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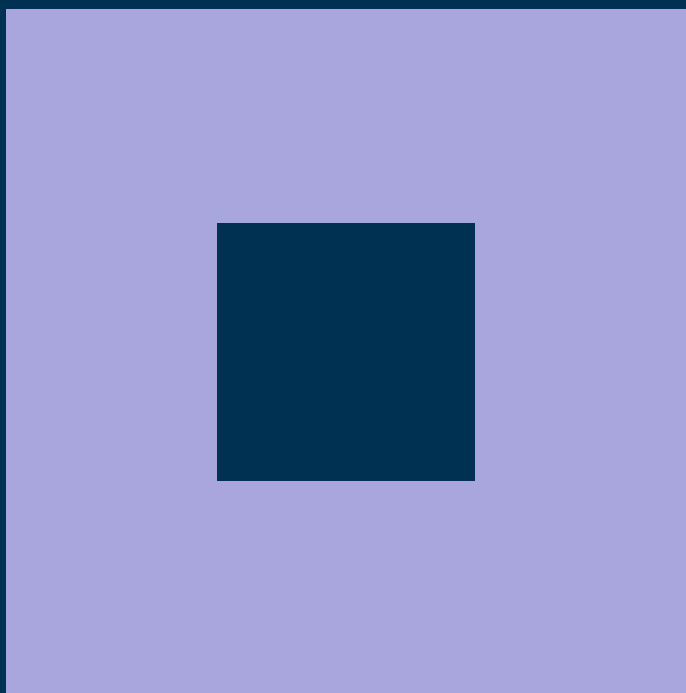
E-ISSN 2280-6792

Educazione Linguistica.  
Language Education

Vol. 15 – Num. 1  
Marzo 2026



**Edizioni**  
Ca' Foscari





e-ISSN 2280-6792

**EL.LE**

Educazione Linguistica.  
Language Education

**Edizioni Ca' Foscari** - Venice University Press

Fondazione Università Ca' Foscari

Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia

URL <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/riviste/elle/>

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**Editore** Edizioni Ca' Foscari | Fondazione Università Ca' Foscari | Dorsoduro 3246, 30123 Venezia, Italia | ecf@unive.it

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Scientific certification of the works published by Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Venice University Press: all articles published in this issue have received a favourable opinion by subject-matter experts, through an anonymous peer review process under the responsibility of the Scientific Committee of the journal. The evaluations were conducted in adherence to the scientific and editorial criteria established by Edizioni Ca' Foscari.



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# Ripensare la ‘grammatica di riferimento’ in prospettiva didattica

Paolo E. Balboni

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**Abstract** This is the third essay of a series concerning the nature and role of teaching materials for today's 'liquid' students, who live and communicate in Bauman's 'liquid modernity'. This essay deals with the nature and use of reference grammars meant for second and foreign language students, which differ from reference grammars for scholars, in nature, aim, form and structure. The main function of reference grammars for students is providing compact and exhaustive descriptions of grammar topics which are spread in the volumes and units of a communicative foreign language course. The essay reports the results of a project aimed at designing an 'ideal' reference grammar that can respond to five research questions: how many of the grammar that rule mental competence and social performance grammars should be included? How to design a grammar that can be used by beginner, intermediate and advanced students, each in their own way of conceiving 'grammar' and of using it? What kind of grammar categories and, consequently, what terminology should be used to facilitate consultation and study? How should the main book interact with its online expansions (interactive exercises, videos, AI etc) to make consultation and study easy, effective, motivating? How can layout, colours, pictures, etc. be used to make consultation and study easy, effective and motivating?

**Keywords** Language teaching. Language Learning. Reference Grammar. Educational linguistics. Grammar in language teaching.

**Sommario** 1 Le grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento. – 2 Il 'bisogno' di grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento nell'approccio comunicativo. – 3 Un'idea nuova di grammatica scolastica di riferimento.



Edizioni  
Ca' Foscari

Submitted 2026-02-02  
Published 2026-04-27



**Open access**

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DOI 10.30687/ELLE/2280-6792/2026/01/000

Le grammatiche 'di riferimento' o, con espressione meno frequente: 'di consultazione', non nascono in ambito edulinguistico, non vogliono aiutare chi sta perfezionando la propria lingua o sta apprendendone una non nativa: sono 'dizionari grammaticali' cui ricorre chi ha un dubbio e quindi consulta i 'lemmi' che gli interessano. Le grammatiche di riferimento, sulle quali la letteratura è molto limitata,<sup>1</sup> possono essere

- a. *normative*: descrivono il modo in cui una lingua dovrebbe essere usata secondo la tradizione linguistica e letteraria; è la tipologia che ha prevalso per secoli, ma che appare oggi sempre meno seguita;
- b. *descrittive*: mostrano la lingua come è, come viene usata dalla comunità che la parla o scrive; come una grammatica normativa riportano le forme più frequenti e consolidate, le regolarità (da cui la parola 'regola', intesa generalmente come 'norma', 'legge') nei meccanismi di funzionamento della lingua, ma riportano anche le varianti più frequenti, riconosciute dai parlanti come forme possibili e comunicativamente efficaci anche se "sbagliate" rispetto alla norma che hanno descritto, oppure troppo auliche, troppo colloquiali ecc.

Oggi, la maggior parte delle grammatiche di riferimento sia cartacee sia elettroniche sono descrittive; si differenziano per la loro completezza, per la teoria linguistica di riferimento (grammatiche pragmatiche, valenziali, ecc.), per il destinatario: ci sono grammatiche di riferimento scritte da studiosi per studiosi, che chiameremo 'accademiche', e ci sono grammatiche di riferimento scritte per studenti di livello abbastanza avanzato, di solito dal B2 in poi, che chiameremo 'scolastiche': in questo saggio ci occupiamo di queste grammatiche, che oscillano tra normatività (lo studente chiede certezze) e descrizione (lo studente cerca di sapere se una variante o una forma sono 'errori' o sono accettabili in alcuni contesti e contesti).

## 1 Le grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento

In questi ultimi anni la domanda di grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento è molto aumentata quantitativamente (ipotizzeremo

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<sup>1</sup> Alcuni testi di riflessione generale su quella che viene spesso definita *language documentation* sono Ameka et al. 2006, probabilmente l'opera più esaustiva sul tema; Gippert et al. 2006; Alvarez, Archaimbault 2007; Colombat 2007, che vede le grammatiche di riferimento dal punto di vista di uno storico; Chiss, David 2014, che offrono una prospettiva francese al tema; Nikolaeva 2015; in particolare, per le grammatiche elettroniche di riferimento si veda Nordhoff 2008.

delle ragioni nel § 2), sebbene in maniera diversa a seconda delle varie lingue che rientrano nell'educazione linguistica. Esplorando i cataloghi di 32 editori scolastici abbiamo rilevato che:

- a. nei cataloghi di *italiano L1* le grammatiche di riferimento sono collocate a chiusura della sezione che presenta le grammatiche pedagogiche, cioè i manuali di italiano usati nella scuola media e nel biennio delle superiori; pochi editori hanno due prodotti, quasi sempre diversi per data di realizzazione e veste grafica piuttosto che per metodologia e idea di fondo di che cosa sia una grammatica di riferimento per studenti delle scuole superiori; alcuni dei cataloghi con sezioni universitarie presentano grammatiche accademiche, che sono sia dei 'classici' sia opere di linguisti ancora attivi;
- b. nei cataloghi di *latino e greco* le grammatiche di riferimento per liceali sono poche e in molti casi hanno una logica da 'bignamino' grammaticale: i manuali di lingue classiche sono delle "grammatiche pedagogiche" in cui si affiancano piccoli (e spesso insignificanti) frammenti di testi classici, descrizioni grammaticali, liste lessicali ed esercizi, per cui la grammatica di riferimento è un quaderno, più che un libro, spesso curato dagli stessi autori dei manuali: un riassunto schematico di quanto presentato nel manuale;
- c. nei cataloghi di *italiano a stranieri* e di *lingue straniere a italiani* c'è molta offerta di grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento, il che significa che la domanda da parte di insegnanti e studenti di lingue è forte. Questi materiali sono di due tipi:
  - c.a gli editori internazionali (Edilingua, Cambridge, Oxford, Hueber, Hachette, ecc.) propongono grammatiche cosiddette 'ecumeniche', indirizzate a studenti di tutto il mondo indipendentemente dalla loro lingua madre: descrivono una lingua usando quella stessa lingua (una grammatica ecumenica di inglese ha descrizioni e consegne didattiche in inglese);
  - c.b gli editori italiani offrono grammatiche di riferimento comparative, che focalizzano sia le differenze tra italiano e lingua straniera, che creano difficoltà allo studente, sia le strutture parallele in italiano e lingua straniera, che possono generare interferenze. Le grammatiche comparative spesso usano l'italiano nelle descrizioni grammaticali.

Questo saggio focalizza le grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento delle lingue straniere, che in editoria sono di italiano per stranieri, di inglese, francese, spagnolo e tedesco: è un settore in cui i manuali 'longevi' sono in via di sostituzione con nuove proposte, fenomeno che

indica due cose: da un lato, i docenti di lingua straniera 'consigliano caldamente' le grammatiche di riferimento (che non possono adottarle obbligatoriamente visto che non sono libri di testo); dall'altro, che c'è un ripensamento del ruolo, dei contenuti, della struttura delle grammatiche didattiche di riferimento. Nel paragrafo 2 cercheremo di esplorarne le cause, ma prima vediamo i parametri essenziali per osservare una grammatica scolastica di riferimento che emergono, o quanto meno si possono intuire, dalla scarsa letteratura<sup>2</sup> sul tema:

- a. *che cosa contiene e che cosa trasmette*: queste grammatiche includono sempre gli elementi indicati per i livelli fino al B2 dal *Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento* e dai conseguenti *profili* delle varie lingue, che sono anche i meccanismi morfosintattici presenti nei manuali oggi usati per l'insegnamento; ogni grammatica applica inoltre varie logiche nell'integrazione sia verso il livello C1 sia, soprattutto, in ordine alle varietà che si allontanano dallo standard; il contenuto è quasi sempre limitato alle grammatiche linguistiche, con qualche cenno sociolinguistico, mentre di trascurano i codici extralinguistici (cinesici, prossemici, oggettivici) e la dimensione discorsivo-pragmatica;
- b. *come sono organizzati i contenuti*: la prassi è la successione delle canoniche parti del discorso, con una focalizzazione morfologica, mentre la sintassi è distribuita (e spesso condotta per cenni, in maniera meno approfondita della morfologia) nelle sezioni che trattano i modi e i tempi verbali e le congiunzioni coordinanti e subordinanti; è sempre presente anche l'ortografia, mentre fonetica e fonologia sono quasi sempre accennate, non approfondite;
- c. *come sono descritti i fenomeni*: «Grammaticography: The Art and Craft of Writing Grammars» è un saggio di Mosel, «A Grammar as a Communicative Act» è un saggio di Payne (entrambi inclusi in Ameka 2006; si veda anche Payne, Weber 2006). *L'implied reader* delle grandi grammatiche di consultazione è uno studioso, che può essere un accademico o un insegnante molto preparato, quindi c'è simmetria tra il linguista che scrive e il linguista che legge; una grammatica scolastica di riferimento al contrario istituisce una relazione

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**2** Sull'uso didattico delle grammatiche di riferimento (più che sulla natura delle grammatiche *scolastiche* di riferimento, assai poco studiata) la riflessione chiave è ormai datata ma ancora validissima, Leech 1994; si possono vedere anche Oberly 2008; Nava 2014b; le slide di Astrid 2017; Castillo Peña 2021, seconda parte del saggio; sulla persistenza della prospettiva prescrittiva nelle grammatiche didattiche si veda Nava 2014a, mentre sulla nuova tendenza descrittiva, attenta alle varietà, si veda in un saggio-intervista ad Anna Camps di Troncoso, 2020, soprattutto a p. 16.

asimmetrica: il linguista deve scrivere per un non-linguista, e questo ci pare il punto critico di maggior rilievo.

## 2 Il 'bisogno' di grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento nell'approccio comunicativo

L'approccio comunicativo novecentesco aveva come principio *focus on meaning*; a fine secolo si produsse una reazione a questo impianto iper-pragmatico, il movimento *focus on form*:<sup>3</sup> non era una reazione uguale e contraria, bensì integrativa: *mentre* si focalizza l'efficacia comunicativa, il *meaning*, si focalizza l'attenzione degli studenti anche sulla *form* necessaria per comunicare quel *meaning*.

I manuali odierni hanno fatto propria questa impostazione, quindi non è più la mancanza di 'grammatica' nei manuali a generare la domanda di grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento e conseguentemente la crescente offerta da parte degli editori scolastici. Ci sono, a nostro avviso, almeno tre bisogni degli studenti, mano a mano che avanzano, livello dopo livello, verso il B2, C1, C2, che generano autonomamente la domanda di grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento da affiancare ai manuali:

- a. i manuali 'diluiscono', le grammatiche di riferimento 'condensano'.

L'insegnamento linguistico, in tutti i corsi e i manuali, è articolato secondo i livelli del Consiglio d'Europa; in particolare, i manuali sono quasi tutti divisi in singoli volumi, uno per ogni livello, e all'interno di ogni livello sono divisi in almeno una decina di unità didattiche su sillabi multipli (funzionali, situazionali, lessicali, culturali e *anche* grammaticali). Quindi la formalizzazione grammaticale è 'diluìta' unità dopo unità, volume dopo volume, con continue riprese 'a spirale' (il grado degli aggettivi, ad esempio, è intuitivo in A1, viene approfondito in A2, si incontrano i comparativi e superlativi irregolari e sovrabbondanti in B1, li si sistematizza in B2: una struttura semplice viene diluita, giustamente, in quattro fasi successive, ma questo significa in quattro volumi, cioè in una quarantina almeno di unità didattiche). Lo studente lavora sul manuale che sta usando, ad esempio quello B1, e se ha bisogno di recuperare un'informazione che era nei due

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**3** Due testi di riferimento essenziali per comprendere l'affermazione del *FonF movement* a inizio secolo sono Skehan 1998 e Robinson 2001; più recente, sulla stessa linea di pensiero, è Rebuschat 2015; un'ampia sintesi in italiano, con un'ampia bibliografia di orientamento, è Della Putta, Ghia 2025, e una rilettura critica è in molti saggi di R. Ellis, tra i quali segnaliamo quello del 2016; una riflessione sulla contemporaneità tra *focus on meaning* e *on form*, che ci pare il punto chiave, è in Spada, Lightbown 2008.

manuali precedenti, ammesso che li abbia a disposizione, si perde facilmente in indici multisillabici, che tra l'altro sono spesso più tematici e funzionali che grammaticali; anche laddove c'è un indice grammaticale, le voci sono generiche: lo studente non troverà mai una voce come 'i comparativi sovrabbondanti di *far, late, little*'. Le grammatiche di riferimento riuniscono, condensano in poche pagine un argomento, trattandolo in maniera esaustiva per un pubblico di studenti fino al B2. Uno studente A1-2 può farne a meno (in realtà non è così, ma spesso lui/lei lo percepisce in questo modo), uno studente dal B1 in poi ne ha *bisogno*;

- b. l'approccio comunicativo mette la morfosintassi in secondo piano.

Le cose collocate 'in secondo piano' spesso non sono chiare: se si lavora sulla funzione comunicativa 'paragonare', quindi sul comparativo che abbiamo citato nell'esempio, sopra, le varie forme vengono presentate in un contesto verosimile e sono accompagnate da esercizi di matrice comunicativa, ma i meccanismi della comparazione, dell'introduzione del secondo termine di paragone, ecc. sono distribuiti su più pagine e su più unità, e molte delle peculiarità (le 'eccezioni') sono riprese, magari in un piccolo box a bordo pagina, in altre unità dedicate ad altri temi, quindi l'annotazione sul comparativo non compare nell'indice e non risulta reperibile. Le grammatiche di riferimento non si pongono problemi comunicativi: se si consulta il comparativo, si sa che ci sono tutte le 'regole', accompagnate da esercizi sia sui comparativi regolare sia sugli irregolari - esercizi di fissazione, senza preoccupazioni di autenticità comunicativa.

- c. In classe i ritmi sono dettati dal docente, in una grammatica di riferimento no.

In classe i ritmi sono dettati dal docente e tutte le attività possono essere fonte di informazione, quindi di valutazione esplicita o non. La vita di classe, per quanto attento ed esperto sia l'insegnante, include sempre un certo livello di ansia.

Una grammatica di riferimento viene consultata individualmente, quasi sempre a casa, dove ogni singolo studente segue i suoi ritmi, risponde ai propri dubbi grammaticali, si esercita e trova le soluzioni senza che tali processi comportino l'ansia di un voto.

Mano a mano che i volumi A1, A2, B1, B2 si accumulano e le strutture morfosintattiche si complessificano, la grammatica di riferimento diventa un'oasi di pace e di serenità autogestita.

### 3 Un'idea nuova di grammatica scolastica di riferimento

T. Marin, direttore editoriale di una casa editrice specializzata in materiale didattico di italiano per stranieri, Edilingua, è autore di vari manuali e curatore di volumi per la formazione di docenti, tra cui uno sul ruolo della grammatica nell'insegnamento dell'italiano (Marin 2021), cui abbiamo collaborato con uno *state of the art article* sull'insegnamento della grammatica. Nella sua veste di editore, Marin aveva notato l'incremento di domanda di grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento, e nella sua veste di formatore internazionale aveva sondato molti insegnanti sul crescente interesse per questo genere di materiale didattico; nella sua veste di persona esperta di linguistica educativa, infine, ci ha proposto una ricerca, non necessariamente finalizzata alla realizzazione editoriale: progettare una grammatica 'ideale' per studenti stranieri di italiano.

Le domande di ricerca concordate erano:

- a. *quali e quante grammatiche* descrivere: dato un modello di competenza comunicativa complesso (abbiamo usato quello descritto in Balboni 2025a), che include le grammatiche linguistiche, extralinguistiche (gesti, espressioni, posture, distanze interpersonali, uso comunicativo di oggetti) e contestuali (sociolinguistiche, pragmatiche, interculturali), è possibile, e come, dare una mappa di tutte queste grammatiche?
- b. *diversi livelli e percorsi di accesso*: stante la prassi consolidata di articolare il corso in più volumi, come consentire a ogni studente di accedere alla grammatica non solo stante la sua competenza (cosa che blocca di solito l'accesso a studenti principianti, A1-2), ma rispettando i modelli di fruizione grammaticale propri del livello in cui si trova?
- c. *terminologia metalinguistica*: nella 'grammaticografia' un tema cruciale è la terminologia: quanto e quella della terminologia italiana classica, molto complessa e in parte ostica anche agli studenti italiani, è comprensibile a stranieri che provengono da tradizioni scolastiche che dedicano poco o nessun tempo all'analisi grammaticale e logica e spesso usano categorie diverse e che in molti casi hanno strutture linguistiche diverse (basti pensare all'articolo, assente in molte lingue)?
- d. *rapporto tra carta e ambienti didattici virtuali*: i corsi di lingua oggi includono (1) manuali cartacei, (2) sezioni online con esercizi e attività spesso interattive e autocorrette, (3) espansioni (non trasposizioni, come gli e-book) pensati per l'ambiente didattico potenziale in quei dispositivi. È possibile progettare una grammatica di riferimento in modo che gli studenti di quei corsi di lingua la usino con le stesse strategie

e modalità operative cui sono abituati, visto nell'uso di una grammatica di questo tipo non c'è l'assistenza di insegnanti o di compagni?

- e. *progettazione grafica ed editoriale*: corsi di lingua di cui al punto precedente sono molto curati dal punto di vista editoriale: come organizzare una grammatica di riferimento con un layout efficace nelle schematizzazioni ma anche accattivante e creativo? Come usare il colore in modo funzionale alla descrizione grammaticale? Come usare le immagini per contestualizzare e per mostrare contenuti, non solo per bellezza grafica - che non è un tratto insignificante visto che Schumann ha dimostrato il ruolo fondamentale della bellezza estetica del materiale nel facilitare l'acquisizione e la ritenzione mnemonica (è al secondo posto su cinque fattori).

Vediamo nei paragrafi che seguono come abbiamo cercato di rispondere a queste domande, risposte che poi hanno guidato la traduzione operativa del progetto in una grammatica scolastica di riferimento di italiano per stranieri (Balboni 2024).

### 3.1 Quali e quante grammatiche?

Il modello di competenza comunicativa di riferimento include più grammatiche, ma in genere le grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento si limitano a quelle linguistiche, morfosintassi e ortografia; la nostra proposta è un'organizzazione in *grammatiche dei codici* e *grammatiche dell'uso*.

Nelle grammatiche dei codici abbiamo:

- a. le *grammatiche linguistiche*: pare utile seguire le parti del discorso canoniche con una logica morfosintattica, inserendo cioè le informazioni sintattiche laddove gli studenti possono facilmente cercarle (ad esempio nei connettivi, nei modi e tempi verbali, ecc.); siccome gli studenti stranieri di italiano hanno già esperienza di studio dell'inglese, può essere opportuno agevolare per la consultazione conservando alcuni accorpamenti tipici di quella lingua, ad esempio avverbi e aggettivi visti come *qualificatori*, preposizioni e congiunzioni, entrambe *connettivi*, aggettivi e pronomi *determinativi*. La fonologia è oggetto di grammatiche pedagogiche e non di consultazione, anche se elementi di fonetica rientrano nelle sezioni dedicate a ortografia e pronuncia e alla varietà regionali (utili per la lettura e l'ascolto, non certo necessarie per la produzione);
- b. le *grammatiche extralinguistiche*, cioè quelle cinesiche (gesti, posture ed espressioni), quelle prossemiche (distanza

e contatto interpersonale), quelle oggettistiche (l'uso di oggetti per comunicare: regali, status symbol, abbigliamento, uniformi ecc.): sono generalmente assenti dai manuali e dalle grammatiche di riferimento, ma sono essenziali in un approccio comunicativo; pongono problemi editoriali (uso di foto o video?), ma soprattutto vanno trattate nella grammatica interculturale (vedi sotto).

Le grammatiche dell'uso, non sempre presenti nelle grammatiche di riferimento, descrivono:

- a. *i vari livelli di formalità e quelli della cortesia*, che riguardano sia la lingua sia i linguaggi non verbali: di solito sono trattati nelle varie parti del discorso (*tu/lei* nei pronomi personali; il condizionale di cortesia; ecc.) ma ci pare necessaria una sezione *ad hoc* sui registri, inclusi quelli relativi al tono di voce, alla gestione dei turni di parola, soprattutto alle mosse comunicative, ad esempio attaccare, contraddire, approvare, modificare, correggere, scusarsi, ecc., in cui la realizzazione formale/informale è complessa dal punto di vista linguistico, con ricorso a domande retoriche, periodi ipotetici, strutture *sì... ma...* al posto delle forme negative esplicite, ecc.;
- b. *la pragmatica*, che costituisce l'asse portante dei manuali comunicativi, dove però viene "diluata", come abbiamo detto sopra, in sillabi a spirale. Lo studente, ad esempio, sa che esistono vari modi di realizzare l'atto 'scusarsi', ma essi sono sparsi in quattro volumi; quindi, serve una sezione in cui lo studente possa trovare una sintesi, ed eventualmente anche una riflessione comparativa (in italiano *scusa!* può realizzare 'scusarsi', 'attirare l'attenzione' e, con tono di voce interrogativo, 'minacciare', tre atti che in altre lingue hanno realizzazioni diverse). Gli atti o funzioni comunicative previsti dal *Quadro* e dalle certificazioni fino al livello soglia, al B1, con le rispettive realizzazioni linguistiche vanno quindi raccolti e, per facilitare la consultazione è sufficiente una struttura basata sulle macrofunzioni di Jakobson (funzione personale, interpersonale, referenziale, ecc.) al cui interno inserire i principali atti comunicativi e le diverse espressioni linguistiche che li realizzano (ad esempio, per la funzione personale: 'dire il proprio nome: *mi chiamo...*, *sono...*, *il mio cognome è...*', e così via per 'dire l'età', 'dire la provenienza', 'dire il titolo di studio', ecc.). Ponendo accanto a ogni espressione un quadratino che lo studente può spuntare, gli si offre anche un quadro dinamico e progressivo della sua competenza pragmatica;
- c. *la grammatica interculturale* descrive i possibili punti di attrito comunicativo dovuto a differenti, e in gran parte

inconsapevoli, modi di usare la voce, di negare, di criticare, di gesticolare, e così via. Dato un modello teorico di competenza comunicativa, una grammatica di riferimento di francese può individuare nei vari costituenti del modello i punti critici nella comunicazione tra italiani e francesi; in una grammatica 'ecumenica', non mirata a un gruppo linguistico/culturale, la realizzazione comparativa è invece impossibile. Per rispondere a queste necessità abbiamo progettato (e realizzato, in Balboni 2024) un sito online che contiene i punti critici della comunicazione tra italiani e altri popoli (al momento sono 29), in continuo aggiornamento ad opera di centinaia di autori e collaboratori.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.2 Diversi livelli e percorsi di accesso

I problemi di accesso sono due: l'accesso linguistico e quello ai contenuti.

L'accesso linguistico riguarda la lingua usata per la descrizione grammaticale e le consegne degli esercizi. In una grammatica comparativa, ad esempio la descrizione del tedesco per studenti italiani, la soluzione può essere quella di usare l'italiano almeno per le parti riguardanti i contenuti del livello soglia (A1, A2, B1) ed eventualmente il tedesco per le parti più avanzate. Una grammatica ecumenica invece è necessariamente stesa nella lingua che viene descritta, ma anche in questo ambito sono possibili, e sono state realizzate, sezioni rese accessibili tramite forme particolari di traduzione.<sup>5</sup>

L'accesso ai contenuti è più complesso: per gli studenti A1-2 e in parte anche B1, ad esempio, la descrizione delle forme e dell'uso del passato dei verbi è inaccessibile perché contiene troppe informazioni, anche se scritte nella sua madrelingua. Nel nostro progetto di una grammatica 'ideale' di riferimento per studenti abbiamo ripensato l'accesso differenziandolo per tre gruppi di livello (A1-2, B1-2, C1-2), non solo sulla base delle differenti competenze linguistiche, ma

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**4** Questa grammatica interculturale, che è uno spin-off del progetto di grammatica scolastica di riferimento, sarà descritto nel numero 15(2) del 2026 di questa rivista.

**5** La traduzione è stata possibile per la parte di grammatica interculturale (Balboni 2024), che è costituita da brevi descrizioni dei punti critici e collocata online, quindi facilmente integrabile e modificabile: studenti dei vari paesi hanno tradotto e stanno traducendo le singole sezioni, che vengono caricate nei file mano a mano che sono disponibili. Quanto alla sezione morfosintattica, il volume vero e proprio, la traduzione alle sezioni A1-2 è accessibile attraverso un QRCode. Nella videogrammatica 'portatile' di cui parleremo in 3.4 i video originali in italiano sono stati tradotti dall'intelligenza artificiale utilizzando la voce dell'autore e adeguando il labiale alle parole, perché nella comprensione di una lingua non nativa il labiale gioca una funzione essenziale.

perché sono gruppi di *studenti che usano la grammatica per scopi e con modalità cognitive diverse*:

a. Lo studente A1-2.

Questo studente sta costruendo le basi grammaticali, unità dopo unità, di solito in maniera non esplicita, con molto apprendimento incidentale, con schematizzazioni minimali, seguendo piuttosto (almeno nella manualistica moderna) una logica almeno in parte induttiva, guidata dal *language acquisition device* che agisce secondo un percorso lineare: (1) osserva l'input, (2) formula delle ipotesi, (3) le verifica e, scoperta la 'regola', (4) la fissa, la esercita, la usa, giungendo laddove necessario a (5) una sistematizzazione formale, esplicita. È un percorso realistico, non solo progettuale (è nei manuali di italiano L1 descritti in Balboni 2025b e nella realizzazione della grammatica di riferimento derivata da questo progetto, Balboni 2024): ad esempio, l'articolo viene presentato con 10 immagini accompagnate da didascalie ('un ragazzo e una ragazza' e così via) che lo studente deve osservare (fase 1 del *language acquisition device*), facendo ipotesi che inserisce in uno schema vuoto sulle forme degli articoli (fase 2), dopo di che volta pagina e trova lo schema completo (fase 3) nonché esercizi applicativi (fase 4) e una sintesi descrittiva (fase 5).<sup>6</sup> Alcuni temi si prestano ad un accesso fortemente induttivo come quello descritto sopra, altri certamente meno: ma il principio fondante è che l'accesso alla grammatica di riferimento avvenga con lo stesso percorso di costruzione delle 'regole' che lo studente A1-2 pratica ogni giorno a lezione.

b. Lo studente B1-2.

Intorno al livello soglia, B1, il lavoro di acquisizione di nuove strutture morfosintattiche diminuisce, mentre cresce il lavoro di sistematizzazione di quanto acquisito: quindi le pagine dedicate a questo livello (pp. 16-17 nello specimen, indicato sopra) sono quelle di una grammatica di riferimento descrittiva, per quanto tarata sui contenuti del *Quadro*, quindi dei manuali più diffusi, e delle certificazioni. Uno dei cardini della progettazione di una grammatica scolastica di riferimento è la divisione, all'interno dei capitoli monotematici, tra le informazioni che riguardano gli studenti principianti e quelle per gli studenti intermedi, induttive le prime e deduttive, le seconde; inoltre, si deve decidere

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<sup>6</sup> Si può vederne le realizzazioni alle pp. 14-17 nello specimen [https://italiano-bello.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Edilingua-Grammatica-italiana-Piu-Specimen\\_web.PDF](https://italiano-bello.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Edilingua-Grammatica-italiana-Piu-Specimen_web.PDF).

quali elementi siano rilevanti solo per studenti intermedio-avanzati (B1, B2, B2+; nell'indice alle pp. 6-8 dello specimen si può vedere che scelta abbiamo operato);

- c. Lo studente C1-2, il laureato in italiano, l'insegnante.

Questo gruppo è il destinatario implicito delle grammatiche di riferimento accademiche; ma una grammatica di riferimento scolastico non può ignorare lo studente che procede e ha imparato come usarla, ne ha fatto uno strumento di frequente consultazione. Questa sezione non è pensabile su carta perché occuperebbe una grande quantità di pagine, con una crescita proibitiva di costi (i destinatari sono studenti...). La soluzione migliore pare un PDF online raggiungibile con un QR-code o una password legata al volume: non ha limiti di lunghezza, è accessibile ovunque, consente la ricerca automatica per parola chiave, può essere ed effettivamente è aggiornata periodicamente, mano a mano che si rilevano incompletezze o si affermano usi innovativi dell'italiano. L'ipotesi su cui abbiamo lavorato (ispirati anche da recenti grammatiche 'accademiche') è che lo studente avanzato non abbia bisogno di descrizioni estese, quanto piuttosto di brevi osservazioni corroborate da esempi: possiamo visualizzarla come una tabella a due colonne verticali, quella di sinistra con i temi (l'articolo determinativo; l'uso dell'articolo determinativo; l'articolo indeterminativo; l'uso dell'articolo indeterminativo; l'articolo partitivo: voci facilmente recuperabili con la funziona TROVA di un file PDF), quella, più estesa, a destra con spiegazioni ed esempi, stesi con la forma di elenchi puntati, fatta di schemi e tabelle.

### 3.3 Terminologia metalinguistica

Ogni lingua ha le sue terminologie, anche per elementi comuni a varie lingue: gli articoli che noi definiamo *determinativi* e *indeterminativi* sono, in quasi tutte le lingue che hanno gli articoli, *definiti/indefiniti*: sembrano dettagli, ma rendono difficile la comunicazione con lo studente straniero.

Uno strumento per riportare la terminologia della lingua in apprendimento a quella che lo studente ha acquisito nella sua lingua materna (almeno per le categorie condivise dalle due lingue) è quella di premettere a ogni tema la lista dei termini principali e chiedere allo studente di scrivere accanto al termine nella lingua oggetto il corrispondente nella sua lingua. Nella pagina sugli articoli, per continuare nell'esemplificazione usata finora, i termini da focalizzare sarebbero *articolo*, *determinativo*, *indeterminativo*, *partitivo*, *genere*, *maschile*, *femminile*, *numero*, *singolare*, *plurale*.

### 3.4 Rapporto tra carta e ambienti didattici virtuali

Come abbiamo detto in apertura al paragrafo 3, punto 'd', i materiali scolastici oggi sono multimodali e multimediali: libro, video, sezioni online statiche e interattive. Dal progetto iniziale è nato *Grammatica Italiana Più* (Balboni 2024), che comprende

- a. un manuale su carta o in ebook;
- b. un PDF con la grammatica generale di livello C1-2, vista in 3.2;
- c. pagine online con centinaia di esercizi interattivi, di attività per il lavoro autonomo con correzione automatica, ma anche quiz e videogiochi che introducono una componente ludica;
- d. pagine online con test per l'autovalutazione guidata;
- e. una videogrammatica per 'pronto intervento': 40 videoclip di 4-5 minuti su temi morfosintattici, che muovono da esempi semplici per procedere a una sintesi di un aspetto grammaticale; includono anche schemi riassuntivi in cui attivare la funzione PAUSA per avere tutto il tempo necessario all'esplorazione. La videogrammatica è stata tradotta in inglese e spagnolo (sono in corso traduzioni in altre lingue), agendo anche sull'immagine in modo da aiutare con il labiale inglese o spagnolo la comprensione dello studente straniero.

### 3.5 Progettazione grafica e editoriale

Le grammatiche di riferimento per studiosi presentano di solito una veste editoriale funzionale alla presentazione dei contenuti, come le pagine di questa rivista; le grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento necessitano di una grafica omogenea a quella dei materiali didattici su cui gli studenti lavorano abitualmente: non per una ragione estetica, ma perché lo studente non sa ancora lavorare su testi austeri, in corpo piccolo, con pochi elementi di comunicazione visiva, e questo vale soprattutto per gli studenti della società e della comunicazione 'liquida' (Balboni 2025b).

Nella manualistica cui gli studenti sono abituati *l'impaginazione* è ariosa e non fitta; i *caratteri* sono scelti per la loro leggibilità ed accessibilità e non perché consentono di includere molto testo in una pagina; le *immagini* hanno raramente una funzione ornativa, servono piuttosto a contestualizzare il testo o sono funzionali ai compiti richiesti (come le immagini nell'esempio sulla scoperta della forma dell'articolo, in 3.2.a); i *colori* hanno una funzione di supporto alla riflessione (ad esempio: *dormo* vs *dormisco* per evidenziare l'infixo -isc- in alcuni verbi della terza coniugazione).

Un formato editoriale simile deve quindi essere previsto per le grammatiche scolastiche di riferimento - e una ricognizione su quelle

in commercio permette di notare che la tendenza a fare grammatiche di riferimento 'belle' dal punto di vista grafico è consolidata.

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# From Training to Practice Designing CLIL Units in Primary Education Lesson Planning as a Pedagogical Outcome

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**Abstract** This study explores a CLIL teacher training course at the University of Palermo, Italy, for preschool and primary educators. Using a qualitative approach, it analyses final teaching units to assess participants' understanding of CLIL. The analysis focused on integrating content and language objectives, scaffolding, learner autonomy, and inclusive practices. The study offers critical insight into how targeted, practice-based professional development can address systemic challenges to produce pedagogically sound and adaptable CLIL materials in resource-constrained, monolingual settings.

**Keywords** CLIL. Primary school. Lesson plan. EFL. Teachers' practices

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Background. – 3 CLIL in Italy. – 4 Material and Methods. – 5 Results and Early Considerations. – 6 Conclusion.



Edizioni  
Ca'Foscari

## Peer review

Submitted 2025-10-14  
Accepted 2026-03-18  
Published 2026-04-27



## Open access

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DOI 10.30687/ELLE/2280-6792/2026/01/001

## 1 Introduction

In the domain of second language acquisition, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL, Marsh 1994) offers a strategic pedagogical framework that promotes the simultaneous learning of subject content and an additional language, thereby challenging the traditional separation between content instruction and language teaching (Coyle et al. 2010). A distinctive strength of CLIL lies in its adaptability to students' needs (Mehisto et al. 2008) and its reliance on context-sensitive approaches (Cenoz et al. 2013) shaped by sociocultural and educational variables, that results in differing implementations across countries (Villabona, Cenoz, 2021). The methodology is both complex and learner-centred, characterised by extensive use of ICT and pedagogical strategies such as the flipped classroom and task-based learning (Porcedda, González-Martínez 2024, 49). CLIL is also recognised as an “innovative or alternative approach to communicative language teaching (CLT)” (Banegas 2012, 46) and has been widely adopted across Europe and beyond. Nonetheless, its dual objectives pose significant challenges, particularly for educators.

In response to these challenges, researchers have proposed various support models. Notably, Meyer (2010) introduced the Pyramid Model, which supports CLIL lesson planning through four key stages: curriculum-based topic selection, multimodal input to facilitate concept understanding, task design incorporating both higher-order and lower-order thinking skills, and a concluding CLIL workout phase. Another influential framework is the 4 Cs model, which focuses on content, communication, cognition, and culture. Within this model, language is addressed as the language *of* learning (disciplinary terminology), language for learning (language necessary for metacognitive development), and language through learning, which emerges during the learning process. CLIL, therefore, encourages the purposeful use of language to collaboratively build new knowledge.

It is important highlighting that one more tenet of CLIL is student agency, encouraging learners to make choices, engage in inquiry, and present their findings, often in public settings. In light of this, Thomas (2000) identifies five key characteristics of CLIL that support such aims: curriculum centrality, driving questions, constructive investigation, autonomy, and project realism. In this sense, technology plays a critical role, especially in fostering debate and discussion (Cinganotto 2019). Based on these premises, the term CLIL is understood as an umbrella term that includes a wide variety of different approaches that are based on sociocultural and educational factors, which implies that CLIL lessons may vary from country to country (Villabona, Cenoz 2021).

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Across Europe, the adoption of CLIL has followed dual trajectories: one shaped by top-down educational policy mandates, and the other emerging organically in response to increasing linguistic and cultural diversity within the European Union. Nonetheless, widespread implementation continues to encounter obstacles, particularly at the level of teacher preparedness. Persistent concerns regarding educators' own linguistic competence and their confidence in planning integrated lessons have been well documented (Favilli, Maffei, Peroni, 2013). Banegas (2012) notes that many practitioners evaluate their pedagogical effectiveness primarily through the lens of subject and language mastery, a perspective that may inadvertently constrain methodological experimentation and innovation.

Despite such reservations, empirical evidence consistently points to the pedagogical value of CLIL, particularly in enhancing learners' motivation and language acquisition outcomes (Azpilicueta-Martínez, Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2023). Even so, the model's successful implementation is frequently described as demanding and contingent upon substantial professional development and classroom experience (Favilli, Maffei, Peroni 2013; Hidalgo, Villarreal, 2024). While numerous EU member states have formally integrated CLIL into national curricula, certain geographical and institutional contexts continue to receive limited attention within the broader discourse (Poveda-García-Noblejas, Antropova, 2024), underscoring the uneven nature of CLIL's diffusion across the European educational landscape. Challenges are further compounded by differing perceptions of CLIL's purpose. In Kazakhstan, for example, CLIL is seen as "merely teaching through another language" (Karabassova 2018, 1), a view that might resonate with teachers lacking adequate CLIL training in Italy, where balancing content and language in practice is a persistent difficulty (Villabona, Cenoz, 2021). Further concerns for the Italian context include limited access to ICT tools, appropriate pedagogical models, and a lack of materials (Porcedda, González-Martínez, 2024). Other discrepancies emerge, especially in secondary education where CLIL is compulsory, yet national exams remain content-focused, leading teachers to perceive CLIL as externally imposed (Aiello, Di Martino, Di Sabato, 2017). Additionally, studies indicate that low-intensity CLIL programmes offer limited gains in receptive skills, while increased exposure significantly improves performance (Hidalgo, Villarreal, 2024). Primary education, furthermore, faces distinct challenges, since English is often taught by non-specialist teachers (Ludbrooke, 2008).

Yet, in areas such as southern Italy, CLIL practices remain underexplored. To address this gap, this study investigates a case study where both the implementation and outcomes of a local CLIL project in Palermo (Italy) are addressed.

The study aims to contribute to the broader literature and analysis of materials produced by the participating teachers. Combining questionnaire data and analysis of realia (lesson plans and materials), the analysis identifies best practices and context-specific challenges. Following a brief overview of CLIL (section 2) and its implementation in Italian primary schools, the study examines pedagogical foundations, teacher perceptions, and instructional outcomes (section 3), offering a structured discussion (sections 3 and 4) on the practical implications and results within a geographically underexplored educational context.

## 2 Theoretical Background

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) constitutes an educational framework wherein subject content is delivered through a foreign language, effectively transforming the target language into a vehicle for learning rather than the explicit focus of instruction. This approach is grounded in the principle that language, when employed in authentic, discipline-specific contexts, facilitates both deeper cognitive engagement and more meaningful language acquisition. Beyond its linguistic benefits, CLIL has been associated with the promotion of learner motivation, intercultural awareness, and readiness for transnational mobility within the European context (Marsh, Maljers 1994).

In contrast to traditional language instruction, which often privileges grammatical form and syntactic accuracy, CLIL emphasizes the functional use of language in real-world, content-driven settings. From a policy and pedagogical standpoint, it supports the European Union's broader objective of fostering multilingualism and preparing learners for participation in an increasingly interconnected and mobile society. Originally conceptualized by Marsh and Maljers (1994), CLIL is underpinned by dual learning aims: the simultaneous development of content knowledge and foreign language proficiency. As Coonan (2002) observes, the model allows for strategic and methodological flexibility, encouraging context-sensitive approaches to curricular integration.

Implementation relies on pedagogical practices aligned with both language learning and cognitive development. These include Total Physical Response (TPR), which links language input with physical activity; Visual, Auditory, and Kinaesthetic (VAK) strategies; Task-Based Learning (TBL); scaffolding techniques; and cooperative learning models. These learner-centred approaches are particularly suited to the developmental needs of young learners, fostering experiential and interactive modes of engagement. Langé (2001) underscores that CLIL does not prescribe a singular method;

rather, it synthesizes a range of pedagogies that promote active, contextualised learning – an orientation supported by findings in cognitive science that highlight the benefits of deeper processing for long-term retention.

Consequently, CLIL educators are required to develop a dual set of competencies: proficiency in the target language (including discipline-specific terminology and classroom interactional metalanguage) and expertise in curriculum design, classroom management, and the integration of language and content objectives. The effectiveness of CLIL depends on teachers' ability to concurrently plan linguistic and subject-based components, underscoring the complexity and demands of this approach in practice. Teachers must structure activities that simultaneously support content understanding and language acquisition, such as using visual aids for content and sentence stems for language scaffolding. Drawing from the social constructivist paradigm, the learner is positioned at the centre of the process, while the teacher acts as a facilitator in a learning environment designed to promote meaningful engagement. This approach encompasses three key phases: knowledge construction, creation of authentic contexts, and guided facilitation. Effective CLIL instruction, therefore, hinges on meticulous lesson planning. Every classroom activity must be designed to support both content and language outcomes. As Brown (2001, 149) notes, a lesson plan is “a set of activities which represent ‘steps’ in a curriculum”, including preparation, execution, and reflection phases.

As detailed in the methodological section, this study adopted a qualitative and descriptive research framework to analyse the structure and components of CLIL lesson plans. To understand these lesson plans, however, a focus on the context in which they emerge is necessary.

### **3 CLIL in Italy**

In the European context, characterized by its linguistic diversity, the integration of a second or additional language is increasingly seen as vital. This is closely tied to European Community policies on multilingualism and minority language rights, where linguistic communities are often defined not by demographic strength or cultural capital, but by political relevance. At a broader policy level, CLIL functions as an extension of language policy and a tool for promoting global citizenship (Hüttner et al. 2013). On an individual level, it is regarded as a means of enhancing students' future employability. The growing scholarly attention to CLIL, especially in secondary education, is largely attributed to policy-driven educational reforms (Poveda-Garcia-Noblejas, Antropova 2024). Research in this area is

most prevalent in countries with established multilingual policies such as Finland, the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria, though interest is also noted in nations like Switzerland and Malta.

For the Italian context, Catenaccio and Giglioni (2016) provide a detailed historical account of foreign language instruction and the implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Their work traces the evolution from early pilot projects in the 1970s to more institutionalized policies by the 1990s. Italy, in fact, despite comparatively low English proficiency rates, stands out for making foreign language education a mandatory part of the primary curriculum (Catenaccio, Giglioni 2016, 198). CLIL implementation, however, presents regional disparities, as argued by Tommaso (2019), who investigated secondary teachers' attitudes toward CLIL-based training programs, finding significant variation in how regions adopt and support CLIL practices. These disparities mirror those previously identified by Catenaccio and Giglioni (2016), underscoring the influence of school infrastructure, teacher motivation and proficiency, and administrative support (Tommaso 2019, 656). Language proficiency, particularly of CLIL teachers, continues to be a central concern. As noted by Porcedda and González-Martínez (2024), insufficient language skills among educators represent a major obstacle to effective CLIL application. This is especially problematic given that CLIL demands not only pedagogical but also linguistic competence in integrating content and language learning.

Despite such challenges, CLIL has shown efficacy, especially in primary education. At this stage, the approach is used to equip young learners with tools for intercultural communication and European multilingual integration. Adami (2022) distinguishes CLIL from traditional English as a Foreign Language (EFL) approach by its cognitive orientation: language serves as a medium for acquiring disciplinary knowledge, rather than being the sole instructional focus. This aligns with earlier perspectives emphasizing content-based, learner-centred strategies that facilitate cognitive and linguistic development (Marsh, Langé, 2000; Coyle et al. 2010). An example of practical courses are European projects such as 4Cs-CLIL for Children,<sup>1</sup> funded under Erasmus+, underscore the value of CLIL in early education. This initiative emphasizes communication, fluency over accuracy, and experiential learning through creative engagement with real-world contexts. In fact, scholars such as Serra (2007) and Adami (2022) note that CLIL fosters not only language acquisition but also higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), encouraging learners to ask questions like “why?”, “how?”, and “what evidence is there?”.

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**1** Please find it at: <http://www.clil4children.eu>.

Focusing on primary education, Catenaccio and Giglioni (2016) observe that CLIL remains optional and loosely regulated, whereas CLIL has been mandatory in upper secondary education since the early 2000s, following the 1999 Presidential Decree n. 275, which outlined school autonomy regulations. This regulation laid the groundwork for various experimental projects in both primary and secondary institutions, and even earlier in education. Age is, in fact, another critical factor in CLIL effectiveness. Younger learners tend to acquire second languages more naturally and with greater long-term success due to brain plasticity and fewer affective filters such as anxiety (Bylund et al. 2021). While older learners may initially progress more quickly due to developed cognitive strategies, young children often surpass them in the long run in terms of fluency and proficiency. Despite their inexperience, young learners benefit from immersive environments where language is integrated into meaningful subject learning. Based on this, Adami (2022) advocates for CLIL integration at the pre-primary level (*Scuola dell'Infanzia*), due to the natural learning inclinations of children aged 3-5, including high neural plasticity and emotional openness. These traits, according to Adami, render young children especially receptive to CLIL's holistic methods.

However, Italy has yet to implement systematic or structural CLIL initiatives in pre-primary education, indicating a missed opportunity to capitalize on early language acquisition potential.

In conclusion, while Italy has shown a strong institutional commitment to multilingual education through CLIL, its implementation varies significantly by region and educational level. While the approach has demonstrated clear benefits in fostering linguistic competence, cognitive development, and intercultural awareness, systemic challenges remain, particularly regarding teacher training, regional disparities, and early childhood education.

## 4 Material and Methods

This study focuses on a CLIL teacher training initiative conducted in Palermo, Sicily, a region often underrepresented in CLIL literature. The project was a collaboration between the University of Palermo and the Regional School Office (*Ufficio Scolastico Regionale*), targeting pre-primary and primary school teachers. The teaching team comprised academic specialists in English didactics, a CLIL-experienced teacher trainer, and a primary education expert. The course design reflected prior collaborations and emphasized collegiality. The curriculum consisted of four fundamental modules (48 hours each) and four advanced characterizing modules (80 hours each), combining in-person and online instruction with a 60:40 and 55:45 ratio, respectively.

Due to a limited number of applicants with adequate language proficiency, only a small cohort was admitted. The training, officially initiated by D.D. 1511 of 23/06/2022, was delivered in a blended format to accommodate geographical and logistical constraints. Sessions were held at the Department of Humanities, University of Palermo, and remotely via Google Meet. A shared Google Drive folder housed course materials and updates.

Seven teachers participated, one from preschool (male) and six from primary schools (female), aged 38 to 58, with English proficiency ranging from B2 to C1. Only one had prior CLIL experience, while two of them expressed scepticism, particularly regarding its applicability to early childhood education. During the initial meeting, participants completed a language proficiency test assessing receptive and grammatical skills. Only two met the threshold, while others committed to improving their proficiency independently or over the following three years.

To address the varied language competencies, the course was conducted entirely in English, maximizing exposure. The modules were tailored to educational levels, focusing on designing and managing CLIL lessons, selecting and adapting materials, and integrating pedagogical strategies suitable for young learners. Module 1 addressed material selection, early childhood pedagogy, and CLIL design, while Module 2 focused on assessment strategies, self-evaluation, and threshold objectives. Instruction was supplemented by resources on the Moodle platform.

Practical application was central to the course. Trainees observed, discussed, and delivered CLIL lessons using a SWOT framework. Final assessments required each participant to develop a complete CLIL teaching unit, including a detailed lesson plan. These lesson plans were the basis of the current qualitative study, which aims to (1) identify preferred content areas, (2) determine pedagogical emphases, and (3) evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of trainee-created materials.

Although no universal format exists, lesson plans typically include goals, objectives, activities, media, and assessment tools. Goals provide a general vision of the lesson's purpose, while objectives specify measurable student outcomes. Activities form the core instructional sequence; they may include the use of media to engage learners and support skills development. Finally, assessments measure learning, experience, and challenges. The analysis of lesson plan reveals the ways in which CLIL teachers adapt instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners, accommodating varying language levels, learning styles, and cognitive abilities.

The study adopts a descriptive, phenomenological approach, analysing lesson plans as pedagogical documents. The first analytic step was to examine stated goals and objectives, ensuring the

integration of both content and language aims, a hallmark of effective CLIL instruction. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learning is mediated through interaction and scaffolding. The second analytical step involved evaluating how lesson plans supported language development. Effective CLIL lessons pre-teach key vocabulary, employ scaffolds (visuals, prompts), encourage structured and unstructured language practice (e.g., role-plays, discussions), and offer opportunities for language production. Third, the content delivery was assessed for cognitive engagement. Lesson plans were examined for activities promoting critical thinking and real-world relevance, in line with communicative language teaching (CLT) and Bloom's taxonomy, which advocates the progression from lower-order to higher-order thinking skills. Assessment strategies formed the fourth area of analysis. CLIL requires both formative and summative assessment to measure language and content learning. Plans were reviewed for evidence of these methods, as well as for teacher self-assessment components.

## 5 Results and Early Considerations

The following analysis examines similarities and differences across seven CLIL lesson plans, created by teachers at Italian primary schools, particularly in terms of structure, teacher strategies, pedagogical preferences, and underlying instructional goals. The analysis focuses on the cover sheet, class profiling, the lesson plan, the self-evaluation.

### 5.1 The Cover Sheet

A cover sheet (CS) is the first page of a CLIL lesson plan. It provides a quick overview of the most important information about the lesson and includes what the subject of the lesson is about, the topic, the content goals, the language goals, the skills the students will develop, who the lesson is for, and data about time (when and how long the lesson is). It helps organize the lesson and make sure it connects content and language learning, which is the heart of CLIL.

The selected cover sheets represent a diverse range of educational levels, from preschool to upper primary, and encompass various content areas, including science, environmental studies, physical education, and literacy. Despite the variation in subject matter, all lesson plans demonstrate a consistent commitment to integrating linguistic and subject-specific content, in alignment with CLIL principles. The standardized template employed across submissions

includes key metadata (e.g., teacher name, date, lesson number, educational level), as well as structured sections detailing lesson objectives, required materials, personal teaching aims, underlying assumptions, anticipated challenges, and proposed solutions.

While the format remains consistent, notable variation emerges in the level of detail and specificity provided by individual teachers. For instance, cover sheets CS2 and CS7 offer extensive elaboration in the 'Content', 'Functions', and 'Cognition' sections, indicating a strong grasp of CLIL's cognitive-linguistic integration. In contrast, CS1 presents a more concise formulation, with limited detail on content objectives and cognitive engagement. Additionally, certain teachers, particularly those responsible for CS3 and CS4, explicitly include broader socio-emotional objectives, such as fostering empathy, environmental awareness, and inclusive communication. These elements are frequently situated under the "Citizenship" category, reinforcing CLIL's orientation toward holistic learner development, encompassing not only linguistic and cognitive growth but also civic education.

A recurring methodological feature across the lesson plans is the strategic use of multimedia resources, including videos, songs, and interactive whiteboards, to facilitate both language acquisition and conceptual understanding. This reflects a shared pedagogical awareness of the value of multimodal scaffolding, particularly in early language learning contexts. The integration of music, as observed in CS3 and CS6, is intended to support pronunciation, memorization, and learner motivation, further illustrating the multisensory, student-centred ethos underpinning the CLIL approach.

Another widely used strategy is pair and group work, intended to foster student-student interaction and reduce teacher talk time (TTT). Teachers such as CS1 and CS5 explicitly mention the goal of increasing student collaboration, while SC7 structured 'pair' and 'open-pair' speaking tasks. Group work is not only seen as a means of language practice but also as a tool to promote peer support, especially for students with learning difficulties or socio-emotional challenges. Additionally, several teachers mention differentiation strategies to manage mixed-ability classrooms. CS5, for example, anticipates difficulties related to language comprehension and plans multiple scaffolded video viewings. CS3 and CS4 mention the support of special needs assistants and the use of visual agendas or arts-based tasks as inclusive methods.

Across the cover sheets, there is a clear balance between content aims (subject knowledge) and language aims (vocabulary, sentence structures, pronunciation). For instance, CS1 focuses on naming the phases of the water cycle, while CS2 emphasizes understanding the differences between living and non-living things. In both cases, content and language objectives are interdependent and explicitly stated.

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In terms of personal teaching goals, several teachers aim to reduce their teacher talk time, improve instruction clarity in L2, and cultivate a positive, engaging learning environment. CS3's personal aims notably include using praise ("I will always say: Great job!") to build student confidence, while CS7 seeks to promote life skills like self-awareness and critical thinking through health-related discussions.

All cover sheets engage with both LOTS (Lower Order Thinking Skills) and HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills). Tasks range from classification and identification (LOTS) to evaluation, analysis and comparison (HOTS). For example, CS5's lesson includes a culturally reflective task comparing British and Italian hobbies, a clear example of cross-cultural thinking and evaluation. The citizenship component is particularly strong in lesson plans that address environmental or health topics. CS3 and CS4 embed sustainability and eco-awareness, while CS7 and CS6 focus on health and personal well-being. These CLIL lessons transcend academic goals, cultivating values aligned with global citizenship and twenty-first-century competencies.

As for anticipated problems, teachers often foresee noise, distraction, or social conflict and pre-emptively design groupings or support mechanisms to address these. For instance, CS2 adjusts seating plans to separate disruptive students, while CS6 supports a hesitant child by placing her next to a familiar peer. Solution often involves pairing high-ability with lower-ability students, multimodal input, and teacher modelling. These responses reveal an emphasis on classroom ecology and inclusive practices.

Finally, these cover sheets reveal a community of practice committed to student-centred, inclusive, and multimodal pedagogy. While each teacher brings a unique voice and level of detail to their planning, the collective focus on scaffolding, collaborative learning, and intercultural or civic education is striking. The covers sheets demonstrate how CLIL, beyond integrating content and language, also supports affective development, critical thinking, and social responsibility.

## 5.2 The Class Profile

The class profile (CP) serves as a foundational descriptive tool for understanding the characteristics of young learners. It informs pedagogical decisions regarding content selection and activity design, ensuring that instruction is linguistically accessible, cognitively appropriate, and pedagogically engaging for the specific group. Across the dataset, teachers consistently demonstrate awareness of learner heterogeneity, particularly in relation to

language proficiency, cognitive development, and the presence of special educational needs (SEN).

Numerous CPs illustrate this inclusive orientation. For example, CP1 references the presence of BES (Bisogni Educativi Speciali) students and highlights the active participation of a learner with special needs. Similarly, CP4 and CP5 identify learners diagnosed with dyslexia, dyscalculia, and behavioural disorders. These observations reflect a shared commitment to inclusive educational practices, aligning with the broader principles of CLIL, which emphasize equity and learner-centred instruction.

Language proficiency levels are generally situated at A1 or below, based on CEFR descriptors. Teachers often juxtapose the class average with specific learner outliers, such as CP5's bilingual pupil or a cognitively advanced student characterized as a 'gamer', underscoring the need for differentiated instructional strategies. Several teachers (e.g., CP3, CP5, CP7) report using peer tutoring by more proficient learners as a means of scaffolding and promoting collaborative learning.

A recurring theme across profiles is the learners' tendency to revert to their L1 (Italian), especially during cognitively demanding tasks or in oral production. While often framed as a pedagogical challenge, this behaviour is also interpreted as diagnostic of areas where additional support is needed. Most teachers adopt a pragmatic approach, viewing L1 use as part of a gradual progression toward increased L2 engagement.

Despite challenges such as attention difficulties and classroom management concerns (evident e.g., in CP6's depiction of a noisy preschool environment or CP5's reference to a group of disruptive learners), the general classroom atmosphere is characterized as positive, cooperative, and conducive to learning.

### 5.3 The Lesson Plan

The analysis identifies recurring didactic strategies, preferred instructional strategies, common educational goals, and recurring or unique challenges. In particular, the lesson plans (LP) were examined for explicit and implicit representation of the 4Cs and the cognitive depth achieved according to Meyer's Pyramid. Each LP was assessed based on the extent to which it addressed each of the 4Cs, as noted in Table 1.

**Table 1** Representation of the 4Cs across LP

<b>Lesson Plan</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Communication</b>	<b>Cognition</b>	<b>Culture</b>
1	High (core scientific concepts like evaporation, condensation)	Moderate (pair work, structured speaking)	Low (basic recall, limited higher-order thinking)	Low (minimal cultural context)
2	High (clear focus on biological concepts)	Moderate (group discussion, labelling)	Moderate (Sorting game, reasoning)	Low (no explicit cultural component)
3	Moderate (environmental awareness)	High (Games, dialogues, group activities)	Moderate (prediction, critical thinking)	Moderate (context of going green)
4	High (marine biology content)	High (Pair work, speaking activities)	Moderate (critical thinking through follow-up activities)	Moderate (environmental awareness)
5	Moderate (personal interests, daily life)	High (Peer interactions, guided conversations)	Moderate (comparison, self-expression)	High (cross-cultural reflection)
6	High (anatomical vocabulary)	High (Pair work, songs)	Moderate (motor skills, hands-on activities)	Low (limited cultural integration)
7	High (health education)	High (Group work, dialogues)	High (reflective discussion)	High (cross-cultural comparisons)

Table 1 reveals that all lesson plans (LPs) successfully address the ‘Content’ component, demonstrating a clear emphasis on disciplinary subject matter. In contrast, the ‘Culture’ dimension receives comparatively limited attention; in some instances, such as LP1 and LP2, explicit cultural references are entirely absent. This imbalance likely reflects a tendency to prioritize content and language acquisition, often at the expense of the intercultural dimension, which is nevertheless a core component of the CLIL framework. The marginalization of cultural learning underscores the need for greater awareness of its pedagogical value in fostering global competence and contextual language use.

Analysed through Meyer’s Pyramid of cognitive processing, most LPs emphasize lower-order cognitive tasks, such as vocabulary recall and basic comprehension, while offering fewer opportunities for higher-order thinking, including problem-solving, evaluation, and real-world application. This surface-level orientation may limit both the depth of content learning and the sustainability of language acquisition.

As discussed in the analysis of cover sheets, the lesson plans consistently integrate multimodal instruction, collaborative learning, guided elicitation, and task-based methodologies. These strategies align with core CLIL principles by promoting cognitive engagement and linguistic development. All LPs incorporate multimodal inputs, such as videos, interactive whiteboards, flashcards, dramatizations, and worksheets, which reflect the tenets of dual coding theory. This theoretical model posits that information presented through both verbal and non-verbal channels enhances memory retention and comprehension, particularly valuable in CLIL contexts where learners must simultaneously process content and language.

Examples such as LP1 ('The Water Cycle') and LP6 ('Body and Health') effectively use visual and kinaesthetic resources to connect abstract terminology to tangible concepts. Moreover, the frequent use of group and pair work demonstrates an application of sociocultural theory, which views language development as fundamentally social. LP7, for instance, includes a column-table collaborative activity that supports peer scaffolding and co-construction of knowledge. However, in several cases, such interactions are insufficiently supported by targeted linguistic scaffolds, thus limiting opportunities for sustained and meaningful L2 use.

Several LPs (i.e., LP1, LP3, and LP5) adopt a structured listening strategy encompassing prediction, gist, and detailed listening stages. This tripartite approach effectively scaffolds listening comprehension and integrates it with content learning. The subject areas represented span science (LP1, LP2, LP4, LP6), environmental education (LP3), and physical education (LP7), each paired with English language objectives. For instance, LP2 integrates a categorization task with vocabulary-building through oral discussion.

Nevertheless, the articulation of language aims remains inconsistent. While vocabulary development is widely addressed, communicative functions such as describing, classifying, and reporting are often underdeveloped and insufficiently scaffolded. The lack of supporting tools, such as sentence frames, word banks, or visual organizers, undermines the communicative efficacy of instruction, thereby constraining one of CLIL's central objectives: functional language use within disciplinary contexts.

Cognitive strategies like categorization (LP2), problem-solving (LP4), and data handling (LP7) promote higher-order thinking within a language learning context, as does metacognitive reflection in LP3 and 5. These also foster cultural awareness and identity building, all of which are key CLIL goals.

Despite these strengths, the plans exhibit weaknesses in scaffolding, assessment, and productive language use. Feedback tends to be superficial, with little affective or formative assessment. While Lesson 5 includes reflective questions, most others focus on

error correction. Productive output is also uneven; some lessons (e.g., LP2) end with passive tasks, while others (e.g., LP7) include rich speaking opportunities.

## 5.4 The Self-Evaluation

Within the framework of lesson planning, the self-evaluation component functions as a critical space for reflective practice, allowing educators to assess their instructional performance, the efficacy of the lesson, and student learning outcomes. This section examines the self-evaluation forms, with the aim of identifying recurring themes and notable divergences in perceived competencies, professional challenges, and developmental aspirations.

One prominent trend observed across the dataset is the consistently high level of self-reported competence in foundational CLIL principles. The majority (5/7) of participating teachers assign themselves scores of 5 or 6 (on a 6-point scale) when evaluating their ability to articulate key CLIL concepts and to communicate its pedagogical advantages. Teachers also express confidence in mentoring peers, for instance through statements such as “I can help other teachers understand CLIL”, and in drawing insights from both their own classroom experiences and those of colleagues. This points to a shared culture of professional collaboration and reflective engagement, values that are deeply embedded in the CLIL teaching community.

However, while general confidence is high, the data also reveal specific areas where self-perceived competence varies significantly. One such area is lesson planning that successfully integrates content and language objectives. Here, responses range from high proficiency (ratings of 5 or 6) to much lower scores, with some teachers indicating a lack of clarity or experience. For example, one participant (Teacher 3) assigns a score of 2 to this item and similarly reports lower confidence in related areas such as scaffolding strategies and instructional materials design. These responses suggest that certain individuals may still be navigating early stages in their professional growth as CLIL practitioners.

Another domain of concern is spontaneous interaction during lessons, particularly in situations in which teachers must respond to student questions without prior preparation. This aspect of classroom discourse tends to receive some of the lowest self-assessments across the group. The discomfort may stem from linguistic insecurities or from the challenges of improvisational teaching in a second language. Teachers 1 and 3, for instance, provide ratings between 3 and 4 and raise concerns about their ability to manage the unpredictability of live classroom exchanges in English.

The ability to maintain instructional quality in English equivalent to that in the teachers' first language (Italian) also emerges as a divisive issue. Teachers with a solid foundation in English language instruction tend to report greater confidence in implementing CLIL strategies, particularly in relation to language-mediated content delivery. In contrast, educators with less linguistic training often express reservations, primarily linked to students' limited English proficiency. As noted by Teacher 5: "It very much depends on the students' level of English. If their level is too low, it won't be easy to maintain their interest". This statement encapsulates a central tension in CLIL pedagogy: the need to maintain cognitive challenge while ensuring linguistic accessibility.

Despite these concerns, many participants report high levels of self-efficacy in key pedagogical areas. Most notably, respondents express confidence in diagnosing learners' needs, adapting or creating instructional materials, and fostering classroom engagement. Several teachers describe themselves as capable of producing original or adapted resources in English, calibrated to the proficiency levels of their students - an indicator of pedagogical flexibility and responsiveness, both of which are essential for effective CLIL practice. Similarly, the evaluation of learners' performance in English - across both oral and written modalities - is generally viewed positively, especially among teachers with extensive experience in language teaching.

Confidence levels are particularly high when working with younger learners. Participants rated themselves at the upper end of the scale (5 or 6) for their ability to prepare age-appropriate materials and design developmentally suitable activities. Teacher 5, for example, draws on considerable experience with children aged 3-6 and emphasizes the integration of cognitive and motor development considerations into instructional planning. Such responses reflect a nuanced understanding of early childhood education and second language acquisition, highlighting the importance of aligning CLIL methodology with learners' developmental stages.

## 6 Conclusion

The European Union's commitment to fostering language proficiency is evident in its policy frameworks, most notably the Barcelona Objective, which set out in 2002 the aim of introducing "at least two foreign languages from a very early age" (Barcelona European Council 2002). This policy emphasis provides a clear mandate for early multilingual education, yet the operationalization of such goals at the classroom level remains fraught with challenges. In Italy, Catenaccio and Giglioni (2016), for instance, identify persistent mismatches between academic CLIL theory and the practical needs of in-service teachers, particularly when working with very young learners. They observe that the task of integrating language and content instruction for this age group requires advanced competences in foreign language teaching, alongside a solid grounding in subject knowledge and age-appropriate pedagogy.

The findings emerging from this CLIL teacher education initiative in Sicily provide a multifaceted account of pedagogical transformation, professional learning, and the persistent challenges associated with implementing Content and Language Integrated Learning at the primary level. Although many participants initially reported limited confidence in their linguistic competence and minimal familiarity with CLIL-specific methodologies, the course fostered a reflective and collaborative learning environment in which teachers designed lesson plans marked by creativity, multimodality, and civic engagement. These outcomes indicate that even a short-term intervention, when underpinned by sound pedagogical design, interdisciplinary scaffolding, and sustained mentorship, can engender meaningful shifts in instructional practice.

Crucially, the programme facilitated opportunities for collaborative knowledge construction, curricular adaptation to diverse learner needs, and iterative refinement of teaching strategies. From an analytical perspective, the submitted lesson plans and accompanying reflective commentaries signal a significant epistemological shift. Rather than construing CLIL as a prescriptive methodology, participants increasingly framed it as a flexible pedagogical stance - one that values translingual practices, promotes learner agency, and situates cognition within socially mediated activity. Over time, many teachers began to reposition themselves not as custodians of linguistic accuracy, but as mediators of multilingual meaning-making. This reorientation was often enacted through the strategic use of visual, gestural, and interactive modalities aimed at attenuating linguistic asymmetries in the classroom. Such practices align with sociocultural theories of language learning and underscore CLIL's capacity to function as a pedagogical interface between disciplinary knowledge and learners' lived realities.

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Nevertheless, the data also reveal several tensions that complicate the adoption of CLIL as an inclusive and equitable pedagogical model in the particular context of Palermo. Teachers' language proficiency levels varied considerably, as did their comfort with spontaneous classroom interaction, a key component of communicative teaching. These disparities prompt critical reflection on the equitable distribution of CLIL's pedagogical benefits. In particular, the underrepresentation of productive language skills, especially oral communication, within several lesson plans signals a persistent misalignment between content instruction and the development of communicative competence. Similarly, assessment practices frequently prioritized task completion over formative, metacognitive, or affective dimensions, underscoring the need for more integrated and holistic evaluation frameworks within CLIL pedagogies. This disconnect may be symptomatic of broader structural dynamics within the Italian educational system, where CLIL is frequently introduced through top-down directives that emphasize certification and procedural compliance. Such an approach risks reducing CLIL to a technical instrument, obscuring the iterative, context-sensitive processes required to enact it as a pedagogical ethos grounded in multilingual meaning-making and inclusive education.

Several pedagogical implications follow. First, CLIL training programmes must move beyond general methodological overviews to include explicit modelling of linguistic scaffolds and adaptive assessment tools that promote authentic interaction. Second, ongoing language development for teachers (particularly in relation to spontaneous, interactive discourse) must be prioritised, as this remains a site of vulnerability. Third, CLIL professional development should be reimagined as participation in a discourse community, where language, content, identity, and inclusion converge to shape a shared epistemology of practice.

Ultimately, this study affirms that when CLIL is embedded within reflective, context-responsive pedagogical frameworks, it offers substantial potential for enhancing both linguistic and disciplinary learning in Italian primary education. Beyond supporting bilingual competence, it can foster intercultural awareness, critical thinking, and civic responsibility, which are capabilities closely aligned with the broader aims of twenty-first-century education. Yet to move from isolated innovation to systemic change, CLIL must become part of an institutionalized dialogue that connects educational policy, teacher development, and classroom practice. Only through such sustained integration can CLIL be realized not as an externally imposed model, but as a locally grounded, discursively enriched approach to teaching and learning.

Among the most frequently cited needs are improved teacher language proficiency, the availability of developmentally suitable

materials, and pedagogical resources tailored to the interests and to cognitive stages of young learners. These needs were echoed in the self-assessment data collected during the project, where teachers reflected on their knowledge of CLIL concepts, their classroom practices, and their engagement with the unique demands of teaching young children. These reflections provide a rich lens through which to examine how teachers negotiate professional identities, respond to pedagogical challenges, and grapple with the dual focus of CLIL, i.e. content and language integration.

From a broader analytical standpoint, the wide implementation of CLIL across Europe reflects a growing commitment to pedagogical models that transcend the traditional subject-language divide. At its core, CLIL positions itself as a transformative approach in the landscape of multilingual education, yet it remains a demanding practice. Implementing CLIL at the primary level requires educators to merge subject-matter expertise with principles of language pedagogy, while simultaneously responding to heterogeneous learner profiles and managing the fluid dynamics of classroom interaction. These demands are further compounded in contexts marked by limited institutional support or incoherent policy frameworks.

Nevertheless, primary education remains a fertile ground for CLIL innovation. Young learners' cognitive malleability, receptiveness to additional languages, and intrinsic motivation for experiential learning align well with CLIL's pedagogical ethos. Yet, structural barriers (such as insufficient pre-service and in-service teacher training, a dearth of contextually relevant instructional materials, and fragmented language education policies) continue to constrain its broader implementation. Pedagogical models such as Meyer's CLIL Pyramid and Coyle's 4Cs framework provide conceptual scaffolding, but their efficacy hinges on sustained investment in professional development, curricular coherence, and cross-institutional collaboration.

Admittedly, the present study is limited by its localized scope, drawing on a small cohort of primary educators in Sicily, and thus does not claim generalisability across diverse educational systems. However, the findings affirm that CLIL should be understood not as a static methodology, but as a dynamic pedagogical discourse, one that embodies broader educational commitments to multilingualism, intercultural competence, and learner autonomy. Realizing these aims will necessitate systemic engagement: robust teacher preparation, pedagogical innovation, and flexible, context-sensitive policy support. Only through such sustained engagement can the full potential of CLIL be realized as both a means and a model for inclusive, future-oriented education.

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# Le tre vie dello storytelling

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**Abstract** The following article describes three modalities of telling a story in the language classroom: the bottom-up modality (from language units to text); the top-down modality (from text to language units), and the interactive modality (students actively participate in the storytelling process by performing tasks assigned by the teacher). The three modalities respond to distinct learner profiles and may possibly be combined within the same course. We also present some examples from each of them.

**Keywords** Performative. Language. Teaching. Storytelling. Improvisation.

**Sommario** 1 Un progressivo interesse verso lo storytelling. – 2 Utilità della narrazione. – 3 Le dimensioni dello storytelling. – 4 Le tre modalità di narrazione: esempi. – 5 Conclusioni.



Edizioni  
Ca' Foscari

## Peer review

Submitted 2026-02-06  
Accepted 2026-03-23  
Published 2026-04-27



## Open access

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DOI 10.30687/ELLE/2280-6792/2026/01/002

## 1 Un progressivo interesse verso lo storytelling

Raccontare una storia<sup>1</sup> è un'arte: fa capo al regno delle arti performative, assieme al teatro (in tutte le sue manifestazioni), al canto e alla danza.

Il linguaggio, in quest'arte, ha un ruolo preminente. Una persona che racconta bene una storia sa modulare il discorso in funzione di ciò che sta raccontando (può rallentare o accelerare il ritmo della narrazione, creare delle pause, sottolineare gli eventi con gesti ed espressioni del viso) e delle esigenze dell'ascoltatore (può usare una certa varietà di lingua e un certo grado di complessità linguistica in funzione dell'età e del grado di competenza linguistica dell'*audience*).

Nell'educazione linguistica per molto tempo lo storytelling è stata una pratica ritenuta di pertinenza degli insegnanti dell'infanzia.<sup>2</sup> Passando nell'età dell'adolescenza e poi nel mondo degli adulti, le poche pubblicazioni al riguardo fanno supporre fosse invalsa la convinzione che, con l'alfabetizzazione, il ragazzo, il giovane e poi l'adulto non avessero più bisogno che la storia fosse letta o raccontata loro, in quanto già sarebbero stati capaci di leggerla per conto loro.

A parte rarissimi casi (tra i quali, segnaliamo, Morgan, Rinvolutrici 1983; Fitzgibbon, Wilhelm 1998), per decenni c'è stata una scarsità di scritti in materia. A determinare l'oblio sono state soprattutto due idee:

- quella secondo la quale lo storytelling sia poco accattivante per un pubblico adulto, posto che è un'attività rivolta a bambini;
- quella secondo la quale nello storytelling vi è un focus su chi racconta (il docente), mentre chi ascolta (in ambito educativo, l'allievo) gioca un ruolo passivo.

A cavallo dei due secoli le cose sono cambiate. In parallelo alla rivitalizzazione dello storytelling in contesti non scolastici<sup>3</sup>, si è notato un progressivo interesse verso la pratica nell'editoria ELT rivolta ad apprendenti adulti:

- Amos Paran e Eleanor Watts, all'interno di un progetto di IATEFL, pubblicano nel 2003 il brevissimo saggio «Storytelling in ELT»;
- Berenice Walther, per Grin, pubblica nel 2008 *Teaching Short Stories in the EFL Classroom*;

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**1** A Modesto Corderi Novoa si deve l'Appendice 2, a Sarah Dyble l'Appendice 3; il resto (corpo dell'articolo e Appendice 1) è di Paolo Torresan.

**2** Tra i tanti contributi sul raccontare a bambini nella classe di lingua, cf. Wright 1985; Ellis, Brewster 1991; Sisti 2016; Costenaro 2012.

**3** Per esempio, in ambito terapeutico (Sant'Agostino 2006), in quello aziendale o della comunicazione in generale (Armstrong 1992).

- Ruth Wajnryb, per i tipi della Cambridge University Press, pubblica nel 2013 *Stories: Narrative Activities for the Language Classroom*;
- David Heathfied, per Delta, pubblica nel 2014 *Storytelling with Our Students*;
- Jeremy Harmer e Herbert Puchta, per Helbling, pubblicano nel 2020 *Story-based language teaching*;
- David Weller, per Stone Harrow, pubblica nel 2023 *Storytelling for Language Teachers: Story Frameworks, Activities, and Techniques*.

Non solo. Le storie che provengono dalla tradizione sono pensate anche come occasioni a cui ricorrere all'interno di percorsi di aggiornamento docenti:

- Nick Owen, per Crown House, pubblica nel 2001 *The Magic of Metaphor: 77 Stories for Teachers, Trainers & Thinkers*;
- Alan Maley, per Pavilion, pubblica nel 2024 *Using Wisdom Stories in Language Teacher Education*.

Da ultimo, recentemente, si è andato affermando il *digital* storytelling (cf., per esempio, Nami 2020; Compagnoni 2022)

Le iniziative di formazione in presenza o da remoto sullo storytelling si stanno moltiplicando, frutto di una coscienza del valore della pratica, anche fuori dal contesto della didattica rivolta a bambini. Uno stato dell'arte positivo, dunque, di rinnovata crescita ed interesse.

## 2 Utilità della narrazione

In un testo medievale si racconta della difficoltà di un abate ad ottenere l'attenzione dei confratelli (*La légende arthurienne* 1989, 1).<sup>4</sup>

In un monastero della Renania, nel XIII secolo, l'abate esortava i fratelli ad essere vigili e pii. Molti però dormivano, alcuni addirittura russavano! Allora il frate, con voce grossa, disse: "Ascoltate, fratelli, ascoltatevi con attenzione. Vi racconto un fatto nuovo e straordinario: C'era una volta un re chiamato Artù...". L'abate si interruppe e disse: "Quanto è grande la vostra miseria, fratelli! Mentre io vi parlavo di Dio vi stavate addormentando; ora, quando mi sono messo a raccontarvi qualcosa di ameno, avete prestato la massima attenzione".

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<sup>4</sup> Salvo diversa indicazione, tutte le traduzioni sono a cura degli autori.

La decisione di ricorrere a una narrazione fu saggia: i frati furono rapiti dall'idea di ascoltare una storia. Una storia ha, infatti, il potere di accendere la fantasia, trasportando chi ascolta in un'altra dimensione, la quale sfugge ai limiti dello spazio e del tempo.

Non si tratta solo di un viaggio con la mente: i sensi sono sollecitati durante l'ascolto, come se vivessimo in prima persona quanto ci viene raccontato: le aree corticali «che elaborano nella vita reale le nozioni di spazio, di movimento, di gusto e di suono sono attivate quando siamo coinvolti da una trama che avvince» (Pinker 1999).

L'arte di raccontare una storia ha una valenza anche logica: stimola il desiderio di fare delle previsioni, attivando il pensiero induttivo (cerchiamo degli indizi per capire cosa succederà poi) e quello abduttivo (in assenza di indizi sufficienti, creiamo una serie di scenari possibili).

Fondamentale nello sviluppo della specie *Sapiens* (i racconti hanno permesso di affrontare il mondo e il rapporto con gli altri sulla base delle esperienze vissute dai predecessori; cf. Harmer, Puchta 2018), l'arte del racconto è anche un viatico per la conoscenza di sé. E lo è in due sensi:

- nell'ascoltare una storia c'è una sospensione del *loop* di pensieri ed emozioni, spesso con valenza negativa: «il nostro vissuto emotivo muta rapidamente [...]. Ciò ci permette di prendere delle distanze dalle nostre emozioni» (Moraes 2022). L'ansia che preme, il cruccio che insiste, il fastidio sottile si dissipano, posto che il racconto ci solleva altrove, ci dis-trae;
- il lettore trova riflesse, nei difetti dei personaggi, le sue contraddizioni: vestendo i panni di questo o di quel personaggio, affronta i propri dilemmi, assumendo la posizione del testimone. Pure nelle virtù descritte ritrova se stesso: il coraggio di un condottiero o la fermezza di una donzella richiamano le stesse emozioni in chi ascolta. In sostanza, mediante i comportamenti descritti nella storia, lo spettatore interiorizza e rielabora le nozioni di bene e di male, di giusto e di ingiusto.

L'importanza filo- e ontogenetica assunta della narrazione si riflette nella fisiologia del cervello: le reti neuronali sono cablate in maniera tale da renderci ricettivi all'ascolto di storie ('neural coupling', Stephens et al. 2010).

Bruner (2003), psicologo ed educatore, ci insegna, peraltro, che il pensiero narrativo non è un *minus* rispetto a quello scientifico; al contrario, è un modo altrettanto importante per acquisire saperi.

*Postrema autem non minimus*, una storia, nell'essere raccontata, crea intimità, per via del vincolo che si genera tra chi racconta e chi ascolta. Durante la narrazione, il battito cardiaco dell'uno e dell'altro si sincronizzano (Perez et al. 2021). Inoltre, se la storia è percepita come significativa, in chi ascolta vi è un aumento dell'ossitocina, il neurotrasmettitore che favorisce (ed è a sua volta sollecitato da) relazioni gratificanti (Zak 2012).

Da un punto di vista dell'apprendimento linguistico, attraverso il racconto si sviluppa l'abilità di ascolto/di lettura e, parallelamente, aumenta il piacere per la lettura e l'ascolto (Wang, Lee 2007; McQuillan 2019); il repertorio lessicale a disposizione dell'allievo si consolida (Mason, Krashen, 2004; Mason et al. 2009) e la competenza fonoprosodica si affina (Krashen 2019). Rispetto all'ascolto registrato, durante il racconto/la lettura di una storia dal vivo vi è la possibilità, da parte del narratore, di adeguare la velocità d'eloquio in base al livello di comprensione dell'*audience*. Laddove si genera incomprensione, il narratore può ricorrere a varie forme di facilitazione del messaggio. Ripetizioni, gesti, *realia*, movimenti, espressioni del viso, parafrasi, circonlocuzioni, disegni: tutto ciò rende il discorso più trasparente, oltre che più concreto, e quindi memorabile.<sup>5</sup>

### 3 Le dimensioni dello storytelling

Come insegnanti di lingua, possiamo considerare lo storytelling secondo le tre dimensioni illustrate nella figura 1. La prima (*comportamenti generali*) concerne le strategie generali messe in atto dal narratore; la seconda e la terza invece (rispettivamente, *modalità di narrazione* e attività di *pre- e post-narrazione*) attengono specificamente all'ambito glottodidattico.

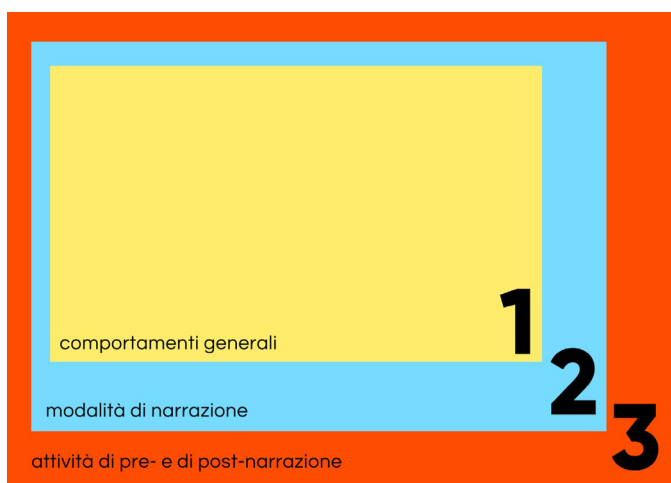


Figura 1 Le dimensioni dello storytelling

<sup>5</sup> Tali azioni illustrative fanno capo all'elaborative assistance', secondo le parole di McQuillan, 1998, ovvero alla 'comprehension aiding supplementation', nei termini di Krashen, Mason, Smith 2018.

### 3.1 Comportamenti generali

La prima dimensione contempla gli accorgimenti che un narratore adotta per rendere efficace il suo intervento (poligono 1) [fig. 1]. Si tratta di una dimensione ben esplorata, e che conta - meno in Italia, più in altri Paesi (per esempio, limitandoci all'Europa, in Spagna, in Inghilterra e in Francia) - percorsi di formazione *ad hoc*. Il repertorio metodologico minimo di un narratore consiste in una serie di microcomportamenti che hanno l'obiettivo di accattivare e sostenere l'attenzione. Per esempio, un buon narratore è tenuto a (Sanna 2021)

- prepararsi a narrare la storia, prima di raccontarla agli altri (memorizzando i punti salienti);
- variare il ritmo della narrazione a seconda degli eventi;
- interpretare i personaggi, alterando il timbro della voce;
- mantenere un contatto oculare con il pubblico;
- esprimere le emozioni (attraverso gesti, volume della voce, espressioni facciali)
- servirsi di qualsiasi elemento che valga a vitalizzare il racconto (musica, oggetti, immagini, ecc.).

### 3.2 Modalità di narrazione

La seconda dimensione (poligono intermedio) [fig. 1] tratta le modalità di narrazione nel contesto dell'apprendimento di una lingua straniera. A nostro modo di vedere si possono individuare tre tipi di narrazione:

- dal basso verso l'alto (*bottom-up*);
- dall'alto verso il basso (*top-down*);
- interattiva.

Vediamole in dettaglio:

- la prima consiste nel premettere l'ostensione del lessico (parole, espressioni polirematiche o brevi frasi) all'esposizione della storia nella sua interezza. È una modalità adatta a classi con un livello di competenza molto basso. L'impegno di chi ascolta/legge è tutto concentrato nel decodificare i singoli *item* lessicali per poi vederli ricomposti all'interno del testo;
- è una modalità che non gode di ampio credito all'interno dell'approccio comunicativo: è ritenuta una pratica pre-comunicativa, posto che si basa su semplici unità linguistiche. C'è da ribattere, tuttavia, che il *focus* lessicale non è fine a se stesso: i lemmi o le costruzioni a cui vengono esposti gli alunni valgono da introduzione/facilitazione alla comprensione del testo. È il testo cioè ad occupare una posizione-regina. In secondo luogo, non è raro che in attività di tipo *bottom-up* sia vi sia un'elaborazione dei segmenti linguistici congiuntamente

- al codice visivo (immagini) e a quello cinestesico (movimenti), a beneficio di una maggiore profondità di codifica (Paivio 1969);
- la seconda modalità opera in un senso contrario rispetto alla prima: la storia è raccontata per intero; successivamente si realizzano focalizzazioni (*noticing*) su aspetti testuali o, più specificamente, linguistici. Si parte dal testo e si arriva alle parole: l'allievo è esposto all'intera storia (come avviene solitamente in ambito non scolastico); successivamente l'insegnante illumina passaggi poco chiari, consolida questa o quella costruzione, riprende una questione morfologica e così via;
  - nella terza modalità il racconto viene inframezzato da attività di vario tipo, durante le quali gli alunni assumono un ruolo attivo. Anche in questo caso si possono prevedere focalizzazioni successive.

Riprenderemo la questione al § 4, condividendo alcuni esempi con il lettore.

### 3.3 Attività di pre- e di post-narrazione

La terza dimensione concerne le attività di pre- e di post-narrazione. Le prime hanno l'obiettivo di facilitare la comprensione, attivando *schemata* di riferimento, mentre le seconde hanno lo scopo di sfruttare appieno la lingua, sollecitando l'allievo a

- svolgere operazioni di *noticing*;
- e/o cimentarsi con pratiche di reimpiego;
- e/o produrre lingua orale o scritta, ispirandosi al tema attorno a cui ruota il racconto o ai ruoli assunti dai singoli personaggi.

È un livello che è ben definito dalla letteratura di riferimento. Questa terza dimensione vale da cornice a narrazioni di tipo *top down* e interattive.

## 4 Le tre modalità di narrazione: esempi

Passiamo agli esempi concreti delle tre modalità di narrazione cui abbiamo accennato sopra: *bottom-up*, *top-down* e *interattiva*.


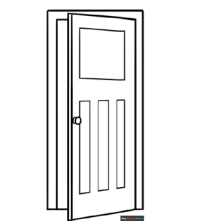
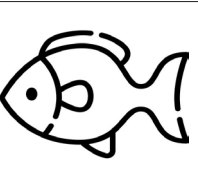
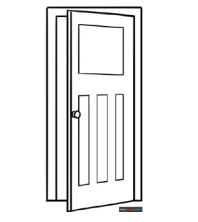
### 4.1 Esempi di narrazione *bottom-up*

La modalità *bottom-up* prevede un'ostensione del lessico in una fase preliminare. Aniché essere distribuiti sotto forma di lista, i lemmi o le frasi possono essere associati ad immagini e/o a gesti.



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È una modalità da attuare con classi con una conoscenza scarsa o nulla della lingua oggetto di apprendimento; il suo impiego è proficuo, in particolare, nel caso in cui la lingua d'arrivo è tipologicamente distante rispetto alla lingua di origine di chi apprende. Tende ad essere prevalentemente usata con classi di bambini.

Quale primo esempio, condividiamo un'attività pensata per apprendenti principianti di lingua tedesca in età precoce. L'insegnante dispone la classe in semicerchio. Annuncia che presenterà la giornata di Jutta, una bambina tedesca: a ogni azione corrisponde un'immagine condivisa e un gesto eseguito dal docente. L'insegnante legge ciascuna frase e mostra l'immagine corrispondente, compiendo un gesto per facilitare la comprensione (se Jutta legge, l'insegnante mima di leggere); gli studenti ripetono la frase e il gesto.

Jutta liest ein Buch	
Jutta öffnet die Tür	
Jutta isst einen Fisch	
die Mutter öffnet die Tür	

Jutta ruft die Katze	
Jutta kommt nach Hause	
Jutta Angst vor Mäusen hat	
Jutta sagt seiner Mutter hallo	
die Maus rennt weg	
die Katze kommt	

Jutta siehe eine Maus	
Jutta geht zur Schule	

In un secondo momento l'insegnante ripete a caso le azioni e sollecita gli studenti a eseguire i movimenti associati, senza che abbiano più accesso alle immagini; da ultimo narra la storia in ordine, com'è nella sequenza a seguire; gli studenti, ad ogni azione, eseguono il gesto corrispondente.

1. Jutta geht zur Schule
2. Jutta liest ein Buch
3. Jutta kommt nach Hause
4. Jutta öffnet die Tür
5. Jutta sagt seiner Mutter hallo
6. Jutta isst einen Fisch
7. Jutta siehe eine Maus
8. Jutta Angst vor Mäusen hat
9. Jutta ruft die Katze
10. Die Katze kommt
11. Die Mutter öffnet die Tür
12. Die Maus rennt weg

Come compito per casa, il docente può assegnare un'attività di abbinamento frasi-immagine, oppure un *cloze* facilitato applicato alle frasi.

Attività simili, basate sull'associazione lingua-gesti, sono reperibili online; a seguire menzioniamo tre esempi:

- la canzone *Peel Banana*, nel canale Mike's ESL;<sup>6</sup>
- l'attività *Captains' Coming Game*;<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Si veda il link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wl7PrtUDyEI>.

<sup>7</sup> Si veda il link: <https://youtu.be/zq9IdYPiJ44?si=uaq1eIvv8vazwNSz>.

- la lezione illustrativa del TPR, *Total Physical Response*, gestita da Herbert Puchta.<sup>8</sup>

## 4.2 Esempi di narrazione *top-down*

La modalità *top-down* prevede che la storia venga presentata integralmente agli allievi. È la modalità tradizionale di narrazione, arricchita semioticamente nell'aula di lingua (i meccanismi di facilitazione di cui abbiamo parlato in precedenza - uso strategico della voce, ricorso a *realia*, ripetizione di formule, ecc. - sono enfatizzati).

La modalità richiede che lo studente abbia già consolidato un lessico sufficiente per operare delle inferenze su frasi o parole difficili da comprendere; se ne consiglia un uso sorvegliato ai livelli bassi.

Onde facilitare la comprensione, la narrazione può essere ripetuta:

- Rinvolucri (2002), per esempio, ha pensato ad un'attività che coinvolge la registrazione di più narratori. Prima della lezione l'insegnante chiede a tre persone che interpretino una storia, ciascuno secondo il proprio stile, e si registrino; in classe l'insegnante fa ascoltare le tre versioni, una dopo l'altra, chiedendo agli alunni di giudicare quale sia, a dire di ciascuno, la più convincente e perché. Si tratta di un compito autentico: l'ascolto non è fine a se stesso ma è sotteso all'espressione di un giudizio di valore;
- nelle storie bilingui, pensate inizialmente per l'insegnamento dell'inglese a cinesi (Ji 1999; 2000; 2002), la narrazione ripetuta si combina con il ricorso alla lingua di origine dello studente. Prima della lezione, l'insegnante si prepara a narrare la storia nella L1, inserendo qua e là delle parole nella lingua oggetto di studio. Il reticolo testuale nella lingua nota favorisce la contestualizzazione dei pochi vocaboli nella lingua obiettivo. In classe la storia viene presentata in questa commistione: gran parte del testo in L1, e rari vocaboli in LS. Successivamente, in lezioni posteriori, l'insegnante presenta versioni della stessa storia in cui il peso lessicale nella lingua oggetto di studio aumenta progressivamente, fino a giungere all'ostensione del testo completamente nella lingua oggetto di studio (si veda un esempio nell'Appendice 1).

Il TPRS, *Total Physical Response Storytelling* (Ray, Seely 1997; Valeri 1998; Lichtman 2018), rappresenta un particolare esempio di narrazione *top-down*. Il docente narra la storia, mimando enunciato

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<sup>8</sup> Si veda il link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Mk6RRf4kKs>.

per enunciato: gli allievi ripetono in coro ciascun enunciato e replicano i gesti. La dimensione performativa, da parte del docente, accresce la comprensibilità del testo; inoltre, la ripetizione corale genera energia e affiatà il gruppo.

Nel contesto di una modalità *top-down*, al fine di agevolare la comprensione, la narrazione spesso è preceduta da attività volte a far emergere le conoscenze in possesso dagli apprendenti. Si pensi per esempio a uno *spidergram* relativo al tema centrale della storia.

Al termine della narrazione, invece, si possono somministrare attività funzionali a un potenziamento della comprensione. Lo *storyboard*, per esempio, è una tecnica di transcodificazione applicata per potenziare la comprensione. Gli studenti, dopo aver ascoltato la storia, tracciano su un foglio alcuni riquadri (4-6), all'interno dei quali disegnano le sequenze più significative e prendono appunti. In seguito, ciascuno confronta i propri disegni con quelli del compagno vicino. Infine, i due rinarrano la storia insieme, servendosi ciascuno dei disegni realizzati e degli appunti stesi. Le stesse sequenze, in un'attività ben più elaborata, il *fotoracconto*, sono mimate da gruppi distinti, le pose sono fotografate, le fotografie sono caricate su un file di presentazione, e infine sono proiettate e descritte agli altri gruppi (Micarelli 1999). Si tratta di una forma di mediazione intertestuale.

Al termine delle attività di comprensione si possono guidare gli alunni alla scoperta di regole (*noticing*). L'attenzione dei discenti è diretta su elementi di vario genere (pragmatici per esempio: si può richiedere di mappare, su una tabella costruita *ad hoc*, le espressioni corrispondenti a determinate funzioni comunicative).

Gli elementi oggetto di *noticing* possono essere a loro volta soggetti a reimpiego (per esempio, una consegna del tipo 'trasforma la storia dal passato al presente' impone una riscrittura dei verbi al presente).

Ampio spazio alla fantasia infine può essere concesso durante lo svolgimento di produzioni ispirate alla storia (es. intervista a un personaggio, riscrittura del finale, ecc.).

Nell'Appendice 2 il lettore accede all'esemplificazione di attività pre- e post-narrazione che corredano una storia in cinese presentata in modalità *top-down*; l'autore è Modesto Corderi Novoa.

### 4.3 Esempi di narrazione interattiva

La *modalità interattiva* si può applicare a qualsiasi livello: dai principianti agli avanzati. Il pregio, rispetto alle modalità precedenti, sta nel fatto che gli studenti sono coinvolti durante la narrazione: l'insegnante affida loro alcuni compiti. Si può arrivare in alcuni casi ad una vera e propria trasformazione della storia all'impronta, da parte dell'insegnante-narratore, sulla base dei dettagli suggeriti dagli allievi.

Presentiamo alcuni esempi, che prevedono, via via, un coinvolgimento crescente da parte degli alunni.

La prima è *l'inserimento, durante la narrazione, di suoni e versi*, concordati tra i gruppi nei quali la classe è stata suddivisa. È un'attività adatta per livelli molto bassi. Ne presentiamo in dettaglio le fasi.

1. L'insegnante divide la classe in gruppi.
2. A ciascun gruppo assegna un personaggio e/o un elemento dell'ambiente evocato nella storia che racconterà (es. un albero, una porta, ecc.). Ad esempio, in riferimento alla favola di Cappuccetto Rosso, e nell'ipotesi che in classe siano presenti sei gruppi,
  - Gruppo 1: Cappuccetto Rosso
  - Gruppo 2: la mamma di Cappuccetto Rosso
  - Gruppo 3: il lupo
  - Gruppo 4: la nonna
  - Gruppo 5: il bosco
  - Gruppo 6: il cacciatore
3. Ciascun gruppo negozia al proprio interno un suono, un verso o una frase adatti al personaggio o all'elemento. Si vedano le scelte eseguite da una classe di italiano di livello A2 (studenti universitari):
  - Gruppo 1: Cappuccetto Rosso: *"Trallallero, trallallallà"* (canzoncina)
  - Gruppo 2: la mamma: *"Mi raccomando, Cappuccetto! Mi raccomando"*
  - Gruppo 3: il lupo: *"Uuuuuuuuuuuuuuu!"* (ululato)
  - Gruppo 4: la nonna: *"Nipotina mia, nipotina mia"*
  - Gruppo 5: il bosco: *"ffffffffffffffff"* (il rumore del vento tra le foglie)
  - Gruppo 6: il cacciatore: *"Pam! Pam!"* (rumore degli spari)
4. L'insegnante racconta la storia di nuovo. Ogni volta che il gruppo sente nominare il personaggio o l'elemento prescelto, formula in coro la frase, il verso o il suono corrispondente.

La seconda attività è il *completamento di parola*. L'insegnante avvisa gli studenti che racconterà loro una favola nota; si interromperà al momento di pronunciare l'ultima sillaba di alcune parole, e gli studenti saranno tenuti a completare le parole. Si veda quest'esempio, immaginato in una classe di italiano L2.

#### CONSEGNA

“Oggi vi racconto la storia di Cenerentola. Non pronuncerò completamente alcune parole: vi chiedo di completare l’ultima sillaba. OK? Per esempio, io dico “Cenerentola era una ragaz...” (studente 1: **za!**). “Esatto: una ragazz**a**. Cominciamo?”

#### INIZIO DELLA NARRAZIONE

“Questa è la storia di Cenerentola. Suo papà era vedo... (studente 2: **vo**),... era vedov**o**... e un giorno decide di sposar... (studente 3: **si**)... di sposar**si**...”

Carlo Guastalla (2025) ha pensato una variante simpatica, in cui l’insegnante, anziché interrompersi, finge di essere balbuziente (completa la parola, solo quando il vocabolo gli viene fornito dalla classe).

In alternativa, si può pensare all’*inserzione di dettagli di fantasia in una favola nota*. Al momento di narrare, l’insegnante esegue delle pause e sollecita gli studenti a completare il testo con dettagli di fantasia; si veda questo esempio:

C’era una volta una bambina di nome Cappuccetto Rosso, aveva.... Quanti anni aveva? [Risposta di uno studente: “**10**”]. Esatto: 10 anni. Questa bambina doveva andare a trovare la nonna che si chiamava.... Come si chiamava la nonna? [risposta di un altro studente: “**Gertrude**”]. Sì, Gertrude, ecc.

Alla fine, l’insegnante può rinarrare la storia, integrando tutti i dettagli aggiunti. Può essere successivamente chiesto agli studenti, di rinarrare la storia per loro conto, a turno a coppie o in piccoli gruppi, includendo i dettagli inseriti.

Un’ulteriore idea, di Joe Winston, è la *realizzazione di still frame progressivi*, pensati dalla classe (cit. in Farmer, s.d.). L’insegnante narra la storia, si ferma in alcuni passaggi topici, i quali dovranno essere illustrati sottoforma di diapositiva (*frozen scene*) da parte di alcuni volontari. Assunte le pose, gli studenti tornano al posto, e l’insegnante continua a narrare.

Il *racconto performativo* (o *performato*), ideato da Modesto Corderi Novoa (2023) e presentato al convegno *Inclusive Practices in Performative Approaches to Language and (inter)cultural Learning* tenutosi all’Università di Padova nel luglio del 2014, è un’ulteriore forma di narrazione interattiva. L’insegnante si interrompe in alcuni punti della storia e coinvolge gli allievi in attività di improvvisazione. Durante le improvvisazioni possono emergere dettagli che l’insegnante può recuperare nel racconto, imprimendo così alla storia delle varianti personalizzate.

Nello stesso convegno, Sarah Dyble ha presentato una tecnica simile applicata alla canzone. Ha sollecitato il gruppo di partecipanti a considerare la storia che si cela dietro al testo e le emozioni che essa veicola, avvisandoli che avrebbero co-creato assieme a lei i gesti corrispondenti alle diverse parti della canzone. Ha quindi invitato il gruppo a esercitarsi ad ascoltare la musica, cantandola in coro ed eseguendo i gesti che illustrano i significati. Si tratta di una forma più elaborata del TPRS: la possiamo considerare una narrazione interattiva, posto che il gruppo è coinvolto nell'elaborazione di una coreografia che riflette l'interpretazione profonda del testo (cf. Appendice 3).

Infine, nella forma più estrema di narrazione interattiva, si può giungere a una *co-costruzione della storia tra insegnante e alunni*. Si tratta di una narrazione improvvisata, senza copione, in cui il racconto procede grazie ai suggerimenti offerti dagli allievi. L'insegnante dev'essere abile, in questo caso, nel districarsi tra i fili della storia, cercando di coerentizzare i suggerimenti all'interno di un testo unico. Siamo però oltre il limite dello storytelling, in un terreno che già si estende nello *storymaking*, nell'inventare una storia (Johnstone 1999).

Riprendiamo, infine, un appunto che abbiamo già espresso: ciascuna attività che fa capo alla modalità interattiva può prevedere, alla pari della modalità *top-down*, attività di pre-narrazione e post-narrazione.

## 5 Conclusioni

Questo articolo punta ad ampliare il repertorio metodologico a disposizione dei docenti. Oltre a scegliere un testo significativo e calibrato sulla competenza degli allievi, l'insegnante-narratore deve scegliere la modalità di narrazione che fa al suo caso, sulla base degli obiettivi che si pone, del livello e dell'età degli studenti.

Abbiamo evidenziato tre modalità di narrazione: la prima, *bottom-up* (dalla parola al testo) è fruibile con classi di bambini e ai livelli principianti; la seconda, *top-down* (dal testo alle parole) è applicabile quando lo studente ha già consolidato un certo patrimonio lessicale; infine, la terza, quella interattiva, sollecita una reazione del pubblico durante la narrazione.

## Appendice 1

Modalità *top-down*. Ciclo di narrazione bilingue (Paolo Torresan)

La narrazione bilingue, adatta per classi principianti e in particolare laddove la distanza tra L1 e L2 sia significativa, consta di un ciclo di racconti (Ji 1999; 2000; 2002).

Il brano, in una prima versione, è nella L1 dello studente, con alcuni vocaboli sparsi in L2. La decisione di quanti e quali vocaboli in L2 impiegare va assunta dal docente nell'ipotesi che gli allievi possano desumere il loro significato dal co-testo in L1. In sostanza, dovrebbe essere relativamente facile, per loro, inferire il significato del vocabolo o della costruzione polirematica o del breve sintagma, grazie alle informazioni trasmesse dal resto del testo, oltre che sulla base dei gesti illustrativi ed eventualmente dei disegni eseguiti dal narratore, di eventuali onomatopee, della somiglianza tra vocaboli della lingua d'arrivo e quelli della lingua di partenza, delle immagini o dei *realia* presentati.

A seguito della prima versione, ne seguono altre, con un peso lessicale in L2 via via maggiore, sino ad arrivare all'ultima, che è interamente in L2. Il ciclo va distribuito in un arco di più lezioni.

A seguire condividiamo un esempio pensato per studenti italiani principianti di tedesco. Il testo di riferimento è la favola del lupo e dei sette capretti (nella versione italiana contenuta in Luise 2007). Presentiamo tre versioni; non è escluso che un insegnante decida di sviluppare il percorso attraverso un numero maggiore di versioni.

### Prima versione: die Ziegenmutter un die sieben kleinen Ziegen<sup>9</sup>

C'era una volta una **Ziege**, che aveva **sieben kleine Ziegen**.

Un giorno la **Ziege** disse ai **kleinen Ziegen**: „**Meine lieben Kleinen**, devo uscire. Per favore non aprite a nessuno **die Tür**. Se **der böse Wolf** entra, **will er euch fressen!**”

I **kleinen Ziegen** promisero che si sarebbero comportati bene e salutarono la **Mutter**: „**Tschüss, Mama!**”

Dopo un po' qualcuno **klopfte an die Tür**. „**Wer ist da?**“, chiesero i **kleinen Ziegen**. „**Eure Mutter ist's!**“, disse una voce profonda. Ma i **kleinen Ziegen** sapevano: „Tu non sei la nostra **Mutter**, lei ha una voce dolce, e tu hai una voce forte; tu sei **der böse Wolf**, vattene!”

**Der böse Wolf** allora pensò: „Devo andare in **Supermarkt** e comprare delle caramelle, così la mia voce diventerà dolce”. Fece poi ritorno alla **Haus** e **klopfte** ancora una volta. „**Wer ist da?**“, chiesero i **kleinen Ziegen**. „**Eure Mutter ist's!**”

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<sup>9</sup> Termini equivalenti a *kleine Ziege* (capretto): *Zicklein, Zieglein*.

“Metti le tue **Pfoten** sulla finestra!”, dissero i **kleinen Ziegen**. **Der böse Wolf** mise le sue **Pfoten** sulla finestra. “**Du bist nicht unsere Mutter**, lei ha le **Pfoten** che sono bianche, e le tue sono nere!”

**Der böse Wolf** era molto arrabbiato. Andò in un mulino e mise le sue **Pfoten** in un sacco di farina, così sarebbero diventate bianche.

Fece ritorno e **klopfte** ancora una volta. „**Wer ist da?**“, chiesero i **kleinen Ziegen**. “**Eure Mutter ist’s!**”

“Metti le tue **Pfoten** sulla finestra!”, ordinarono i **kleinen Ziegen**. **Der Wolf** mise le sue **Pfoten** sulla finestra. I **kleinen Ziegen** aprirono la **Tür**, e **der böse Wolf** entrò dentro la **Haus**.

**Der böse Wolf fraß das erste kleine Zieglein, das zweite, das dritte, das vierte, das fünfte und das sechste.**<sup>10</sup> Il **siebte kleine Zieglein** si era nascosto dentro un **Pendeluhr**.

**Der böse Wolf** uscì dalla **Haus** e si distese sotto a un **Baum**.

Quando la **Ziegenmutter** fece ritorno alla **Haus**, non trovò i suoi **kleinen Ziegen**. Li chiamò: „**Meine kleinen Ziegen! Meine kleinen Ziegen!**“ poi sentì una vocina provenire dal **Pendeluhr**: „**Mama, ich bin hier.**“ Era il **siebte kleine Zieglein**.

La **Ziegenmutter** aprì il **Pendeluhr** ed estrasse il **kleine Zieglein**. Il **siebte kleine Zieglein** le raccontò quello che era successo.

La **Ziegenmutter** e il **siebte kleine Zieglein** uscirono dalla **Haus** e trovarono **den Wolf** che stava dormendo sotto a un **Baum**. La **Ziegenmutter** disse al suo **kleine Zieglein**: „**Va’ nella Haus e prendi die Schere, die Nadel und den Faden.**“

Il **kleine Zieglein** portò **die Schere, die Nadel und den Faden**. La **Ziegenmutter** tagliò la pancia del **Wolf** e tutti i **kleinen Ziegen** erano vivi. La **Ziegenmutter** disse: „**Meine kleinen Ziegen, prendete Steine e mettetelo nella pancia del Wolf.**“

I **kleinen Ziegen** presero le **Steine** e le misero nella pancia del **Wolf**. Poi la **Ziegenmutter** cucì la pancia del **Wolf mit Nadel und Faden**.

Quando **der Wolf** si svegliò, si sentì pesante. Aveva una grande **Durst**, andò nel fiume a bere della **Wasser**. Ma tutte le **Steine** pesanti lo trascinarono sotto la **Wasser**. La **Ziegenmutter** e i suoi **kleinen Ziegen** furono molto felici.

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**10** L’insegnante facilita la comprensione attraverso l’enumerazione.

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## Seconda versione: die Ziegenmutter und die sieben kleinen Ziegen

Es war einmal eine Ziege, die sieben kleine Ziegen hatte.

Eines Tages sagte die Ziege zu ihren kleinen Ziegen: „Meine lieben Kleinen, devo uscire. Bitte öffnet niemandem die Tür. Se der böse Wolf kommt, will er euch fressen!”

I kleinen Ziegen promisero che si sarebbero comportati bene und riefen: “Tschüss, Mama!”

Dopo un po' klopfte jemand an die Tür. “Wer ist da?”, fragten die kleinen Ziegen. „Eure Mutter ist’s!“, sagte eine Stimme profonda. Ma i kleinen Ziegen sapevano: „Das ist nicht unsere Mutter, Sie hat eine Stimme che è süß, und du hast eine Stimme che è forte; tu sei der böse Wolf, vattene!”

Der böse Wolf allora pensò: “Devo andare in Supermarkt e kaufen delle Bonbons, così la mia Stimme diventerà süß”. Er kam zurück nach Hause e klopfte ancora una volta. “Wer ist da?”, fragten i kleinen Ziegen. “Eure Mutter ist’s!”

“Metti le tue Pfoten ans Fenster!“, sagten i kleinen Ziegen. Der böse Wolf mise seine Pfoten an das Fenster. “Du bist nicht unsere Mutter, sie hat Pfoten che sono weiß, und deine sind schwarz!”

Der böse Wolf war sehr wütend. Er ging zu einer Mühle e mise le sue Pfoten in un sacco di Mehl, così sarebbero diventate weiß.

Er kam zurück und klopfte ancora una volta. “Wer ist da?”, fragten i kleinen Ziegen. „Eure Mutter ist’s!“

„Metti deine Pfoten ans Fenster!“, ordinarono i kleinen Ziegen. Der Wolf mise le sue Pfoten sulla Fenster. I kleinen Ziegen öffneten die Tür, e der böse Wolf entrò dentro la Haus.

Der böse Wolf fraß das erste kleine Zieglein, das zweite, das dritte, das vierte, das fünfte und das sechste. Il siebte kleine Zieglein si era nascosto dentro a un Pendeluhr.

Der böse Wolf uscì dalla Haus und legte sich unter einen Baum.

Quando die Ziegenmutter nach Hause kam, non trovò i suoi kleinen Ziegen. Sie rief: „Meine kleinen Ziegen! Meine kleinen Ziegen!“. Und sie hörte eine kleine Stimme provenire dal Pendeluhr: „Mama, ich bin hier.“ Es war das siebte kleine Zieglein.

Die Ziegenmutter öffnete die Pendeluhr ed estrasse il kleine Zieglein. Il siebte kleine Zieglein le raccontò was passiert war.

Die Ziegenmutter und das siebte kleine Zieglein uscirono dalla Haus e trovarono den Wolf unter einem Baum schlafen. Die Ziegenmutter sagte zum kleinen Zieglein: “Geh ins Haus und hol die Schere, die Nadel und den Faden”.

Das kleine Zieglein holte die Schere, die Nadel und den Faden. Die Ziegenmutter tagliò la Bauch del Wolf, und alle kleinen Ziegen waren noch am Leben. Die Ziegenmutter sagte: “Meine kleinen Ziegen, nehmt Steine e mettetele nella Bauch del Wolf”.

Die kleinen Ziegen nahmen Steine e le misero nella Bauch del Wolf. Poi die Ziegenmutter cucì la Bauch del Wolf mit Nadel und Faden.

Quando **der Wolf** aufwachte, si sentì **schwer**. Er hatte großen **Durst**, und ging zum **Fluss Wasser trinken**. Ma le **schweren Steine** lo trascinarono **unter Wasser**. Die **Ziegenmutter** e i suoi **kleinen Ziegen** furono molto **glücklich**.

## Versione finale: die Ziegenmutter und die sieben kleinen Ziegen

Es war einmal eine Ziege, die sieben kleine Ziegen hatte.

Eines Tages sagte die Ziege zu ihren kleinen Ziegen: „Meine lieben Kleinen, ich muss jetzt weg. Bitte öffnet niemandem die Tür. Wenn der böse Wolf kommt, will er euch fressen!“

Die kleinen Ziegen versprachen, brav zu sein, und riefen: “Tschüss, Mama!”

Nach einer Weile klopfte jemand an die Tür. “Wer ist da?”, fragten die kleinen Ziegen. “Eure Mutter ist’s!”, sagte eine raue Stimme. Doch die kleinen Ziegen wussten: “Das ist nicht unsere Mutter, sie hat eine süße Stimme, und du hast eine so harte Stimme; du bist der böse Wolf, geh weg!”

Der böse Wolf dachte nach: “Dann gehe ich in den Supermarkt und kaufe mir Bonbons, damit meine Stimme süß wird”. Er kam zurück und klopfte erneut. “Wer ist da?”, fragten die kleinen Ziegen. “Eure Mutter ist’s!”

“Stell deine Pfoten ans Fenster!”, forderten die Ziegen. Der Wolf legte seine Pfoten an das Fenster. „Du bist nicht unsere Mutter, sie hat weiße Pfoten, und deine sind schwarz!“

Der böse Wolf war sehr wütend. Er ging zu einer Mühle und steckte seine Pfoten in einen Sack Mehl, sodass sie weiß wurden.

Er kam zurück und klopfte erneut. “Wer ist da?”, fragten die kleinen Ziegen. “Eure Mutter ist’s!”

“Stell deine Pfoten ans Fenster!”, forderten die Ziegen. Der Wolf legte seine Pfoten an das Fenster. Die kleinen Ziegen öffneten die Tür, und der böse Wolf sprang ins Haus.

Der Wolf fraß das erste kleine **Zieglein**, das zweite, das dritte, das vierte, das fünfte und das sechste. Nur das siebte kleine **Zieglein** hatte sich in einer Pendeluhr versteckt.

Der böse Wolf ging aus dem Haus und legte sich unter einen Baum.

Als die Ziegenmutter nach Hause kam, fand sie keine ihrer kleinen Ziegen. Sie rief: „Meine kleinen Ziegen! Meine kleinen Ziegen!“ Und sie hörte eine kleine Stimme aus der Pendeluhr: „Mama, ich bin hier.“ Es war das siebte kleine **Zieglein**.

Die Ziegenmutter öffnete die Pendeluhr und nahm das kleine **Zieglein** heraus. Das kleine **Zieglein** erzählte, was passiert war.

Die Ziegenmutter und das kleine **Zieglein** gingen aus dem Haus und fanden den Wolf unter einem Baum schlafen. Die Ziegenmutter sagte zum kleinen **Zieglein**: „Geh ins Haus und hol die Schere, die Nadel und den Faden.“

Das kleine **Zieglein** holte die Sachen. Die Ziegenmutter schnitt dem Wolf den Bauch auf, und alle kleinen Ziegen waren noch am Leben. Die Ziegenmutter sagte: “Meine kleinen Ziegen, nehmt Steine und legt sie in den Bauch des Wolfes”.

Die kleinen Ziegen nahmen Steine und legten sie in den Bauch des Wolfes. Dann nähte die Ziegenmutter den Bauch des Wolfes mit Nadel und Faden zu. Als der Wolf aufwachte, fühlte er sich sehr schwer. Er hatte großen Durst und ging zum Fluss Wasser trinken. Doch die schweren Steine zogen ihn unter Wasser. Die Ziegenmutter und ihre kleinen Ziegen waren sehr glücklich.

## Appendice 2

### Esempio di narrazione top-down, con attività di pre di post-narrazione (Modesto Corderi Novoa)

Teaching Unit: “Drama as a Tool for Teaching Chinese Chengyu (塞翁失马 Sàì Wēng Shī Mǎ)”

This unit is intended for audiences of all ages and nationalities. It integrates language, culture, and critical thinking, helping students internalize not just a Chengyu (a proverb about Chinese culture) but a philosophy of life rooted in Chinese culture (cfr. Su, 2024 for more insights into the meaning of this proverb). The Chinese level of the intended audience is beginner-intermediate (A1-A2 level, CEFR; HSK 1-3, Confucius Institute).

*Duration:* 3 sessions of 60 minutes

*Learning Objectives*

1. Linguistic:
  - Expand vocabulary related to emotions, unexpected events, and morals.
  - Practice narrative structures
2. Cultural:
  - Understand the meaning of “塞翁失马” (When Old Sai Lost His Horse) and its teachings on the duality of fortune.
  - Explore the importance of Chengyu in Chinese culture.
3. Attitudinal:
  - Promote creativity and cooperation through theatrical activities.
  - Reflect on the relativity of success and failure in everyday life.

*Necessary Materials*

- Simplified text of the story by 塞翁失马 (English translation).
- Cards with key vocabulary: 马 (horse), 摔断腿 (break a leg), 战争 (war), 福 (blessing), 祸 (misfortune).
- Theater props: masks (happy/sad), scarves, hats.
- Whiteboard or projector to outline the story.

Here you are the English version and Chinese version of the story (<https://www.cultureyard.net/blog/chinese-idiom-sai-weng-shi-ma-yanzhi-feifu/>).

Once upon a time, an old stableman was living around the Great Wall. One day, his horse ran off on its own towards the Hu people, a tribe inhabiting northern China. Everyone was consoling the old stableman. He said: "Why are you so sure this is not going to bring me luck?" After a few months, his horse returned from the Hu people with one of their steeds, and everyone was congratulating the old stableman. He said again: "Why are you so sure this is not the start of a calamity?" He now had a wealthy home with a noble steed. His son loved riding the horse, but one day he fell off the horse and broke his leg. Everyone was comforting the old stableman, and he said again: "Why are you so sure that this not going to bring me luck?" A year passed, and a large troop of Hu people invaded the Great Wall area. These strongmen waved their bows and arrows enticing the other side to start a war. Among the people from the Great Wall area who fought, nine out of ten died, and the survivors were left with severe injuries. But because of the stableman's son's broken leg, he was spared from the fight, and the father and son were safe.

古时候塞上有一位养马的老翁。有一天，他家的马自己跑到胡人那里去了，大家都来安慰他。这位老翁说：“为什么就知道这不是福运呢？”过了几个月，他家的马带领着胡人的骏马回来了，大家都祝贺他。这位老翁又说：“为什么就知道这不是祸端呢？”家里有钱又有骏马，他的儿子喜欢骑马，有一次从马上摔下来折断了大腿骨。大家都安慰他，老翁又说：“为什么就知道不是福运呢？”过了一年，胡人大举侵入边塞，健壮的男子都拿起弓箭参战，塞上参战的人，十个死九个，不死的都是重伤。唯独他的儿子因为腿摔断了的缘故，父子得以保全性命。

## Unit Structure

### SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION TO CHENGYU AND HISTORY

#### 1. Warm-up activity (15 min):

- Show pictures of a horse, an old man, and a soldier. Ask: What connection do these elements have?
- Introduce the concept of Chengyu and its function in Chinese (brief examples of other Chengyu).

#### 2. Reading and comprehension (25 min):

- Distribute the simplified text of 塞翁失马. Read aloud, identifying new vocabulary.
- Comprehension questions:

- Why did the neighbors think old Sai was unlucky to lose his horse?
- How did misfortune ultimately become a blessing?
- 3. *Group reflection (20 min):*
- Debate: Have you experienced a situation where something bad had positive consequences?
- Introduce the associated proverb: 塞翁失马, 焉知非福 (“How do you know if it is a curse or a blessing?”).

## SESSION 2: CREATING A THEATER SCRIPT

1. *History review (10 min):*
  - Reconstruct the plot on the board using key images and phrases.
2. *Creative writing workshop (30 min):*
  - Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students.
  - Each group writes a short play script (5-10 lines per character) based on the story. Suggested roles:
    - Old Sai (塞翁)
    - Neighbor 1 (optimistic)
    - Neighbor 2 (pessimistic)
    - Narrator
3. *Guided essay (20 min):*
  - Practice pronunciation and emotional intonation (joy, sadness, surprise).
  - Use objects or masks to characterize the characters.

## SESSION 3: REPRESENTATION AND REFLECTION

1. *Theater in the classroom (30 min):*
  - Each group performs their work (5-7 minutes).
  - The audience takes notes on: What lesson did the work convey?
2. *Feedback and analysis (20 min):*
  - Discuss the differences between the versions (e.g., the emphasis on humor versus drama).
  - Relate the story to the modern use of Chengyu (e.g., in news or speeches).
3. *Closing activity (10 min):*
  - Students write a letter to “Old Sai” giving him advice using the Chengyu.

*Assessment*

  - Active participation: Contribution to dialogues and creativity in the work.

- Cultural understanding: Correct use of Chengyu in suggested contexts.
- Oral expression: Fluency and use of learned grammatical structures.

#### *Additional Resources*

- Short animated video of the story on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpyCAjPHoz4>
- English translation of the Chengyu <https://www.cultureyard.net/blog/chinese-idiom-sai-weng-shi-ma-yanzhi-feifu/>

#### *Notes for the Teacher*

- Differentiation: Assign roles according to level (e.g., narrator for advanced students).
- Playful approach: Allow students to add comical or modern elements to the story.

## **Appendice 3**

### **Modalità interattiva. The performative song (Sarah Dyble)**

#### Songs are stories

At a conference in Padua, attended primarily by language teachers, I presented a workshop offering techniques for unlocking narratives within songs as a tool for language learning. Experience has shown me that children learn songs easily and with enthusiasm once they understand the story of the lyrics, especially if they embody this through drama - connecting on an emotional level with the song's narration, which enhances their conviction and musical accuracy as they deliver rhythm and melody as their story performance.

I wished to immerse the teachers in Padua in this interactive experience of presenting a song and searched the song for a hook - an easy entry point to captivate students. This is normally not the beginning of the song but functions as a catalyst to facilitating participants' perception of their potential to sing, as well as giving clues towards the song's story.

We were learning Adele's *Rolling in the Deep* which has a chorus, verse and bridge which can be slotted together in various configurations to build a multipart iteration of all the main sections of the song. I preferred to teach through modelling, not cumbersome verbal instructions.

I sang the hook, inviting teachers on the course to echo each phrase back:

*You're going to wish you,  
Never had met me,  
Tears are going to fall,  
Rolling in the deep.*

encouraging them to enact the sentiment of the words, we then learned the verse:

*There's a fire,  
Starting in my heart,  
Reaching a fever pitch,  
It's bringing me out the dark,  
Finally, I can see you crystal clear,  
Go ahead and sell me out  
And I'll lay your ship bare,*

I asked for actions demonstrating the meaning of each line - and invited them to consider why:

What story is Adele trying to tell and how could we embody this through how we sang her lyrics?

The final two lines “*sell me out*” and “*lay your ship bare*” cannot be easily translated. Exploring these idioms therefore raises the level of language learning - inviting participants to share similar means of getting this meaning across in their mother tongue. It also invites backstory:

Why is Adele not scared of someone attempting to “*sell me out*”?

What do participants think she might do to “*lay your ship bare*”?

Asking students to imagine the things about the song's recipient she is not afraid of revealing stimulates real interactive discussions.

Within our twenty minute slot I could not go into more depth than utilising the hook to catalyse storytelling but on a practical level we had the entire room of 30 singing the entire song in two parts at the top of their lungs as the time concluded and no one told me they felt awkward. Perhaps they were being kind - but perhaps embracing the performance in character as storytellers, embodying a narrator having a fight with her ex-lover and the enjoyment of playing this out in a group ensemble demonstrates the potential of singing not only for language acquisition and musical progression but also for improving self-esteem and wellbeing and fostering communities. I strive to work towards in every session I run. To make some more examples, *Paradise* by Coldplay and *We Go Together* by Vampire

Weekend became firm favourites of a group of adults suffering from dementia and their carers and their sense of achievement at being able to remember recently composed songs surprised me. I realised that this simple act of singing a new song via telling the story of a girl flying away and dreaming of *Paradise* disrupted the participants view of themselves degrading to insanity through dementia; instead they had just proved to themselves and their families that parts of their brains were still perfectly capable of learning and doing - which seemed to bring them a new zest for life.

At the other end of the age spectrum, at Christmas time, I realised that most traditional Christmas carols have lyrics almost senseless to non-native English speakers - and had great fun with children aged 4 to 8 co-creating and acting the stories of each of the *Twelve Days of Christmas* through mime, images and sounds. We had “three French hens” going on a shopping trip to Paris, and “four calling birds” who just won’t stop chattering to each other. I invite you to imagine the rest of the *Twelve Days* with your own students.

Songs and stories are ways of understanding and locating ourselves in the present, exploring and narrating our pasts and offer potential for imagining new potential for our futures. I cannot teach songs without considering both each song’s mood and story, alongside trying to sense how my participants engage with their world - and present each song’s story in a way which is relevant to each groups’ charisma. It is always an evolving work in progress, but perhaps never sensing I have the ultimate answer is part of being a reflective practitioner, always open to new stories and keeping the world and our engagement with it active and resonant with the energies of those we teach.

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# Genres de discours et alternance codique dans l'enseignement du FLE Pratiques co-enseignées et perspectives inclusives en contexte plurilingue

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**Abstract** This empirical study analyses communicative interactions in French as a Foreign Language (FLE) teaching within a multilingual context, involving 22 FLE teachers and 22 support teachers from Italian secondary schools. The survey highlights the dominant but often unplanned use of code-switching, as well as a tension between declared didactic approaches and observed discursive practices. It also emphasizes the importance of better integrating support teachers – often excluded from linguistic practices – not only in relation to students with special needs but as key actors in promoting inclusion for the entire class.

**Keywords** FLE. Soutien. Inclusion. Interaction. Approches.

**Sommaire** 1 Introduction. – 2 Approche méthodologique et cadre d'intervention : premiers constats. – 3 Catégories et paramètres de l'analyse. – 4 Modes de communication et genres de discours : résultats relevés. – 5 Conclusion.



Edizioni  
Ca'Foscari

#### Peer review

Submitted 2025-10-22  
Accepted 2026-03-27  
Published 2026-04-27



#### Open access

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DOI 10.30687/ELLE/2280-6792/2026/01/003

## 1 Introduction

Cette contribution se propose d'analyser l'interaction communicative dans des contextes institutionnels d'apprentissage des langues. Il s'agit d'une étude empirique - entamée en janvier 2024 et toujours en cours - menée auprès d'un échantillon de 22 enseignants de FLE (= français langue étrangère) et de 26 enseignants de soutien (désignés ici comme enseignants spécialisés), exerçant dans des classes plurilingues au sein d'établissements d'enseignement secondaire, tant du premier que du second cycle, en Italie.

L'objectif est d'analyser les pratiques discursives, à savoir les genres de discours (Beacco 2011; Schneuwly 1994), mobilisées lors des cours de français langue étrangère, ainsi que l'impact de ces pratiques sur les processus d'inclusion et d'exclusion (Alessandrini 2024).

Dans le système éducatif italien, où le groupe classe se compose d'élèves présentant un handicap certifié, de ceux ayant des troubles spécifiques de l'apprentissage (DSA = Disturbi Specifici dell' Apprendimento), d'élèves à besoins éducatifs particuliers (BES = Bisogni Educativi Speciali), et également d'élèves issus de la migration - ces derniers souvent recensés parmi les BES -, la classe est co-animée par l'enseignant de la matière (ici, le professeur de FLE) et un enseignant de soutien, souvent dépourvu de compétences en langue française et/ou en didactique des langues).

En effet, la formation initiale de ces enseignants, caractérisée par une forte hétérogénéité des parcours académiques d'origine, révèle fréquemment des lacunes significatives dans certaines compétences et domaines de spécialisation (en particulier en ce qui concerne la connaissance et l'enseignement des langues secondes).

De même, la formation universitaire et postuniversitaire des enseignants de FLE, dans les cursus menant à la qualification à l'enseignement, présente souvent des insuffisances en matière de didactique spécialisée et de pédagogie inclusive. Ces manques peuvent avoir des répercussions notables sur la capacité de ces enseignants à interagir de manière adéquate et à collaborer efficacement au sein d'une équipe pédagogique.

Dans ce contexte, plusieurs questions se posent : comment s'articule l'interaction entre les différents acteurs linguistiques au sein de la classe plurilingue ? De quelle manière les pratiques discursives mises en œuvre pour soutenir les apprentissages sont-elles intégrées dans une perspective inclusive ? Et quelles sont les incidences de ces pratiques sur les dynamiques relationnelles entre enseignants, ainsi que sur la relation pédagogique avec les apprenants ?

À partir de la présentation du cadre méthodologique adopté dans cette recherche et de l'analyse des données empiriques recueillies, nous proposerons d'abord une étude des approches pédagogiques

majoritairement adoptées. Ensuite, un examen approfondi des genres discursifs et des formes d'interaction communicationnelle mobilisés en classe lors des séances de français langue étrangère, en lien avec les enjeux d'inclusion scolaire.

## **2 Approche méthodologique et cadre d'intervention : premiers constats**

Cette étude repose sur une recherche qualitative combinant des questionnaires semi-structurés et des observations participantes menées par le chercheur dans le cadre de son expérience professionnelle en tant qu'enseignant de soutien, distinctes des contextes directement étudiés. L'enquête a été conduite auprès d'un échantillon de 48 enseignants, composé de 22 enseignants de langue et culture françaises intervenant dans des établissements d'enseignement secondaire du premier cycle (45,5 %) et du second cycle (54,5 %), ainsi que de 26 enseignants de soutien, dont 69,2 % exercent au collège et 30,8 % au lycée. Les deux groupes d'enseignants proviennent de différentes régions d'Italie et ont été recrutés par deux canaux principaux : d'une part, via des organismes engagés dans la formation à l'enseignement du français langue étrangère et seconde<sup>1</sup> ou dans la promotion de la langue française (Alliance Française); d'autre part, par le biais de réseaux professionnels (collègues d'établissement, parcours de spécialisation) et par le bouche-à-oreille.

Les questionnaires administrés ont été structurés selon les caractéristiques suivantes : celui destiné aux enseignants de FLE comprend 37 questions (29 à choix multiples et 8 ouvertes), tandis que celui destiné aux enseignants spécialisés en comporte 60 (52 à choix multiples et 8 ouvertes). Les questions portent principalement sur la composition des classes, les approches didactiques adoptées, les dynamiques du travail collaboratif, ainsi que sur les processus communicationnels et genres de discours. Lors de l'analyse des réponses, nous avons mobilisé deux différents critères d'interprétation des données : à savoir l'analyse de Causa sur les différents types d'alternance en contexte d'enseignement (Causa 2011) et l'étude de Beacco sur les différentes formes et catégories de communication - 'genre des discours' - en contexte scolaire (Beacco 2011). Les pourcentages mentionnés renvoient à des données déclaratives fournies par l'ensemble des enseignants des deux groupes.

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**1** Notamment Francophonia : <https://www.francophonia.com/>.

Les premiers résultats relatifs aux contextes d'intervention révèlent une hétérogénéité marquée au sein de chaque classe, tant sur le plan des acquis scolaires que des compétences linguistiques. Ces disparités linguistiques sont étroitement liées à plusieurs facteurs : d'une part, aux caractéristiques personnelles des élèves - notamment d'éventuels troubles spécifiques de l'apprentissage (élèves DSA) ou des situations de handicap cognitif - ainsi qu'à leur origine socioculturelle, leur répertoire linguistique, leur parcours familial et communautaire (élèves à besoins éducatifs particuliers - BES), sans oublier leur expérience antérieure dans l'apprentissage de la langue concernée. Certains élèves du lycée, par exemple, ont déjà étudié le français au collège - le français étant une langue optionnelle parmi les principales langues officielles européennes - et disposent d'une bonne maîtrise de la langue. D'autres, qui l'apprennent pour la première fois, rencontrent davantage de difficultés. Les apprenants originaires de pays francophones présentent généralement un niveau relativement avancé par rapport aux autres.

D'autre part, ces disparités peuvent également s'expliquer par les parcours éducatifs et professionnels des enseignants (Lussier 2004) - et tout particulièrement ceux des enseignants de soutien. Leur formation initiale, au-delà de la formation de troisième cycle en pédagogie spécialisée (condition requise pour accéder à ce poste, détenue par 92,3 % d'entre eux), couvre des domaines très variés : de la formation scientifique (technologie : 20 %, sciences et biologie : 8 %, droit et économie : 16 %), à la formation en sciences humaines (sciences humaines : 8 %, histoire-géographie : 8 %), en passant par la formation artistique (arts plastiques : 8 %, musique : 4 %), la formation motrice (12 %) et la formation linguistique (anglais : 4 %). Seuls 12 % de ces enseignants possèdent un diplôme en français.

En cohérence avec cette diversité des parcours, il est important de souligner qu'à peine six enseignants de soutien sur vingt-six démontrent une maîtrise véritablement solide du français, dont seulement trois atteignent un niveau B2 et trois un niveau C1, ce qui révèle une compétence linguistique relativement limitée au sein de ce groupe.

Cette réalité linguistique engendre une double asymétrie significative : d'une part, une distance notable par rapport à l'enseignant de FLE, souvent mieux doté en compétences langagières ; d'autre part, une disparité vis-à-vis des élèves, dont les compétences en français dépassent fréquemment celles des enseignants spécialisés, compliquant ainsi les interactions et limitant, dans certains cas, la collaboration pédagogique au sein de la classe (Alessandrini 2025).

Cette double asymétrie a des répercussions importantes sur la dynamique pédagogique et relationnelle en classe. En effet, l'apprentissage étant intrinsèquement lié à l'interaction linguistique (Gardner 2019; Depperman, Pekarek-Doehler 2021), la maîtrise

limitée du français chez les enseignants de soutien peut restreindre leur capacité à intervenir efficacement lors des cours, réduisant ainsi leur rôle à un accompagnement logistique ou comportemental, au détriment d'un soutien véritablement didactique. Par conséquent, dans le contexte du groupe-classe, où l'échange s'opère principalement entre l'enseignant de FLE et les élèves, l'enseignant de soutien se retrouve souvent en position périphérique, voire exclu des interactions langagières qui structurent les apprentissages.

À cette asymétrie s'ajoute un déséquilibre complémentaire : parmi les enseignants de FLE interrogés, seuls 26,1 % disposent d'une spécialisation en pédagogie et en didactique spécialisées – un domaine pourtant fondamental pour mettre en œuvre une approche inclusive et différenciée de l'enseignement. Cette carence en formation spécifique limite leur capacité à collaborer efficacement avec les enseignants de soutien, ainsi qu'à répondre aux besoins éducatifs particuliers de certains élèves.

Or, la langue des disciplines, tout comme la fréquence d'emploi d'un code donné par rapport à un autre, ou encore le type de communication instaurée, varie considérablement en fonction de plusieurs facteurs : le profil des élèves, l'approche pédagogique adoptée, le niveau des classes concernées (Vigner 2011), ou, plus généralement, l'ensemble des participants à l'interaction – sans oublier la nature des activités didactiques menées : interrogation des élèves, distribution des consignes, explication du travail, commentaire des résultats, etc. (Beacco 2011).

Dans cette perspective, notre étude s'appuie sur un cadre d'analyse fondé sur des catégories et paramètres clairement définis, tels que les lieux de l'interaction (espace physique et institutionnel), les participants (enseignants de FLE, enseignants spécialisés, élèves), les supports (oral, écrit), ainsi qu'un aperçu des principales approches et pratiques didactiques mises en œuvre par les enseignants.

Une attention particulière est portée à la dimension discursive de ces pratiques (Bucheton et al. 2004) entendue comme l'ensemble des modalités verbales et interactionnelles par lesquelles se construisent les relations pédagogiques et s'articulent les contenus disciplinaires dans la classe plurilingue.

### **3 Catégories et paramètres de l'analyse**

La communication verbale en classe se décline en plusieurs formes (ou formats), qualifiées de 'genres de discours' (Beacco 2011; Schneuwly 1994), telles que l'exposé de l'enseignant, les discussions dirigées ou encore les interactions entre les enseignants et/ou avec les élèves.

Ces genres de discours remplissent diverses fonctions – communiquer des informations, expliquer, persuader,

vérifier la compréhension, évaluer, etc. – et sont, selon Beacco (2011, 44) « souvent instables et facilement susceptibles de passer de l'un à l'autre ». En effet, ils peuvent varier notamment en fonction des méthodologies d'enseignement employées : l'exposé, par exemple, se prête à une approche traditionnelle (leçon magistrale), alors que l'échange collectif convient plus facilement à des approches collaboratives (travail de groupe/en couple/jeux de rôle/dialogues guidés/laboratoires).

Cette variété génère des dynamiques d'alternance codique, en particulier dans les contextes multilingues et plurilingues, lesquelles s'articulent, selon Causa (2011), autour de deux dynamiques principales. La première est celle de la 'micro-alternance', c'est-à-dire des passages ponctuels et non programmés d'une langue à l'autre à l'intérieur même d'un discours ou entre les tours de parole des participants. Ce phénomène se produit, par exemple, lorsqu'un élève recourt à la L1 pour demander un mot inconnu en L2, ou encore lorsque l'enseignant reformule en L1 afin de s'assurer de la compréhension d'un énoncé formulé initialement en L2. La seconde dynamique est celle de l' 'alternance séquentielle', qui se caractérise par un emploi planifié et alterné des deux langues au sein d'un même cours, en lien notamment avec la nature des activités proposées ou des supports utilisés.

Lorsqu'un enseignement mobilise deux langues, les différentes configurations discursives (genres de discours) permettent d'anticiper les ressources langagières dont l'enseignant aura besoin pour assurer une gestion efficace des échanges. Il peut ainsi élaborer des stratégies adaptées visant à organiser l'alternance des langues en fonction des modalités spécifiques de communication mises en œuvre en classe (Causa 2002).

Par ailleurs, selon Beacco (2011), ces configurations permettent de définir des catégories de communication identifiables par des paramètres tels que :

- le *lieu* de production : cours, séances de travaux pratiques en laboratoire ou sur le terrain, échanges verbaux orientés vers la réalisation d'une tâche ;
- les participants : l'enseignant de FLE, l'enseignant de soutien pédagogique et les élèves ;
- les supports : oraux (improvisés, spontanés ou préparés), écrits (lecture de documents, consignes, manuel, productions écrites des élèves), ou encore sémiotiques non verbaux (schémas, cartes, ecc.).

Ces paramètres orientent les ressources linguistiques employées ainsi que les stratégies discursives et pédagogiques que les enseignants mobilisent en fonction des objectifs didactiques.

Dans le cadre de notre étude, les deux formes de communication – la micro-alternance et l'alternance séquentielle – ont été prises en compte et analysées à partir des approches didactiques adoptées, afin d'être mises en relation avec les 'genres de discours' identifiés dans nos données. Cette mise en correspondance vise à mieux comprendre la manière dont les choix linguistiques s'articulent aux formats interactionnels observés en classe.

Quant aux paramètres théorisés par Beacco, nous avons analysé, en ce qui concerne le lieu, uniquement les cours à l'intérieur des salles de classe, les ateliers et laboratoires ne constituant pas des activités didactiques fréquemment utilisées.

Pour ce qui est des participants, nous avons pris en compte les élèves ainsi que les deux catégories d'enseignants – enseignants de FLE et enseignants spécialisés – dont les différences en termes de formation, d'expériences et de compétences peuvent influencer les dynamiques de communication (Lussier 2004).

Concernant le support, nous avons limité notre analyse à l'oralité.

Enfin, la complexité engendrée par la diversité des compétences et des statuts des locuteurs nous a conduits à circonscrire notre analyse à trois catégories (ou genres) de discours :

- L'exposé, où « l'enseignant [de matière] parle seul pendant une durée variable, voire pendant toute la durée de la leçon ; les élèves sont en situation d'écoute et n'interviennent pas ou peu (par ex. demande de clarification), ou sur l'initiative de l'enseignant » (Beacco 2011, 43);
- L'exposé avec interaction, c'est-à-dire le cours dialogué, qui se caractérise par l'alternance d'explications et de questions adressées aux apprenants par l'enseignant de FLE ;
- Les échanges collectifs, où les deux langues sont utilisées en alternance en fonction des besoins, de manière collective ou individuelle, aussi bien par l'enseignant que par les élèves.

Ces catégories ont été examinées par rapport à deux différents groupes de locuteurs, le premier constitué par les élèves et les enseignants de FLE, le deuxième constitué par les élèves, les enseignants de FLE et les enseignants spécialisés. Les données obtenues auprès des enseignants de soutien pédagogique et des enseignants de matière ont été traitées séparément. Les items ont été définis sur la base des modèles principaux de communication indiqués par les enseignants questionnés.

#### 4 Modes de communication et genres de discours : résultats relevés

Les déclarations des enseignants interrogés - en lien avec l'observation des pratiques en classe - mettent en lumière la manière dont s'articulent, en contexte réel, les types d'alternance linguistique et les genres de discours précédemment décrits, en relation avec les approches didactiques les plus couramment employées en salle de classe. Dans cette optique, l'analyse des données recueillies permet d'identifier quelles approches méthodologiques sont effectivement privilégiées par les enseignants, afin de dresser un état des lieux favorisant une meilleure compréhension des dynamiques communicationnelles observées, ainsi que l'identification d'éventuels décalages ou incohérences entre les pratiques déclarées et les interactions effectives en classe.

Les informations collectées reposent exclusivement sur les réponses fournies par les enseignants de soutien, qui interviennent - et sont intervenus au fil des années - dans plusieurs classes et en collaboration avec divers enseignants, ce qui leur permet d'offrir une vision plus exhaustive et représentative des pratiques pédagogiques observées. À l'inverse, les enseignants de FLE ne peuvent témoigner que de ce qui se passe dans le cadre de leur propre discipline, ce qui limite la portée de leur perspective. Les résultats obtenus indiquent que la leçon magistrale/traditionnelle est privilégiée dans 96,2 % des cas lors des leçons de français. L'apprentissage coopératif ou travail de groupe est mentionné par 42,3 % des répondants, le Peer Tutoring ou travail en binôme par 23,1 %, tandis que les jeux de rôle, simulations, dialogues guidés, débats, ainsi que les laboratoires et la didactique par projets, sont cités par 19,2 % des enseignants.

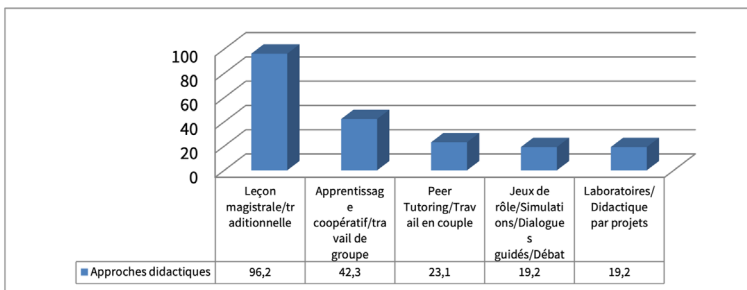


Figure 1 Approches didactiques

Compte tenu des résultats recueillis, il apparaît que l'interaction en classe de français privilégie une communication essentiellement unidirectionnelle, centrée sur l'enseignant, ce qui limite les occasions

d'échanges entre élèves. Cependant, la présence notable de formes de coopération suggère l'existence d'espaces d'interaction plus dialogiques. De plus, bien que moins fréquentes, les activités plus interactives témoignent d'une volonté d'instaurer des échanges plus authentiques, susceptibles de mobiliser l'alternance des langues en fonction des besoins communicatifs et des compétences individuelles des locuteurs.

À ce stade de l'analyse, il s'avère pertinent d'examiner les modes de communication déclarés par les deux groupes d'enseignants, tout en tenant compte des observations effectuées en classe, afin d'évaluer la correspondance entre les pratiques pédagogiques professées et les dynamiques interactionnelles mises en œuvre, mettant ainsi en lumière d'éventuels points de convergence ou de divergence. D'après les premiers résultats, il ressort d'abord que le mode de communication le plus courant est constitué par l'alternance des codes, et tout particulièrement en fonction des compétences individuelles des locuteurs (ce qui correspond à 45,5 % des réponses des enseignants de FLE et à 61,5 % des réponses des enseignants de soutien). Ce type d'alternance, qui concerne tous les locuteurs du groupe classe, relève de ce que Causa appelle la 'micro-alternance' (Causa 2011). Elle se manifeste principalement dans les situations d'interaction, mais on la retrouve également en situation d'exposé ou d'explication.

Le deuxième mode de communication le plus fréquemment utilisé dans notre corpus – concernant notamment le professeur de FLE et les élèves – correspond à une alternance codique liée au type d'activité d'enseignement (explication de règles de grammaire, clarifications d'ordre général, etc.). Cette forme d'alternance, qualifiée d'alternance séquentielle, a été mentionnée dans 40,9 % des réponses des enseignants de FLE et dans 34,6 % des réponses des enseignants de soutien pédagogique. À l'instar du mode d'alternance précédent, cette forme de communication apparaît aussi bien dans les phases d'explication que dans les moments d'interaction.

**Tableau 1** Modes de communication

Modes de communication	Réponses Enseignants FLE	Réponses Enseignants spécialisés	Locuteurs engagés
Alternance en fonction des compétences individuelles des locuteurs « micro-alternance »	45,5%	61,5%	Élèves Enseignants FLE Enseignants spécialisés
Alternance codique en fonction du type d'activité « alternance séquentielle »	40,9%	34,6%	Élèves Enseignants FLE

Concrètement, comme le montreront nos résultats, chaque modalité d'alternance peut apparaître dans une variété de genres discursifs. L'exposé, par exemple, souvent défini comme un moment de transmission structurée du savoir par l'enseignant (Beacco 2011; Dolz, Schneuwly 1998), peut intégrer des formes d'alternance codique, notamment lors de séquences de définition, de commentaire, de reformulation ou de traduction.

L'exposé avec interactions, ou cours dialogué, peut mobiliser à la fois la micro-alternance et l'alternance séquentielle, car il suit un schéma interactionnel récurrent – question de l'enseignant, réponse de l'apprenant, demande de précision, puis rectification – qui organise les échanges en classe (Beacco 2011) et met ainsi en évidence la nature à la fois structurée et flexible de la communication enseignant/élève.

Quant aux échanges collectifs, bien qu'ils se caractérisent par un certain degré de spontanéité – les élèves prennent eux-mêmes la parole ou désignent leurs pairs pour intervenir –, les thématiques sont définies de manière négociée par les enseignants, qui apportent précisions et/ou rectifications, favorisant ainsi le passage des savoirs quotidiens aux savoirs plus formalisés.

Ces particularités se reflètent pleinement dans les données recueillies, qui illustrent concrètement les modalités d'alternance codique observées dans le cadre de notre enquête, ainsi que leur articulation avec les différents genres discursifs.

**Tableau 2** Genres de discours principaux

Exemple observé (données)	Genres de discours	Mode de communication	E. FLE (22)	E. Spécialisés (26)	Locuteurs engagés
Exposé enseignant en français + Traduction ponctuelle en italien.	Exposé	Micro-alternance	8 (36,4%)	2 (7,7%)	Élèves Enseignants FLE
Exposé enseignant en français + Interaction élève-enseignant en français.	Exposé avec Interaction	Pas d'alternance	6 (27,3%)	6 (23,1%)	Élèves Enseignants FLE
Exposé enseignant en français + Interaction élève-enseignant en italien (Réponses/questions des élèves en italien)	Exposé avec Interaction	Alternance séquentielle	6 (27,3%)	4 (15,4%)	Élèves Enseignants FLE
Interaction élève-enseignant en français + Reformulation/traduction de l'enseignant en italien	Échange collectif	Micro-alternance	4 (18,2%)	3 (11,5%)	Élèves Enseignants FLE

Comme le montre la figure, l'exposé est souvent suivi d'une traduction en italien, constituant ainsi une forme de 'micro-alternance'. Ce genre

de discours, qui concerne exclusivement les enseignants de FLE et les élèves, a été relevé dans 36,4 % des réponses des enseignants de matière et dans 7,7 % des réponses des enseignants de soutien, ces derniers étant exclus de ce genre discursif dans la mesure où la communication est toujours gérée et dirigée par l'enseignant de FLE. Quant à l'exposé avec interactions (ou cours dialogué), qui constitue le genre le plus fréquemment utilisé, il se décline selon deux modalités rarement employées de manière strictement séparée, mais plutôt en alternance :

- exposés en français alternant avec des interactions également en français (27,3 % des enseignants de FLE et 23,1 % des enseignants de soutien);
- exposés en français accompagnés d'interactions en italien (27,3 % des enseignants de FLE et 15,4 % des enseignants de soutien).

La première modalité ne comporte aucune alternance entre les deux langues, tandis que la seconde correspond à une forme d'alternance séquentielle'. Ces échanges sont relativement prévisibles et témoignent d'une compétence interactionnelle et communicative restreinte : d'une part, ils offrent aux élèves un espace favorable aux échanges ; d'autre part, ils demeurent peu spontanés, se limitant souvent à des réactions verbales succinctes, telles que quelques mots ou fragments de phrases (Beacco 2011). Ce type d'interactions, utilisé notamment aux niveaux débutants en français, est principalement observé, dans notre échantillon, chez les enseignants intervenant au collège.

En ce qui concerne l'échange collectif - caractérisé par une interaction initiale en français entre enseignant et élève, suivie d'une reformulation ou d'une traduction en italien - il a été recensé dans 18,2 % des réponses fournies par les enseignants de FLE, et dans 11,5 % des cas rapportés par les enseignants spécialisés.

Ce genre de discours, tel que le définit Beacco (2011), ne vise pas prioritairement la transmission de savoirs, mais met davantage l'accent sur la négociation du sens des contenus abordés au cours de la leçon, ainsi que sur la co-construction des connaissances à travers des démarches argumentatives. Dans ce cadre, les échanges collectifs prennent la forme d'une communication spontanée, au sein de laquelle les ressources langagières des apprenants sont mobilisées en temps réel, créant ainsi un espace privilégié d'expression personnelle et de développement linguistique. Ce caractère spontané et co-construit rapproche alors ces interactions de formes de communication authentiques, notamment de celles observées dans les échanges quotidiens entre locuteurs bilingues (Causa 2011).

Ce genre de discours, qui concerne presque exclusivement la relation entre l'enseignant de FLE et les élèves, peut également impliquer les enseignants de soutien pédagogique et se décliner

sous plusieurs formes. Lorsque ces derniers ne disposent pas de compétences linguistiques suffisantes, la communication s'établit principalement, d'une part, en italien avec l'enseignant de soutien et en français avec les élèves ; d'autre part, en italien avec l'enseignant de soutien et en alternance français/italien avec les élèves. Dans les deux cas, l'écart entre les réponses des deux catégories d'enseignants s'avère significatif.

En complément des modalités principales décrites ci-dessus, d'autres formes d'interaction ont également été relevées, certaines se caractérisant par l'usage exclusif d'une seule langue, d'autres alternant avec des pratiques de traduction. Toutefois, il s'agit de cas marginalement représentés, mentionnés par un nombre restreint - voire nul - d'enseignants.

**Tableau 3** Genres de discours impliquant tous les locuteurs

Exemples observés	Genres de discours	Mode de communication	E. FLE (22)	E. Spécialisés (26)	Locuteurs engagés
Interaction en italien avec le professeur de soutien + Interaction en français avec les élèves.	Échange collectif	Micro-alternance	6 (27,3%)	2 (7,7%)	Élèves Enseignants FLE Enseignants spécialisés
Interaction en italien avec l'enseignant de soutien + Alternance français/italien avec les élèves	Échange collectif	Micro-alternance	10 (45,5%)	7 (26,9%)	Élèves Enseignants FLE Enseignants spécialisés
Interaction en français + Traduction en italien avec tous les locuteurs.	Échange collectif	Micro-alternance	0	2 (7,7%)	Élèves Enseignants FLE Enseignants spécialisés
Interaction en italien avec tous les locuteurs	Échange collectif	Pas d'alternance	2 (9,1%)	3 (11,5%)	Élèves Enseignants FLE Enseignants spécialisés
Interaction en français avec tous les locuteurs	Échange collectif	Pas d'alternance	0	1 (3,8%)	Élèves Enseignants FLE Enseignants spécialisés

Premièrement, une interaction exclusivement en italien avec l'enseignant de soutien, associée à une interaction en français avec les élèves, est observée chez 27,3 % des enseignants de FLE, contre seulement 7,7 % des enseignants spécialisés.

Deuxièmement, une interaction en italien avec l'enseignant de soutien, accompagnée d'une alternance entre le français et l'italien avec les élèves, est plus fréquente : cette modalité est adoptée par 45,5 % des enseignants de FLE et 26,9 % des enseignants spécialisés. Ce genre discursif recueille par ailleurs le plus grand nombre de mentions dans les deux groupes.

Il convient également de noter que 7,7 % des enseignants de soutien ont déclaré recourir à un mode de communication alternant interaction et traduction avec l'ensemble des interlocuteurs, alors qu'aucun enseignant de FLE n'a fait état de ce type d'interaction.

Enfin, les données montrent que l'interaction exclusivement monolingue est relativement rare. Seuls 9,1 % des enseignants de FLE et 11,5 % des enseignants de soutien privilégient une communication intégralement en italien avec tous les locuteurs. En revanche, l'interaction uniquement en français est quasi inexistante : aucun enseignant de FLE ne l'a mentionnée, tandis qu'un seul enseignant de soutien (3,8 %) l'a indiquée. Ces résultats mettent en lumière la complexité des interactions en cours de FLE, où l'italien joue fréquemment le rôle de langue pivot dans les échanges avec les enseignants de soutien, tandis que le français demeure privilégié dans la relation directe avec les élèves.

## 5 Conclusion

Les premières analyses mettent en évidence une forte récurrence de l'alternance codique entre l'italien et le français comme modalité discursive privilégiée. Néanmoins, cette stratégie linguistique tend, dans un nombre significatif de cas, à marginaliser l'enseignant de soutien, aussi bien dans les échanges verbaux que dans les interventions pédagogiques.

Les résultats montrent en effet que les modes de communication mobilisés en classe ne reposent pas systématiquement sur une alternance codique. Lorsqu'elle est présente, celle-ci semble principalement déterminée par les compétences linguistiques des interlocuteurs, davantage que par une intention didactique explicite ou une planification méthodologique rigoureuse intégrant les différentes dimensions de l'apprentissage (explicitation lexicale, modélisation syntaxique, activités de compréhension guidée, corrections interactives, etc.).

Les données révèlent en effet une certaine incohérence entre les styles de communication observés en classe et les approches didactiques déclarées. Si l'usage de l' 'exposé avec interaction' et de l' 'échange collectif' domine les pratiques discursives, l'enseignement demeure largement fondé sur un modèle magistral traditionnel.

Cette disparité peut s'expliquer, en partie, par la répartition du temps de parole : on peut raisonnablement supposer, par exemple, que le temps de parole de l'enseignant - qui dirige presque systématiquement la communication - occupe une large part de la séance, tandis que les interventions des élèves demeurent relativement limitées. Ce mode de fonctionnement implique - et explique - également une participation restreinte de l'enseignant de soutien pédagogique, dont le rôle s'inscrit principalement dans des dynamiques d'aide ponctuelle, ciblant un ou deux élèves à la fois, et ne relevant pas d'une interaction collective.

Par ailleurs, le recours à une approche traditionnelle peut aussi se justifier par la nécessité, pour les enseignants de FLE, de se conformer aux programmes ministériels, souvent contraignants, au détriment d'objectifs plus souples liés à l'apprentissage inclusif ou à l'interaction langagière authentique.

L'asymétrie entre les deux enseignants complique également la mise en œuvre de pratiques pédagogiques réellement inclusives, en rendant plus difficile la coordination et la co-construction des activités entre enseignants de la discipline et enseignants de soutien (Alessandrini 2024). En conséquence, les élèves bénéficient moins pleinement d'un environnement d'apprentissage collaboratif et adapté à leurs besoins linguistiques et cognitifs.

Dans ce contexte, le recours à une alternance séquentielle structurée, mobilisant différentes fonctions didactiques - expliquer, reformuler, appeler à l'aide, répondre -, pourrait représenter une voie privilégiée pour renforcer à la fois la collaboration entre enseignants et l'inclusion des élèves. Cette stratégie constituerait ainsi « la stratégie didactique la plus spécifique [...] et surtout la plus féconde, tant sur le plan de la construction des savoirs disciplinaires que sur le plan de l'inclusion » (Causa 2011, 61), ce type d'alternance étant par ailleurs adaptable, flexible et évolutif, selon les publics et les contextes.

Face à cette situation, il serait également souhaitable, dans une perspective d'inclusion, de tendre vers un équilibre plus marqué entre les différentes approches didactiques. L'enjeu serait de favoriser une utilisation plus souple et plus spontanée de la langue cible, ainsi qu'une implication plus active de l'ensemble des participants à l'interaction. Cela permettrait à tous les locuteurs d'exploiter pleinement leurs compétences linguistiques, tout en développant les savoirs disciplinaires et en participant à une dynamique véritablement inclusive.

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# Fostering Motivation and Engagement in ESL Writing with Image Generative AI Introducing the MotivAI Writing Framework

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**Abstract** This paper proposes The MotivAI Writing Framework, a didactic model for integrating image generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) into English as a Second Language (ESL) writing instruction. Grounded in a qualitative and theoretical methodology, drawing from established learning theories such as Self-Determination Theory, Flow Theory, the ARCS Model, and the L2 Motivational Self System as well as recent practical classroom experiences, this framework aims to significantly enhance student motivation and engagement. It outlines how generative AI can be strategically incorporated across pre-writing, drafting, revising, and publishing stages to foster productive language skills, cultivate digital literacy, and promote critical thinking. The framework addresses potential challenges like ethical considerations and teacher training, offers scaffolding strategies for diverse learners, and emphasizes a balanced approach where AI serves as a powerful supplement to, rather than a replacement for, human-led instruction. Ultimately, this proposal advocates for a thoughtful and effective integration of AI, positioning it as an ally for educators seeking to create more dynamic, engaging, and inclusive ESL writing environments for secondary school students.

**Keywords** GenAI. Motivation. Engagement. ESL Writing. Pedagogical Framework.

**Summary** 1 The Evolving Educational Landscape in the Age of AI: Challenges and Opportunities. – 2 Literature Review. – 3 Conceptualising a Pedagogical Framework for GenAI in Motivating Younger Learners: Significance, Methodology and Guiding Theories. – 4 The MotivAI Writing Framework: Design and Principles. – 5 Discussion. – 6 Conclusion.



#### Peer review

Submitted 2026-03-26  
Accepted 2026-03-27  
Published 2026-04-27



#### Open access

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DOI 10.30687/ELLE/2280-6792/2026/01/004

## **1 The Evolving Educational Landscape in the Age of AI: Challenges and Opportunities**

With the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI), education continues to undergo significant transformation. The generation born into this digital age, often termed “digital natives” (Prezsky 2001a), intuitively, though sometimes superficially, interacts with technology; in the current landscape, this now includes AI-powered tools and platforms. While they may readily employ these sophisticated technologies, their inherent digital literacy for educational purposes is not always fully developed (Scanni 2023, 22, referencing Kirschner et al. 2017). Prezsky (2001b) notes different attention spans compared to previous generations. In an “information-rich world” (Simon 1971), AI, exacerbates “poverty of attention”. This challenge is worsened by educators’ “pedagogical inertia” (Citton 2017), a discernible reluctance to embrace technological innovation that may lead instructors to disregard the implications of the Digital Native/Digital Immigrant dichotomy.

Historically, the discourse surrounding the quality of education facilitated by technology, including early forms of online learning, was often polarised between utopian and dystopian views. The utopian perspective celebrates the Internet (and subsequently, AI)’s potential to revolutionise learning by increasing participation, promoting equality, and enhancing the inclusion of students who might otherwise face barriers to traditional classroom access (Yar 2014). Conversely, the dystopian view cautions against the Internet as a source of societal problems, raising concerns about privacy, autonomy, potential addiction to technology, and alienation from human interaction (Yar, 2014). This perspective emphasises the importance of “resisting excessive optimism and preventing possible errors related to the failure to identify future risks” (Pinto et al. 2021, 2). For educators, reconciling these extreme positions is crucial (Rambe, Nel 2015). A mitigated perspective acknowledges the “multiple educational opportunities that technology presents” while remaining vigilant against the risks. Therefore, a balanced approach is proposed, viewing AI and its applications, such as image GenAI, as a valuable supplement to, rather than a replacement for, traditional education. As Citton (2017) metaphorically states regarding MOOCs, which can be extended to AI-enhanced learning, it “cannot, however, substitute for presential teaching, any more than a video of a pizza (even high definition) can substitute for a real pizza in the eyes of a hungry person” (99). This illustrates that while AI offers powerful tools, it does not replace the comprehensive and nuanced experience of human-led instruction. The goal is to synergistically combine the inclusive access and innovative possibilities offered by AI with the essential human elements of teaching and learning.

This paper aims to explore the transformative potential of image generative AI (GenAI) in enhancing motivation and engagement of ESL/EFL students in writing tasks. As a didactical proposal, it addresses to answering the following questions: How can image GenAI be conceptually integrated into ESL writing instruction to enhance student motivation and engagement? What pedagogical frameworks can leverage image GenAI to cultivate productive skills, motivation, and engagement in ESL writing, grounded in theories and practical experience? What are key considerations and benefits of implementing such a framework to promote ESL writing development and critical AI literacy? The proposed pedagogical framework aims to achieve multiple objectives: to consolidate oral and written production skills (speaking and writing) in English, with particular attention to applying grammar rules; to explore the potential of GenAI as a tool to support language learning and creativity; to promote inclusion by ensuring the active participation of all students, including those with disabilities and Special Educational Needs (SEN), through accessible methodologies and tools; to stimulate the ability to formulate clear and grammatically correct prompts to interact effectively with AI; and to foster conscious and responsible AI use through reflection on its ethical and practical implications.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Understanding Motivation and Engagement in Second Language Learning**

Learning a new language is a profoundly complex endeavour that involves more than just acquiring vocabulary and grammar. As Brown (2007) posits, it's a holistic process where the learner's entire being is engaged in bridging their first language and culture with a new linguistic and cultural framework. Success demands significant commitment and involvement influenced by both external factors like curriculum design (Mirhadizadeh 2016) and internal factors, with motivation being paramount.

Existing research highlights several key factors that influence motivation and engagement in ESL writing. Task difficulty is a critical element: tasks either too easy or difficult can diminish motivation and engagement. Optimal tasks provide a manageable challenge, fostering accomplishment (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Learner autonomy, or the degree to which students have control over their learning process, is consistently linked to higher motivation (Deci, Ryan 1985). When students feel a sense of ownership over their writing topics or tools, intrinsic motivation increases. Furthermore, timely, constructive, and specific feedback that focuses on improvement can significantly

boost a learner's confidence (Hattie, Timperley, 2007). The relevance of writing tasks, collaboration, and a supportive environment also contribute to a positive climate (Dörnyei, 2001).

Beyond these, the integration of ludic elements and active learning methodologies like gamification can improve motivation and knowledge retention compared to traditional methods (Dicheva et al. 2015; Plass et al. 2015). These methods, rooted in constructivist and socio-constructivist theories (Mollica 1976; 2019), create interactive experiences that foster cognitive and socio-emotional competencies through engaging narratives and interactive challenges.

To further understand the mechanisms underlying motivation, several theoretical frameworks offer insights. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT), states that intrinsic motivation is fostered when three psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci, Ryan 1985). In ESL writing, this suggests that providing choices and collaborative tasks can enhance engagement.

Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) describes a state of optimal experience where an individual is fully immersed in an activity. For flow to occur, there must be a balance between task challenge and individual skill. Appropriately challenging tasks increase engagement and enjoyment.

The ARCS Model (Keller 1987) focuses on Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. Applying ARCS to writing means designing novel tasks (Attention), showing practical utility (Relevance), providing scaffolding (Confidence), and offering meaningful feedback (Satisfaction).

Finally, and complementing broader theories of motivation, The L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) (Dörnyei 2009) offers a framework comprising the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience.

## 2.2 Generative AI in Language Learning: Benefits and Challenges

While traditional digital tools enhanced engagement via authentic materials (Mahdi 2014; Zeng, Takatuska 2009), image GenAI introduces a new dimension to "authentic materials" by enabling students to generate visuals directly related to their writing ideas, increasing ownership. Traditional research shows that images aid vocabulary acquisition and reduce anxiety (Paivio 1986; Mayer 2001). GenAI takes this further by allowing learners to create their own visuals, tapping into deeper cognitive processes through active creation rather than passive reception.

Recent studies uncover the transformative potential of image GenAI. Significant reductions in writing anxiety and improved

self-regulation have been observed due to the non-judgmental nature of AI feedback (Tiandem-Adamou 2024; Mohammed, Khalid 2025). AI tools further increase motivation through up-to-date information, real-time feedback, and gamified features, bridging gaps left by traditional methods (Ahmed et al. 2025). As writing assistants, these tools support brainstorming, provide samples for analysis, and scaffold the writing process while developing critical thinking (Wang, Dang 2024; He 2024).

Regarding the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), research indicates that GenAI positively affects the Ideal L2 Self and L2 Learning Experience, significantly enhancing writing self-efficacy (Huang, Mizumoto 2024; Zaim et al. 2025). In secondary school settings, AI-generated images boost motivation and learning speed, with students finding tasks “more fun than sitting and looking at other pictures” (Berg et al. 2024, 503). Furthermore, AI-generated feedback has been shown to improve trait emotional intelligence and writing proficiency through detailed focus on grammar and coherence (Mohammed, Khalid 2025; Rachmawati et al. 2024).

However, challenges remain. Over-reliance on technology can hinder writing development and create dependency (Zhai et al. 2024; Abbas et al. 2024). Concerns regarding inaccurate information, cultural bias, and unequal access to high-speed internet are paramount (Ahmed et al. 2025; (Wang, Dang 2024)). Integration is contingent on structured guidance to manage issues like plagiarism and the development of prompt engineering skills, which are not inherent (Huang, Mizumoto 2024; Berg et al. 2024). Additionally, teachers face time constraints in keeping up with shifting AI literacy levels. Despite these hurdles, GenAI remains a valuable tool for students with writing difficulties (Kuerban et al. 2025). The key to success lies in striking a balance between technology and traditional pedagogy.

### 2.3 Research Gaps

Despite growing research, significant gaps remain regarding how image GenAI affects motivation and engagement for younger ESL learners (secondary school). Existing literature often focuses on traditional visuals or general digital tools, lacking comprehensive pedagogical frameworks tailored for this demographic. We need more studies on long-term impacts on writing development (Berg et al. 2024; Huang, Mizumoto 2024). Additionally, there is a lack of research on how GenAI can meet diverse cultural and linguistic needs of students from varying backgrounds (Weng, Fu 2025; Zaim et al. 2025).

### **3 Conceptualising a Pedagogical Framework for GenAI in Motivating Younger Learners: Significance, Methodology and Guiding Theories**

In light of the identified gaps in the existing literature, there is a clear and pressing need for the development of tailored pedagogical frameworks to effectively harness the motivational potential of GenAI, particularly for younger learners. The MotivAI Writing Framework addresses the lack of AI-integration models specifically designed for secondary education. GenAI offers unique possibilities beyond traditional practice, acting as a role-play partner and personalizing learning experiences (TeachingEnglish.org.uk, n.d.). Crucially, text-to-image tools (e.g., Canva) transform routine writing into interactive tasks by linking linguistic precision to visual output. As demonstrated by Buyuksimkesyan (2023), visualising descriptions fosters self-correction and clarity, providing immediate feedback that stimulates creativity.

This paper proposes a novel pedagogical framework for integrating image GenAI into ESL writing instruction. The methodology employed in developing this framework is primarily qualitative and theoretical, drawing upon a review of existing literature on motivation, engagement, and image GenAI, complemented by insights derived from personal experience in language education. As this is a didactic proposal rather than an empirical study, the methodology focuses on the conceptual design and rationale behind the proposed instructional approaches.

The development of this pedagogical framework was a thoughtful process, beginning with the synthesis of key theoretical tenets directly from the literature review. I consciously aligned my design principles with established models of motivation, such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which underscores the vital needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness to foster intrinsic motivation. Similarly, Flow Theory, with its emphasis on optimal experience when challenges align with skills, and Keller's ARCS Model, providing a systematic approach to capturing attention, establishing relevance, building confidence, and ensuring satisfaction, served as guiding stars. Moreover, Dörnyei (2009) posits that a strong and vivid Ideal L2 Self is a powerful motivator, as learners are driven by the desire to reduce the discrepancy between their current and ideal L2 selves. This aligns with the MotivAI Writing Framework's aim to foster a sense of autonomy and competence, allowing students to visualise their linguistic potential through AI-generated content, thereby strengthening their Ideal L2 Self and promoting greater engagement and persistence in ESL writing tasks. These theories provided the conceptual scaffolding upon which I built the proposed intervention. This involved a creative and analytical process of identifying precise

integration points within the ESL writing continuum where image GenAI could exert the most meaningful impact. Could it be leveraged in the pre-writing phase to spark initial ideas and overcome writer's block by creating visual prompts? Could it assist in the drafting process by helping students visualise characters or settings, thus enriching their descriptive language? Or perhaps in revision, by offering a new perspective through AI-generated imagery derived from their text? Each proposed integration was carefully considered for its potential to enhance intrinsic motivation and engagement, aligning directly with the theoretical principles identified.

A crucial aspect of this design process was the commitment to practical applicability. Given that this paper is a didactic proposal, it was essential to move beyond abstract concepts and generate concrete, actionable examples. This involved conceiving detailed activities and illustrative lesson plan segments that vividly demonstrate how image GenAI could be brought to life in a secondary ESL classroom. These examples are rooted in an understanding of real-world classroom dynamics, the diverse proficiency levels of ESL learners, and the practical constraints faced by educators.

Furthermore, the methodology proactively addressed potential challenges and the necessity for scaffolding. No technological integration is without its hurdles, and image GenAI presents unique considerations. Ethical concerns, such as the responsible use of AI and avoiding perpetuating biases, were front of mind. Copyright issues, particularly regarding AI-generated content, also required careful thought. Crucially, the framework was designed with an inherent understanding of the need for robust teacher training and professional development to ensure educators are equipped to effectively utilise and manage these tools. Strategies for scaffolding were also integrated, ensuring that students with varying levels of language proficiency and digital literacy could access and benefit from the frameworks, preventing the technology from becoming an additional barrier rather than an enabler.

In essence, this methodology outlines a rigorous, theoretically informed process of conceptual design. It moves from a deep understanding of the problem space, established in the literature review, to the crafting of practical solutions in the form of a pedagogical framework. It is a testament to the potential of synthesising established educational theory with emerging technological capabilities to foster more motivating and engaging learning environments for ESL students.

## 4 The MotivAI Writing Framework: Design and Principles

Building upon the theoretical foundation previously established in the literature review and the methodological approach outlining our didactic proposal, The MotivAI Writing Framework utilises image GenAI to stimulate motivation and engagement in ESL writing. It is a flexible pathway conceptualised to be tailored to diverse learning objectives and various classroom contexts. Its core lies in fostering a dynamic interplay between visual inspiration and linguistic expression, thereby transforming writing into an interactive, personalised, and intrinsically motivating experience.

The architecture of the framework is rooted in SDT, Flow Theory, and the ARCS Model. At its very essence, it champions learner autonomy and ownership, empowering students to actively shape their creative journey by enabling students to generate visual prompts and manipulate AI output through precise language. This developed autonomy fosters a stronger sense of competence, with AI acting as an ally to overcome writing barriers and providing immediate feedback. The novelty and interactive nature of GenAI naturally capture attention and relevance, aligning perfectly with the ARCS Model's initial components. Furthermore, the framework aims to cultivate a state of flow where visual-to-text challenges balance with linguistic abilities. The integration of image generation with ludic elements and inspiration, such as theatre-based like (e.g., *Kamishibai*, improvisation, creating tableau vivant scenes, or even character-driven role-playing scenarios and visual narrative techniques or comic strips), transforms writing into a playful endeavour which significantly enhances student involvement and deeper learning. Therefore, this framework is designed to stimulate creativity, autonomy, and critical awareness.

The primary goals of The MotivAI Writing Framework are multifaceted and directly address the objectives identified for language learning in a technologically evolving society:

- Enhance intrinsic motivation through the novelty and personalization of image GenAI.
- Deepen engagement via visual prompts that spark creativity.
- Foster visual-linguistic connections, requiring precise language and strengthening grammatical skills (e.g., present simple) to translate abstract ideas into imagery.
- Develop critical thinking and prompt engineering skills, emphasising the importance of linguistic precision.
- Promote confidence by helping students create compelling visual and written works.
- Encourage responsible AI use, fostering awareness of ethical implications and AI-generated content such as bias.

## 4.1 Key Components and Integration into the Writing Process

The framework incorporates image GenAI across the writing continuum, transforming each phase into a visual-linguistic synergy:

- Pre-writing: Students brainstorm keywords and experiment with AI prompts to generate exploratory images. These visuals serve as ‘concrete anchors’, providing a rich vocabulary that overcomes writer’s block and inspires narrative arcs.
- Drafting: Images provide visual scaffolding. Students describe emotions, interpret visual elements, or build stories around AI-generated characters. This tangible reference point helps organize thoughts and expand vocabulary through immediate feedback.
- Revising: Students generate alternative visuals based on their drafted text. Discrepancies between the intended scene and the AI output highlight vague language, reinforcing the need for linguistic precision. Peer feedback includes discussing the alignment between text and imagery.
- Presenting: Students use AI to create covers, digital storyboards, or background illustrations. This adds a professional dimension to their output, fostering pride and providing a shareable artefact of their creativity.

## 4.2 The MotivAI Writing Framework in Action: A Sample Didactic Intervention

To illustrate the framework, I present an activity mirroring a successful intervention for a lower secondary ESL class focused on environmental sustainability. The objective is the collaborative creation of a short story, emphasizing descriptive language and the consistent application of the present simple (third person singular), a common grammatical hurdle for this demographic.

- Phase 1: Visual Story Foundation with *Kamishibai*. The lesson begins with brainstorming environmental vocabulary. Using *Kamishibai* (Japanese paper theatre), groups draft a short story in English. Expected sentences maintain controlled structures (e.g., subject-verb-complement) to reinforce grammatical rules, with each sentence accompanied by a hand-drawn illustration. This choral narrative stimulates both oral and written production through a traditional, tactile medium.
- Phase 2: AI-Powered Digital Storyboards. After a brief overview of GenAI and ethical use, students transition from their drawings to digital storyboards using an image GenAI app (e.g., Canva). They translate their *Kamishibai* phrases into precise AI prompts. This process forces students to observe how linguistic

precision - vocabulary and syntax - directly influences the visual output. Notably, students must repeat detailed descriptions of recurring elements (e.g., protagonists) because GenAI lacks inherent contextual memory, further reinforcing the need for grammatical consistency and descriptive clarity.

- Phase 3: Revision and Ethical Reflection. Groups evaluate the alignment between the AI-generated images and their intended narrative. Students refine their text or adjust prompts to improve coherence. This phase includes a teacher-led discussion on the ethical implications of AI, emphasizing the human role in critical thinking and the necessity of verifying AI outputs for bias or inaccuracy.
- Phase 4: Presenting and Sharing. Groups present their digital storyboards, explaining how AI supported their creative process. The project can culminate in a contest, providing a tangible goal. Students reflect on their learning journey, acknowledging how the synergy of traditional methods and AI enhanced both their language skills and their engagement.

### 4.3 Addressing Potential Challenges

The integration of image GenAI, while immensely promising, necessitates a thoughtful and proactive approach to potential challenges. Regarding ethical considerations, the framework explicitly integrates discussions around the responsible use of AI. Students are guided to understand that AI is a tool to augment, not replace, human creativity, viewing AI as an ‘ally’. Concerning copyright and attribution, the evolving landscape of AI-generated content is acknowledged. For educational purposes, the framework emphasizes that images created by AI are primarily for internal classroom use. Students are taught to attribute the AI tool used, fostering an understanding of intellectual property. For external or commercial use, explicit guidance on licensing and usage rights would be provided, prioritising the pedagogical context. Finally, teacher training and preparedness are crucial for the success of this framework, which hinges on equipping educators with the necessary technical knowledge and skills. This necessitates dedicated professional development workshops that cover not only the technical aspects of using image GenAI tools and effective prompt engineering, understanding different AI models but also including pedagogical strategies for integrating AI meaningfully into the ESL curriculum. Teachers must facilitate discussions around AI’s limitations, guiding students through the creative process while providing targeted linguistic feedback.

#### 4.4 Scaffolding for Diverse Learners

The framework is designed with flexibility to support varying levels of language proficiency and digital literacy, promoting inclusion as a core outcome. For students developing proficiency, the framework offers several supports: teachers can provide pre-selected prompts and sentence starters to reduce cognitive load. Initial activities focus on basic descriptive tasks, where AI images function as dynamic visual dictionaries. Additionally, teacher modelling of prompt creation provides clear examples and reduces student anxiety.

For students with advanced proficiency, the framework encourages experimentation with abstract or multi-layered prompts to create sophisticated images. This challenges them to describe complex emotions or philosophical concepts visually. Students can also create images fitting specific literary genres, pushing their stylistic boundaries. Furthermore, they can engage in critical analysis of AI output, discussing how different prompts yield varying visual interpretations. To support varying digital literacy, the framework begins with a guided introduction to AI tools. Collaborative learning is encouraged through group activities, where digitally literate students support their peers. Activities gradually increase in complexity, moving from simple image creation to intricate visual storytelling, ensuring a gradual development of computational thinking. By integrating GenAI and providing appropriate scaffolding, The MotivAI Writing Framework offers a dynamic pathway for ESL students to cultivate their skills and experience renewed motivation.

### 5 Discussion

The proposed MotivAI Writing Framework emerges as a response to the identified gaps in the literature, particularly the need for pedagogical approaches that addresses the unique motivational needs of younger ESL learners in an AI-infused educational landscape. By explicitly integrating GenAI, this framework moves beyond general technology integration to offer targeted strategies. Drawing on SDT, the framework enhances autonomy through creative expression, fosters competence via immediate visual feedback, and promotes relatedness through collaborative activities, turning writing into a shared, interactive experience. This directly addresses the often-cited challenge of engaging “digital natives” who exhibit “poverty of attention” by offering novel, interactive, and visually rich tasks that align with their digital sensibilities (Prensky 2001b; Simon 1971).

The core strength of the MotivAI Framework lies in its practical application of GenAI to spark creativity and engagement. By transforming descriptive writing into an interactive challenge,

the framework capitalises on the novelty and immediacy of AI. This process allows to visually verify the clarity of their language. The iterative nature of refining prompts to achieve desired visual outcomes inherently develops critical thinking and precise language use. Furthermore, AI's ability to act as a role-play partner (Peachey 2024) directly supports the ARCS Model by capturing attention and building confidence. The playful and explorative nature of generating images can transform writing from a daunting task into a more fun activity (Berg et al. 2024), fostering a state of flow (Csikszentmihályi 1990) and boosting motivation and retention (Dicheva et al. 2015).

### 5.1 Ethical Considerations and Responsible AI Use in Education

The MotivAI Framework is also designed with a critical awareness of the challenges posed by GenAI integration. Concerns about over-reliance, plagiarism, potential biases, and “hallucinations” (Wang, Dang 2024; Zaim et al. 2025; Peachey 2024) are not overlooked. Instead, the framework positions these challenges as opportunities for learning. For example, evaluating AI-generated images fosters digital literacy by showing that AI requires human oversight. The emphasis on crafting precise prompts for AI interaction inherently teaches effective communication and problem-solving. The framework promotes a balanced and pedagogical approach, encouraging teachers to move beyond simply banning AI towards rethinking assessment. Addressing practical issues like teacher training and equitable access remains paramount, underscoring that the framework's success relies on systemic support, guiding students to understand that AI is a tool to augment, not replace, human creativity. Conversations about AI bias are crucial to foster critical thinking, underlining the importance of the human element in creative processes. The emphasis remains on the student's original thought, with AI serving as a visual prompt, ensuring the human element remains central.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper presented The MotivAI Writing Framework, a didactic proposal designed to utilise the capabilities of image GenAI to enhance motivation and engagement in ESL writing, particularly for younger learners. By synthesising insights from motivational theories (SDT, Flow Theory, ARCS Model), and practical classroom experiences, the framework offers a structured and innovative approach to address a critical gap in literature regarding tailored AI pedagogical frameworks for primary and secondary schools.

The framework's strength lies in its capacity to transform writing into an interactive, creative, and intrinsically motivating experience. By enabling students to visualise their descriptive language through AI-generated images, it provides immediate feedback, fosters critical thinking through prompt refinement, and promotes autonomy and competence. While acknowledging potential pitfalls such as over-reliance and the need for critical evaluation of AI outputs, the MotivAI Framework champions a balanced and responsible integration of AI as a tool to complement, not replace, traditional teaching. This theoretical proposal, while comprehensive, calls for empirical validation in diverse classroom settings to assess its impact on learner outcomes. Moving forward, empirical studies are needed to validate the framework's effectiveness across diverse educational contexts, focusing on long-term impacts on writing proficiency and teacher AI literacy. Future research should also explore its use in different age groups, investigate long-term effects of AI on writing skill development, and examine specific teacher professional development models for successful implementation. Optimal prompt engineering strategies and the impact of AI on the socio-emotional aspects of learning among younger students represents a promising direction for future inquiry. Ultimately, educators should embrace technological innovation with pedagogical foresight, ensuring AI serves as an ally in creating dynamic, inclusive, and highly engaging learning environments.

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# Designing an AI-Based Chatbot to Support Autonomous Writing in German as a Foreign Language

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**Abstract** The growing availability of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) raises new questions about its role in supporting autonomous writing and text revision in second and foreign language learning. This paper presents a design-oriented, quasi-experimental study on a personalised chatbot developed to support autonomous writing in German as a foreign language (DaF). Conducted over one school year with secondary school students at CEFR levels A2-B1, the study compares an experimental group receiving dynamic scaffolding and immediate during-writing feedback with a control group relying on traditional, non-dialogic tools and delayed teacher feedback. Data will include analyses of text quality in supported writing tasks and pre- and post-test tasks without tools, as well as questionnaires and interviews on motivation, self-efficacy and emotions. The study shows how GenAI can function as a process-oriented scaffolding tool that fosters learner autonomy without replacing agency.

**Keywords** Large Language Models. Generative AI. AI-assisted writing. AI-generated feedback. German as a Foreign Language

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Framework. – 3 Chatbot Design and Behaviour. – 4 Methodology. – 5 Preliminary Baseline Results. – 6 Conclusion.



Edizioni  
Ca' Foscari

## Peer review

Submitted 2026-02-06  
Accepted 2026-03-27  
Published 2026-04-27



## Open access

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DOI 10.30687/ELLE/2280-6792/2026/01/005

## 1 Introduction

The rapid diffusion of Large Language Models (LLMs) has intensified interest in how generative AI can support second language (L2) writing processes. Recent studies indicate that AI-based tools may enhance text revision, learner motivation, and engagement, particularly when they provide timely and task-relevant feedback (Hattie, Timperley 2007; Meyer et al. 2024; Steiss et al. 2024). At the same time, research consistently shows that the pedagogical value of educational technologies depends primarily on their pedagogical design, as technology should not be considered an end in itself (Mishra, Koehler 2006; Celik 2023). In school contexts, writing instruction is often constrained by what has been described as the *bandwidth problem* (Wiley 2006): providing detailed and frequent feedback on student writing requires substantial time and effort, particularly when teachers are responsible for multiple students across several classes. As a result, sustained writing practice and formative feedback are frequently limited (Applebee, Langer 2011; Kihara et al. 2009; Graham 2019). These constraints are further compounded outside the classroom, where many students complete writing tasks independently at home without access to individual tutoring or additional instructional support, often due to economic or contextual factors. This paper reports a design-oriented study of a personalised chatbot supporting writing in German as a foreign language (DaF) in secondary education. The chatbot offers dynamic scaffolding and immediate, criteria-referenced feedback while preserving learners' agency. The study examines whether this form of AI-mediated support leads to greater improvements in text revision and writing performance than non-dialogic tools and delayed teacher feedback, and explores students' perceptions in terms of motivation, writing anxiety, and self-efficacy.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Generative AI and Chatbots in Language Education

As LLMs become increasingly powerful and widespread, growing attention has been devoted to their potential role in language education. Recent research highlights the capacity of generative AI to foster learner autonomy, motivation, and language development through engaging and personalised learning experiences that allow learners to progress at their own pace (Allehyani, Algamdi 2023; Annamalai et al. 2023). Within this landscape, chatbots have emerged as particularly promising tools, as they can simulate a wide range of interactions while providing immediate feedback in a

non-judgemental environment, potentially reducing learners' fear of error and evaluation (Barrot 2023; Chiu et al. 2023; Candrasari et al. 2024). Beyond spoken interaction, generative AI tools have also been shown to support vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension (Kohnke et al. 2023), and written production in L2 contexts (Dos Santos et al. 2023).

## 2.2 AI-Supported Writing as a Process-oriented Activity

In the domain of writing, AI systems are increasingly conceptualised as collaborative companions that can support different stages of the writing process (Oloff et al. 2022). A systematic review by Wang and Dang (2024) identifies three recurrent forms of AI-assisted writing support: process scaffolding, data analysis, and resource searching. Among these, process-oriented scaffolding emerges as a central pedagogical strategy, defined as guided support that helps learners initiate, connect, and progressively develop ideas through gradual approximation towards independent text production. Such scaffolding encourages learners to conceptualise writing as a process rather than a product and has been shown to increase confidence, especially among L2/FL writers who experience uncertainty during text production. At the same time, a growing body of research underscores that the pedagogical value of AI-assisted writing depends crucially on how AI involvement is designed and perceived (Reza et al. 2025). Learners' sense of ownership and accomplishment is closely tied to their perceived contribution and agency in the writing process (Wang, Wang 2025). Studies show that when AI is framed as an enhancement tool rather than a replacement, learners report stronger feelings of ownership and accomplishment (Kobiella et al. 2023), whereas diminished perceptions of contribution may undermine authorial identity (Rezwana, Maher 2023). These findings highlight the importance of interaction designs that clearly delineate human and AI roles and preserve learner agency.

## 2.3 Feedback in L2 Writing

Within AI-assisted writing, feedback represents a particularly powerful - yet challenging - pedagogical mechanism. Research on feedback consistently demonstrates that learning outcomes are influenced less by the quantity of feedback than by its timing, focus, and quality (Kluger, DeNisi 1996; Hattie, Timperley 2007). While process-oriented writing instruction with frequent, individualised feedback is empirically well supported (Graham 2018), it remains difficult to sustain in everyday school practice due to time constraints

and workload (Warschauer, Ware 2006; Applebee, Langer 2011). Against this backdrop, AI-mediated feedback has been proposed as a potential means of complementing traditional feedback practices.

In this respect, it is useful to clarify how feedback may differ not only in timing or source, but also in terms of the action taken on the learner's text and the context in which it is provided. Following Li's classification (2025), feedback can be distinguished according to how it addresses the targeted linguistic or textual issue. Action-oriented feedback may involve direct correction, where an erroneous form is explicitly replaced; metalinguistic feedback, which provides comments or clues about the nature of the problem and possible ways to improve it; or indirect feedback, which merely signals the presence of an issue without supplying the correct form.

Other categories include reformulation, whereby a sentence or a larger textual unit is rewritten without altering its meaning, and modelling, which consists in providing an exemplary text on the same task or prompt without intervening directly in the learner's production. Furthermore, Li distinguishes between integrated feedback, which is embedded within the text (e.g., track changes), and detached feedback, which appears as a separate list of comments or a summary at the end of the text. These categories are particularly relevant in the context of AI-generated feedback, as generative tools are capable of producing multiple feedback types - often within the same interaction - ranging from surface-level corrections to more global reformulations or model texts.

## 2.4 Empirical Evidence on Ai-generated Feedback and Writing Outcomes

Most empirical studies investigating the use of ChatGPT-generated feedback in L2 writing have primarily focused on its impact on writing performance. In a randomised controlled study with upper secondary EFL students, Meyer et al. (2024) found that learners who revised their texts using GPT-generated feedback significantly outperformed peers revising without feedback, showing gains in both revision quality and task motivation. Comparable findings have been reported in higher education contexts (Lo et al. 2025). Similar effects were observed by Alanazi et al. (2025), whose mixed-methods study showed that secondary school students receiving ChatGPT-based automated feedback achieved greater improvements in writing performance than those following traditional instruction, while also reporting generally positive perceptions of the feedback, alongside concerns related to ethical and qualitative aspects. In this regard, further evidence is provided by Koltovskaia et al. (2024), who indicate that L2 students accepted or incorporated approximately 60% of

the revisions suggested by the AI. This selective uptake suggests an evaluative engagement with feedback rather than uncritical adoption. Notably, none of the participants sought supplementary feedback from external sources, such as dictionaries or peers, to further refine their texts.

In contrast to human teachers, who typically adopt a balanced combination of direct and indirect feedback, tools like ChatGPT tend to rely predominantly on metalinguistic feedback and full reformulation. This preference for reformulation can sometimes result in redundant feedback, as the AI may rewrite text that is already grammatically correct merely to alter style. Consequently, scholars argue that, to approximate the pedagogical value of human feedback and preserve learner agency, AI feedback must be carefully designed – for instance, by prompting the system to prioritise indirect or metalinguistic cues over direct correction or reformulation, thereby encouraging learners to actively engage in the revision process rather than passively accepting automated changes.

These differences in feedback practices are also reflected in learners' evaluations and uptake of feedback. When both teacher and GenAI feedback are provided, students tend to evaluate teacher feedback more positively overall and show higher success rates in integrating it into their revisions. Specifically, students engage to a greater extent with GenAI feedback related to text organisation, whereas teacher feedback is favoured and more successfully integrated when it targets content and language-related aspects of writing (Zou et al. 2025). Beyond this distinction, evidence proves that, while AI-generated feedback appears to be highly effective in consistently referencing explicit assessment criteria (Steiss et al. 2024), human feedback remains superior in terms of accuracy, contextual sensitivity, and supportive tone. Taken together, these findings point to important limitations of AI feedback, especially when it is not pedagogically designed or adequately contextualised, as the absence of instructional grounding may reduce its reliability and affective appropriateness. In addition, several studies reveal that GenAI feedback is often perceived as insufficiently individualised, as it may not align with learners' linguistic background, curricular goals, or local assessment practices (Guo, Wang 2024). It may include not only inaccurate but also unnecessary suggestions, fail to recognise irrelevant content, or prioritise surface-level corrections over more substantive issues (Koltovskaia et al. 2024; Lin, Crosthwaite 2024).

Problems of accessibility and usability have also been reported, including confusing presentation formats and difficulty locating feedback within the text (Koltovskaia et al. 2024; Guo, Wang 2024).

## 2.5 Quality Principles and Accessibility in Ai Feedback Design

The findings discussed above suggest that the value of AI feedback lies not merely in its immediacy or scalability, but in how it is designed and embedded within instruction. For feedback – human or AI-generated – to be genuinely formative, it should adhere to widely shared quality principles (Steiss et al. 2024). Specifically:

- **criteria-referenced feedback:** feedback should explicitly refer to assessment criteria, rubrics, or relevant descriptors (e.g. the CEFR), in order to make task objectives transparent to learners (Black, William 2009; Graham 2018);
- **accuracy:** comments should relate exclusively to what the student has actually written, avoiding additions, inferences, or interpretations that are not supported by the text (Bai, Hu 2017);
- **prioritisation of essential features:** feedback should focus on truly relevant and immediately improvable aspects, rather than overwhelming learners with excessively long or detailed lists of comments (Grimes, Warschauer 2010; Moore, Macharthur 2016);
- **clarity of directions for improvement:** research indicates that effective feedback is clear and uses precise language to provoke actionable writing strategies (Beach, Friedrich 2006; Roscoe et al. 2013);
- **supportive tone:** feedback should maintain an encouraging and non-directive tone, offering suggestions and alternatives while stimulating reflection without embarrassing and/or ridiculing the learner (American Psychological Association Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education 2015; Graham et al. 2015): this may trigger elevated cortisol levels, which can negatively impact cognitive processes and hinder learning (Balboni et al. 2014).

Within this framework, Li (2025) points out that accessibility represents a crucial criterion for evaluating feedback in L2 writing. Feedback should be delivered in language that learners can readily understand, as students may struggle to process comments formulated using overly sophisticated vocabulary or complex linguistic structures. Unlike L1 contexts, where native-speaking writers typically have no difficulty understanding the language of feedback, accessibility becomes a central pedagogical concern in L2 writing, as the feedback itself may otherwise constitute an additional linguistic barrier rather than a support for learning. An effective prompt to train the chatbot giving feedback should integrate three core components: input, task, and output. The input specifies both the writing task (e.g., prompt, objectives, constraints) and relevant learner characteristics such as age, proficiency level, and educational

context. The task component defines the role assigned to GenAI and the specific action it is expected to perform (e.g., providing feedback as an L2 teacher). Finally, the output component determines the form and focus of AI-generated feedback, including its scope (global vs. local), degree of explicitness, mode of presentation, language of delivery, intended audience, and alignment with assessment criteria or rubrics.

Together, these components ensure that AI feedback is pedagogically aligned, accessible to L2/FL learners, and coherent with instructional goals.

## 2.6 Literature Gaps and Research Questions

Despite the growing body of research on AI-supported L2 writing, relatively few studies have examined personalised chatbot systems that integrate dynamic scaffolding and immediate feedback throughout the autonomous writing process, particularly within longitudinal, school-based designs that investigate their impact on writing performance while also taking learners' affective responses into account. Much of the existing research has instead relied on short-term interventions (often lasting three or four weeks) or single-session implementations (Wang, Dang 2024), which, while offering valuable insights, leave key dimensions underexplored - most notably the role of timely feedback within an iterative, dialogic writing process (Crosthwaite, Sun 2025), as well as the potential of AI to support autonomous writing practice outside the classroom over extended periods of time.

For instance, Lo et al. (2025) examine AI-generated feedback in a Hong Kong university context, focusing not only on revision practices but also on improvements in overall text quality as the primary indicator of writing performance. Their quantitative analyses show significant gains in essay quality measured through rubric-based assessments of language use, organisation, and content among students receiving AI feedback. However, the reliance on a single writing task and the limited time allocated for feedback consultation and revision constrain the depth and generalisability of the findings. Crucially, the AI system is employed solely as a feedback-generating tool, rather than as an interactive chatbot functioning as a writing partner during the composing process.

Similarly, Meyer et al. (2024) demonstrate that AI-generated feedback can enhance revision quality and task motivation in school-based settings; however, their intervention is limited to a single revision cycle, making it difficult to assess the sustainability of these effects over time. As in Lo et al. (2025), the AI is not designed as a dialogic support system but provides post-hoc feedback on completed

drafts. Finally, research on AI-supported writing has overwhelmingly focused on English as a second or foreign language (Crosthwaite, Sun 2025), with German as a foreign language (DaF) receiving comparatively little attention. On these bases, the present study addresses the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** To what extent do chatbot-supported writing activities influence the quality of written texts in German as a foreign language compared to traditional writing support?
- **RQ2:** How do students perceive AI-supported writing in terms of task motivation, self-efficacy, and writing-related anxiety when compared to traditional forms of writing support and feedback?

### 3 Chatbot Design and Behaviour

The chatbot, available on both the ChatGPT and Gemini platforms, guides students through the three phases of Zimmerman's self-regulated learning model (1998). Self-regulated learning (SRL) involves the coordinated regulation of cognitive, metacognitive, motivational-emotional, and behavioural dimensions of learning (Persico 2016).

From a cognitive and metacognitive perspective, SRL entails the deliberate use of strategies to process information, solve problems, and reflect on one's own thinking. At the motivational and emotional level, it involves sustaining engagement, managing emotions such as anxiety, and developing self-efficacy beliefs. Behaviourally, SRL includes persistence, adaptive help-seeking, and the active management of the learning environment. Building on this multidimensional view, Zimmerman's model conceptualises SRL as a cyclical process comprising three interrelated phases: forethought, performance, and self-reflection. In the forethought phase, learners analyse task demands, set goals, and plan strategies. During the performance phase, strategies are enacted and regulated through self-monitoring, effort management, and strategic adjustment. In the self-reflection phase, learners evaluate their performance and reflect on the effectiveness of their strategies, informing subsequent learning cycles.

Recent research suggests that LLMs can support SRL by aligning with these regulatory processes. Drawing on Xia et al. (2025), GenAI provides pedagogical affordances that promote learner autonomy by supporting planning, monitoring, and reflection across phases. In the forethought phase, AI tools can assist learners in clarifying objectives and planning their work proactively (Hew et al. 2023). During the performance phase, timely feedback and information support can facilitate self-monitoring and strategic adjustment while reducing

cognitive load (Chen 2024). In the self-reflection phase, analysis of learning behaviours can foster metacognitive awareness and support self-evaluative judgments, preparing learners for subsequent learning cycles (Sun et al. 2023; Takagi et al. 2023).

In line with this framework, the chatbot operationalises SRL support across the three phases of Zimmerman’s model, while allowing flexible movement between phases in line with Flower and Hayes’ process-oriented model of writing (1981). More specifically, during the planning phase, the chatbot poses guiding questions such as “Why did you choose this topic?” and may suggest simple outlines or conceptual maps to help structure the text before writing.

**FASE 1 – PIANIFICAZIONE (Forethought)**

Tema: Il mio migliore amico

In questa fase non si scrive ancora il testo in tedesco.  
L'obiettivo è chiarire idee, contenuti e direzione del testo ✨

---

♦ **1** Domande guida

Rispondi in **italiano**, con frasi semplici o parole chiave:

1. Perché hai scelto di parlare del tuo **migliore amico**?
2. Da quanto tempo lo conosci e **come vi siete conosciuti**?
3. Cosa vi piace fare **insieme** nel tempo libero?
4. Quali **qualità** ha il tuo migliore amico?
5. Perché questa amicizia è **importante** per te?

👉 Scrivi senza preoccuparti della forma; sono solo appunti.

**Figure 1** Guiding questions for idea generation and planning of a writing task in German as a Foreign Language (own illustration)

When talking about friendship [fig. 1], and in particular about a best friend, the chatbot prompts students with guiding questions such as how long they have known each other, what they do together in their free time, why this friendship is important, and which qualities the friend has. Importantly, the chatbot explicitly reassures students that they should not worry about linguistic form at this stage, as the focus is on generating ideas and taking notes. In the performance phase, the chatbot first asks students to produce an initial draft of the text. Upon request, the chatbot can also provide lists of topic-related vocabulary or expressions. These lists were developed in collaboration with the students’ teachers and are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). As shown in the example conversation [fig. 2], before inviting students to write their draft, the chatbot offers a set of writing strategies.

These include encouraging the use of brief and clear sentences, the use of connectives to foster textual cohesion, and the explicit motivation of ideas. Finally, the chatbot prompts students to check whether their sentences are complete and explicitly emphasises that the text they are producing is only a draft. The chatbot then provides in-process feedback in order to foster monitoring and self-control. Students are subsequently invited to revise their text and submit a final version.

#### ♦ Prima di scrivere la bozza

Ricorda:

- frasi brevi e chiare
- usa almeno un perché (*weil / denn*)
- 80–150 parole (non di più!)

★ Quando vuoi, scrivi la **prima bozza in tedesco**.

Io ti darò un **feedback immediato**, chiaro e gentile, e poi passeremo alla **versione definitiva** 🇩🇪

📄 👍 🗣️ 🔊 🔍 ⋮




**Figure 2** Guidelines for drafting a short text in German as a foreign language (own illustration)

Feedback on the final version of the text serves as a bridge to the reflection phase. In this phase [fig. 3], students are invited to reflect on their writing process through a brief metacognitive diary, responding to questions such as “What difficulties did you encounter?” or “Which strategies did you use to overcome them?”. By explicitly prompting learners to articulate challenges and strategies, this interaction is designed to foster metacognitive awareness and to support the self-reflection phase of self-regulated learning, encouraging learners to consolidate insights gained during writing and revision for future tasks.

### FASE 3 – RIFLESSIONE (Self-reflection)

Ora ti chiedo di fare un piccolo passo metacognitivo.

Rispondi in italiano, anche in modo semplice (3–4 righe vanno benissimo):

-  Cosa ti ha messo più in difficoltà mentre scrivevi questo testo?
-  Cosa hai migliorato grazie al feedback rispetto alla prima bozza?
-  A cosa farai più attenzione la prossima volta che scrivi un testo in tedesco?

 Scrivi come in un breve diario di riflessione.

Dopo, se vuoi, chiudiamo con il **feedback al chatbot**, come previsto dal percorso 😊

**Figure 3** Guiding questions for self-reflection on difficulties, learning progress, and future writing strategies (own illustration)

Behind the chatbot’s design and behaviour lies the teacher’s pedagogical expertise; as highlighted by Celik (2023), the Intelligent-TPACK framework emphasises teachers’ capacity to design purposeful prompts that align generative AI with instructional goals. Since output quality depends not only on the model or its training data but also on prompt effectiveness, the instructional design of the chatbot is strongly based on the principles of prompt engineering, understood as the practice of crafting precise textual inputs to guide AI responses. An effective prompting strategy involves starting with simple instructions and progressively adding detail and contextual information based on the responses obtained. To this end, ambiguity in natural language must be avoided as much as possible, and prompts should be clear and descriptive, with examples provided when necessary. Unlike human communication, where politeness plays a central role, interaction with GenAI requires a strong emphasis on clarity and conciseness (Dornburg, Davin 2024; Giray 2023). It is therefore advisable to use direct action verbs (e.g. *write*, *classify*, *summarise*, *translate*) to formulate precise and unambiguous instructions.

Building on these principles, the chatbot’s behaviour is regulated through a set of explicit prompting guidelines embedded directly in the system prompt. At a general level, the chatbot is instructed to maintain a polite, encouraging, and clear interactional style, while avoiding excessive positive reinforcement that could reduce the instructional value of feedback. Its language is systematically adapted to learners aged 16-18 and tailored to the CEFR A2/B1 level, ensuring accessibility without oversimplification. Crucially, the prompting guidelines strictly prohibit the chatbot from performing the task on behalf of the learner: the system is instructed never to generate complete drafts or model texts, nor to engage in direct

rewriting of students' productions. Instead, feedback is designed to operate primarily through indirect and metalinguistic strategies (Li 2025), prompting learners to identify and revise problematic areas autonomously.

In a first step, the chatbot visually highlights all potential errors in bold, with a particular focus on orthographic and morphological features. This initial intervention constitutes a form of indirect feedback, as deviations are signalled throughout the text without being explicitly corrected or reformulated. By increasing the perceptual salience of problematic forms, the chatbot prompts learners to notice errors and engage in self-correction, while maintaining their responsibility and agency in the writing process. In a second step, the extended feedback adopts a metalinguistic focus, selectively addressing only two or three key issues that are considered most important and immediately improvable. The feedback is metalinguistic because it does not merely point out incorrect forms but explicitly draws learners' attention to the underlying linguistic rules involved, for example subject-verb agreement, plural formation, or the systematic capitalisation of nouns in German, a recurrent source of difficulty for Italian learners of DaF. Through brief explanations, reminders, and illustrative examples, the chatbot supports learners in reflecting on these rules and applying them autonomously in revision.

This approach directly addresses a recurrent issue in AI-assisted L2 writing identified in the systematic review by Wang and Dang (2024), namely the tendency of GenAI tools to automatically edit or rewrite students' original texts. Such practices may encourage copy-paste revision and limit opportunities for reflection and active decision-making during revision, with apparent improvements in the final product that reflect short-term, text-bound gains rather than genuine development of writing competence. All of this is carried out in line with widely shared quality principles for formative feedback (Steiss et al. 2024), which, for example, recommend focusing on a limited number of truly relevant and immediately improvable aspects, rather than overwhelming learners with excessively long or detailed lists of comments (Grimes, Warschauer 2010; Moore, MacArthur 2016). The prompt further instructs the chatbot to encourage the use of short, clear, and simple sentences, as well as the use of connectors such as *denn* and *weil* to express reasons, with the explicit motivation that doing so may lead to the awarding of additional points. To ensure task consistency and comparability across sessions, the chatbot monitors compliance with predefined constraints, including a required text length of 80-150 words. Taken together, these prompting guidelines ensure that the chatbot serves as a scaffolding-oriented instructional tool rather than a text generator, thus preserving learner agency.

## 4 Methodology

The intervention will last for one school year and will be conducted at the Liceo Linguistico Internazionale Grazia Deledda in Genoa. It will involve students with proficiency levels ranging from A2 to B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). All writing tasks will be selected from the *Deutsches Sprachdiplom* (DSD) task catalogue and will focus on informative text types, such as writing about hobbies, family, media, and related everyday topics. The instructional intervention is structured into seven sessions distributed over the school year: an initial in-class session (Session 1) to establish a baseline, a sequence of five guided writing sessions carried out at home (Sessions 2-6), and a final in-class session (Session 7) to examine potential transfer effects. Two groups will be compared: an experimental group (n = 16) using a personalised chatbot that provides immediate feedback, and a control group (n = 22) using metacognitive checklists and other traditional, non-dialogic writing support tools, with feedback provided by the teacher at a later stage. Data collection focuses on two main dimensions:

- **Quality of text revision and writing performance (quantitative analysis):** In Sessions 2 to 6, students in the experimental group will complete the writing tasks individually at home using the chatbot: they will produce an initial draft, receive immediate feedback after draft submission within an iterative writing process, and submit a revised version. The final text will be submitted by sharing a chatbot-generated link, which students will send to the teacher via email. Writing improvement will be operationalised by calculating the difference (delta) between the initial draft and the revised text using an analytic scoring rubric aligned with CEFR A2-B1 descriptors, assessing text complexity, linguistic accuracy, and textual cohesion and coherence. The control group will likewise complete the writing tasks individually at home, working on a shared document (e.g. Google Drive) whose structure mirrors that of the chatbot-based sessions. Students will submit an initial draft, receive delayed teacher feedback, and then produce a revised version. During the writing process, learners may use dictionaries, grammar overviews, and other traditional support tools. Improvement will be calculated for this group using the same analytic rubric and delta procedure. In both groups, learners will have two days to revise their texts after receiving feedback. In contrast, Sessions 1 and 7 will be conducted in class, where all students will produce written texts without any support tools in order to assess writing quality under conditions of full autonomy and to

examine potential transfer effects beyond the supported writing phases.

- **Students' perceptions (quantitative and qualitative analysis):** Students' perceptions are investigated through Likert-scale questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, exploring how learners experience different types of support and feedback in relation to task motivation, self-efficacy, and writing anxiety.

## 5 Preliminary Baseline Results

Prior to the first writing task, a baseline questionnaire on writing-related motivation, self-efficacy and anxiety was administered to both groups. Results show high motivation to improve writing in German and high anxiety in evaluative contexts, alongside comparatively low intrinsic interest in writing.

The experimental group reported greater difficulty with independent writing and a higher fear of negative teacher evaluation. Open-ended responses from both groups reveal similar perceived difficulties, mainly related to grammatical accuracy (verb placement, case, word order), lexical choice and text organisation. With regard to feedback practices, participants in the experimental group in particular highlighted the benefits of immediately available feedback for reducing uncertainty during writing. Overall, learners in both groups expressed a positive but critical attitude towards AI, viewing it as a supportive tool for brainstorming, planning and revision rather than as a replacement for autonomous writing.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper has presented a design-oriented investigation of a personalised chatbot developed to support autonomous writing in German as a foreign language in secondary school contexts. Grounded in models of self-regulated learning and process-oriented writing, the chatbot was designed to provide dynamic scaffolding and immediate, criteria-referenced feedback while deliberately preserving learners' agency and responsibility for text production.

Through a longitudinal comparison between AI-supported writing and traditional, non-dialogic tools with delayed teacher feedback, the study addresses key gaps in existing research, particularly in relation to school-based contexts, adolescent learners, and languages other than English. Specifically, it investigates how repeated exposure to a personalised chatbot acting as a dialogic writing partner may be associated with improvements in text revision and writing performance as well as with changes in task motivation, self-efficacy,

and writing-related anxiety, responding to recent calls for a more nuanced understanding of AI-based educational tools.

The analysis of students' initial texts (T1), intended as a diagnostic reference point, will allow recurrent error patterns and writing difficulties to be mapped through a systematic error analysis. Errors will be grouped into broader categories following the classification proposed by Mlakar Gračner (2018), namely morpho-syntactic errors, lexico-semantic errors, and orthographic and punctuation errors. With regard to textuality, the category of discourse-related errors as defined by Chlosta et al. (2010) will also be adopted. This analysis will inform the progressive calibration of the prompts and feedback requests addressed to the chatbot in response to learners' emerging needs. In addition, a focus group with teachers will support the validation of the tool by offering practitioner-based insights into its pedagogical adequacy and by identifying directions for its further development. Beyond the specific research questions addressed, the study outlines a pedagogically grounded chatbot design that may inform future research and practice in FL writing instruction. While broader implications for instructional innovation and teacher professional development lie beyond the scope of the present analysis, the proposed model highlights the central role of pedagogical design in supporting formative feedback, learner autonomy, and reflective writing practices in AI-assisted language education.

This perspective aligns with recent research by Saeli et al. (2025), who investigated EFL teachers' attitudes toward adopting ChatGPT as a teaching and feedback tool through a survey-based study. Their findings reveal a generally high level of openness toward professional development related to AI use, with the highest-rated item indicating teachers' strong willingness to invest time and effort in learning how to use ChatGPT effectively. Such results highlight the importance of pedagogically informed models that not only introduce AI tools into language classrooms but also support teachers in developing the necessary competences to integrate them responsibly and meaningfully.

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