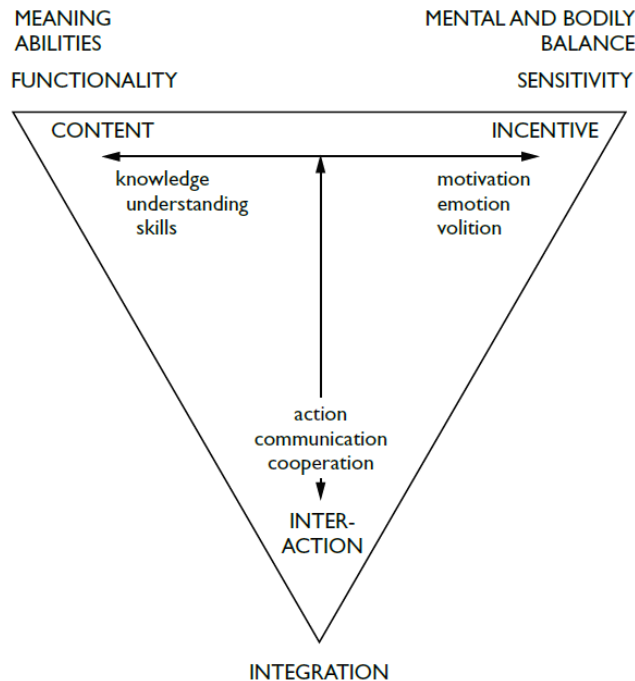


Figure 1. Learning processes and dimensions.

Illeris elaborated a model of learning (Figure 1¹) in which the environment, at the bottom, and the learner, at the top, are the two interrelated components of the *external interaction process*, which is represented by a vertical double arrow (Illeris 2009). On the other side, two equal psychological functions involved in any learning, i.e. «the function of managing the learning content and the incentive function of providing and directing the necessary

¹ Illeris, 2009, p.10

mental energy that runs the process» (Illeris 2009, 9), are joined together by another double arrow, which is placed horizontally between the two functions, and represents the *psychological acquisition process* (ibid.).

The two double arrows can form a triangle in which each angle represents each of the three dimensions of learning (Illeris 2009):

1. The *content dimension* (or *cognitive dimension*) involves the learning content and contributes to «building up the understanding and the capacity of the learner» (Illeris 2009, 10). Knowledge, skills, beliefs, strategies, and behaviours are included into this dimension and contributes to the development of the adult learner's personal *functionality* (Illeris 2009).
2. The *incentive dimension* (or *emotional dimension*) «provides and directs the mental energy that is necessary for the learning process to take place» (Illeris 2009, 10). Elements such as feelings, emotions, determination, and motivation ensure «the continuous mental balance of the learner» (ibid.), who therefore fosters his personal *sensitivity* (ibid.).
3. The *interaction dimension* (or *environment dimension*) is the dimension of external interaction and ensures that «the raw material» (Merriam & Caffarella 2007, 97) - or impulses such as perception, transmission, experience, imitation, activity, and participation - triggers the learning process. The interaction dimension «serves the personal *integration* in communities and society and thereby also builds up the *sociality* of the learner» (Illeris 2009, 11).

The triangle represents what might be described as the tension of learning, stretched out «between the development of functionality, sensitivity and sociality - which are also the general components of what we term as competencies» (Illeris 2009, 11).

Simplicity and comprehensiveness are the two main strengths of Knud Illeris' model of learning since «we can all relate to how a learning activity reflects cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions» (Merriam & Caffarella 2007, 99). Although Illeris did not developed his theoretical approach and model of learning considering it as exclusive to adult learning, Merriam and Caffarella (2007, 100) affirm that Illeris' approach relates more to adult learning rather than children development since the latter are less aware of the social context; in addition, their cognitive and emotional dimensions are still not completely mature.

1.3.5 Jarvis' learning process

Since the late 1980s, British sociologist Peter Jarvis has been a central figure in the field of adult education and lifelong learning. The crucial point of Jarvis' understanding of learning has always been the connection between societal and experiential conditions and the learner's personal development, especially during adulthood.

Indeed, according to Jarvis, learning is

the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person (Jarvis 2012, 4)

Jarvis (2012) states that learning always occurs within a social context and begins with a new experience. According to the sociologist, there is a basic condition that is essential for learning to happen: disjuncture (Merriam & Caffarella 2007; Jarvis 2012).

A disjuncture is a unique experience that occurs when our prior knowledge is insufficient to address a problem and creates a disequilibrium that a person is not prepared to handle. A disjuncture is the state of unease that leads to plan something new (Merriam & Caffarella 2007; Jarvis 2012). Disjuncture occurs in social interaction and can cause dissonance in any aspect of life, from knowledge to skills, from sense to emotions and beliefs (Jarvis 2012).

According to Jarvis, the five human sensations are always at the basis of all learnings (Merriam & Caffarella 2007; Jarvis 2012). Indeed, our biology is intimately related to learning because a whole person is made up of both mind and body and has a personal biography which interacts with the learning experience (Merriam & Caffarella 2007; Jarvis 2012). All experiences occur within the individual learner's world and which is influenced by «the changes that occur both in the wider world, in which it exists, and to the individual's involvement in it» (Merriam & Caffarella 2007, 101).

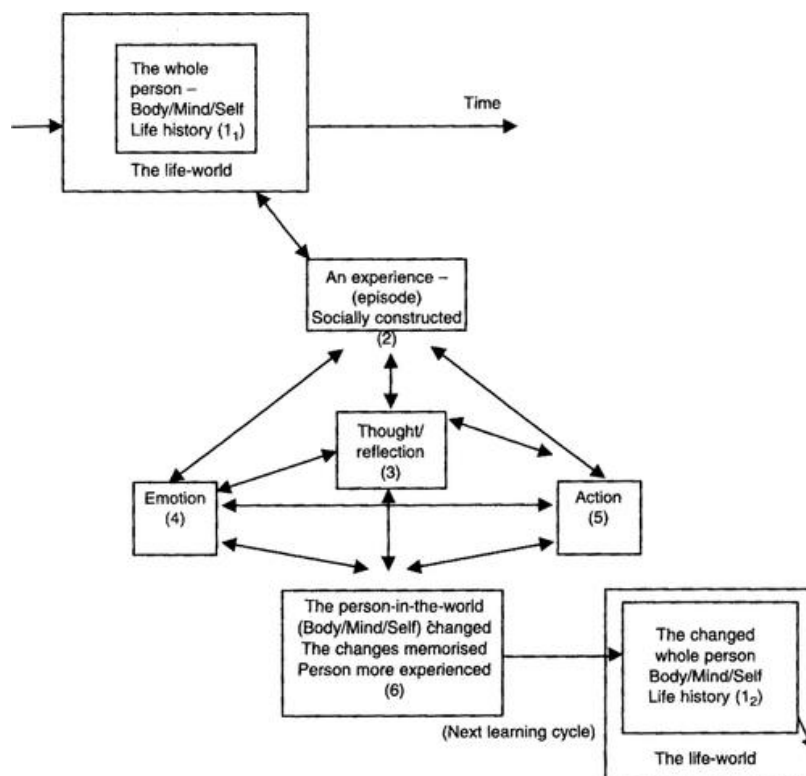


Figure 2. The transformation of the learner through experience

As can be seen in Figure 2², Jarvis model of learning begins with the person in the lifeworld who face a disjuncture, which cannot be immediately accommodated or assimilated. According to Jarvis' model, three ways of learning are possible: thinking (*thought and reflection*), doing (*action*) and feeling (*emotion*) (Merriam & Caffarella 2007). Each of these ways of learning can be combined with the others in several ways, resulting in different types of learning (e.g. critical thinking, action learning, problem solving, ect.).

The cycle then repeats itself continuously, creating a dynamic model that highlights the continuous and lifelong nature of learning.

² Jarvis, 2012, p.8

1.3.6 Self-directed learning

A rich array of work on self-directed learning has been produced in the last 50 years, providing descriptive studies and models and exploring also the personal characteristics and attributes of those who are self-directed in their learning (Merriam & Caffarella 2007).

The study of self-directed learning has grown as one of the major core of adult education research starting from Canadian adult educator Allen Tough, who at the end of the 1960s' provided the first comprehensive description of self-directed learning as a form of study that he termed *self-planned learning*. Tough's theory drawn on the pioneering work of Houle and affirms that most adult learning occurred in autonomy, without the help of educators (Merriam & Caffarella 2007).

According to Brookfield (1994), Malcolm Knowles has provided the most exhaustive definition of self-directed learning, defining it as a process

in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles 1975, 18)

Merriam and Caffarella (2007, 107-110) identify the three primary goals of self-directed learning:

- 1- «To enhance the ability of adults to be self-directed in their learning» (2007, 107). This goal, drawing mainly from humanistic philosophy and from Knowles and Tough's studies, assumes that it is the job of educators helping students to be able to plan, carry out and evaluate their own learning (Merriam & Caffarella 2007). For instance, educators may aid individuals or groups in using resources or mastering language learning strategies.
- 2- «To foster transformative learning as central to self-directed learning» (2007, 107). This goal is grounded in the works of Mezirow and Brookfield (Merriam & Caffarella 2007). Transformative learning was defined by Mezirow (2000) as:

The process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames or reference (meaning schemes, habits of mind, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open,

emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (Mezirow 2000, 8)

Essentially, adults need to critically reflect and understand the historical, cultural and biographical reasons for their needs and interests: such self-knowledge is a fundamental prerequisite for autonomy in self-directed learning.

- 3- «To promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning» (2007, 107). The third goal was highly supported by Collins and Brookfield (Merriam & Caffarella 2007).

Collins emphasizes the importance of having learning emancipation as a core concern of self-directed learning and adult education (Collins 1996 cited in Merriam & Caffarella 2007, 109). Brookfield (cited in Merriam & Caffarella 2007) states that having learners controlling over all educational needs and decisions has to be a consistent element of self-directed learning. Therefore, educators need to shift to learners as much control as possible in the learning process and learners should have more easily accessible and adequate resources in order to exercise more control on their learning.

Chapter Two

Adults and foreign language learning

In recent decades, scientific research in the psychological and pedagogical field has made significant progress in the study of adult learning and the processes involved in adult education. However, less work has been done in the foreign language (FL) education field, where researches on adult FL acquisition are still at an initial stage (Begotti 2019; Begotti 2011).

The following chapter explores adult foreign language learning. First, it presents adult learner's peculiar features, who is goal oriented and directs his learning to fulfil needs or demands. It then moves on analysing the age-related variables that come into play when an adult decides to learn a foreign language. Factors are divided according to three different categories: biological factors, individual factors and situational factors. The last part of the chapter focuses on the most effective teaching methodologies that can be used in adult foreign language teaching.

2.1 The adult foreign language learner

Adult foreign language learners have significant and distinctive features, clearly different from younger learners (Begotti 2011).

First, according to Serragiotto (2004) and Balboni (2015), adult learners are unwilling to question their status of adult and their knowledge; therefore, they are not eager to let the teacher guiding them during the learning process without questioning his or her choice. In other words, the adult foreign language learner

Vuole essere coinvolto nelle decisioni che lo riguardano, vuole che sia chiaro il percorso che sta facendo, vuole avere la possibilità di misurare continuamente il percorso effettuato, vuole anche essere autonomo nell'apprendimento (Serragiotto 2004, 113)

Secondly, adult learners always embark on new learning experiences driven by the need to close a gap between personal or professional needs and the reality which they live in (Begotti 2011); to do so, they choose their learning opportunities selectively, according to their own purposes, whereas children mainly learn for biological and psychological reasons.

Hence, adult participation in a foreign language course is the result of a conscious choice aimed at asserting social roles, improving language skills for professional reasons or reaching personal fulfilment (Begotti 2019).

2.2 Age-related factors in foreign language learning

Although older learners are less likely than young children to fully master a foreign language, a closer examination of studies relating age to language learning reveals that age reflects differences in the situation of learning and that «the younger-the-better notion» (Griffiths 2008, 35) is the result of

misinterpretation of the facts relating to speed of acquisition, misattribution of age differences in language abilities to neurobiological factors, and, most notably, a misemphasis on poor adult learners and an underemphasis on adults who master L2s to nativelike levels (Marinova et al 2000, 9)

According to Marinova-Todd, Bradford Marshall and Snow (2000), biological age does influence language learning, but primarily because it is also associated with social, psychological, affective and individual factors that can affect language learning and proficiency, both positively and negatively.

The role played by ageing in foreign language learning and the relationship between age and other variables affecting learning are highly debated issues (Griffiths 2008).

In the following paragraphs a list of age-related factors will be presented and analysed in relation to age. The most common have been divided into three general categories, following Mazzotta's (1996) distinction into (1) biological variables, (2) individual variables, and (3) social variables.

2.3 Biological factors

None of the biological explanations suggested to account for age-related differences in foreign language acquisition is without controversy. Until recently, due to a lack of knowledge about the brain functioning and its ageing processes, the most common idea was that a progressive mental decline was inevitable in conjunction with advancing age. But scientific progresses have made scientists and scholars to reconsider initial studies and promote a new vision of the adult brain (Daloiso 2009).

2.3.1 The Critical Period Hypothesis

According to the Critical Period Hypothesis, language can be acquired more easily during childhood and puberty than at other stages of life: once this window of opportunity is passed, the ability to learn decline inevitably (Marinova et al 2000). The idea that there is a critical age for language learning that finishes before puberty was popularized in 1959 by Canadian brain surgeons Penfield and Roberts, who based their theories on studies on brain damage. According to Penfield and Roberts the most effective time to learn a second or foreign language is between the ages of 4 and 10. After age 10, the human brain becomes rigid because it loses its plasticity as a consequence of the process of lateralization, which involves the firm localization of language-processing abilities in the left atmosphere of the brain (Griffiths 2008).

Penfield and Roberts' theoretical assumptions were then supported also by Lenneberg (1967), who noted that the rapid growth of nerve connections, which ceases at puberty, coincides with the child's L1 acquisition process.

2.3.2 Evidence against the Critical Period Hypothesis

Although an early starters' long-term advantage is recognized in terms of speed of acquisition and phonetic sensibility, the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) itself does not seem to have fully unanimous support and it is highly debated. Griffiths (2008) reports that Krashen, for instance, challenged Lenneberg's theory by affirming that the lateralization process may be completed by age 5; consequently, the CPH cannot be used as explanation

for observing age-related differences in FL/L2 development (Griffiths 2008). In addition, Lamendella suggested the term *sensitive period* «to emphasize that language acquisition might be more efficient during early childhood but was not impossible at later ages» (Marinova et al 2000, 10).

Numerous neuropsychological studies have shown that brain plasticity tends to decrease with the end of critical periods for language acquisition, when cognitive functions are established in specific brain areas. However, other scientific studies have demonstrated that the brain can still modify and reorganize the neuronal circuits thanks to environmental experiences and beneficial stimuli even during adulthood. In the adult brain, although most synaptic connections have already stabilized, it is still possible to create new connections thanks to the involvement in new activities (Daloiso 2009).

Some neurobiological studies have led to a rethinking of the concept of mental decline, i.e. the progressive loss of the ability to learn, memorize and rework cognitive while ageing (Daloiso 2009). Maintaining a good state of mind despite physical ageing is also determined by external factors related to lifestyles and habits. In Daloiso's words:

Nel campo delle neuroscienze e della psicologia si è pertanto riconosciuto che per ridurre il declino mentale sono fondamentali non solo il controllo dello stress, ma anche le relazioni sociali, l'educazione continua e la stimolazione intellettuale degli adulti (Daloiso 2009, 117)

2.4 Individual factors

Affective and cognitive factors play a significant role in determining the success of foreign language learning processes.

2.4.1 Affective factors

Affective factors are rooted in human nature, influence students' attitude toward the target language, and have been hypothesised to be partially responsible for the difference between children and adults in language learning (Serragiotto & Luise 2007). Among the positive affective factors, Begotti (2019) indicates motivation as the most important one; on the other side, the scholar lists anxiety, stress, and hyper-emotionality among the emotional factors that can have an adverse effect on foreign language learning.

Motivation

Motivation is the motor of human behaviour. According to Paolo E. Balboni (2015), motivation is the energy that puts human action into motion.

Drawing from theories applied in the marketing field, Balboni (2015) has elaborated a motivational model– the so-called Tripolar model – that fully describes three types of motivation, namely *Duty*, *Need*, and *Pleasure*.

- *Duty* concerns the obligation to learn and it is mostly present in compulsory education situations – i.e. school. If it is not supported by any real interest it only leads to learning, yet no acquisition. As soon as the student carries out his duty – e.g. passing an exam - the content previously learnt is immediately forgot.
- *Need* is a rational and conscious motivation. Even though it is more effective than *Duty*, it has two limitations: (1) the need must be perceived as such, and (2) it works as motivation until the need is satisfied.
- *Pleasure* is the most powerful motivation and is the only one that leads to acquisition because of its links to the student's real interests.

The primary goal to be pursued is to instil the genuine pleasure for learning in learners, strengthening a motivation that makes learning as deeper, stable and lasting as possible (Begotti 2011).

Another well-known theory in the field of motivation studies is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed in the 1970s by Professors Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan. In their theory, the two scholars make the basic distinction between

intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and *extrinsic motivation*, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome (Deci & Ryan 2000, 55)

In the language education field, the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has led to defining a series of peculiar behaviours in adults, who can be encouraged to study foreign languages by one or both types of motivation (Harter cited in Begotti 2019).

Table 1 indicates the typical behaviours that push towards an intrinsic or extrinsic type of motivation (Begotti 2019, 51):

Intrinsic pole	Extrinsic pole
Preference for challenge	Preference for easy work assigned
Curiosity and interest	Pleasing the teacher and getting good grades
Independent mastery	Dependence on the teacher
Independent judgment	Reliance on teacher's judgement
Internal criteria	External criteria

Table 1. Typical behaviours of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations

In the adult learner, motivation supports him in improving his professional life, but also enhances his self-esteem and achieving his goals (Begotti 2011).

Griffiths (2008) and Begotti (2019) suggest that, in most cases, older learners' approach to foreign language learning is driven by intrinsic motivation rather than external, but the origins of motivation can be very subjective - e.g. cultural growth, professional needs, refinement, pleasure, interest and passion for languages, family and friends, moving abroad, language certificates and exams, etc. (Daloiso 2009).

Negative affective factors

Begotti (2019) states that among all the factors that can negatively affect adult foreign language learning, anxiety, stress, and hyper-emotionality are the most common.

Generally, the adult learner has a great sense of self-worth and does not want to embarrass himself in front of the class. Hence the fear of making mistakes or being judged leads adult students to act less naturally; on the contrary, children acts more spontaneously and without inhibitions (Serragiotto 2004; Serragiotto & Luise 2007; Begotti 2019).

Hyper-emotionality makes any learning activity anxious and prevents effective learning. A hyperemotional state can be caused by the relationship with classmates and the FL teacher, or by the fear of social judgment. Even stressful situations and excessive nervousness due to external reasons can provoke anxiety, and thus affect the learning process in a negative way (Begotti 2019).

In Griffiths' opinion (2008), adults are aware of their own limits, whereas younger learners do not realize how much they do not know. Also, adults are aware of the things they are expected to have learnt at some stage in the learning process; if they realize they have not reached an expected level yet, they are likely to avoid practicing the foreign language to protect their ego because the discrepancy between the adult's current language level and the target language level might cause them shame, anxiety and feeling of being inadequate (Griffiths 2008). Children are not aware of their own limitations or external expectations and therefore they do not feel the need to protect their ego in social situations, which gives them more freedom to make errors without being emotionally affected by them.

2.4.2 Cognitive factors

Cognitive factors refer to the processes within one's mind such as information processing, conceptualization and communication of ideas, problem solving, use of learning strategies, ect. Several linguistic functions, such as the ability to produce speech and understand it, overflows into the realm of cognition; thereby language learning processes are unsurprisingly in close contact with other cognitive functions (Mazzotta 1996).

Griffiths (2008) cites a range of studies (e.g. Krashen 1985; Snow & Hoefnagel-Hohle 1978) that suggest that older students tend to learn a new language faster than children, at least in the initial stages of the learning process. For instance, Krashen explains that adults' faster initial progress results from their ability to obtain more comprehensible input by means of their greater experience, knowledge, and ability to negotiate communicative acts. Furthermore, adult learners can learn a new language by consciously thinking about the rules. Advanced cognitive functions also explain why older students are faster than younger ones since they can rationalize the new foreign language or using previous linguistic knowledge of patterns of their L1 for communicative purposes.

It has also been suggested that adult's metacognitive skills should give them advantage in FL learning (Griffiths 2008). In the language learning and teaching field, metacognitive competence is defined as «an awareness of and reflections about one's knowledge, experiences, emotions and learning» (Haukås 2018, 13).

According to Ausbel (1964) metacognitive skills bring two considerable advantages. First, adult learners have a larger native-language vocabulary, especially regarding abstract concepts; therefore, when learning a foreign language, they do not acquire thousands of new

notions but merely the new verbal symbols that represent these concepts. Secondly, adult learners «can make conscious and deliberate use of grammatical generalizations and can explicitly apply them to suitable exemplars» when learning the structure of a new language (Ausbel 1964, 421).

Due to their abstraction and systematization abilities, adult learners require an explicit meta-communicative and metalinguistic reflection on language (Serragiotto 2004; Serragiotto & Luise 2007; Balboni 2015).

Older learners may be able to learn at least some aspects of the foreign language more efficiently than their younger counterpart because of their greater cognitive maturity, which may help adults dealing with the abstract nature of language better than youths. However, the development of the rational and abstract thought induces adult learners to satisfy the desire to have a fully conscious understanding of language in terms of isolated rules, which could be just what prevents them from reaching full competence.

Indeed, there is a downside to having more advanced cognitive functions. Piaget, mentioned by Harley (1986), shows how human cognitive development is achieved through different maturational stages, changing systematically as people age. At some point of the cognitive development, individuals move on to a more formalistic and operational way of thinking. After puberty, indeed, language learning is no longer depending on a specific ability for acquiring a language, but

on more general learning abilities - the same ones they might use to acquire other kinds of skills or information. It is argued that these general learning abilities are not as effective for language learning as the more specific, innate capacities that are available to the young child (Lightbown & Spada 2013, 93)

For this reason, for instance, it is suggested that children may be better able to acquire an acceptable accent in a new language as a result of their intellectual capacities, which are less differentiated along particular lines (Ausbel 1964).

2.5 Situational factors

Situational factors in adult foreign language learning and teaching include (1) the learning context, (2) the teaching methodology, and (3) the teacher's role.

2.5.1 The learning context

The learning context exerts a significant influence on adult foreign language learning. A language class is generally heterogeneous: students have individual interests, needs and motivations, attitude and skills, biographies and personalities (Serragiotto & Luise 2007). Surely, this brings about human and cultural richness, but also several difficulties for both the teacher and the adult learner. The former has to try to reconcile the differences, while the latter has to accept individuality of his classmates (Begotti 2019).

Atmosphere in the classroom is another variable to account for. It should be encouraging and not concentrated on comparing students with each other or pointing out errors (Griffiths 2008). According to Knowles, the classroom atmosphere should feature physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual help, freedom of expression and acceptance of differences (Knowles 1973).

The teacher

Knowles (1973) states that the teacher must possess the following attitudinal qualities:

- Authenticity;
- Non-possessive caring, prizing, trust and respect;
- Emphatic understanding, and sensitive and accurate listening.

In the last decades, theories of language teaching have reconsidered the role of the language teacher. Today, the primary focus of teaching is the learner, who is placed at the core of the learning process, with his personal characteristics and needs. Hence, the teacher must be versatile and able to understand the needs of the class.

According to Serragiotto (2004) the foreign language teacher should assume several roles:

- 1- As *facilitatore*, the FL teacher should create a relaxed, friendly and calm learning environment, considering not only students' language needs, but also their background, personalities, interests and motivations, learning styles and strategies, etc;

- 2- As *animatore* and *organizzatore*, the FL teacher should be able to plan and carry out activities considering also individualized instructions. He should also try to encourage, stimulate and intrigue his students;
- 3- As *consulente linguistico*, the FL teacher should offer his knowledge and skills, putting them at the service of his students when requested;
- 4- As *artista* and *sperimentatore*, the FL teacher should always explore and test new teaching methodologies and techniques, also using his own imagination to create more suitable and useful teaching materials.

2.5.2 Teaching methodology

Griffiths (2008) suggests that the teaching method has more meaning for older learners, as their background and experience with languages is more varied than that of younger students. Generally, as the adult learner considers his own experience as a resource for learning, he might rely on those techniques and methodologies that he has already employed in the past and may be sceptical about the most recent approaches, undermining also the confidence on the teacher's teaching skills (Serragiotto 2004).

As Begotti (2019) argues, there is not a universally appropriate teaching approach or methodology suitable for all types of students. Therefore, the teaching methodology should be selected and adapted to each group and level of skills, and consider the characteristics that distinguish andragogy from pedagogy, and in particular

L'accentuazione dell'autonomia nel processo di apprendimento, la consapevolezza della propria esperienza di vita, la soggettività biografica e la situazione concreta in cui si generano e interagiscono gli apprendimenti e la mediazione personale, la richiesta e la necessità di riflessione consapevole ed esplicita che derivano dalla maggiore capacità di astrazione e concettualizzazione, nonché la natura particolare della motivazione (Serragiotto 2004, 114)

Adult education offers a wide range of different teaching approaches and methodologies. As suggested by Begotti (2019), the teacher must be able to choose teaching techniques consistent with the teaching unit and with the group of students whom he has to deal with. Indeed, not all teaching techniques are always well accepted or recognized as effective by adult learners (Begotti 2019; Balboni 2015).

It is the case, for instance, of *game-like methodologies*, or *ludic-activities* for language learning, where games gain a strategic value as tool to achieve both linguistic and educational goals.

The riskiest of all are role taking, role making and role playing, where students are asked to simulate a communicative situation in front of the class, jeopardizing their self-esteem (Serragiotto & Luise 2007). Indeed, adult learners are not always willing to participate in these activities because they are afraid of making themselves ridiculous in front of the class, or are too introverted, or they consider these activities a waste of time (Begotti 2019; Balboni 2015; Serragiotto 2004). Nonetheless, these techniques are essential for the development of the socio-pragmatic competence and are difficult to replace with others that are less anxiety-inducing (Begotti 2019). Therefore, as Balboni (2015) and Serragiotto (2004) suggest, it is the teacher's responsibility to explain the reasons *why* game-like methodologies are chosen and *which* are the final goals that they aim at, in order to make adult students more likely to participate.

Serragiotto (2004) affirms that FL teaching techniques that allow the adult student to confront himself with his own competence rather than with the teacher are extremely useful and effective. Indeed, the skills acquired over the years and the life experiences of an adult can be employed and enhanced with teaching techniques that highlight them, such as open-ended questions, discussions, writing productions and problem-solving activities (Begotti 2019).

Finally, Cooperative Learning activities are also widely employed in adult foreign language learning contexts (Begotti 2019). The advantages that derive from such this methodology offers several social, motivational and creative advantages:

un adulto che ha appreso a utilizzare le tecniche cooperative ha maggiori possibilità di raggiungere il successo in ambito formativo. Può sviluppare il proprio pensiero critico e creativo, sviluppa la capacità di interazione con un gruppo e abilità sociali, consegue un atteggiamento maggiormente positivo nei confronti della formazione e accresce l'autostima e il senso del rispetto reciproco (Begotti 2019, 80)

2.5.3 *The educational agreement*

Adult foreign language learning is, as already seen, a voluntary and highly motivated activity, and the teacher must account for expectations, goals and needs of his students (Daloiso 2009). Hence, the so-called *patto formativo*, or “educational agreement” is a crucial element in all adult language teaching practice (Balboni 2015; Begotti 2019; Daloiso 2009).

The educational agreement is based on a negotiation between the internal needs and interests of the adult student and the needs of the external, social or professional environment. Begotti clearly lists the main features and benefits of an educational agreement:

In primo luogo consente di tener conto dell’ampia gamma di caratteristiche diverse, esperienze pregresse, livelli, motivazioni, interessi, e capacità che caratterizzano molti gruppi di adulti. In secondo luogo, permette di utilizzare differenti risorse per imparare gli stessi contenuti, consente allo studente di visualizzare la sistematizzazione del suo apprendimento e di coinvolgerlo direttamente (Begotti 2019, 40)

Daloiso (2009) states that the educational agreement consists of two “contracts” or “agreements”:

- A *psychological contract*, through which the teacher identifies previous experiences, motivations and expectations of his students through different tools (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, ect.) in order to define goals and objectives shared by the group;
- A *teaching contract* aimed at making some teaching choices together with the students in order to achieve the goals previously set.

The *patto formativo* starts from the diagnosis and analysis of students’ needs. Then it moves on with the definition of objectives, resources and strategies, and ends with the indication of the activities and criteria that will be adopted for evaluation (Begotti 2019). It basically outlines *why* the teachers does what he does, *how* he will do it and *how* he is going to evaluate his students.

Negotiating an educational agreement is a particularly delicate moment, as adult learners are not always familiar with this type of approach to language teaching. Thereby, the teacher

will have to guide them throughout the process and formulate a clear and democratic methodological proposal.

Finally, it is important to clarify that the educational agreement does not diminish the role of the teacher, who is nevertheless assured of the role of expert and continues to make some teaching choices independently (Daloiso 2009).

Chapter Three

Language Learning Strategies

In the last four decades, the language education field has witnessed a growing interest concerning language learning strategies (LLS), which are «among the main factors that help determine how –and how well –our students learn a second or foreign language» (Oxford 2003, 1).

The following chapter begins by considering the large number of LLS definitions that have been provided in the last 50 years of studies and researches. It then goes on describing the main characteristics of language learning strategies and which elements make them effective.

The second part presents the major LLS classifications, starting with the pioneering studies on *The Good Language Learner* of the 1970s, until getting to the most relevant taxonomies of the 1990s and the studies of the new millennium.

Finally, the last part of chapter investigates the relationships between learner's individual variables and the use of language learning strategies. A special attention is given to the relationship between age and LLS use.

3.1 Defining Language Learning Strategies

Interests in language learning strategies began in the 1970s with the publication of papers and studies about the good language learner, which found out that successful language learning was often linked to the use of certain types of learning strategies and individual characteristics.

However, scholars have not yet arrived at a consensus regarding a universal and comprehensive definition of language learning strategies and still today, in Ellis' words, the concept is «fuzzy» and «not easy to tie down» (1994, 529).

A useful starting point would be to refer to Joan Rubin, who brought the concept of language learning strategies to a larger audience in 1975, when her pioneering study, titled *What the 'Good Language Learner' Can Teach Us*, was published in TESOL Quarterly. Rubin defined learning strategies as «the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge» (1975, 43), suggesting a list of strategies and individual features presumed to be essential for good second or foreign language learners (see 3.4.1).

Some years later, Tarone (1981) described learning strategy as an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the foreign or second language, whereas Anita Wenden explained strategies as «steps or mental operations used in learning or problem solving that require direct analysis, transformation or synthesis on learning material in order to store, retrieve and use knowledge» (1986, 10).

In the late 1980s, Wenden and Rubin (1987) stated that learning strategies include strategy knowledge, affective factors, and strategic behaviours: all these elements enable learners to improve target language learning. They also declared, however, that the difficulty of providing a comprehensive definition derived from the intrinsic elusive nature of strategies.

In *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition* (1990), O'Malley and Chamot defined language learning strategies as «the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help comprehend, learn, or retain new information» (1990, 1) in foreign language learning.

At around the same time, Rebecca Oxford published the pioneering research titled *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know* (1990). Oxford is accounted as one of the most influential scholars in the language education arena and her studies on language learning strategies are considered a landmark for both teachers and learners. According to the scholar (1990; 2003), strategies are multifaceted process-oriented tools that facilitate language learning and enable learners to achieve learning autonomy and communicative competence. Specifically, learning strategies are

Specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques – such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task – used by students to enhance their own learning (Oxford 2003, 2)

In the mid-1990s, renowned scholar Rod Ellis gave an LLS definition based on the idea that language learning is a process in which learners move through stages. Therefore, according to Ellis, «a strategy consists of mental or behavioural activity related to some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition or language use» (1994, 530).

Nonetheless, despite all the ground-breaking researches conducted from the 1970s until the 1990s, issues with the definition remained unsolved, and the controversy continued into the new millennium (Griffiths 2008).

In 2003 Dornyei and Skehan recommended abandoning the term *strategy* in favour of the more versatile term “self-regulation” (Griffiths 2008), namely

the degree to which individuals are active participants in their own learning and includes factors such as cognition, metacognition, motivation, and behavioural and environmental variables used by learners to promote their own learning (Dornyei 2005, 85)

However, this idea was never really a possible option because learners need strategies in order to self-regulate; thus, language learning strategies become tools «proactively employed by learners in the process of regulating their own learning» (Griffiths 2018, 8). Strategies and self-regulation are therefore mutually interdependent.

Due to the controversy over the definition of language learning strategy, some researchers abandoned the attempt to find a comprehensive and conclusive definition and decided to focus on the most essential features of strategies instead (Griffiths 2008).

3.2 Characteristics of Language Learning Strategies

In trying to display language learning strategies’ characteristics, we will refer to Griffiths’ comprehensive work on LLS (2018, 9-20), in which she suggests that, by looking at the language education literature of the last 50 years, it is possible to «identify the essential characteristics of language learning strategies and to incorporate them into a workable definition» (Griffiths 2018, 9).

According to the scholar, the main features of language learning strategies are:

- Action orientation;
- Conscious choice;
- Goal orientation;
- Language learning orientation.

3.2.1 Action orientation

Language learning is not a unilateral process, yet dynamic, and learners are not passive recipients (Larsen-Freeman 2001, cited in Griffiths 2018). Also, to be considered strategic learners, students must exert some agency, i.e. taking actions (Oxford 2003).

According to Rubin (1975) the nature of language learning strategies is active because they are what students *do*. However, Griffiths (2018) states that, although the vast majority of scholars recognize that strategies are active, there is much less agreement on the nature of this *activity*. Macaro, for instance, believes that strategies are situated in the domain of cognitive behaviours, i.e. strategies are mental actions. Therefore, strategies are «more appropriately described in terms of thinking rather than doing» (Macaro 2006, 327). On the other side, Oxford (1990) would include also physical activities. A third position, like Griffiths' one (2008), combines Oxford and Macaro's physical/mental divergence, claiming that the term *activity* includes both physical and mental behaviours.

In addition, the action component of learning strategies allows us to distinguish them from *learning styles*, namely «the general approaches – for example, global or analytic, auditory or visual – that students use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subjects» (Oxford 2003, 2). Learning styles are the learner's internal characteristics, while strategies are activities that enable learners to promote their learning. Therefore, styles are «related to, but distinct from, language learning strategies, although strategies choice may be influenced by learning style» (Griffiths 2018, 11).

3.2.2 Choice orientation

According to Bialystok, language learning strategies are «optional means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language» (1978, 71): learners *choose* strategies, since it would be impossible to force them to adopt strategies against their will.

However, discourse on strategy choice has posed a controversial question on whether this choice is conscious or not. Oxford (1990) Bialystok (1978), Cohen (1998), and Macaro (2006) believe that strategies are conscious activities. Cohen (1998), in particular, argues that language learners who use strategies must be, at least, partially conscious of them even if they are not attending them fully. Macaro (2006) adds that mental processes which are employed unconsciously cannot be considered strategic.

However, deciding whether a student is conscious, or unconscious, of strategy choice and use is far from unequivocal as it might seem. For this reason, Griffiths (2018) suggest adopting the more useful *deliberate/automatic* continuum, introduced by Wenden (1991 cited in Griffiths 2018). For instance, novice learners choose and use strategies in a more deliberate way, whereas, in conjunction with expertise, the choice tends to become more automatic. Still, if advanced learners encounter a new learning challenge, they might revert to a more deliberate selection modality, moving along the continuum (Griffiths 2018).

Finally, strategy choice depends on (ibid.):

- *Individual factors*, such as motivation, aptitude, level of proficiency, gender, age, affective variables, culture, ect.;
- *Contextual factors*, such as learning environment, available resources, teaching methods, ect.;
- *Learning goals*, i.e. the purpose for which a student is studying (such as personal interest and satisfaction, exams or specific qualifications and certificates, ect.).

3.2.3 Goal orientation

According to Oxford (1990; 2003) strategic behaviours imply purposeful and goal-oriented activities, aiming at a specific learning target. Therefore, an activity, to be considered strategic, must be purposefully related to a goal. The specification of a goal is

also considered by Macaro (2006) as one of the identifying features of learning strategies.

As he states:

Human action is normally considered to be directed by purpose and dependent on the pursuance of goals [...] Therefore, a key feature of a strategy should be the explicitness of its goal orientation (2006, 328)

It is the goal-oriented dimension that distinguish strategies from *skills*, another concept with which strategies are commonly confused. Skills relate to the way language is employed in order to send and receive messages, and are usually conceptualized in terms of reading, listening, speaking and writing (Griffiths 2018). Griffiths also argues that skills might be employed as strategies to reach a learning goal: for instance, students may decide to read not for pleasure, but to enrich their vocabulary or practice their pronunciation. In other words, when actively chosen as a tool to achieve a goal, skills become strategies. However, it is important to keep a clear-cut distinction: skills relate to how language is used, strategies are actions chosen to reach the learning target.

3.2.4 Language Learning orientation

Language learning strategies are employed by learners to learn, to acquire new materials and be able to use them when a new need arises (Griffiths 2018). In fact, strategies are «both situation-specific and transferable to other situations or tasks» (Macaro 2006, 328). Thus, a single strategy is (1) suitable for a specific task and (2) applicable to a considerable number of any other learning contexts that a learner will face in the future.

Language learning might be achieved either by direct cognitive engagement with the available information, and by regulating and managing metacognitive, affective and social engagement.

In the light of the essential features of language learning strategies explained above, Griffiths suggests an updated LLS basic definition:

Activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning (Griffiths 2018, 87)

3.3 Strategy effectiveness

According to Carol Griffiths, the issue of definition and characteristics of language learning strategies «should be kept separate from the question of strategy effectiveness» (2018, 20). The same point is made by Oxford (2003), who affirms that «a given strategy is neither good nor bad; it is essentially neutral until the context of its use is thoroughly considered» (Oxford 2003, 8). According to the latter, a strategy is effective and useful to language learning when

(a) the strategy relates well to the L2 task at hand, (b) the strategy fits the particular student's learning style preferences to one degree or another, and (c) the student employs the strategy effectively and links it with other relevant strategies (Oxford 2003, 8)

Strategy effectiveness is also influenced by *how* strategies are employed. Language learning is indeed a very complex process and LLS use is not an isolated phenomenon (Anderson 2008). Rather, successful language learners use language learning strategies in chains and are able to choose them from an LLS repertoire according to individual and specific goals, situations, and individual variables (Griffiths 2018). To be effective, a strategy must be combined with other strategies, either in sequence or simultaneously, in order to form what Macaro calls «strategy clusters» (2006, 327).

According to Anderson (2008), strategies are interdependent and enable learners to select and orchestrate them if they want to achieve positive outcomes. In Griffiths' words, the orchestration metaphor conveys the idea that «strategies need to be harmonized with each other if they are to produce the desired learning outcome» (Griffiths 2018, 23).

The importance of strategy orchestration is underlined in two studies on unsuccessful language learners, i.e. those of Porte (1988), and Vann and Abraham (1990), cited by

Griffiths (2018). The two studies demonstrated that successful strategy use may depend on more than merely quantity or frequency: unsuccessful language learners were very active strategy users, yet they were unable to orchestrate their strategy repertoires effectively (ibid.).

Appropriate LLS use enables students to take responsibility for their own learning by enhancing learner autonomy, independence and self-direction. In addition, a greater degree of self-efficacy – i.e. the awareness of being effective learners – is reached (Oxford 2003).

3.4 The Good Language Learner studies and earlier classifications

In the field of language education, the Good Language Learner studies are a group of ground-breaking academic studies developed during the 1970s which focused on the strategies that successful learners employ in foreign and second language learning.

Researches on the Good Language Learner were first introduced to the L2/FL literature in 1975, when American scholar Joan Rubin published her landmark essay *What the 'Good Language Learner' Can Teach Us* in TESOL Quarterly.

Later, Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco published another influential study - i.e. *The Good Language Learner* - originally published in 1978.

3.4.1 Joan Rubin's studies on the Good Language Learner

Joan Rubin (1975) identified six essential features of the good language learner by observing her students in class and eliciting observations from other FL/L2 teachers. According to the scholar (1975: 45-47), the good language learner:

- *Is a willing and accurate guesser*: the good language learner collects and stores information efficiently, using all the clues previously gathered in the learning environment. He is therefore able to narrow down the meaning and intent of communication;
- *Has a strong drive to communicate*: the good language learner does not limit himself to a single sentence construction, rather he uses several means to get his

message across, such as nominalisation of verbs and verbalisation of nouns, gestures, cognates, circumlocution, paraphrase, ect.;

- *Is often inhibited*: the good language learner is not afraid of making mistakes;
- *Is prepared to attend to form*: the good language learner always looks for language patterns through analysis, categorization, synthesis, ect.;
- *Practices*: the good language learner looks for opportunities to speak in class, starts conversations with native speakers, ect.;
- *Monitors his own speech and the speech of others*: the good language learner constantly attends and controls his speech and performance;
- *Attends to meaning*: the good language learner knows that paying attention to the context, the relationship between participants, and the rules of speaking is equally important as following the rules of grammar.

In relation to language learning strategies classification, Joan Rubin distinguished two groups of strategies and eight subgroups (Table 2³):

Primary LLS classification	Secondary LLS classification
Direct strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classification/verification; - Monitoring; - Memorisation; - Guessing/inductive inferencing; - Deductive reasoning; - Practice.
Indirect strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating opportunities for practice; - Production tricks.

Table 2. Rubin's LLS classification

3.4.2 The Good Language Learner Study: Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco's research

A particularly influential study, *The Good Language Learner* (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco 1996), was conducted in the mid-1970s and originally published in 1978. Following Stern's previous researches in 1975, the authors of *The Good Language Learner* wanted to pursue two main goals: (1) identifying the main internal features of the good

³ Adapted from O'Malley & Chamot 1990, 4

language learner and (2) determining all the techniques, activities and strategies that were indispensable for successful language acquisition (1996).

The research demonstrated that good language learners appeared to use five significant strategies which are reported in the following table (Table 3⁴), adapted from O'Malley and Chamot's summary of LLS research (1990, 5):

Primary LLS classification	Secondary classification
Active task approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responds positively to learning opportunities or seeks and exploits learning environments; - Adds related language learning activities to regular classroom programs; - Practices;
Realisation of language as a system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analyses individual problems; - Makes L1/L2 comparisons; - Analyses target language to make inferences; - Makes use of fact that language is a system;
Realisation of language as a means of communication and interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasises fluency over accuracy; - Seeks communicative situations with FL/L2 speakers;
Management of affective demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finds socio-cultural meanings; - Copes with affective demands in learning;
Monitoring L2 performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constantly revises L2/FL system by testing inferences and asking L2/FL native speakers for feedback.

Table 3. The Good Language Learner Study - LLS classification

3.5 Main classifications of language learning strategies

Strategy classification is not less difficult than providing definition of strategy or describing its characteristics. Over the last 50 years there have been numerous attempts to classify strategies, listing and organizing them in inventories and taxonomies.

As we have already seen in the previous paragraphs, much of the earlier research on the Good Language Learner (Rubin 1975, Stern 1975, Naiman et al. 1996) concentrated on compiling inventories of learning strategies that learners were observed to use or reported

⁴ Adapted from O'Malley & Chamot 1990, 5.

using. The Good Language Learner studies anticipated many of the issues and questions that were thoroughly debated in the 1980s and 1990s, when scholars produced more complex and comprehensive classification schemes and taxonomies of language learning strategies, with mutually exclusive categories.

In particular, we will focus on the taxonomies elaborated at the beginning of the 1990s by O'Malley and Chamot and by Oxford. Both taxonomies are based on Rigney's (1978, cited in Griffiths 2018) definition of language learning strategies, described as «procedures which facilitate acquisition, retention, retrieval and performance» (Griffiths 2018, 60).

3.5.1 O'Malley and Chamot's classification

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) identify a grand total of twenty-six language learning strategies, divided into three groups:

- *Cognitive strategies*, which «operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in a way that enhances learning» (O'Malley & Chamot 1990, 44), moving towards task completion.
- *Metacognitive strategies*, which are «higher order executive skills» (ibid.) and self-regulatory strategies.
- *Socio-affective strategies*, which are a «broad grouping that involves either interaction with another person or ideational control over affect» (O'Malley & Chamot 1990, 46).

The first two groups of strategies - i.e. cognitive and metacognitive ones - approximately correspond to Rubin's indirect and direct strategies. The addition of the group of the social strategies marked an important step towards the recognition of the importance of interaction strategies in language learning and reflected the growing interest in socioculturalism, an approach to learning and teaching that supports the idea that learning is achieved through social communication with others (Griffiths 2018). Also, in the social strategies' category, O'Malley and Chamot included affective strategies (e.g. self-talk), which will be treated as separate category in following studies such as Oxford's.

Table 4⁵ shows O'Malley and Chamot's classification of language learning strategies (1990, 137-139) in detail:

Group	LLS classification
Metacognitive strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planning - Directed attention; - Selective attention; - Self-management; - Self-monitoring; - Problem identification; - Self-evaluation;
Cognitive strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repetition; - Resourcing; - Grouping; - Note-taking; - Deduction/induction; - Substitution; - Elaboration; - Summarisation; - Translation; - Transfer; - Inferencing;
Socio-affective strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Questioning for clarification; - Cooperation; - Self-talk; - Self-reinforcement;

Table 4. O'Malley and Chamot's LLS classification

3.5.2 Rebecca Oxford's taxonomy

Rebecca Oxford's taxonomy, based on an extensive review of previous studies and theories, is the most widely applied and comprehensive classification system for language learning strategies.

In her well-known book, *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*, published in 1990, Oxford makes a first and general distinction between direct strategies and indirect strategies. The former consist of «strategies that directly involve the target language» meaning that they «require mental processing of the language» (Oxford 1990, 37), whereas the latter «provide indirect support for language learning through focusing,

⁵ Adapted from O'Malley & Chamot 1990, 137-139.

planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing cooperation and empathy and other means» (Oxford 1990, 151).

A second distinction (Figure 3⁶) is made between six main categories: cognitive, memory-related, compensation, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies; the first three are direct strategies, the other three are classified as indirect strategies.

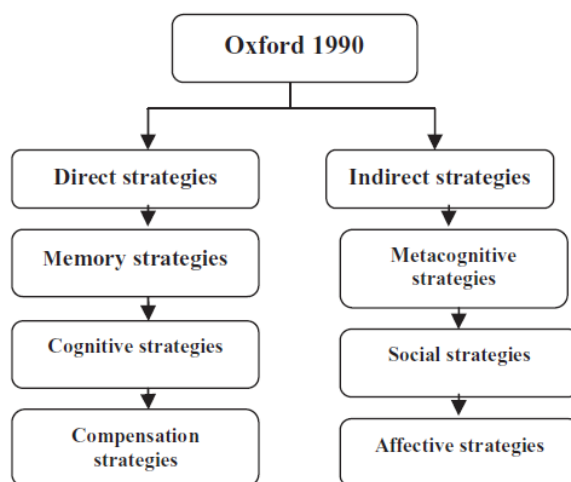


Figure 3. Oxford's direct and indirect strategies classification

Memory-related strategies

Memory-related strategies include a large set of techniques aimed at storing, retrieving and transferring information for future use (Oxford & Nyikos 1989). According to Lavasani and Faryadres (2011), the principle behind memory-related strategies is that of meaning: all the memory techniques that the language student adopts must be personally meaningful to him in order to make the strategy works efficiently.

Memory-related strategies have been divided into four subsets (Oxford & Ehrman 1990; Oxford 2003):

- *Creating mental linkages* (grouping, associating/elaborating, placing new words into a context);
- *Applying images and sounds* (using imagery, semantic mapping, using keywords, representing sounds in memory);
- *Reviewing well* (structured reviewing);

⁶ Lavasani & Faryadres, 2011, p.192

- *Employing action* (using physical response or sensation, using mechanical techniques).

Compensation strategies

Foreign language learners employ compensation strategies to overcome deficiencies and limits they have in the knowledge of the target language (Oxford & Nyikos 1989). They help learners making up for missing knowledge, mostly in speaking and writing, where students have a limited vocabulary, especially in the first stages of language acquisition.

Compensatory strategies have been divided into two subsets (Oxford & Ehrman 1990; Oxford 2003):

- *Guessing intelligently* (using linguistic clues, using other clues);
- *Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing* (switching to the first language, getting help, using mime or gestures, avoiding communication partially or totally, selecting the topic, adjusting or approximating the message, coining words, using a circumlocution or synonym).

Cognitive strategies

The last group of direct strategies - i.e. cognitive strategies - allows foreign language learners to manipulate the language material through identification, retention and retrieval of language elements. They are essential for associating new information with existing information in long-term memory and for forming and revising internal mental models, manipulating or transforming the target language (Oxford & Nyikos 1989; Lavasani & Faryadres 2011).

They can be broken down in four subsets (Oxford & Ehrman 1990; Oxford 2003):

- *Practicing* (repeating, formally practicing with sounds and writing systems, recognizing and using formulas and patterns);
- *Receiving and sending messages* (getting the idea quickly, using resources for receiving and sending messages);
- *Analysing and reasoning* (deduction, analysing expressions, contrastive analysis, translating, transferring);

- *Creating structure for input and output* (taking notes, summarizing, highlighting).

Metacognitive strategies

Oxford defines metacognitive strategies as «actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices, and which provides a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process» (1990, 137). Indeed, language learners use metacognitive strategies for managing the whole language acquisition process, from planning to arranging, from focusing to evaluating their own learning strategies use. (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

Oxford and Ehrman (1990) and Oxford (2003) divide them into three subsets:

- *Centering learning* (overviewing and linking with already known material, paying attention, delaying speech production to focus on listening);
- *Planning and arranging learning* (finding out about language learning, organizing, setting goals, identifying the purpose of a language task, planning for a language task, seeking practice opportunities);
- *Evaluating learning* (self-monitoring, self-evaluating).

Social strategies

Social strategies concern learner's interaction with other people and managing discourse (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

Social strategies are divided into three subsets (Oxford & Ehrman 1990; Oxford 2003):

- *Asking questions* (asking for clarification or verification; asking for correction);
- *Cooperating with others* (cooperating with peers, cooperating with proficient users of the new language);
- *Empathizing with others* (developing cultural understanding, becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings).

Affective strategies

Finally, affective strategies enable language learners to manage their emotions and feelings, control attitude, strengthen their motivation, and foster their values (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

Affective strategies are divided into three subsets (Oxford & Ehrman 1990; Oxford 2003):

- *Lowering anxiety* (using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, meditation);
- *Encouraging oneself* (making positive statements, taking risks wisely, rewarding yourself);
- *Taking emotional temperature* (listening to the body, using a checklist, writing a language learning diary, discussing your feeling with someone else).

Main concerns about Oxford's taxonomy

Over the years, Oxford taxonomy has received moderate criticism.

First, the introduction of compensation strategies in her classification indicates that the scholar includes in her concept of language learning strategy, beside language learning, also language use. According to Oxford, indeed, language use leads to language acquisition, therefore it should be included. Secondly, Oxford considers memory strategies as a separate category, whereas other scholars consider memory-related strategies as cognitive actions (Dornyei 2005). Thirdly, also compensation strategies are «somewhat confusing» (Ellis 1994: 539) as they might be considered communication strategies rather than learning strategies. A fourth issue concern the fact that Oxford states that the boundaries between the different categories are blurred, as learners can use more than one strategy at a time. Consequently, it is also not easy to classify a specific strategy into only one group (Griffiths 2018).

Nonetheless, Oxford's taxonomy remains the most widely applied classification of language learning strategies mainly because of the significant amount of research conducted by Oxford herself and by other researchers applying her taxonomy and using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The strategy groups in Oxford's taxonomy and the SILL will, therefore, form the framework based on which the language learning strategies reported by participants in this study will be categorized and analysed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

3.5.3 More recent considerations

Dornyei and Cohen (2002, cited in Griffiths 2018, 61) stated that, since memory-related strategies can be included in cognitive strategies, Oxford’s taxonomy can be reduced to four groups: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies, and affective strategies.

Griffiths (2018) suggests that Cohen and Dornyei classification scheme can be further reduced to a binary division, between cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Indeed, if we accept that metacognitive strategies are used to supervise or manage language acquisition, then Griffiths suggests that «social and affective strategies and themselves used metacognitively to manage social interaction and affective state, which in turn contribute to the management of cognitive engagement» (2018, 61). Metacognitive and cognitive go together and can be classified as in Table 5⁷ (Griffiths 2018):

METACOGNITIVE/REGULATORY STRATEGIES			
AFFECTIVE	SUPERVISORY	SOCIAL	
Maintaining motivation	Planning	Managing interaction	
Reducing anxiety	Monitoring	Seeking partners	
Rewarding oneself	Assessing	Asking for help	
COGNITIVE/DIRECT STRATEGIES			
Meaning-focused	Skill-focused	Phonology-focused	Pragmatics-focused
Rule-focused	Vocabulary-focused	Fluency-focused	Discourse – focused

Table 5. Griffiths' revision of LLS classification

3.6 Variables affecting language learning strategies choice and use

In the language education field, it has been firmly believed that language learning strategies are among the most relevant factors that contribute to successful foreign or second language learning. However, they are not independent, but instead, strategy choice processes take place within an intricaded network of other variables, namely contextual factors, the learning target, and the learner’s individual features (see 3.2.2).

⁷ Adapted from Griffiths, 2018, p. 63.

Specifically, the following paragraph will provide a general introduction on the main individual variables that affect LLS use and choice. In the last part of the paragraph, studies on the relationship between language learning strategies and ageing will be explored more thoroughly.

3.6.1 Learner's individual variables in language learning strategy use

The number of individual variables influencing strategy choice and use is considerable and still growing. Indeed, in recent years, interest in the influence of individual factors in language learning has been notably strong, resulting in what Ellis calls a «veritable plethora» (1994, 472) of such factors in the FL/L2 learning literature.

Some of the most generally investigated of these individual factors include motivation, nationality and culture, age, gender, personality, learning style, autonomy, identity, beliefs, aptitude, investment, career orientation, ect (Griffiths 2018; Oxford 1990; Oxford and Ehrman, 1990; Ellis 1994).

Among all the factors mentioned above, we will provide additional information on the ones that scholars and researchers in the language education field have conducted more studies on, i.e. proficiency level, motivation, learning style and gender.

Proficiency level

Learner's level of proficiency, namely the one's level of competence in a foreign language, can affect his LLS choice and use (Ellis 1994; Oxford and Ehrman 1990).

The influence of language proficiency on language learning strategy choice has been widely examined in numerous studies (cited in Lee & Oxford 2008) and most researchers agree that more proficient learners not only possess a bigger repertoire of strategies but they also employ them more frequently than less proficient learners (Oxford & Nyikos 1989).

Considering LLS categories, Lavasani and Faryadres (2011) affirm that memory strategies are more frequently employed by less proficient language learners; as language competence increase, learners abandon memory-related strategies in favour of cognitive and

metacognitive strategies. No data have been found on the correlation between proficiency and affective and social strategies use.

Motivation

Motivation is, according to Oxford and Nyikos (1989), the most important variable influencing language learning strategy use. After studying the language learning strategies of more than 1200 university students, Oxford and Nyikos reported that highly motivated learners tend to employ a broader and richer array of learning strategies and use them with more frequency than poorly motivated students.

Not only does strong motivation improve language learning strategy use, but constant and efficient strategy use leads to strengthen motivation too:

Appropriate strategies lead to enhanced actual and perceived proficiency, which in turn creates high self-esteem, which leads to strong motivation, spiralling to still more use of strategies, great actual and perceived proficiency, high self-esteem, improved motivation and so on (Oxford & Nyikos 1989, 295)

Learning style

A study conducted by Ehrman and Oxford (1990) focused on the influence of individual learning style on the learning strategies that language students use.

Extroverts, for instance, demonstrated a clearly marked preference for social strategies: working with peers, asking for clarifications and any other social strategy were the only favoured types of strategies. Cognitive strategies are occasionally employed, but with less comfort than social strategies. On the other side, introverted language learners opted for cognitive and metacognitive sets of strategies, while totally rejecting any other groups (Ehrman and Oxford 1990).

Gender

In the studies on the effect of gender on strategy choice and use, females have consistently been reported as using language learning strategies more frequently and efficiently than males (Griffiths 2018).

In their study with university students, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) stated that gender yields a «profound influence» (p. 296) on language learning strategy use. Indeed, compared with men, women have shown a more extensive and repeated use of metacognitive, affective and social strategies; the latter are the most common among all and reflect female preferences for social interaction (Oxford & Nyikos 1989; Griffiths 2018).

Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1990 cited in Lee & Oxford 2008) found out metacognitive strategies such as goal setting, planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation, are more frequently employed by women rather than men.

However, there is a group of studies that show a less clear-cut distinction: for instance, in the study by Lee and Oxford (2008), gender was found to had impact on strategy choice only when combined with other variables, such as proficiency. In addition, Griffiths (2018) affirms that men and women who are in line with their learning style are equally successful, no matter the gender.

3.6.2 Language learning strategies and age

Issues associated with age and FL/L2 learning have been highly debated for a long time (see Chapter 2). However, although there is a considerable body of research that focuses on the relationship between age and successful language learning, studies specifically aimed at investigating the relationship between age and strategy use are not readily available. Indeed, very few scholars have studied the effect of age on choice of language learning strategies (Chen 2014).

At the beginning of the 1990s Ehrman and Oxford (1990) investigated language learning strategies used by adult language learners in an intensive training setting. The two scholars observed that younger learners adopt strategies in a task-specific manner, whereas older students use more generalised strategies, employing them with more flexibility. In addition, as age increase, strategies become more complex and sophisticated. Oxford and Ehrman concluded that there might be «optimism for older learners» (1990, 317), since they found that older students were not the weakest, not the youngest the best.

Lee & Oxford (2008) reported two studies (i.e. Lee 2000; Wong Fillmore et al. 1985) which demonstrated that youths employ social strategies (e.g. questioning, asking for help, ect.) more frequently than their older counterparts. On the contrary, metacognitive strategies

are much more preferred by adult learners, who report a more frequent use of arranging, monitoring and evaluating strategies (Lee & Oxford 2008, 9).

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

The following chapter focuses on the research methodology of the thesis, based on an online questionnaire investigating the use of Language Learning Strategies in adulthood. All participants have attended Italian language courses at the Italian Cultural Institute in Sydney, Australia.

The chapter first starts listing the aims and research questions of the study and continues describing the questionnaire sample. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to the questionnaire and its design, whereas the final part focuses on data collection and analysis methodologies.

4.1 Aims and Research Questions

Since adulthood is the longest stage in human life and undergoes various changes, this thesis assumes that LLS use differs from one stage of adulthood to another as well. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate Language Learning Strategies used by adult language learners and explore the influence of advancing age on the strategic choices they make to learn a foreign language. Specifically, the objective is to understand whether strategy use is influenced by the more or less young age and, if is so, to identify the most and least used strategies for every age range.

To hold a wider and more comprehensive view on the possible developments that occur within adulthood, the study also takes into account affective variables such as motivation and anxiety, which have been hypothesised to be partially responsible for the difference between children and adults in L2 and FL learning.

Based on the aims of the study, the research questions are:

- 1- *Which Language Learning Strategies are the most and least used by adult FL learners?*
- 2- *Is there a difference in LLS use according to the age group of belonging? If so, which are the main trends?*
- 3- *How do adult learners perceive their learning abilities as adult FL learners compared to language learning at a younger age?*
- 4- *Which are the easiest and most difficult language skills to develop in adulthood? Do the trends change along with ageing?*
- 5- *What drives adults to learn Italian as a Foreign Language? Does motivation change according to the age group of belonging?*
- 6- *How do adult FL learners feel when learning Italian? Do they feel comfortable or anxious?*

4.2 Participants

To respond to the research questions listed above, the present study recruited adult students of Italian as a Foreign Language and asked them to complete an online questionnaire. Specifically, the questionnaire was administered to adults studying Italian as a foreign language at the Italian Cultural Institute (IIC) in Sydney, where I did my internship⁸ from May 2019 to August 2019.

Language courses at the IIC in Sydney run from February to December and are divided into four terms. To collect more data, it has been decided to contact also students who attended language courses before the beginning of my internship at the Institute.

⁸ The MAECI-MIUR-CRUI Foundation internship program is based on an Agreement signed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Ministry of Education, University and Research and CRUI Foundation for Italian Universities. The program targets master's degree students and has as its main aim the acquisition of concrete knowledge about the Italian government's international activities, including the promotion of Italy and its language and culture. The diplomatic offices involved are Embassies, Consular Offices, Permanent Representations and Italian Cultural Institutes.

4.3 Instruments and Procedures: The Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was designed to collect data for this case study (see Appendix). Before sharing, the questionnaire was viewed and approved by the thesis supervisor. It was also sent to the language teachers of the Institute to inform them of the research.

4.3.1 The design

The questionnaire was designed on *Google Forms*, an online survey administration app. Google Forms offers several advantages such as ease of share, access, and consultation, automatic organization of data into graphs, and automatic calculation of percentages; it is also cheap and easy to design.

But most importantly, in terms of the overall purpose of the study, Google Forms allowed to subdivide students' responses by creating successive sections according to the age range selected in *Question 4*, directing students to two successive sections - the SILL and the third part – dedicated to a specific age group. For instance, answers of Young Adults were collected in Section 2 and Section 7, answers of Early Adults were collected in Section 3 and Section 8, answers of Middle adults were collected in Section 4 and Section 9 and so on. In this way, data was gathered by age group (see 4.3.2).

A short introduction was also designed so that the purpose of the study and the questionnaire would have been clear to respondents:

Dear student,

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect data for my MA thesis, which focuses on adult language learning strategies. The questionnaire is anonymous - data will be used only for my research – and it will take no more than 15/ 20 minutes. After providing some general information, you will complete the SILL (Strategic Inventory for Language Learning), a questionnaire used in the language education field to investigate learners learning strategies. Finally, I will ask you to answer a few open questions about your foreign language learning experience.

Grazie mille per il tuo prezioso aiuto,

Linda

The questionnaire was then divided into three main parts for a total of 68 questions:

- *General information* (Questions 1-5);
- *Strategy inventory Language Learning* (Questions 6-55);
- *Few more questions* (Questions 56-68).

4.3.2 First part: general background information

The first part of the questionnaire allowed to collect data on students' socio-demographic and educational background. Questions from 1 to 5 gathered information concerning gender (*Question 1*), native language (*Question 2*), continent of origin (*Question 3*), age (*Question 4*), and current level of Italian (*Question 5*).

Gender

The first question is on participants' gender, which is one of the most common questions in questionnaires. However, in this case, it turned out to be a rather thorny issue. The first version of the questionnaire indeed included the classic binary distinction between *male* and *female*. However, the teachers of the Institute pointed out that in Australia the issue of gender is deeply felt, and it does not have to be underestimated. Thus, they advised me not to limit the options to the binary distinction between men and women, and to include at least the options "*other*" and "*I don't want to disclose it*". According to them, without this editing, many participants would have refused to fill in the questionnaire, feeling offended by the request to strictly identify themselves as a man or a woman.

Native language and Continent of Origin

Although the target participants were all living in Australia, the questionnaire includes also questions on the mother tongue (*Question 2*) and continent of origin (*Question 3*).

The decision derived from the fact that Australia has the world's eighth-largest high rate of foreign-born inhabitants and a large percentage of second- and third-generation migrants. Therefore, it could had happened that, among the IIC students, there was someone who was not Australian-born or who did not speak English as First Language.

Age

Question 4 asked participants to select their age group. The age range have been divided according to the categorization provided by Bee and Bjorklund (2000), which is often adopted in the national and international literature. The two scholars classify adult life into five main stages:

- *Young Adulthood* (18-25 years old);
- *Early Adulthood* (26-40 years old);
- *Middle Adulthood* (41-65 years old);
- *Late Adulthood* (66-75 years old);
- *Late, Late Adulthood* (more than 75 years old).

Current level of Italian

Question 5 asked students to select their current level of Italian, considering the course level to which they were attending, or attended, at the Institute.

Although Australia does not officially adopt the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), it was decided to use its levels of proficiency because students at the IIC are familiar with them. Indeed, the Italian language courses offered at the IIC are structured according to the Common European Framework of Reference, i.e. A1 classes, A2 classes, B1 classes, ect (https://iicsydney.esteri.it/iic_sydney/it). Also, before enrolling, students take an assessment test based on the CEFR levels in order to be placed into the most suitable course level.

4.3.3 Second part: The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

Questions from 6 to 55 contains the fifty statements of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford & Burry-Stock 1995; Oxford 1990).

The SILL was designed for the first time in 1986 by Rebecca Oxford as an instrument for assessing the frequency of use of language learning strategies by students at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California (Oxford & Burry-Stock 1995).

Over the years, the Inventory has been implemented and translated into many languages; today it is the most used rating scale employed to assess LLS use in foreign and second language learning.

The structure of the SILL

The 7.0 version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning used in this study (Oxford 1989b) is a 50-item instrument divided into six parts, corresponding to the six strategy groups identified by Oxford in her taxonomy (3.5.2). Each statement, adapted to learning Italian as a foreign language, describes the use of one strategy. The six categories include:

- *Memory-related strategies* (Items 1 to 9);
- *Cognitive strategies* (Items 10 to 23);
- *Compensation strategies* (Items 24 to 29);
- *Metacognitive strategies* (Items 30 to 38);
- *Affective strategies* (Items 39 to 44);
- *Social strategies* (Items 45 to 50).

The SILL uses a five-points Likert scale to assess the use of each strategy. Each participant had to tick the number that best described what he does or does not to learn Italian. Each number stands for the level of frequency of use:

- 1- *Never true;*
- 2- *Usually not true;*
- 3- *Somewhat true;*
- 4- *Usually true;*
- 5- *Always true;*

Oxford's model of language learning strategies and the SILL were chosen for three main reasons. First, among the different taxonomies of strategies presented by researchers in the last 50 years, Rebecca Oxford's classification is the most detailed one, with the largest

number of subcategories. Therefore, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning allows to obtain a comprehensive view on the learner's strategy use.

Secondly, in contrast with other taxonomies, Oxford's model considers compensation strategies and memory-related strategies as categories on their own, therefore the SILL results allow a detailed and in-depth analysis.

Thirdly, the Strategic Inventory for Language Learning offers participants practical examples of strategy use; thus, it is easier for them to reflect on their own actions and provides more accurate data.

4.3.4 Third part: questions on cognitive and affective variables

The last part of the questionnaire focuses on respondents' personal opinions about learning a foreign language in adulthood, and affective factors involved in language acquisition. In order to let each respondent to express his detailed opinions and impressions about adult language learning, most of the questions were purposely designed as open-ended questions.

Question 56 asks participants to describe the reasons why they want to learn Italian. Questions 57 to 66 consider more cognitive aspects and ask learners what do they think is the effect of age on language learning (*Question 57*), if they think that learning a foreign language at their age is different from learning it as a child or adolescent (*Question 58*), and which of the four basic language skills are the easiest (*Question 61*) or the most difficult ones (*Question 63*) to improve according to their FL learning experience.

The last two questions target affective factors, i.e. feeling comfortable when using Italian (*Question 67*) and anxiety (*Question 68*).

4.4 Data collection

The link to the online questionnaire was sent to each student of the IIC through the institutional e-mail on the Institute. Data was collected anonymously, and students were not asked to provide their personal emails before submitting their answers.

Almost 250 students who were studying, or had studied, Italian at the Italian Cultural Institute in Sydney during my stay as intern received the email with the link to the questionnaire. A total of 163 responses has been collected.

4.5 Analysis of data

As mentioned before, Google Forms automatically collects data into a single worksheet and provides graphs and percentages. This information was used as a basis for a larger analysis, carried out in Excel, where data was processed and interpreted taking into account each research question.

More specifically, all data provided by Google Forms for each age group have been entered manually into two separate Excel worksheets – one for quantitative data analysis and the other one for qualitative data analysis - in order to gather all age groups responses.

4.5.1 Quantitative data analysis

The first Excel worksheet focuses on quantitative data and has been organized with variables (i.e. 50 learning strategies and age groups) as the rows and the cases (i.e. Likert-scale points) as the columns. An individual cell, thus, contained a group age's evaluation of a specific strategy.

Having reported all the age groups' answers to every question in the Excel worksheet, the process of analysis has been divided into two parts. First, the statistical function SOMMA was used to sum all the answers for each Likert-scale point. Secondly, the analysis concerned the calculation of the percentages for each scale point given to each question.

4.5.2 Qualitative data analysis

The second Excel worksheet gathered qualitative data. Since open-ended questions are rather difficult to count mathematically, to carry out the analysis of qualitative data answers to each question were divided into macro-categories, to which a number was then assigned.

Chapter Five

Results and Discussion

The following chapter aims at presenting the questionnaire results and discussing the main trends. First, an overview on background information will be given. The second part focuses on the SILL questionnaire, presenting data on the use of language learning strategies. Through quantitative data analysis, this section explores the main trends concerning adult learners LLS use and the relationship between the use of language learning strategies and age group of belonging. The third and final part discusses qualitative data about adult learners' perceptions on learning Italian as a foreign language in adulthood, the most difficult and easiest language skills to develop as adults, foreign language learning motivation and language learning anxiety.

5.1 Background information

The following paragraphs show results concerning the first part of the questionnaire, which collected information on respondents' gender, first language, continent of origin, age, and level of proficiency.

5.1.1 Gender

A broad majority of female adult students participated into the research, namely 68,7% of total respondents. On the other side, male participants were almost 29,5%. Three people did not want to disclose their gender (Table 6).

	Frequency	%
Male	48	29,4
Female	112	68,7
Other	0	0
I don't want to disclose it	3	1,8

Table 6. Gender

5.1.2 First Language

Table 7 provides information about participants' native language. Unsurprisingly, the great majority of the IIC students who filled in the questionnaire are English native speakers (91,4%). 8,6% of adult learners at the Institute do not have English as their first language. The other languages reported in the questionnaire are Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbian, Croatian and Greek.

	Frequency	%
English	149	91,4
Other	14	8,6

Table 7. First language

5.1.3 Continent of Origin

The vast majority of respondents (86%) were Australian-born (Table 8). However, data also reveals the presence of internationals living in Australia, coming mainly from Europe (9%) and North America (2,5%). A smaller number of respondents were born in Asia (1,9%) and South America (0,6%).

	Frequency	%
Oceania	140	85,9
Europe	15	9,2
North America	4	2,5
South America	1	0,6
Asia	3	1,8
Africa	0	0

Table 8. Continent of Origin

5.1.4 Age

Table 9 provides information about participants in relation to their age group of belonging. The largest group is that of *Late Adults* (66-75), followed by *Middle Adults* (41-65) and *Young Adults* (18-25). Participants aged over 75 years - i.e. *Late, Late Adults* - are 17,2% of respondents; finally, the smallest group is that of *Early Adults* (26-40).

	Frequency	%
Young Adults	33	20,2
Early Adults	22	13,5
Middle Adults	35	21,5
Late Adults	45	27,6
Late, late Adults	28	17,2

Table 9. Age

5.1.5 Level of Proficiency

Most participants (27%) who participated to the study affirm to have reached an Intermediate level of Italian, namely the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Subsequently, there is a significant participation of Upper-Intermediate students (21,5%) and Advanced students (22,1%); 17,2% of participants are Beginners, whereas only 12,3% of respondents are Absolute Beginners (Table 10).

	Frequency	%
Absolute Beginners (A1)	20	12,3
Beginners (A2)	28	17,2
Intermediate (B1)	44	27
Upper Intermediate (B2)	35	21,5
Advanced (C1-C2)	36	22,1

Table 10. Level of proficiency

5.2 Language Learning Strategies and Adult Learners: a general overview

In the following paragraphs, the results are discussed in the context of the following research question:

- *Which Language Learning Strategies are the most and least used by adult FL learners?*

To rank order strategies from the most frequently employed to the least used ones, adult learners' SILL replies have been analysed using frequency statistic and following Rebecca Oxford's scale of strategy use (1990).

Oxford categorises strategy frequency of use into three levels - i.e. *High*, *Medium* and *Low* - on a scale of 1 to 5. Language learning strategies with a mean score between 3.5 and 5.0 reported a high range use, strategies with an average score between 2.5 and 3.4 are employed with medium frequency of use, whereas strategies with a mean score between 1.0 and 2.4 reported a low range of use (Table 11).

Frequency	Use of Strategy	Range
High	<i>Always or almost always used</i>	4.5 to 5.0
	<i>Usually used</i>	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	<i>Sometimes used</i>	2.5 to 3.4
Low	<i>Generally used</i>	1.5 to 2.4
	<i>Never or almost never used</i>	1.0 to 1.4

Table 11. Levels of strategy frequency of use

Findings reveals that, in general, adult learners at the IIC in Sydney make a medium use of language learning strategies. Indeed, the mean score of the overall SILL for all participants is 3.33, suggesting that, on average, adult learners occasionally employ learning strategies when leaning Italian as a foreign language. Specifically, as can be observed in detail in Table 12, mean scores for students in the six main categories of language strategies range from 3.80 to 2.67.

Strategy Category	M	Frequency	Rank
Metacognitive strategies	3.80	<i>High use</i>	1
Social strategies	3.79	<i>High use</i>	2
Cognitive strategies	3.44	<i>Medium use</i>	3
Compensatory strategies	3.41	<i>Medium use</i>	4
Memory-related strategies	2.77	<i>Medium use</i>	5
Affective strategies	2.67	<i>Medium use</i>	6
Overall SILL	3.33		

Table 12. Frequency of use of LLS categories

Also, results reported in Table 10 indicate that all the language learning strategies employed by adult foreign language students fall in the medium frequency of use, except for metacognitive and social strategies which are adopted more frequently. Adult learners employ language learning strategies in the following order: metacognitive, social, cognitive, compensatory, memory-related, and, finally, affective strategies.

Table 13 indicates percentages of frequency of high, medium, and low use for each category.

	High Frequency	Medium Frequency	Low Frequency
	%	%	%
<i>Metacognitive strategies</i>	76,1	22,1	1,8
<i>Social strategies</i>	76,1	17,2	6,7
<i>Cognitive strategies</i>	50,9	43,6	5,5
<i>Compensatory strategies</i>	52,8	37,4	9,8
<i>Memory-related strategies</i>	12,9	63,8	23,3
<i>Affective strategies</i>	14,7	45,4	39,9
<i>Overall SILL</i>	44,2	46	9,8

Table 13. Frequency of use of LLS categories (percentages)

Approximately 44% of adult students report adopting language learning strategies in high range use; 46% of them report themselves as moderate users of language learning strategies, whereas only about 10% state that they use these strategies in the low range.

Metacognitive strategies result to be the most frequently used among all the six categories of language learning strategies ($M = 3.80$), with more than 76% of students reporting a high frequency of use for this category and about 22% declaring a medium use. Less than 2% report a low use for metacognitive strategies.

Metacognitive strategies are followed by social strategies, which have an average score of 3.79. 76% of adults employ social strategies very frequently, nearly 17% in the medium range and about 7% in the low range.

Cognitive strategies are in third position ($M = 3.44$). Almost 51% of students consider themselves as highly habitual users of this category of strategies, nearly 44% as occasional users and almost 6% as poor users.

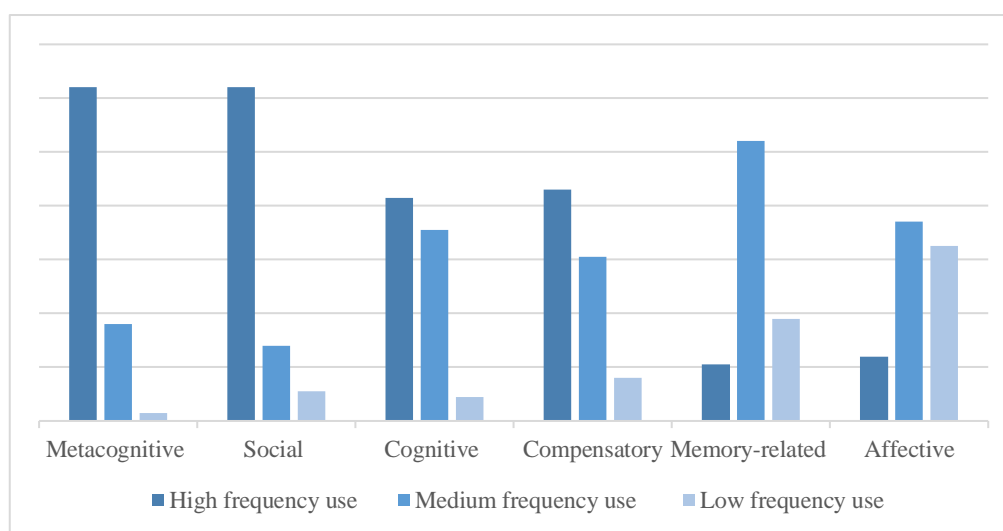
In the category of compensatory strategies, ranked fourth ($M = 3.4$), 52,8% of adult FL learners reveal that they highly adopt cognitive strategies, approximately 37% employed them in a moderate frequency, whereas almost 10% fall in the low range of use.

Adult learners show a lower tendency to employ memory-related strategies, ranking them as the fifth preferred strategy category. Only 13% of adults state that they highly adopt

memory-related strategies, whereas almost 64% use them only sometimes. On the contrary, 23% of students specify that they generally never or rarely use memory-related strategies.

Finally, affective strategies are the least frequently used among the six LLS categories. They are employed in a high frequency by 14,7% of adult learners, nearly 45% in a medium frequency and almost 40% in a low frequency use.

Results are shown in graph form below (Graph 1).



Graph 1. Frequency of use of LLS categories

Data concerning pattern of strategy preference in adult learners is consistent with previous research findings, which demonstrated that adult foreign language learners feature a more frequent and efficient use of metacognitive strategies than their younger counterparts. This tendency is due to adult learners' advanced cognitive and metacognitive functions, which allow students to be more aware of themselves and their learning process (Oxford 1989a) and understand the importance of centering, arranging, planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning process and progress (Lee and Oxford 2008). Therefore, the greater preference for metacognitive strategies was highly predictable.

On the contrary, results concerning social strategies were unexpected for two main reasons. First, previous studies on the correlation between LLS use and age showed that adult FL learners are less likely to use social strategies than younger foreign language students (Lee and Oxford 2008).

Secondly, adult students learn Italian in a foreign language learning context, attending to a 2.5 hours lesson per week over a 10-week period. Since social strategies involve

interaction, communication and cooperation with others, it was quite unpredictable that adult learners in this study would report a high use of them because, excluding the classroom environment, FL learning contexts often lack direct exposure to the target language. In FL learning context, indeed, opportunities to socially practice outside the class are very limited if compared to second language learning contexts. The lack of exposure to the Italian language makes the learning context in Australia a partially poor environment to employ social strategies, yet students showed a high tendency to ask questions, ask for help from Italian native speakers, ask others to slow down or repeat in order for them to understand, ask Italian native speakers for corrections, and learn about the Italian culture.

Lack of direct exposure to Italian might explain why cognitive strategies are ranked third. Adult learners might try to compensate lack of direct interaction with practicing techniques such as repeating, practicing with sounds and writing systems, reading, watching Italian media and so on.

On the other side, affective strategies are reported at the bottom of preference ranking for adult students of Italian as a foreign language. The infrequent use of affective strategies might be attributed to the fact that adult learners are not aware of the important role of affective strategies in increasing motivation, having positive attitudes in FL learning, and lowering anxiety. They might also believe that language learning and emotions are not completely related. However, a greater use of affective strategies would be extremely beneficial to adult learners to overcome affective barriers.

As explained in Chapter Two, anxiety, stress and hyper-emotionality can negatively affect adult foreign language learning; employing affective strategies could therefore help them mastering the fear of making mistakes and being judged or feeling under pressure (Begotti 2019; Griffiths 2008).

5.3 Language Learning Strategies and Age Groups

Table 14 provides information about the LLS range use for each age group.

	High Frequency	Medium Frequency	Low Frequency	Mean
	%	%	%	
Young Adults	39,4	57,6	3	3.5***
Early Adults	36,4	54,5	9,1	3.3**
Middle Adults	34,3	62,9	2,9	3.3**
Late Adults	44,4	51,1	4,4	3.4**
Late, late Adults	25	71,4	3,6	3.2**

Table 14. Adults learners and LLS frequency of use

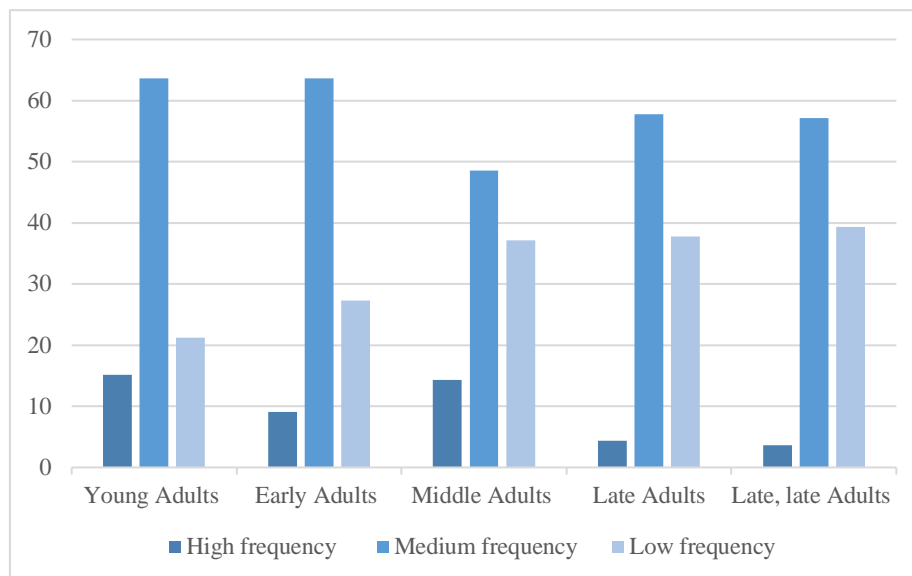
Overall, Young Adults are the only ones who result to be frequent users of language learning strategies (M=3.5), whereas the other groups report themselves as moderate users of language learning strategies. Therefore, Young Adults are followed, in order of average LLS use, by Late Adults (M=3.4), Early Adults and Middle Adults (M=3.3) and, finally, Late, late Adults (M=3.2). Furthermore, results show that, in conjunction with ageing, the frequency of LLS use gradually, though slightly, decreases: 0.3 scale points separate the highest (Young Adults: M=3.5) from the lowest average score (Late, late Adults: M=3.2).

In the following sections, the frequency of use for each category set and each individual strategy will be illustrated in graphs and discussed in relation to the five different age groups. In the final paragraph the main trends of LLS categories use will be indicated.

5.3.1 Memory-related strategies and age groups

Memory-related strategies are ranked in fifth position in the general classification of language learning strategies and are moderately used by all age groups. Specifically, Young Adults (M=2.9) employ memory-related strategies more frequently than the other age ranges and are followed in order by Early Adults (M=2.8) and Middle Adults (M=2.7). Late Adults and Late, late Adults use memory-related strategies the least (M=2.6).

Graph 2 shows that the use of memory-related strategies progressively declines concurrently with ageing: percentages of high and medium frequency of use indeed steadily decrease with advancing age, while low frequency of use rise concomitantly.

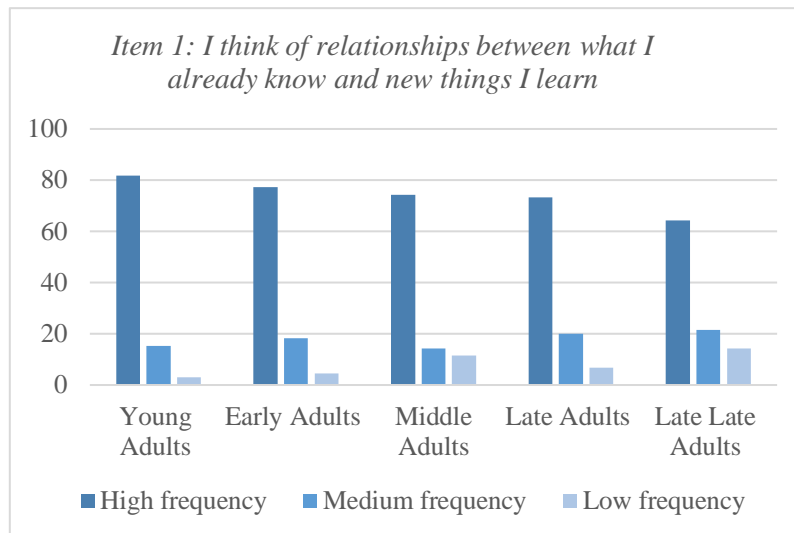


Graph 2. Memory-related strategies use and age groups

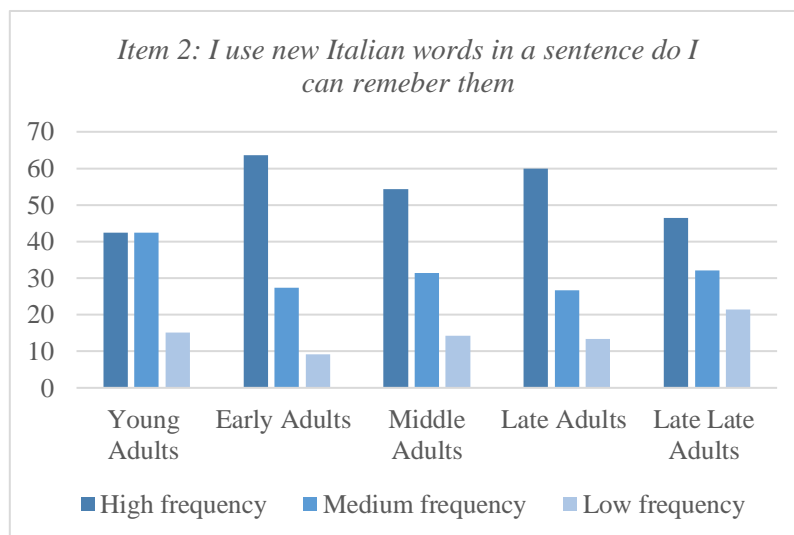
According to Rebecca Oxford's taxonomy, memory-related strategies consist of four strategy subsets: (1) creating mental linkages, (2) applying images and sounds, (3) reviewing, and (4) employing actions. Overall, creating mental linkages (M=3.3) and reviewing (M=3.3) are the two most moderately used types of memory-related strategies by adult learners, followed by applying images and sounds (M=2.5); only employing action strategies fall in the low range of use (M=1.9).

In the SILL questionnaire, creating mental linkages strategies include thinking of relationships between what is already known and what is new (*Item 1*), using new words in sentences in order to remember them better (*Item 2*), and remembering words or phrases by recalling their location on the page or the board (*Item 9*).

Item 1 is the most frequently used strategy among the three listed above. Young Adults are the most frequent users (81,8%), followed in order of age ranges by the other groups. Late, late Adults feature the highest number of medium users (21,4%) and poor users (14,3%). The graph below shows a decline of frequent users concurrently with a rise of occasional users and poor users.

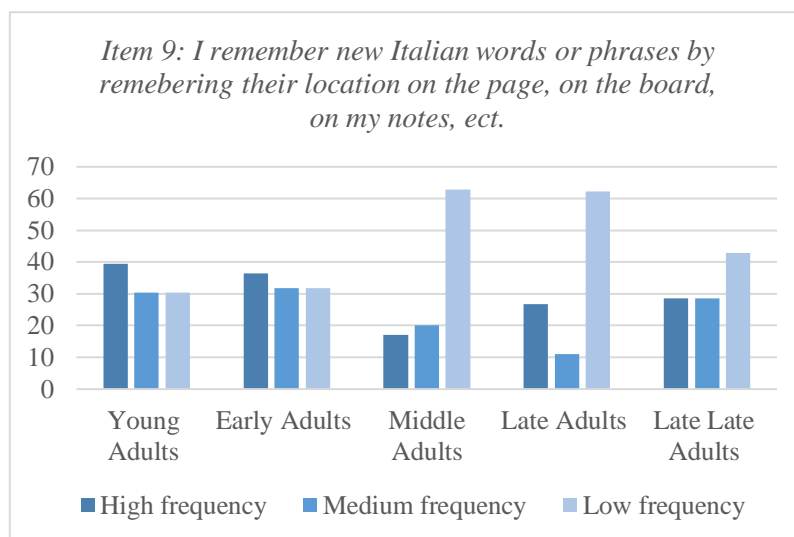


A different trend is displayed in relation to using new words in sentences to remember them better (*Item 2*). Findings indicate that Young Adults and Late, late Adults employ this strategy the least since the two groups report the highest percentage of poor users (Late, late Adults: 21,4%) and the lowest number of frequent users (Young Adults: 42,4%). Early Adults adopt this strategy the most, with a percentage of frequent users that exceeds 60% and the lowest number of poor users (9,1%). On average, Middle Adults (M=3.5) and Late Adults (M=3.6) use this strategy in the high range as well.



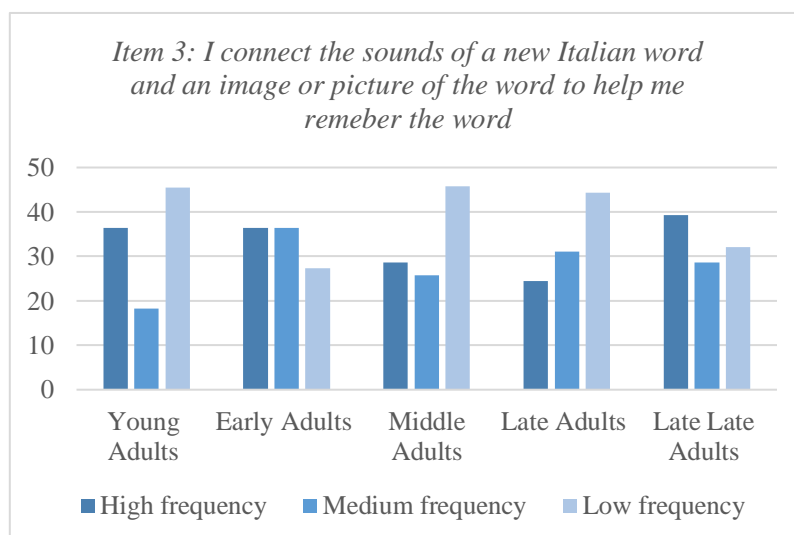
Results of *Item 9* suggest another trend. First, unlike the two previous items, the average score of this strategy is 2.9, indicating only a moderate frequency of use. Secondly, only Young Adults and Early Adults feature a larger number of frequent users, which however does not reach 40% (Young Adults: 39,4%; Early Adults: 36,4%). On the contrary, a

substantial number of Middle Adults (62,8%), Late Adults (62,2%) and Late, late Adults (42,9%) rarely or sporadically use it.

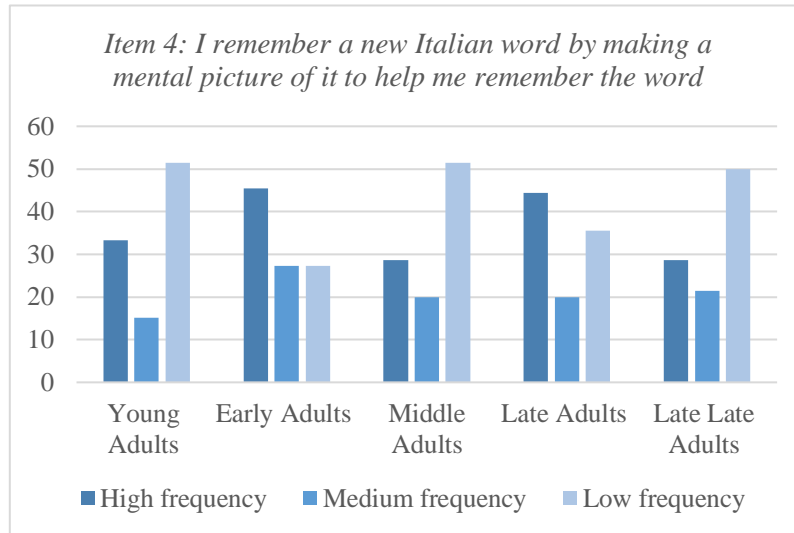


Overall, all age groups are medium users of applying images and sounds strategies, except for Late Adults, who use this set of strategies in a low range of use (M=2.4). In Rebecca Oxford’s taxonomy, applying images and sounds strategies includes three subsets: connecting sounds and pictures to remember better (*Item 3*), making mental pictures of new words (*Item 4*), and using rhymes (*Item 5*).

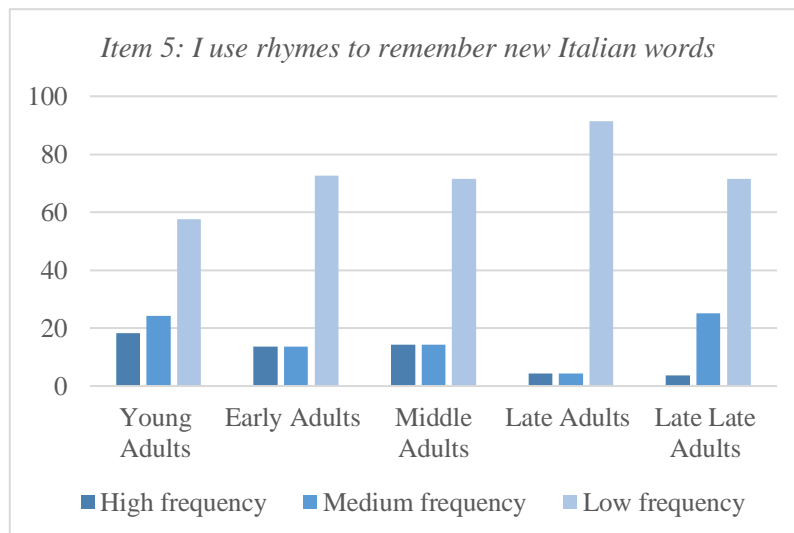
Over 44% of Young, Middle and Late Adults state that they never or rarely connect sounds and pictures to remember words better (*Item 3*); specifically, Middle Adults result to be the group which employ this strategy the least. On the contrary, the larger number of Late, late Adults (39,3%) frequently employ it. In Early Adults the number of frequent users (36,4%) equals that of occasional users (36,4%), whether 27,3% sporadically use this strategy.



Concerning *Item 4*, Young Adults and Middle Adults still result to be the two groups with the highest percentages of low frequency of use, 51,5% and 51,4% respectively; they are followed by Late, late Adults (50%). Unlike them, Early Adults and Late Adults make mental pictures of new words to remember better more frequently, although the percentages of high frequency of use does not reach 50%.

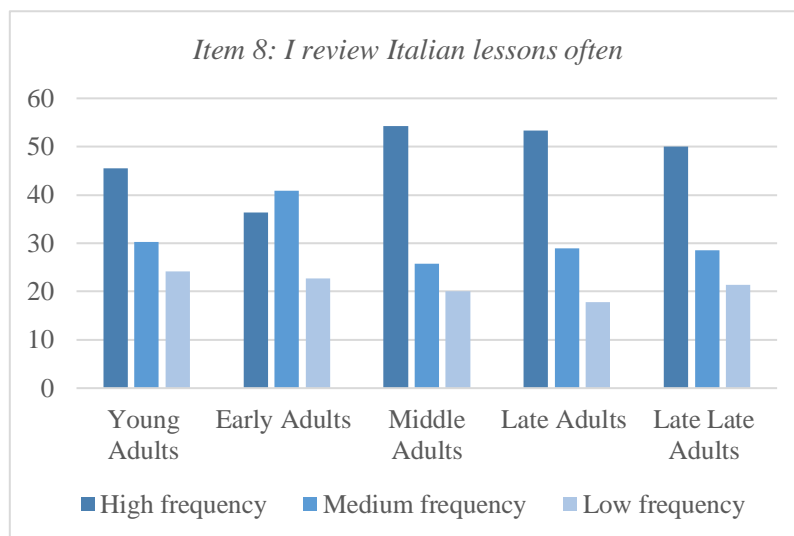


Finally, using rhymes is rarely or sporadically used by all age groups. Specifically, results concerning Late Adults are the most extreme, with over 90% of poor users and less than 10% of moderate and regular users. Young Adults have the highest percentage of frequent users (nearly 20%) and Late, late Adults the highest percentage of Late, late Adults (25%).



Reviewing (*Item 8*) is the second most frequently employed memory-related strategy. As the graph below shows, results of high frequency of use are higher in the three older groups,

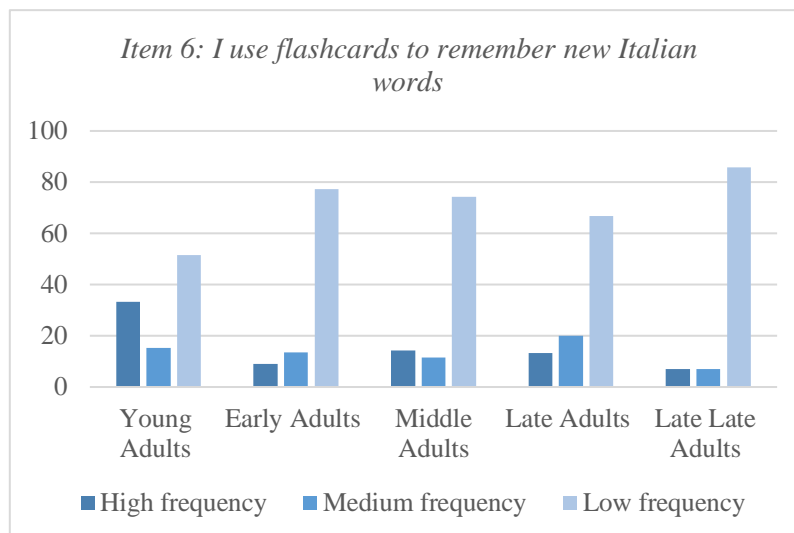
whose frequent users equal or exceed 50%, contrary to Young (45,5%) and Early Adults (36,4%). Furthermore, most Early Adults report reviewing more moderately rather than frequently.



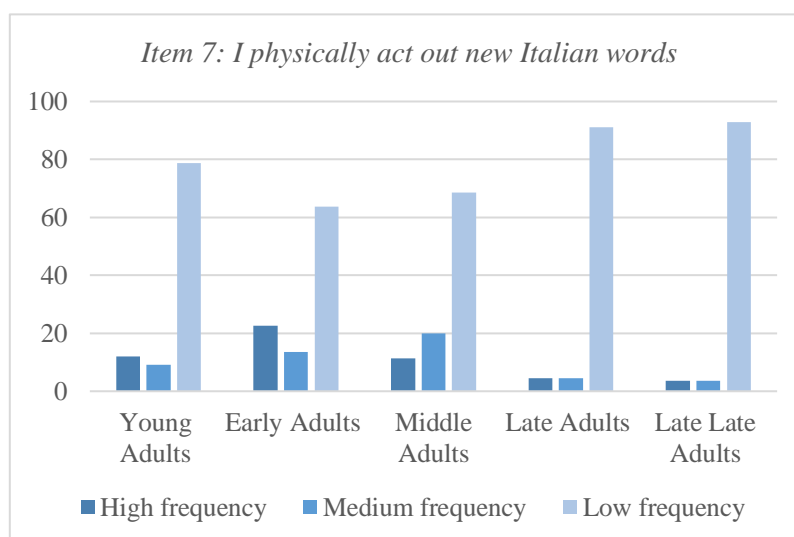
The last set of memory-related strategies includes employing action strategies. Average scores illustrate that all age groups are low users with respect to this strategy type. Furthermore, ageing leads to a gradual decrease in frequency of use (Young Adults: M=2.2; Early Adults: M=2.0; Middle Adults: M=1.9; Late Adults: M=1.7; Late, late Adults: M=1.6).

Employing actions strategies comprise using flashcards for recalling information (*Item 6*), and physically acting out new words to remember them better (*Item 7*).

In general, flashcards (*Item 6*) are rarely or never adopted by adult learners, whose percentage of low frequency of use exceeds 50% in all age groups, reaching 85% in the Late, late Adults group. However, data shows that more than 30% of Young Adults employ this memory-related strategy more frequently, resulting to be the only group reporting a moderate use of flashcard, whereas the other groups use it in the low range.



Physically acting out new words (*Item 7*) is the least used among all memory-related strategy and the least used by all groups. Nevertheless, comparison of data shows that Young Adults ($M=1.9$), Early Adults ($M=2.2$) and Middle Adults ($M=1.9$) employ this strategy more frequently than Late Adults ($M=1.5$) and Late, late Adults ($M=1.5$). In the first three younger groups, indeed, results of high and medium frequency of use exceed 10%, while in Late Adults and Late, late Adults these percentages does not even reach 5%.

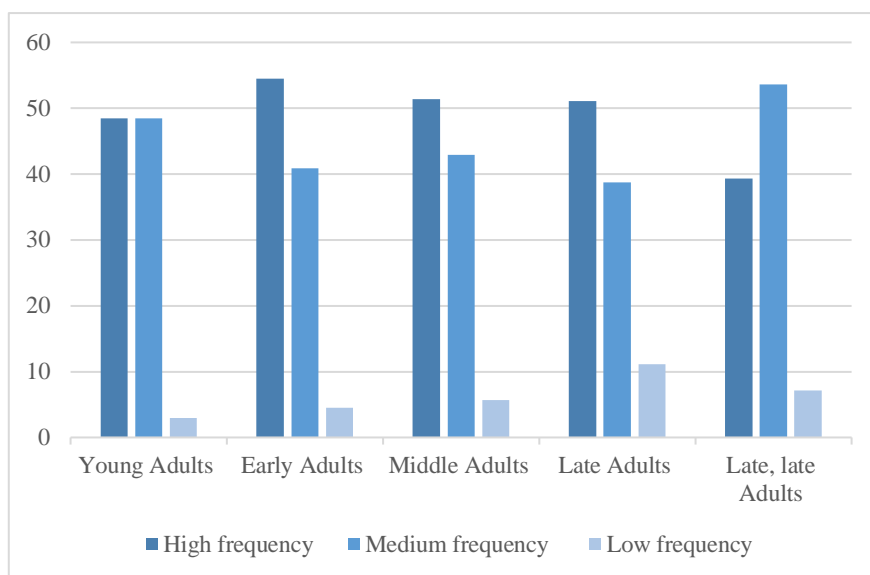


5.3.2 Cognitive strategies and age groups

Cognitive strategies are the third most frequently used language learning strategies by adult learners who participated in this study. However, comparison of findings indicates that only Young Adults report to be extensive users of cognitive strategies ($M=3.5$), whereas

Early, Middle and Late Adults lie on the borderline between high and medium frequency of use, with an average score of 3.4. Late, late Adults' mean score is the lowest (M=3.2), but still within the medium range.

Graph 3 illustrates that Young Adults feature an equal number of regular users and occasional users (both 48,5%); however, the number of poor users is the lowest among all groups (3%). Early, Middle and Late Adults are still characterized by a majority of habitual users, respectively 54,4%, 51,4% and 51,1%. However, regular users decrease concurrently with the growth of poor users, which reaches its peak in Late Adults (11,1%). Only in the Late, late Adults group, the number of medium users (53,6%) exceeds the number of frequent users (39,3%). In all age groups, poor users are minimal, although a trend of growth in conjunction with ageing can be observed, with the maximum peak in Late Adults.



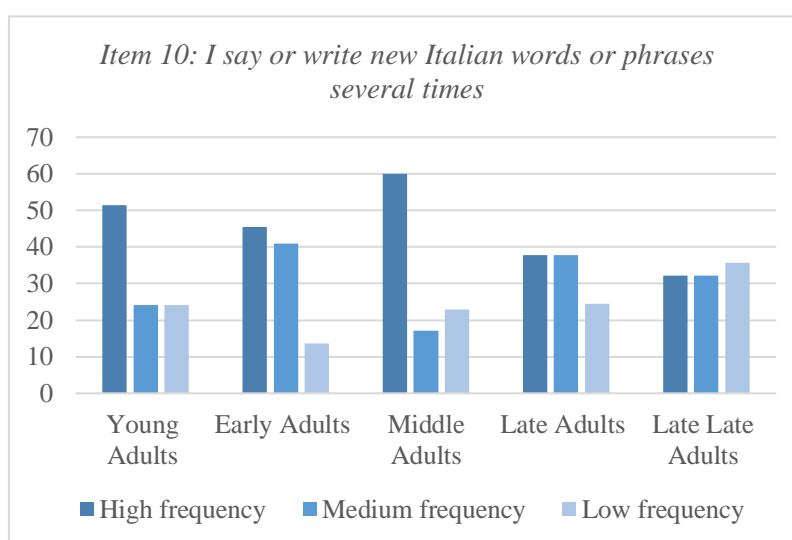
Graph 3. Cognitive strategies use and age groups

According to Oxford's taxonomy, cognitive strategies consist of four subsets, namely (1) practicing, (2) receiving and sending messages, (3) analysing and reasoning, and (4) creating structure for input and output. Overall, practicing strategies (M=3.5) and analysing and reasoning strategies (M=3.5) are regularly used by adult learners, while receiving and sending messages strategies (M=3.3) and creating structures strategies (M=2.9) are only moderately employed.

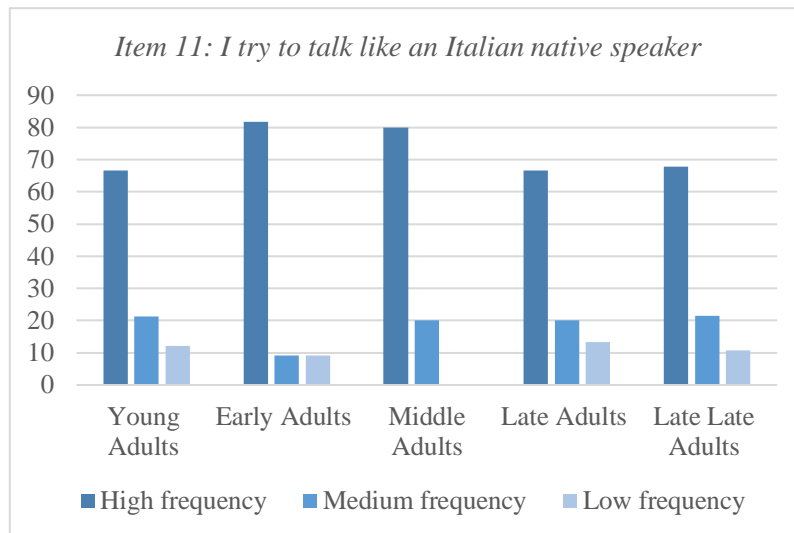
Practicing strategies are the most numerous, consisting of eight different items in the SILL: saying or writing new Italian words several times (*Item 10*), trying to talk like a native speaker (*Item 11*), practicing the sounds of Italian (*Item 12*), using words differently (*Item*

13), starting a conversation in Italian (*Item 14*), watching Italian media (*Item 15*), reading for pleasure in Italian (*Item 16*), and trying to find patterns in Italian (*Item 20*).

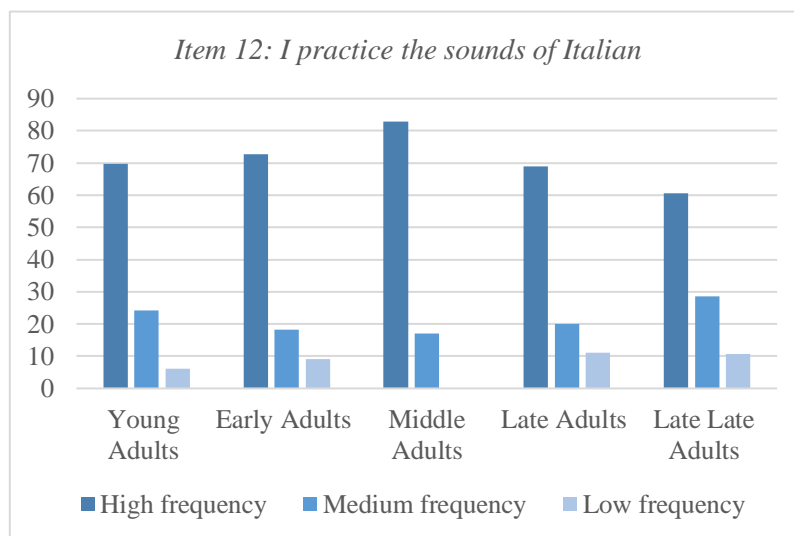
The SILL scores per group indicate that the first practicing strategy (*Item 10*) is more frequently used by Young Adults (M=3.5), Early Adults (M=3.5) and Middle Adults (M=3.6); the latter specifically have the highest percentage of frequent users (60%). On the contrary, most Late Adults (M=3.3) and Late, late Adults (M=2.8) employ the strategy only moderately. Particularly, Late Adults have the same percentage of high and medium frequency of use, while students over 75 exceed 35% per number of poor users, against regular and occasional users (both 32,1%).



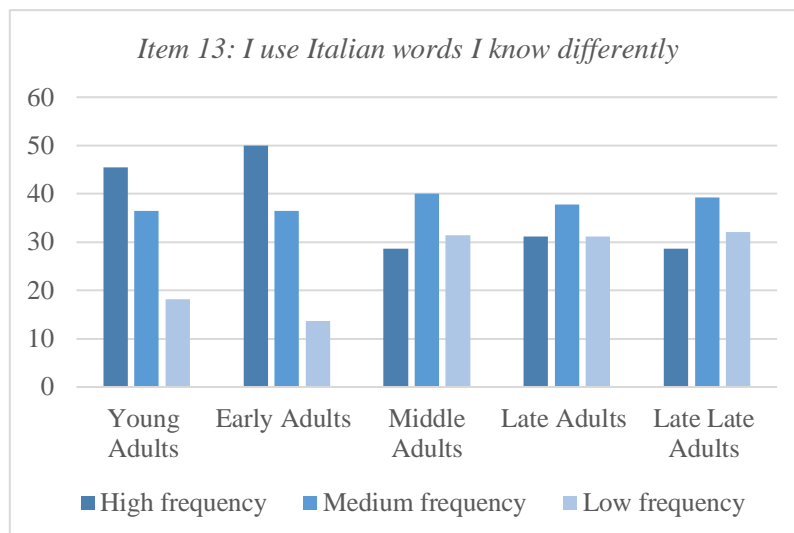
Item 11 concerns the cognitive strategy of trying to talk like an Italian native speaker, which, along with *Item 12*, appears to be the most frequently used among all cognitive strategies and by all age groups (M=4.0). The most frequent users are Early Adults (81,8%), followed by Middle Adults (80%); the latter, in particular, feature 0% of poor users. Young Adults, Late Adults and Late, late Adults still employ this strategy extensively and each group overcomes 60% of high frequency of use.



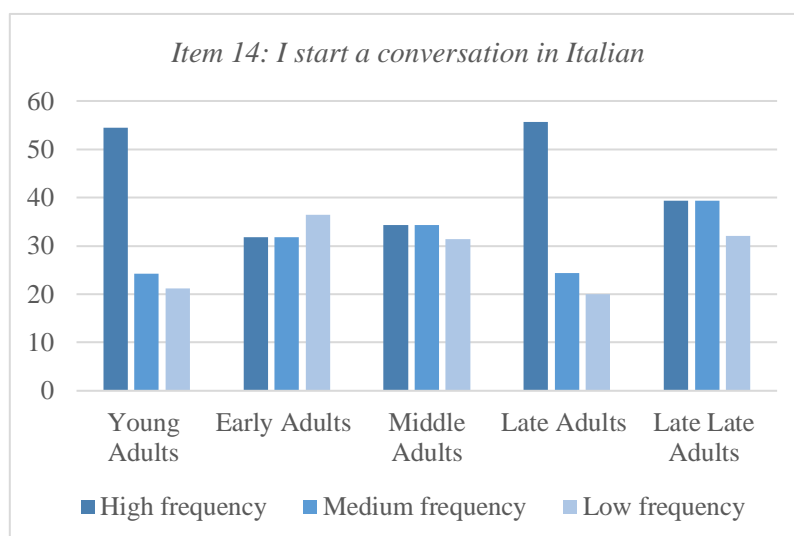
Findings on *Item 12* display a very similar trend. All groups frequently practice the sounds of Italian, and Middle Adults report the most frequent use of this strategy. The graph also illustrates an increasing trend of use from Young Adults to Middle Adults; after 65 the growing trend starts descending, until reaching its lowest point in Late, late Adults. However, percentages of high frequency of use still exceed 60%.



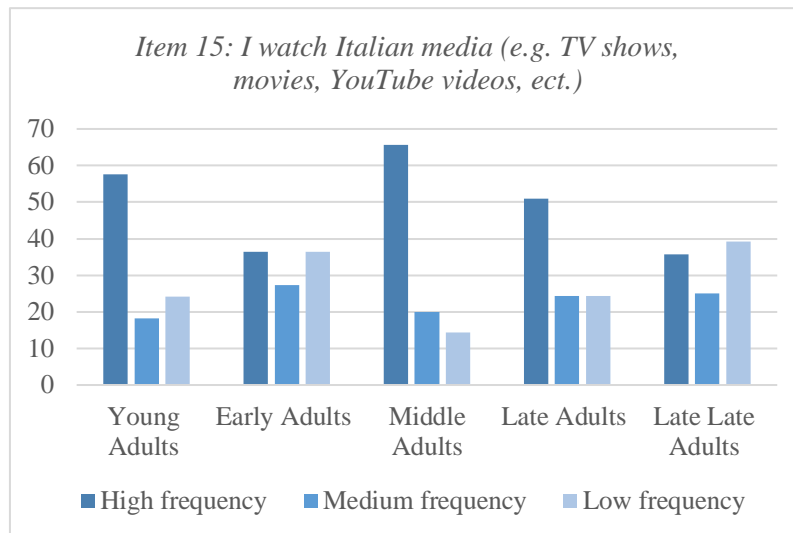
Frequency of use regarding *Item 13* differ more from group to group. This strategy is most frequently used by younger students - i.e. Early Adults (50%) and Young Adults (45,5%). In the three older groups the highest percentages refer to medium frequency of use, followed by low range of use. On average, this strategy is moderately employed by adults (M=3.1).



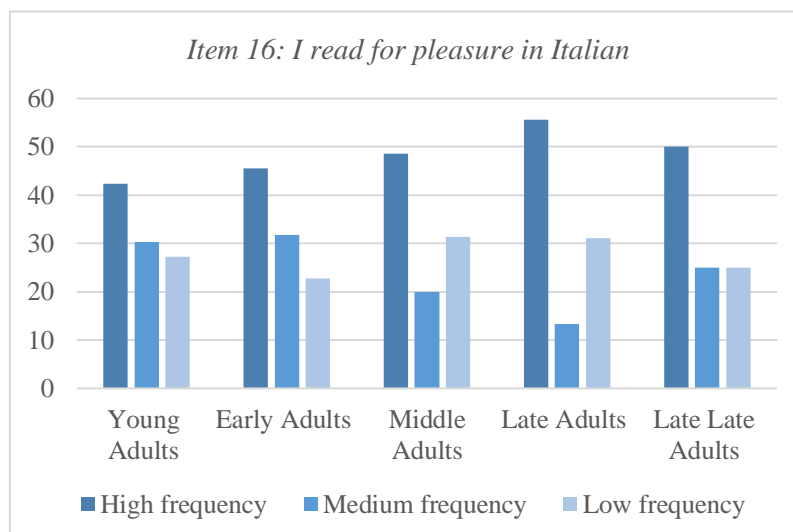
Mean strategy scores indicate that only Young Adults ($M=3.5$) and Late Adults ($M=3.5$) are frequent strategy users with respect to *Item 14*. In the group of Early Adults most students never or sporadically start a conversation in Italian, whereas in Middle Adults and Late, late Adults data concerning high frequency of use equals that of medium frequency of use. On average, Late, late Adults ($M=3.2$) employ this strategy more frequently than Middle Adults ($M=3.1$).



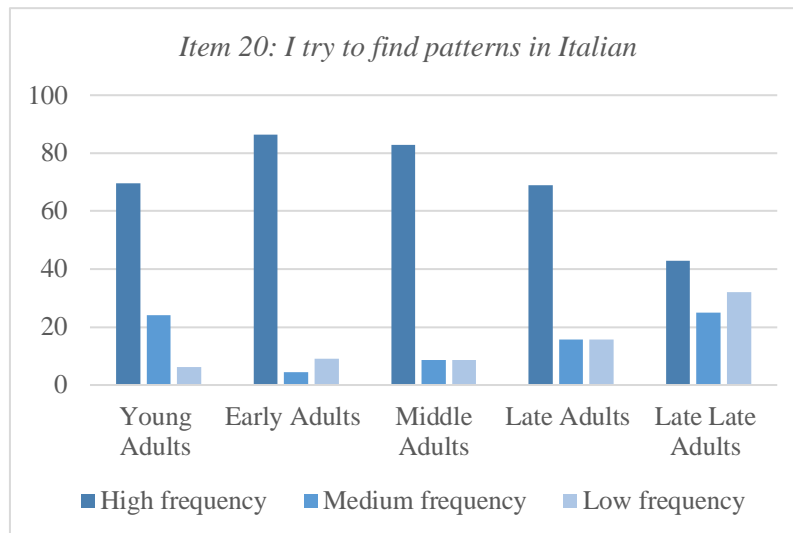
The majority of Young Adults (57,6%), Middle Adults (65,7%) and Late Adults (51%) frequently watch Italian media, while frequent users (36,4%) are equal to poor users (36,4%) in Early Adults. Almost 40% of Late, late Adults sporadically or never watch Italian media, whereas lowest percentages report a regular or moderate use, respectively 35,7% and 25%.



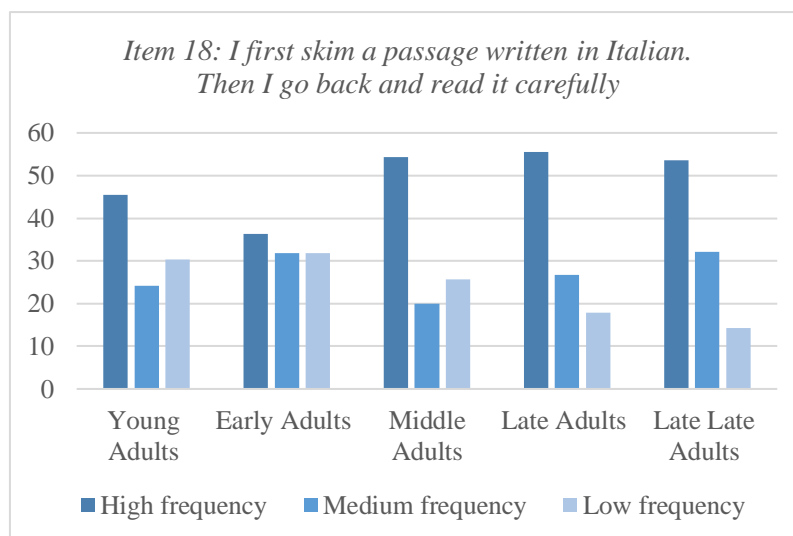
Reading for pleasure in Italian (*Item 16*) is regularly used by the majority of students in all groups. The graph shows an increasing percentage of high frequency of use, concurrently with ageing, which reaches the highest peak in Late Adults. Different trends can be observed in relation to medium and low frequency of use. In Young and Early Adults moderate users are more numerous than poor users, whereas in Middle and Late Adults this pattern is reversed. In Late, late Adults the two percentages are equal (25%).



The last practicing strategy (*Item 20*) is frequently employed by the majority of Young Adults (69,7%), Early Adults (86,4%), Middle Adults (82,9%) and Late Adults (68,9%): all groups report a frequent use of this strategy, with average scores between 3.8 and 4.2. Only Late, late Adults are, on average, moderate users with respect to *Item 20* (M=3.1). Indeed, in the oldest group nearly frequent users are nearly 43%, followed by poor users (32,1%) and moderate users (25%).



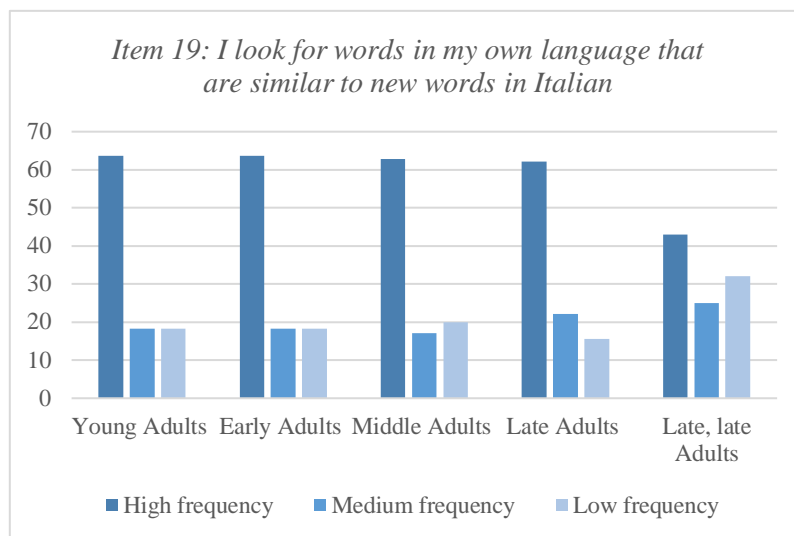
Receiving and sending messages strategies refer to skimming technique (*Item 18*), i.e. reading over the passage quickly to understand the general meaning and then going back and reading it carefully. Mean strategy scores suggest that all age groups employ this strategy occasionally, except Late Adults, who fall in the high range of users.



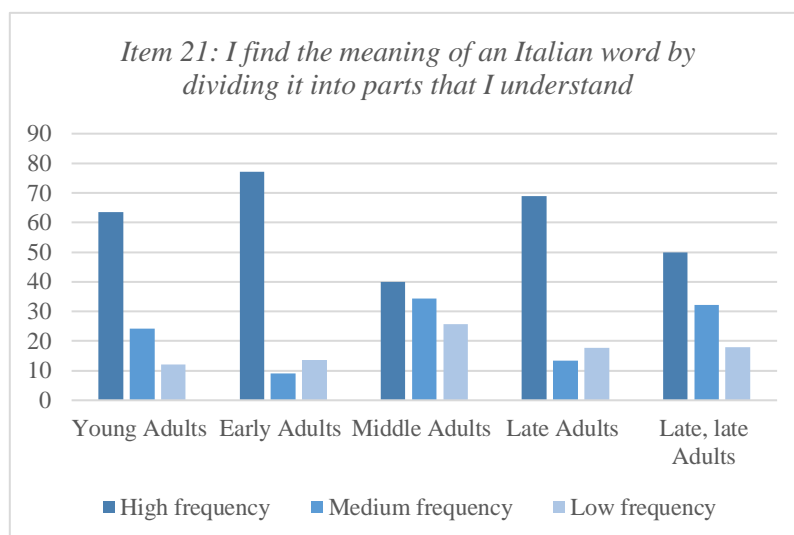
Concerning analysing and reasoning strategies, the SILL include three items: looking for words in the native language that are similar to Italian words (*Item 19*), finding the meaning of unfamiliar Italian words by dividing them in parts that can be understood (*Item 21*), and avoiding word-for-word translation (*Item 22*).

All age groups look for words in their native language that are similar to new Italian words (*Item 19*). In all groups the number of frequent users is always the highest, although

a decline of it can be observed, with Late, late Adults being in last position (43%). A trend of growth concerning the number of poor users related to ageing can also be noticed.

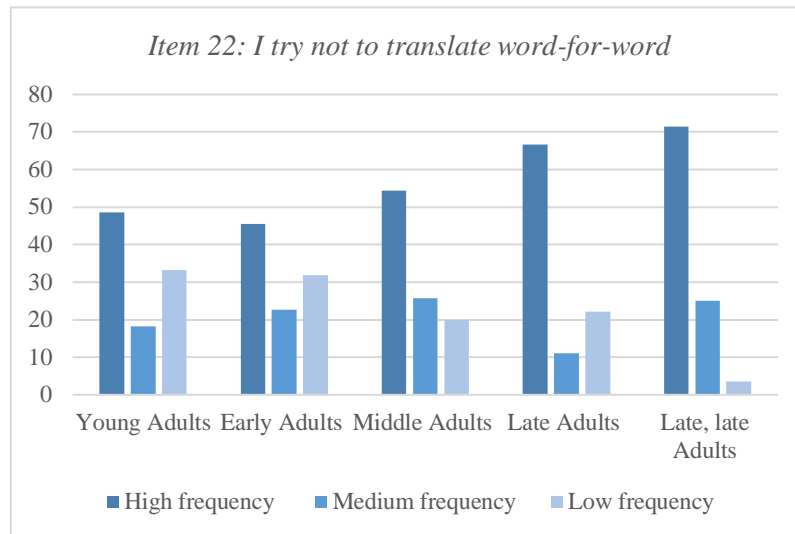


60% of adult learners employ the strategy of finding the meaning of an Italian word by dividing it into parts they understand (*Item 21*). Results show that this cognitive strategy is frequently used by all groups to a more or less extent. On average, Young, Early, Late and Late, late Adults use it more frequently than Middle Adults, who are the only group being reported to use it in the medium range.



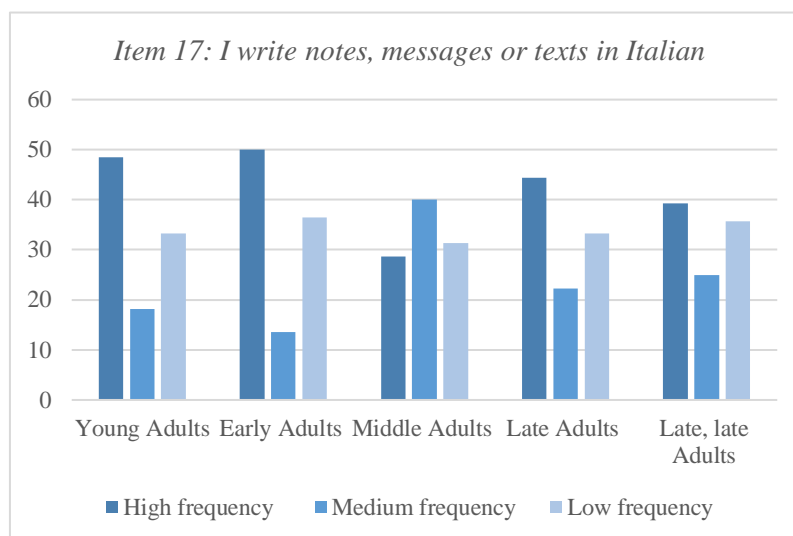
Avoiding word-for-word translation (*Item 22*) is the third analysing and reasoning strategy investigated in the SILL. The graph below shows that in all groups the percentage of regular users are the highest. Interestingly, a reverse trend of growing is observed: 71% of Late, late Adults try not to translate word-for-word regularly, while only 48% of Young

Adults and 45% of Early Adults do so. Comparison of means confirm the trend: Young and Early adults are, on average, occasional users, whereas the three older groups avoid translating word-for-word more consistently.

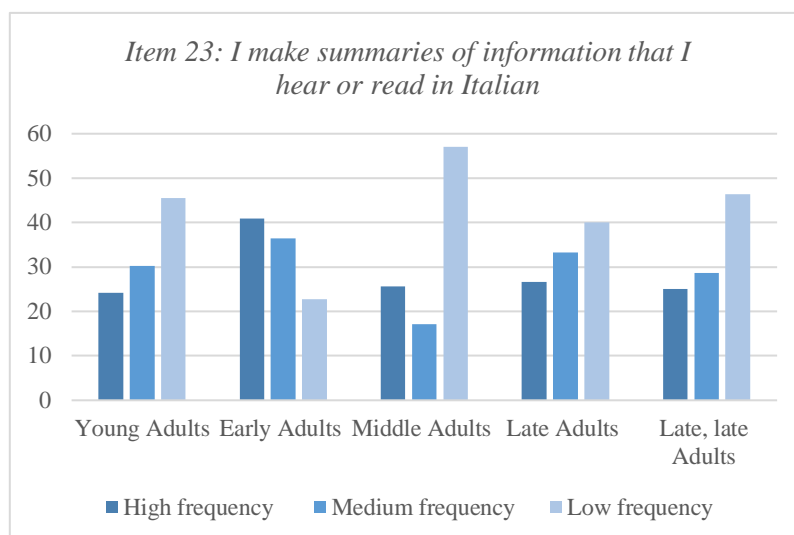


Writing notes in Italian (*Item 17*) and making summaries of information previously heard or read (*Item 23*) are the two cognitive strategies aimed at creating structure for input and output.

Item 17 is most frequently employed by the exact majority of Early Adults (50%); Young Adults, Late Adults and Late, late Adults use it frequently as well, although to a lesser extent. Middle Adults are the only group in which the percentage of occasional users (40%) exceed those of frequent (28,6%) and poor users (31,4%).

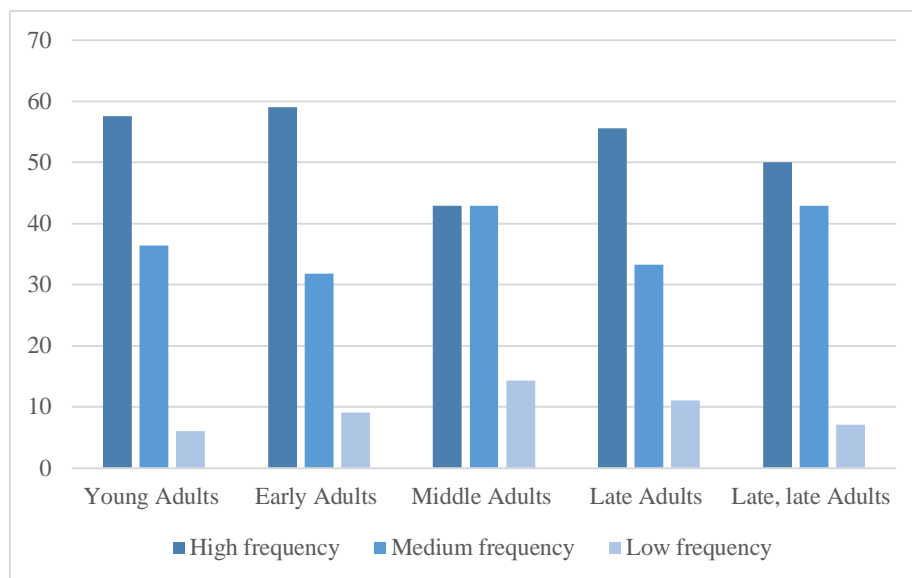


The last cognitive strategy investigated in the SILL concerns making summaries of information previously heard or read (*Item 23*). Overall, only in Early Adults the number of frequent users exceeds those of poor users and occasional users. Young Adults, Middle Adults, Late Adults and Late, late Adults' highest percentages represent learners who never or sporadically employ this strategy, respectively 45,5%, 57,1%, 40% and 46,4%.



5.3.3 Compensatory strategies and age groups

Compensatory strategies are ranked in fourth position in the general classification of language learning strategies. Comparison of mean scores indicate that younger students – namely Young Adults, Early Adults– use compensatory strategies in the high range, both with a mean of 3.5. Specifically, Early Adults report using compensatory strategies more frequently than the other groups (59,1%), followed by Young Adults (57,6%). On the contrary, Middle Adults, Late Adults and Late, late Adults result to be moderate users of compensatory strategies, with average scores of 3.2, 3.4 and 3.3 respectively (Graph 4).

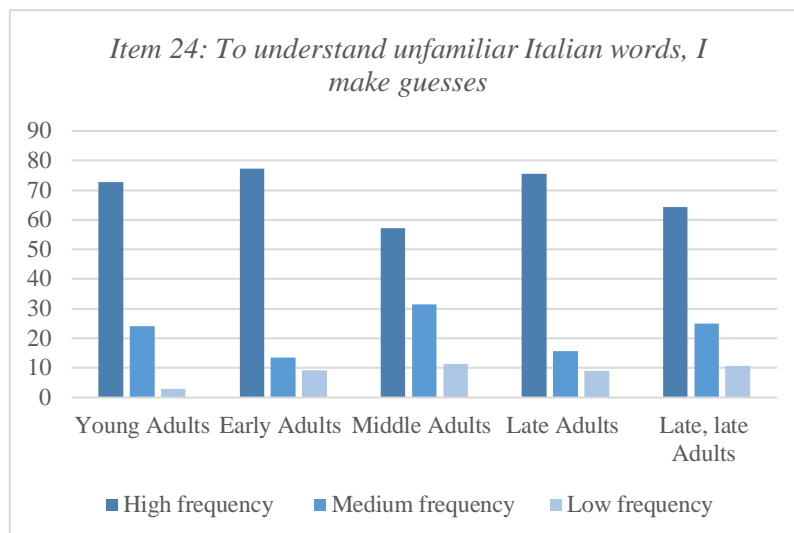


Graph 4. Compensatory strategies use and age groups

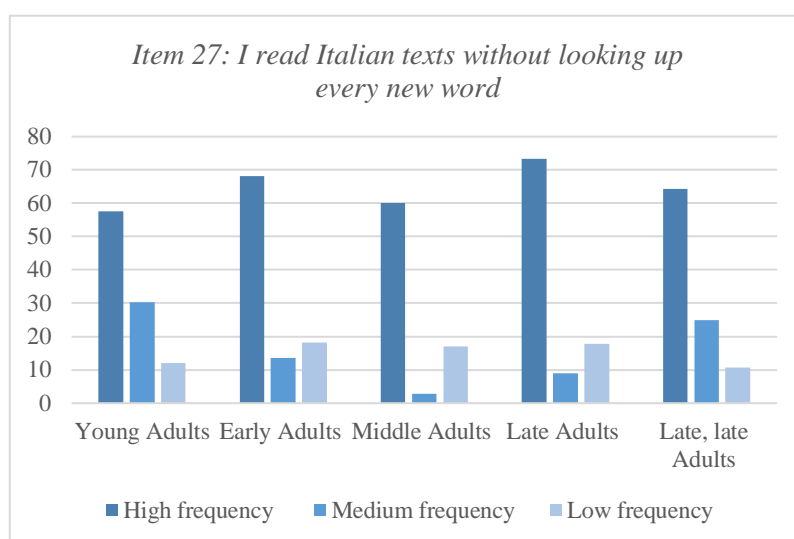
Compensatory strategies include two subsets: (1) guessing intelligently, and (2) overcoming limitations. The average scores illustrate a low variability between the two subsets, with guessing strategies ($M=3.4$) being slightly more frequently used than overcoming limitations strategies ($M=3.3$).

In Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, guessing strategies consist of three items, namely making guesses to understand unfamiliar words (*Item 24*), avoiding looking up every new word while reading (*Item 27*), and trying to guess what the interlocutor will say next (*Item 28*).

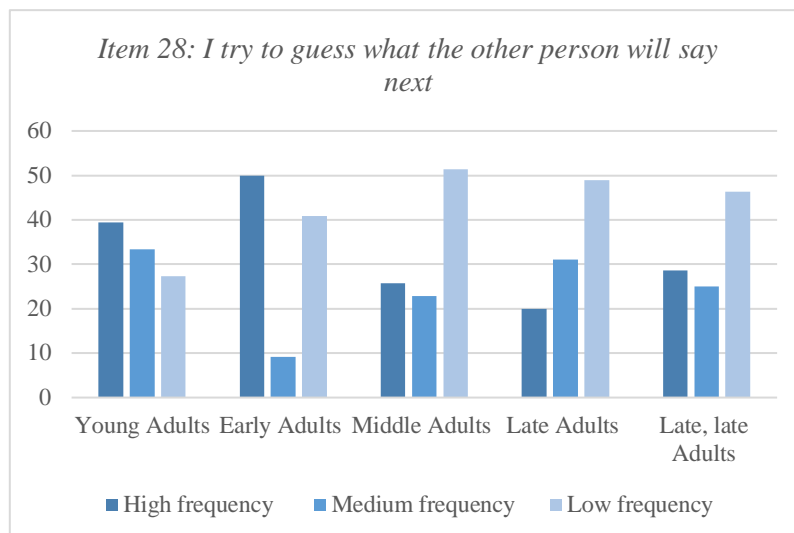
The graph below provides information about the use of the first guessing strategy (*Item 34*). Most members of each age group frequently make guesses when they encounter unfamiliar Italian words. Specifically, Early (77,3%) and Late Adults (75,6%) use it more frequently than the other groups, while Middle Adults use it less regularly (nearly 58%).



A slightly different pattern is observed in findings concerning *Item 27*. In all age groups the percentage of regular users is still the highest, between 55% and 75%; in particular, this strategy is used most frequently by Late Adults (73,3%) and Early Adults (68,2%). Young Adults employ it frequently, but to a smaller extent (57,6%).

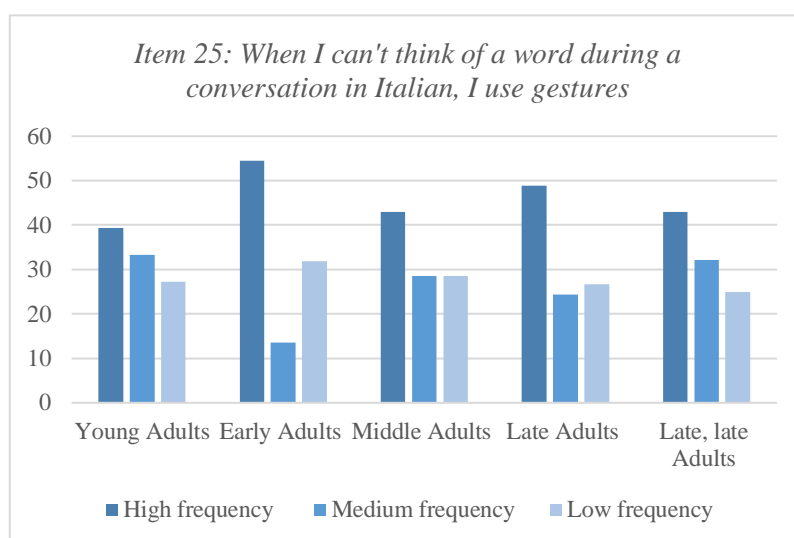


On the contrary, trying to guess what other people will say next (*Item 28*) is one of the least used compensatory strategy and the least used guessing strategy (M=2.8). Unlike the two previous guessing strategies, which are frequently used by all age groups to a more or lesser extent, data concerning the strategy in question shows different patterns of use among age groups. It is always or almost always used by Young Adults (72%), Early Adults (59%) and Late, late Adults (52%), whereas Middle Adults (51%) and Late Adults never or rarely use it (48%).



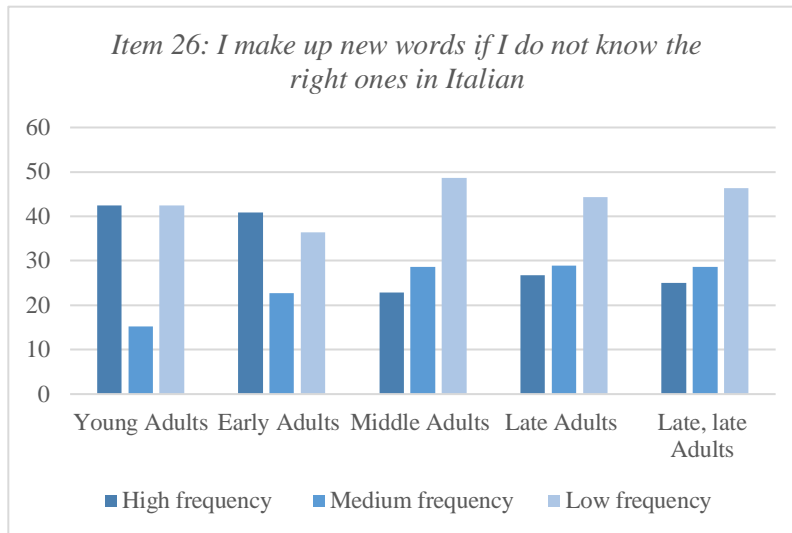
Like guessing strategies, overcoming limitations strategies include three different actions in the SILL: using gestures (*Item 25*), making up new words (*Item 26*), and using synonyms (*Item 29*).

Findings show that adult learners frequently use gestures when they cannot think of a word during a conversation in Italian (*Item 25*). Excluding the high frequency rate, which reaches the highest scores in each age group, data concerning medium and low frequency follows different trends. In Young Adults and Late, late Adults moderate users are more numerous than poor users, whereas in Early Adults and Late Adults groups the trend is reversed. Finally, in Middle Adults the two ranges are equal.

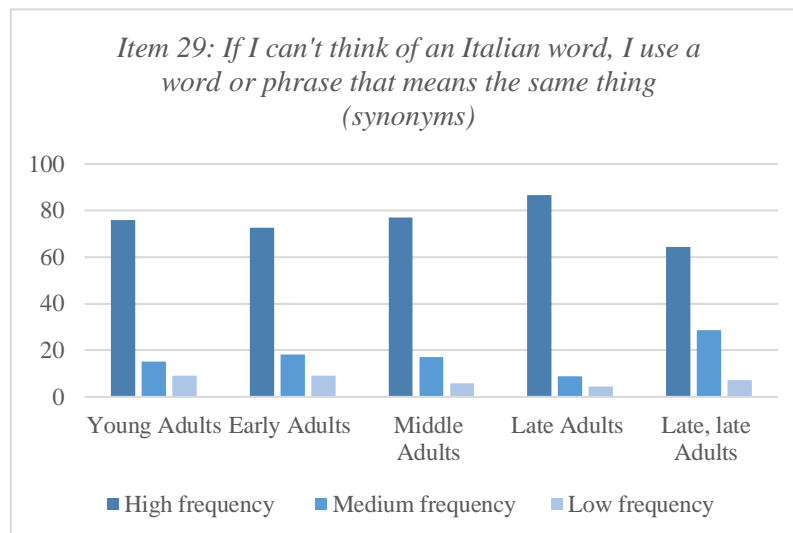


Overall, making up new words (*Item 26*) is rarely used by adult learners, especially older ones. Indeed, Middle Adults, Late Adults and Late, late Adults report a higher number of

poor users compared with the number of regular and/or moderate users. Also, in these groups moderate users exceed frequent users. Different trends feature, on the contrary, Young and Early Adults. The former report an equal number of frequent and poor users (both 42,4%); the latter feature more regular users (40,9%) than poor (36,4%) and moderate ones (22,7%).

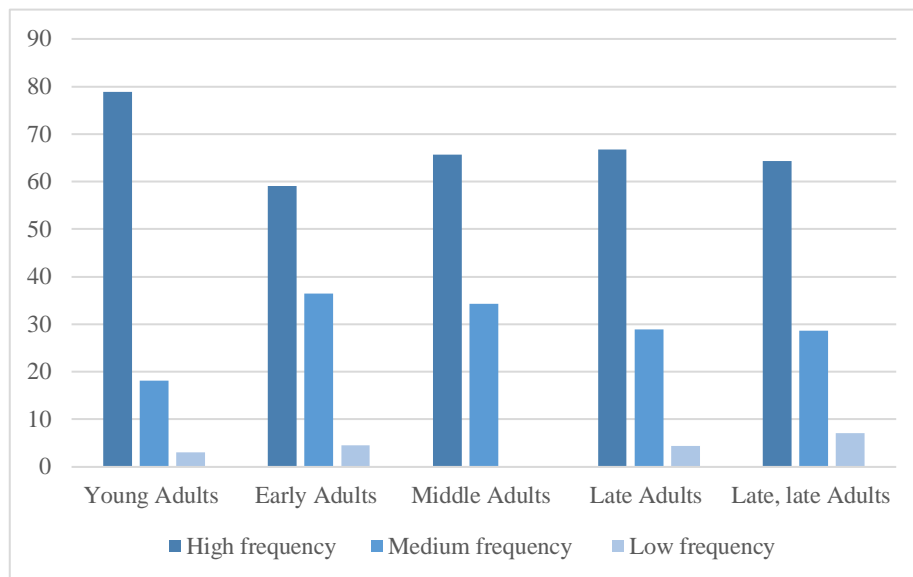


Finally, using synonyms when the proper word is unavailable (*Item 29*) is the second most used overcoming limitation strategy by all the age groups, especially Late Adults (86,7%). Results of low frequency of use are minimal in all groups, whereas moderate users are generally more numerous, especially in Late, late Adults (nearly 29%).



5.3.4 Metacognitive strategies and age groups

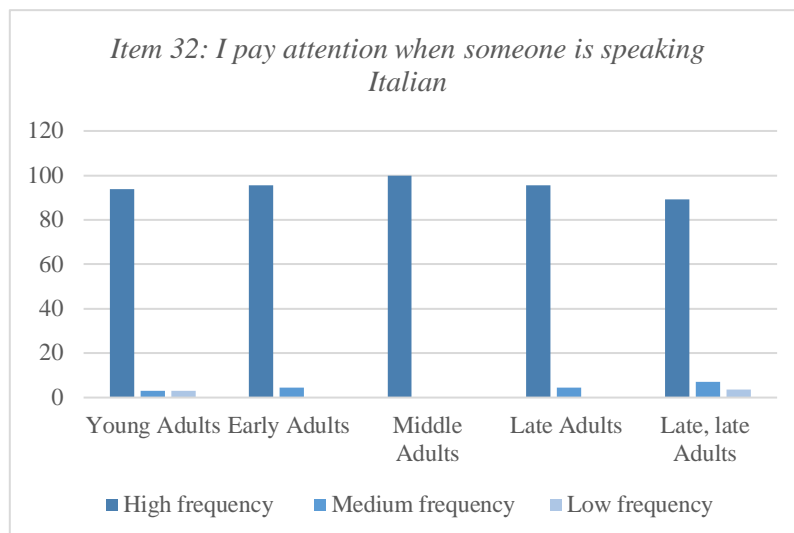
Metacognitive strategies are the most frequently used set of strategies by adult foreign language learners. All age groups' members are regular users of metacognitive strategies, with Young Adults using them the most (M=3.9), followed by Middle and Late Adults (M=3.8). Early and Late, late Adults' average score in 3.6. Almost 80% of Young Adults report using metacognitive strategies frequently, followed by Late Adults (66,7%). In the Middle Adult group, the percentage of learners who never or rarely use metacognitive strategy is 0%, whereas in the Late, late Adults group is the highest among all (7,1%) (Graph 5).



Graph 5. Metacognitive strategies use and age groups

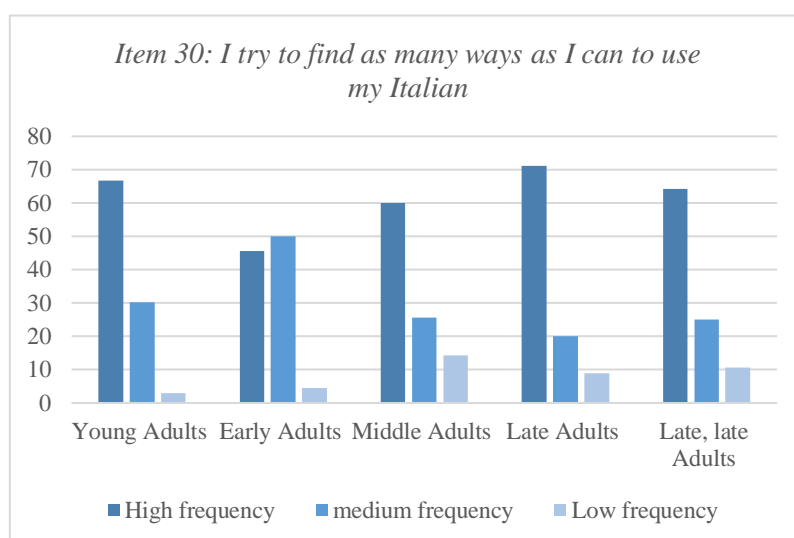
In Oxford's LLS classification, metacognitive strategies include three subsets: (1) centering learning, (2) arranging and planning learning, and (3) evaluating learning.

In the SILL, the first subset is represented by *Item 32*, namely paying attention when someone is speaking. It is the most used metacognitive strategy, by all groups. The graph below shows the trends of use for each age group, each of which exceed 85% of regular users. Surprisingly, 100% of Middle Adults use it frequently, as well as nearly 96% of Early and Late Adults, which also do not have members who never or rarely use it. Only in the youngest group and the oldest one there is minimal percentage of poor users, respectively 3% and 3,6%.

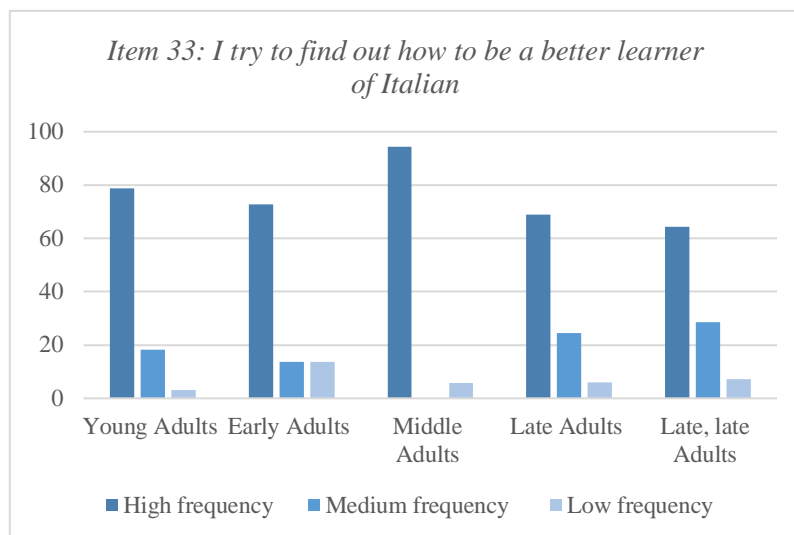


On average, arranging and planning learning strategies are extensively used by Young Adults (M=3.8), Middle Adults (M=3.7), Late Adults (M=3.8) and Late, late Adults (M=3.5). Only Early Adults report to employ them occasionally (M=3.3). This subset of metacognitive strategies consists of: finding as many ways as possible to use Italian (*Item 30*), finding out how to be a better learner (*Item 33*), planning a study schedule (*Item 34*), looking for people to talk in Italian with (*Item 35*), looking for opportunities to read in Italian (*Item 36*), and having clear goals for improving language skills (*Item 37*).

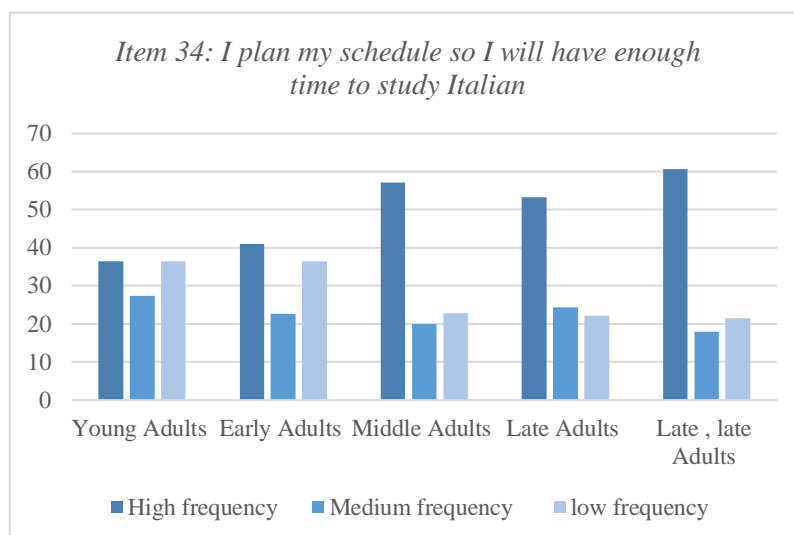
Item 30 is employed by all groups extensively, except Early Adults, which majority (50%) use it only moderately. Late Adults (71,1%) adopt this strategy more frequently than all the other groups, followed by Young Adults (66,7%) and Late, late Adults (64,3%).



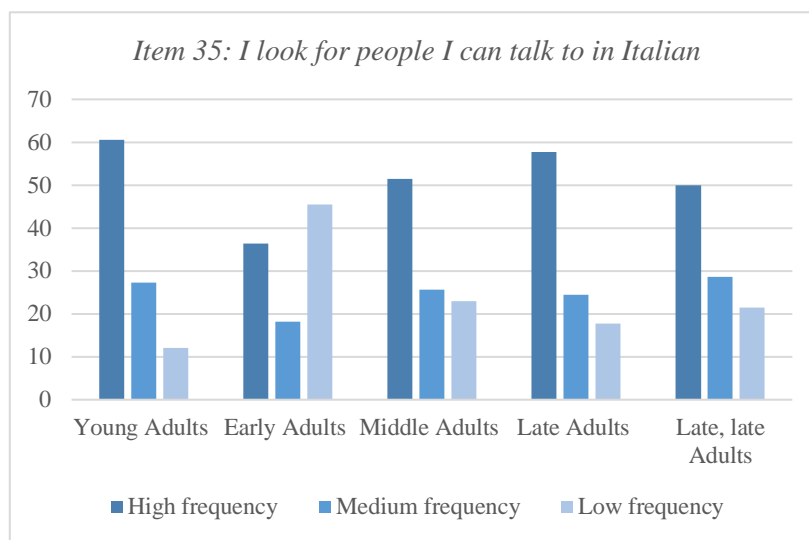
Finding out how to be a better learner (*Item 33*) is the second most extensively used metacognitive strategy ($M=4.1$). All groups adopt it with high frequency, notably Middle Adults (94,3%), followed by Young Adults (78,8%) and Early Adults (72,7%). In Late Adults and Late, late Adults percentages of high frequency gradually decline – respectively 68,9% and 64,3% - while the number of moderate and poor users increases.



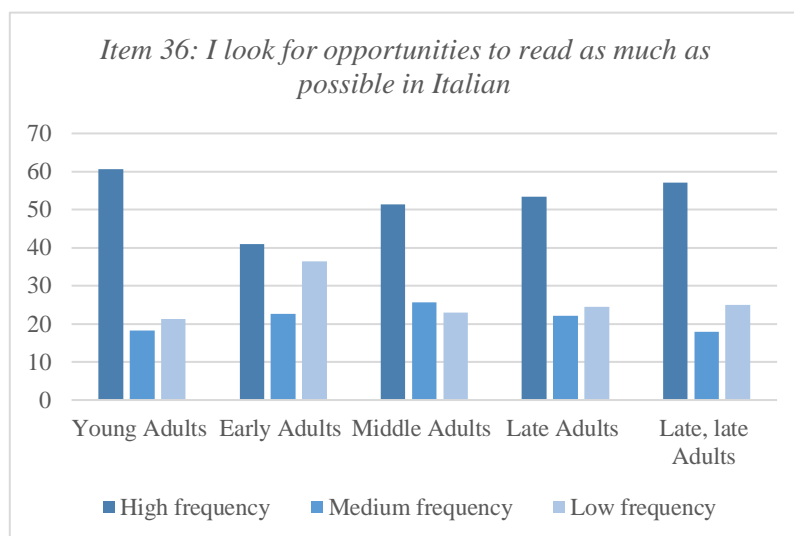
Results indicate that planning a study schedule (*Item 34*) is the only metacognitive strategy which falls in the medium range of use and, consequently, it is the least employed metacognitive strategy among all ($M=3.3$). Comparison of data included in the graph below indicates that Young Adults and Early Adults report the lowest percentages of regular use and, on average, employ study scheduling only moderately. On the contrary, the three oldest groups result as being more frequent users, with a mean of 3.5. Indeed, it can be clearly seen that data concerning Middle, Late and Late, late Adults displays the highest percentages of high use and the lowest percentages of medium and low use.



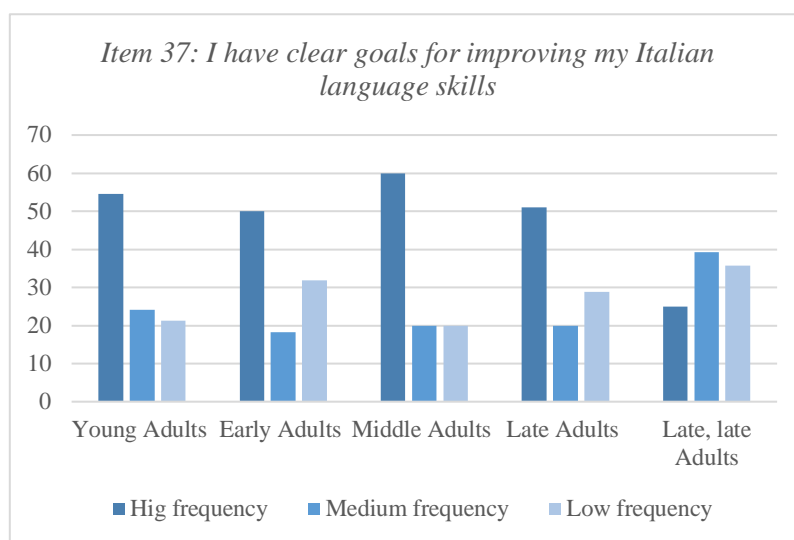
According to the SILL average score, *Item 35* is frequently employed by all adult learners (M=3.5). However, levels of frequency of use differ for each group. For instance, most Young Adults (M=3.9), Middle Adults (M=3.5) and Late Adults (M=3.6) are considered, on average, frequent users as percentages of high frequency of use exceed 50% in all of them. In contrast, Early Adults (M=3.0) and Late, late Adults (M=3.4) employ it in the medium range. The graph shows that all groups look for people to practice the language regularly, except Early Adults, whose 45,5% never or rarely employ this strategy.



The fifth arranging and planning strategy (*Item 36*) is consistently employed by all age groups, especially Young Adults (60%). On the contrary, Early Adults' percentages of high frequency of use slightly exceeds 40%; moreover, people aged between 26 and 40 feature the highest number of poor users (36,4%).

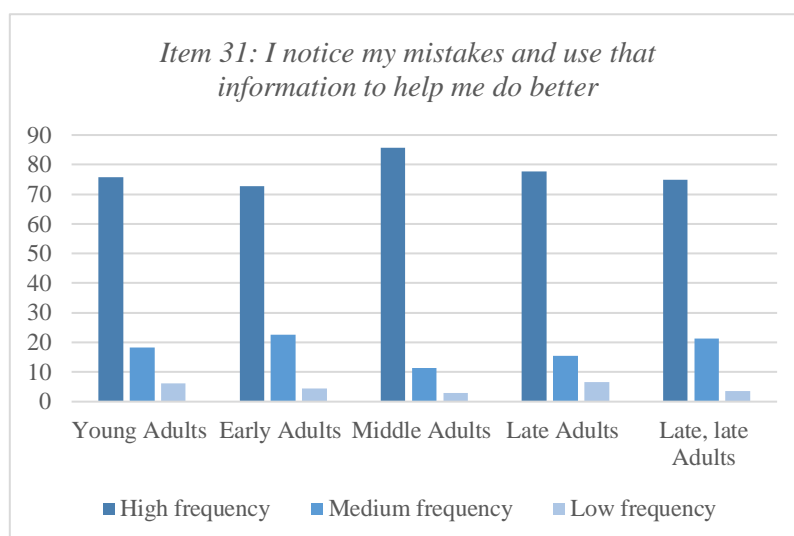


Setting clear learning goals (*Item 37*) is a metacognitive strategy mainly and mostly used by Young Adults (M=3.6) and Middle Adults (M=3.5). Similarly, the substantial majority of Early Adults and Late Adults regularly have clear goals for improving their Italian language skills, respectively 50% and 51,1%. Unlike learners under 75, most of Late, late Adults (39,3%) set goals only sometimes, followed by the ones who never or rarely adopt this strategy (35,7%); only 25% of Late, late Adults regularly set clear learning objectives.

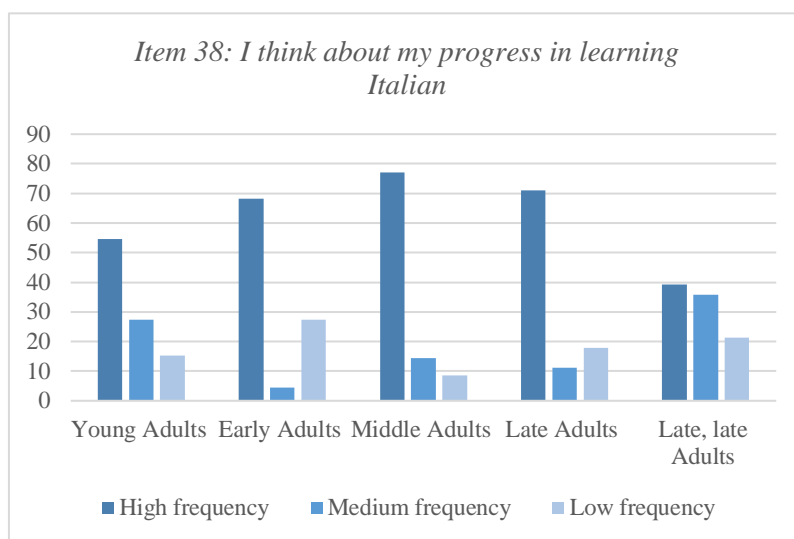


Evaluating learning strategies include noticing mistakes and using them to improve learning (*Item 31*) and thinking about the learning progress (*Item 38*).

The metacognitive strategy of noticing mistakes is frequently used by all age groups, each of which report an extensive use of it, with Middle Adults being in the lead. Early Adults are ranked in last position, with the highest percentage of medium (nearly 23%) and low use (4,5%).

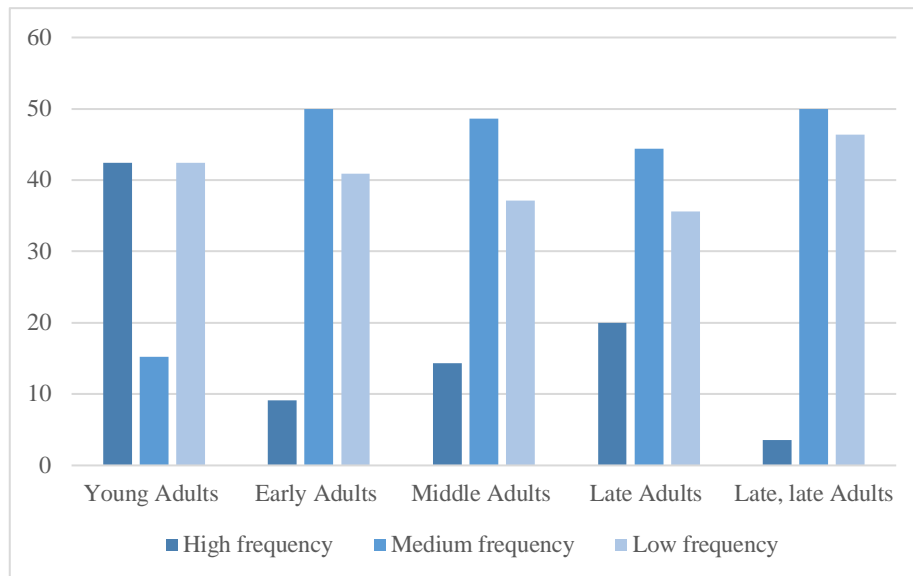


The metacognitive strategy of reflecting on the learning process (*Item 38*) is employed by most adults of each group. The percentage of habitual users exceed 50% in each group, except for the oldest ones - the Late, late Adults - whose percentage of high frequency of use does not even reach 40%; indeed, learners aged over 75 result as the only age group reporting a medium use of this strategy (M=3.4), whereas the other average scores for each age group fall in the high range of use. The graph also shows that the trend of high frequency reaches its maximum peak in the Middle Adults group, before gradually declining to the lowest scores.



5.3.5 Affective strategies and age groups

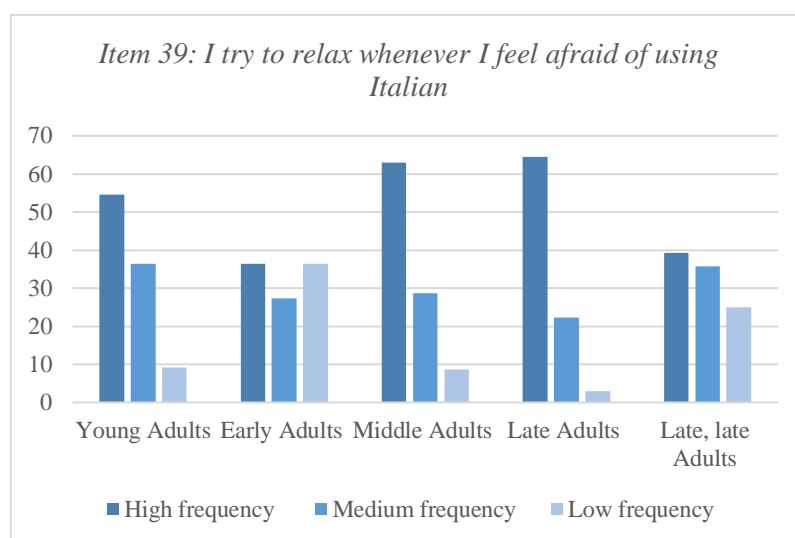
Affective strategies are ranked in sixth and last position as the strategies used least frequently by adult learners. In relation to the use of these strategies according to age, Graph 6 shows that Young Adults report using affective strategies more frequently than all the other groups (42,4%), though the frequency of low use is one of the highest scores (42,2%), second only to Late, late Adults (46,4%). Except for Young Adults, in all age groups the highest percentages correspond to the medium frequency of use, followed by low frequency of use.



Graph 6. Affective strategies use and age groups

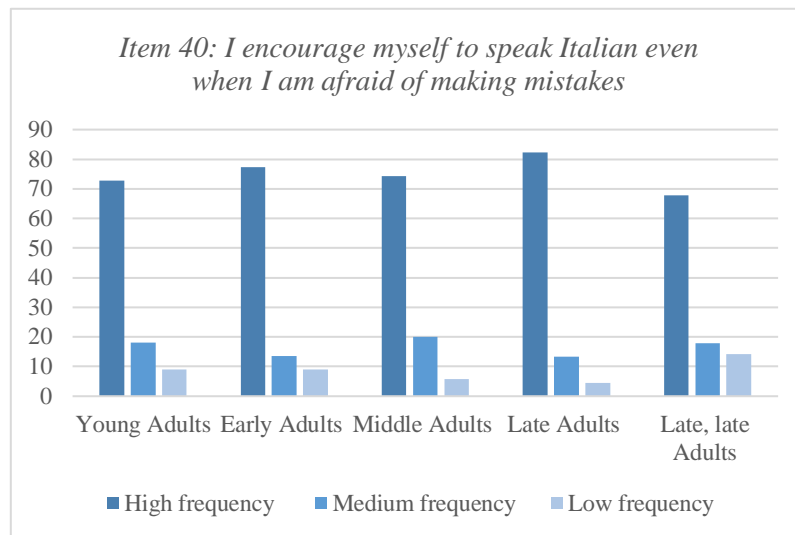
Affective strategies' subsets are three, namely (1) lowering anxiety, (2) encouraging oneself, and (3) taking emotional temperature. Overall, adult learners are frequent users of lowering anxiety techniques ($M=3.5$), moderate users of strategies involving encouraging oneself ($M=2.9$) and poor users of taking emotional temperature strategies ($M=2.2$).

In the SILL, lowering anxiety strategies correspond to *Item 39*. The graph below shows that Young Adults, Middle Adults and Late Adults employ this strategy more frequently than the other two age groups, with percentages of high frequency of use that exceed 50% (Young Adults: 54,5%; Middle Adults: 62,9%; Late Adults: 64,4%). In Late, late Adults regular users are nearly 40%, whereas in Early Adults they equal the number of poor users (36,4%).

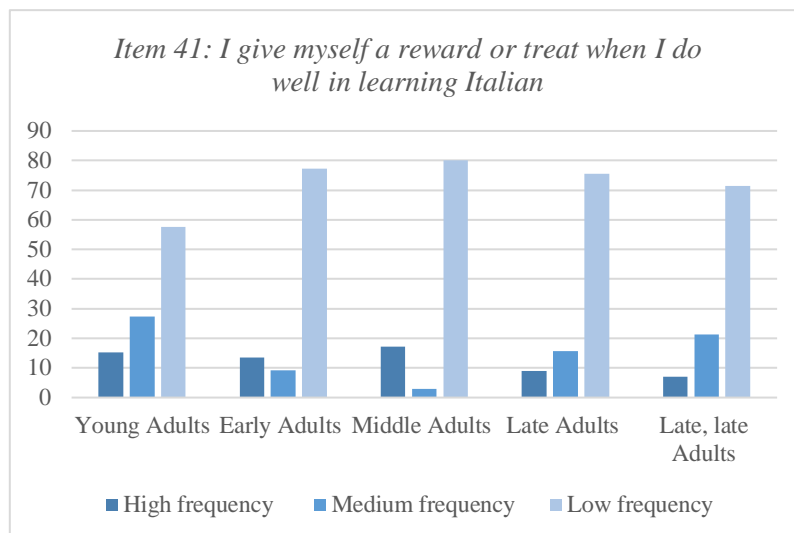


Concerning affective strategies aimed at encouraging oneself, all age groups report using them moderately, with Young Adults using them the most (M=3.1) and Late, late Adults using them the least (M=2.8). This subset of affective strategies includes encouraging oneself whenever feeling afraid of making mistakes (*Item 40*) and giving rewards or treats when accomplishing a learning goal (*Item 41*).

Data on *Item 40* indicates that self-positive talk and encouragement are normally practiced by all age groups in the high range. Findings also illustrate an incline in the use of this strategy until age 75. Late, late Adults indeed use encouragement techniques less frequently than younger groups and have higher results of medium and low frequency of use.

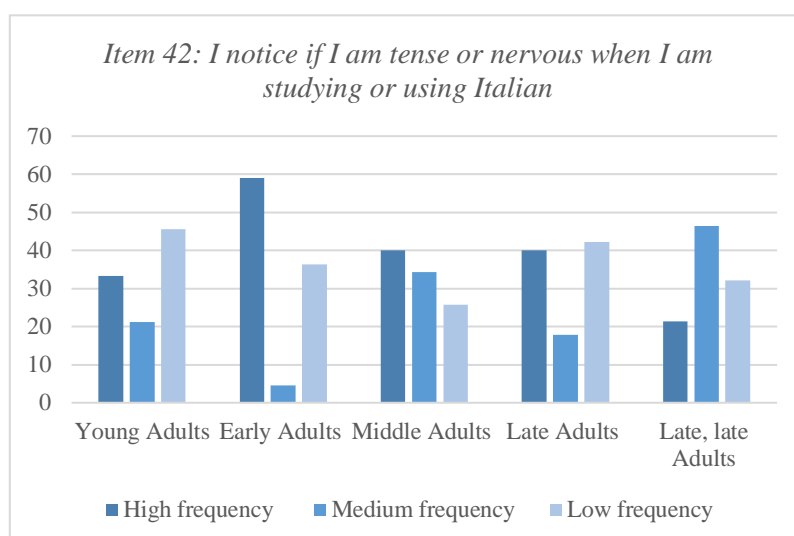


On the contrary, rewarding oneself (*Item 41*) is one of the least used affective strategies. All groups indeed report employing it sporadically or never, especially Middle Adults (80%). Young Adults' frequency of poor use is the lowest, but still over 50% (57,6%).

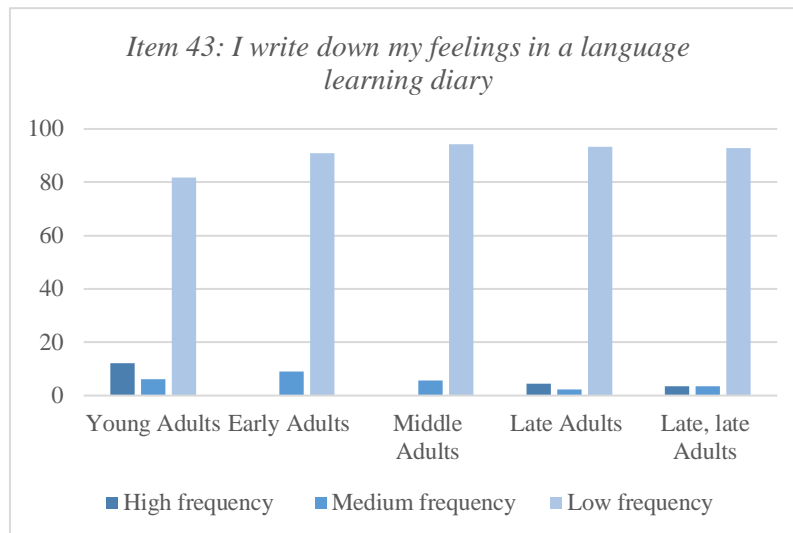


Taking emotional temperature strategies correspond to noticing when feeling tense or nervous (*Item 42*), writing down personal feelings on a learning diary (*Item 43*), and talking with someone else about emotions experienced in language learning (*Item 44*).

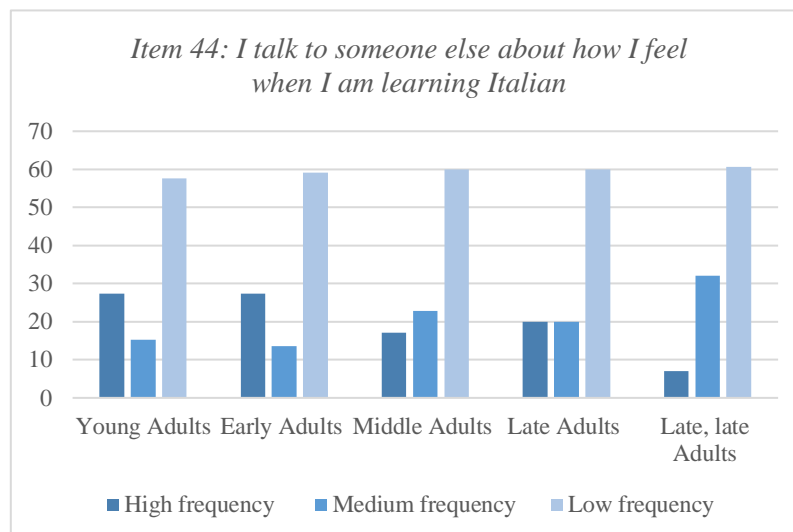
Results concerning *Item 42* in relation to age vary widely. Noticing is indeed more frequently employed by Early Adults (59,1%) and, to a less extent, Middle Adults (40%). Most Late, late Adults (46,4%) employ this affective strategy only moderately, whereas most Young Adults (45,5%) and Late Adults (42,2%) only rarely or even never adopt it.



Writing a language learning diary is the least used affective strategy by adult learners. Habitual users are found only in Young Adults (12,1%), Late Adults (4,4%) and Late, late Adults (3,6%), whereas in Early and Middle Adults no respondent report using this strategy regularly.



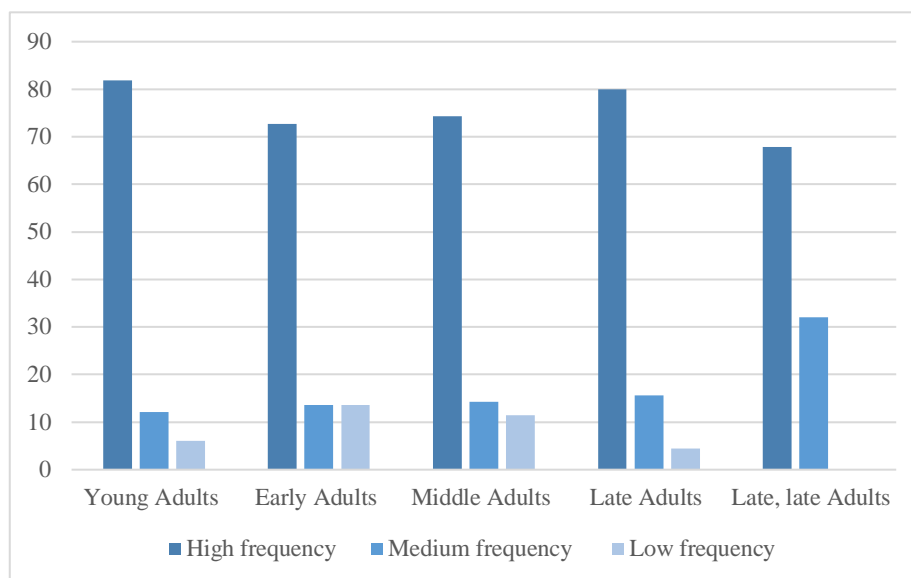
Finally, comparison of data indicates that *Item 44* is generally never or sporadically employed by adult learners, with no age difference. Interestingly, data about high and medium frequency of use follow different patterns. In Young Adults and Early Adults, the number of frequent users is higher than moderate users, whereas in Late Adults the two numbers are equal (20%). On the contrary, in Middle and Late Adults the trend is inverted: data on medium frequency of use are higher than those of high frequency of use.



5.3.6 Social strategies and age groups

Social strategies are ranked in second position in the general classification of language learning strategies, after metacognitive strategies. Overall, they are regularly used by all age

groups. Young Adults report using social strategies more frequently (81,8%), followed by Late Adults (80%). Late, late Adults have the highest number of moderate users (32,1%), while the number of poor users in 0%. An increase of moderate users with ageing in conjunction with a decline of low frequency of use can be observed (Graph 7).

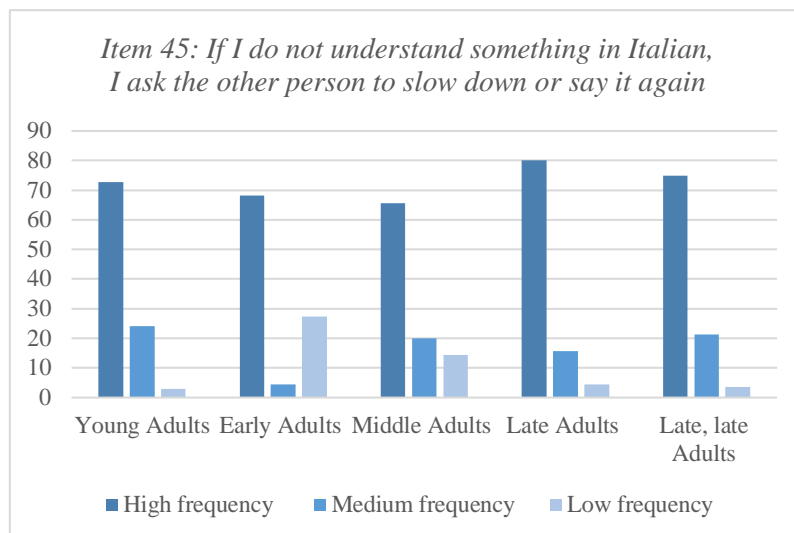


Graph 7. Social strategies use and age groups

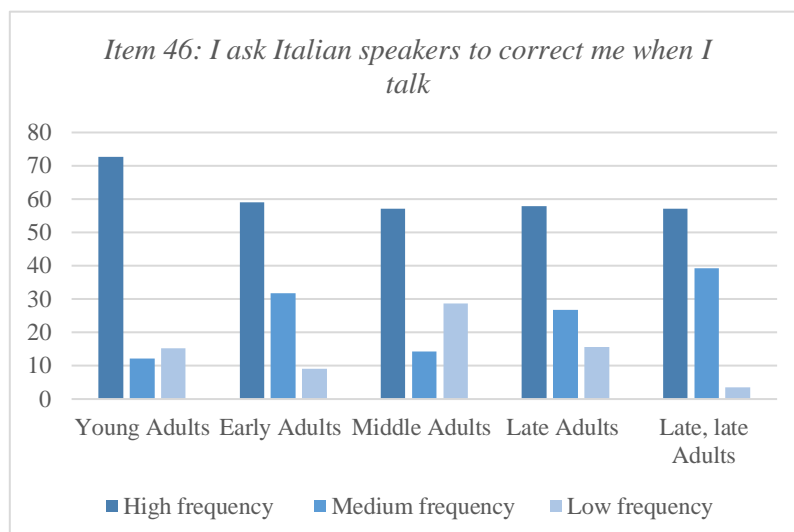
Rebecca Oxford divides social strategies in three subsets: (1) asking questions, (2) cooperating with others, and (3) emphasizing with others.

In the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, social strategies based on asking questions are asking to slow down or repeat (*Item 45*), asking for corrections (*Item 46*), asking help from Italian native speakers (*Item 48*), and asking question using the foreign language, in this case Italian (*Item 49*).

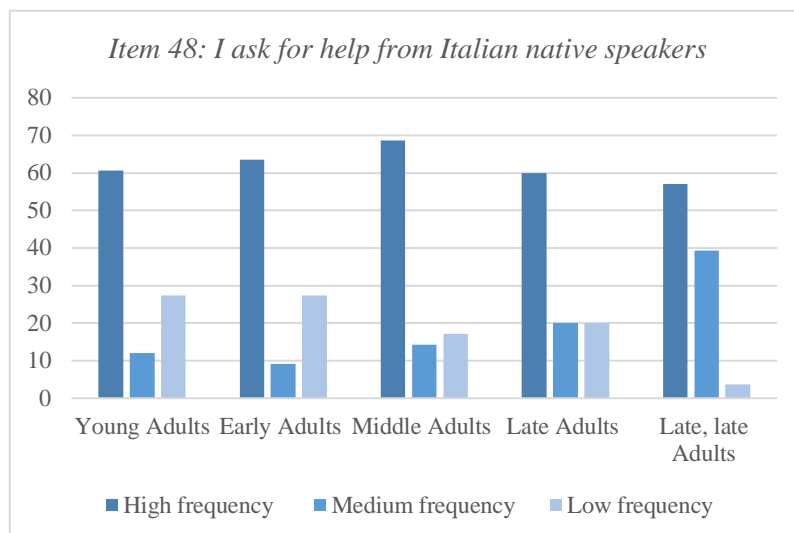
Data concerning *Item 45* indicates that adult learners always or almost always ask their interlocutor to slow down or repeat when they do not understand something. Specifically, this social strategy is most frequently employed by Late Adults (80%), whereas Middle Adults regularly use it the least (65,7%). Results on low frequency of use reveal that Early Adults have the highest number of poor users (27,3%), which decline with ageing.



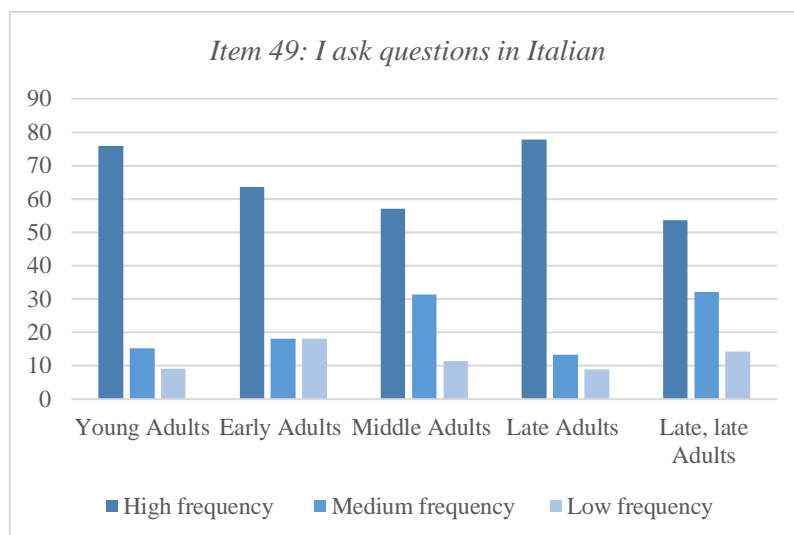
More than 70% of Young Adults ask Italian speakers to correct them when they talk (*Item 46*). The percentage of high frequency of use remain the highest one in all groups, although a slight decrease can be observed. In the three older groups a clear trend can be noticed: while the percentage of high frequency of use remain almost steady, the number of poor users gradually decrease until 3,6% (Late, late Adults); concomitantly, data on medium frequency of use gradually incline.



Students who frequently ask help from Italian native speakers (*Item 48*) represents the majority in all groups. Specifically, data reported on the graph shows that numbers of high frequency of use incline from Young Adults (60%) and Early Adults (63,6%) until Middle Adults (70%), before descending towards Late Adults (69%) and finally Late, late Adults (57,1%). Medium frequency of use follows a different trend and gradually increase in conjunction with ageing; on the contrary, low frequency of use decreases.

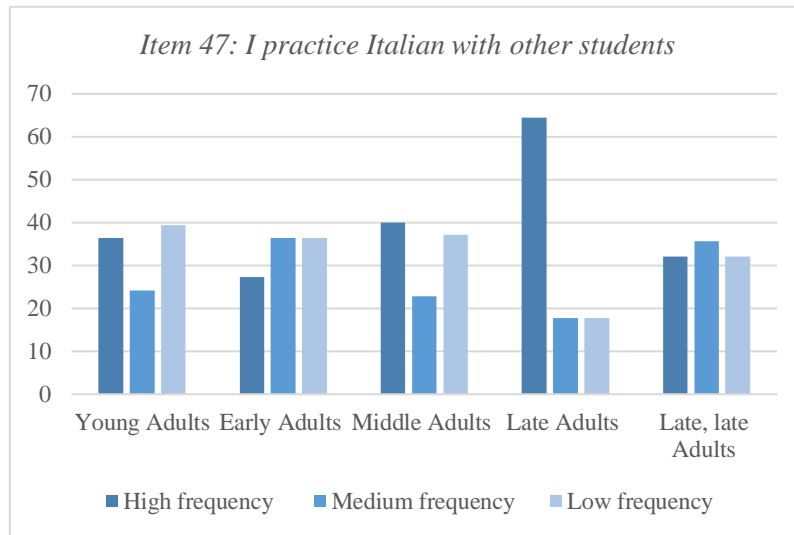


The strategy of asking questions in Italian (*Item 49*) is regularly used by all groups, especially Late Adults (77,8%) and Young Adults (75,8%). Even the majority of Early Adults (63,3%), Middle Adults (57,1%) and Late, late Adults (53,6%) employ this strategy frequently, though to a lesser extent. Middle Adults and Late, late Adults also have the highest number of moderate users - respectively 31,4% and 32,1%. On the contrary, in Early Adults, moderate users are equal to poor users.

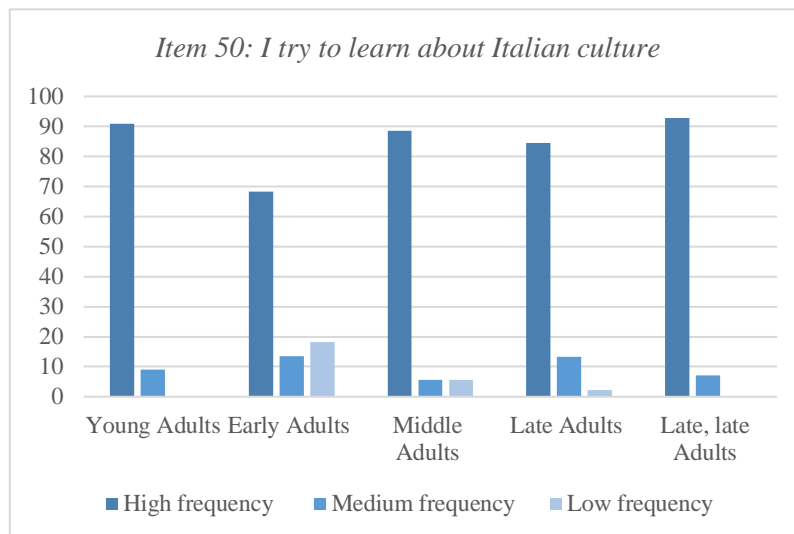


Practicing Italian with other students (*Item 47*) is the only cooperating strategy included in the SILL. Interestingly, data concerning this strategy significantly differs among groups. For instance, the only group where the striking majority frequently adopts this strategy is that of Late Adults, who also report the lowest percentages of medium and low frequency of use - both 17,8%. Even most of Middle Adults regularly practice Italian with other students but in quite small percentage (40%), which is also very close to that of low frequency of use

(37,1%). The larger number of Young Adults rarely or never adopt this strategy, while in Late, late Adults moderate users are the most numerous. Finally, Early Adults report the lowest percentage of high frequency of use (27,3%) and equal numbers or occasional and poor users (both 36,4%).



Finally, emphasizing strategies imply trying to learn about Italian culture (*Item 50*). Young Adults and Late, late Adults report the highest percentages of high frequency of use, respectively 90,9% and 92,9%. They also do not feature poor users. Middle Adults and Late Adults report a vast majority of frequent users – 88,6% and 84,4% respectively – and a smaller number of medium and poor users which is roughly 10-15%. Early Adults report slightly different numbers: a smaller percentage of high frequency users (nearly 70%) and a higher number of moderate (13,6%) and poor users (18,2%).



5.4 Age groups and LLS use: summary of the main trends

In this section, the results are discussed in the context of the following research question:

- *Is there a difference in LLS use according to the age group of belonging? If so, which are the main trends?*

5.4.1 Age groups and overall LLS use

In paragraph 5.3 data about the frequency of average LLS use for each age group supports the hypothesis that age groups employ language learning strategies differently. Indeed, only Young Adults result as frequent LLS users, whereas the older age groups report themselves as moderate users. Also, a steady decline of average scores indicate that the frequency of LLS use decrease in conjunction with ageing.

Therefore, a first significant relationship has been found to exist between age groups and the use of Language Learning Strategies.

5.4.2 Age groups and strategy categories use

The ranking order of frequency of use for each LLS category in each group can be observed in Table 15.

Rank	Young Adults	Early Adults	Middle Adults	Late Adults	Late, late Adults
1	Metacognitive	Metacognitive	Metacognitive	Social	Social
2	Social	Social	Social	Metacognitive	Metacognitive
3	Compensatory	Compensatory	Cognitive	Cognitive	Compensatory
4	Cognitive	Cognitive	Compensatory	Compensatory	Cognitive
5	Memory-rel.	Memory-rel.	Memory-rel.	Affective	Memory-rel.
6	Affective	Affective	Affective	Memory-rel.	Affective

Table 15. Age groups and strategy categories use

As shown, the ranking based on range of use for each group does not significantly differ from the other age ranges. Young Adults, Early Adults and Middle Adults follow the same order of preference, namely (1) metacognitive, (2) social, (3) cognitive, (4) compensatory, (5) memory-related, and (6) affective strategies. In Late Adults and Late, late Adults, metacognitive strategies swap position with social strategies; consequently, the latter are

reported to be the most preferred one among students aged over 65. Furthermore, Late Adults prefer compensatory strategies to cognitive strategies.

Comparison of average scores reported in the table below (Table 16) demonstrate that, although the order of strategies preference is substantially the same for each age group, frequencies of use differ, sometimes significantly.

	Young Adults	Early Adults	Middle Adults	Late Adults	Late, late Adults
Memory-related strategies	2.96**	2.89**	2.73**	2.67**	2.65**
Cognitive strategies	3.53***	3.47**	3.45**	3.43**	3.27**
Compensatory strategies	3.54***	3.55***	3.27**	3.41**	3.32**
Metacognitive strategies	3.94***	3.61***	3.85***	3.86***	3.65***
Affective strategies	2.78**	2.67**	2.69**	2.71**	2.44*
Social strategies	3.91***	3.59***	3.60***	3.98***	3.72***

Table 16. Average LLS categories use per age groups

Furthermore, findings reveal that only the use of memory-related strategies and cognitive strategies steadily declines in conjunction with ageing: general average scores of frequencies of use gradually decrease with advancing age and younger adults result to be more frequent users than their older counterparts in both strategies. Also, Young Adults are the only ones using memory-related strategies and cognitive strategy in the high range of use, whereas adult learners aged over 26 employ them in the medium range.

Young Adults and Early adults employ compensatory strategy very frequently; the range of use then decline to the medium range in learners aged over 40. However, single average scores decline unsteadily. All age groups employ metacognitive strategies in the high range - specifically, in descending order, Young Adults, Late Adults, Middle Adults, Late, late Adults and Early Adults. Affective strategies are used moderately by all groups, except Late, late Adults, who employ them rarely or never. Social strategies are frequently employed by all age groups.

It is believed that, in the first two strategy categories – memory-related and cognitive strategies - age might play an active role in the choice and use of language learning strategies since there is a trend of steady descending frequency of use that occur in conjunction with ageing. Furthermore, is not excluded that ageing affects the use of compensatory and affective strategies as well, as their frequency of use descends from higher to lower levels in older groups. However, comparison of individual mean scores reveals that the decline within

the same frequency of use is unsteady. Metacognitive and social strategies use seem not to be affected by advancing age since their frequency of use remains high throughout adulthood.

5.5 Perceptions on learning a foreign language in adulthood

The two following paragraphs illustrate adult learners' perceptions on learning a foreign language in adulthood compared to language acquisition at a younger age as children.

First, it is important to state that no significant trends of answers related to specific age ranges have been identified. For this reason, data regarding *Question 57*, *Question 58* and *Question 59* will be illustrated and discussed in general terms, considering respondents as a whole group, and not divided into age ranges.

In this section, the results related to qualitative data are discussed in the context of the following research question:

- *How do adult learners perceive their learning abilities as adult language learners compared to learning at a younger age?*

5.5.1 The effects of age on foreign language learning

Question 57 asked respondents to explain if there is and what do they think is the effect of age in their foreign language learning process.

Chart 1 shows that the overwhelming majority of adult learners (72%) believe that age affects foreign language acquisition, both positively and negatively. Only a small percentage of participants (17%) did not consider process of ageing as a variable that can influence language learning. The rest of adults (10%) were undecided or did not know at all.

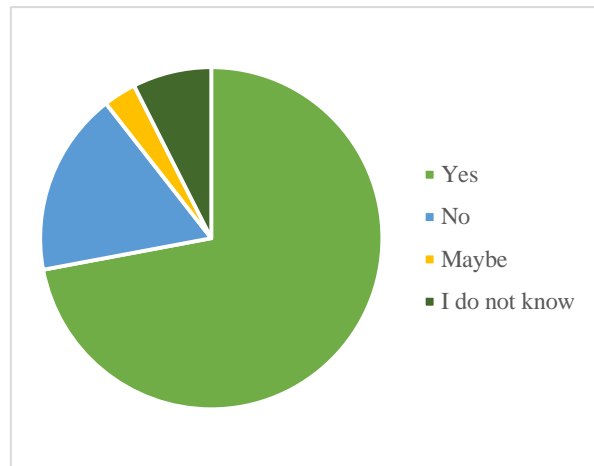


Chart 1. The effects of age in the learning process

According to most participants, age has a positive effect on FL learning especially because it is associated with other variables. The first variable brought into question by adult learners is motivation:

- *I know that young people (especially kids) learn faster than adults. But some people use this as some kind of excuse not to learn. If you really want to learn, you have to do your best and look up for strategies that work for you.*
- *Very little. I did have more difficulty with language learning as a child because I didn't want to devote the time to study.*
- *I don't think it has much of an effect. Yes, I think my memory was better when I was younger, but there's a determination and focus that comes with age. I value my ambition as much as I do my memory. So, what I may I lack in brain plasticity, I gain in sheer will.*
- *I take my learning serious and do it because I want to.*
- *Makes me more determined to learn.*

Other students mentioned previous language learning experience, numerous opportunities available as well as language learning strategies use as variables that are related to age and can positively affect language learning:

- *The positive effect is experience, I know from other languages I learnt how a language works and what to focus on, on the other hand learning a language as a child would have been much more natural.*
- *I think fairly young age makes it easier to learn new things, there are also more learning opportunities for students, projects abroad.*
- *You have more experience in learning, so you know which strategies work for you.*

- *I think my age can help because of my background knowledge and connections that I can make with other foreign languages I speak.*
- *I think being in this age actually helps in the learning process. Having more life experiences allows for an easier way to relate to the language and the culture.*

A smaller number of adult students state that age certainly affect language learning, though negatively. Most of them believe that age slows down the process of learning because it is related to lower brain plasticity:

- *Age slows me down*
- *It's easier to grasp the younger you are*
- *The older you are the more practice and concentration it takes to learn a new language.*
- *I think it makes it harder as the brain slows naturally as you age*
- *It makes it harder than I remember it being in other languages when I was younger*
- *Probably more rigid in thinking, therefore harder to accept different ways a language is constructed.*
- *Harder to absorb*
- *My recall is slower*
- *No question it is harder now. My brain felt much more plastic when I was young.*

Also, adult life is busier, and adults often do not find the proper amount of time to dedicate to language learning, resulting in a longer process. However, work life is an obstacle until retirement, when older adults have more time available:

- *Busier and more stressful life, making it hard to dedicate time.*
- *I am old so it makes learning and retention more difficult. By the same token, I am old enough to be retired so my time is more available.*

Some students also mentioned affective factors as elements that, related to age, can negatively affect language learning in adulthood:

- *I am slower to pick things up and I am more cautious about sounding stupid and I get frustrated to not have the full vocabulary to explain what I mean.*

5.5.2 Children vs Adults in foreign language learning

As seen in Chapter Two, children and adults learn foreign languages differently due to biological, cognitive, affective and situational variables. All the answers to *Question 58* and *Question 59* confirm participants' awareness of these differences.

One of the main differences that adult respondents illustrated in their answers were the biological differences between younger and older brains. Children are described as “sponges”, able to absorb first and foreign languages intuitively, whereas adult learners learn more systematically and need explicit patterns and rules:

- *As a little child you learn in a more intuitive way whereas as an adult you try to learn and understand language patterns and rules.*
- *I think that a child or young person is like a sponge: they absorb the external stimuli easily compared to adults and older people. I am sure that it is: as an older person the brain etc is slower and not as receptive as for children or younger people.*
- *Younger minds are usually more of a sponge.*
- *Children imitate, repeat, are more intuitive. you are more aware of the process of learning and you don't imitate so much.*

Language Learning Strategies are among the cognitive variables that benefit adult foreign language learning. They are recognised by adult learners as a useful tool to improve their learning:

- *As a kid you just absorb the language by being exposed to it. As an adult you can use learning strategies that you have already acquired in other domains.*
- *I am more conscious about learning strategies.*
- *I think brain wiring has been set up in those formative years so that learning strategies are applied in further language acquisition. I believe if someone has acquired a second language at school or university it is easier for them to learn a new language as an adult.*
- *Children are less inhibited, but adults can apply cognitive strategies.*
- *I don't have as much mental space for new information. But by the same token, I have many, many more strategies for remembering new vocabulary, just by virtue of being an adult.*

In addition, respondents mentioned affective factors and differences such as motivation and language inhibition. According to respondents, while children learn a foreign language because of school curricula and are, in certain terms, “forced” to do so, adult learners are

more motivated to learn because they *want* to. Therefore, motivation can compensate other limits related to ageing, such as less time available and more effort required:

- *Children have more plasticity, but as an adult I have more personal motivation than just because it is a school class. Therefore, I am more likely to practice every day and also study more effectively because I have more practice at studying.*
- *It's very easy to remember things when you're young and when all you have to focus on is school. As an adult, remembering what you're learning is a bit more challenging, you don't have as much time to dedicate to learning a new language, but you are far more motivated to learn the language as an adult than as a child, which I believe compensates.*

Another affective factor mentioned is the lack of fear in younger learners, which can play an advantageous role in children language learning:

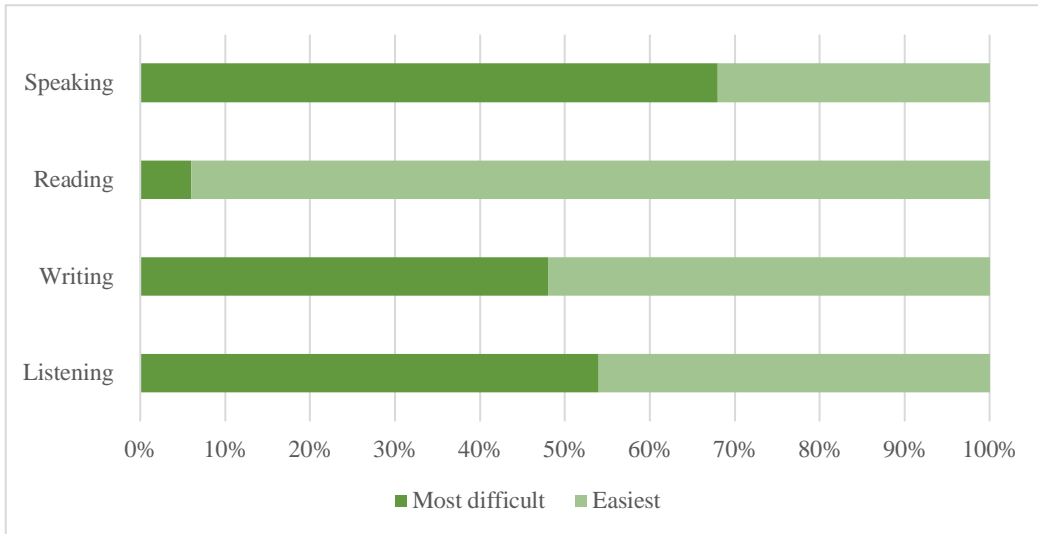
- *Children are fearless and don't care if they make mistakes.*
- *Children are less inhibited.*

5.6 The development of language skills in adulthood

In this section, the results related to qualitative data are discussed in the context of the following research question:

- *Which are the easiest and most difficult language skills to develop in adulthood? Do the trends change along with ageing?*

Graph 8 illustrates data referring to the most difficult and the easiest language skills to acquire in adulthood according to the adult learners who filled in the questionnaire.

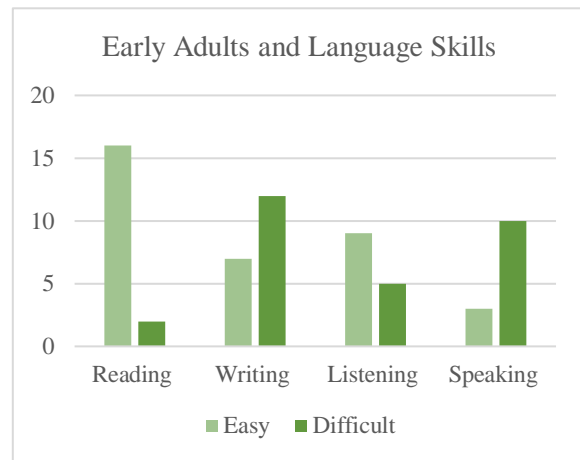
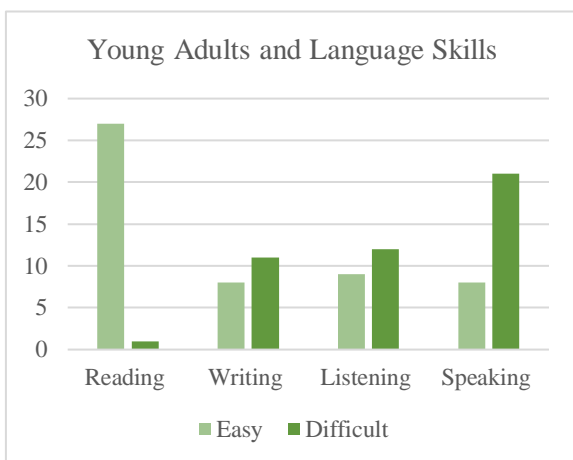


Graph 8. Most difficult and easiest language skills to acquire in adulthood

In general, Speaking is considered the most difficult language skill to acquire by the large majority of respondents (68%), followed by listening skills, which is considered difficult to acquire by almost 55% of adult respondents. On the contrary, reading and writing skills are the easiest ones. Specifically, reading is considered as the easiest one in 94% of cases, whereas writing by 52% of participants.

5.6.1 Most difficult and easiest language skills among age groups

The graphs below provide information about the easiest skills to acquire when learning a foreign language according to each age group.





Excluding the easiest and the most difficult skills of all - namely *Reading* and *Speaking* – it can be noticed that data concerning *Writing* and *Listening* differs from group to group. For instance, the majority of Late Adults and Late, late Adults reported *Listening* as more difficult than *Writing*, however, the difficulties they experienced vary.

Most of the learners attributed their listening difficulties to external factors such as native speakers' talking speed:

- *Listening is hard because native speakers talk very fast*
- *the flow of the Italian language spoken is often fast and hard to catch up if you're not familiar with the words*
- *Many Italians speak way faster than what I'm used to. So, it's really hard to comprehend everything. In my speed I'm getting along.*

Other learners considered *Listening* as a difficult activity because of their approach to listening tasks such as considering word by word and sticking with unknown words:

- *When I hear a word I don't know, I stop listening and try to translate. Then I lose the conversation thread.*

Also, Late Adults and Late, late Adults perceived *Listening* as one of the most difficult skills because of their hearing impairment:

- *My hearing may be a problem when listening.*
- *So many factors affect how well you understand what is being said and you do not control most of them, such as hearing impairment.*
- *My hearing is not so good.*
- *I do have some hearing loss which may be an issue.*

On the contrary, Early Adults and Middle Adults expressed greater difficulties in writing activities rather than listening for the following reasons:

- *Writing is hard because I'm bad at spelling.*
- *Writing requires to know the exact forms (using the wrong gender or wrong preposition in spoken language usually isn't as bad as in written texts) and also writing isn't my favourite thing already in my mother tongue.*
- *Depends on the context, but most time the right vocabs for the mentioned sentences are missing. There is an "image" of the sentence in your mother language and it's hard to translate it in this way.*
- *Writing is another story because you really have to understand the grammar and the spelling in order to do it well.*

Most Young Adults considered both *Listening* and *Writing* as difficult skills to acquire, motivating their answers with the same reasons of other age groups.

In general, *Speaking* is considered the most difficult language skill to acquire by the large majority of respondents (68%) because it requires totally active participation and does not give time to organize the discourse:

- *You have to put to use your language skills spontaneously and without too much thinking about what is right and what is wrong*

- *Speaking doesn't give you the time to think about the right grammatical forms and can be stressful if you do not know how to express certain things.*
- *Speaking gives you little time to think about what you're going to say, it causes the most pressure.*

Speaking also exposes learners to affective barriers which negatively affects language practice:

- *I am often inhibited by speaking a language I don't yet know very well. I find it easier in a class situation when everyone is in the same situation. But I am embarrassed when speaking to native Italian speakers.*
- *Because it takes a lot of courage to actively speak the language and come up with sentences which are grammatically correct.*

However, those who considered Speaking as one of the easiest skills to improve believe that their knowledge of other foreign languages similar to Italian such as Spanish give them more help and resources to practice Italian even at low levels of proficiency.

On the contrary, almost the totality of participants reported making less efforts in reading activities because of their passivity:

- *More "passive" than speaking or writing and you have more time for it than when listening*
- *Reading is the easiest because it's passive, you don't have to put that much effort into it.*
- *You don't have to have an active use of your language knowledge and you don't have to fight down fears of embarrassment by not using the language adequately*

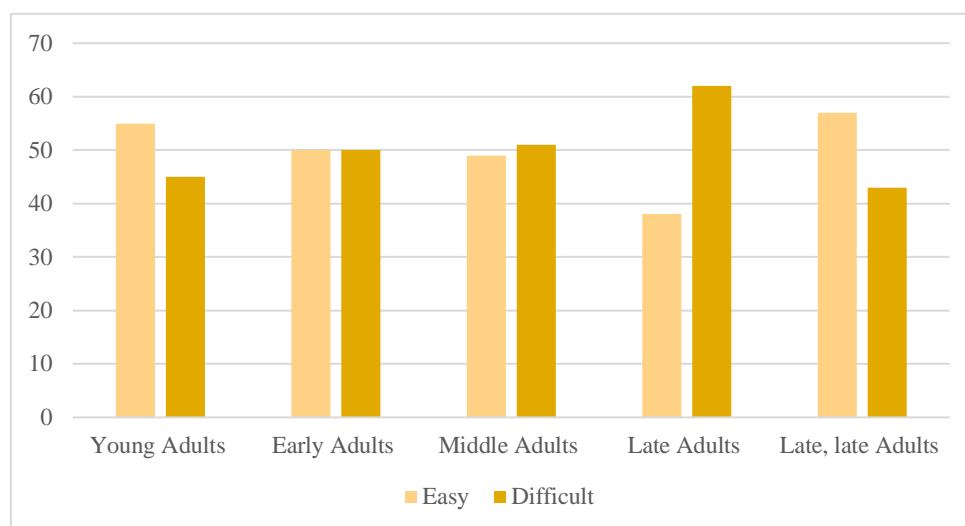
The majority of learners reported that the main advantage of reading is that it can be done at own speed and allows having time to organize concepts, read again, apply the correct strategies if the reader encounters unknown words:

- *Because I have time to think about what I want to write and I can read passages again and again until I understand it*
- *Because I have time to understand and to think about how I want to express myself.*
- *Reading because it gives me a visual of the word and I can't confuse it with something else.*
- *Reading allows me to use my understanding of other languages without getting confused by how the words sound and if it sounds different than what it looks like.*
- *I can connect words with other languages I know and make sense out of what I am reading*

- *You have time to process the info and see how words are spelled (to help with interpretation) vs when hearing, some words sounds similar but will alter the meaning if you don't think of the correct word first.*
- *I can do this at my own speed. I can predict, using context, other language knowledge (e.g. Latin, English, French), and I find it a relatively passive experience.*

5.6.2 Grammar acquisition

Question 65 asked Italian language learners whether they consider Italian grammar easy or difficult to acquire. 79 adult learners out of 163 (48%) answered that they think that Italian grammar is easy to learn. However, adults who believed that acquiring Italian grammar is difficult are in the majority, even if minimal (52%). Graph 9 illustrates participants' perceptions on grammar according to their age group:



Graph 9. Grammar acquisition

While Early Adults' results are equal, most Middle Adults and Late Adults considered Italian grammar as easy, whereas Young Adults and Late, late Adults believe the opposite.

The advanced cognitive functions which characterise adults such as metacognition allow adult learners to rationalize a new foreign language or using previous linguistic knowledge of patterns of previously learnt languages for communicative purpose. Indeed, over 40% of adults that considered Italian grammar “easy” had already learnt another foreign language, mostly French and Spanish – which are both romance languages:

- *It's a Latin language, and I speak French and Spanish.*

- *Because I learnt Latin and French at school, so the structure of the language is not too difficult.*
- *It has a structure that I can follow comparable to French.*
- *Being a native Spanish speaking the grammar rules of these both romance languages have the same Latin basis which makes them very similar in many ways.*

Also, advance cognitive functions enable adult foreign language students to approach grammar differently from children, in a more systematic and conscious way of thinking about the rules. However, the development of the rational and abstract thought induces adult learners to satisfy the desire to have a fully conscious understanding of language in terms of isolated rules, which could be just what prevents them from reaching full competence. What children acquire naturally is perceived as difficult, complicated and illogical by adult learners:

- *English is much simpler, maybe not pronunciation, but we're more flexible with rules, and there are no genders. And of course, mastering all the subjunctive forms for every word is a pain.*
- *The irregular verb conjugations that have no rules! Also, I struggle sometimes with the little things like prepositions.*
- *It's complicated and has lots of illogical and exceptions.*
- *Italian grammar is so different from English language grammar. Not having learnt any European languages at school, conjugations were a complete mystery and I found this to be the most difficult challenge. M/F words were the next hurdle and the corresponding adverb and adjective in M/F, S/P. This took a long time to understand.*
- *Masculine and feminine, singular and plural structures don't exist much in English. So, verb conjugation is a very different way of thinking. And the dreaded irregular verbs.*

5.7 Affective factors

Affective factors are rooted in human nature and play a significant role in determining the success of a foreign language learning process.

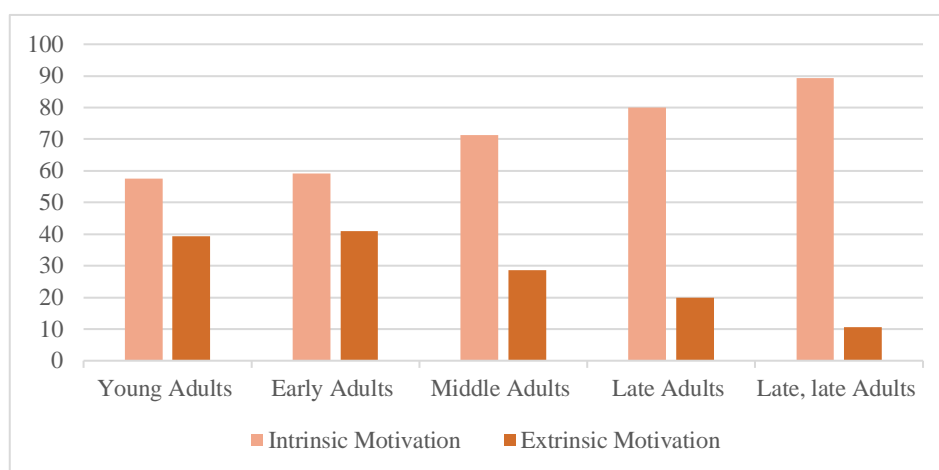
Specifically, this study wanted to analyse students' motivation, regarded as the most important positive affective factor in foreign language learning. Also, results on negative emotional factors such as anxiety have been investigated.

In this section, the results related to qualitative data are discussed in the context of the following research questions:

- *What drives adults to learn Italian as a Foreign Language? Does motivation change according to the age group of belonging?*
- *How do adult foreign language learners feel when learning Italian? Do they feel comfortable or anxious?*

5.7.1 Motivation and Age

Question 56 asked respondents to openly explain the reasons why they wanted to learn Italian as a foreign language. First, adults' answers have been classified according to Deci and Ryan's basic distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Graph 10 shows data related to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation according to age groups.



Graph 10. Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivations in adult FL learners

We can clearly see that all age groups are driven by an intrinsic motivation toward learning Italian as a foreign language. This data confirms scholars' suggestion that older learners' approach to foreign language learning is driven by intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic and instrumental (Griffiths 2008; Begotti 2019). It can also be noticed that, as age raises, the gap between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation widens, with a growth of intrinsic motivation in opposition to a decline of extrinsic motivation. For instance, 57,6% of Young Adults are driven by intrinsic motivation, while 39,4% of them are need-driven. On the contrary, only 10,7% of Late, late Adults are extrinsically motivated: the vast majority of them (89,3%) are pleasure-driven.

The origins of motivation can be very subjective (e.g. cultural growth, professional needs, refinement, pleasure, interest and passion for languages, family heritage, friends and love

relationships, moving abroad, language certificates and exams, etc). Table 17 shows the seven different types of motivation that have been identified in the open-ended answers, ranked in order of relevance:

Motivation	%
1. <i>Specific interest for Italian culture and language</i>	47,9%
2. <i>Travel reasons</i>	19,6%
3. <i>Love and/or friendship reasons</i>	12,3%
4. <i>Family heritage</i>	9,8%
5. <i>Work and Business</i>	9,8%
6. <i>Passion for Foreign Languages in general</i>	9,8%
7. <i>Study reasons</i>	3,7%

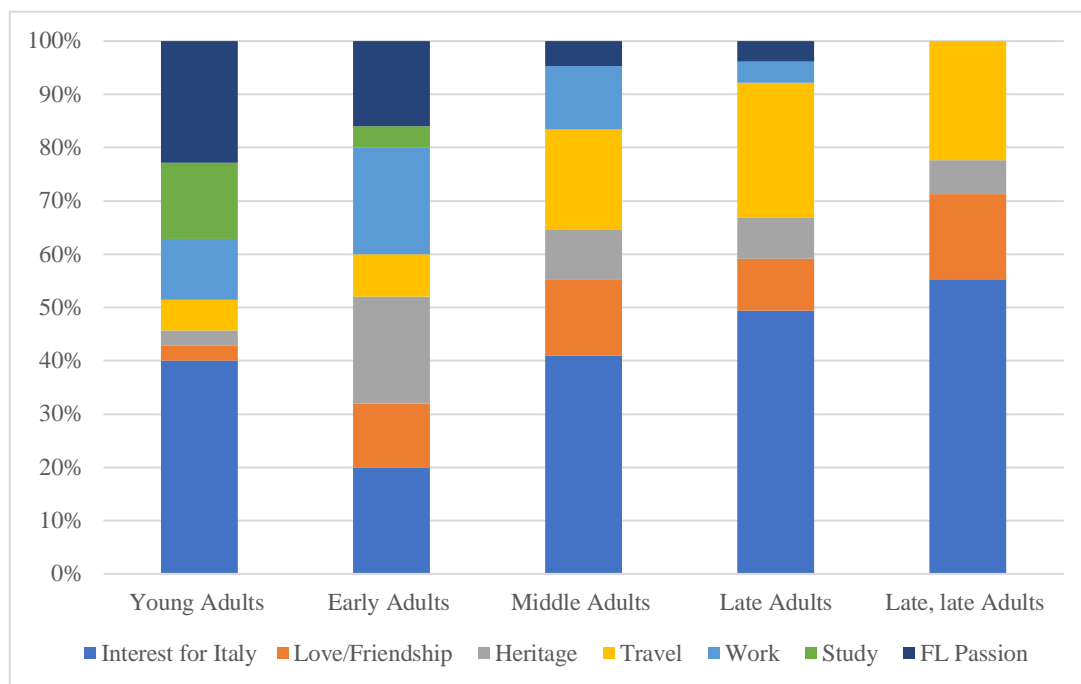
Table 17. Types of motivation in adult FL learners

Almost 48% of respondents affirmed that they decided to study Italian as a foreign language because of a specific interest for Italian culture and language. A smaller percentage of respondents (19,6%) study Italian for travel reasons, mainly because they want to be able to communicate when visiting Italy. The third reason is *Love and/or friendship reasons*: 12,3% of learners have indeed friends in Italy, Italian friends living in Australia, or Italian partners.

A tiny number of participants enrolled in Italian language course because of their Italian roots, their job and business, their passion for foreign languages and because of study reasons (e.g. attending to an Italian university).

Even though it is difficult to classify these motivations as exclusively intrinsic or exclusively extrinsic, we can say that *Travel reasons*, *Work and Business* and *Study reasons* are more instrumental and extrinsic than the other ones.

Graph 11 shows information about the seven types of motivation in relation to the age groups:



Graph 11. Types of motivations in the five age groups

We can see that all age groups clearly differ in terms of types of motivation. Also, for each group it is possible to identify one or two motivation that visibly prevail over the others. Only Early Adults' motivations are less outstanding.

Interest for Italian language and culture stands out as the main language learning motivation in all age groups, although with different percentages. Only in the three older groups – Middle Adults, Late adults and Late, late adults – the motivation driven by the interest for Italian language and culture exceeds 50%, reaching a peak of 76% among Late Adults.

It is interesting to notice that the specific interest for Italian language and culture seems to increase in conjunction with the decline of the motivation related to the general passion for languages:

	Young Adults	Early Adults	Middle Adults	Late Adults	Late, late Adults
<i>Interest for Italian culture and language</i>	42%	15%	52%	76%	52%
<i>Passion for Foreign Languages</i>	24%	12%	6%	6%	0%

Many younger learners indeed explained that they decided to learn Italian because they love language learning in general and because they have already learnt another romance language (mostly French and Spanish) – therefore it is easier for them studying Italian as

another foreign language. However, with ageing, studying Italian seems to become more passionate and genuine, due to a real and specific interest in Italy's language and culture.

Also, percentages of those who decide to study Italian because their partner is Italian, or they have Italian friends, generally increase with ageing as well as the desire to reconnect with their family roots through language.

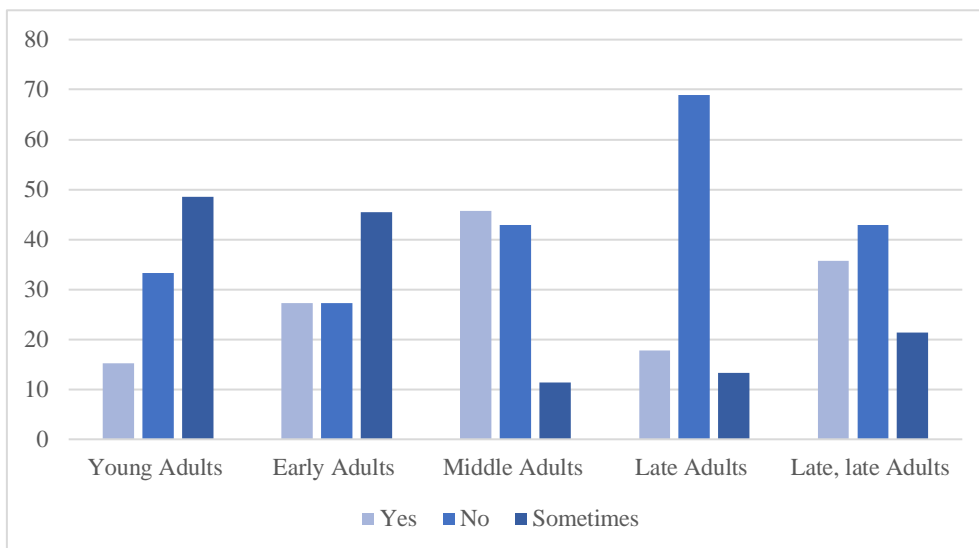
	Young Adults	Early Adults	Middle Adults	Late Adults	Late, late Adults
<i>Love and/or friendship reasons</i>	3%	9%	18%	15%	15%
<i>Family heritage</i>	3%	15%	12%	12%	6%

Concerning more extrinsic and instrumental motivation, they are stronger within Young Adults and Early Adults. For instance, it was quite predictable that *study reasons* (e.g. attending to an Italian university, language certificates, ect.) would have been exclusive to Young Adults and Early Adults. *Work and business* reasons decline with ageing as well, certainly due to retirement. In opposite to studying and working, language learning motivation related to travelling grows with participants getting older, with a pick within the Late Adults group members.

	Young Adults	Early Adults	Middle Adults	Late Adults	Late, late Adults
<i>Study reasons</i>	15%	3%	0%	0%	0%
<i>Work and business</i>	12%	15%	15%	6%	0%
<i>Travel</i>	6%	6%	24%	39%	21%

5.7.2 Anxiety and Age

Anxiety is one the most common factor that can negatively affect adult foreign language learning. The following graph shows data concerning adult learners' responses to *Question 68 - Do you feel anxious when using Italian? Why?* Answers have been firstly divided into three categories: 1-Yes, 2-No, 3-Sometimes.



Graph 12. Anxiety and age groups

Overall, apart from the third column for each age group, the most anxious adult group is that of Middle Adults (45,7%), whereas Late Adults are the least anxious learners (68,9%) (Graph 12).

Learners of the first two groups – Young Adults and Early Adults – affirm that they mostly feel anxious only “*sometimes*” and that their anxiety levels depend on the context. If we exclude the third column, we can see that, in general, most Young Adults admit they do not experience anxiety when learning (33,3%), whereas in the Early Adults group *Yes* and *No* receives the equal number of votes (both 27,3%).

The Middle Adults group is the only age group where the number of participants who feel anxious (45,7%) is higher than the number of participants who do not (42,9%), even though the difference between the data is very subtle. In the Late Adult group, the difference is much more substantial: almost 70% of learners aged between 66 and 75 do not face anxiety when learning Italian as a foreign language; only 17,8% of them experience anxiety. Finally, in the Late, late Adults group, almost 7 percentage points separate anxious learners from learner who do not have to cope with anxiety.

The reasons why students feel anxious are several and common to all age groups. From the analysis of answers to *Question 68*, combined with the open answers to *Question 67* (i.e. *Do you feel comfortable when using Italian? Why?*), it emerges that a low level of proficiency and communicative competence is one of the main reasons why adult learners feel anxious when learning a foreign language. Here some explanatory answers are reported:

- *It's hard to keep it flowing while speaking especially because I'm a beginner.*

- *I feel I can't get the right words.*
- *I don't like the feeling of not being able to express myself fully and as well as I could in my native language, so when I am trying to talk about more complex or new matters I sometimes feel anxious that I cannot make myself be understood adequately*
- *Only in some situations that are more formal and require different type of vocabulary.*
- *Because I'm afraid other people won't understand me, or I won't understand them.*

This perception is consistent with previous studies and investigations which show that anxiety levels rise because of external expectations connected to the current level of proficiency. Indeed, if adult learners have not reached an expected level yet, they are likely to avoid practicing the foreign language to protect their ego because the discrepancy between the current language level and the target level might cause them shame, anxiety and feeling of being inadequate (Griffiths 2008).

A modest number of students state that their anxiety level depends on the context: in class, when all students are at the same level of competence, levels of anxiety are lower because they are “*all in the same boat*” and therefore understand each other feelings and insecurities. When outside the classroom, few students prefer to previously let people know they are only beginners, especially because they all consider Italian native speakers as “*helpful and understanding, especially when they know that their interlocutor does not speak fluently*”. To overcome their low level of proficiency and lessen anxiety levels, students explain that they tend to rely on strategies such as “*taking a detour to say what I mean*” or “*formulating a concept before saying it to make sure it's correct*”.

Interestingly, a significant majority of adult learners are aware that self-confidence is the key solution for lowering anxiety levels. Being a beginner is a temporary condition; reaching language goals and improving competence enhance self-confidence and enable adult foreign language learners to feel more comfortable:

- *I remind myself that it's an achievement to be able to communicate I another language and people I have spoken with have always been very positive and helpful.*
- *Continue practice, practice, practice in varying circumstances builds self-confidence: it is a self-fulfilling process: the more you use the language the better you get, the better you get you feel more confident and so it goes.*

Nonetheless, according to respondents, the fear of making mistakes and appearing foolish in front of the class or native speakers is the main source of anxiety. The following answers confirm the results:

- *I don't want to look foolish if I say something completely wrong.*
- *I am afraid of making silly mistakes.*
- *I feel anxious when I need to have a more extensive conversation especially with a native speaker because I may need time to think of the vocabulary and structures and I may not have the vocabulary I need.*
- *Speaking with a native speaker who I do not know is always more intimidating.*
- *Yes. Just because I don't like making mistakes. Some days I'm "it's okay who cares if I make mistakes". Other days, especially when communicating something important, like business matters, I get anxious.*

Findings are therefore consistent with previous studies on adult learners, which affirm that the adult learner is generally more anxious than children because of his great sense of self-worth and fear of making mistakes or being judged (Begotti 2019).

Overcoming the fear of making mistakes and feeling more comfortable is possible by understanding that making errors is part of the learning process; indeed, one of the students explains: *"I used to be worried about making mistakes. But I have come to understand that it's best simply to have a "best go" and not be ashamed of speaking knowing that there will be errors. This realisation has made me less anxious over time"*.

5.8 Strengths and weaknesses of the five age groups

In the following paragraphs, the most significant strengths and weaknesses of each age group in relation to the use of foreign language learning strategies and the other variables investigated in the questionnaire will be identified.

5.8.1 Young Adults

Young Adults, aged between 18 and 25, are ranked first in the general classification of the most frequent LLS users. Average scores also indicate that they are the only ones that report a frequent and extensive use of language learning strategies, whereas all the other age groups employ them only moderately.

Furthermore, Young Adults are the only group in which four out of six strategies categories – i.e. metacognitive, social, compensatory and cognitive - fall in the high range

use. Memory-related and affective strategies are only moderately employed, but still obtaining the highest average scores. Another strength of Young Adults related to LLS categories is the extensive use of cognitive strategies, which are occasionally employed by all adult learners aged over 25 instead.

Considering individual strategies use, Young Adults' top ten most used language learning strategies are mainly metacognitive, followed by social and compensatory; only one memory-related strategy and one cognitive strategy result to be included among the top ten strategies, whereas no affective strategies are reported (Table 18).

-
1. *I pay attention when someone is speaking in Italian* (metacognitive)
 2. *I try to learn about Italian culture* (social)
 3. *I try to find out how to be a better learner of Italian* (metacognitive)
 4. *I notice my mistakes and use that information to help me do better* (metacognitive)
 5. *I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn*
(memory-related)
 6. *I try to find patterns in Italian* (cognitive)
 7. *To understand unfamiliar Italian words, I make guesses* (compensatory)
 8. *I ask questions in Italian* (social)
 9. *I try to find as many ways as I can to use my Italian* (metacognitive)
 10. *If I can't think of an Italian word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing* (compensatory)
-

Table 18. Top ten strategies mostly employed by Young Adults

Results indicate that, although Young Adults employ language learning strategies more frequently than all the other groups, they do so with less variety, if compared to Middle Adults; however, they still adopt a wider range of language learning strategies than Late Adults and Late, late Adults.

In relation to language skills acquisition, Young Adults affirm that only *Reading* is easy to acquire, whereas *Writing*, *Listening* and *Speaking* require more effort and are more challenging. On the contrary, Young Adults find Italian grammar easy to acquire.

Considering motivation, Young Adults report the highest percentage of extrinsic motivations and the lowest percentage of intrinsic ones. However, despite this, they are more intrinsically motivated to study Italian as a foreign language (57,6%) than extrinsically (nearly 40%). The interest for Italian language and culture outstands as the main intrinsic motivation to study Italian as a foreign language; however, Young Adults also report a high percentage of students who decided to enrol in an Italian language course for a general passion for foreign languages. Many younger learners indeed explain that they have decided to learn Italian because they love foreign language learning in general and because they have

already learnt another romance language – therefore it is easier for them studying Italian as another foreign language. Consequently, it seems that a considerable number of Young Adults might be motivated to study Italian to acquire and impart language knowledge and experience and be more skilled in view of the entry into the world of work.

Overall, Young Adults do not experience anxiety when using Italian as a foreign language. Most of them affirm that they mostly feel anxious only occasionally and that their anxiety levels depend on the context.

With respect to the other age groups, Young Adults' strengths can be summarised as follow:

1. They are the most frequent and extensive users of language learning strategies of all age groups.
2. They report a high frequency of use of four out of six LLS categories (metacognitive, social, compensatory and cognitive).
3. They employ metacognitive, memory-related strategies and affective strategies more frequently than older students.
4. Along with Early Adults, they employ compensatory strategies more frequently than learners aged over 40.
5. They are the only group which employ cognitive strategies in the high range of use.
6. Only *Reading* is considered an easy skill to acquire.
7. They find grammar easy to acquire.
8. Most of them feel anxious only sometimes or not at all.

With respect to the other age groups, Young Adults' weaknesses can be summarised as follow:

1. Although they employ language learning strategies more frequently than all the other groups, they adopt a less varied set of LLS categories.
2. *Speaking*, *Listening* and *Writing* skills are considered difficult and challenging.
3. They report then smallest gap between extrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

5.8.2 Early Adults

Early Adults, aged between 26 and 40, are ranked third in the general classification of the most frequent LLS users, on par with Middle Adults. Their average scores of LLS frequency

of use (M=3.3) falls in the medium range use, which indicate that Early Adults employ language learning strategies moderately.

By looking at each LLS category use, data reveals that Early Adults extensively employ metacognitive, compensatory and social strategies. In particular, along with Young Adults, Early Adults are the only ones whose compensatory strategies use falls in the high range of use. On the contrary, despite using them frequently, Early Adults employ social strategies less regularly than all the other age groups. Memory-related, cognitive and affective strategies are adopted occasionally.

Considering individual strategies use, similarly to Young Adults, Early Adults employ language learning strategies with less variety if compared to Middle Adults; however, they still adopt a wider range of language learning strategies than Late Adults and Late, late Adults. Indeed, Early Adults' most preferred strategies are metacognitive and cognitive, followed by compensatory. They list only one affective and one social strategy among the top ten individual strategies, whereas no memory-related strategies are reported (Table 19).

-
1. *I pay attention when someone is speaking in Italian* (metacognitive)
 2. *I try to talk like an Italian native speaker* (cognitive)
 3. *I try to find patterns in Italian* (cognitive)
 4. *I notice my mistakes and use that information to help me do better* (metacognitive)
 5. *I practice the sounds of Italian* (cognitive)
 6. *I encourage myself to speak Italian even when I am afraid of making mistakes* (affective)
 7. *If I can't think of an Italian word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing* (compensatory)
 8. *To understand unfamiliar Italian words, I make guesses* (compensatory)
 9. *I try to learn about Italian culture* (social)
 10. *I try to find out how to be a better learner of Italian* (metacognitive)
-

Table 19. Top ten strategies mostly employed by Early Adults

Early Adults experience more difficulties when trying to improve speaking and writing skills; on the contrary, *Reading* and *Listening* are easier to acquire. Opinions on the level of difficulty of Italian grammar are even: it is considered difficult by 50% of Early Adults; the other 50% find it easy to acquire.

Early Adults are more intrinsically motivated than extrinsically. However, interestingly, no single motivation outstands as the most important and common one. Specifically, *Interest for Italian Language and Culture*, *Work and Business* and *Family Heritage* are equivalent and are the three main motivations in this age group, followed by *Passion for Foreign*

Languages in general and *Travel reasons*. Only *Love and/or friendship reasons* and *Study reasons* got a smaller number of votes.

Like Young Adults, Early Adults do not feel anxious when using Italian as a foreign language. The majority of them indeed state that anxiety depends on the context, with the classroom being a more anxious environment.

With respect to the other age groups, Early Adults' strengths can be summarised as follow:

1. They report a high frequency of use of three out of six LLS categories (metacognitive, social and compensatory).
2. Along with Young Adults, they employ compensatory strategies more frequently than learners aged over 40.
3. *Reading* and *Listening* are easier to acquire.
4. The majority of them do not experience anxiety when learning Italian as a foreign language.

With respect to the other age groups, Early Adults' weaknesses can be summarised as follow:

1. They employ social and metacognitive less frequently than all other age groups.
2. They employ a less varied set of individual language learning strategies.
3. *Speaking* and *Writing* are difficult to acquire.
4. It is difficult to identify a more prominent language learning motivation.

5.8.3 Middle Adults

Middle Adults, aged between 41 and 65, are ranked third in the general classification of the most frequent LLS users, on par with Early Adults. Results of general LLS use indicate that Middle Adults employ language learning strategies moderately since their average scores of frequency of use falls in the medium range use (M=3.3).

However, unlike the previous age group, only two strategies categories – metacognitive and social - are frequently employed by Middle Adults. On the contrary, four out of six categories are adopted only occasionally. Also, Middle Adults prefer cognitive strategies to compensatory strategies, which are reported to be employed less regularly than all the other age groups.

Interestingly, although Middle Adults report a lower frequency of use than the two younger groups and a smaller number of frequently used LLS categories, this group result to be the one which adopts the widest range of individual language learning strategies. Indeed, the top ten most employed learning strategies include all strategies categories; metacognitive, cognitive, social, memory-related and affective strategies are included, at least once, in the top ten list (Table 20).

1.	<i>I pay attention when someone is speaking in Italian</i> (metacognitive)
2.	<i>I try to find out how to be a better learner of Italian</i> (metacognitive)
3.	<i>I try to learn about Italian culture</i> (social)
4.	<i>I try to find patterns in Italian</i> (cognitive)
5.	<i>I practice the sounds of Italian</i> (cognitive)
6.	<i>I try to talk like an Italian native speaker</i> (cognitive)
7.	<i>I notice my mistakes and use that information to help me do better</i> (metacognitive)
8.	<i>If I can't think of an Italian word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing</i> (compensatory)
9.	<i>I encourage myself to speak Italian even when I am afraid of making mistakes</i> (affective)
10.	<i>I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn</i> (memory-related)

Table 20. Top ten strategies mostly employed by Middle Adults

In relation to language skills acquisition, Middle Adults report that only *Speaking* is difficult to acquire, whereas *Writing* is equally easy and difficult. On the contrary, *Listening* and *Reading* require less effort. Unlike Young and Early Adults, Middle Adults experience more difficulties when it comes to acquire the Italian Grammar.

With respect to motivation, about 70% of Middle Adults are intrinsically motivated to study Italian as a Foreign language, primarily because of their genuine interest for Italy, its culture and its language. *Work and Business* persists as one of the most mentioned extrinsic motivation, although *Travel reasons* is in first place.

Lastly, anxiety can be considered as the most significant weakness of this age group. The Middle Adults group is indeed the only age group where the number of participants who feel anxious is higher than the number of participants who do not experience anxiety when learning or using Italian, although the difference between the data is very subtle.

With respect to the other age groups, Middle Adults' strengths can be summarised as follow:

1. They adopt the widest range of individual language learning strategies.

2. They find *Writing, Listening* and *Reading* easy to acquire.
3. 70% of them are intrinsically motivated to learn Italian as a foreign language.

With respect to the other age groups, Middle Adults' weaknesses can be summarised as follow:

1. They frequently employ only two LLS categories out of six (metacognitive and social).
2. They employ compensatory strategies less frequently than all other age groups.
3. They find grammar difficult to acquire.
4. They are the most anxious group.

5.8.4 Late Adults

Late Adults, aged between 66 and 75, are ranked second in the general classification of the most frequent LLS users. Mean scores of general frequencies of LLS use show that Late Adults (M=3.4) employ language learning strategies more frequently than Early and Middle Adults, although all three groups fall into the category of moderate users anyway.

In comparison to the three younger groups, Late Adults report a slightly different trend of LLS categories preference and therefore a different order of frequency of use. First, in Late Adults, social strategies are the most preferred ones, whereas metacognitive strategies are ranked second. Secondly, like Middle Adults, Late Adults prefer using cognitive strategies instead of compensatory ones. However, in Late Adults, cognitive strategies are reported to be adopted less regularly than all the other age ranges. Finally, Late Adults are reported to be the only age group in which affective strategies are not in last place and are more frequently employed than memory-related ones.

With respect to individual strategies use, Late Adults employ language learning strategies with less variety in comparison to the three previous age groups. Indeed, in the top ten list of the most frequently used individual language learning strategies, no memory-related and cognitive strategies are included (Table 21).

-
1. *I pay attention when someone is speaking in Italian* (metacognitive)
 2. *I try to learn about Italian culture* (social)
 3. *If I can't think of an Italian word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing* (compensatory)

4. *If I do not understand something in Italian, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again* (social)
5. *I encourage myself to speak Italian even when I am afraid of making mistakes* (affective)
6. *I notice my mistakes and use that information to help me do better* (metacognitive)
7. *I try to find out how to be a better learner of Italian* (metacognitive)
8. *I ask questions in Italian* (social)
9. *To understand unfamiliar Italian words, I make guesses* (compensatory)
10. *I think about my progress in learning Italian* (metacognitive)

Table 21. Top ten strategies mostly employed by Late Adults

Late Adults experience more difficulties when trying to enhance listening and speaking skills; on the contrary, whereas they consider *Reading* and *Writing* easier to acquire. Like Middle Adults, Late Adults find acquiring Italian grammar rather challenging and difficult.

Considering motivation, the gap between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations becomes increasingly large, with 80% of Late Adults being intrinsically motivated to enrol in an Italian language course. *Passion for Foreign Languages in general* and *Work and Business* motivations are minimised, while *Interest for Italian language and culture* is still the most widespread motivation even in Late Adults. Furthermore, in Late Adults the *Travel reasons* motivation reaches its peak in terms of most voted instrumental motivation.

As opposed to Middle Adults, Late Adults are the least anxious group of all. In this age group indeed the difference between students who feel anxious and students who do not is substantial, with almost 70% of adult students aged between 66 and 75 who do not experience anxiety at all when using Italian.

With respect to the other age groups, Late Adults' strengths can be summarised as follow:

1. They are ranked as the second most frequent LLS users after Young Adults.
2. They use social strategies more frequently than all the other age groups.
3. They are the only age group in which affective strategies are not in last place and are more frequently employed than memory-related strategies.
4. *Reading* and *Writing* are easy to acquire.
5. They are mostly intrinsically motivated.
6. They are the least anxious group.

With respect to the other age groups, Late Adults' weaknesses can be summarised as follow:

1. They use cognitive strategies less frequently than all the other age groups.

2. They employ individual language learning strategies with less variety.
3. They find grammar difficult to acquire as well as *Speaking* and *Listening*.

5.8.5 *Late, late Adults*

Lastly, Late, late Adults, aged over 75, are ranked fifth and last in the general classification of the most frequent LLS users, with an average score of 3.2.

Like Late Adults, Late, late Adults prefer employing social strategies rather than metacognitive strategies. However, like most age groups, they prefer compensatory strategies to cognitive ones and place affective strategies in the last place, as the least frequently employed LLS category. The latter result is probably Late, late Adults' main weakness as learners over 75 are reported to be the only ones who never or sporadically employ affective strategies when learning Italian as a foreign language. Furthermore, they report an occasional use of memory-related, cognitive and compensatory strategies, whereas only social and metacognitive strategies fall in the high frequency of LLS categories use.

Like Late Adults, Late, late Adults adopt language learning strategies with less variability in comparison to learners aged under 66. Specifically, only metacognitive, social, cognitive and compensatory strategies are listed in the top ten most frequently employed language learning strategies (Table 22).

-
1. *I try to learn about Italian culture* (social)
 2. *I pay attention when someone is speaking in Italian* (metacognitive)
 3. *I notice my mistakes and use that information to help me do better* (metacognitive)
 4. *I try to not translate word-for-word* (cognitive)
 5. *I try to find out how to be a better learner of Italian* (metacognitive)
 6. *If I do not understand something in Italian, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again* (social)
 7. *I try to talk like an Italian native speaker* (cognitive)
 8. *If I can't think of an Italian word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing* (compensatory)
 9. *I ask Italian speakers to correct me when I talk* (social)
 10. *I ask for help from Italian native speakers* (social)
-

Table 22. Top ten strategies mostly employed by Late, late Adults

In relation to language skills acquisition, Late, late Adults experience less difficulties when trying to improve reading and writing skills; on the contrary, Speaking and Listening are more difficult to acquire. Also, similarly to their youngest counterpart – i.e. Young

Adults – Late, late Adults experience no difficulties when it comes to acquire the Italian Grammar.

With respect to language learning motivation, results indicate that Late, late Adults report the highest rate of intrinsic motivations and the lowest rate of extrinsic motivations, in direct opposition to Young Adults. In Late, late Adults *Passion for Foreign Languages in general* is completely gone and the only instrumental motivation identified is *Travel reasons*. *Interest for Italian language and culture* reaches its peak. Overall, the majority of Late, late Adults do not experience anxiety when using Italian as a foreign language.

With respect to the other age groups, Late, late Adults' strengths can be summarised as follow:

1. They find Italian grammar easy to acquire.
2. They are the most intrinsically motivated age group, with *Interest for Italian language culture* motivation being the most widespread of all motivations.
3. Most of them do not experience anxiety when learning and/or using Italian as a foreign language.

With respect to the other age groups, Late, late Adults' weaknesses can be summarised as follow:

1. They are the least frequent LLS users.
2. They use memory-related, cognitive, affective and compensatory strategies only occasionally, whereas only social and metacognitive strategies fall in the high frequency of LLS categories use.
3. They employ memory-related strategies less frequently than all the other age groups.
4. They are the only age group who rarely or never employ affective strategies.
5. They use a less varied set of language learning strategies.

Conclusions and suggestions for further research

The present study addresses the role of age in the use of language learning strategies by adult learners of Italian as a foreign language.

Although it is not possible to generalise the results of this research to each individual FL adult learner, findings have identified age differences in strategy use, and demonstrated that, overall, to younger age groups correspond higher frequencies of LLS use. However, trends are not steady and LLS categories use is influenced by ageing to a more or lesser extent. For instance, in memory-related and cognitive strategies, age might play a greater role in the choice and use of language learning strategies of these categories since there is a trend of steady descending frequency of use that occur in conjunction with ageing. The frequency of use declines from higher to lower levels in older groups in compensatory and affective strategies as well; however, comparison of individual groups mean scores reveals that the decline within the same frequency of use is unsteady. In addition, the use of metacognitive and social strategies seems to be less affected by advancing age since their frequency of use remains high throughout adulthood.

Also, previous studies demonstrated that, even though ageing has an impact on LLS use, there are other variables such as level of proficiency, gender, motivation, learning context, teaching methods, and so on which are believed to have a greater influence on language learning strategies use than age (Oxford 1989a; Griffiths 2008).

Therefore, further research is needed to better understand the correlation between ageing and LLS use.

The part of the research which investigated language learning strategies use employed a quantitative design – i.e. the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning. Future studies could employ qualitative methodologies such as interviews with follow-up questions to better investigate the reasons why adult learners employ certain types of strategies rather than others. This methodology could help to obtain a deeper examination of LLS use and a better understanding of the possible relationship between age and learning strategies use.

Considering previous studies, the same SILL data might be used to explore other variables mentioned in the current study such as proficiency level, gender, motivation, and anxiety. For instance, since each age group included students who were not at the same proficiency level, an interesting follow-up research could be investigating whether, within the same age group, trends of LLS use change according to proficiency. The same methodology could be applied to other individual and affective variables.

In addition, pedagogical implications should be further explored. Since some LLS categories reported higher frequency of use than others, teachers of Italian as a foreign language might care to consider carefully these strategies, specifically metacognitive and social ones, and consider the implication of these findings for their own teaching practice. They will need to consider carefully the kind of support their students need if they want their learning experience to be successful; on the other side, adult learners should be made aware of the wide range of strategy options and uses. Therefore, LLS instruction in relation to adulthood and different age groups should be the object of another possible follow-up research.

Lastly, language learning strategies are not limited to the ones cited in SILL and we must consider that the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning was developed in the 1980s and published in several versions in the 1990s. Since then, many more language learning strategies have been explored and proposed by other scholars and still there might be more that have not been investigated yet, especially those strategies derived from the continuous and relentless technological progress, which continues and will continue to offer innovative opportunities and tools for foreign language learning. Therefore, a further suggestion could look at the newest technological language learning strategies employed by language learners; this data could be then employed for a review of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning.

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Appendix

Questionnaire on Adult Language Learning Strategies

Dear student,

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect data for my MA thesis, which focuses on adult language learning strategies. The questionnaire is anonymous - data will be used only for my research – and it will take no more than 15/ 20 minutes.

After providing some general information, you will complete the SILL (Strategic Inventory for Language Learning), a questionnaire used in the language education field to investigate learners learning strategies. Finally, I will ask you to answer a few open questions about your foreign language learning experience.

Grazie mille per il tuo prezioso aiuto,

Linda

SECTION 1 – GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other
- I don't want to disclose it

2. Your native language is:

- English
- Other (specify)

3. Where are you from?

- Oceania
- Europe
- North America
- South America
- Africa
- Asia

4. How old are you?

- 18-25 years old
- 26-40 years old
- 41-65 years old
- 66-75 years old
- More than 75 years old

5. What is your current level of Italian?

- Absolute Beginner A1
- Beginner A2
- Intermediate B1
- Upper-Intermediate B2
- Advanced C1/C2

**SECTION 2 – STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL) -
Version 7.0 (1989b)**

Tick the number that best describes what you do. Each number stands for the frequency you use that strategy:

1 = NEVER TRUE

2 = USUALLY NOT TRUE

3 = SOMEWHAT TRUE

4 = USUALLY TRUE

5 = ALWAYS TRUE

Please answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements.

6. Item 1 - I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn	1	2	3	4	5
7. Item 2 - I use new Italian words in a sentence so I can remember them	1	2	3	4	5
8. Item 3 - I connect the sound of a new Italian word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word	1	2	3	4	5
9. Item 4 - I remember a new Italian word by making a mental picture of the word to help me remember the word.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Item 5 - I use rhymes to remember new Italian words	1	2	3	4	5
11. Item 6 - I use flashcards to remember new Italian words	1	2	3	4	5
12. Item 7 - I act out new Italian words	1	2	3	4	5
13. Item 8 - I review Italian lesson often	1	2	3	4	5
14. Item 9 - I remember new Italian words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, on my notes, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
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15. Item 10 - I say or write new Italian words several times	1	2	3	4	5
16. Item 11 - I try to talk like an Italian native speaker	1	2	3	4	5
17. Item 12 - I practice the sounds of Italian	1	2	3	4	5
18. Item 13 - I use Italian words I know differently	1	2	3	4	5
19. Item 14 - I start conversations in Italian	1	2	3	4	5
20. Item 15 - I watch Italian media (e.g. TV shows, movies, YouTube videos, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
21. Item 16 - I read for pleasure in Italian	1	2	3	4	5
22. Item 17 - I write notes, messages or texts in Italian	1	2	3	4	5
23. Item 18 - I first skim (i.e. read over the passage quickly) a passage written in IT. Then I go back and read it carefully	1	2	3	4	5
24. Item 19 - I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in Italian	1	2	3	4	5
25. Item 20 - I try to find patterns in Italian	1	2	3	4	5
26. Item 21 - I find the meaning of an Italian word by dividing it into parts that I understand	1	2	3	4	5
27. Item 22 - I try to not translate word-for-word	1	2	3	4	5
28. Item 23 - I make summaries of information that I hear or read in Italian	1	2	3	4	5
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29. Item 24 - To understand unfamiliar Italian words, I make guesses	1	2	3	4	5
30. Item 25 - When I can't think of a word during a conversation in Italian, I use gestures	1	2	3	4	5
31. Item 26 - I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in Italian	1	2	3	4	5
32. Item 27 - I read Italian texts without looking up every new word	1	2	3	4	5

33. Item 28 - <i>I try to guess what the other person will say next.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
34. Item 29 - <i>If I can't think of an Italian word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing (synonymous)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
35. Item 30 - <i>I try to find as many ways as I can to use my Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
36. Item 31 - <i>I notice my mistakes and use that information to help me do better</i>	1	2	3	4	5
37. Item 32 - <i>I pay attention when someone is speaking in Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
38. Item 33 - <i>I try to find out how to be a better learner of Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
39. Item 34 - <i>I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
40. Item 35 - <i>I look for people I can talk to in Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
41. Item 36 - <i>I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
42. Item 37 - <i>I have clear goals for improving my Italian language skills</i>	1	2	3	4	5
43. Item 38 - <i>I think about my progress in learning Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
44. Item 39 - <i>I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
45. Item 40 - <i>I encourage myself to speak Italian even when I am afraid of making mistakes</i>	1	2	3	4	5
46. Item 41 - <i>I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in learning Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
47. Item 42 - <i>I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
48. Item 43 - <i>I write down my feelings in a language learning diary</i>	1	2	3	4	5
49. Item 44 - <i>I talk to someone else about I feel when I am learning Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
50. Item 45 - <i>If I do not understand something in Italian, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again</i>	1	2	3	4	5
51. Item 46 - <i>I ask Italian speakers to correct me when I talk</i>	1	2	3	4	5
52. Item 47 - <i>I practice Italian with other students</i>	1	2	3	4	5
53. Item 48 - <i>I ask for help from Italian native speakers</i>	1	2	3	4	5
54. Item 49 - <i>I ask questions in Italian</i>	1	2	3	4	5
55. Item 50 - <i>I try to learn about Italian culture</i>	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 3 – FEW MORE QUESTIONS

56. Why do you want to learn Italian?

57. What do you think is the effect of age in your language learning process?

58. Do you think that learning a foreign language at an adult age has been different from learning as a child or adolescent?

59. If so, in which ways?

60. Has learning Italian been easier or more difficult than you expected?

61. In terms of your own learning which of the following skills are the easiest for you? (you can select more than one)

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

62. Why?

63. In terms of your own learning which of the following skills are the most difficult for you? (you can select more than one)

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

64. Why?

65. Do you think Italian grammar is easy or difficult to you?

66. Why?

67. Do you feel comfortable when using Italian? Why?

68. Do you feel worried or anxious when using Italian? Why?

SUBMIT

