What are the underlying mechanisms that allow people to select and process contextual cues and successfully understand a written or oral text, or to learn a new word? And what hurdles are to be faced when the pragmatic abilities are inefficient, like in some non-neurotypical conditions? All the contributions in this special issue tackle the role of pragmatic processing and associated cognitive demands in linguistic tasks of different nature, ranging from vocabulary learning to morphological processing to reading and listening and comprehension tasks in first (L1) and foreign languages (FL). The empirical investigations carried out with typical and atypical learners of English, French, Spanish and Portuguese highlight how cognitively demanding text interpretation might be. A picture emerges from this collection of studies that shows the complex interaction of an efficient cognitive system and of individual linguistic abilities when implicit and explicit information must be understood and controlled for successful and appropriate communication. These articles advance our understanding of the impact of pragmatic abilities in comprehension processes at various levels of the L1 and FL system, and, at the same time, they offer suggestions and valuable food for thought for the development of effective and inclusive classroom practices that will help language teachers to meet their daily challenges.

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Pragmatic efficiency and text comprehension in L1 and L2 spoken and written communication

Edited by

Gloria Cappelli
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Chapters by:

Marcella Bertuccelli
Elisa Mattiello
Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli
Silvia Masi and Gianmarco Vignozzi
Alessandro Aru
Nicoletta Simi
Silvia Bruti

Elisa Lupetti
Monica Lupetti and Ana Luiza O. De Souza
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Denise Filmer
Matteo Migliorelli
Rosa M. García Jímenez

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LINGUE E LINGUAGGI

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PREFACE

GLORIA CAPPELLI[1], SABRINA NOCCETTI[2], NICOLETTA SIMI[3]
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This special issue tries to offer a multifaceted picture of the role of pragmatic processing in written and spoken communication in a first and foreign language. The fourteen articles collected in the volume present the outcomes of a two-year project funded by the University of Pisa[1] which brought together researchers working in the fields of English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese linguistics and language teaching and sharing a common interest in the complex interaction of the features of different language systems, linguistic tasks and language users when pragmatic processing is required.

Pragmatic efficiency is crucial for successful communication, which is a complex social activity involving cognitive and linguistic skills as well as socio-cultural competence. Indeed, all levels of the linguistic system contribute to the (co-)construction of meaning (Levinson 1983; Sperber, Wilson 1995). Pragmatic skills allow us to successfully perform many different receptive and expressive language tasks, ranging from shaping the message for the function it must carry out, to correctly recognizing such function in a certain context, from selecting the best register for a communicative situation, to drawing inferences to interpret non-literal and implicitly communicated information (Ariel 2010; Domaneschi, Bambini 2020; Stemmer 2000). These activities, although apparently effortless for neurotypical language users – especially when they operate in their first language –, come with a significant cost in terms of cognitive resources (Domaneschi, Bambini 2020; Paradis 1998). Inferential processes need the rapid integration of linguistic and extra-linguistic information, which is demanding in terms of attention, memory, and mind-reading resources (Schumacher 2017). For this reason, non-typically developing language users with impairments in any of the cognitive areas mentioned (e.g., people with dyslexia, cf. Cappelli *et al.* 2018, 2022) might be less efficient than their neurotypical peers in tasks involving pragmatic processing. At the same time, pragmatic competence also relies on the knowledge of socio-cultural norms. Thus, operating in a foreign language might also pose challenges in terms of pragmatic processing and efficiency (Rubio-Fernandez, Jara-Ettinger 2020).

For completely different reasons and probably in quite different ways, pragmatic inefficiency may have a negative impact on many everyday-life operations for both foreign language- and non-typically developing language users.

The importance of pragmatic abilities in the language classroom has been mostly explored in terms of the acquisition and development of the pragmatic skills required for appropriate social behaviour in the L2 (e.g., in initiating conversation, taking turns, preforming felicitous speech acts, cf. Culpeper *et al.* 2018; Plonsky, Zhuang 2019; Taguchi 2019 among others). However, to the best of our knowledge, not much has been said relative to the underlying processes which allow people to select and process contextual cues. Such processes are grounded in the greatly diverse cognitive characteristics of individual language users rather than in culture and language-specific aspects of communication. Thus, a linguistic approach to the issue should assume a view of the pragmatic processing (i.e., interpretation) of texts as emerging from the complex interaction of intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of language use. The extrinsic, and generally cultural-specific aspects can be (and should be) explicitly taught. Awareness of the socio-cultural values underlying communicative events should be developed in foreign language learners. On the other hand, the intrinsic, individual aspects of pragmatic processing can only be accounted for and integrated into language teaching practices to ensure maximally inclusive learning environments.

Many activities proposed to foreign language learners rely on efficient pragmatic processing. Examples of common tasks proposed in the foreign language classroom include inferring rules and regularities from examples, resolving reference ambiguity, deriving novel word-meanings from contextual clues. They all require good pragmatic skills, as well as vocabulary knowledge and well-functioning working memory. Many reading and listening comprehension tasks found in standardised tests also rely on pragmatic efficiency, since learners must be able to construct a mental model of the text by filling in information which is not explicitly provided. In non-pathological situations, bridging and elaborative inferences are performed frequently and seemingly effortlessly, if appropriate lexical and cultural knowledge is available. On the other hand, learners with non-typical development might find some of these activities challenging (cf. Bambini *et al.* 2016, 2021; Cappelli *et al.* 2022; Cummings 2017, 2021). Investigating pragmatic processing in atypical learners can advance our knowledge of the underlying processes at work in successful communication which go otherwise unnoticed in unimpaired language use. This in turn can help improve our understanding of the obstacles posed to successful foreign language learning and use by tasks that are taxing on pragmatic processing

resources.

Each of the articles in this special issue of *Lingue e Linguaggi* tackles the question of the role of pragmatic processing in text comprehension from a different point of view and focuses on one of the many facets of this complex matter. Some articles explore the way in which different phenomena (e.g., punctuation, morphological processing of blends, interpretation of phrasal verbs, idiomatic expressions, and extended metaphors) may demand efficient pragmatic skills in order to be correctly processed and interpreted and open for further reflection on the effects of such demand for foreign language learners with and without specific learning difficulties (SLDs).

Marcella Bertuccelli Papi explores the cognitive complexity of punctuation by showing how the long-standing debate on the prosodic vs. grammatical function of punctuation marks is by itself insufficient to explain the complexities of punctuation. Bertuccelli Papi proposes to view punctuation as a complex system of signs which contribute to the economy of text interpretability by offering clues for the most efficient, efficacious, and appropriate processing of the text. **Elisa Mattiello** discusses the recognisability of lexical blends for EFL learners. Blends are generally not transparent in terms of morphemic structure, and their source words might be difficult to recognise, especially for foreign language users. Mattiello asked a group of Italian learners of English to identify the source words and meanings of a set of blends selected according to different phonological, morphotactic, semantic criteria. Results seem to indicate that the recognisability of English lexical blends by Italian native speakers depends on the characteristics and category of the blends but also on pragmatic factors, e.g., the context where blends are used. Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli's and Silvia Masi and Gianmarco Vignozzi's articles also focus on difficulties deriving from lack of linguistic transparency. More specifically, they investigate phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions and the comprehension issues they may create for non-native speakers of English. **Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli** offers an in-depth analysis of phrasal verbs in academic lectures as a spoken genre that requires listeners to process complex and abstract content in real time. She proposes a corpus-based investigation of the use of phrasal verbs that reveals that they occur frequently and display substantial variation in form. The author also finds that roughly half of the occurrences have figurative meanings, which often display instances of pragmatic strengthening to both expand on core meanings and communicate speaker attitude. She concludes by discussing the pedagogical implications of the analysis and offers suggestions for strategies that may help L2 learners to cope with the demands posed by processing phrasal verbs. **Silvia Masi and Gianmarco Vignozzi** offer a parallel but different interpretation of phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions. Their

contribution reports on the experimental investigation of the contribution of spontaneous gestures to the comprehension of co-occurring phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions by learners of English. Interestingly, they compare the effect on learners with and without dyslexia (i.e., in a neurotypical and in a neurodivergent population). Masi and Vignozzi hypothesise that iconic gestures may assist all learners in the interpretation of semantically opaque expressions, but especially in learners with dyslexia who are known to be less efficient in processing figurative language and pragmatic meanings in general. The results of the study seem to confirm the authors' hypothesis and they conclude that multimodal teaching materials should be exploited to offer inclusive activities for EFL instruction to dyslexic learners. **Alessandro Aru**'s article also focuses on figurative language, but from the wider angle of textual interpretation. More specifically, he focuses on the interpretation of extended metaphors in political discourse. Aru adopts Kövecses' "multi-level view of conceptual metaphor" and shows how the micrometaphors within the extended metaphor share the same source domain and the same image schemas and argues that they conceptualise the target domain at the level of frames (which is more specific and, therefore, richer in information), by elaborating specific aspects of the domains. The author offers a discussion of this phenomena from the point of view of its complexity and of the demands it may pose on the cognitive resources supporting pragmatic processing, thus presenting possible challenges for foreign language learners with and without SLDs.

The articles by Silvia Bruti and Nicoletta Simi focus on the interpretation of more global pragmatic phenomena such as impoliteness and humour. **Nicoletta Simi**'s contribution reports on an experimental study which aimed at assessing the performance of English-speaking readers with and without dyslexia when they need to resolve lexical and syntactic ambiguity in jokes. The study addresses different types of ambiguity in punchlines and the way in which they may be processed by readers, considering the involvement of participants' vocabulary knowledge and working memory skills in the pragmatic process of interpretation. Data show that individuals with dyslexia were systematically outperformed by the neurotypical members of the control group. The largest difference in performance was observed in jokes relying on syntactic ambiguity, which leads the author to conclude that the need to reassign word classes to ambiguous elements in order to reach the correct contextual interpretation of a text is a demanding task in terms of working memory resources, and, therefore, a potential source of difficulty for comprehenders. **Silvia Bruti's** article focuses on the interpretation of (im)politeness by EFL learners. It assumes the twofold perspective of a reflection on the complexity of processing this pragmatic phenomenon and of an exploration of the merits of

explicit teaching of pragmatic issues in the EFL classroom. The author stresses the importance of teaching pragmatics, and (im)politeness in particular, to advanced learners of English. She then illustrates the results of a behavioural experiment carried out with different groups of EFL students with the aim of investigating to what extent they recognize and understand (im)politeness and its different nuances in interaction, without having received any formal instruction on the topic. By using excerpts from the TV series *Sherlock* (2010-2017), whose main character is a trigger for face-threatening acts, Bruti explores how learners with different backgrounds, levels of language competence, and access to different inputs (e.g., audio-visual or audio, both implemented by the written transcription of the dialogues) understand and recognise impoliteness.

The dual perspective found in Bruti's article, that is, the interest for the pragmatic processes at work in text interpretation on the one hand and for language teaching practices on the other, also underlies the contributions by Elisa Lupetti, Monica Lupetti and Ana Luiza Oliveira De Souza, Gloria Cappelli and Gloria Cappelli and Sabrina Noccetti. **Elisa Lupetti** focuses on the pragmatic effectiveness of texts written in French as a foreign language (FFL) by Italian-speaking university learners with previous knowledge of French. The data obtained from a reading comprehension task involving reporting the content of news articles reveal the influence of the native language on the L2, both for reading comprehension and for writing tasks. The author argues that being familiar with the topic, being able to exploit research tools and having lexical competence affect pragmatic effectiveness and guarantee an interactive approach, favouring the activation of the interaction between reader, text and context. Elisa Lupetti concludes that learners merge their ability to produce appropriate speech acts and socio-linguistic competence to achieve pragmatic effectiveness. **Monica Lupetti and Ana Luiza O. de Souza** explore the reading comprehension performance of Italian-speaking university students learning Portuguese as a foreign language (PFL) and compare it with that of Italian-Portuguese bilingual young people who speak Portuguese as a heritage language (PHL). The authors explore the possibility of using the cloze test as a tool to verify whether the performance and task outcome of the two groups of readers differ when it comes to the pragmatic processing of texts. The efficacy of the cloze test is also investigated in relation to grammatical and lexical knowledge. Cappelli's and Cappelli and Noccetti's articles discuss two steps of the same research. **Gloria Cappelli's** contribution investigates the performance of EFL learners with and without dyslexia in reading comprehension tasks. More specifically, the author tries to answer the question of whether, given the cognitive and communicative profile of the participants in the study, the type of questions (i.e., factual vs. inferential

questions) and the language of the text (i.e., Italian L1 vs. EFL) may be factors of increased difficulty and may consequently result in reduced accuracy. The data obtained through a reading comprehension task reveal significant differences between the learners with dyslexia and their neurotypical peers with respect to the inferential processing of texts. The participants without dyslexia systematically outperformed dyslexic learners in accurately answering questions relying on either local or global coherence inferencing, and their performance was less influenced by reading in a foreign language. **Gloria Cappelli and Sabrina Noccetti**'s article represents an expansion of this research. It offers a retrospective analysis of data collected from additional reading comprehension activities proposed to the two groups of English foreign language learners with the aim to verify whether vocabulary knowledge contributes to the task outcome. More specifically, the authors' analysis explores the contribution of vocabulary depth to the level of accuracy in answering factual and inferential questions in the two groups. Cappelli and Noccetti's initial hypothesis that vocabulary depth would be associated with better comprehension in both dyslexic and non-dyslexic readers was, however, only confirmed for words which corresponded to the deepest vocabulary knowledge according to an adapted Word Associates Test. A qualitative analysis of the unexpected results was carried out and several factors hindering text comprehension by dyslexic readers were identified, including a difficulty in selecting the relevant sense of focus words in contexts in which competing elements coexist and a negative interaction between lexical and pragmatic-inferential processing.

The last two articles in the volume deal with the teaching of pragmatic aspects in the foreign language classroom. **Denise Filmer** reports on action research carried out within an EFL course for post-graduate students of an International Studies programme at the University of Pisa in which the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis was exploited to develop reading comprehension skills. More specifically, Filmer focuses on English newspaper headlines as an example of authentic teaching materials characterized by non-standard morpho-syntactical and lexical features as well as the presence of culturemes and ideological stances potentially capable of hindering comprehension, even for native speakers. Filmer shows that the research-oriented classroom practice encouraged students to critically engage with news texts by learning to unpack and infer meanings from news headlines, to apply the tools of critical discourse analysis to the construal of news discourse and to reflect on and discuss the content of selected news articles presented in class. **Matteo Migliorelli** analyses reading comprehension activities in Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) teaching materials, with special attention on the promotion of inferential processes. The author examines six PFL teaching coursebooks through a

qualitative approach based on Applegate *et al.*'s (2002) model which suggests a change of perspective in the elaboration of reading proposals and sets new goals that would lead the readers to a profound reflection on what they read and on the use of the information in the text to formulate their interpretation. Migliorelli's article concludes that materials for PFL teaching should be rethought in light of the central role played by inferential processes in reading comprehension. Finally, **Rosa María García Jiménez** reflects on the importance of teaching evidential mechanisms to intermediate and advanced learners of Spanish as a foreign language (SFL), with the aim of improving the understanding of the non-prototypical meanings conveyed by the past imperfect tense, the future tense and the conditional in European Spanish. The author discusses the way in which these contents are presented in teaching materials and makes suggestions for SFL teaching practice.

Bionotes: Gloria Cappelli, PhD, is Associate Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Pisa. Her research focuses on semantics and pragmatics, and second and foreign language acquisition in learners with and without dyslexia. She has published in national and international journals and in edited volumes and has authored and edited books on English verbs of cognitive attitude, lexical semantics and tourism communication ('I reckon I know how Leonardo da Vinci must have felt': Epistemicity, *Evidentiality and English Verbs of Cognitive Attitude*, Pari Publishing, 2007). Her most recent publications include the co-edited volume *A Linguistic Approach to the Study of Dyslexia* (2022; with Sabrina Noccetti, Multilingual Matters), which also includes her chapters on "The Impact of Dyslexia on Lexico-Semantic Abilities: An Overview" and "Dyslexia and Pragmatic Skills" (with S. Noccetti, N. Simi, G. Arcara and V. Bambini). She is a member of the Italian Association of English Studies and of the European Society for the Study of English.

Sabrina Noccetti, PhD, is Assistant Professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Pisa. Her research focuses on the emergence of first languages, and second and foreign language acquisition in learners with and without dyslexia. She has authored the monographs on the acquisition of Italian as a first language ("*Pre- and Proto-morphology in Language Acquisition: An Italian case study*", Edizioni Plus), and on the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language ("*Morfologia dell'Inglese. Errori nel processo di apprendimento di L2*", Edizioni ETS). She has co-edited the volume *Semantics and morphology of early adjectives in first language acquisition* (with E. Tribushinina and M. Voeikova, Cambridge Scholar) and published in the journal *Dyslexia* (with G. Cappelli, G. Arcara and V. Bambini). Recently, she has co-edited the volume *A Linguistic Approach to the Study of Dyslexia* (2022; with G. Cappelli, Multilingual Matters), which also includes her chapter on "*Visual and Auditory Stimuli for Teaching EFL Vocabulary to Learners with Dyslexia*" and "*Dyslexia and Pragmatic Skills*" (with G. Cappelli, N. Simi, G. Arcara and V. Bambini).

Nicoletta Simi, PhD, is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Department of Psychology of the University of Tuebingen, Germany. She holds a PhD in English linguistics from the Department of Philology, Literature and Linguistics at the University of Pisa. During her PhD studies, her interests involved the development of a comprehensive understanding of key phenomena that are at stake in reading comprehension processes. Her PhD research

project was centred on the study of these processes in typically-developing young adults and in young adults with dyslexia speaking English as L1 and L2. She gives further attention to the underlying general processes such as cognitive processing speed, working memory and motivational / anxiety aspects of language use. Currently, she investigates how conflicts of linguistic nature are detected, monitored and adapted in L1 speakers of English and German. She deals with lexical ambiguity, negation and world knowledge violations.

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THE COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY OF PUNCTUATION

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Abstract – A long-standing scientific debate has focused on the prosodic versus grammatical function of punctuation marks. In this paper, I claim that such an approach is by itself insufficient to explain the complexities of punctuation: no matter how hard we try to systematically connect punctuation with intonation, pauses and syntactic boundaries, exceptions will always turn out in usage that force us to find specific explanations in specific contexts. As an alternative, the paper explores the hypothesis that punctuation is a complex system of signs which contribute to the economy of text interpretability, indicating points in the text where cognitive processes may operate to construct a pattern which enables its interpretation in an efficient, efficacious and appropriate manner.

Keywords: punctuation; cognition; text; grammar; iconicity.

1. Historical background: a brief overview

In the *Preface* to his *Making a Point*, David Crystal writes:

> There are two extreme views about punctuation. The first is that you dont actually need it because its perfectly possible to write down what you want to say without any punctuation marks or capital letters and people can still read it youdontevenneedspacebetweenwordsreally they dont exist when we speak to each other after all and yet we none the less understand what people are saying. The second is that it's essential because it aids legibility. It's much easier to read if there's punctuation. Also, the marks show us how to read aloud in a way that reflects the pauses, rhythm, and melody that we use in speech. They help us see the grammar of complex sentences. And they help us sort out ambiguities – otherwise, nobody would ever have got the joke in *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. (Crystal 2015, p. IX)

The paragraph iconically reproduces the long-standing debate on the functions of punctuation. With individual opinions ranging between the two extremes, the scientific debate mainly focuses on the prosodic versus grammatical function of punctuation.

Notoriously, the debate has a long-standing tradition, dating back to the beginning of the writing systems themselves and, as far as most of the modern punctuation marks are concerned, to the advent of printing (cf. Buzzoni 2008; Crystal 2015; Mortara Garavelli 2008; Parkes 1992). Briefly, punctuation is traditionally assumed to have developed as a guide to oratory

and eloquence: punctuation marks were used to help readers to orally deliver their speeches in a rhetorically effective manner (therefore marking pauses, breath-taking points, intonation, rhythm); after the advent of printing, and with the spread of literacy and of silent reading, the rhetorical function gradually lost its primacy and came to coexist with a grammatical function whereby readers were helped to make sense of the text structure.

Nowadays, the prevailing view is that punctuation may have both a prosodic and a grammatical function, with prosody indicating pauses that come at the end of some intonational contours and therefore marking off prosodic units and, ultimately, rhythm. The two functions do not necessarily need to be mutually exclusive or in contradiction with each other: physiology actually reveals that speech organs are stimulated during readings (the so-called "inner ear" of writers and readers; cf. also Moro 2015). But it is undeniable that the needs of the ear are different from the needs of the eye, and conflicting patterns of interpretation may arise when the writer is using punctuation marks with oral speech in his/her mind and the reader interprets them with reference to the grammatical articulation of the written text.

A quick look at a few quotations from texts and handbooks prove that the debate is still underway. In their *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language,* Quirk *et al.* (1985) claim that

> punctuation practice is governed primarily by grammatical considerations and is related to grammatical distinctions. Sometimes it is linked to intonation, stress, rhythm, pause, or any other of the prosodic features which convey distinctions in speech, but the link is neither simple nor systematic, and traditional attempts to relate punctuation directly to (in particular) pauses are misguided. (Quirk et al. 1985, p. 1610)

On the other hand, Chafe (1988) acknowledges that punctuation may serve different ends, but insists that the prosodic approach is the one to be preferred

> At this point some readers may object that the signaling of prosody is only one of the functions of punctuation, and perhaps not the primary one. Although that is a common belief, and although certainly there are instances of punctuation that do not serve prosodic ends, I will defend the position here that those instances are departures from its main function, which is to tell us something about a writer's intentions with regard to prosody of that inner voice. (Chafe 1988, p. 397)

Nunberg (1990) rejects the general opinion that punctuation is only a device for reflecting intonation, and claims that after the divergence of written and spoken languages, punctuation has become a linguistic system on its own right (cf. also Nunberg *et al.* 2001).

Many contributions from corpus analysts and computational linguists have further striven to find regularities in the grammatical parsing functions

of punctuation (Bayraktar *et al.* 1998; Garat 2006; Jones 1994, 1996) and the relationship between tonicity, tonality and grammatical units has been further explored in studies on the guide functions of punctuation (Halliday 2005; Patt 2013).

I would like to argue that such approaches, although detailed and articulated, are by themselves insufficient to explain the complexities of punctuation: no matter how hard we try to systematically connect punctuation with intonation, pauses and syntactic boundaries, exceptions will always turn out in usage that force us to find specific explanations in specific contexts. A systematic account of the contemporary usage of punctuation seems to call for new dimensions of analysis. In this paper, I would like to put forward the hypothesis that from a cognitive point of view, punctuation marks points in the text where the mind can operate to build a pattern which enables the interpretation of the text in an efficient, efficacious and contextually appropriate manner (cf. Bertuccelli Papi 2017).

2. Conventional and unconventional punctuation

Let me first consider the first part of my thesis. There are conventional and unconventional patterns of punctuation usage. Here are some examples.

Grammars prescribe that full stops mark the end of sentences, but in (1) they unconventionally mark off a constituent (a prepositional phrase) and in (2) they isolate nouns:

(1) You are no doubt working extremely hard. At avoiding the things you dislike and doing the things you do best. (*Oxford English Grammar*, p. 512)

(2) But there is also punishment and self-imposed pain here – guilt, perhaps, at taking the role of breadwinner away from the father. Anxiety. Solitude. Defilement. Despair. Blacking. All these things come together, and we are left with the image of a young boy writhing in agony on the rat-infested floor. (*Oxford English Grammar*, p. 512)

Present-day grammars warn against the use of commas between subject and verb or verb and its object (they condemn the usage as yob's comma), but this is a time-bound convention, since in the XVII century placing a comma in those positions was recommended for reasons of clarity. In his *An Essay on Punctuation* (1785), Joseph Robertson gave the following examples:

(3) The good taste of the present age, has not allowed us to neglect the cultivation of the English language. (p. 73)

(4) Whoever is capable of forgetting a benefit, is an enemy to society (p.74).

Grammars say that commas are normally used to separate words and word groups in a simple series of three or more items as in

(5)   They own a car, a motorbike, two bikes, and a scooter (Oxford comma before "and" in the list)

but it is not infrequent to find use of coordination with no commas:

(6)   And then I couldn't see the walls anymore and the back of someone's jacket touched my knee and I felt sick and I started groaning really loudly and the lady on the bench stood up and no one else sat down. And I felt like I felt like when I had a flu and I had to stay in bed all day and all of me hurt and I couldn't walk or eat or go to sleep or do maths. (Haddon 2003, p. 216)

As Nunberg (1990, p. 13) argued, all other things being equal, changes in punctuation marks may trigger different inferences and meanings in the text:

(7)   a. Order your furniture on Monday, take it home on Tuesday. (conditional reading: if you… you can …)

b. Order your furniture on Monday; take it home on Tuesday. (sequence of two orders)

(8)   a. He reported the decision: we were forbidden to speak with the chairman directly.

(second sentence is the content of the "decision")

b. He reported the decision; we were forbidden to speak with the chairman directly.

(second sentence explains why someone else reported the decision)

c. He reported the decision – we were forbidden to speak with the chairman directly.

(both 8a and 8b).

Intuitively, there is a clear distinction between (7a)-(8a) on one side and (7b)-(8b) on the other side. While commas and colons integrate material to complete one (simple or complex) proposition, semicolons and full stops mark the boundaries between two pragmatically independent propositions, leaving to the reader the burden to flesh out or saturate logical forms that might be incomplete with as many inferences as necessary up to the highest levels of illocutions and attitudes.

This is evident in the sentences below, where the likelihood of George writing the article diminishes, and the ironic tone increases, as punctuation marks become stronger:

(9)   a. George promised to write the article when he had the time.

b. George promised to write the article, when he had the time.

c. George promised to write the article. When he had the time.

d. George promised to write the article…. when he had the time.

Again, intuition suggests that the "pragmatic space" left empty by full stops and ellipses is larger than the one left by commas. Whereas in (9a) and (9b) the time clause is governed by the verb "promise", in (9c) and (9d) the full stop and the ellipses mark two independent communicative units, each with its own implicit illocutionary force, and consequently the empty space can be filled with inferences that may take various forms. In particular, the pragmatic segmentation produced by the full stops and ellipses triggers a higher order ironic attitude of skepticism founded on an echo of words that are typically used in contexts when one does not want to really commit himself to keep a promise (cf. Wilson and Sperber 2012, Yus 2016).

Punctuation marks determine different syntactic segmentations of the sentence/text and consequently generate different meanings. It is often the case that our knowledge of the world helps us to make sense of wrong or missing punctuation by mentally correcting and converting it to the conventional paradigm. The title of Lynne Truss's publication, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, is only an amusing example of the dramatic consequences that may follow from the wrong use of punctuation marks:

(10)   A panda walks into a cafe. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and fires two shots in the air.

"Why?" asks the confused waiter, as the panda makes towards the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife annual and tosses it over his shoulder.

"I'm a panda," he says, at the door. "Look it up."

The waiter turns to the relevant entry and, sure enough, finds an explanation.

Panda. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves. (Truss 2003, p. 3)

The comma is clearly misplaced: what is meant is "Eats shoots and leaves."

Exclamation and question marks may replace verbal speech acts and attitudes. Plenty of examples could be drawn from blogs and e-mails that testify to the existence of conventional functions. Here is an example from a children's book:

(11) Pooh said something so clever that Christopher Robin could only look at
      him with mouth open and eye staring, wondering if this was really the
      Bear of Very Little Brain whom he had known and loved so long.

      "We might go in your umbrella," said Pooh.

      "?" (=WHAT DO YOU MEAN?)

      "We might go in your umbrella," said Pooh.

      "??" (= I STILL DO NOT UNDERSTAND)

      "We might go in your umbrella," said Pooh.
      "!!!!!!!" (=OH, I SEE)
      For suddenly Christopher Robin saw that they might." (Milne 2004, p. 9)

The interpretations suggested in capital letters show that a basic prototypical
cluster of conventional emotional meanings must be attached to these marks,
leaving to the context the task of identifying their real pragmatic value.

   The next point in my argument is: if punctuation marks signal points in the
text where cognitive processes may operate to construct a pattern which
allows its pragmatic interpretation in an efficient, efficacious and appropriate
manner, what happens when we have no punctuation at all?

   Here are some examples: a literary text (12), a student's e-mail in Italian
(personal communication) which may easily translate into English (13) and a
technical report (14):

(12) I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like
      the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me
      under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and
      then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me
      would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms
      around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all
      perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will
      Yes. (Joyce, 1997, Ulysses, p.107)

(13) Salve professore io ho svolto l'esame di inglese giuridico a settembre
      2015 e ottenni l'idoneità tuttavia a causa di impedimenti di tipo
      lavorativo non ho mai potuto venire a ricevimento per convalidare il
      voto sul libretto cartaceo purtroppo solo adesso mi accorgo che non è
      stato convalidato neanche sul libretto elettronico mi chiedevo se fosse
      necessario recarsi a ricevimento per ottenere questa convalida l'email
      con il risultato la ho sempre ma sul vecchio indirizzo di posta elettronica
      (…) [*Hello professor I sat the exam of Legal English in September 2015
      and I passed it however because of work engagements I have never been
      able to come see you in your office to have the mark added to my
      university record book unfortunately I have just realized that it hasn't
      been added to my online transcripts either I was wondering whether I
      should come see you to have this mark recorded I still have the email
      message with the results but it was sent to my old email address* (…) –
      personal communication]

(14)   This initial workshop identified the work scopes and phasing generated several different sourcing strategies for those work scopes and proposed selection criteria to compare the sourcing strategies to best benefit the [project]. (online text[1])

No doubt the reasons for omitting punctuation in Joyce's text are different from those of the student and of the technician. The effects are also different. In Joyce's text the so-called *stream of consciousness* effect, the reproduction of the flow of thoughts can be invoked; we have seen that in Haddon's text above (example 6) the lack of punctuation was rhetorically meant to reproduce the anxiety of the young autistic protagonist who finds himself alone in an unknown train station; the student may have had in mind the intention of not bothering the Professor and going to the nitty gritty of the message – which is often the case with social media and e-communication, but as to the technical report, we can safely assume that it is not inspired by either the stream of consciousness philosophy or by the spur of anxiety. Moreover, while in the e-mail sentences are unambiguously connected by the discourse markers that make them cohere, in the technical report the lack of punctuation creates garden-path effects that make comprehension more difficult.

Dawkins (1995) claims that there is a conventional hierarchy of punctuation ranging from the strongest (full stops, question marks and exclamation marks), through the medium (semicolon, colon, dash), to the weakest (commas and zero punctuation), and suggests that going up and down the scale creates stronger or weaker connections between elements of the text. In his view, if we want to mark close connection between elements, we will choose no punctuation – if appropriate – or punctuation that provides minimum separation, like commas. If, on the other hand, we want to indicate separation, we will choose punctuation that provides the maximum separation. It seems to me that connectedness is not what the reader will appreciate most in the student's e-mail and in the technical report above, and even in the literary text the notion of connectedness definitely underestimates the communicative import of the omission of punctuation. I agree with Dawkins, however, that sometimes there is a way of punctuating which follows "principles" rather than "rules" in order to reproduce intended meanings and intended emphasis.

From a cognitive point of view, this raises the question of the nature of such principles. My proposal (cf. Bertuccelli Papi 2017) is that these principles can be referred to *naturalness* and *markedness* as global semiotic

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[1] Example retrieved from https://cybertext.wordpress.com/2012/11/22/a-light-hearted-look-at-how-punctuation-can-change-meaning/ (last accessed October 2022).

parameters upon which the notion of cognitive economy hinges. A crucial constraint on all cognitive operations, the biological principle of economy is based on assessment of the complexity of the task in terms of attention and information processing, time resources, and cognitive efforts, and is constantly at work to guarantee the efficiency of any communicative system. The underlying assumption of my hypothesis is that the naturalness of punctuation is directly proportional to the economy of text comprehension: the more natural the punctuation choices, the more economical the processing of the text.

Naturalness and *markedness*, in turn, are here understood as follows (for individual approaches cf. Battistella 1990; Dressler 1989; Haimann 1985, 1995; Willems, de Cuypere 2008): "natural" is what makes a pattern cognitively more accessible, fosters functional efficiency, makes information processing easier and consequently makes text interpretation more economical, whereas "marked" is what makes a pattern cognitively less accessible, exhibits lower functional efficiency, makes information processing more difficult and engages more cognitive resources, thus making text comprehension less economical (cf. Givón 1989):

+economical	---------------------------------------	-economical
+natural	---------------------------------------	-natural
-marked	---------------------------------------	+marked

Table 1
Naturalness vs. markedness.

As stated above, my guiding hypothesis is that, from a cognitive point of view, punctuation marks contribute to the economy of text/discourse interpretation by indicating points in the text where cognition may operate to construct a pattern which makes the text easier to process. In order to be able to provide a comprehensive framework for the analysis of punctuation, the hypothesis needs to be further articulated in terms of a set of parameters to which we may assume the notions of markedness and naturalness are related.

The notion of pattern I am using here, for instance, invokes the semiotic notion of iconic diagrammaticity (cf. Haimann 1980, 1985; Langendonck 2010; Nöth 2008). A subtype of iconicity, this notion has been widely employed in several different contexts. Here, reference is made to Peirce's classification of signs into icons, indices, and symbols (cf. Hartshorne, Weiss 1931-1935) and to the subdivision of icons into images, diagrams, and metaphors.

Sharing a relation that semioticians have variously identified as one of similarity/resemblance / parallelism/ projectability between *signans* and *signatum*, iconic signs can also be extended to cover analogies between *signantes* at different levels of language organization.

Lingue e
Linguaggi

Functional Theories of Naturalness as developed in phonology and morphology make use of a notion of iconicity which is best understood as *diagrammaticity* or *isomorphism* – a stucture/function mapping according to which the nodes of the codified function are mirrored, in a 1-1 correspondence, by the nodes of the codifying function. Nöth (2008) has remarked that the notion of diagrammatic iconicity is particularly important as a precondition for mutual understanding:

> Diagrams in language are both cognitively necessary and rhetorically efficient since icons are superior to other signs when clearness of representation and coherence of argumentation is concerned. (Nöth 2008, p. 73)

The point that I would like to make is that punctuation choices may be more or less diagrammatic in so far as they enable the construction of a pattern that exhibits functional correspondence nodes.

Punctuation is a segmentation pattern of the physical space which can be mapped diagrammatically onto a conceptual space. The conceptual space is organized phonologically, syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically. Each of these levels may represent a possible pattern that punctuation brings to the fore, isolating it from the others and selectively shifting the reader's attention to it.

Here are some examples of how punctuation may be diagrammatic with reference to each level.

- Phonologico-prosodic: punctuation is diagrammatic if it reproduces rhythm, pauses and intonation. This may happen if the text is a transcript of an oral discourse, if it is mimetic of a spoken utterance, or if it includes instructions for aloud reading. In the following example, ellipses are diagrammatic because they mark the pauses of inarticulate thought:

(15) Mouth:.... out... into this world... this world... tiny little thing... before its time... in a godfor–... what?.. girl?.. yes... tiny little girl... into this... out into this... before her time... (Beckett 1973, p. 1)

- Semantic: punctuation is diagrammatic if it mirrors the conceptual structure of a sentence propositional content. Below, the comma mirrors the meaning of the verb "to pause":

(16) He paused for a moment, and then began to speak.

Commas slow down the rhythm of reading, thus mirroring the slow rhythm of walking in:

(17) She walked with long, slow, steady, and deliberate strides. (*Using English for Academic Purposes*[2])

Finally, in example (18) full stops block the smoothness of syntax, breaking the sentences into small, rigid units, thus mirroring the rigidity of the members:

(18) Then all of a sudden I went rigid. ….I couldn't move. I couldn't even speak. I tried to call out to my boy for help but I couldn't. Rigor mortis. Paralysis. My entire body had turned to stone. (Dahl 1980, p.13)

- Syntactic: punctuation is diagrammatic if it marks the syntactic structure of a sentence in terms of its hierarchical organization and of its linear distribution. Syntactic diagrammaticity marks the syntactic boundaries of the sentence and of the text (for a textual approach to Italian punctuation cf. Ferrari 2003; Ferrari, Lala 2013; Ferrari *et al.* 2008, 2017; Lala 2012). Therefore, if we signal the end of an independent sentence by means of a full stop or a colon, our punctuation pattern is highly diagrammatic, but if we mark it by a comma or a semicolon it is less diagrammatic:

(19) a. He missed the train. He arrived late.
     b. He missed the train; he arrived late.
     c. He missed the train, he arrived late.
     d. He missed the train: he arrived late.

Variations of syntactic punctuation brings about different semantic and pragmatic interpretations: "late" in (20a) implies "at the station" whereas in (20d) it implies "at the meeting".

- The use of a punctuation sign is pragmatically diagrammatic if it marks the attitude or the illocution conventionally associated with it. Exclamation marks, for instance, prototypically mirror the writer's emotions:

(20) It's a boy, it's a boy! (Parsons 1999, p. 1)

Individual marks may be pragmatically diagrammatic in specific contexts. It has been noticed, for example, that "In most written language, the full stop is a neutral way to mark a pause or complete a thought; but digital communications are turning it into something more aggressive" (Crair 2013):

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[2] http://www.uefap.net/grammar/grammar-in-eap-punctuation (last accessed October 2022).

(21) "Say you find yourself limping to the finish of a wearing workday. You text your girlfriend: "I know we made a reservation for your bday tonight but wouldn't it be more romantic if we ate in instead?" If she replies,

we could do that

Then you can ring up Papa John's and order something special. But if she replies,

we could do that.

Then you should probably drink a cup of coffee: You're either going out or you're eating Papa John's alone" (Crair 2013).

The punctuation mark would be perceived here as expressing a speech act of threatening.

3. Conclusions

These few remarks are meant to draw attention to the complexity, dynamicity, and flexibility of the contemporary system of English punctuation, while at the same time trying to open up new directions of research that might lead to the discovery of a higher order systematicity beyond apparent irregularities. In my mind, future research in the direction briefly outlined here will need to take into account at least the following points.

Within each pattern, the distribution of punctuation marks may be more or less natural, more or less marked, depending on choices along a set of contextual parameters that need to be further specified. The parameter I have selected here for exemplifying the analysis of punctuation is Diagrammatic iconicity, but others could be found. Transparency, for instance, to be understood as a property of punctuation marks which concerns the quality and quantity of inferences they make necessary in order to interpret a text, would make for a good candidate. We could hypothesize that a mark is transparent if it enables direct access to a pattern: consequently, transparency correlates with naturalness and diagrammaticity. Its opposite is opacity or scarce transparency, which correlates with markedness and lack of diagrammaticity. A scale of naturalness might be tentatively put forward featuring at its positive extreme what is +iconic/diagrammatic, +transparent, and at its opposite end what is not natural, and therefore +marked, which would include iconic/ diagrammatic, and -transparent. Intermediate points along these scales are determined by pragmatic factors which occur in the communicative process to modify the abstract values assigned to some choices by the theory (in this respect the hypothesis presented here differs

from Battistella 1996). These factors affect the efficiency, efficacy and appropriateness of some choices making them more or less optimal. These remarks call for further research on the relationship between the parameters and optimality (cf. Bertuccelli Papi 2017).

Naturalness and optimality are not mutually exclusive because they belong to different dimensions of text interpretability. Specifically, naturalness concerns the cognitive dimension of text interpretation, whereas optimality concerns the communicative dimension of texts in terms of regulative parameters (Beaugrande, Dressler 1981). Text efficacy, efficiency and appropriateness are bound to text types and context variables which make some patterns more salient than others. Therefore, punctuation choices that the theory would envisage as more or less marked in abstract cognitive terms can actually turn out to be optimal in a specific context and with reference to a specific text type. Thus, the lack of punctuation in Molly's monologue would be considered unnatural (i.e., marked) in purely theoretical terms because it makes syntactic and semantic processing more difficult, but it is optimal in terms of communicative efficacy, efficiency, and appropriateness once we assume that the intention of the author was to diagrammatically reproduce the flow of thought. Similarly, a comma after the subject as in

(22)   Sylvia, is playing the piano

which the theory would predict as marked because syntactically non diagrammatic, would be optimal in communicative terms assuming the speaker is implying that Sylvia, not someone else, is playing the piano, and therefore an information structure pattern is to be constructed.

Furthermore, there are correlations among parameters and there are interactions between parameters and patterns. These interactions may be harmonic or in conflict: cf. Battistella (1990, p. 45): "No single diagnostic is a fully reliable indicator of marked/unmarked status for every opposition. We cannot count on all indicators pointing to the same conclusion", and Dressler (1989, p. 118): "Several parameters of markedness must be considered simultaneously, and they may be in conflict with one another". From a theoretical point of view, the complexity of the punctuation systems calls for finer investigation of such interrelatedness.

Finally, the theoretical framework for punctuation that I have put forward above has no direct bearing on the pedagogy of punctuation, even though the proposal is not neutral in this regard. In fact, it stands to reason that, from our perspective, "correctness" cannot be the only parameter for assessing the use of punctuation in students' writings. Instead, making students aware of the many variables that affect the use of punctuation and of the cognitive motivations underlying them, may help students to become aware of their

punctuation choices and of the consequences they have in text structuring and interpretation.

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BLEND RECOGNISABILITY IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
An experiment

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Abstract – Recognisability is one of the major constraints that most linguists place on lexical blends and their well-formedness. Blends indeed display an unpredictable output that is not transparently analysable into morphemes, and their source words are difficult to recognise for both hearers and readers. The possible combinatory patterns of the source lexemes, the different portions that are retained in the final blend, and their semantic contribution to the overall meaning increase the number of variables and classificatory criteria for blends, thus decreasing predictability of the output given an input. For students of EFL, lexical blends are even more difficult to access due to the fact that the language in which they are formed is not their native language. This paper reports on results from an experiment on 18 Italian students who were tested on English blends. The participants were asked to identify the source words and meanings of a number of blends selected according to different (phonological, morphotactic, semantic) criteria. The results of the experiment show that the recognisability of English lexical blends by Italian native speakers depends on 1) the type of characteristics that the blend displays (overlap between the source words, semantic weight of the source words, headedness, same prosodic structure as one of the source words), 2) the category (substitution vs. overlap, coordinate vs. attributive) to which the blend belongs, and 3) the context where it is used. In general, the experiment sheds some light on the type of processes (e.g., decomposition and textual reference) involved in the recognition and accessibility of English lexical blends.

Keywords: lexical blends; EFL; recognisability; source words.

1. Introduction

Lexical blends are words formed by merging parts of two or more source words (henceforth SWs), with partial loss of at least one of them, and often with phonemic or graphemic overlap. Commonly cited examples of English blends are *smog* ← *sm*(oke) + (f)*og* and *brunch* ← *br*(eakfast) + (l)*unch*. The loss or fusion of phonemic/graphemic material inevitably makes the process of blend accessibility more complicated to the language speaker and of even more difficult comprehension to the non-native speaker.

Several studies demonstrate that, in order to be well-formed and successful, both elements in the blend must be recognisable (Bat-El 2006; Bauer 2012; Cannon 1986; Gries 2004; Mattiello 2013). This is generally

known as the Principle of Maximisation, i.e., to preserve as much of the SWs as it is optimal for their recognisability (Beliaeva 2014; Gries 2004, 2006). On the other hand, the Principles of Least Effort (Zipf 1949) and of Linguistic Economy (Martinet 1955) favour the formation of new blend words that are brief, not redundant, easy to pronounce, and pleasing to the ear. Accordingly, new English blends should be created as a compromise between maximisation of segments from the SWs and minimisation of efforts in production, perception, and recognition.

Investigating the individual quantitative contributions of SW_1 and SW_2 to blends, Gries (2004, p. 664) has demonstrated the greater relevance of SW_2 compared with SW_1 in terms of number of syllables retained, an observation already made by Kubozono (1990, p. 12). The greater importance of SW_2 over SW_1 has also been validated by Arndt-Lappe and Plag (2013), whose findings suggest that the preservation of the prosodic structure and length of SW_2 are essential factors in determining the prosodic structure in the blend and the location of the switch point between the SWs. Because of the greater similarity between a lexical blend and its SW_2 in terms of length and stress (cf. SW_2 *lunch* and *brunch* vs. **breakfunch*, Gries 2004), we may hypothesise that SW_2 is commonly easier to access than SW_1.

However, as recently observed by Bauer (2012, p. 13), "It is generally accepted in the psycholinguistic literature that recognizability is easier for word beginnings than for word ends". Thus, given the prototypical AD structure of blends,[1] we would expect that SW_1, whose beginning is preserved, is easier to access than SW_2, whose end is preserved instead. This expectation will not be confirmed by the results of our experiment (see, e.g., *racino* or *pleather* in § 3.3.1) since there are other factors intervening in SWs recognisability,[2] highly depending on how much phonological material of the SW is preserved (i.e., a syllable or less than a syllable).

In this paper, we investigate the factors that may contribute to SWs recognisability in English blends by native Italian speakers. We hypothesise that three main factors can influence the recognisability of the SWs in a blend, and therefore their understanding:

- Factor 1: Overlap at the switch point between SW_1 and SW_2.

- Factor 2: Semantic relationship – i.e., synonymy, near-synonymy, co-hyponymy, or antonymy – between SW_1 and SW_2.

- Factor 3: Contextual information referring to either SW_1 or SW_2, or both.

Experiments conducted on native speakers of Italian learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) will be carried out to verify the validity of these

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[1] See the blending formula AB + CD → AD (Plag 2003, p. 123).
[2] Other factors influencing SWs recognisability, such as high vs. low frequency of the SWs, their prototypicality, length, ordering, etc., will not be taken into account here.

three hypotheses. In particular, according to the first hypothesis, overlap blends, i.e., displaying overlapping segments, would be easier to access than substitution blends, where the SWs do not share any segments. According to the second hypothesis, coordinate (paradigmatic) blends, i.e., coordinating words from the same semantic field, would be more accessible than attributive (syntagmatic) blends. Finally, according to the third hypothesis, blend recognisability is facilitated in context, where contextual material anaphorically or cataphorically refers to one of the SWs or to both. A general consensus on the recognisability of the SWs in some types of English blends can 1) help distinguish the core from the periphery (Bauer 2012) and identify preferences in blend perception, and 2) understand some of the processes, such as decomposition and textual reference, which are involved in blend accessibility and interpretation.

2. Blending in English

Blending has for long been regarded as an irregular and unpredictable process in English word-formation (Aronoff 1976; Bauer 1983; Plag 2003). Despite the fact that blends are a very productive source of lexical innovation (Gries 2004, p. 639), linguists have denied them a place in regular morphology (e.g., Dressler 2000), confining them to extra-grammatical word-creation (Ronneberger-Sibold 2010). On the other hand, recent studies on English blends have shown that they display regularities in terms of prosodic structure (Bat-El, Cohen 2012; Arndt-Lappe, Plag 2013), semantic properties (Beliaeva 2014; Renner 2006), and prototypical features (Bauer 2012; Mattiello 2013, 2021). However, blends represent an under-researched area, still posing problems of classification and fuzzy boundaries (Bauer 2012).

2.1. The classification of blends

The wide variety of types and their huge diversity make blends a heterogeneous morphological category. Although several labels are used to classify them, two parameters according to which they can be categorised include their form and their meaning.

From a formal viewpoint, blends are commonly divided into two general types: **substitution** blends and **overlap** blends (Bauer 1983; Bauer, Huddlestone 2002; Gries 2004; Kemmer 2003). In substitution blends, a part of one of the SWs (also called "splinter") can be replaced with another lexeme (Lehrer 1996). For instance, *feminazi* [1989] 'a person (typically a woman) regarded as holding extreme feminist views' is a blend of *femi*(nist)

+ *Nazi*.[3] In order to form this blend, the second part of *feminist* is replaced with another lexeme, i.e., *Nazi*. Thornton (1993, p. 145) calls this type "partial blend", because only one of the SWs is abbreviated. Another type of substitution blend is illustrated by the blending of the first part of one SW and the final part of another. *Chugging* [2003] ← *ch*(arity) + (m)*ugging* and *racino* [1995] ← *r*(acetrack) + (c)*asino* are two recent examples of this type of blending. By contrast, overlap blending occurs when the two lexemes which are combined share a common morphological or phonological unit. For example, the combination of *sex* and *text* to make *sext* [2001], which denotes 'a sexually explicit or suggestive message text sent electronically', is facilitated by the /eks/ phonological segment shared by the SWs. Thus, overlap in blends helps maximisation of segments from the SWs that are preserved in the final blend.

From a semantic viewpoint, blends are divided into **coordinate** (or portmanteau) and **attributive**. For these types, Dressler (2000, p. 5) respectively uses the labels "paradigmatic contaminations" and "syntagmatic shortenings", although he only includes the former under the heading of 'blend'. Similarly, Plag (2003, p. 123) considers "proper blends" only the coordinate type. For instance, a *magalogue* [1978], denoting 'a promotional catalogue designed to resemble a high-quality magazine', coordinates *maga*(zine) and (cata)*logue*, while *beefalo* [1974], referring to 'a cross-bred livestock animal that is three-eighths bison and five-eighths domestic cow', is made up of *beef* and (buff)*alo*. Coordinate blends are sometimes termed "exocentric" (Bat-El 2006, p. 67) because they may not be headed. Another possible interpretation of coordinate blends is that they exhibit two heads, i.e., a *magalogue* is both 'a type of catalogue' and 'a type of magazine'. Attributive or determinative blends, by contrast, are headed and, therefore, they are said to be "endocentric" (Bat-El 2006, p. 67). Like endocentric compounds, endocentric or attributive blends modify one element by another, as in *picon* [1990] ← *p*(icture) + *icon* or *glam-ma* [2003] ← *glam*(our) + (grand)*ma*. Needless to say, these two classifications, based on different parameters, can intersect, in that, morphologically, *picon* is a substitution blend and *beefalo* is an overlap blend. In *glam-ma*, the overlap is not central, but involves the SWs' beginning (*glamour* + *grandma*).

2.2. Blending vis-à-vis compounding

While there are key differences between blends and compounds, the foundations which underpin their formation are essentially the same: the combination of established source lexemes in order to encode a new meaning.

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[3] Dates in square brackets and meanings of the new blends are drawn from the OED.

However, the fact that blends combine parts of lexemes, rather than whole lexemes (Kemmer 2003, p. 75), can potentially lead to problems of recognition and interpretation. While a speaker can easily identify the source lexemes of a regular compound because they are present in their entirety, this is not always the case for blends. Thus, for instance, the source lexemes of *vodka martini* are easily accessible, while the SWs of the blend *vodkatini* [1955] are less easily so.

This difference leads to the tricky issue of distinguishing blends from the neighbouring category of clipped compounds, in that the two share some type of shortening process. According to Beliaeva (2014, p. 29), clipped compounds (or "clipping compounds" as she calls them) are contractions of existing compounds (e.g., *sitcom* ← *sit*(uation) *com*(edy)), whereas blends are instances of creative word-formation involving the formation of new notions in the process of conceptual integration (e.g., *Oxbridge* ← *Ox*(ford) + (Cam)*bridge*)). Thus, while in clipped compounds shortening takes place after compounding, in blending shortening and compounding happen simultaneously. Other scholars rather discriminate between the two categories on the basis of their different structure: i.e., blends are generally AD-forms, whereas clipped compounds commonly conform to an AC pattern (Bat-El 2006).

The fact that the two source lexemes of a clipped compound are often attested together (e.g., *situation comedy*) whereas the SWs of a blend are not (e.g., **Oxford Cambridge* is not a compound) increases the importance of recognisability in the latter. Morphologists indeed agree that one of the fundamental notions in blends is their recognisability: i.e., "[b]oth elements in the blend must be recognizable if the blend is to be successful" (Bauer 2012, p. 13). The accessibility and acceptability of novel blends have been already tested by Lehrer (1996) and Connolly (2013) with native speakers. However, the degree of SWs recognisability by non-native speakers has not been investigated hitherto, nor have blends been classified and distinguished on the basis of their optimal structure for perception and interpretation. The experiment conducted in this paper is meant to fill this gap.

3. The recognisability of blend source words/meanings: An experiment

An experiment was carried out in order to investigate the ways in which non-native speakers identify the source lexemes of English blends and how increased recognisability can favour the accessibility of some types of blends rather than others. In the experiment, the participants were presented with a number of blends and were asked to identify their source lexemes, either SW1

or SW_2, with no time constraints. The following subsections outline key aspects of the experiment.

3.1. Participants

18 Italian students of EFL participated in the experiment. The participants were all native speakers of Italian from various parts of Italy, and all were between 20-23 years old. Of these participants, 10 were male and 8 were female. All participants were attending University in Pisa and had not completed their first cycle of university education. They all had a certified B2 CEFR level.

3.2. Materials and methods

The materials used for the experiment included a list of 36 blends selected from a larger database of recent instances. All blends were existing words attested in the OED and had been obtained via an advanced search on the dictionary platform.[4] Recent blends were chosen because they are not widely known, especially by Italian speakers, who are generally not much familiar with the blending process (Thornton 2004). However, results from participants who were familiar with the blends presented were excluded from the analysis.

The experiment was divided into three parts, with a ten-minute break between them. In each part, the participants were presented with a list of twelve blends. In the first two parts, the blends were accompanied by either their SW_1 or their SW_2. In other words, one of the SWs was given in order to activate the process of recognition of the other SW, either by subtracting the disclosed SW from the total blend, or by associating the disclosed SW's meaning with the meaning of the undisclosed SW. In the third part, the blends were given in a context from COCA (*Corpus of Contemporary American English*) or NOW (*News on the Web*) corpora. The stimuli were presented to the subjects in random order with or without context, in an attempt to access the ways in which the participants assessed the blends' meanings based solely on their structure or aided by co-textual information.

3.3. Procedure

The experiment described in this paper aimed to investigate the interpretative strategies of the participants. The aim was not of psycholinguistic nature, but to examine how diverse types of blends can have implications for their

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[4] The filter 'blend' was used to select all the entries which are labelled blends in the OED's etymology. Only recent blends attested from 1950 onwards were chosen for the experiment.

interpretations. This article explores whether or not the recognisability of the source lexemes of a blend and its co-textual material might be factors influencing the blend accessibility, and, more generally, suggest preferences or trends in blend perception and recognition.

In particular, the experiment aimed to investigate a number of hypotheses, which are outlined as follows:

- if the blend displays an overlap at the switch point between the SWs, a majority of speakers will agree on its source lexemes and on its meaning;

- where the SWs in a blend are in a semantic relationship of identity (e.g., fantastic and fabulous), similarity (e.g., jeans and leggings), or opposition (e.g., friend vs. enemy), the more likely it is that a consensus will be achieved with regard to its source lexemes and meaning. In the above cases, tautology is expected to be the easiest to recognise while antonymy to be the most difficult;

- where the SWs in a blend are in an anaphoric or cataphoric reference relation with the co-textual elements of the blend, the more likely it is that a consensus will be achieved with regard to its source lexemes and meaning.

Each participant was given a questionnaire divided into three parts. When each part was concluded, it was not possible to change any of the previous responses. The questionnaire gave a definition of a blend and cited two examples of the phenomenon. Participants were presented with one of the three lists, the first two lists with twelve blends, the last one with eleven blends. For the first two parts, six of the blends on each list were followed by their SW_1 and the other six by their SW_2. Participants were asked to cite the missing source lexemes and encouraged to guess the blends' meanings. The meanings were explained in Italian by the participants and then translated into English by the present author. Only the most cited meanings were taken into account. For the last part, all the blends were followed by a contextualised example but no SWs. Here participants were asked to guess the blends' meanings based on co-textual information.

The blends were of a number of different types. In the first list, six were formed through substitution and six were formed through overlap. Blends with a non-central overlap or only graphic overlap were considered substitution blends.[5] Of overlap blends, two were partial blends preserving one SW in its entirety (indicated with an asterisk in Table 1) and one preserved both SWs (indicated with two asterisks). In both the second and the

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[5] According to Beliaeva (2014, p. 59), a non-central overlap occurs when the SWs have one or more coinciding letters/phonemes either at the beginning (*snarfle* ← *snarf* + *snaffle*) or at the end (e.g., *hoolivan* ← *hooligan* + *van*).

third list, six attributive blends and six (Table 2)/five (Table 3) coordinate blends were presented. The number of syllables in the blends in each list also varied from one to four syllables. The blends in Tables 2-4 are given in order of length, from monosyllabic to four-syllable blends. Table 1 shows the blends which were used in the experiment and the various categories they represent. They are listed in alphabetical order.

Types	Overlap blends	Substitution blends
Attributive blends	bromance** Clintonomics* dancercise flexecutive* flexitarian freegan* freemium* glamping militician monergy sext* shoppertainment* vog webisode* webliography*	gengineer* glam-ma hoolivan* machinima wigger
Coordinate blends	animatic beefalo* boatel* burkini frenemy* glocal* hip-hopera** jeggings magalogue pleather*	fantabulous racino skort smaze zonkey

Table 1
The blends included in the experiment. Those marked with * preserve one of their SWs entirely and those marked with ** preserve both SWs with an overlap.

3.3.1. Hypothesis 1: Overlap between the source lexemes entails consensus about the source words/meaning

In order to examine hypothesis 1, the participants were presented six overlap blends and six substitution blends in random order. The first SW was disclosed for half of the blends and the second SW for the other half, sometimes facilitating recognition, other times making it harder. Then, participants were asked to provide the missing SWs and the meanings of the blends. All participants declared that they were not familiar with the blends. The experiment indeed seeks to investigate how non-native speakers interpret innovative blends; therefore, unfamiliarity was an essential prerequisite for relevance to this study.

Table 2 shows the participants' responses to the question about the source lexemes/meanings of the blends. For the undisclosed SWs, each response given is followed by the number of respondents who provided that

response. The correct response (provided by the OED) is underlined in the table. Some of the slots were left incomplete by the participants. For the blends' sense, only the most commonly-cited meanings have been highlighted.

Blend	Source Word 1	Source Word 2	Most commonly-cited meaning
smaze	*small* x 8 *smack* x 3 *smart* x 3 <u>*smoke*</u> x 2 (2 incomplete)	**haze**	not much haze x 7 haze mixed with smoke x 2
bromance	**bro**	<u>*romance*</u> x 16 *performance* x 2	a romance between brothers x 14 the performance of one's bro x 1
freegan	**free**	*slogan* x 10 <u>*vegan*</u> x 4 *hooligan* x 2 *organ* x 1 (1 incomplete)	a free slogan x 9 a person who generally eats no animal products x 4
pleather	No conclusive response (7 different responses, 11 incomplete) <u>*plastic*</u>	**leather**	No meanings provided
glam-ma	**glamourous**	*cinema* x 4 <u>*grandma*</u> x 1 *panorama* x 1 *schema* x 1 (11 incomplete)	a glamorous cinema x 4 a glamorous grandmother x 1
wigger	*woman* x 13 *wild* x 2 (3 incomplete) <u>*white*</u>	**nigger**	a black woman x 12
monergy	*monitor* x 6 <u>*money*</u> x 5 *month* x 1 (6 incomplete)	**energy**	a monitor powered by energy x 4 energy/power of money x 3
magalogue	**magazine**	<u>*catalogue*</u> x 10 *dialogue* x 8	a catalogue resembling a magazine x 8
hoolivan	<u>*hooligan*</u> x 17 (1 incomplete)	**van**	a van for hooligans x 15
racino	*race* x 7 *racism* x 2 *racist* x 1 *racial* x 1 (7 incomplete) <u>*racetrack*</u>	**casino**	a casino where people race x 4
machinima	**machine**	*minima* x 2 *anima* x 2 (14 incomplete) <u>*cinema*</u>	No meanings provided
Clintonomics	**Clinton**	<u>*economics*</u> x 18	economics of President Clinton x 17

Table 2

Identification of the source lexemes of overlap vs. substitution blends. The disclosed SW is marked in bold, the undisclosed SW(s) provided by respondents is/are in italics, the correct one is also underlined.

The most common responses to the question about source lexemes and meanings allowed us to verify hypothesis 1: if a blend displays an overlap at the switch point, a majority of participants will agree on its source lexemes/meaning. For SW_1 in **overlap blends**, 28% of respondents provided *money* for *monergy*, but no response *plastic* was provided for *pleather*. For SW_2, 100% of respondents provided *economics* for *Clintonomics*, 89% provided *romance* for *bromance*, 56% provided *catalogue* for *magalogue*, and 22% suggested *vegan* for *freegan*. Even if with a low number of participants percentages below 80% have little or no significance, it is worth noting that SW_2 was recognised by the participants in the majority of cases. This may be because it generally provides the stress and prosodic contour for the final blend. Moreover, thanks to the overlap, the identification of the correct SW also facilitated meaning recognition. The overlapping phonemes ranged from one in fr<u>ee</u> + v<u>e</u>gan /iː/, p<u>l</u>astic + <u>l</u>eather /l/ and mo<u>ne</u>y + e<u>ne</u>rgy /n/ to two in b<u>ro</u> + <u>ro</u>mance /rəʊ/ and Clint<u>on</u> + ec<u>on</u>omics /ən/. In m<u>a</u>ga<u>z</u>ine + c<u>a</u>t<u>a</u>logue /æ ə/, a discontinuous overlap facilitated SW recognition. From these findings we can infer that, not only the overlap, but also its position in the SWs is fundamental in the process of SW recognition: indeed, in *pleather*, the overlap occurs between the onsets of the first syllables of p<u>l</u>astic and <u>l</u>eather. Hence, while the latter is entirely identifiable, the former is scarcely recognisable. By contrast, in *bromance*, the overlap allows for the preservation of both SWs because the switch point is between the only syllable of SW_1 and the first syllable of SW_2.

In overlap blends, the percentages of respondents giving a (nearly) correct meaning progressively were: *Clintonomics* 'the economic policies of President Clinton' (94%), *bromance* 'intimate friendship between men' (78%), *magalogue* 'promotional catalogue designed to resemble a magazine' (44%), and *freegan* 'a person who eats discarded food' (22%). For *monergy* 'expenditure on energy', the meanings suggested by the participants were far from the correct one, while for *pleather* 'a synthetic fabric treated to resemble leather' no meaning was provided because the respondents were not able to identify the undisclosed SW_1 *plastic*. It is not surprising that there is a strict correlation between SWs recognisability and meaning understanding.

For the SWs in **substitution blends**, respondents displayed many more solutions than for overlap blends. For SW_1, 94% of respondents provided *hooligan* for *hoolivan*, mainly because *hooli-* is an infrequent word beginning. However, there was much more uncertainty for the other SWs: e.g., only 11% provided *smoke* for *smaze*, yet most respondents suggested *small*, and a considerable number *smack* and *smart*, probably because they assumed that a graphical overlapping *-a-* might link the two SWs. A similar uncertainty was for SW_1 in *racino*, with four concurrent responses, i.e., *race* (39%), *racism* (11%), *racist* (6%), *racial* (6%), and 39% left incomplete, the

correct one being *racetrack*. For *wigger*, no respondents suggested correct *white*, but 72% offered *woman* and 11% proposed *wild*, the latter response perhaps partially guided by a graphical overlapping *-i-*. For SW$_2$, only 6% suggested correct *grandma*, while *cinema* (22%), *panorama* (6%), and *schema* (6%) were alternative options, 61% left the slot empty. Similarly, for *machinima*, 78% left the response incomplete and correct *cinema* was not identified, *minima* and *anima* rivalling with 11% each. In this case, the blend respelling *machinima* (in the place of *machinema*) may have obstructed the recognition of SW$_2$.

The difficulty in SW recognition correlated with difficulty in meaning identification: *smaze* 'a mixture of smoke and haze' (11%), *glam-ma* 'a glamorous grandmother' (6%), no meaning for *machinima*, and incorrect meaning (based on incorrect SWs) for *wigger* and *hoolivan*. For *racino*, the correct SW (*racetrack*) was not identified by the respondents, but the majority of cases provided the more general term *race*, which allowed them to draw near the meaning 'a building complex having a racetrack and gambling facilities associated with casinos'. These percentages are not comparable to those recorded for overlap blends.

Based on these data, it appears that we can draw some inferences about the effect that overlap has both on consensus on the source lexemes of a blend and on related consensus about its meaning. There appears that consensus on the correct source lexemes is most commonly reached where the blend SWs share from one to three phonemes, also discontinuously. Even if further investigation with larger datasets would be necessary before drawing firmer conclusions, we can also infer that consensus on SWs correlates with consensus about the blend's meaning.

3.3.2. Hypothesis 2: Semantic relationship of similarity (or opposition) between the blend SWs entails consensus about the source words/meaning

In order to examine hypothesis 2, the participants were presented six coordinate blends and six attributive blends in random order. The first SW was disclosed for half of the blends and the second SW for the other half, sometimes facilitating recognition, other times making it harder. Then, participants were asked to provide the missing SWs and the meanings of the blends. All participants declared that they were not familiar with the blends, except for *webliography*, which was known by three respondents, and *fantabulous*, known by one respondent.[6] Table 3 shows the participants' responses to the question about the source lexemes/meanings of the blends.

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[6] These specific results have been excluded from Table 3.

For the undisclosed SWs, each response given is followed by the number of respondents who provided that response. As above, the correct response is underlined in the table. Some of the slots were left incomplete by the participants. For the blends' meanings, only the most commonly-cited meanings have been highlighted.

Blend	Source Word 1	Source Word 2	Most commonly-cited meaning
vog	*vague* x 3 (15 incomplete) *volcanic*	**fog**	No meanings provided
skort	*skirt* x 16 *skate* x 2	**short(s)**	shorts resembling a skirt x 7 both skirt and shorts x 8
glamping	**glamorous**	*camping* x 10 *jumping* x 3 (5 incomplete)	glamorous, fashionable camping x 9 high jump x 2
zonkey	*zebra* x 15 *zone* x 2 (1 incomplete)	**donkey**	the offspring of a zebra and a donkey x 10 an animal resembling a zebra and a donkey x 4
jeggings	**jeans**	*leggings* x 18	leggings that resemble a pair of jeans x 16 tight-fitting, skinny jeans x 2
frenemy	*friend* x 15 *friendly* x 3	**enemy**	a person who is both a friend and an enemy x 15 a false friend x 3
gengineer	*general* x 14 (4 incomplete) *genetic*	**engineer**	a general engineer x 6
hip-hopera	**hip-hop**	*opera* x 18	music that combines hip-hop and opera x 16 opera with hip-hop music x 2
flexitarian	**flexible**	*humanitarian* x 4 *authoritarian* x 4 (10 incomplete) *vegetarian*	a person who is authoritarian, but also flexible x 2
militician	**military**	*technician* x 4 *politician* x 2 *musician* x 2 (10 incomplete)	technician involved in the military x 1 politician involved in the military x 1
fantabulous	*fantastic* x 17 (1 excluded)	**fabulous**	fantastic and fabulous x 17
webliography	**web**	*bibliography* x 8 (4 incomplete, 6 excluded)	bibliography of web sources x 6 bibliography on the web x 2

Table 3
Identification of the source lexemes of coordinate vs. attributive blends. The disclosed SW is marked in bold, the undisclosed SW(s) provided by respondents is/are in italics, the correct one is also underlined.

The most common responses to the question about source lexemes and meanings allowed us to verify hypothesis 2: if the SWs of a blend display semantic similarity, a majority of participants will agree on its source lexemes/meaning. For SW_1 in **coordinate blends**, 94% of respondents provided *fantastic* for *fantabulous*, 89% provided *skirt* for *skort*, 83% provided *zebra* for *zonkey*, and 83% suggested *friend* for *frenemy*. Although the phonological similarity between SW_1 and the blends *fantabulous* and *skort* may respectively have helped the recognition of *fantastic* and *skirt*, the synonymy relationship with disclosed *fabulous* and the co-hyponymy relationship with *shorts* have undoubtedly contributed to the SWs identification. The importance of a semantic relationship between the SWs in coordinate blends is even more evident in *zonkey*, in which *zebra* has been mainly identified thanks to its co-hyponymy with *donkey*, and in *frenemy*, in which the antonymic relationship between *friend* and *enemy* has facilitated the respondents' task. This contradicts expectations that antonymy is the most difficult relation to recognise (cf. Section 3.3). In addition, a semantic relationship of co-hyponymy has helped participants in the recognition of SW_2 in the coordinate blends *jeggings* and *hip-hopera*, whose second words *leggings* and *opera* were identified by all respondents (100%).

In coordinate blends, the meaning identification task also appeared facilitated by the SWs' semantics. The percentages of respondents giving a (nearly) correct meaning progressively were: *fantabulous* 'of almost incredible excellence' (100%), *jeggings* 'tight-fitting stretch leggings styled to resemble a pair of denim jeans' (89%), *hip-hopera* 'music that combines elements of hip-hop and opera' (89%), *frenemy* 'a person with whom one is friendly, despite a fundamental rivalry' (83%), *skort* 'a pair of shorts having a flap across the front to give the appearance of a skirt' (83%), and *zonkey* 'the offspring of a zebra and a donkey' (55%).

The same easiness was not evidenced by the results for **attributive blends**. Recognition of SW_1 was highly difficult in *vog*, in which nobody suggested the correct word *volcanic*, and in *gengineer*, for which most suggested *general* (78%) instead of *genetic*. Recognition of SW_2 was difficult in *militician*, for which only 11% provided *politician*,[7] and impossible in *flexitarian*, for which nobody suggested *vegetarian*,[8] easier for *glamping* (*camping* was provided by 55%) and *webliography* (with *bibliography* given by 66% of the participants who did not know the blend). The latter two blends were assigned the correct meaning by 50% (*glamping*) and 66%

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[7] Although this is considered an attributive blend, the two SWs are semantically/pragmatically related, as in most dictatorships the rulers (or politicians) are military men.

[8] The fact that 4 respondents provided *authoritarian* as SW_2 means that language users/learners strive to establish semantic connections between SWs (in this case an antonymic one) to make sense of novel blends. This piece of evidence bears on hypothesis 2.

Lingue e
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(*webliography*), as a further confirmation that SWs recognition helps meaning identification.

Based on these results, it can be said that also hypothesis 2 has been confirmed. While it appears that participants have most difficulty in coming to a consensus about the source lexemes and meaning of attributive blends, it also appears that the degree of consensus increases with coordinate blends. The degree of consensus with regard to the SWs of coordinate blends overcomes 83% for all blends, and their meaning has been identified by more than 50% of the participants, for five of them by more than 80%. In attributive blends, the ambiguity of competition between possible SWs increases compared to coordinate blends, whose SWs are more similar in syntactic and semantic terms.

3.3.3. Hypothesis 3: Co-textual information (e.g., reference to the blend SWs) entails consensus about the blend's meaning

In order to examine hypothesis 3, the participants were presented five coordinate blends and six attributive blends randomly, first in isolation and then in context. The blend SWs were not disclosed, but, on some occasions, they were mentioned in the contexts provided. In one context, the SWs appeared entirely and in proximity to (esp. following) the blend.

Then, participants were asked to provide the meanings of the blends. All participants declared that they were not familiar with the blends. Table 3 shows the participants' responses to the question about the meanings of the blends. The blend SWs are reported in the table, but, as said, they were not provided to the respondents. Each response given in the last column is followed by the number of respondents who provided that response.

Blend	Context	Most commonly-cited meaning
sext *sex + text*	Whether a **sext** qualifies as relatively safe sexual experimentation or a disaster often depends on who finds out about it. (COCA, 2014)	a sexual text message x 13 a text about sex x 3 (2 incomplete)
glocal *global + local*	The inventive expression, '**glocal**', speaks to the intersections of the global and the local, how predominantly local events are globalised, and those of global resonances are reinterpreted or reformulated in local, even rustic settings. (NOW, 2019)	both global and local x 17 in-between global and local x 1
boatel *boat + hotel*	Now, Ireland is set to get its own **boatel** – and it could be here as early as the end of this year. (NOW, 2017)	a small boat x 3 (15 incomplete)

freemium *free + premium*	Amazon is reportedly developing a **freemium** version of Prime Video. (COCA, 2017)	something free x 8 (10 incomplete)
dancercise *dance + exercise*	For all those who are tired of going to the gym and getting on the boring treadmill, the dancing diva will be sharing her secrets of staying in shape through a special '**Dancercise**' workout. (NOW, 2016)	dance and exercise x 10 a dancing exercise x 5 exercise while dancing x 3
beefalo *beef + buffalo*	The Fort served perfectly medium-rare **beefalo**. (COCA, 2004)	beef x 5 meat such as beef x 2 (11 incomplete)
burkini *burka + bikini*	She was also the first woman to wear a **burkini** during the swimsuit portion of the event. (COCA, 2017)	bikini in the form of a burka x 7 swimsuit that resembles a burka x 3 (8 incomplete)
webisode *web + episode*	Nimbus became one of the early experimenters with the short online film, or "**webisode**". (COCA, 2012)	short online film x 16 episode on the web x 2
animatic *animated + schematic*	We've reached out to Fox for an official comment on the **animatic**, and will update this post if we hear a response. (COCA, 2016)	animated cartoon x 4 (14 incomplete)
flexecutive *flexible + executive*	• Realities of the Personal Information Economy • Birth of the new **Flexecutive** • Development of new Bleisure Hives (NOW, 2014)	executive x 7 (11 incomplete)
shoppertainment *shopper + entertainment*	This is unlike visits to larger malls, which are for '**shoppertainment**', not necessarily to make a purchase. (COCA, 2002)	shopping mall x 3 entertainment for shoppers x 1 (14 incomplete)

Table 4
Identification of the meaning of coordinate vs. attributive blends in context.

The most common responses to the question about the blends' meanings allowed us to verify hypothesis 3: if the context of a blend provides references to its SWs, a majority of participants will agree on its meaning. The results reported in Table 4 point out that all contexts that provided no relevant information about the blend SWs were unhelpful for the participants. For instance, for *boatel* 'boat which functions as a hotel', 83% left the task incomplete, and the remaining respondents only identified SW$_1$ (*boat*), as evidenced by the meaning suggested. This result is surprising, because SW$_2$ (*hotel*) is an Anglicism that Italians know and regularly use; therefore, we would have expected it to be identified by at least some of the respondents.

Similarly, for *freemium* 'a free gift, given by a business in order to persuade customers to pay for other goods or services', 55% left the task

incomplete and 44% only recognised SW_1 (*free*), while for *animatic* 'a preliminary mock-up of a film', 78% did not provide any meaning, and the remaining 22% included in the meaning suggested SW_1 (*animated cartoon*), but not SW_2 (*schematic*). By contrast, for *flexecutive* 'a professional whose use of information technology offers flexible employment opportunities', only SW_2 (*executive*) was identified by 39%, but not the first SW, probably due to the excessive brevity of the context.

On the other hand, when the two SWs were cited in the context (*global* and *local*), all respondents (100%) identified the meanings of *glocal* 'both global and local'. Other words provided by the contexts functioned as semantic indices for disambiguation. In *burkini* 'swimsuit for women which covers the head and body', *swimsuit* was an anaphoric semantic prime for *bikini*, identified by 40% of respondents, while *short online film* was a cataphoric semantic prime for *webisode*, whose meaning 'an episode of a drama or comedy series, which is made available online' was understood by all respondents (100%), although only 11% recognised the two SWs *web* and *episode*. Partial anaphoric reference (*sexual*) helped the comprehension of *sext* 'a sexually explicit message sent electronically' (89%), while the verb *served* was less useful for the understanding of *beefalo* 'a cross-bred livestock animal that is three-eighths bison and five-eighths domestic cow', whose SW_1 *beef* was clearer to respondents (39%) than SW_2 *buffalo* (0%).

For *shoppertainment* 'the provision of entertainment within a shopping centre', *malls* and *purchase* may even have acted as distractors for those who answered 'shopping mall' (16%), while only 5% identified SW_2 *entertainment*. Lastly, for *dancercise* 'dancing performed as an exercise', a combination of anaphoric and cataphoric semantic primes (*gym*, *dancing*, *staying in shape*, *workout*) helped the identification of both SWs *dance* and *exercise* by 100% of respondents. Needless to say, an anaphoric relation (as with *global* and *local* referring back to *glocal*) is easier to identify than a cataphoric relation (as with *dancing* preceding *dancercise*). Moreover, the adjacency (vs. distance) of the blends to their SWs (or their semantic primes) may have also played a role in the recognition and interpretation processes.

4. General discussion

A comparison of the results obtained from the three-part experiment gives a clearer idea of the factors influencing blends' interpretation. Table 5 compares the percentages for the source lexemes and correct meanings of overlap vs. substitution blends, coordinate vs. attributive blends, and blends found in informative vs. uninformative context. When the context was found to be a distractor, it was considered uninformative.

Blend	Comparison of % of correct source lexemes responses	Comparison of % of correct meaning responses
Overlap vs. substitution	49% vs. 18%	43% vs. 6%
Difference between overlap vs. substitution	D = **31%**	D = **37%**
Coordinate vs. attributive	92% vs. 18%	75% vs. 15%
Difference between coordinate vs. attributive	D = **74%**	D = **60%**
Informative context vs. Uninformative context	74% vs. 1%	88% vs. 1%
Difference between informative vs. uninformative context	D = **73%**	D = **87%**

Table 5
Percentages of correct source lexemes/meaning responses in the three-part experiment.

These results show that consensus about source lexemes and meaning is more readily reached when 1) the blend exhibits an overlap between the SWs, 2) the two SWs are semantically related, and 3) the blend is found in a relevant context providing semantic prime(s) to either its SWs or its meaning. In particular, the results of a comparison between the different types of blends that functioned as stimuli in the experiment show that prior knowledge of one of the SWs of a coordinate blend can significantly help (92%) in the identification of the other SW (e.g., *shorts → skirt, donkey → zebra*), while in an attributive blend the two SWs are much more independent and harder to identify, because they are semantically unrelated (cf. *volcanic* vs. *fog*, *genetic* vs. *engineer*), only syntactically related by a syntagmatic grammatical relation.

When the SWs are provided by the context or semantic primes are given to respondents in the blend's co-text, their recognition is high (74%) and the meaning readily identified (88%), whereas a concise and uninformative context is irrelevant to blend recognisability.

Finally, the presence of an overlap at the switch point has revealed to be helpful for both SWs identification (49%) and meaning disambiguation (43%). Indeed, an overlap allows maximisation of segments from the SWs that are preserved in the final blend (e.g., *Clinton + economics*). However, when the overlap occurs very early in SW$_1$ (*plastic + leather*) or very late in SW$_2$ (*boat + hotel*), maximisation of segments is jeopardised by optimal structure, and only one of the SWs is recognised (*leather, boat*).

5. Conclusions

The hypotheses which were proposed before the experiment generally appear to have been borne out by the results. The results show a direct correlation between consensus on the identification of source lexemes and on the identification of the meaning for blends with an overlap between the SWs. There is even more evidence to support the assertion that consensus on the SWs/meaning is most easily reached with coordinate blends whose SWs stand in a co-hyponymy relationship, or with blends whose SWs are cited in the co-text, either as anaphoric or as cataphoric references.

It must be noted that this is a pilot experiment with a small number of participants and a small number of blends and larger numbers of participants and/or blends might have led to different results. The main aim of this experiment was to explore the nature of consensus in assigning meaning to innovative English blends by non-native speakers learning EFL. In general, the experiment confirmed that blends are hard to disambiguate for Italian learners of EFL and that their SWs are often indiscernible because of the economical nature of blends compared to compounds. However, the context where a blend is used can significantly help in blend recognisability and learners should check for primes before or after the blend in order to find out formal or semantic similarities between the blend itself and its co-textual information.

Ultimately, the experiment can allow us to draw some conclusions about the distinction between the core and the periphery in blend perception and recognition. Semantically, coordinate blends, whose SWs are paradigmatically rather than syntagmatically related, are easier to perceive and recognise than attributive blends (cf. Mattiello 2021 for the preferred semantic types of blends in the OED). Formally, overlap blends mixing SWs that share some segments and merging them where they overlap, are easier to recognise than substitution blends. Although generalisations would require statistically more significant figures, we can infer from our results that overlap and coordinate blends belong to the core for perception. Contextually, the accessibility of blends may be favoured by the co-presence of at least one of the source lexemes, or of synonyms which may act as semantic primes to the source lexemes.

In general, the meaning of an unknown form can often be reconstructed in the context of a broader discussion. However, blend recognisability and accessibility seem to require specific reference to their source lexemes, in that other related words may even function as distractors to the specific blend's meaning. Other variables can of course influence blend recognisability, such as the frequency and length of the source lexemes, rhyme between SW_2 and the blend, and other structural aspects concerning the combination of the source lexemes. Further experiments can take these variables into account,

but it appears that the context (or co-text) remains the main factor influencing blend accessibility.

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PHRASAL VERBS IN ACADEMIC LECTURES
Some semantic and pragmatic insights from a corpus-assisted analysis

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Abstract – Phrasal verbs are notoriously challenging for L2 learners of English, especially when such composite structures are not present in their native languages. Features of phrasal verbs that can create considerable comprehension issues include varying degrees of semantic opaqueness and high levels of polysemy, as well as the dynamic nature through which new forms and meanings frequently emerge. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of phrasal verbs in academic lectures as a spoken genre that requires listeners to process complex and abstract content in real time. The transcripts of 15 multi-disciplinary lectures collected from the OpenCourseWare web sites of Yale University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology were analysed with corpus methods, including part-of-speech tagging, in order to shed light on the use of phrasal verbs in terms of forms, meanings, and patterns of usage, with a view to those that may be problematic for L2 listeners. Results showed that phrasal verbs were quite frequent, while also displaying substantial variation in form and with roughly half having figurative meanings. Further contextual analysis of figurative phrasal verbs revealed instances of pragmatic strengthening to both expand on core meanings and communicate speaker attitude. The article concludes with a discussion of the pedagoggical implications of the analysis, with attention to strategies for helping L2 learners more effectively cope with the difficulties of phrasal verbs.

Keywords: lectures; phrasal verbs; corpus analysis; academic discourse; part-of-speech tagging.

1. Introduction

The challenges faced by L2 learners when listening to academic lectures have been well documented in the relevant literature. On a linguistic level, L2 listeners must cope with an extensive range of language features on various levels: phonological (Norris 1995; Rost 2002), lexico-syntactic (Deroey, Taverniers 2012; Flowerdew 1994; Swales 2004), structural (Crawford Camiciottoli 2007; Young 1994), pragmatic (Fortanet 2004; Simpson 2004), and cultural (Crawford Camiciottoli 2018; Miller 2002; Zhu, Flaitz 2005). At the same time, they are required to process a high concentration of complex content with abstract concepts imparted by academics who may also have unfamiliar approaches to lecturing and classroom interaction (Lynch 2011).

This unique combination of linguistic, content-related, and contextual factors that all come into play during a lecture means that academic listening is considerably more demanding for L2 learners than their L1 counterparts, even for those at high proficiency levels in the target language (Mulligan, Kirkpatrick 2000).

Other potential difficulties for L2 lecture comprehension are related to what Buttery *et al.* (2015, p. 208) have described as the phenomenon of "conversationalisation" in spoken academic discourse. Already as far back as the 1990s, Dudley-Evans (1994, p. 148) identified the ''conversational style" lecture as one in which the topic had been planned but not the actual speech, thus resulting in a relatively informal delivery and some interaction with the student audience. Since then, other studies have confirmed a trend towards lectures becoming increasingly conversation-like and interactional (Crawford Camiciottoli 2007; Morell 2004; Swales 2004). Studies based on corpora of authentic lecture discourse have also revealed a number features that are typically associated with informal speech production. These include discourse dysfluencies such as pause fillers and false starts (Crawford Camiciottoli 2007; Glass *et al.* 2004,), as well as various lexical features of an informal nature, for example, discourse markers (Schleef 2008; Swales, Malczewski 2001), question tags (Pérez-Llantada 2005), hedging and vagueness indicators (Mauranen 2004), and idioms (Crawford Camiciottoli 2007; Simpson, Mendis 2003). Among informal lexical features of spoken language, we can certainly list phrasal verbs (hereafter PVs) that both Quirk *et al.* (1985) and Biber *et al.* (1999) characterize as commonly present in English conversation and largely informal in tone. However, how PVs are used in academic lectures appears to have been explored only marginally. Crawford Camiciottoli (2004) identified some PVs within discourse structuring patterns to announce to students how the lecture will unfold (e.g., *I'm gonna go through it now*, *we'll go over the main points*). Liu (2003) provided the example of the PV *come up with* found in a multi-genre corpus that included academic lectures. Thus, previous research on PVs in lecture discourse has been quite sporadic and lacking in systematicity. In an attempt to address this gap, this study examined the use of PVs in a corpus based on the transcripts of 15 academic lectures. The aim was to shed light not only on their linguistic forms, but also on their meanings in this context of usage, with particular attention to those that may be challenging for L2 listeners. To do so, I addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent are PVs used by the lecturers?
2. Which categories of PVs can be identified?
3. Which patterns of usage can be identified?

It is well known that PVs can create comprehension difficulties for L2 learners due to their wide-ranging degree of semantic transparency/opaqueness and

idiomaticity (Celce-Murcia, Larsen-Freeman 1999; Cornell 1985; White 2012), and high level of polysemy (Gardner, Davies 2007; Garnier, Schmitt 2016). In addition, although PVs are highly frequent in English, most languages do not possess such verb + particle combinations (Celce-Murcia, Larsen-Freeman 1999), which can further exacerbate difficulties when the native language of L2 learners lacks such constructions. Another complicating feature of PVs for L2 learners is that they are very dynamic, such that new forms and meanings are coined with extreme frequency and ease (Bolinger 1971; Darwin, Gray 1999).

In light of all the issues discussed in the preceding paragraphs, it is important to acquire a better understanding of how PVs are actually used in lecture discourse in order to promote more successful L2 comprehension of this key feature that characterizes the speech of native and proficient speakers of English (Garnier, Schmitt 2016). As the linguistic focus in this research, in the following section I provide a brief overview of some salient aspects involved in analyzing PVs.

2. Phrasal verbs

As common features of the English language, phrasal verbs have stimulated considerable interest among linguists who have proposed various definitions, descriptions, and classifications in relation to their syntactic and semantic properties.[1] According to Quirk *et al.* (1985), phrasal verbs are multi-word verbs containing a verb and an adverb particle that can be categorized into two types: intransitive (with no direct object) or transitive (with a direct object and possible variation in the position of the adverb particle). They also mention the potentially idiomatic meanings and intensifying function of PVs, as in *liven up* (Quirk *et al.* 1985, p. 1152). Biber *et al.* (1999, p. 403) similarly define PVs as "multi-word units consisting of a verb followed by an adverbial particle" and also describe their transitive/intransitive variations with possible particle movement, while noting the complex semantic properties of particles such as *out, in, up* or *down*, in terms of "core spatial or locative meanings", as well as frequent "extended meanings" (Biber *et al.* 1999, p. 403). Based on an analysis using the British National Corpus, Gardner and Davies (2007, p. 341) provide an empirically-driven definition of PVs as two-part verbs comprised of a lexical verb and an adverbial particle "that is either contiguous (adjacent) to that verb or noncontiguous (i.e., separated by one or more intervening words)". While this definition accounts for the considerable variation in the syntactic patterning of PVs, it does not encompass issues linked to their meanings.

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[1] For in-depth theoretical discussions of PVs that are beyond the scope of this study, see the book-length treatments by Bolinger (1971), Fraser (1976), Sroka (1972), and Thim (2012).

Focusing instead more on the semantic relations between verbs and particles in PVs, Fraser (1976, p. 6) described "verb-particle combinations" as figurative (e.g., *figure out, look up*) with idiomatic meanings, completive (e.g., *fade out, beat up*) where the particle encodes a sense of completion to the overall meaning, and systematic where the particle retains its "adverbial force" to a greater or lesser extent. For instance, in *hide away*, the adverbial meaning of *away* is largely retained, while in *hunt down*, the adverbial meaning of *down* is less clear. Laufer and Eliasson (1993, p. 38) later formulated three semantic categories of PVs: literal meaning (e.g., *go away*), semitransparent meaning that can be retrieved from context (e.g., *eat up*), and figurative meaning (e.g., *let down*). Their study was conducted in an instructional context in order to shed light on why L2 learners may avoid using PVs. The results showed that learners whose first language has no PVs (in this case, Hebrew) tended to avoid them (especially those with figurative meanings) more than learners whose first language does have PVs (in this case, Swedish). Thus, the native language appears to play an important role in the acquisition of PVs among L2 learners. Interestingly, English PVs are often synonyms of single verb forms of Latinate originate (e.g., *get rid* of vs. *eliminate*, *go down* vs. *descend* (McArthur 1989; Swales, Feak 2004). For L2 speakers of Latin-based Romance languages, such single verb forms in English are largely transparent. On the contrary, these speakers may encounter difficulties understanding their PV alternatives as forms that do not occur in their native languages.

When examining issues involving PVs in L2 instructional settings, it is also important to acknowledge the pragmatic nature of some facets of meaning. In an in-depth analysis of English phrasal verbs, Mahpeykar (2014) applies the notion of *pragmatic strengthening* (Traugott 1988) to describe new meanings that become associated with certain lexical forms arising from implicatures in certain recurring contexts of usage. For example, Mahpeykar (2014) contrasts the central sense of *take off* (meaning to get hold of something and remove it) with the pragmatically strengthened *take off* (meaning to stop working temporarily), in which a person removes him/herself from the place of work.[2] According to Traugott (1988, p. 407), pragmatic strengthening also entails a "strengthening of the expression of speaker involvement". In the context of PV usage, this can be seen in choices that encode evaluative meanings. For example, some uses of the PV *show up* may imply a critical attitude (e.g., *After over an hour, she finally showed up*), rather than a more neutral choice such as *arrived*. Clearly, these pragmatic aspects of PVs can create obstacles to successful comprehension among L2 learners.

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[2] The PV *take off* has other extended meanings: leave (*the plane took off; she took off from the party last night*); become popular or successful (*the new book really took off*); provide a discount (*you can take off 10% from the original price*)

Lingue e Linguaggi

3. Methodology

3.1. The corpus

The transcripts of 15 lectures were collected from the OpenCourseWare
(OCW) platforms of Yale University (eight lectures) and the Massachusetts
Institute of Technology (MIT) (seven lectures).[3] In an effort to avoid potential
skewing related to disciplinary aspects, I selected lectures from a variety of
disciplines spanning the humanities, social sciences, and hard sciences.
However, this selection was somewhat constrained by the different disciplinary
traditions that characterize the two institutions. MIT has a strong research focus
in applied sciences and engineering, while Yale's curriculum continues to
reflect its origins that privileged the classics and theology. The Yale lectures
were delivered in the timeframe from 2007 to 2011, while the MIT lectures
were delivered during the period from 2010 to 2013.[4] Table 1 provides an
overview of the corpus.

Lecture	Discipline	Course title	Univ.	Tokens
1	Art History	Roman Architecture	Yale	15623
2	Ecology and Evolutionary Biology	Principles of Evolution, Ecology and Behavior	Yale	7408
3	History	The American Revolution	Yale	8285
4	Psychology	Introduction to Psychology	Yale	8259
5	Geology and Geophysics	The Atmosphere, the Ocean, and Environmental Change	Yale	6969
6	Classics	Introduction to Ancient Greek History	Yale	9466
7	English	Modern Poetry	Yale	5081
8	Political Science	Capitalism: Success, Crisis, and Reform	Yale	5583
9	Economics	Principles of Microeconomics	MIT	7677
10	Biology	Fundamentals of Biology	MIT	5654
11	Electrical Engineering and Computer Science	Introduction to Algorithms	MIT	7016
12	Civil and Engineering Dynamics	Engineering Dynamics	MIT	6659
13	Physics	Quantum Physics I	MIT	11143
14	Chemistry	Introduction to Solid State Chemistry	MIT	6654
15	Literature	The Film Experience	MIT	6566
				118,043

Table 1.
The Yale/MIT OCW lecture corpus.

[3] https://oyc.yale.edu/ and https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/audio-video-courses/.
[4] The 2007-2013 timeframe of the corpus was conditioned by issues of accessibility and
representativeness. Specifically, it includes only courses that did not require formal enrollment in
order to be accessed and courses that would ensure an adequate multi-disciplinary representation.

3.2. The analysis

The corpus described above was compiled into a single file in plain text in order to process it with the part-of-speech (POS) tagger of Wmatrix (Rayson 2008), which automatically assigns a tag to each word according to its corresponding part of speech on the basis of a predetermined tagset. The tagset contains 137 tags that identify parts of speech at a highly articulated level and, according to its developers, has an accuracy of 96-97%. The POS tagged file was then elaborated with Wordsmith Tools (Scott 2008) using the tag RP (preposition or adverb particle) as a search term. The initial query retrieved 1032 concordance lines containing the following lexical items tagged as RPs: *about, along, around, back, by, down, in, off, on, out, over, through*, and *up*. The concordance lines were then resorted to order them according to various verb tags[5] to the left of the RP tag, which enabled the identification and elimination of all instances in which the particles were not used in PV structures, and thus not relevant to this study. For example, there were many instances in which adverb particles were combined with deictic elements here/there and spatial adverbs (e.g., *out there, over here, up here, down there, down below, up above*), in coordinated lexical phrases (e.g. *up and down, in and out, through and through*), in temporal expressions (e.g., *early on, later on*), or in enumerating expressions (e.g., *first off*). There were also numerous concordance lines in which the item tagged as RP functioned as a simple preposition followed by a NP (e.g., *the last class was about the comparison model, buttressed by two barrel vaults, they are in everything*). The raw concordance output thus required extensive filtering to remove unwanted items. To resolve dubious cases of whether items qualified as PVs or not, I further examined items in an extended context of usage beyond the concordance lines and/or consulted the Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary for Learners of English (2001).

After the first phase of filtering, 794 concordances lines containing PV structures remained. In line with previous descriptions of PVs (Biber *et al.* 1999; Gardner, Davies 2007; Quirk *et al.* 1985), there was some structural variation in that particles were not always adjacent to the verb and that the number of intervening words could vary, for example, *let me back up, write it up, flesh this out, got the thing off to* […], *break the problem down, start them all off*. The 794 concordance lines were then submitted to a second phase of filtering in order to identify PV categories in terms of transparency of meaning. Particular attention was paid to distinguish those that could be interpreted as

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[5] In the tagset, the following lexical verb forms are articulated: VV0: base form of lexical verb, VVD: past tense of lexical verb, VVG: *-ing* participle of lexical verb, VVGK: *-ing* participle catenative, VVI: infinitive, VVN: past participle of lexical verb, VVNK: past participle catenative, VVZ: *-s* form of lexical verb.

figurative or semantically opaque, as these are the specific type of PVs that are likely to be the most challenging for many L2 listeners, and thus of particular interest to this study. More specifically, following Laufer and Eliasson (1993) and Biber *et al.* (1999), I manually examined the 794 PVs within their context of usage to tease out figurative PVs whose meanings were non-compositional and/or contained particles that did not reflect literal spatial meanings. For example, I eliminated *go down* meaning *descend* as semantically transparent (Laufer, Eliasson 1993) as its particle encodes a literal spatial meaning, whereas I retained *go on* meaning *happen* as semantically opaque as its particle does not encode a literal spatial meaning. I also opted to remove PVs of a completive nature (Fraser 1976), such as *add up*, *divide up*, and *cut up*, as these encoded relatively transparent meanings based on the verbal element. At the end of this process, the items whose meanings were interpreted as figurative or semantically opaque (Laufer, Eliasson 1993) were examined and interpreted within their context of usage to determine patterns of usage that may have implications for L2 lecture comprehension.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Global analysis of PVs

In terms of overall frequency, the 794 PVs that emerged from the Yale/MIT OCW lecture corpus corresponded to 6.72 occurrences per 1000 words. Of those, 372 encoded figurative meanings, corresponding 3.15 occurrences per 1000 words and accounting for 46.8% of all PVs in the corpus.[6] Because, to the best of my knowledge, no previous studies have systematically examined the frequency of PVs in lecture discourse, let alone the frequency of figurative PVs, it is difficult to determine conclusively whether these results reflect high or low usage in the corpus. However, two helpful observations can be made. First, Biber *et al.* (1999, p. 409) found overall phrasal verb frequencies of 1800 per million words (i.e., 1.8 occurrences per 1000 words) in English conversation. Thus, 6.72 PVs per 1000 words overall in the Yale/MIT OCW lecture corpus and even 3.15 occurrences per 1000 words of figurative PVs indicates that they are quite prominent in these lectures. Second, the 372 figurative PVs correspond to an average of 24.8 per lecture and there were no lectures in the corpus without any PVs. Therefore, it seems reasonable to surmise that figurative PVs are relatively common features of lecture

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[6] The remaining 422 items (53.2%) were broadly categorized as literal/semitransparent since clear distinctions between the two categories are not always discernable (Thim 2012). These PVs were not subjected to further in-depth analysis primarily because they are less likely to cause comprehension problems for L2 listeners, but also for reasons of space and feasibility.

discourse, suggesting that L2 listeners indeed have numerous opportunities to encounter them.

4.2. Contextual analysis of figurative PVs

With particular reference to the figurative PVs that emerged from the lecture corpus, the Appendix lists the lemmas of the various inflected forms that were identified as having distinct meanings from the in-depth analysis of the concordance lines. They are ranked according to frequency and presented along with their corresponding meanings within the specific context of usage. Five items were polysemous (i.e., *get back*, *go on*, *make up*, *pick up*, and *work out*) with each meaning being counted separately, for a total of 109 distinct meanings across 104 different PV types.

Among the top-ranking PVs (10+ occurrences), several could be clearly linked to the instructional setting in which an expert seeks to impart knowledge and guide student audiences through the lecture content. For example, *come back* (n=13), *go back* (n=10), and *go on* meaning *continue talking* (n=10), were often used in a discourse structuring or metadiscursive capacity to provide signposts for listeners as to how the lecture is unfolding. This result thus corroborates Crawford Camiciottoli's (2004) study which also found metadiscursive PVs in lectures. Examples 1-3 illustrate this usage. Similarly, the frequent use of *turn out* (n=25) and *end up* (n=18) which both refer to something that develops or concludes in a particular or unexpected way (see the Appendix) were often used to help learners focus on the important result or outcome of the situation, as seen in examples 4 and 5. The relatively high frequency items *figure out* (n=28) and *come up with* (n=16) encode the mental processes of the senser (Halliday 1985), as shown in examples 6-7. In example 6, the mental process refers to the learners' own development of conceptual knowledge in line with the goals of academic lectures.

(1)   So let's *come back* to computing expectation values for momentum. *(Quantum Physics I/MIT)*

(2)   I want to stop at this point to *go back* to another issue. *(Introduction to Psychology/Yale)*

(3)   Let's *go on* now - z double dot? *(Engineering Dynamics/MIT) 3*

(4)   The availability of that silver would *turn out* to be crucial at various moments in Athenian history. *(Introduction to Ancient Greek History/Yale)*

(5)   So did the company […] *end up* paying or not? *(Capitalism: Success, Crisis, and Reform/Yale)*

(6)   So our problem is to *figure out* how did this all get going? *(Principles of Evolution, Ecology and Behavior/Yale)*

(7)   A number of the established elite in Massachusetts — lawyers, particularly merchants, wealthy merchants — were forced to *come up with* their own solution. *(The American Revolution/Yale)*

The most frequent PV in the corpus was *go on* (n=39) meaning *happen* (examples 8-10). This more informal alternative supports the trend towards the "conversationalisation" of academic discourse observed by Buttery *et al.* (2015, p. 208). It was typically used in the present perfect continuous tense and sometimes in the form of a rhetorical question which the lecturer then proceeds to answer, as a way to focus the students' attention on a particular aspect of lecture content (example 10). This is similar to what Bamford (2005) described as self-elicitation questions used by lecturers to stimulate and maintain audience interest.

(8)   These two things are *going on* at once. *(Modern Poetry/Yale)*

(9)   So that's what's *going on* inside. *(Introduction to Solid State Chemistry/MIT)*

(10) So what's *going on* in all of these cases? At the surface of the ocean […] *(The Atmosphere, the Ocean, and Environmental Change/Yale)*

However, the more frequent items (i.e., 10+ occurrences) discussed above would seem unlikely to cause serious comprehension difficulties for two reasons. First, L2 learners may already be familiar with them as PVs are commonly included in English language teaching syllabi and assessment instruments even at intermediate levels of proficiency.[7] Second, their meanings could be recovered relatively easily from the context of usage, as for the discourse structuring items (i.e., *go back, go on, come back*). In the latter case, such PVs could even be reclassified as semitransparent in this particular context of usage, following Laufer and Eliasson (1993), thus demonstrating the challenge of applying rigid semantic categories to PVs. Indeed, as Thim (2012, p. 13) noted in relation to the semantic properties of PVs, "it is not always possible to draw clear-cut distinctions".

What emerged as particularly interesting from the analysis was the wide variety among distinctive types of figurative PVs used by the lecturers. In fact, while only 8 (7.3%) occurred 10 times or more, 55 (50.4%) occurred only once, pointing to considerable variation in usage. Many of the less frequent PVs (i.e., <10) were used in similar ways as the more frequent ones described above, but took on less familiar forms and encoded a higher degree of idiomaticity. For example, there were other PVs beyond those mentioned previously that performed a discourse structuring function as illustrated in examples 11-14.

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[7] See, for example, English language teaching resources that indicate PVs as topics covered at intermediate levels: https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/126460-cec-handbook-for-teachers.pdf; https://www.gatehouse.it/CLASSIC/docs/Examination%20Specification%20B2.pdf; http://blairexamenglish.com/fce/general/50-phrasal-verbs-commonly-used-fce-exam.

(11) I want to talk a bit about two crucial issues and some other matters that will *come up* later. *(The Film Experience/MIT)*

(12) So today what I want is *pick up on* the discussion of the uncertainty principle that we sort of outlined previously. *(Quantum Physics I/MIT)*

(13) We'll first *go over* some basic facts about language. *(Introduction to Psychology/Yale)*

(14) So the last step, which I'll *touch on* very briefly, was proof of what's called semi-conservative replication. *(Fundamentals of Biology/MIT)*

Other figurative PVs encoded mental processes related to understanding concepts or formulating thoughts, but contain highly opaque verbal elements, as illustrated in examples 15-18. Such meanings may be familiar to many L2 students without dedicated instruction.

(15) I want to *tease out* some of those meanings for you as well. *(The Film Experience/MIT)*

(16) So in particular, just to *flesh this out* a little more, if we were in 3D, for example […] the wave function would be a function of all three positions x, y and z. *(Quantum Physics I/MIT)*

(17) But ornamentation or decoration that has certain meaning to it: a meaning that certainly *conjures up* ancient Greece. *(Roman Architecture/Yale)*

(18) So Eigen tried to *cook up* a way out of this, and he called it hypercycles. *(Principles of Evolution, Ecology and Behavior/Yale)*

Following Mahpeykar (2014), some PVs seemed to display the process of pragmatic strengthening whereby a new meaning that expands on the central sense becomes established through recurrent usage in particular contexts. In example 19, *pull out* means to bring something into the discussion in a strategic way instead of its central sense of physically taking something out of somewhere. Similarly, in examples 20 and 21, respectively, *put out* means to be made irrelevant (vs. to extinguish, for example, a fire) and *pull off* means to succeed in doing something difficult (vs. succeeding in removing something from somewhere).

(19) The Peloponnesian War is about to break out, the enemies of Pericles will *pull out* the curse of the Alcmaeonidae to use against him, because his mother was of Alcmaeonids family. *(Introduction to Ancient Greek History/Yale)*

(20) The lost state of Franklin had this little tiny moment of almost existing and then "poof," it was *put out*. *(The American Revolution/Yale)*

(21) Since we don't have clickers, but I want to *pull off* the same effect, and we can do this, because it's binary here. *(Quantum Physics I/MIT)*

The notion of pragmatic strengthening involving an upscaling of speaker attitude and involvement (Traugott 1988) was also evident. In example 22, *comes in* takes on a negative connotation related to an unjust intrusion or interference, while in example 23 *sitting around* implies critical attitude linked to idleness that leads to problems.

(22) What happens when the government *comes in* and says you have to pay $1.05 for every kilogram of pork you sell? *(Introduction to Microeconomics/MIT)*

(23) Look at what happens when you have a standing army *sitting around*. They can't help themselves; they're always threatening to overturn the government. *(The American Revolution/Yale)*

The lecturers also used some highly colloquial PVs typically associated with casual conversation between peers, as seen in examples 24-28. The uses of the latter two (i.e., *cop out* and *poke around*) also convey a sense of mild self-deprecation, perhaps to create a less authoritative atmosphere and build rapport with the audience, in line with previous work on lecture discourse in U.S. educational settings (Crawford Camiciottoli 2005; Dyer, Keller-Cohen 2000). From the perspective of interpersonal pragmatics, such "relational work" (Locher 2013, p. 236) reflects the process of building and maintaining relations in social-situated interactions.

(24) The bath is what they wanted most of all – a place where they could go to bathe, but also *hang out* with their family and friends. *(Roman Architecture/Yale)*

(25) But I'll sure ask you concept questions. I really want you to understand the principles. I don't get real *hung up* on having you do the grungy grind-it-out things. *(Engineering Dynamics/MIT)*

(26) You can bet they will be looking very carefully over the shoulders of the aristocratic archons whenever they are in power to see that they're not *screwing up*. *(Introduction to Greek History/Yale)*

(27) We're going to prove that under an assumption. We'll have to warm up a little bit. But I'm also going to *cop out* a little as you'll see. *(Introduction to Algorithms/MIT)*

(28) When I was *poking around*, researching this this morning, I found some book — I think it's called something like The Lost State of Franklin. *(The American Revolution/Yale)*

A final example illustrates the use of a PV in a highly discipline-specific context, namely, *glom on*, which is an informal way to express the notion of seizing and appropriating something for oneself (example 29). Here the use of the PV serves to highlight the exploitive nature of a virus in reproducing itself. This particular item is likely to be unfamiliar to L2 learners and would thus need to have its meaning reinforced in some way, perhaps through repetition

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(in this lecture, it is actually repeated three times) or with co-occurring non-verbal cues, such as descriptive gesturing.

(29) Where is the transforming principle in the little virus? It *gloms on* to the cell somehow gives something into the cell, and poof, 20 minutes later, half an hour later, lots of viruses. *(Fundamentals of Biology/MIT)*

5. Concluding remarks

This analysis of PVs in a corpus of academic lectures has provided some insights into their usage in an interactional setting that can be broadly characterized as institutional and asymmetrical, with expert to novice communication. Regarding the extent to which PVs were used in the lectures (Research Question 1), the quantitative results indicate that they were considerably more frequent than in casual conversation (cf. Biber *et al.* 1999). Concerning the different categories of PVs (Research Question 2), I distinguished those with figurative meanings from those with either literal or semi-transparent meanings (Laufer, Eliasson 1993), with the former accounting for almost half (46.8%). Given the potentially challenging nature of figurative PVs for L2 listeners, these items were then the focus of the in-depth contextual analysis to identify patterns of usage (Research Question 3). This analysis revealed that many figurative PVs encoded meanings that are core features of the lecture genre: discourse structuring to guide listeners through the lecture and mental process verbs related to the understanding of conceptual knowledge. Such usage could also contribute to the higher frequency of PVs overall in the lectures with respect to general English conversation. There was also a high level of variation across PV types, with roughly half occurring only once and including several that were highly idiomatic and non-compositional in meaning. A number of figurative PVs with pragmatically modulated meanings were detected in the corpus, for example, PVs with new meanings in particular contexts of usage derived from the pragmatic strengthening of their central senses, as well as those that functioned interpersonally to manage the rapport between lecturers and audiences.

The complex synergy of distinctive lexical, semantic, and pragmatic features of the PVs found in the Yale/MIT OCW lecture corpus lends support to previous research that has highlighted their capacity to create difficulties for L2 learners (Celce-Murcia, Larsen-Freeman 1999; Cornell 1985; White 2012), and thus leads to important pedagogical implications. First, because the presence of L2 students in lecture audiences is now a given in the era of globalized higher education, lecturers need to be aware of these students' needs and, specifically, the potential comprehension issues of PVs. Although it is unrealistic to expect content lecturers to analyse their own lecture discourse or

to unnaturally control their use of PVs, they could be encouraged to monitor L2 learners' comprehension of them and be prepared to assist them through strategies to enhance understanding such as repetition, reformulation, or non-verbal cues that mirror or reinforce meanings. Indeed, Lynch (1994) and Flowerdew and Miller (1996) have advocated for training initiatives to prepare lecturers for international audiences and there is some evidence that native English-speaking content lecturers have attempted to make adjustments to their speech delivery and vocabulary to facilitate international students (Crawford Camiciottoli 2005, 2007; Flowerdew, Miller 1996). Second, language practitioners involved in EAP teaching and specifically in preparing L2 students for English lecture listening experiences, need to become more aware of the differing degrees of transparency/opaqueness in PVs. Such knowledge would provide practitioners with more insights into why some PVs may be particularly problematic for learners. Specific professional development activities could be organized for this purpose. As Armstrong (2004, p. 223) argues, it is not sufficient for English language instructors to have the "unconscious knowledge of the native speaker" in relation to PVs; they must develop a "conscious awareness of the semantic systems underlying these complex constructions". In this way, they will be better equipped to teach PVs more effectively and meaningfully to the benefit of their students.

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Annex

	Phrasal verb	Meaning in context of usage	Frequency
	go on	happen	39
	figure out	understand something through careful thinking	28
	turn out	develop or end in a particular way	25
	end up	reach or come to an unexpected conclusion	18
	come up with	think of an idea, answer or solution	16
	come back	talk about again	13
	go back	talk about again	10
	go on	continue talking	10
	come along	insert oneself into a situation	9
	look up	search for meaning in a text	9
	set up	start a process or establish something	9
	take over	conquer	9
	give up	stop trying to do something	7
	live on	continue to exist	6
	get back	return to something/someplace	5
	start off	begin something	5
	break down	divide into parts for the purpose of analysis	4
	glom on	seize and appropriate for oneself	4
	pick up	accelerate	4
	pop up	appear unexpectedly	4
	use up	use all of something so that there is no more left	4
	build up	accumulate	3
	come up	be talked about or discussed	3
	get down	direct attention and effort to understanding something	3
	hold back	prevent from doing something	3
	hold on	wait for a short time	3
	knock off	cause to become separated	3
	make up	constitute	3
	play out	develop and come to an end	3
	show up	arrive at a place	3
	sit back	relax and not become anxious	3
	work out	calculate	3
	work out	develop or end in a successful way	3
	write up	write something in a complete and final form	3
	back up	return to a previous talking point	2
	break out	start suddenly	2
	bring up	mention and start to talk about something	2
	come about	happen	2
	conjure up	evoke an idea about something	2
	cut back	reduce the amount of something	2
	drop out	stop being part of something	2
	fall off	decrease in quantity	2
	hang out	spend time with other people	2
	knock out	eliminate	2
	mess up	do something badly	2
	move on	talk about something different	2
	pick up	pay for	2
	pull out	bring something into a discussion in a strategic way	2
	set out	intend to do	2
	start out	begin talking about	2
	take out	underwrite an official document	2
	think through	consider a problem carefully and completely	2
	throw out	reject something	2
	turn over	give responsibility for something to someone	2
	beat back	make someone move backwards	1
	brew up	become problematic	1
	carve out	find space/time for something	1
	clear up	find an explanation for something	1

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		close off	bring the lecture to a conclusion	1
		comes in	insert oneself into a situation	1
		cook up	invent a plan to avoid something	1
		cop out	avoid doing something that should be done	1
		crop up	appear unexpectedly	1
		curse out	berate with curse words	1
		cut down	reduce the amount of something	1
		die down	become less strong gradually	1
		die off	become extinct	1
		fall back	return to a previous course of action	1
		fix up	renovate an object	1
		flesh out	discover more information about something	1
		follow through	complete something that was started	1
		freeze out	prevent someone from taking part in something	1
		get back	contact someone again	1
		get back	talk about again	1
		get off	send something by post or other form	1
		go over	discuss in detail	1
		go through	discuss in detail	1
		hung up	become excessively concerned or worried about something	1
		kick in	start to work or have an effect	1
		lay out	discuss in an organized way	1
		leave off	stop talking about something	1
		make out	manage to see something	1
		make up	invent	1
		narrow down	reduce number of possibilities gradually	1
		pick up on	begin talking about again	1
		pick up	obtain	1
		poke around	do slowly without hurrying	1
		pull off	succeed in doing something	1
		put out	made irrelevant	1
		put up	display in a public place	1
		put up with	accept something that is annoying or unpleasant	1
		rise up	start a fight and refuse to obey	1
		rule out	decide that something is not possible	1
		screw up	do something badly	1
		send off	send something by post	1
		settle down	get used to a new situation	1
		shut down	put an end to something	1
		shut off	keep separate	1
		sit around	spend time doing very little	1
		stand out	be clearly visible	1
		start over	begin explaining something again	1
		step back	reflect calmly and deliberately on something	1
		stir up	cause trouble	1
		take on	challenge someone	1
		tap into	manage to use something for good results	1
		team up	work together with someone else to do something	1
		tease out	find information that is hidden or not clear	1
		touch on	mention a topic briefly	1
		whip out	take something out quickly and suddenly	1
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ON THE ROLE OF GESTURES IN THE COMPREHENSION OF PHRASAL VERBS AND IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH
A case study comparing the performance of learners with and without dyslexia

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Abstract – This contribution focuses on the role of spontaneous gestures in the comprehension of co-occurring phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions by learners of English as a foreign language. The hypothesis at the basis of the work is that iconic gestures may assist in the understanding of semantically opaque expressions not only learners with typical development, but also learners with developmental dyslexia, who tend to have greater difficulty in processing figurative language and pragmatic meanings. An experiment was run covering 11 not-fully compositional verbs and non-transparent idioms as linguistic stimuli accompanied by iconic and metaphoric gestures, which were taken from authentic audio-visual materials. Two groups of Italian students, with and without dyslexia and consisting of 23 members each, from undergraduate courses at the University of Pisa were recruited for the experiment. Each student was exposed to the same stimuli via two different modes, namely audio and video, following different orders of presentation. The results seem to support the initial hypothesis, as highlighted by the better performance elicited through the visual mode where gestures were clearly visible, especially when learners with dyslexia were involved. Consequently, the study provides evidence in favour of a multimodal orientation and use of correlated strategies in the learning/teaching of English as a foreign language in general, and even more so when learners with dyslexia are present.

Keywords: Idiomatic expressions; phrasal verbs; language comprehension; multimodal literacy.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to cast light on the potential contributions of unprompted gestures co-occurring with opaque idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs for their comprehension by non-native learners of English as a foreign language.

Speech formulas, such as idioms and phrasal verbs, are key elements to prompt fluency in English learners' production, and their understanding is vital to ensure smooth and effective communication (Gibbs 2012; Wood 2019; Wray

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[1] Although the research was carried out jointly by the two authors, Silvia Masi wrote sections 3, 4, 6 and 7, and Gianmarco Vignozzi wrote sections 1, 2, and 5.

2002). Despite being natural and extremely common fixed expressions for English native speakers, idioms and phrasal verbs are often perceived as a source of difficulty and distress by non-native learners. This is especially the case when the meaning of these expressions is completely idiomatic, i.e., when it is non-transparent and does not correspond to the sum of the meanings of the single lexemes. If such difficulties in decoding the meaning-making of opaque expressions are true for typically-developing students (Cacciari, Corradini 2015; Siyanova-Chanturia *et al.* 2011), studies have shown that students with developmental dyslexia face particular challenges when processing these instances of non-literal language (cf. *inter alia* Cappelli, Noccetti 2016; Cardillo *et al.* 2018; Griffiths 2007).

Since some gestures, and in particular the iconic and metaphoric ones, tend to represent entities and ideas expressed through speech, we decided to investigate whether they could have a role in easing learners' decoding of semantically complex expressions such as idioms and phrasal verbs.

By relying upon an experimental study conducted on Italian learners of English with and without developing dyslexia from the University of Pisa, our research aims to answer the following broad research question:

- Can students with and without dyslexia take advantage from gestures accompanying idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs, thus showing gesture potential to help decode their meaning?

The article is divided into seven sections. Section two introduces the concept of formulaic language and reviews some of the most relevant studies on English idioms and phrasal verbs. Section three presents gesture studies and gives information about their communicative functions and potentials in discourse. In section four the experimental test at the basis of this research is carefully described and exemplified. Results are then gathered and assessed in section five and critically wrapped-up in sections six and seven.

2. Formulaic language, phrasal verbs and idioms

Idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs pertain to the wide category of formulaic language, i.e., "multiword language phenomena which holistically represent a single meaning or function and are likely mentally stored and used as unanalysed wholes, as are single words" (Wood 2019, p. 30). In other words, formulaic expressions are recurrent word strings whose meaning is not necessarily the result of a word-by-word reading, but it is often attached to the formula as a whole. They are, therefore, ready-to-use in the mental lexicon of the speaker and not necessarily generated by language grammar rules.

Formulaicity is widely acknowledged to play a pivotal role in language production and this is especially true for the English language (Barlow 2011). In

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fact, Erman and Warren (2000) claim that formulaic sequences make up to over 50% of English native speakers' language production and Conklin and Schmitt (2012) maintain that at least one-third to one-half of English spoken conversation is composed of formulaic elements.

Psycholinguistic research, in particular, has found out that the usage of formulaic language is a key element to speech fluency. Indeed, these fixed sequences act as mental shortcuts that contribute to avoid processing overload in native speakers and hearers, as well as in second language learners (cf. *inter alia* Cacciari, Tabossi 1988; Gibbs 2012; Wood 2015, 2019; Wray 2002, 2008).

Classifying the different linguistic phenomena ascribable under the umbrella term of formulaic language is quite challenging as the boundaries among the categories are often blurred. On the basis of recurrent structural, semantic, syntactic or pragmatic regularities, Wood (2019, p. 31) upholds that the "main categories of [formulaic language] are collocations, idioms, lexical phrases, lexical bundles, metaphors, proverbs, phrasal verbs, n-grams, conc-grams, and compounds". In this contribution we focus in particular on idioms and phrasal verbs, which, apart from being among the most wide-spread instances of formulaic language, share a similar semantically opaque and non-compositional nature. Indeed, figuration is what makes their meaning particularly challenging especially for learners of English as a second language with or without special needs (Cacciari, Corradini 2015; Siyanova-Chanturia *et al*. 2011).

Given their limited flexibility (Moon 1998), the institutionalised and non-transparent nature of their meaning (Fernando and Flavell 1981; Glucksberg 2001), and the fact that they are stored and processed holistically as chunks (Wray 2002), idiomatic expressions are generally considered the most representative type of formulaic language in discourse (Wood 2019). Idioms could be defined as stable strings of words "that convey speaker meaning that cannot be determined by simply adding up the meanings of each word or morpheme" (Gibbs 2012), i.e., their meaning is non-compositional and non-literal; thus not easily intelligible to learners with a limited knowledge of the language.

Scholars in the field of semantics have proposed different scales or continuum of idiomaticity (cf. *inter alia* Fernando 1996; Fernando, Flavell 1981; Glucksberg 2001; Moon 1998) distinguishing between more transparent idioms, e.g., 'white lie', where the word 'white' has a figurative meaning and 'lie', instead, is connected to its literal meaning, and fully opaque idioms (e.g., 'it's a piece of cake'), whose meaning is totally figurative.

From the point of view of usage, applied research has found that idioms are not simply embellishments to language deployed as colourful stylistic items to enrich plain and literal language, instead they are used to express meanings in a vivid and straightforward manner through metaphoric conceptualizations (Cooper 1999). This can also have pragmatic implications as it may help being more indirect and polite when expressing subjective positive or negative

evaluations (Carter 1997) and could also facilitate sharing ideas that can be problematic to communicate using literal language (Gibbs 2012).

Phrasal verbs, intended as non-compositional constructions of lexical verbs and adverbial or prepositional particles (Quirk *et al.* 1985), such as 'make up' meaning 'to invent', share with idiomatic expressions a similar semantic opacity and constructional fixedness. As Quirk *et al.* (1985, p. 1152) noticed "the meaning of the combination manifestly cannot be predicted from the meanings of verb and particle". In fact, just as idioms, phrasal verbs seem to function as single syntactic units whose meanings are memorised holistically, separately from the meanings of the component words (Wray 2002; Wood 2019). As a consequence, they are considered by some scholars as particular kinds of idiomatic expressions (Jackendoff 1995).

The high frequency of phrasal verbs in English emerged in different empirical quantitative studies, such as in Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) who defined them as ubiquitous in spoken interactions, and in Gardner and Davies (2007, p. 347) who estimated that "learners will encounter, on average, one [phrasal verb] in every 150 words of English they are exposed to".

Hence, the prevalence and usage of both idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs makes it very important to recognise and to acquire them for learners in order to become fluent and proficient in English, as well as to be able to follow a conversation smoothly. Notwithstanding that, their complex nature makes it very difficult for non-native learners, being them typically-developing students or students with dyslexia, to grasp their meanings.

3. Some notes on gesture research

3.1. Gesture types and functions

The field of modern gesture studies can be traced back to the 1970s, when researchers from different disciplines started to converge on the view of gesture and speech as two aspects of the same process (McCafferty, Stam 2008). Since then, different classifications of gesture types and functions have been proposed (e.g., Kendon 2004; Lin 2017; McNeill 1985, 1992, 2005; Weinberg *et al.* 2013, *inter alia*), some of which are briefly referred to below.

While emblems are language-like, conventional gestures that depend on a given culture (as the 'thumb up' gesture for 'ok'), gesticulations are spontaneous, often unconscious and idiosyncratic. Among the most influential categorisations is McNeill's distinction into beats (quick movements occurring at the meta-level of discourse), iconics (representing concrete entities and actions), metaphorics (derived from concrete representations but illustrating abstract ideas), deictics (pointing gestures) and cohesives (tying together discourse material) (McNeill 1992). The categories were later revised, due to the highly polysemous and

multifaceted nature of gestural forms, in favour of more flexible dimensions (such as iconicity, metaphoricity and deixis, among others, see McNeill 2005; also see Wagner, Malisz, Kopp 2014) for their characterisation in a given context. Further research has indeed highlighted that gesture-speech relationships can have variable functions (e.g., reinforcing, integrating, supplementary, complementary and contradictory, see Lin 2017) and can also be studied in terms of groupings of gestures or gesture families (e.g., Fricke *et al.* 2014; Kendon 2004; Müller 2004). As for the multiple functions of gestures, in particular, taking stock of around forty-five years of research, recent evidence reviews and new experimental findings have underlined their pervasive dual role in communication from the perspectives of both the speaker/producer and the listener/viewer (Church *et al.* 2017). From the point of view of gesture production, gestures have, for example, been found to reduce cognitive load (Cook, Fenn 2017; Ping, Goldin-Meadow 2010). A single act of gesture can in fact be viewed simultaneously as a reflection of the speaker/producer's cognitive processes and as a facilitator of lexical access, information packaging and other operations for the benefit of the listener/viewer's understanding (Hostetter, Boncoddo 2017).

3.2. Neurobiological and psychological evidence

Neurobiological and psychological evidence has indeed shown the potential of gestures to provide a more transparent version of events than speech, on account of their use of space and time in a holistic format. Additionally, thanks to mirror neurons, sensorimotor areas that are active in the brain when performing an action are also triggered when a person observes someone else performing that action, and this may be applied to the role of gestures in language understanding too (Müller *et al*. 2013). As a result, seeing someone's gestures may also activate the sensorimotor system of the viewer in similar ways (Hostetter, Boncoddo 2017). Gestures can even enhance or expand speech and transform our thinking and communication accordingly (Church, Goldin-Meadow 2017). For example, they have been found to foster the expression of latent ideas, along with problem-solving strategies and inference-making (Nathan 2017).

The psychological tenet underlying much research is in fact that gestures are a reflection of our embodied cognition, i.e., they are motivated by our sensorimotor experiences, by our understanding of concepts as grounded in the way we physically interact with the world (cf. *inter alia* Alibali, Nathan 2007; Cook, Fenn 2017; Hostetter, Boncoddo 2017; McNeill 2005; Müller *et al*. 2013). More precisely, gestures may profile aspects of basic and spatial image schemas which have been shown to structure source domains underpinning conceptual metaphors (Mittelberg 2018), thus providing the backbone for the development of more complex conceptual structures and abstract meaning extensions. As a matter of fact, not only can gestures represent objects, concrete actions and spatial relations, but they may also anchor abstract concepts in the world. By making

them more tangible, gestures act as a bridge between internal cognitive processes and the external environment (Beaudoin-Ryan 2017).

3.3. Evidence from SLA

Experimental research on the role of gestures in second language acquisition and learning/teaching has globally confirmed that congruent co-speech gestures may help in the comprehension, retrieval, memorisation and overall learning of novel vocabulary items (cf. Gullberg, McCafferty 2008; Lazaraton 2004; Kelly *et al.* 2009; Lazaraton and Ishihara 2005; Littlemore 2009; Littlemore *et al.* 2012; Macedonia, von Kriegstein 2012; Macedonia *et al.* 2011; Straube *et al.* 2009; Taleghani-Nikazm 2008). Although there is extensive variation cross-culturally and cross-linguistically in the interpretation of gestures (cf. Brown 2000 in Lazaraton 2004), the latter (along with other visual cues) have also been acknowledged a clarifying role in the interpretation of ambiguous, culturally-dependent rhetorical devices such as metaphoric expressions in L2, especially when learners' linguistic level is weak, as their understanding of metaphor may rely on a more general conceptual framework represented through gestures (Kida 2008).

3.4. The learning/teaching of phrasal verbs and idioms and the potential role of gestures

Raising awareness of conceptual structure as a motivating factor for linguistic organisation has been the rationale behind a great deal of Cognitive Linguistics-oriented research on word polysemy and correlated proposals for applications to pedagogy. Crucially for the purposes of the present study, the learning and teaching of English prepositions/particles, phrasal verbs and idioms have received a lot of attention from this perspective.

On many accounts, the senses of polysemous particles are conceived of as forming a semantic network in which the origin of senses can be explained by virtue of their relation to others in the network and especially to the core one, which stems from the cognitive domain of concrete, physical space. This primary sense, that is, motivates the emergence of more peripheral abstract senses via different types of figurative extensions that, in time, become conventionalised through repeated use (cf. Tyler, Evans 2003).[2]

As for idioms, research has shown that the 'dead' imagery behind them can be easily revived by referring to underlying conceptual metaphors (as a synchronic motivation) or by tracing the idiom back to its literal origin

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[2] For other relevant works, cf. Brugman, Lakoff 1988; Castillo 2017; Condon 2008; Dirven 2001; Holme 2009; Kartal, Uner 2017; Kurtyka 2001; Lakoff 1987; Lindner 1983; Lindstromberg 1998; Littlemore 2009; Mahpeykar, Tyler 2014; Masi 2011; Rudzka-Ostyn 2003; White 2012, *inter alia*.

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(diachronic motivation), which may also help to evoke a picture of a concrete scene (cf. Boers 2001; Boers *et al.* 2007; Kövecses 2001, also cf. Abolfazli, Sadeghi 2017; Boers, Lindstromberg 2008; Lazar 2003; Skoufaki 2005;, *inter alia*).

A widely shared aspect of all this literature is the valuable contribution of an array of visual cues as modes of presentation used for explanatory and learning purposes, viz. static schematic representations and pictorial illustrations, but also moving images and audiovisual aids (cf. Takahashi, Matsuya 2013), role-plays and movies (in the teaching of idioms, cf. Abolfazli, Sadeghi 2017). Gestures have been broached too (Littlemore 2009, and esp. cf. Holme 2009 for suggestions on their use to grasp the different senses of some prepositions), although, as far as we know, their plausible effectiveness as an enhancement strategy for the understanding of phrasal verbs and idioms largely remains to be ascertained from an experimental point of view, especially as far as their possible impact on learners with dyslexia is concerned.

4. Research hypotheses and assumptions

In previous research on the role of gestures in different multimodal genres for the development of multimodal literacy in ESP teaching (see Masi 2016, 2019, 2020 on TED Talks; Vignozzi 2016, 2019 on animated movies and on TV interviews)[3], it was indeed noticed that in several cases they tended to meaningfully represent objects, dynamic actions and/or spatial relations as concrete bases standing for the non-compositional, abstract meanings of some English phrasal verbs and idioms. Inspired by the evidence on gesture functions and effects briefly presented in the preceding overview, we hypothesised that 1) they may enhance the salience and transparency of such notoriously problematic vocabulary items via reification, and that 2) they may do so not only for the benefit of students of English in general, but also for learners with developmental dyslexia in particular, as the latter have been found to especially take advantage from a multimodal presentation of vocabulary input (Cappelli, Noccetti 2016; Noccetti, Cappelli 2018). Indeed, authentic multimodal input for stimuli presentation can provide a useful basis for studying any type of communicative behaviour in order to improve that behaviour and our understanding of the underpinnings of multimodal literacy (see for example Bonsignori *et al.* 2022 and Bonsignori, Crawford Camiciottoli 2016). We thus embarked on a small pilot experimental study to verify the validity of such hypotheses.

The objection may be raised that cross-cultural and cross-linguistic variation in the use of gestures is a possible argument against our hypotheses, as

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[3] Audio-visual genres are in fact being exploited more and more in language instruction (cf. Bonsignori, Crawford Camiciottoli 2016; Crawford Camiciottoli, Bonsignori 2015; Takaesu 2013, *inter alia*).

gestures may actually reflect different cultural-historical conceptualisations of the world (McCafferty 2008). However, research has also shown similar preferences of gesture-speech production by speakers despite different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Lin 2017). In fact, we did not take into account cross-cultural differences in this first stage, and we assumed the following: 1) nonverbal modes of communication are more universal in the form-meaning relationship than those relationships are in speech; 2) a great deal of gestures are motived by highly shared basic conceptual structures and cognitive-semiotic processes grounded in nature; 3) continuous exposure to multiple media inputs where English is pervasively available, also as a lingua franca (Hanamoto 2017) in an ever more interconnected global community, may be responsible for an increasingly generalised internalisation /or even reduction of differences, with correlated heightened cross-cultural meaningfulness and a clarifying potential of some such conceptualisations.

4.1. Test design and methodology

In order to verify our hypotheses, eleven stimuli (i.e., eight phrasal verbs and three idioms) with not fully transparent meanings and accompanied by metaphoric and iconic gestures (McNeill 1992) were taken from the preceding multimodal research mentioned above.[4] Two groups of informants were selected, one consisting of Italian learners of English with developmental dyslexia (henceforth referred to as Dys)[5], and the other of Italian learners of English with typical development (henceforth referred to as CG for control group). Each comprised twenty-three students from nineteen to twenty-five years of age, all enrolled in different degree programmes at the University of Pisa.[6]

The test methodology was inspired by relevant experimental studies based on the manipulation of the presence/absence of gesture (Church *et al.* 2017), as research has shown that, when processing speech, manipulation results in altered brain activity (Kelly 2017). Thus, each informant was exposed twice to the same stimuli, which were presented by means of both short audio clips and videos (in which significant co-speech gestures were visible). Also, each group of students was further divided into two subgroups (Dys 1 and 2; CG A and B), in which questions had an alternate distribution depending on modes, in order to verify the effect of different combinations of mode presentation on learners' performance. In other words, stimuli presented first through audio clips and then through videos in Dys 1 followed a reversed order – first via video, then via audio – in Dys 2, with the same pattern applied to CG A and B.

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[4] See Masi 2016, 2019, 2020, Vignozzi 2016, 2019.

[5] All of them had been officially diagnosed with the condition, as confirmed by the Disability Office of the University (Ufficio Servizi per l'Integrazione di studenti con Disabilità - USID).

[6] They came from different secondary schools and had, on average, a lower-intermediate level of English.

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The test was run on the 'Moodle' University platform (https://elearning.humnet.unipi.it/), was timed for 35 minutes, had the format of multiple-choice questions (with one question per page), except for the first, which was aimed at ascertaining the informants' possible prior knowledge of the target items. A last question was included to elicit informants' feedback on their impressions on the extent to which the audiovisual mode had helped them identify the correct options.[7] Below is a screenshot of such 'diagnostic' question (Figure 1), which also presents the list of the target expressions of the experiment (the latter are in the infinitive form, although they were often in the past in the actual clips):
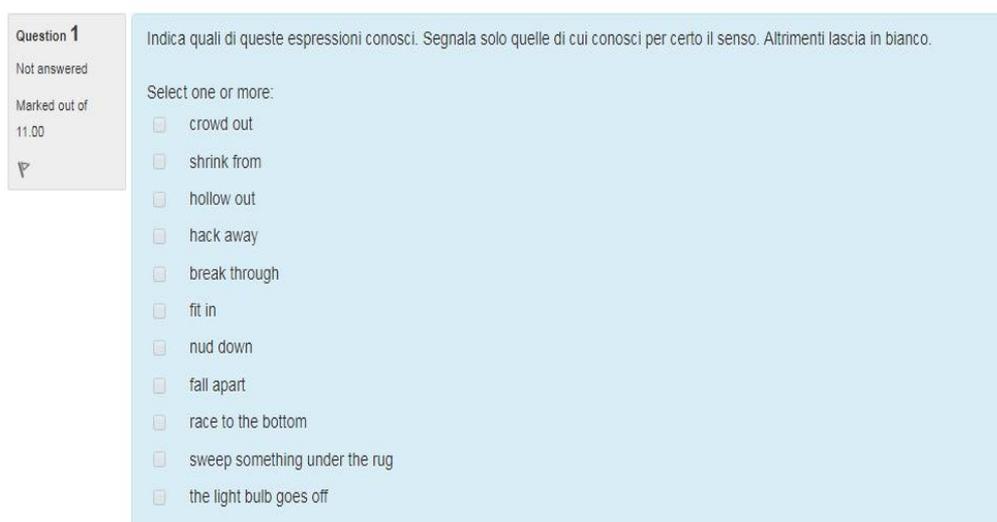
Figure 1
Screenshot of question 1 in the test.[8]

As can be seen from the list, a pseudo verb (*nud down*) was also part of the experiment, and was accompanied by a metaphoric gesture (compatible with *down*) intuitively guiding interpretation, while an existing phrasal verb (*fall apart*) was synchronised with a counterintuitive gesture – in a clip of our own construction – so as to verify the impact of incongruent or conflictual information on our informants' performance, especially on the Dys group's (cf. Section 4.1 and 4.2). Indeed, neurological evidence has shown that the brain expects gesture information to coordinate with speech (Kelly 2017), and experimental studies have also found that gestures conveying information that is incongruent or in

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[7] Approximate translation of instructions in the question: In the test, did the video clips help you understand the meanings of the expressions in bold type? Answers options: yes, sometimes; never; always, not very much.

[8] Approximate translation of instructions in the question: Indicate the expressions that you are familiar with. Select only those you know for sure. Do not select anything in case the expressions are not familiar.

conflict with the information conveyed in speech can hinder understanding (Kelly *et al*. 2004).

By way of illustration, below are two sample questions from the test, with screenshots from the videos. The first (Figure 2) includes the representation of one phrasal verb, i.e., *fall apart,* accompanied by a presumably incongruent gesture of both hands converging at the centre, in front of the speaker, rather than moving out and away in opposite directions, which would have been a more congruent representation of two people going separate ways after the end of their relationship. The second (Figure 3) relates to the idiom *light bulb goes off*, with the speaker's hand opening next to his head to represent the bulb that lights up as an idea suddenly comes to his mind.

Example 1: They tried to save their marriage by going to therapy. In the end, it fell apart anyway.

Figure 2
Screenshot of question with video for *fell apart* and incongruent gesture.[9]

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[9] Approximate translation of instructions and of options: In the video clip you are about to watch, which of the options given below best captures the meaning of 'fell apart'? a. worked, b. was shuttered, c. stayed the same.

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Example 2: When on my trip, the product worked so well that the light bulb went off.

Figure 3
Screenshot of question with video for *the light bulb went off.*[10]

Even though context plays an important role in meaning disambiguation, the length of samples was kept to a minimum (ten to fourteen seconds) in the attempt to exclude the possible contribution of other linguistic cues as much as possible and better appreciate the effect of co-verbal gestures alone.

5. The results of the test

The analysis of the results of the test started off with the evaluation of the overall performance of the two groups of participants, i.e., Dys and CG, in recognizing the meaning of the idiomatic expressions and the phrasal verbs presented in the test. Figure 4 shows the percentages of correct and incorrect answers in recognizing the meanings of the stimuli in the two groups.
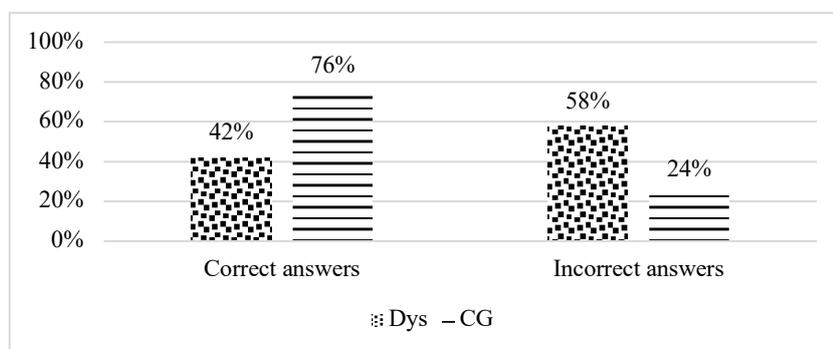
Figure 4
Overall test performances.

[10] Approximate translation of instructions and of options: In the video clip you are about to watch, which of the options given below best captures the meaning of 'the light bulb went off'? a. I forgot, b. I had an idea, c. I unplugged myself (mentally).

On a surface level, we can notice that the CG gave more correct answers than the Dys group (76% the former and 42% the latter). Such a result is perfectly in line with the studies carried out by Cappelli and Noccetti (2016) and Noccetti and Cappelli (2018) that bring to the fore the difficulties of processing and understanding figurative language and pragmatic meanings for dyslexics in particular.

If we observe more in detail whether correct answers are paired either with auditory or with audiovisual stimuli, it emerges that both groups were more likely to answer correctly when assessing audiovisual stimuli (Figure 5). This suggests that the audiovisual stimulus is more easily intelligible both for Dys students and for the CG.
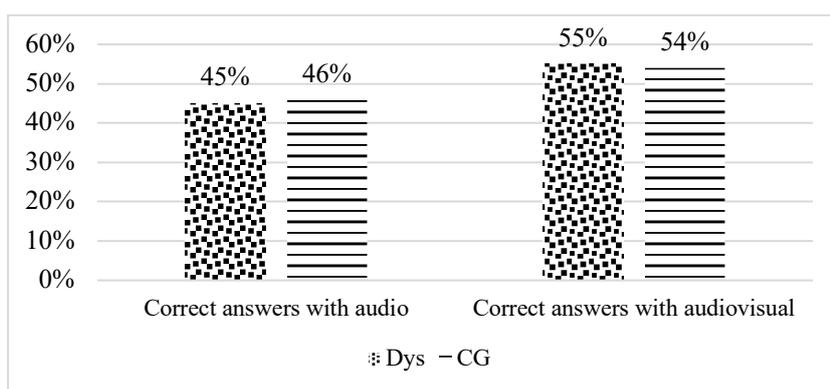
Figure 5.
Correct answers with audio and audiovisual stimuli

After considering the overall performances of the two groups, we attentively assessed the combinations of the response patterns in relation to the modes of presentation of the stimuli as well as their order of administration: either auditory first and then audiovisual or the other way round. This should help to evaluate possible performance divergences triggered by the different semiotic modes involved in the retrieval of the meaning.

Regardless of the order of administration of the stimuli, in both groups there were several pairs in which the answer to the audiovisual stimulus was correct while the one to the auditory stimulus was incorrect (hereafter 'Type 1' sequences) (Figure 6). Type 2 sequences, instead, comprised audiovisual mode with correct answers followed by the auditory one featuring again a correct answer. Hence, the good performance in the auditory mode could depend, at least in part, on the positive influence of the preceding audiovisual input. Both Type 1 and Type 2 appear to be compatible with our hypothesis about the potentially beneficial effect of the audiovisual input to discern the meaning of the idiom or the phrasal verb they had to evaluate.

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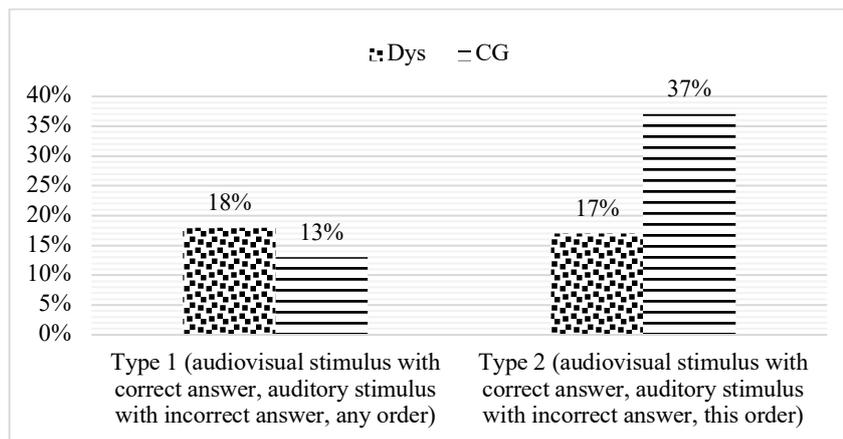
Figure 6
Sequences of answers: Type 1 and Type 2.

In more detail, the results for the sequence of modes of presentation displayed in Type 1 seem to confirm the preference students with dyslexia have for the audiovisual stimulus. In 18% of cases, they gave the correct answer when presented with the audiovisual stimulus but the incorrect one when evaluating the auditory alone, as compared to the control group for which the same condition occurred in 13% of cases. On the contrary, the CG more often had both answers (Type 2, first to the audiovisual then to the auditory stimulus) correct (37% as compared to 17% for Dys).

If the modes illustrated in Type 1 and Type 2 seem to support the effectiveness of the audiovisual input to decode the meaning of idioms and phrasal verbs, other sequences of answers seem to privilege the influence of the auditory stimulus. In some cases, in fact, we noticed counterintuitive combinations (hereafter Type 3 sequences) with respect to the starting research hypothesis. Counterintuitive combinations are those in which the auditory stimulus corresponds to the correct answer and the subsequent audiovisual stimulus to the incorrect answer, as if the video had confused students' ideas or had been misinterpreted. Finally, two last combinations that could be detected are the one featuring a correct response associated with the auditory stimulus, followed by an equally correct response with the audiovisual stimulus (hereafter 'Type 4') and another with incorrect answers both to the audiovisual and the auditory stimulus, no matter the order of presentation (hereafter 'Type 5'). Figure 7 showcases the percentages of the modes of presentation in Type 3 and Type 4 sequences in the two groups.
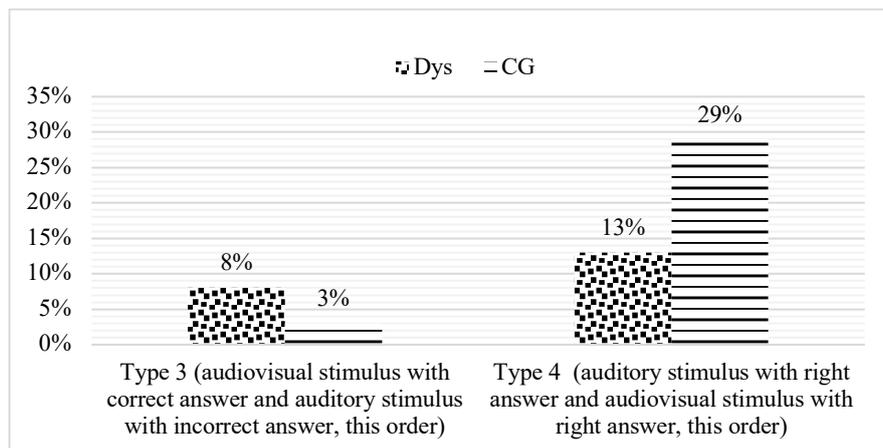
Figure 7
Sequences of answers: Type 3 and Type 4.

Quantitative data indicate that the CG gave fewer counterintuitive answers (Type 3) and overall performed better than the students with dyslexia when the auditory stimulus preceded the audiovisual one (Type 4). However, this trend could also suggest their deeper previous knowledge of the idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs presented in the test. This aspect could be verified by evaluating the answers given to question 1, in which we asked the informants to specify which of the stimuli presented they already knew.

5.1. The case of "nud down"

A case that deserves to be mentioned separately is that of *nud down*, a pseudo phrasal verb that we created *ad hoc* to test whether the audiovisual stimulus would lead the students to attach to it the meaning triggered by the visual mode. In fact, in the video the speaker uses a metaphoric gesture, synchronised with the verb, in which the speaker moves something away from herself and towards the outside. This gesture should be explanatory of the meaning that we intended as the correct one in the test, i.e., to drive away. In other words, the stimulus was crafted to intuitively guide the informants' interpretation towards the correct answer.

If we evaluate the answers given to this particular stimulus, it is interesting to notice that the group of students with dyslexia gave more correct answers in correspondence to the audiovisual stimulus than the CG. Figure 8 puts together the figures for Type 1 and Type 2 sequences for this particular stimulus.

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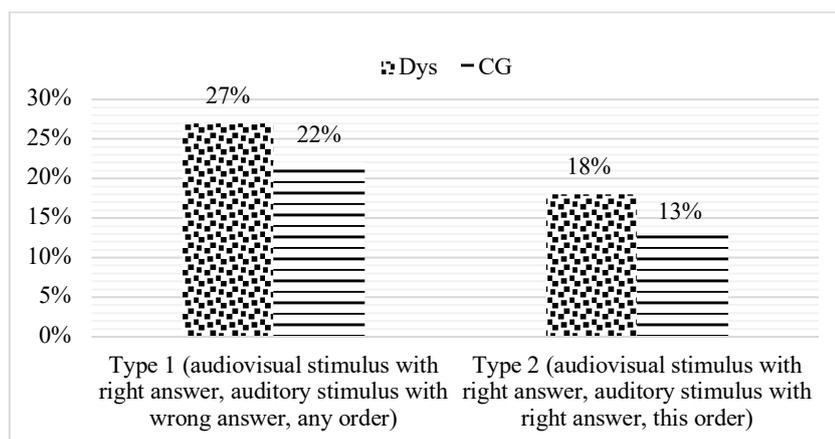
Figure 8
Type 1 and Type 2 sequences of answers for *nud down*.

In 27% of cases the students with dyslexia recognised the meaning of the pseudo phrasal verb when exposed to the audiovisual stimulus but not when assessing the auditory stimulus alone,[11] as compared to 22% for the CG. If we look at the performances in the sequences of answers with the correct answer with the audiovisual and the correct answer with the subsequent auditory stimulus (Type 2), a similar trend was observed for the Dys group, who featured 18% of these sequences vs. 13% for the CG. Therefore, these results seem to strengthen our starting hypothesis and the results discussed above according to which especially the group of students with dyslexia relies on the audiovisual stimulus to derive the meaning of unknown expressions.

5.2. The case of "fall apart"

Another case that is worth mentioning is that of *fall apart*, a phrasal verb meaning *to shatter* for which an audiovisual stimulus with a counterintuitive gesture was created. In fact, in the video the hands and the arms of the speaker converge towards the centre in front of her. To put it simply, the aim of this stimulus was to assess the misleading effect of a gesture that would metaphorically point to a wrong meaning. The pie charts below (Figure 9 and Figure 10) summarise the performances of the two groups for this stimulus.

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[11] This percentage refers to 'Type' 1 sequence of answers, for which the correct answer for the audiovisual stimulus and incorrect one for the auditory are considered in any order of appearance.
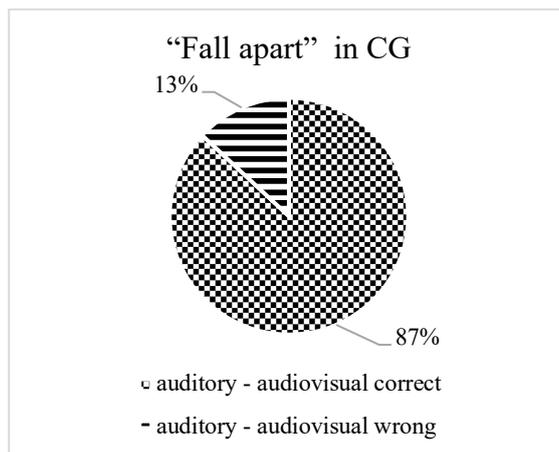
Figure 9
Fall apart CG.
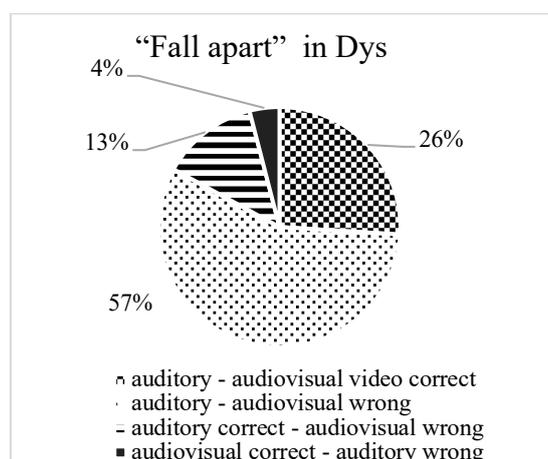
Figure 10
Fall apart Dys.

In the Dys group, in most cases there are combinations of incorrect answers both to the auditory and to the audiovisual stimulus (57% of cases, regardless of the order of presentation of the sequences). Moreover, there are also some cases of correct answer associated with the auditory stimulus and incorrect answer with the audiovisual one (13%). These results could lead to infer that when the prior knowledge of the lexical item is lower, as testified by answers to question 1 (cf. Section 4) the misleading visual input creates confusion and leads to wrong interpretations. The CG overall performed better with 87% of correct sequences of answers. Differently from the Dys group, none of them got confused by the misleading video. Such a result could suggest both a better prior knowledge of the meaning of the phrasal verb and a lower attention for what is suggested by the visual mode.

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6. Discussion and wrap-up

Among the expected results from this case study is surely the better performance of the CG (cf. Figure 4). The latter has also emerged from a lower degree of completely incorrect sequences of answers independently of the order of mode administration, viz. 18% vs 44% for the Dys group (cf. Type 5 in Figure 11 that summaries all our Types below).

	Dys	CG
type 1	18%	13%
type 2	17%	37%
type 3	8%	3%
type 4	13%	29%
type 5	44%	18%
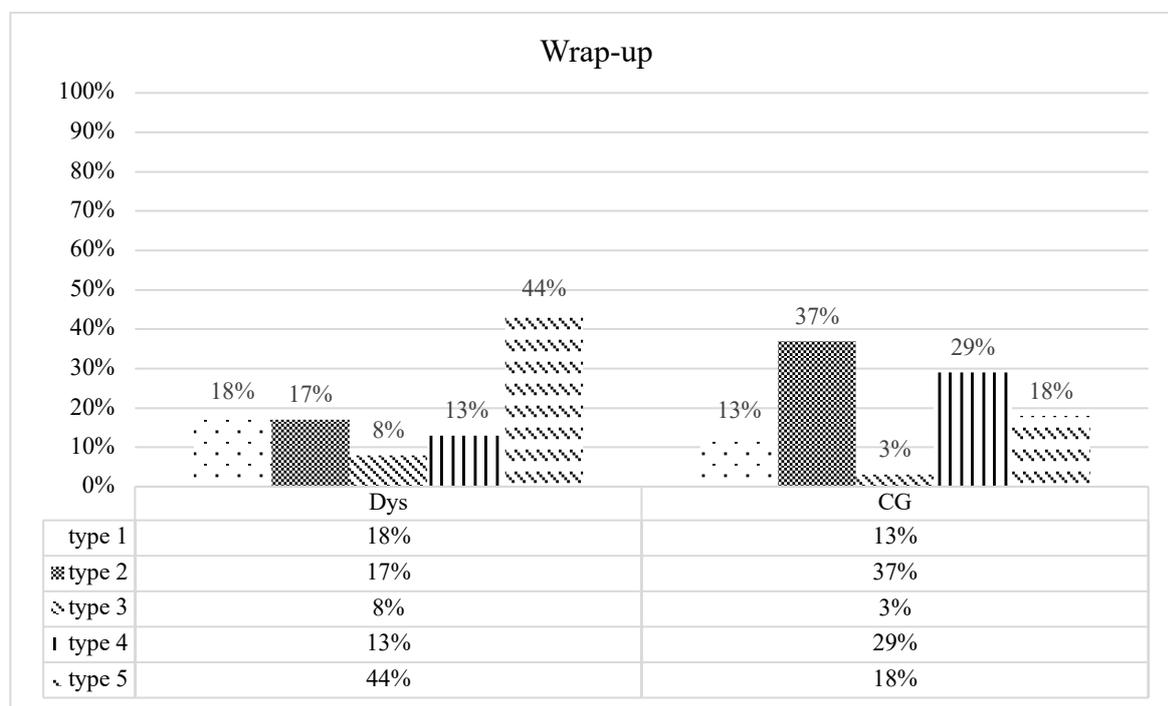
Figure 11
Summary of all Types involved in the study.

More significantly, the fact that the audiovisual stimulus was more intelligible than the audio both for Dys students and for the CG (with over 50% of correct answers in each group, see Figure 5) appears to confirm the validity of our first hypothesis, i.e., gestures captured in video clips may actually enhance the salience and transparency of problematic vocabulary items such as phrasal verbs and idioms via reification. Furthermore, of all the Types taken into account in the study, Type 1 (sequences with correct answers only when the stimulus was presented via audiovisual mode, independently of order of mode administration) appears as the most revealing as far as our second hypothesis was concerned, namely that gestures captured in video clips may be especially beneficial for learners of English with developmental dyslexia (see Figure 6). More data, gathered from a higher number of informants in both groups, would be necessary to further verify the validity of these results, along with a more stringent control of informants' prior knowledge of the targeted expressions.

In fact, the first diagnostic question in the test gave us some information on students' own evaluation of their prior knowledge of the expressions (which had to be selected from a list), with higher vocabulary skills predicted by the learners in the CG. However, informants' actual performance, together with data from the last feedback question on their perceived helpfulness of the video clips – which had 'yes, sometimes' as the most frequent answer, often displayed incongruent results with initial predictions. This suggests that the perception of learners' passive vocabulary knowledge cannot be trusted in full.

Although difficult to determine, knowing for sure whether an informant is already familiar with a given target expression would allow for the isolation of the role and better appreciation of the impact of mode of stimulus administration in other Types of sequences from the study. For example, it would enable us to determine whether the results of the correct interpretation of audio input in Type 2 sequences (preceded by correct interpretation of video input, see Figure 6) were actually prompted by the audiovisual mode or were rather influenced by better prior knowledge. The former case might apply to our Dys group, who generally evaluated their prior knowledge of items as lower than the CG, while the latter might be possibly true of CG students, who predicted higher vocabulary skills to start with. This interpretation would also comply with their good performance when audio stimuli preceded audiovisual ones, see Type 4 in Figure 7).

A selection of more homogeneous stimuli in terms of transparency – not only of expressions but also of gestures depicting them – would be necessary too. The stimuli that were easier to understand by Dys (that is, which received the highest number of correct answers by informants in this group) consisted of more iconic and / or transparent configurations, e.g., *hack away*, accompanied by the gesture of the speaker imitating the action of typing on a keyboard, and *race to the bottom*, accompanied by a gesture clearly pointing down. The students in this group also performed exceptionally well in the case of the pseudo verb *nud down* accompanied by a gesture illustrating a plausible (i.e., correct) interpretation in context, thus showing once again their greater reliance on other modes beyond the verbal one. The CG performed better in the case of *race to the bottom*, too, but also in the case of *break through*, accompanied by a slightly perceivable sudden gesture of the speaker's index pointing outwards to the front, and of *fall apart*, the verb we matched with a counterintuitive gesture, probably because they relied on prior knowledge of the item or on other contextual cues (such as verbal co-text, prosody, facial expressions), whose possible influence cannot be completely excluded. Informants from the Dys group, instead, performed poorly in this case, probably due to the confusing contribution of the incongruent gesture. Among the more difficult stimuli for both groups were *shrink from* and *crowd out*, more specialised in meaning and accompanied by more complex gesture configurations (on *crowd out* see Masi 2016).

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7. Conclusions

Overall, the present case study, even though small, provides evidence in favour of a multimodal orientation and use of visual input and gestures in the learning/teaching of English phrasal verbs and idioms, especially when learners with dyslexia are involved. Indeed, the results appear to point to a positive answer to our main research question as proposed in the introduction. This has been highlighted by the better performance elicited through the visual mode where gestures were clearly visible, especially when learners with dyslexia were involved.

It would then be both interesting and useful to replicate and expand the scope of the experiment to validate the findings above by gathering more data from more informants, also taking into account the possible influence of cultural factors to verify their actual impact on the interpretation of gestures.[12] A higher degree of control over some variables would also be necessary, especially over prior knowledge of the target expressions, degree of transparency and correlated difficulty of stimuli (conceived of as word/gesture match), and other contextual cues that may influence interpretations. Also, our study was based on authentic materials, which are the ideal source for stimuli selection, although the identification of suitable samples is far from easy and may be an obstacle to the developments of the research as suggested above.

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[12] On the great number of gestures used esp. by Italians, see for example Bonaiuto and Bonaiuto 2014, as well as Kendon 2004.

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CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURES OF EXTENDED METAPHOR IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract – The study aims at applying Kövecses' "multi-level view of conceptual metaphor" to extended metaphor. This model gives the possibility to explain systematically, from a cognitive point of view, the interactions and the relationships of the multiple micrometaphors contained within an extended metaphor. The idea is that the metaphors within the extended metaphor share the same image schema and domain in a scale of metaphorical conceptualisations, which goes from the most schematic level to the least schematic one. It is at the level of frames that the micrometaphors within the extended metaphor differ from each other and show their connections, because they elaborate different aspects of the same domain. The connections between the micrometaphors not only contribute to give cohesion and coherence to the text, but also allow the speaker to articulate the speech in an effective and comprehensible manner, and the addressee to better understand the message conveyed by the metaphor. In order to give empirical substance to my claim, Kövecses' model is applied to a series of extended metaphors found in everyday language and political discourse. In particular, to Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech.

Keywords: extended metaphor; conceptual structures; frames; multi-level view.

1. Introduction

Metaphor as figurative use of language has been analysed from the perspectives of various disciplines, including linguistics, stylistics and rhetoric that have studied its applications and effects in different contexts of use, from poetry to everyday language. This study deals with a particular type of metaphor which has received less attention especially in the field of linguistics: extended metaphor.

Extended or sustained metaphor is generally defined as a linguistic metaphor extending over more than one clause. It is often confused with allegory which has sometimes been used to include extended metaphor (Crisp 2005, pp. 325-6). Although allegory can be considered a super-extended metaphor, Crisp argues that the former displays a qualitative rather than just a quantitative difference with "ordinary" extended metaphor. In particular, extended metaphors create a conscious, and rather strange, experience of metaphorical blended spaces, while allegories refer to and characterise

fictional situations functioning as their metaphorical sources (Crisp 2008, p. 293).

The present work aims at analysing some instances of extended metaphor by applying Kövecses's (2020) theoretical model which makes a distinction between the various conceptual structures that come into play in the process of conceptual metaphor interpretation. Kövecses differentiates between image-schemas, domains, frames and mental spaces, placing them along a scale that goes from the most schematic structure (image-schemas) to the least schematic (mental spaces), which, however, is also the most specific, therefore richer in information.

Kövecses argues that conceptual metaphors are realised at four levels of schematicity in an interconnected vertical hierarchy of image-schemas, domains, frames, and mental spaces. In other words, contrary to how they are conceived in the literature, conceptual metaphors cannot and should not be connected to a single conceptual structure, such as frames or domains: they are at the same time complexes of all four of these structures. He calls this structuring the "multi-level view of metaphor". This study adopts that perspective in order to explain the articulation of an extended metaphor into two or more "micrometaphors".

Furthermore, the study aims to explore the contribution that the presence of an extended metaphor within the text can provide to the process of understanding the text itself. Following Rezanova and Shilyaev's (2015) studies, I will argue that extended metaphor provides coherence and cohesion to the text. Moreover, I will show how it is used in political discourse with a rhetorical intention to persuade the audience. Finally, I will hypothesise that the presence of multiple micrometaphors that elaborate on multiple aspects of the frames may facilitate text comprehension, resulting in a lower demand on pragmatic resources.

In the following sections, I will describe Zoltan Kövecses' model, recalling the definition of the various conceptual structures adopted to describe the framework of conceptual metaphor; then, I will provide three examples of extended metaphors from three different contexts; finally, I will try to apply Kövecses' model to a series of extended metaphors from everyday discourse in order to account for the conceptual structures underlying it, with particular emphasis on Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech.

2. Conceptual structures

In his work "Extended conceptual metaphor theory", Kövecses (2020, p. 50) argues that Cognitive Linguistics uses a number of different categories to refer to the conceptual structures that constitute conceptual metaphors. The

most commonly employed one is that of domain (as in source and target domain), but several others are also in circulation, including image schemas (e.g., Lakoff 1990, 1993), frames (e.g., Kövecses 2006; Lakoff 1996), scenes (e.g., Grady 1997), mental spaces (e.g., Fauconnier, Turner 2002), schemas (e.g., Lakoff, Turner 1989), and scenarios (e.g., Musolff 2006, 2016).

For this reason, it is difficult to identify the appropriate conceptual unit which comes into play in the formation of conceptual metaphors. It may be argued that we can replace one unit with another without affecting the process of metaphorical categorisation; or that some conceptual structures are inappropriate for describing this operation. For instance, both Grady (1995) and Musolff (2006), although for different reasons, claim that domains are not the appropriate units to modulate this process.

Kövecses (2020, p. 51) claims that it is best to think of conceptual metaphors as simultaneously involving conceptual structures, or units, on several distinct levels of schematicity (see, e.g., Lakoff 1987; Langacker 1987; Rosch 1978). He distinguishes four such levels: the level of image schemas, the level of domains, the level of frames, and the level of mental spaces (in addition to the linguistic level of the actual utterances with which the metaphors are instantiated). Kövecses describes this proposal as a new comprehensive framework for the study of metaphor in Conceptual Metaphor Theory: the "multi-level view of conceptual metaphor".

Central to this view is the notion of schematicity, a term of Cognitive Grammar that refers to the level of detail in the form or the function of constructions. It is defined as the relation between a schema and its instantiation, where the schema is a relatively unspecified conceptual structure whereas the instantiations have a higher degree of specificity (Kerevičien 2009, p. 2). The multi-level view of conceptual metaphor places the conceptual structures involved in the process of metaphorical categorisation in a hierarchy of schematicity.[1] Within this hierarchy, the four conceptual structures occupy different levels disposed from the most schematic to the least schematic, as in Figure 1.

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[1] This view entails that, given particular concepts, the various levels of schematicity form a continuous hierarchy; the various levels shade gradually into more or less schematic levels. In other words, the levels within such schematicity hierarchies do not have rigid boundaries but are graded as regards their schematicity. For instance, the concept of JOURNEY presupposes the more schematic structure of MOTION and, more specifically, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL MOTION (to distinguish it from other types of motion) (Kövecses, 2020: 52).
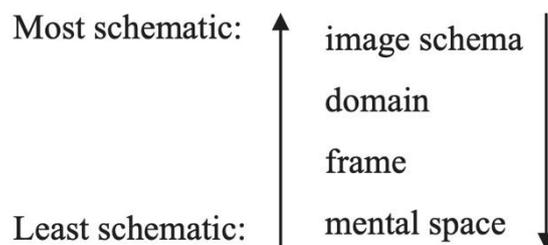
Figure 1
Schematicity hierarchy for four conceptual structures (Kövecses, 2020, p. 52).

The least schematic unit is also the most specific one, which means it is the unit providing the highest amount of information.

2.1. Image-schemas

Mark Johnson defines an image schema as "a recurring dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence to our experience" (Johnson 1987). Image schemas have several important properties: they are imagistic, not propositional, in nature; they are relatively abstract conceptual representations that arise directly from our everyday interaction with and observation of the world. More specifically, they are concepts arising from embodied experience. These structures are meaningful at the conceptual level precisely because they derive from the level of bodily experience, which is directly meaningful. For example, our image-schematic concept COUNTERFORCE arises from the experience of being unable to proceed because some opposing force is resisting our attempt to move forward (Evans, Green 2006, p. 301). Among the most common image schemas we find OBJECT, CONTAINER, LINK, CENTRE-PERIPHERY, CYCLE, NEAR-FAR, SCALE, PART-WHOLE, CONTACT, PROCESS, PATH and VERTICALITY (cf. Johnson 1987).

The term 'image' in 'image-schema' is equivalent to the use of this term in psychology, where imagistic experience relates to and derives from our experience of the external world. Another term for this type of experience is sensory experience, because it comes from sensory-perceptual mechanisms that include, but are not restricted to, the visual system (Evans, Green 2006, p. 178).

Kövecses (2020, p. 53) argues that "because of their highly schematic nature, image schemas range over the entire conceptual system making a wide variety of concepts and experiences meaningful. For example, the concept of journey presupposes the more schematic structure of MOTION and, more specifically, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL MOTION (to distinguish it from other types of motion). Further, concepts may take several image

schemas to support them conceptually. For example, the concept of BODY is based on the image schemas of CONTAINER, VERTICALITY, (STRUCTURED) OBJECT, and so on. Finally, concepts may be characterized by the same image schemas. For instance, the concept of BUILDING (in the sense of an enclosed construction), similar to the BODY, presupposes the CONTAINER, VERTICALITY, and OBJECT schemas".

2.2. Domains

Domains are necessarily cognitive entities: mental experiences, representational spaces, concepts, or conceptual complexes (Langacker 1987, p. 147). In other words, domains are conceptual entities of varying levels of complexity and organization.

The only prerequisite that a knowledge structure has for counting as a domain is that it provides background information against which lexical concepts can be understood and used in language (Evans, Green 2006, p. 230). Unlike image schemas, domains are not analogue, imagistic patterns of experience, but propositional in nature in a highly schematic fashion. They are at a level immediately below image schemas. If on the one hand image schemas make domains such as JOURNEY, BODY, and BUILDING (mentioned above as concepts) meaningful, on the other hand, domains have many more parts than image schemas, and are thus more information rich (Kövecses 2020, p. 53). In fact, they bring some relevant aspects of a concept to the foreground (Ruiz de Mendoza 2012): for instance, the concept of BODY can be used both to indicate our motor system and for spatial location or topological relationships (Heine 1997).

2.3. Frames

According to Fillmore (1982), a frame is a schematisation of experience (a knowledge structure), which is represented at the conceptual level and held in long-term memory. More specifically, the frame relates the elements and entities associated with a particular culturally embedded scene from human experience. Fillmore argues that words and grammatical constructions are relativised to frames, which means that the 'meaning' associated with a particular word (or grammatical construction) cannot be understood independently of the frame with which it is associated. The semantic frame is a knowledge structure required in order to understand a particular word or related set of words. Consider the related group of words: "buy", "sell", "pay", "spend", "cost", "charge", "tender", "change", and so on. Fillmore argues that in order to understand these words, we need access to a COMMERCIAL EVENT frame which provides 'the background and

motivation for the categories which these words represent' (Fillmore 1982, pp. 116–17).

According to Kövecses, the relationship undergoing between domains and frames is one of inclusion: domains include or consist of frames. Therefore, we can think about this relation also in terms of schematicity, with domains being more schematic and frames involving more specific information than domains.

2.4. Mental spaces

The concept of mental space derives from Fauconnier's Mental Spaces Theory:

> mental spaces are very partial assemblies constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action. They contain elements and are structured by frames and cognitive models. Mental spaces are connected to long-term schematic knowledge, such as the frame for WALKING ALONG A PATH, and to long-term specific knowledge. (Fauconnier 2007, p. 351)

Mental spaces are more specific than frames, in that they do not operate with generic roles and relations in most cases, but with specific instances of roles and relations. At the same time, they are also coherent organisations of experience, just like frames and domains, but they function at a very specific and conceptually-rich level. Moreover, mental spaces are used in online processing for purposes of local understanding (Kövecses 2020, p. 54).

2.5. Multi-level view and conceptual metaphor

Summing up, while image schemas exist as continuous and analogue patterns beneath conscious awareness, prior to and independently of other concepts (Hampe 2005, p. 1), domains and frames work on a different level of long-term memory, with frames offering more specific information than domains (although they do not cover all aspects of a domain). Finally, mental spaces are used in online processing in working memory. A fifth level is the one in which speaker and listener use symbols (linguistic or otherwise) that make manifest, or elaborate, the content of particular mental spaces (Kövecses 2020, p. 55). The four structures participate in metaphorical conceptualisation.

Following the studies of Grady (1997), Kövecses illustrates the example of the source domain of BUILDING, analysing it at different levels of schematicity. BUILDING is a concept that is based on, or characterised by, several image schemas, such as CONTAINER, VERTICALITY, PART-WHOLE, and OBJECT.

Domains are conceptually supported by image schemas in the sense

*L*ingue e
*L*inguaggi

that the image schemas apply to the various aspects of domains that characterise them. These aspects are essentially the concepts that belong to the domain matrix associated with BUILDING (Kövecses 2020, p. 68). In other words, domains elaborate image schemas. The domain of BUILDING also possesses several frames of BUILDING as a PROCESS, a PHYSICAL SUPPORT or frames related to its PARTS (walls, windows, rooms, etc.) or its FUNCTION. Thus, frames further elaborate the various aspects of domains. At the mental spaces (or scenario, as in Musolff 2006) level, we would have further specifications of any of the frames discussed above. For example, an elaboration of the BUILDING frame would be the mental space associated with a sentence like "John built himself a strong house" that indicates the specific individual who built the house and a structural property of the house. These are pieces of information that are not contained in the more schematic BUILDING frame (Kövecses 2020, pp. 59-60).

As for conceptual metaphors, the mappings between the source and target concepts occur on the same level: image schemas correspond to image schemas, domains to domains, frames to frames, and mental spaces to mental spaces (Kövecses 2020, p. 90). Take the conceptual metaphor THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, p. 46): the BUILDING source domain participates in the conceptualization of THEORIES by means of two frames within it: the BUILDING AS PROCESS frame (which gives rise to the first mapping of BUILDING and CREATION) and the PHYSICAL SUPPORT frame which structures two more mappings (ABSTRACT STABILITY and LASTINGNESS). The meanings of the conventionalised expressions, the three mappings on which they are based, the two frames associated with the BUILDING source domain, as well as the other constitutive frames are at the supraindividual level, i.e., at the level of long-term semantic memory, where we store decontextualized conceptual information related to building as a conceptual domain (Kövecses 2020, p. 63).

Then, this decontextualised information is used in real discourse, where people communicate interacting with each other and the context of utterance. The presence of information-rich context and the more flexible use of frame elements allows the participants to process online (i.e., at the level of mental spaces) a linguistic metaphor based on the PHYSICAL SUPPORT frame such as:

Is that the foundation for your theory? (Lakoff, Johnson 1980, p. 46)

Or we may have another linguistic metaphor based on the PROCESS frame such as:

Increasingly, scientific knowledge is constructed by small numbers of specialized workers. (Kövecses 2002, 2010).

In sum, a metaphor that is used in a specific communicative situation as part of a mental space will activate the frame structure to which it is linked, which will, in turn, activate the domain of which the frame is a part, and this activation will reach the image schema that conceptually supports the frame (Kövecses 2020, p. 69). In other words, conceptual metaphors cannot and should not be linked to a single conceptual structure, such as frames or domains. Conceptual metaphors are complexes of all four of these at the same time. Furthermore, this view is in line with Lakoff's (1993, p. 215) Invariance Principle, which states: "Metaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology (that is, the image-schema structure) of the source domain, in a way consistent with the inherent structure of the target domain".

3. Extended metaphor

As discussed above, the operation of metaphor processing extends to cover the four structures which participate in its formation. In this section, I would like to look at a specific aspect of this trope: the extension of the metaphorical field over more than one clause, which characterises extended metaphor.

Extended or sustained metaphor (or megametaphor, as in Rezanova, Shilyaev 2015) is a powerful linguistic device which is employed especially, but not exclusively, in literary language. According to Lakoff and Turner (1989), literary and ordinary metaphor do not differ in kind, but in terms of degree: "great poets, as master craftsmen, use basically the same tools we use; what makes them different is their talent for using these tools, and their skill in using them" (1989). However, Werth (1994, p. 84) argues that there are some differences between these two. In particular, literary metaphor is often used simply to make the expression more striking. Metaphor in such cases is much more a question of poetic choice, then, rather than being forced on the producer because of the poverty of the language.

As we will see below, extended metaphor is not used only in poetic language. One of its most striking features is the ability to work as a cohesion and coherence device through the entire discourse, as discussed in Rezanova and Shilyaev (2015, p. 33). Megametaphor provides a paradigm for metaphorical expressions of a particular text, organising at the same time the text into a coherent[2] whole. As Kövecses notes, it "may run through entire

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[2] Textual coherence, being primarily a cognitive category, is expressed in the cohesion of text on the surface level (Rezanova, Shilyaev 2015, p. 38).

literary texts without necessarily 'surfacing'" (Kovecses 2010, p. 57). Rezanova and Shilyaev (2015, p. 33) argue that it manifests itself through the metaphorically used lexemes in the text, commonly called "micrometaphors".

Micrometaphors can be found in certain relationships with each other as shown in the following example:

(1)   *Freezing* the country was a challenge, *thawing* it *out* will be just as hard. (The Telegraph, 30/05/20)

The Telegraph's article describes the lockdown measures that were taken to stop the spread of Covid-19 throughout the country. The lockdown is described in terms of freezing the country thus stopping all its activities. However, now is the time to restart: we understand the second metaphor "thawing it out" as a function of the first one, as there is a conceptual dependency relationship within the metaphorical interpretation. In particular, these two micrometaphors are in a relationship of complementarity.

The presence of a higher number of micrometaphors gradually contributes to strengthen the message conveyed by the extended metaphor, thus making it a powerful device when used for ideological purposes, especially in politics. Metaphors in political speech are not only used to describe a domain in terms of another: they always have pragmatic "added value", which allows the speaker to express his or her evaluation of a specific topic, to make an emotional or persuasive appeal or to rescale and frame certain problems or situations within a familiar experience pattern. Then, these situations can be dealt with by familiar problem-solving strategies (Musolff 2016, p. 4). Just like ordinary metaphors work as rhetorical devices, extended metaphors allow the speaker to modulate the content of the speech often with a rhetorical intention of persuading the audience:

> A year ago, at the height of the emergency, we called on Prime Minister Draghi to take responsibility [...] Today, if we have entrusted *this ship* in trouble to a *helmsman,* there are no conditions for *stopping the engines*, for *changing the crew*, for asking the helmsman for a new assignment. On the contrary, this confirms the importance we attribute to the *role of the helmsman*, because our ship is still in trouble. (Giuseppe Conte, 25th January 2022)

Here, Giuseppe Conte is expressing his contrariety to current Prime Minister Mario Draghi becoming President of the Republic, because Italy, as the rest of the world, is facing a particularly difficult period due to the Covid-19 pandemics. He conceptualises Italy in terms of a sailing ship and Draghi as its helmsman who must not abandon the ship and the crew. This is because, as a ship would be stopped by turning off its engines, the country would

momentarily stop if Parliament had to nominate a new Prime Minister in case Draghi became the new President of the Republic.

The use of the extended metaphor gives force coherence and cohesion to Conte's speech. Also, it allows him to express his disapproval regarding this political situation, using a clear, effective and comprehensible language. As these examples prove, extended metaphor is widely employed also outside literature. Further examples of literary and non-literary uses of extended metaphors can be found in Goatly (1997), who compared the use of metaphor in samples extracted from six different genres (in English). Amongst other things, he found that modern lyric poetry has a larger percentage of active and extended metaphors than literary (e.g., modern novels) and non-literary (e.g., conversation and news reports) genres. However, the previous examples show that extended metaphor is commonly employed in everyday speech as well as in political speech, due to its capacity of creating powerful images and articulating them into further images at different levels of granularity which enables the speaker to insist on an idea by modulating the contents without the risks of dull repetitions.

It is precisely for this reason that understanding whether extended metaphor is an element of difficulty or facilitation in the recovery of meaning is particularly interesting. Unfortunately, there are no experimental studies which have analysed the processing ease or difficulty of extended metaphor from this multi-level perspective. However, in the following sections, I will hypothesise that the presence of an extended metaphor may contribute to lowering the demand of pragmatic resources.

4. Multi-level view of extended metaphor

In this section, I will show how Kövecses' multi-level view of metaphor described in section 2 applies to the instances of extended metaphor discussed in section 3, providing a systematic account of their internal structure as we have seen in the above-mentioned example (3). As previously underlined, there is a conceptual dependency undergoing between the two micrometaphors within this short extended metaphor. Now, I will look at the structures which take part in the metaphor conceptualisation.

The conceptual metaphor underlying this utterance is TEMPERATURE IS INTENSITY. These domains are based on the mappings between the image-schemas of HEAT/COLD and STATE. Both micrometaphors "Freezing the country" and "Thawing it out" share the same source domain, and, for the Invariance Principle, the same image-schemas as well. It is at this level that we can perceive the relationship of complementarity between the two states implicated by the metaphors COOLING IS SLOWING DOWN MOVEMENT and HEATING IS

INTESIFYING MOVEMENT.

As regards Giuseppe Conte's interview, we are dealing with the conceptual metaphor A COUNTRY IS A SHIP, based on the image schemas of MOTION (SOURCE-PATH-GOAL MOTION) and ACTIVITY. The domains of SHIP and COUNTRY are further elaborated in different frames, such as COUNTRY AS PHYSICAL OBJECT and SHIP AS CREW, which respectively map with ABSTRACT MOTION and POLITICS frames. In particular, the mapping between COUNTRY AS PHYSICAL OBJECT and ABSTRACT MOTION refers to the path a country has to follow in order to move forward and, eventually, overcome difficulties; the mapping between the metonymic use of CREW for the SHIP and POLITICS refers to the internal organization of the COUNTRY, where a government is in charge in the same way as a helmsman steers the ship, whose passengers are the citizens of the country.

As a consequence, we will have the online conceptualisation of SHIP as a COUNTRY at the level of mental spaces with linguistic metaphors such as "there are no conditions for stopping the engines" or "this confirms the importance we attribute to the role of the helmsman, because our ship is still in trouble". It is at the level of mental spaces that we process the conceptual metaphor in relation to the context of utterance. Thus, we understand that Conte is speaking about Italy and its current Prime Minister Mario Draghi, and he is expressing his disagreement with this specific scenario.

These examples prove that it is possible to apply Kövecses' model on extended metaphor. The brief discussion shows that the micrometaphors in it belong to the same domain (and, for the Invariance Principle, to the same image schemas), but it is at the level of frames that they differ from each other (while maintaining the internal coherence that characterises the extended metaphor), because frames make use of and elaborate on the various aspects of the domain. They further differ at the level of mental spaces, where we contextualise on online specifications, elaborations, modifications and fusions of frames (Baicchi 2020, p. 5). In the following subsection, I will apply the multi-level view of metaphor to a passage of one of the most famous speeches in recent history.

4.1. Multi-level view analysis of the "I have a dream" speech

I will take into consideration a short extract of Martin Luther King Jr's "I have a dream" speech:

> In a sense, we've come to our nation's capital to *cash a check*. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were *signing a promissory note* to which every American was to fall *heir*. This note was a *promise* that all men,

> yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the *"unalienable Rights"* of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is obvious today that America has *defaulted on this promissory note*, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of *honoring this sacred obligation*, America has given the Negro people *a bad check*, a *check* which has come back marked *"insufficient funds"*. But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are *insufficient funds* in the great *vaults of opportunity* of this nation. And so, we've come to *cash this check*, a check that will give us *upon demand* the *riches of freedom and the security of justice*. (Martin Luther King Jr, 28th August 1963)

This is one of the most powerful metaphors that Martin Luther King Jr used in his speech. He describes the civil rights written in the Constitution and in the Declaration of Independence ("promises") in terms of promissory notes or checks which were given to every American citizen, regardless of skin colour. The African American community has every right to cash this check, but America does not seem willing to keep its promises, due to "insufficient funds". Therefore, this country's system of justice and equality has failed ("bankrupt"). Apparently, they are not able to guarantee to the African American community the same rights, the same opportunities every American citizen must have.

This is an extended metaphor, consisting of a number of micrometaphors such as "to cash a check", "promissory note", "the bank of justice is bankrupt", "there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation", "a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice", etc. All these metaphors belong to the domain of BANKING which participates in the conceptualisation of RIGHTS. The image schemas working as basis for the BANKING domain are CONTAINER and RESOURCES.

At the level of frames, a number of aspects of the BANKING domain is then elaborated. The frame of BANKING ACTIVITIES maps with PROMISE. In particular, we can conceive the activities performed by and through a banking institution (such as signing a check, cash a check, signing a promissory note or honour an obligation) as agreements between the bank and its clients or between the clients themselves. If these promises are broken (e.g., due to insufficient funds or bankruptcy), then one of the parties to the contract does not receive what is due to it. Within this perspective, the frame of RESOURCES maps with RIGHTS. Therefore, we find that "check", "promissory note" or "funds" are used to describe the civil rights every citizen has.

Finally, the frame of BANK AS PHYSICAL OBJECT maps with RIGHTS. The "vaults" of a bank are a secure space where money, valuable or documents can be stored. There is nothing as precious as civil rights, so they must be kept safe and, at the same time, available to all citizens. These

mappings are then processed online at the level of mental spaces where, by interpreting the situational context, we can conceive the laws written in the American Constitution in terms of checks or promissory notes which cannot be cashed by every citizen; the bankruptcy of the bank of justice as a failure in guaranteeing every American citizen the same rights; and the empty vaults in terms of the country, whose efforts were directed only to one group of citizens and none remained for the other.

As in the previous example, each micrometaphor expands and elaborates specific aspects of the frame, thus modulating a concept into several conceptual structures that preserve its integrity at the levels of image schemas and domains, while at the same time introducing differences that keep the reader/listener focused. Understood as basic cognitive structures which guide the perception and representation of reality, frames are able to organise knowledge and motivate inferences: they create slots for expected objects (Bertuccelli Papi 2020, p. 28). Within this view, each micrometaphor constitutes a slot which has to be filled with information available in the mind of the reader. Given that they further elaborate aspects of the same domains and image-schemas, every frame is connected with the others. Thus, with the metaphor extending over multiple micrometaphors, the addressee's interpretation of one micrometaphor leaves place to the following expected interpretation, gradually lowering the cognitive demand for meaning retrieval.

In other words, the presence of a number of micrometaphors allows the speaker to deliver his/her message, without necessarily making it too complicated, and helps creating expectations in the reader/listener, whose cognitive effort may decrease as the metaphor unfolds. Therefore, extended metaphor is shown to organise the text both conceptually – via a coherent set of frame structures of the source domain – and linguistically, by way of applying a network of metaphorical lexemes to the description of a concept (Rezanova, Shilyaev 2015, p. 31). It would be interesting to further explore this aspect of extended metaphor on an experimental basis.

In sum, within this view, it is the frame that guarantees the coherence and the consistency of the extended metaphor. Acting as organising structures in long-term memory, frames further elaborate specific aspects of the domains level, by providing the knowledge structures necessary to process particular words or related set of words.

5. Conclusions

The present study aimed at applying the multi-level view of conceptual metaphor to the phenomenon of extended metaphor. I analysed two short passages collected for another research work and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I

have a dream" speech. All these extracts contained extended metaphors characterised by different degrees of complexity.

The analysis has shown how multi-level view can be profitably applied to extended metaphor as well. It shows how the micrometaphors within the extended metaphor share the same source domain and the same image schemas. These metaphors conceptualise the target domain at the level of frames (which is more specific and, therefore, richer in information), by elaborating specific aspects of the domains. Frames allow to perceive the connections between the micrometaphors by establishing the common conceptual basis, thus guaranteeing the coherence of the extended metaphor. These connections enable the speaker to communicate his/her message effectively, without, probably, making the process of understanding the text more difficult. However, this aspect needs empirical verification in order to provide an accurate answer. Finally, it is at the level of mental spaces that we can process online and contextualise instances of metaphorical speech.

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REINTERPRETATION PROCESSES AND HUMOUR UNDERSTANDING IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING YOUNG ADULTS WITH DYSLEXIA

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Abstract – The aim of this study is to assess whether and how lexical and syntactic ambiguity are resolved in jokes by readers with and without dyslexia. This research focuses specifically on an important phenomenon of language comprehension, i.e., the ability to access word meaning quickly and effortlessly in sentences which, in this specific work, are made more challenging by the presence of "lexical and syntactic ambiguity". The present study addresses the ambiguity in punchlines from a semantic perspective with the aim of showing how different types of ambiguity are perceived by readers and how they reanalyse jokes by considering their ambiguous forms. This work focuses on homonymy in jokes where the humorous effect is triggered by words whose disambiguation does not involve a change of word class (i.e., "bat" has two meanings that belong to the same word class, both are nouns) and words whose disambiguation instead requires a change in word class (i.e., "seal" has two meanings that belong to two different word classes, noun and verb).

Keywords: dyslexia; language comprehension; ambiguity; figurative language; humour.

1. Introduction

In our daily communication, we may encounter a large number of comic situations, many of which derive from verbal humour. One of the ways to achieve a humorous effect is the use of ambiguity. The ambiguity of language is a pervasive phenomenon common to most existing languages and the need to disambiguate word meanings accurately and rapidly is vital for communication. In fact, approximately 80% of common words in English have multiple dictionary definitions (Rodd *et al.* 2002). While many of us are able to accurately disambiguate most words without effort, research has revealed large individual differences in this skill: those who perform poorly on general comprehension tests have been shown to be both slower and less accurate at retrieving word meaning (Rodd *et al.* 2002, 2013, 2016). In fact, language comprehension requires a series of skills that help us map words into meaning while accessing and integrating lexical representation in a coherent representation of sentence meaning (Blott *et al.* 2021). This activity is incremental as we start accessing word meaning wor-by-word while reading. This can be useful for rapid comprehension, but it can lead to

misinterpretation in the case of ambiguous sentences as in the example below.

The old man headed for the **bank** but he had a long way to **swim** to finally reach it.

① *Activate and integrate*   **!** ② *Detect processing error*

③ *Activate and integrate to resolve processing error*
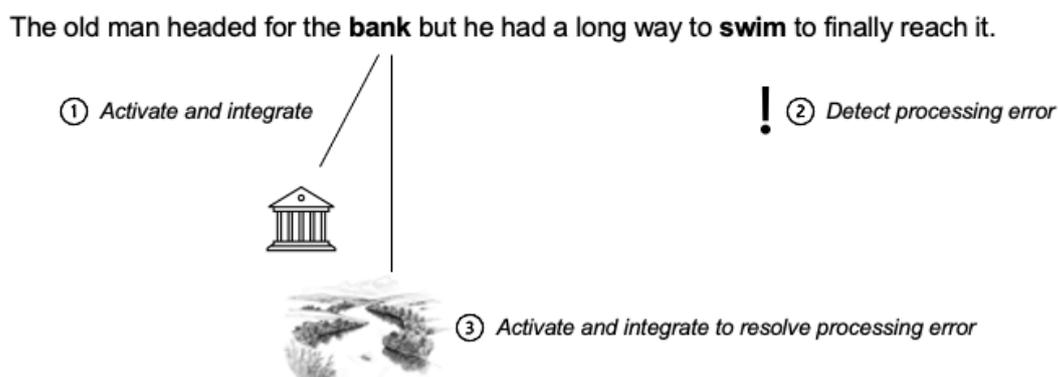
Figure 1

Adapted from Blott *et al*. (2021) - Reinterpretation process in a semantically ambiguous sentence. While reading the sentence, readers will first be led to interpret the ambiguous word "*bank*" with its dominant meaning (financial institution), and they will detect their processing violation to sentence coherence only when encountering the disambiguating word "*swim*". The activation and subsequent integration of the secondary meaning of the word"*bank*" (river side) is then needed to successfully comprehend the given sentence.

The example reported in Figure 1 (adapted from Blott *et al*. 2021) represents a common phenomenon in language use. The ambiguity lies in the multiple meanings of the homonym word "*bank*". In fact, *bank* may refer both to the financial institution and to the river side. The process of disambiguating the word *bank* to its subordinate meaning occurs only towards the end of the sentence thanks to the word "*swim*". In the past 50 years, research has debated whether all meanings of ambiguous words are activated at the same time or whether only one meaning is activated over the competing others (Schvaneveldt *et al*. 1976; Simpson, Krueger 1991; Tabossi 1988). The general agreement is that, despite the temporal activation of all meanings, the processing system quickly prefers one single meaning over the others, and it settles on that (Seidenberg *et al*. 1982; Twilley, Dixon 2000). This preference is usually led by two factors. On the one hand, it depends on the frequency of the multiple meanings of the ambiguous words (Twilley, Dixon 2000) and on the other it depends on the latest encountered occurrence of the ambiguous word (Rodd *et al*. 2013, 2016). In the case of the sentence in *Figure 1*, no previous disambiguating context is given and, for that reason, the reader's processing system has to rely on the most frequent and dominant meaning of the word *bank*. This leads to misinterpretation until the disambiguating word *swim* is processed. Properly detecting the meaning coherence violation triggers reinterpretation processes that recognise the ambiguity of *bank* as the trigger for those interpretation difficulties, and readers can finally access its subordinate meaning (i.e., 'river side') while integrating it into the proper

context.

This process of accessing the dominant meaning, detecting the conflict, inhibiting the accessed meaning and accessing the subordinate meaning can require quite some effort. Therefore, disambiguation processes have always been associated with processing costs. It is no surprise that sentences that need reinterpretation are processed more slowly that those that do not show any conflicting interpretation (Duffy *et al.* 1988; Rayner *et al.* 1994; Sereno *et al.* 1992). Evidence from eye-tracking and self-pace reading has also shown that readers spend more time on regions containing the disambiguating words (Blott *et al.* 2021; Simi *et al.* 2022). Moreover, they show a larger number of regressions to previous regions supposedly indicating difficulties in integrating the disambiguating information within the previous context (Frazier, Rayner 1987). Even though most of the evidence relies on syntactically ambiguous sentences (e.g., garden-path sentences such as "The old man the boat"), previous investigations (MacDonald *et al.* 1994) discussed how this type of ambiguity is influenced by the ambiguity of lexical representations. The way we access, build upon, and maintain complex lexical representations may result in different comprehension outcomes according to the readers' individual differences (Daneman, Carpenter 1983; Twilley, Dixon 2000), and the way individual differences affect reading comprehension is of great practical importance. Perfetti and Stafura (2014) argue that readers with higher processing costs on lexical access tasks show limited resources for misinterpretation repairment. Moreover, Perfetti (2007) puts forward the Lexical Quality Hypothesis, according to which reading comprehension skills depend on the quality of the words' lexical representations. For effective reading comprehension, the words' mental representations should be influenced by their correct lexical representation, which need to be rapidly recalled and which do not require much cognitive effort. Orthographical, phonological and meaning elements are considered high in quality when all three of these lexical representations are specified and bound together so that retrieving one type of information will immediately activate other types of information associated with the word (Richter *et al.* 2013). However, readers with impaired lexical representations may risk retrieving incorrect lexical information in comprehension processes. In this case, readers will have to rely on larger working memory resources for word-level processes, and this will mean that the limited capacity may not be sufficient for the higher-level comprehension processes such as knowledge-based inferences (Richter *et al.* 2013). Therefore, comprehension is significantly connected to lexical knowledge (Adlof *et al.* 2006; Braze 2007; Prat, Just 2011).

Differences in word forms and meanings have been found in adult readers (Mainz *et al.* 2017). In fact, it was shown that the more extensively

readers have experienced written text, the more efficiently they process word-sentence integration (MacDonald *et al.* 1994). This may influence the activation of strategies to resolve processing difficulties and misinterpretations. In previous research on on-line sentence processing, it was suggested that larger lexical knowledge is linked to eased word recognition and lexical processing at the sentence level (Ashby *et al.* 2005; Payne *et al.* 2012; Taylor, Perfetti 2016). The author of this work believes in the importance of shedding light on the role of lexical expertise in comprehension and reinterpretation in adults with dyslexia, who, as recent investigations have shown, present difficulties in their lexical access abilities (cf. Cappelli *et al.* 2022 for an overview).

   For the reasons discussed above, this study has focused its research on the performance of people with dyslexia, who have been shown to have differences in their text comprehension abilities (Cappelli this volume; Cappelli, Noccetti this volume), in their working memory capacity (Ullman 2004; Ullman, Pierpont 2005), in their lexical retrieval skills (Alloway *et al.* 2010, 2014) and, more recently, in their pragmatic abilities (Cardillo *et al.* 2018; Cappelli *et al.* 2018, 2022; Griffiths 2007; Lam, Ho 2014; Simi 2018). This latter field of study is still rather new, and difficulties have been identified in children with dyslexia in metaphor understanding (Cardillo *et al.* 2018; Kasirer, Mashal 2017), in scalar implicature processing (Hu *et al.* 2019) and in their broader communicative abilities (Ferrara *et al.* 2020; Lam, Ho 2014). Despite these studies having as their focus children with dyslexia, a few recent investigations point towards the persistence of these difficulties in adulthood, even at university level (Cappelli *et al.* 2018, 2022; Griffiths 2007; Simi 2021; Smith-Spark *et al.* 2016). However, to the best of the author's knowledge, no attention has been given to a specific aspect of pragmatics, namely, humour processing. Therefore, in this study, semantically ambiguous sentences were embedded in humorous contexts to investigate the reinterpretation processes and pragmatic abilities in individuals with dyslexia. As discussed in this section, this type of ambiguity leads readers to misinterpret the sentence at first, and only later is the first interpretation adjusted to successfully comprehend the sentence. We used a web-based tool (Gorilla, Anwyl-Irvine *et al.* 2020) to present the first part of a joke followed by three possible endings for the reader to choose from. The ambiguous element was inserted only in the humorous ending (CH). To successfully comprehend the joke, participants were required to disambiguate the ambiguous word. Comprehension was assessed using a Judgement task in which readers had to decide if the joke was funny or not. We also collected the responses related to the other two possible endings: wrong but related (WR) and wrong and unrelated (WU).

   In addition, we wanted to investigate the differences between two types

of ambiguities in jokes: lexical and syntactic ambiguity. Both lexical and syntactic ambiguity involve two or more words with identical phonological and graphic representation but with different meanings. Word class change takes place at the lexical level; however, the word has different syntactic roles and has multiple meanings that trigger different interpretations. According to the syntactic ambiguity resolution model (MacDonald *et al.* 1994), both lexical and syntactic knowledge in sentence comprehension is governed by common lexical processing mechanisms and syntactic ambiguities, just as lexical ones, depend on ambiguities at the lexical level (Chiaro 1992). We are speculating that having to disambiguate a word maintaining the same word class would be an easier process than having to retrieve meanings that belong to different word classes because both lexical retrieval and syntactic skills are necessary.

With this idea in mind, half of the jokes relied on lexical ambiguity with word class maintenance across meanings and the other half relied on lexical-syntactical ambiguity with word class shift across meanings. Moreover, we also included a Vocabulary knowledge test and a Digit Span test to investigate whether the reader's lexical knowledge affected on-line reading behaviour. Our hypothesis was that the group with dyslexia would show larger processing costs than their typically developing peers. We expected dyslexic readers to fail to reinterpret the jokes and, therefore, to be less accurate than the control group in the task. In the word class shift condition, we expect this difference to be even more evident as the reinterpretation requires recalling a meaning that belongs to a different word class, which is an additional step. Finally, we also hypothesised that we would find individual differences in reinterpretation processes, since we assumed that the readers' lexical knowledge would play a role in their processing costs. As put forward by previous research (Ashby *et al.* 2005) readers with a larger lexical knowledge show a facilitation in tasks that require lexical access. Therefore, our hypothesis was that dyslexics would not be as successful as their peers in lexical access tasks and that would correlate with their more limited lexical knowledge (Camia *et al.* 2022; Cappelli *et al.* 2022).

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The participants were 36 young adults with developmental dyslexia (mean age=21;5; SD= 1;9) and 41 typically-developed young adults (mean age= 20;9; SD= 1;8). All participants were university students recruited at Lancaster University through the Sona Systems (https://www.sona-

systems.com/). For the dyslexic group, the including criteria were twofold; being an English native speaker and having dyslexia. The control group had only one including criterion that of being English native speakers. Exclusion criteria were non-corrected visual or auditory deficits or significant cognitive impairments. All participants signed a consent form and this study was approved by the ethical committee at Lancaster University. All participants with dyslexia had been previously diagnosed by educational or clinical psychologists on the basis of reading and spelling performance.

2.2. Materials and design

To investigate the participants ability to disambiguate ambiguous lexical items in a humorous context, the critical sentence was inserted at the end of jokes. The first part of the joke did not contain any ambiguity; it was just providing the context. The critical sentence, instead, contained an ambiguous word with two meanings (i.e., a dominant and a subordinate meaning, e.g., "bank"). The disambiguation process would consist in attributing the subordinate meaning to the ambiguous word in order to obtain a humorous effect. The lack of disambiguation would not trigger "a laugh" but would instead create a coherent but absurd situation. The critical sentence was expected to create processing difficulties that would then lead to reinterpretation. We will refer to this sentence as coherent humorous (CH) punchline (see Example in Table 1). To investigate comprehension and reading behaviours, two other possible endings were created: a wrong but related ending (WR), and a wrong unrelated ending (WU). Participants had to choose which of the three alternatives was the correct and humorous punchline. In all (CH) punchlines, there were 5-7 words that separated the first part of the joke from the ambiguous word in order to allow participants to carry out and complete the meaning selection process. The jokes were divided into two conditions: same word class (SWC) and different word class (DWC). In the first, the CH punchline contained ambiguous words whose meanings belonged to the same word class (adjective vs. adjective). In the latter, the CH punchline contained ambiguous words whose meanings belonged to different word classes (noun vs. adjective).

Condition	Joke stem	Coherent Humorous Punchline (CH)	Wrong Related Ending (WR)	Wrong Unrelated Ending (WU)
Same word class (SWC)	Mark looked at his wife while she was putting a dress in the *fridge* and said: "What the heck are you doing?" And she replied:	I'd like to have something **cool** to put on this evening	Sorry, honey, I was distracted	I am going to take your car today
Different word class (DWC)	The child ran home screaming, "Dad! Dad! Dad! Look what I've got!!" as he was opening his hands towards his father. His father replied "Oh boy! How did you catch a *squirrel*?" The child said:	I climbed a tree and acted like a **nut**!	I used my net!	I want a piece of that pie!

Table 1

Example stimuli. Coherent Humorous Punchlines (CH) contained an ambiguous word that needed to be disambiguated towards its subordinate meaning. The two conditions could either present words whose meanings belonged to the same word class (adj. vs adj) or to different word classes (noun vs adj). Two incorrect endings were also provided.

In the examples above, the punchline in the SWC condition lies in the ambiguous word "cool" which can refer to the temperature reached by putting the dress in the fridge (adjective) or it can refer to the wife's desire to wear something fashionable (adjective). The humorous effect is achieved because of the unexpected ambiguity of the target word. The punchline in the DWC condition reaches a humorous effect because a "nut" can refer to the nuts squirrel love to hoard (noun) or a crazy person (adjective). Again, unexpected ambiguity makes the joke on point and the readers can have a laugh only if they are able to retrieve the two meanings of the target word and choose the funniest one in the specific context.

Our investigation compared the interpretation of participants with and without dyslexia when they were presented with ambiguous elements in the two conditions (same word class vs different word class) and needed to reinterpret them in order to recognise the humour. The ambiguous words came from previous studies on ambiguity (Vitello *et al.* 2014) where participants were asked to rate the words dominant and subordinate meanings. A total of 30 jokes were created per condition and they were pseudorandomly assigned to participants. The measured dependent variables were reaction times and accuracy.

2.3. Procedure

The experiment was built and administered through Gorilla (Anwyl-Irvine et al., 2020). At the beginning of each trial, a fixation cross (500ms) was shown at the centre of the screen. Afterwards the first part of the joke was displayed and, after reading this, three possible endings were presented to the participants who were instructed to use the mouse to select the correct humorous punchline. Three types of endings were used: a coherent humorous

punchline (CH), a wrong but related ending (WR), and a wrong unrelated ending (WU). Both the joke stem and its endings were read and recorded by a mother tongue speaker, and they were played when the text appeared on the screen. This was done in order to control and compensate for any phonological difficulty participants with dyslexia might have encountered. After each trial participants responded to the Humour Judgement task giving a score from 1 (not funny at all) to 7 (very funny) on a standard Likert scale. The whole experiment lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. Dyslexic participants were in general slower than their typically developed peers in completing the task.

After the experiment, participants' lexical and working memory skills were further assessed through the WAIS-R Vocabulary and the Digit Span Tests. The vocabulary test focuses on the subjects' receptive functions and verbal linguistic skills and general cognitive abilities. Participants were asked to provide a definition for each given word. The test is designed to assess vocabulary size and reading comprehension abilities. The Digit Span Test consists in repeating digits read by the examiner. The subjects tested cannot see or read the sequence, so they need to remember the digits. The test is subdivided into 3 subtests: direct digit span test, backwards digit span test, reordering digit span test. This test assesses basic cognitive skills, in particular the immediate recalling of orally presented information. This test has been shown to correlate with working memory capacity. This part of the session took 10 minutes.

2.4. Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted using RStudio (RStudio Team 2015). Reaction times and accuracy percentage were analysed. Performance in the Vocabulary and the Digit Span tests were recorded as z scores calculated by subtracting the mean from the total score and dividing the result by its standard deviation

With this measures study, we aimed at investigating: a) the difference between dyslexics and typically developing participants in processing ambiguity, b) effect of ambiguity on humour processing and comprehension outcomes, c) the differences in processing ambiguous words whose meanings belong to the same word class and those whose meanings belong to different word classes, d) the role of individual differences in lexical knowledge and working memory in dealing with misinterpretations in the two different conditions.

3. Results

3.1. Comprehension Results

Accuracy rates were significantly lower in the dyslexic group than in the control group in both conditions. In fact, we found a statistically-significant difference in average accuracy rate by both group (F(1)= 243.68, p < 0.0001) and by condition (F(1)= 27.36, p<0.0001). On average, participants with dyslexia were 23% less accurate than controls in the same word class condition and 37% of times less accurate than controls in the different word class condition (see Figure 2, A). In Figure 2, B, the participants' selections of the jokes' endings are represented.
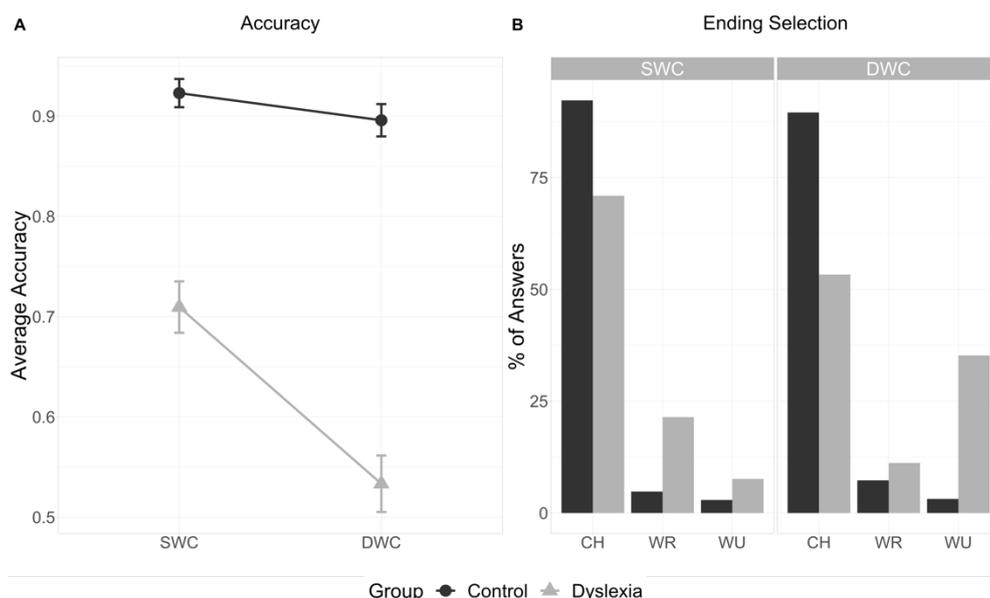
Figure 2
A. Performance of adults with dyslexia and controls in the task in the two conditions. Raw scores were transformed to proportions (relative to 1, the maximum obtainable score) before plotting. SWC indicates the condition in which the disambiguation occurred thanks to a shift in the same part of speech (noun vs noun), DWC indicates the condition in which the disambiguation and the humorous effect was reached shifting from one part of speech to another (noun vs adjective). Error bars denote standard errors.
B. Participants' selection among the three possible endings. CH indicates the correct humorous ending, WR indicates the wrong but related ending, WU indicates a wrong and completely unrelated ending.

The pattern is quite interesting. When not selecting the correct answer, controls usually select the wrong related answer in both conditions. Dyslexics, instead, act the same as controls in the SWC condition, but, conversely, they chose significantly more frequently the wrong unrelated answer in the different word class condition. This indicates in the DWC

condition, that dyslexic participants do not recover the subordinate meaning of the ambiguous words, and, in addition, they probably also experience a processing resources overload and are thus unable to access both meanings of the words. Ultimately, dyslexic readers seem unable to form a coherent comprehension of the jokes (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).

3.2. Reaction Times

Even when the dyslexics chose the correct ending, there was a significant difference in reaction times for condition ($F(1)= 62.862$, $p < 0.0001$) and for group ($F(1)= 13.540$, $p < 0.0001$). However, in the same word class condition, the two groups of participants showed a smaller difference (~1 second) than in the different word class condition (~4.5 seconds), see Table 3 for the descriptive statistics.

Group	Condition	Reaction Times (ms)	
		Mean	SD
Control Group	Same Word Class	3305	1223
	Different Word Class	3712	1399
Dyslexic Group	Same Word Class	3451	1325
	Different Word class	4176	1591

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for reaction times (ms).

The reaction times results (see Figure 3) show a significant processing difficulty for the dyslexic group in the different word class condition. This seems to point to the fact that the cognitive resources required to process such a condition are depleted in the dyslexic group. Given the previously discussed accuracy results, we can confidently assume that comprehension was not achieved.
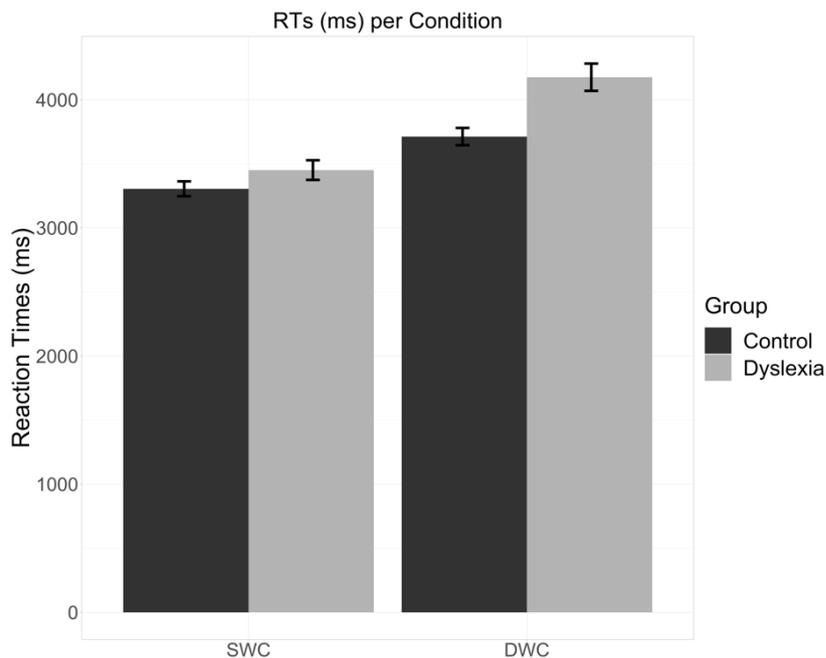
Figure 3
Reaction Times (RTs) of adults with dyslexia and controls in performing the task in the two conditions. Error bars denote standard error.

3.3. Individual Differences and Pragmatic Processing

On the WAIS-R Vocabulary test, out of a maximum score of 57, the dyslexic group performance (M_{Vocab}= 30, SD_{Vocab}= 8.8) was relatively worse than the performance of the control group (M_{Vocab}= 48, SD_{Vocab}= 10). Similarly, the dyslexics performance (M_{Digits}= 26, SD_{Digits}= 6.3) on the WAIS-R Digit Span Test, out of a maximum score of 48, was also worse than that of the control group (M_{Digits}= 40, SD_{Digits}= 9.1).

We analysed our dependent variables (i.e., reaction times and accuracy) in relation to the participants scores in the Vocabulary and the Digit Span tests. To draw meaningful conclusions, there should be large variance in Condition effects across individuals. As evident in Figure 4, there is high variability in both reaction times and accuracy measures per condition. We will now discuss the role of lexical knowledge and working memory capacity in the processing of the two ambiguous conditions.

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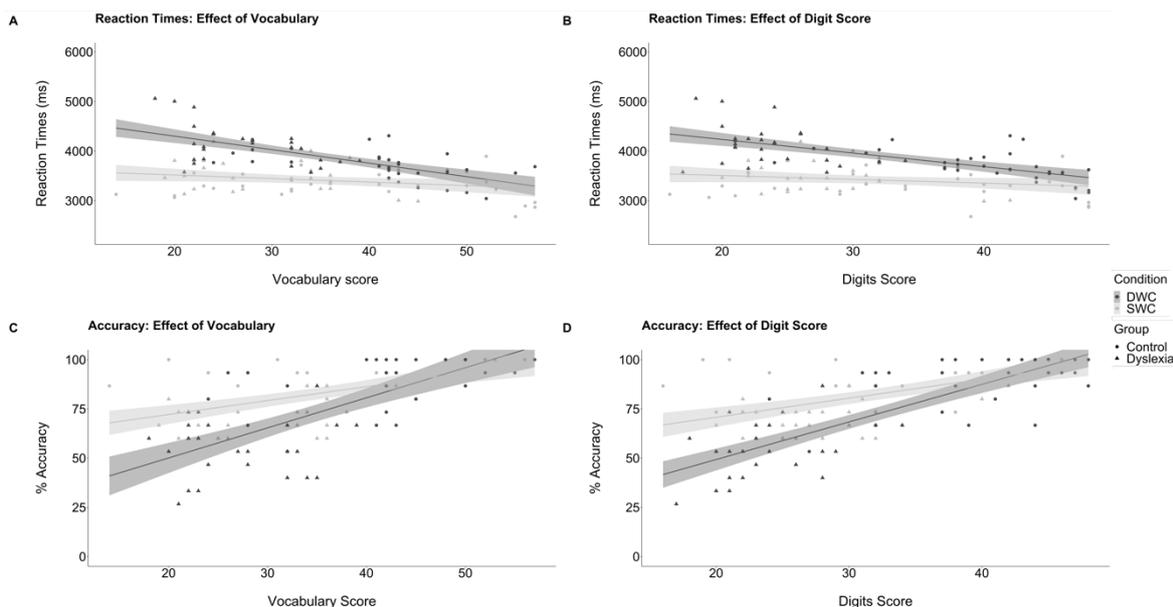
Figure 4
Relationship between lexical knowledge, working memory and task performance.
Scatterplots for reaction times and accuracy show a comparison between the SWC
condition and the DWC condition. Geompoints show the performance of the two different
groups of participants.

3.3.1. Comprehension accuracy

Effects of Vocabulary and Digits Score and their interaction with group and
ambiguity condition on accuracy performance were significant (see Figure 4,
C and D). The comprehension results showed that they were influenced both
by the readers' lexical knowledge and by their working memory capacity.

3.3.2. Reaction Times

Higher vocabulary knowledge is also associated with faster reaction times
plus we found an interaction of ambiguity and vocabulary knowledge (Figure
4A). Moreover, we found an interaction of DWC condition and reaction time
and working memory capacity (Figure 4B) but no interaction between SWC
reactions times and working memory capacity. This result hints at the fact
that the cost demands of shifting between word classes in terms of reactions
times did depend on the reader's working memory capacity.

4. General Discussion

This study aimed at investigating reinterpretation processes and pragmatic
abilities in individuals with dyslexia. To do so we used semantically

ambiguous sentences in humoristic contexts. We also wanted to investigate the differences between two types of ambiguities in jokes: lexical and syntactic ambiguity. In fact, half of the jokes relied on lexical ambiguity with word class maintenance across meanings and half of the jokes relied on lexical-syntactical ambiguity with word class shift across meanings. We hypothesised that the group with dyslexia would show larger processing costs than their typically developing peers in processing ambiguity in jokes. In particular, we expected a difference between the two conditions (same word class vs. different word class) because we hypothesised that having to recall meanings belonging to different word classes would require a larger working memory and lexical knowledge abilities. For this reason, we also investigated how individual differences influence interpretation processes. Specifically, our hypothesis was that dyslexics would have an impaired lexical access because of their limited lexical knowledge (Camia *et al.* 2022; Cappelli *et al.* 2022).

In line with our hypothesis, dyslexics performed more poorly than controls in processing jokes in both conditions, both in terms of reaction times and accuracy. Dyslexics were 23% less accurate than controls in the same word class condition and 37% less accurate than controls in the different word class condition. Moreover, when choosing an alternative other than the correct one, dyslexics chose the related non-humorous ending more often in the same word class condition, but they chose the unrelated ending more frequently than controls in the different word class condition. This points toward a larger processing difficulty in this latter condition and ultimately towards a poor comprehension of jokes.

Concerning reaction times, even when choosing the correct ending, dyslexics were significantly slower than controls in both conditions, but, again the different word class condition seemed to be more challenging than the same class condition. This fact, combined with lower accuracy, seems to indicate that dyslexic participants were often unable to resolve the ambiguities in the different word class condition. The fact that in general dyslexics seem to have difficulties in processing ambiguity might be attributed to the notion that they are not as familiar as the controls with the multiple meanings of the ambiguous words. In both conditions, even when jokes were considered funny (hence we can assume a correct interpretation of the joke), dyslexic participants took significantly longer to process them.

Moreover, we investigated the influence of the individuals' vocabulary knowledge and working memory capacity on the interpretation processes and comprehension accuracy. The analysis of correlation showed that vocabulary knowledge, and hence lexical expertise influenced the processing times in both groups of participants in both conditions. Interestingly, a remarkably strong effect of working memory was found in the processing of jokes

belonging to the different word class condition. This is in line with the Reading Systems Framework (Perfetti, Stafura 2014) which suggests that readers with weaker lexical knowledge must resort to further processing resources to carry out lexical access tasks. In our study, the use of semantically ambiguous words (with ambiguities belonging to the same word classes or to different word classes) require the pragmatic ability to detect coherence violation and, to resolve such violation, readers must access and integrate a secondary and alternative meaning. Our data show how dyslexic readers (who showed reduced lexical knowledge with respect to their non-dyslexic peers) were impaired in such disambiguation processes compared to control readers who had larger lexical knowledge. Moreover, we can argue that changing word class requires even a further processing step. In this specific condition, in fact, the subordinate meaning has to be accessed through a different word class and that, according to our hypothesis, would require larger processing resources. Our data seem to confirm our hypothesis that less efficient working memory exerts an effect on the accuracy and reaction times performance of our participants.

5. Conclusions

Overall, our results provide evidence of reinterpretation difficulties in jokes containing lexical ambiguity, especially when the joke relied on accessing meanings that belonged to different word classes. This was an interesting result, showing that dyslexics probably underwent a cognitive overload and while processing the ambiguity lost track of the overall meaning. Moreover, our results pointing towards a prominent role of lexical knowledge and working memory capacity for an accurate and rapid lexical access are new and promising. Despite this data being still quite preliminary, we believe that this line of study is worth further investigation to extend our results and to overcome this study's limitations. One of the limitations is the relatively small sample of our target group. Although sufficient to show differences with their typically developed peers, a larger sample would strengthen our preliminary results and that would enable a generalisation across the focus group. Another limitation concerns the clinical diagnosis of our participants. We could not control for any comorbidities the participants might have had. A more homogeneous and controlled group could confirm or show different results. Another limitation regards the small number of stimuli (30 per condition) that we were able to construct. Further studies should employ a more systematic approach, in which ambiguity is presented in different conditions and tasks (i.e., one could use the words in isolation and track the participants responses when presented with the words' dominant or subordinate meaning). Even with these limitations, to the best of our

knowledge, the present study is the first to successfully show that adult readers with dyslexia have difficulties in dealing with humour processing when lexical disambiguation is required. These results contribute to shedding light on lexical and pragmatic difficulties in adults with dyslexia and advance our understanding of the possible interventions and compensatory measures that can be implemented at the university level to effectively reduce the impact of such issues.

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RATING IMPOLITENESS IN EFL
Results from an Experiment with TV Series

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Abstract – This contribution is part of a wider project aimed at ascertaining the merits of explicit teaching of pragmatic issues in EFL classes. More specifically, after reflecting on the importance of teaching pragmatics, and (im)politeness in particular, especially to advanced learners of English, the result of an experiment carried out with different groups of EFL students are discussed, with a view to understanding to what extent they understand (im)politeness and how they perceive its different nuances in interaction, without having received any formal instruction on the topic. By using excerpts from the TV series *Sherlock* (2010-2017), whose main character is a trigger for face-threatening acts, respondents with different backgrounds, levels of language competence, and different inputs (audio-visual or just audio, both integrated by the transcription of the dialogues) were asked to recognise and rate impoliteness. The students involved, who had not been taught (im)politeness explicitly, were proposed different situations, which they were asked to rate in terms of impoliteness, using Lickert scales. They were also asked to describe the characters involved in every interaction through adjectives.

Keywords: impoliteness, second-language pragmatics, EFL, audiovisual materials.

1 Introduction

The aim of the present contribution is to shed light on the comprehension of (im)politeness by EFL students. As is well-known, the perception and comprehension of what counts as a normal, natural and smooth interaction is subject to cross-cultural variation. Thus, as recognised by Thomas in her seminal work (1983), even when learners have an advanced knowledge of the (L2) language, they are not exempt from making pragmatic errors.

Defined by Kasper and Schmidt (1996, p. 150) as "the study of the development and use of strategies for linguistic action by non-native speakers", Second Language Pragmatics (henceforth, SLP) is concerned with the crucial passage from the theoretical knowledge of how a language works to the test of use, i.e., putting it into practice. Bardovi-Harlig clarifies this aspect by saying that SLP is concerned with the ways in which "learners come to know how-to-say-what-to-whom-when", which emphasises the various contextual aspects of an interaction (2013, p. 68).

As was shown by Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983), pragmatics is often discussed in terms of socio-pragmatics (relating to the contextual dimensions of pragmatics) and pragma-linguistics (the use of linguistic devices to achieve certain aims). In most cases, even when learners develop the linguistic means to do something with words, the right circumstances of use escape them. Culpeper, Mackey and Taguchi (2018, p. 2) quote an illuminating example of a Mandarin-speaking student interacting with her advisor in the UK. She presented her supervisor with a Chinese painting as a form of greeting and she was at a loss when the British lecturer said: "Wow! Really, you shouldn't have". For the Chinese student this utterance counted as a reproach, because she did not understand the true nature of this speech act, i.e., a conventionalised way of accepting a gift and thanking the giver for it. In fact, the student replied with "Sorry", which either meant that she did not understand the lecturer's utterance, or, alternatively, that she did not know how to downgrade the lecturer's utterance by underlining that the gift was only a small thing. The exchange ended with another turn by the lecturer, who felt the need to clarify what he meant by adding "No, I mean, it's lovely, thanks".

Examples like this show that both socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic features may represent obstacles for students who, despite their good knowledge of the language, are not capable of interacting with natives smoothly. As has emerged from the above example, crucial aspects that define SLP are: the speaker's intended meaning, conventionalised expressions, the management of politeness, and the like.

Functional approaches, which became popular in foreign language teaching in the 1970s, provide students with the necessary resources to perform a vast array of language functions, while sociolinguistics gives them the instruments to understand which specific means are used in specific contexts.

Starting from these premises, in what follows, the results of an experiment carried out with EFL students will be described, with a view to understanding to what extent they recognise and understand (im)politeness in interaction and how they perceive its different nuances, without having received any formal instruction on the topic. By using video clips from the TV series *Sherlock* (2010-2017), whose main character is a trigger for face-threatening acts, the principal aim is to ascertain how EFL students, with different backgrounds and levels of competence in the language, and exposed to different types of input, understand and recognise impoliteness. The test and its results represent an initial step in a wider project, whose more ambitious aim is to use different forms of input to teach pragmatics explicitly at an advanced level.

2 SLP studies: a historical background

Among the first to discuss the importance of pragmatics between L1 and L2 was Thomas (1983), who highlighted the need to develop, alongside lexico-grammatical competence, pragmatic (and cross-cultural pragmatic) competence, i.e., "the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context" (1983, p. 92). The 1980s saw a flourishing of studies on comparative/contrastive linguistics, cross-linguistic and L2 pragmatic surveys. A seminal work that lay the ground for future developments was the interlanguage project on speech acts developed by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), a comparison of speech acts (requests and apologies) across seven languages using Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) in L1 and L2 environments, which evidenced pragmatic failures stemming from L1-L2 differences and L1 transfer. Studies that followed in this tradition considered an array of parameters such as level of proficiency, length of study of the language, length of exposure to the language by residing in the country, but the acquisition of pragmatic competence revealed very difficult to define and calculate across different L2 groups.

The most significant finding in the subsequent decade was that pragmatic competence is teachable, that is, explicit pragmatic instruction is profitable for L2 students, alongside other factors. However, a caveat of these research projects was that the majority concerned English and concentrated on college students and did not take into account other age groups (Culpeper *et al.* 2018, pp. 9-10).

In the following decades little space was granted to developmental studies, which are the best method to ascertain pace and patterns of L2 acquisition, including in pragmatics. By contrast, most studies concentrated on pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic behaviour in non-native speakers and their differences from native speakers, rather than on second language acquisition (Bardovi-Harlig 1999, 2010; Kasper, Rose 1999, 2002; Kasper, Schmidt 1996). Most recently, however, L2 pragmatic studies have been fully situated within SLA theory. Some of the questions that longitudinal studies have to answer concern the comprehension of pragmatic phenomena and how decoding develops from semantic to pragmatic inferencing, and how pragmatic production is gradually built up, shifting from one-to-one form-function correspondence and over-generalisation to a wider and more sophisticated array of form-function mapping. The main theoretical underpinnings include for example the noticing hypothesis, skill acquisition theories, language socialisation theory, dynamic system theory and the interaction approach, as evidenced by Culpeper *et al.* (2018, p. 15). Developments in the conceptualisation of pragmatics have also influenced research into SLP, which nowadays goes beyond the competence of the single speaker to adopt a

conception in which pragmatic competence is considered situated in context (Young 2008) and presupposes interaction with co-speakers. Given the changes in world borders and the increased circulation of people on the one hand, and the rise of internationalisation and multilingualism on the other, recent studies have acknowledged the changing role of the once-coveted native speaker model. Communicative needs have thus re-defined the "appropriateness model" which was in vogue until the end of the last century, for example conceptualising appropriateness "according to local norms, rather than idealized native speaker norms" (Culpeper *et al.* 2018, p. 18). Still, in teaching English (or any other language) to foreign learners, it is essential to provide them with natural models of interaction, which they can observe and analyse, retaining structures and lexis to be re-used when needed.

3. Impoliteness

In what follows (see 4), the aim is to test if and how Italian students of English recognise and perceive impoliteness, without having been explicitly taught about it. My interest in this depends on the cross-cultural variation that characterises the two lingua-culture sets: as emerges from studies on cultural orientation, English texts, in line with the features of *Low Context Cultures* (Hall 1990; Katan 1999; Manca 2012, 2016), tend towards simplicity and reader-friendliness, whereas Italian are still richly informative and often pay less attention to the addressee's needs. In the sphere of interpersonal relationships this often translates into special attention being given to the interlocutor's negative face in English-speaking countries (and in the UK in particular), whereas Italian and Mediterranean cultures attach more importance to positive face, in the form of appreciation of the interlocutor, but may often result intrusive (Bruti 2006).

Interesting differences have been shown in the relevant literature regarding the performance of speech acts (see George 2018, pp. 410-411 for a retrospective description of the PIXI group's findings, and, *inter alia*, Aston 1988, 1995; Bruti 2009a, 2009b, 2013; Gavioli, Mansfield 1990; George 1990; Gesuato 2016, 2017; Vincent-Marrelli 1988; Zorzi *et al.* 1990; Zorzi 1990), but little work has been done, to the best of my knowledge, on contrastive (im)politeness (Bruti 2021).

Although impoliteness as a construct has been mentioned in the literature since the earliest politeness studies (Brown, Levinson 1987; Lakoff 1973; Leech 1983), it only really began to attract researchers' attention as a phenomenon in its own right towards the end of the 20th century (Culpeper 2005; 2011), with the so-called "third wave" of impoliteness studies (see Bruti 2021). As has been pointed out by Locher, impoliteness no longer corresponds to the infringement of expected social norms, but "the scope of analysis has

been widened from face-maintaining and face-enhancing data to instances of conflictual and face-aggravating behaviour" (2015, p. 5).

On the whole, studies on (im)politeness have developed from scrutinising interaction "as a system of rational choices made by an ideal speaker to evaluating how choices about what counts as (im)politeness are made in specific contexts" (Bruti 2021, p. A83). In other words, there is no expression that is either polite or impolite in itself, out of context. As Culpeper and Terkourafi explain (2017, p. 29), "[e]ven a bare imperative directive *Shut up* can be polite, if said slowly and evenly with a kind tone of voice to one's chatty sweetheart". Consequently, discursive approaches have become established and have often adopted a specific focus on cross-cultural variation (Watts 2003; Locher, Watts 2005; Locher 2006).

Impoliteness has lately become more and more pervasive in a vast array of contexts, genres and interactions. Although politeness, "targeted at reaching a desirable social balance and solidarity" (Bruti 2021, p. A80), continues to be the preferred strategy in interaction in a vast array of contexts, the number and types of occasions in which interactants are hostile and aggressive on purpose has grown enormously in recent decades (see Bazzanella 2020, p. 14, who highlights how studies on impoliteness, insults, slurs, etc. have grown to account for the growth of both physical and verbal violence in our society). There are discourses in which conflict talk is more central than collaborative or supportive talk (e.g., army recruit training, exploitative TV programmes, talk between car drivers and wardens, see Culpeper 2005, but also computer-mediated communication in the form of chat-rooms, Youtube crews, Twitter, see Bruti 2021 for a more detailed account). Studies on telecinematic register and on some TV programmes have shown how impoliteness is liberally used in scripts as an element that can provoke laughter in the audience. This strategic use of impoliteness has been labelled in different ways: Lorenzo-Dus calls it "incivility-as-spectacle" (2009, p. 100), while Dynel talks of "vicarious pleasure" (2016, 2017, p. 462). Impoliteness events entertain the viewer at someone else's expense by exploiting aggressive behaviour and face-threats. The genres where this form of humour is recursive are contests and quizzes, e.g., *The Weakest Link, Britain's Got Talent*, "where competition partially accounts for a certain degree of aggressiveness, but also in political debates and interviews, and, more recently and noticeably, TV fiction, especially TV series" (Bruti 2021, p. A84). Bednarek (2012), in her studies on media language, has highlighted that the language of nerds too is somehow characterised by a marked use of impoliteness. Sheldon, the Aspergerish scientist of *The Big Bang Theory*, and many other remarkable and unconventional characters (e.g., Doctor House, Sherlock) are characterised by their behaviour, which is "'antisocial', 'abnormal', 'rude', or 'not quite human'" (Bednarek 2012, p. 199; see also Dynel 2016, 2017; Pillière 2013), as they find it difficult to understand and apply social conventions, relate to other

human beings, and build rapport. Their interlocutors often become the target of this disagreeable behaviour, "which often borders on the pathological, but at the same time proves to be the source of (bitter) humour on the external axis for the watching audience" (Bruti 2021, p. A84).

In media dialogues impoliteness is thus used with two main functions: the first one, as an adversarial move, between characters (internal axis); the second one, to entertain viewers, as was mentioned above (external axis). Various tactics that increase emotionally-loaded talk (Bednarek 2010, 2011) have been noticed as typical features of telecinematic dialogue, because they push the plot forward in a way that is unexpected, unconventional and therefore attractive for the audience.

4. The experiment: methodology and research aims

This section describes the experiment that was carried out as a preliminary step in a research project aimed at evaluating the benefits and shortcomings of teaching foreign language pragmatics explicitly. This is therefore a pilot study that will be replicated in the future with a higher number of respondents, and by isolating variables such as command of the language and familiarity with the characters and situations to be evaluated, as well as by explicit instruction in cross-cultural pragmatic issues. For the time being, the respondents counted on their knowledge of the language to give their answers, but in the future I would like to be able to differentiate between students who have been taught pragmatics and politeness issues explicitly from those who have not, and between relying on bimodal input (e.g., audio-visual material) or monomodal input (e.g., just audio).

More specifically, my aim was to ascertain how EFL students understand and perceive impoliteness in interaction. In order to situate impoliteness and offer respondents a contextualised representation, I decided to select a set of examples from the TV series *Sherlock*, where impolite interactions are very frequent. On the basis of previous studies on the topic, I identified four examples of the four main types of impoliteness according to Leech 2014 and four distractors, i.e., interactions where impoliteness is not an issue (see below). Leech distinguishes four types of impoliteness: non-politeness, impoliteness, irony or sarcasm, and banter. The first one, non-politeness, corresponds to the absence of politeness (either socio-pragmatic or pragma-linguistic) in situations in which it would have been expected, whereas impoliteness is the polar opposite of politeness. Given that there has been considerable overlap and confusion between impoliteness and rudeness in the English language, Leech specifies that rudeness occurs when there is an additional offensive use of language, that is "adding aggravating affront to impoliteness" (2014, p. 229). Finally, he mentions two further impoliteness

strategies, irony and banter. The former implies a contrast between the overt meaning, which is polite, and the covert one, which is impolite; conversely, with banter the contrast is between the overt meaning, which is impolite, and the implicated meaning, which is its opposite

The methods that have been widely adopted in research in pragmatics, especially to assess students' comprehension and production of pragmalinguistic forms and their socio-pragmatic adequacy, include DCTs, scaled response questions, role plays, and multiple choice tests. One drawback of DCTs is that they lack features of natural conversation such as all the typical traits of turn-taking, prosody, gestures, etc. They are an approximation, in that a written form attempts to reproduce an oral one. Results for DCTs may also differ considerably from naturally-occurring data: an example comes from a research experiment carried out by Golato on compliment responses (2005), in which DCTs highlight the use of *Danke* in 12% of responses, while in naturalistic data this form never appears. On the other hand, scaled response questions are useful because there is no correct answer as such and they do not require learners to choose between appropriateness or non-appropriateness; therefore, the task can rely on their degree of certainty or confidence. They are mostly used for speech act analysis, to associate form and context, or to test cross-cultural variation. They are employed to rate phenomena on a Likert scale, or evaluate different contextual parameters: thus, this instrument seems especially suitable to assess impoliteness.

The test (see Appendix), administered in Italian to 21 students on the Moodle platform, starts off with some general questions, aimed at ascertaining the respondents' age, gender, language competence (self-assessed) and familiarity with the series used to represent impolite behaviour. I decided to ask students to self-assess their language level because higher or lower language proficiency may have important repercussions on their ability to evaluate what counts as polite or impolite behaviour. Clearly, in order to establish thorough correlations between results and language competence, students should be evaluated by means of a language test. For the time being, it can hypothesised that students with a solid language knowledge should be more at ease in interpreting pragmatic meanings and evaluating politeness.

The question regarding the respondents' familiarity with the TV series is crucial, in that people may have heard about Cumberbatch's *Sherlock* and the leading character's social awkwardness, and they may even have watched some episodes, thus forming the impression that Sherlock is a sociopath and that behaviours that would be considered impolite for other characters might be considered normal for him.

The test includes eight questions, for each of which students are asked to evaluate the degree of impoliteness by means of a Likert scale ranging from 0 (least impolite) to 5 (most impolite). The type of impoliteness portrayed in the clips (and therefore how they should be interpreted by viewers) was

established by the author of this paper on the basis of previous investigations on the topic of (im)politeness and of other studies on the TV series *Sherlock* (Bruti, Zanotti forthc.). In the future, since the evaluation relies on the cultural perception of impoliteness, native speakers should be involved, either before administering the test, to check their perception of the proposed examples, or as respondents to the test itself as a control group. Each of the questions relates to an interaction that is briefly described to provide some background information and is complemented with the transcribed dialogues and a video clip. For each situation there is an additional open question in which students are asked to describe the people involved in the interaction by means of an adjective (very often students provided several adjectives). Four of the eight clips/situations are examples of the four different types of impoliteness in the model put forward by Leech (2014), which turns out to be extremely convenient to analyse Sherlock's speech and to differentiate between the most recursive impoliteness strategy he employs. These four strategies are exemplified respectively in clips 1 (non-politeness), 3 (impoliteness), 5 (irony) and 7 (banter). Clips 2, 4, 6 and 8 do not represent prototypical examples of impoliteness and were introduced in the questionnaire as distractors.

4.1. Results and discussion

In what follows, the results of the questionnaire regarding the evaluation of impoliteness are illustrated and discussed; then some of the evaluative adjectives chosen by the respondents to describe the speakers involved in the interactions are considered. The results of the evaluation of impoliteness can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 1 below. Afterwards, comparisons are drawn with results from a comparable experiment on impolite events in *Sherlock* that was carried out a couple of years ago on different groups of students, in a classroom setting and by means of a paper questionnaire.

The above results are compared with those obtained from a comparable experiment, carried out before the pandemic in a classroom setting and as a paper-based test, with students from two different university programmes, namely 24 undergraduates in Tourism Management and Organisation and 20 postgraduates in Specialised Translation. On that occasion, the test was administered to the undergraduates by dividing the class into two groups, one was given the transcribed dialogues for the eight situations and only listened to the audio, while the other half was shown the clips and could find the dialogues on the answer sheet. The postgraduates could rely on dialogues and were shown the clips. All respondents were asked whether they were familiar with the series and had watched some episodes.

	Likert scale of impoliteness						Average impoliteness rate
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Clip 1	--	1	5	3	8	4	3.4
Clip 2	6	3	6	4	1	1	1.4
Clip 3	--	--	--	2	6	13	4.5
Clip 4	1	1	2	5	11	1	3.3
Clip 5	--	--	1	2	2	16	4.6
Clip 6	4	1	7	5	3	1	2.2
Clip 7	1	3	2	7	7	1	2.8
Clip 8	--	1	4	7	7	2	2.9

Table 1
Impoliteness rates for each clip/situation and average values.
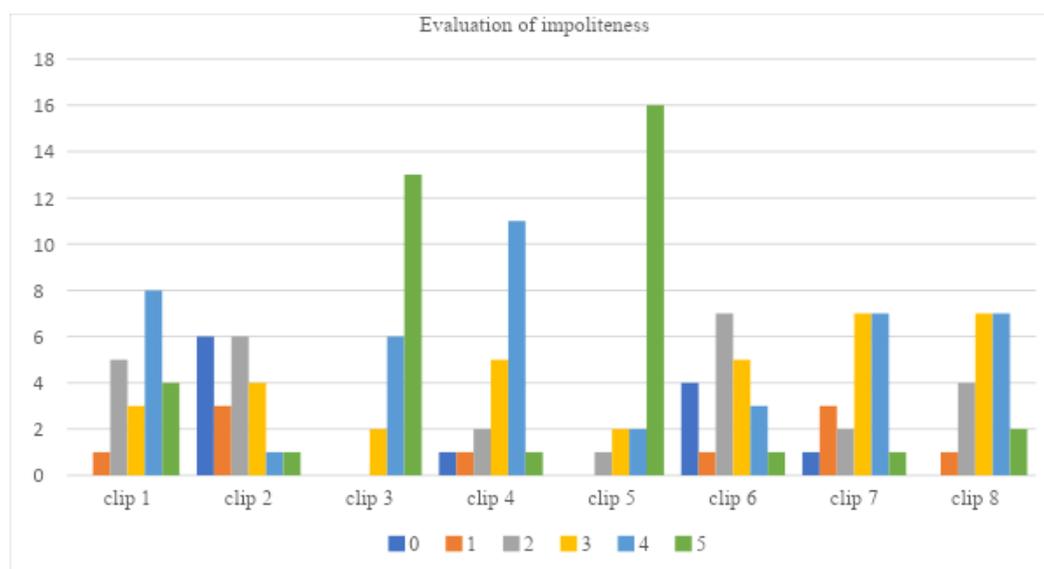
Figure 1
Results of the assessment of impoliteness in the 8 situations (clips 1 to 8) proposed.

The situation that was perceived as the most impolite was the one in clip 5, with an average of 4.6 points out of 5, whereas the one that was perceived as the least impolite was situation 2, with an average of 1.4. In clip 5, Sherlock's caustic attitude is associated with irony, i.e., the impolite content is conveyed indirectly, as he says the opposite of what he means ("Yes, thank you for your input."). In this case his target is Detective Anderson, a member of Lestrade's forensics team at New Scotland Yard. Unlike Lestrade, Anderson openly despises Sherlock, who loathes him back. In the situation under analysis, he is giving Sherlock some details about a murder, but Sherlock considers them so obvious and trite that he ironically praises him, thanking him for his contribution. Here the addressee of this impolite, ironic remark has several clues to appraise the real nature of the utterance, as Sherlock is quite serious, even intimidating in his look, and his tone of voice is sarcastic. What is interesting about this example is that almost all students not only recognised and understood irony, but they evaluated this utterance even more impolite

than impoliteness *tout court* as seen in clip 3. The concomitants of speech, that is Sherlock's tone of voice, his gaze, and his kinesics might have been helpful in understanding his intentions and meaning.

According to my interpretation of the data, students correctly rated clip 2 as the least impolite. In fact, this clip was meant as a distractor. Holmes needs to enter an apartment, so he decides to ring someone who lives in the same block to have the door opened: he cleverly chooses someone whose label on the doorbell is very new, that is someone who might not know her neighbours well. Sherlock rings and briefly explains that he lives in the flat below and has locked himself out. Ms Wintle replies cooperatively, even when Sherlock asks her to let him pass through her balcony. Of the twenty-one respondents, only two rated this situation with 4 and 5, and the one who ranked it as most impolite could not assess her own language competence, so her choice might be due to a lack of language proficiency and scarce perception of meaning nuances. The exchange between Sherlock and Ms Wintle might appear brisk, but there is nothing impolite about it. Whenever Sherlock has a precise purpose in mind (in this case, to be let in), he seems slightly more careful of social conventions. Even from Sherlock's viewpoint, the situation could be considered neutral, if not altogether polite.

Situation 3, which I selected as a prototypical example of impoliteness, involves Sherlock Holmes, Lestrade, a detective at Scotland Yard, who often uses Sherlock's help to solve difficult cases, and John Watson, a military doctor, once a veteran of the war in Afghanistan and now Holmes's roommate, here only a bystander. Lestrade is taken by surprise by Sherlock's order, "Shut up", as he was silent. Being in a position of power, Sherlock declares he is disturbed by the fact that Lestrade is struggling to come to terms with the murder, as if he really heard the noise made by his brain working. This situation ranks second for the level of impoliteness, with an average value of 4.5. All the respondents rated it with a 3, 4 or 5, showing they understood the degree of face-threat that it implies. I expected this example to be recognised better than clip 5, the example of irony, because clip 3 shows a peremptory order, whereas clip 5 displays irony, which is not always easily identified as such and understood.

Banter, which is represented in clip 7, is the third least impolite situation in the respondents' evaluation, with an average score of 2.8. Again, the majority of students rightly rated this example as not particularly impolite. Only one respondent rated this case with 5, but there is a ready explanation: the student had neither heard about *Sherlock* before, nor had she watched any episode, so she was justified in not recognising the bond of friendship between Sherlock and Watson and the former's friendly teasing. Likewise, the student who rated this exchange with 0 also had no previous acquaintance with the

series. This partly explains why he rated banter as less impolite than truly neutral exchanges such as those in clip 2 and clip 6.

Another interesting case is represented by clip 1, in which Sherlock's lack of (expected) politeness is directed at Molly, a specialist registrar in the morgue at *St. Bartholomew's Hospital* in London. Molly, who has a crush on Sherlock, asks him if he would join her for coffee. After a hesitating start, she gains courage because he mentions the fact that she is wearing lipstick, thus suggesting that he has noticed it, but soon afterwards he takes her invitation literally (i.e., as an offer of an actual cup of coffee) and does not react to the implicit invitation to spend some time together. Even though she is evidently hurt, she tries to shrug off the blow. Overall, this situation was rated with an average score of 3.4. In fact, Sherlock's utterance "Black, two sugars please. I'll be upstairs" is an unmitigated direct request (an example of a "bald on record" strategy, in Brown and Levinson's terms (1987), revised and adapted by Culpeper 1996 for impoliteness). As has emerged from a study of Sherlock's behaviour in the original dialogues of the series and their translation for dubbing and subtitling (Bruti and Zanotti forthc.), the viewing of a couple of episodes of *Sherlock* makes clear that non-polite behaviour is for him the unmarked conduct, to which additional offensive language may be appended from time to time, when tension escalates, and disagreement and conflict are openly shown. His interlocutors' perception of his behaviour vary, depending on a series of factors, including their closeness to Sherlock, their emotional involvement, etc. When Sherlock displays indifference, his interlocutors react with different verbal or non-verbal responses, which the audience use to understand Sherlock's behaviour, i.e., either non-polite (which often elicits surprise or puzzlement) or impolite (which usually provokes stronger responses). So, in the case of clip 1, variation in the respondents' ratings may depend on how familiar they are with Sherlock's 'unmarked' level of impoliteness in the series.

Before concentrating on the students' choice of adjectives, the above results are compared with those obtained from a similar experiment, carried out before the pandemic in a classroom setting and as a paper-based test, with students from two different university programmes, namely 24 undergraduates in Tourism Management and Organisation and 20 postgraduates in Specialised Translation. On that occasion, I administered the test to the undergraduates by dividing the class into two groups, one was given the transcribed dialogue for the eight situations and only listened to the audio, while the other half was shown the clips and could find the dialogues on the answer sheet. The postgraduates could rely on dialogues and were shown the clips. All respondents were asked whether they were familiar with the series and had watched some episodes.

The first consideration that can be made is that within the group of 2019 respondents, 9 students from Tourism Management and Organisation and 10

from Specialised Translation did not know the TV series, and therefore could not rely on previous knowledge of the main character and of his unusual social behaviour. Within the 2022 group, 6 students out of 21 declared they were not acquainted with the series. A comparison of the average rating of impoliteness by different respondents can now be made, starting from the data in Table 2.

	2019 experiment – no knowledge of *Sherlock* (undergraduates) – average ratings	2019 experiment – no knowledge of *Sherlock* (postgraduates) – average ratings	2019 experiment – audio only – average ratings	2022 experiment – knowledge of *Sherlock* – average ratings
Clip 1	2.6	3.1	1.6	3.3
Clip 2	1.9	2.3	1.1	2.5
Clip 3	4.3	4.4	3.4	4,5
Clip 4	3.6	4.1	3	3.1
Clip 5	3.9	4.7	2.2	5
Clip 6	1.6	2.3	1	3
Clip 7	2.1	2.2	1.5	3
Clip 8	3	3.3	1.9	3.8

Table 2
Average impoliteness ratings for each situation/clip with no previous knowledge of the series; 2019 group with audio information only.

Overall, it appears that the 2019 undergraduate group rated face-threats in impolite speech acts overall as less serious: in fact, apart from situation 4 ("My secret supply: what have you done with my secret supply? […] Cigarettes! What have you done with them? Where are they?), all the other cases have lower average impoliteness rates in comparison with the 2022 ratings. Out of the 10 students of the 2019 group from the BA in Tourism Management and Organisation with no knowledge of the series, 6 only listened to the audio of the dialogues, so they could not rely on the concomitants of speech, which, in Sherlock's case, are transparent: cold and intimidatory looks, tense and nervous movements, etc. These students rated the case of impoliteness proper (clip 3) as the most impolite, while clip 5 (ironic impoliteness) ranked second. This means that irony was less clear for this group, possibly because some of the respondents did not have access to visual information. The 2022 students did the opposite, as they ranked the ironic clip as the most aggressive example of impoliteness, followed by clip 3. In this case, all the students could rely on the information drawn from kinesics, as they were shown videos.

For the 2019 group of undergraduates, clip 4, depicting an interaction between Sherlock and Mrs Hudson, was the third most impolite situation. A possible explanation is that lack of familiarity with the characters prevented respondents from understanding Sherlock's directness and non-hostile provocations, as well as Mrs Hudson's humorous complaints. Again, 6 respondents could not rely on semiotic codes other than the audio one. Interestingly, the 2019 respondents from the Master in Specialised Translation with no previous knowledge of the series judged the situations proposed as

more impolite in general than the group questioned more recently and recognised the case of impolite irony in clip 5, which they rated as the most impolite interaction of all. Better language competence and specific training in contrastive linguistics and translation can account for the more nuanced perception these results suggest.

The third column in Table 2 provides information about ratings of impoliteness provided by the 2019 respondents who listened to the dialogues without watching the videoclips, whether they were familiar or not with the TV product used for the test. On the whole, EFL students who only had access to the audio channel seemed to have a reduced perception of impoliteness, probably because they were not able to grasp the value of suprasegmental traits such as pitch, tone, and ironic and sarcastic colourings of the voice.

4.1.1. A look at the adjectives

To understand how the 2022 respondents differentiated between situation 3 and 5, the two cases with the highest impoliteness score, I decided to take a look at the adjectives that were selected by participants to describe Holmes, Lestrade (involved in clip 3) and Anderson (in clip 5). More specifically, a couple of them seem to have captured the nuances and implications of the two interactions. One student, who was not familiar with the series and had not watched any episode, rated clip 3 with a 4, describing Sherlock as "bossy" and Lestrade as "quiet", whereas she considered Sherlock as even more impolite in clip 5, rated with a 5, as Sherlock appears "overbearing and […] superior", while Anderson is "nice and helpful". Another respondent, who was familiar the TV series, rated clip 3 with the highest value of impoliteness (5), and clip 5 with a 3. The difference is reflected in the student's choice of adjectives: in clip 3 Sherlock appears "aggressive" and in clip 5 "arrogant". She understood the aggravated force of the former situation and the ironic value of the latter. Another interesting example is provided by a third student who had not watched the series but was able to differentiate between these two situations, rating clip 3 with a 4 and clip 5 with a 5 and describing Sherlock as "conceited" ("*spocchioso*" in his own words) in the first case and "irritated" in the second. The annoyance in the second situation is what triggers the ironic outburst, which the respondent recognised. Most of the remaining answers, although they differentiate slightly between situation 3 and 5, do not account for this difference in the choice of adjectives, which are either the same or synonymous.

The selection of adjectives for clip 1 is revealing too, in relation to the Molly Hooper – Sherlock Holmes interaction. As was shown above, in this case acquaintance with the audio-visual product and the characters seemed to have a bearing on the rating of the interaction as less impolite than situations 3 and 5. Almost all the respondents understood that Molly is in love with

Sherlock, and described her as "shy", "nervous", "embarrassed"; "clumsy", "sweet", "kind", "submissive". Those who rated this situation with a 2 or a 3 judged Sherlock as "indifferent", "detached", or "bored", thus showing that he had no interest in Molly.

This task has its limits and is somewhat controversial, as allowing respondents to choose adjectives freely means collecting a vast array of results, with many near synonyms. However, although a limited number of adjectives would be more convenient, asking respondents to choose from a selection of answers would orient their interpretation and skew the results. Among the respondents who knew the series, there is more agreement on the perception of the main character, as fewer adjectives were chosen, all of them depicting Sherlock as detached and socially awkward. By contrast, those who did not know the series depicted him as aggressive, e.g., "arrogante" ('arrogant'), "sarcastico" ('sarcastic'), but also, quite oddly, "curioso" ('curious'), "imbarazzato" ('embarrassed'). More investigation is needed.

5. Conclusions

With all its caveats, I think the experiment I carried out provides useful suggestions for further investigation. Its main limitations are that fictional situations were used to evaluate impoliteness; however, as is well known in pragmatics studies, it is very difficult to find contextualised authentic material. At best, dialogue transcriptions from spontaneous conversations might be used, but then the visual component would be missing. A second shortcoming was that in this kind of studies the number of variables should be controlled, in order to assess the impact of each factor: in this case, in both the 2019 and 2022 experiments students were of different ages and origins, with different backgrounds and language competence, and some had prior knowledge of the TV series used for the experiment. In relation to language competence, this factor in particular must be taken with caution, as students self-assessed their language skills. The third, and perhaps most serious flaw, is that the type of impoliteness exemplified in the clips (and how they should be interpreted) was identified by the author. Since the evaluation rests on cultural perceptions of impoliteness, native speakers should be involved before administering the test, either to check their perception of the test items, or as respondents to the test itself (control group), or both.

Overall, in the 2022 experiment, in which all respondents were shown videoclips of the situations under evaluation, identification and comprehension of impoliteness in interaction were very satisfactory, as the students recognised the two most face-threatening situations (clip 3 and 5), were able to identify irony (in clip 5) and rated it mostly impolite and aggressive. Banter, represented in clip 7, was considered the third least impolite situation in the respondents'

evaluation, as the majority of students rated this example as not particularly impolite. The students whose evaluations were more extreme (i.e., maximum or minimum impoliteness) had no familiarity with the series and therefore were not aware of the close relationship between Holmes and Watson, which often results in the former teasing the latter.

When comparing the above results with data obtained from the 2019 experiment, it can be observed that average impoliteness rates were lower in all three groups from 2019 in comparison with those of the 2022 group. This is possibly because 1. many more 2019 students had little knowledge of the series, 2. some of them only listened to the audio files of the exchanges. Of the three 2019 groups, the Translation postgraduates seemed to be more sensitive to impoliteness nuances, possibly thanks to their specific training.

The answers to the questions regarding the choice of adjectives to describe the characters involved in impolite interactions offer controversial results, as when respondents are allowed to provide their own choices, a wide range of results are obtained, with many synonyms or near synonyms. Perhaps a limited but sufficiently varied selection should be provided, so as to restrict the range of results and at the same time prevent interpretation bias.

Acquaintance with the fictional product and characters, access to visual and kinesic information, language competence and specific training in linguistic issues are all relevant factors contributing to the rating of impoliteness in interaction. In the future, the experiment can be fine-tuned to better evaluate the impact of each component, with students with different backgrounds, language competence, and previous knowledge of the series and characters. Other audio-visual materials should be employed, to control the familiarity factor; at least one group of respondents should be chosen among specialists who are explicitly taught about (im)politeness and another among native speakers of English. However, this pilot experiment seems to show that the use of bi-modal (audio and visual) input is crucial in understanding the nuances of (im)politeness, especially in a foreign language.

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Appendix

Cari studenti, care studentesse,

nel questionario che segue troverete, alla pagina 1, le domande 1-5 su alcuni dati relativi a voi, alla vostra competenza linguistica e alle vostre abitudini come spettatori di prodotti audiovisivi.

Successivamente, nelle domande 6-21, vedrete dei brevi video clip, di cui troverete la trascrizione dei dialoghi, tratti dalla serie TV *Sherlock*. Vi si chiede di valutare qualche battuta (indicata in neretto nel testo) in termini di scortesia (su una scala di intensità da 0, cioè per nulla scortese, a 5, molto scortese).

Relativamente ai personaggi coinvolti nello scambio vi si chiede di descriverli, così come li percepite, con un aggettivo.

Vi ringrazio anticipatamente per la vostra collaborazione. Menzionerò il vostro aiuto nel lavoro scritto su questo argomento, e, se vorrete, ve ne manderò una copia.

Silvia Bruti

Soggetto intervistato:

Indica la tua età: …………………………………………..

Genere: ……………………………

Competenza linguistica in inglese: B1 ☐ B2 ☐ C1 ☐ C2 ☐ non so giudicare ☐

Conosci *Sherlock* la serie?: Sì ☐   No ☐

Ne hai visto qualche puntata?: Sì ☐   No ☐

****

Situazione 1

Molly Hooper è una giovane patologa che lavora al St Bartholomew's Hospital Morgue. Lei e Sherlock Holmes si conoscono per lavoro, perché in quell'obitorio e laboratorio Sherlock Holmes conduce i suoi esperimenti.

MOLLY: Listen, I was wondering… Maybe later, when you're finished…
SHERLOCK: Are you wearing lipstick? You weren't wearing lipstick before.
MOLLY: I, er… I refreshed it a bit.
SHERLOCK: Sorry, you were saying?
MOLLY: I was wondering if you'd like to have a coffee.
SHERLOCK: **Black, two sugars please. I'll be upstairs**.
MOLLY: Okay.

Su una scala da 0 a 5 (0 per niente, 5 massimamente scortese), quanto reputi scortese la battuta in **neretto** di Sherlock Holmes?

………………………………………………………………………

Quali altri aggettivi useresti per descrivere, da quello che percepisci, Molly Hooper e Sherlock Holmes nei confronti l'uno dell'altra?

Molly Hooper   Sherlock Holmes   .

Situazione 2
Sherlock Holmes deve entrare in un appartamento e suona a un campanello di una persona, la cui etichetta è stata di recente apposta sul campanello, per farsi aprire il portone.

WATSON: So what do we do now? Sit here and wait for him to come back?
HOLMES: Just moved in.
WATSON: What?
HOLMES: The floor above. New label.
WATSON: Could have just replaced it. (*Buzzes*)
HOLMES: No-one ever does that.
MS WINTLE: Hello?
HOLMES: Hi! Um, I live in the flat just below you. I-I don't think we've met.
MS WINTLE: No, well, uh, I've just moved in.
HOLMES: **Actually, I've just locked my keys in my flat.**
MS WINTLE: D'you want me to buzz you in?
HOLMES: **Yeah. And can I use your balcony?**
MS WINTLE: What?

Su una scala da 0 a 5 (0 per niente, 5 massimamente scortese), quanto reputi scortesi le battute in **neretto** di Sherlock Holmes?
………………………………………………………………………………

Quali altri aggettivi useresti per descrivere, da quello che percepisci, Ms Wintle e Sherlock Holmes nei confronti l'uno dell'altro?
Ms Wintle   Sherlock Holmes

Situazione 3
I parlanti coinvolti sono Lestrade, detective a Scotland Yard, che si avvale dell'aiuto di Sherlock in diverse occasioni; Sherlock Holmes, che spesso sbaglia il nome di battesimo di Lestrade (Greg); e John Watson, un medico militare reduce della guerra in Afghanistan che una volta tornato a condurre una vita da civile diventa il coinquilino di Holmes, qui soltanto astante.

SHERLOCK: **Shut up.**
LESTRADE: I didn't say anything.
SHERLOCK: **You were thinking. It's annoying.**

Su una scala da 0 a 5 (0 per niente, 5 massimamente scortese), quanto reputi scortese le battute in neretto di Sherlock Holmes?
………………………………………………………………………………
Quali altri aggettivi useresti per descrivere, da quello che percepisci, Lestrade e Sherlock Holmes nei confronti l'uno dell'altro?
Lestrade   Sherlock Holmes

Situazione 4

Sherlock Holmes ha da poco smesso di fumare. Sta cercando la sua riserva nascosta di sigarette finché non arriva Mrs Hudson, la sua padrona di casa.

MRS HUDSON: Ooh-ooh!
SHERLOCK (*rummaging about in the fireplace as he speaks almost sing-song*): **My secret supply: what have you done with my secret supply?**
MRS HUDSON: Eh?
SHERLOCK: **Cigarettes! What have you done with them? Where are they?**
MRS HUDSON: You know you never let me touch your things! (*She looks around at the mess*.)
MRS HUDSON: Ooh, chance would be a fine thing.
SHERLOCK (*standing up and facing her*): I thought you weren't my housekeeper.
MRS HUDSON: I'm not.

Su una scala da 0 a 5 (0 per niente, 5 massimamente scortese), quanto reputi scortesi le battute in **neretto** di Sherlock Holmes?
……………………………………………………………………………

Quali altri aggettivi useresti per descrivere, da quello che percepisci, Mrs Hudson e Sherlock Holmes nei confronti uno dell'altro?
Mrs Hudson   Sherlock Holmes

Situazione 5

I parlanti coinvolti sono Sherlock Holmes e Anderson, il capo della scientifica della squadra investigativa dell'ispettore Lestrade. Al contrario di Lestrade, Anderson non sempre gradisce la presenza di Holmes sulle scene del crimine.

ANDERSON: She's German. 'Rache': it's German for 'revenge'. She could be trying to tell us something …
SHERLOCK**: Yes, thank you for your input**.

Su una scala da 0 a 5 (0 per niente, 5 massimamente scortese), quanto reputi scortese la battuta in **neretto** di Sherlock Holmes?
……………………………………………………………………………

Quali altri aggettivi useresti per descrivere, da quello che percepisci, Lestrade e Sherlock Holmes nei confronti l'uno dell'altro?
Anderson   Sherlock Holmes

Situazione 6
Sherlock Holmes sta interrogando la segretaria di un uomo che è stato ucciso da poco, Amanda. I due si sono appena conosciuti.

HOLMES: **What kind of a boss was he, Amanda? Appreciative?**
AMANDA: Um, no. That's not a word I'd use. The only things Eddie appreciated had a big price tag.
HOLMES: **Like that hand cream. He bought that for you, didn't he?**
HOLMES: Look at this one. Got a taxi from home on the day he died. Eighteen pounds fifty.

Su una scala da 0 a 5 (0 per niente, 5 massimamente scortese), quanto reputi scortesi le battute in **neretto** di Sherlock Holmes?
………………………………………………………………………………

Quali altri aggettivi useresti per descrivere, da quello che percepisci, Amanda e Sherlock Holmes nei confronti l'uno dell'altro?
Amanda   Sherlock Holmes

Situazione 7
I protagonisti sono Sherlock Holmes e John Watson, medico militare divenuto il coinquilino di Sherlock Holmes al 221B di Baker Street.
SHERLOCK: John? John! You are amazing! You are fantastic!
JOHN: Yes, all right! You don't have to overdo it.
SHERLOCK: **You've never been the most luminous of people, but as a conductor of light you are unbeatable**.
JOHN: Cheers. ... What?
SHERLOCK: **Some people who aren't geniuses have an amazing ability to stimulate it in others**.
JOHN: Hang on – you were saying "Sorry" a minute ago. Don't spoil it. Go on: what have I done that's so bloody stimulating?

Su una scala da 0 a 5 (0 per niente, 5 massimamente scortese), quanto reputi scortesi le battute in **neretto** di Sherlock Holmes?
………………………………………………………………………………

Quali altri aggettivi useresti per descrivere, da quello che percepisci, John Watson e Sherlock Holmes nei confronti l'uno dell'altro?
John Watson   Sherlock Holmes

Situazione 8
Sherlock Holmes è chiamato dal fratello Mycroft a risolvere un problema che coinvolge un membro della famiglia reale. L'Equerry è un dignitario di corte che Sherlock Holmes incontra in questa occasione.

SHERLOCK: I'll need some equipment, of course.
MYCROFT: Anything you require. I'll have it sent to...
SHERLOCK (*interrupting*): **Can I have a box of matches?** (*He's looking at the equerry as he speaks*.)

*L*ingue e
*L*inguaggi

EQUERRY: I'm sorry?
SHERLOCK: **Or your cigarette lighter. Either will do.** (*He holds out his hand expectantly*.)
EQUERRY: I don't smoke.
SHERLOCK: **No, I know you don't, but your employer does.**

Su una scala da 0 a 5 (0 per niente, 5 massimamente scortese), quanto reputi scortesi le battute in **neretto** di Sherlock Holmes?
………………………………………………………………………………
Quali altri aggettivi useresti per descrivere, da quello che percepisci, l'Equerry e Sherlock Holmes nei confronti l'uno dell'altro?
Equerry   Sherlock Holmes

L'ANALYSE DU TEXTE ECRIT
Quelle efficacité pragmatique en français L2?

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Abstract – Our article aims to analyze the pragmatic effectiveness of texts written in French as a second language (L2) by Italian-speaking university readers with previous knowledge of the foreign language. The case study, carried out on 106 texts, reveals the influence of the native language on the L2, both for reading comprehension and for writing tasks. Being familiar with the topic, being able to exploit research tools and having lexical competence affect pragmatic effectiveness and guarantee an interactive approach, favoring the activation of the interaction between reader, text and context. Thus, during their writing task, readers will merge illocutionary competence (ability to produce speech acts) with socio-linguistic competence (choice of vocabulary suited to the context) to achieve pragmatic effectiveness. The analysed data, along with a supplementary questionnaire on the strategies used in understanding and text production, will shed some light on the mechanisms chosen by the typically-developing reader student to satisfy the request (answering some questions) and on the difficulties that hamper the passage from efficiency to pragmatic effectiveness. In fact, according to the findings, authentic and reader-oriented production, which departs from the words in the text, and which is based on a principle of lexical compensation, seems to be rarely adopted by students. Why? How can we favor this kind of production? At the end of the article, we try to answer the questions raised.

Keywords: reading comprehension; pragmatic efficacy; FLE; verbatim; authenticity.

1. Introduction

Cet article naît de la nécessité de répondre à la question posée en guise de titre qui porte sur l'efficacité pragmatique d'un discours en français L2.[1] Depuis plusieurs années la compréhension du texte en langue étrangère est partie prenante des travaux que nous soumettons à nos étudiants de FLE tout au long de notre cours universitaire ainsi qu'au moment de l'examen final. C'est justement au cours des corrections que certaines remarques sur la qualité des réponses données se sont imposées. Notre travail vise à vérifier la capacité d'exploration d'un texte écrit en français L2 de la part d'un normolecteur

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[1] De même que H. Akmoun, nous souhaitons ne pas rentrer dans le débat français L2 (FLS) et français langue étrangère (FLE), le français représentant dans ce contexte une langue non première que les étudiants apprennent tout au long de leur parcours universitaire comme première langue étrangère. Cela étant, nous nous éloignons de la classification proposée par Cuq (2005, p. 93) et nous utilisons les deux termes en tant que synonymes.

italophone, le terme *exploration* étant utilisé dans le sens de lire un texte en français L2, en acquérir les notions-clé et formuler un discours personnel sur le sujet proposé pour répondre aux questions après-lecture, proposées en tant qu'activité.

Dans les sections suivantes nous rentrerons dans les détails, en partant d'un cadre théorique s'appuyant sur une littérature plurilingue et focalisant l'attention sur certains aspects de la compréhension écrite, de la production de réponses en langue étrangère, du lien entre les compétences en langue première et en français L2.

Des précisions méthodologiques ainsi que la présentation de cas particuliers suivront. Nous soulignons dès maintenant que notre analyse relève d'une étude explorative et descriptive visant à mettre en évidence les stratégies adoptées par des étudiants, non spécialistes,[2] dans la production d'un discours écrit en L2.

2. Cadre théorique

2.1. Compréhension en L2 et langue première

La lecture d'un article en langue étrangère ainsi que le travail de compréhension qui le suit s'avèrent intéressants pour l'étudiant et pour l'enseignant: d'un côté, l'étudiant-lecteur développe et renforce ses connaissances sur la culture du pays étranger, objet de lecture et d'apprentissage tout en faisant face à la difficulté de produire des réponses correctes du point de vue linguistique et du contenu; de l'autre, l'enseignant évalue l'efficacité pragmatique et argumentative des réponses données par l'apprenant et réfléchit sur plusieurs aspects, tels que la capacité de compréhension d'un texte en langue étrangère, les compétences de production d'un texte écrit,[3] l'emploi et l'influence des stratégies de lecture choisies. Ces derniers éléments ne peuvent pas se passer de l'influence de la langue première sur les processus mentaux mis en place par le lecteur lorsqu'il se confronte avec le texte que l'on lui propose. D'ailleurs, cela semblerait représenter l'obstacle majeur: "La compréhension du texte en langue étrangère ou L2 (langue seconde) est difficile car on ne peut pas observer les mécanismes et les processus mentaux" (Bouvet, Bréelle 2004, p. 25). De plus, suivant Daloiso (2020, p. 4), la production écrite après lecture ne permet pas au chercheur de comprendre les processus de construction dégagés. Pour cela, il faudrait verbaliser chaque passage en utilisant des interviews, autrement dit des *think-aloud protocols*. Cependant, il est tout aussi vrai que les questions

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[2] La recherche prend en compte les travaux de nos étudiants en Licence d'Économie. Ils choisissent le français parmi d'autres langues : l'anglais et l'espagnol.

[3] Nous considérons le texte écrit comme l'ensemble des réponses au questionnaire qui se trouve à la fin de l'article proposé aux étudiants.

facilitent le lecteur dans l'activation de stratégies (Rosenshine *et al.* 1996) pour bien lire et mieux comprendre le texte.

Lorsque nous parlons de compréhension du texte en L2, nous nous insérons dans un domaine complexe qui implique généralement des activités du type "exploiter un répertoire linguistique en assemblant, intégrant et alternant délibérément les langues" (Volume complémentaire du CECR de 2021, p. 130) pour déduire le sens de textes écrits dans une autre langue. La proximité des langues peut simplifier la tâche. Notamment, pour ce qui est de la compréhension de l'écrit, il faut bien préciser quel est l'objectif de lecture, la manière de lire utilisée par l'apprenant en dépendant largement: s'agirait-il d'une lecture *pour s'orienter* ou bien d'une lecture *pour s'informer et discuter*? C'est le second cas qui nous intéresse. Cependant, bien qu'ils soient informatifs, les textes proposés à nos lecteurs exigent la mise en place de la compétence 'savoir s'orienter' afin de trouver les bonnes réponses. Voilà donc qu'une toute première lecture attentive et soignée sera suivie d'une lecture recherche, à savoir "lire rapidement un texte en 'diagonale' pour décider si on va le lire (ou en lire des passages) sérieusement (= écrémer) et en second lieu, parcourir rapidement un texte à la recherche de quelque chose de particulier - généralement une information (= balayer)" (Conseil de l'Europe 2021, p. 56).

Écrémer et *balayer*, deux actions qui s'alternent de manière spontanée tout au long d'une lecture informative, indépendamment de la langue du texte. Quel est donc le rôle joué par la langue première? Comment la langue première influence-t-elle la lecture et, par conséquent, la compréhension d'un texte en L2? Tout lecteur, ayant une connaissance de la langue étrangère de niveau B (CECR), estime nécessaire de s'appuyer sur sa langue première pour activer l'interprétation et la compréhension des mots ou des notions difficiles. En ce sens, dans les échelles des descripteurs du CECR à propos de la compréhension générale de l'écrit, nous lisons:

- B1 = Peut lire des textes factuels clairs sur des sujets relatifs à son domaine et à ses intérêts avec un niveau satisfaisant de compréhension;
- B2 = Peut lire avec un grand degré d'autonomie en adaptant le mode et la rapidité de lecture à différents textes et objectifs et en utilisant sélectivement les sources de référence appropriées. Possède un vocabulaire de lecture large et actif mais pourra avoir des difficultés avec des expressions idiomatiques moins fréquentes. (Volume complémentaire du CECR de 2021, p. 56)

La familiarité avec le thème proposé, la capacité de sélectionner les ressources de soutien ainsi que la connaissance d'un vocabulaire riche en L2 aident le normolecteur dans le décryptage du texte et également dans le travail de production, car une disponibilité majeure de formes linguistiques peut conditionner l'efficacité et la pertinence du message (Mariani 2015) Cependant, tout au long de l'activité de lecture et de compréhension, certains

obstacles apparaissent: c'est le cas des "expressions peu fréquentes", mentionnées dans le CECR, auxquelles nous ajoutons également les expressions figées, les termes techniques, les termes se référant à un contexte qui n'est pas partagé par l'apprenant et dont nous parlerons plus loin. Voilà donc que pour atteindre l'objectif – répondre de manière correcte aux questions – le normolecteur doit être bien motivé, sa motivation étant l'élément qui déclenche l'activation des compétences stratégiques favorisant de telle sorte l'interaction lecteur-texte. En ce sens, Giasson (2003) et Legendre (2005) considèrent la compréhension comme une opération dont les protagonistes sont le lecteur, le texte et le contexte qui s'entrecroisent tout en rendant la compréhension un processus complexe. Bien que de manière différente, mais par l'emploi de termes comparables, les publications scientifiques mettent en évidence les variables des facteurs mentionnés plus haut.

Ainsi, Vakilifard, dans son article de 2015, *Compréhension de Texte en Langue Étrangère : Élaboration d'un Modèle de Facteurs en Jeu,* retrace par ordre chronologique le parcours avancé par les chercheurs à ce sujet et propose un classement des facteurs propres aux lecteurs, aux textes et aux contextes. Il s'ensuit que dans le premier cas, – les facteurs spécifiques des lecteurs – , nous retrouvons les connaissances conceptuelles, linguistiques et les facteurs intrapersonnels; la densité, le lexique, les structures et la redondance caractérisent le texte, alors que le contexte peut être social, psychologique et physique.

Partageant l'analyse de Vakilifard, nous en reprenons certains points pour arriver à la question posée plus haut: comment la langue première influence-t-elle la lecture et, par conséquent, la compréhension d'un texte en L2? Selon Brantmeier *et al.* (2014, p. 34), il existe un "rapport étroit et positif entre la littératie en langue première et la littératie en L2", la *littératie* étant la capacité de lire et écrire en langue première. La connaissance, qu'elle porte sur les aspects lexicaux et syntaxiques de la langue ou sur le plan culturel lié à la matière examinée, représente le point de départ pour la bonne compréhension du texte: le normolecteur, conscient de ses compétences et capacités, pourra ainsi commencer et avancer dans son travail bien motivé, ce qui lui permettra d'atteindre son objectif. Son interprétation du texte sera différente par rapport à celle d'un autre lecteur et également de l'auteur, les trois n'étant pas censés partager le même arrière-plan culturel. Il est donc fondamental de bien préparer le terrain pour l'interaction avec le texte, car

> les lecteurs peuvent comprendre et se rappeler plus que d'autres s'ils ont une bonne connaissance sur les subtilités culturelles du contenu d'un texte et partagent les mêmes schémas culturels que l'auteur. (Yousef *et al.* 2014, p. 711)

Quant aux enseignants, ils jouent évidemment un rôle clé dans cette situation: ce que Balboni (2012) définit comme une approche interactive du texte passe par l'intervention d'un guide dont la fonction principale est de clarifier les

points flous, tout en créant un contexte concret pour développer et augmenter la motivation de l'apprenant, en établissant les liens avec des connaissances préalables et en analysant le paratexte; ces actions, renforçant les compétences de l'étudiant, lui permettront de procéder en toute autonomie dans la lecture et la compréhension d'un texte en L2. De plus, lorsqu'il s'agit d'un article de presse – c'est notre cas – visant à présenter des informations liées au domaine économique, la connaissance de certaines structures typiques du discours journalistique et de certains termes techniques s'impose, ceux-ci pouvant représenter un obstacle dans la compréhension du texte. En effet, comme le souligne Cortelazzo (1994), la langue spécialisée est une variante de la langue naturelle. Bien qu'il s'agisse d'un texte à finalité didactique, il est important d'éviter toute manipulation, toute simplification ou l'emploi de synonymes, de garder l'authenticité[4] de l'article et de stimuler l'accomplissement d'une tâche de réalité: écrire un article de presse. D'ailleurs, la presse écrite, ayant pour cible un vaste public devrait être accessible, même en présence de structures précises, du point de vue linguistique, rhétorique et graphique qui n'empêchent pas la compréhension globale. Il faut quand même tenir compte que, se référant à la réalité culturelle et sociale française, ces textes représentent les "discours sociaux" dont Beacco parle en 1993, dans l'article "Civilisation et Discours sociaux en classe de langue".

Maria Dolores Picazo (1997) parle d'un *appareillage* créé pour persuader et convaincre le lecteur et reconnaît dans le texte journalistique la nécessité d'une harmonie entre forme et contenu, une tendance à la synthèse et une dimension plus expositive qu'explicative. Le lecteur devra ainsi se débrouiller dans ce panorama apparemment linéaire où la parataxe remplace l'hypotaxe, les phrases simples prédominent sur le structures complexes et la nominalisation s'ajoute à un emploi fréquent des formes impersonnelles. Cela étant, le problème principal est toujours représenté par le lexique, les expressions figées et les termes techniques évoqués plus haut, que l'on pourrait inclure parmi les aptitudes sémantiques mentionnées à l'intérieur du CECR. Toute stratégie de lecture passe par plusieurs *opérations de communication langagière,* telles que la capacité de reconnaître, d'identifier, de comprendre et d'interpréter le message. Il en est de même pour la production écrite.

2.2. Production en L2 et langue première

Le fait de répondre de manière correcte aux questions posées en bas du texte demande au normolecteur la mise en pratique d'aptitudes cognitives, linguistiques et bien évidemment, motrices; ce qui lui permet d'organiser et écrire la réponse. Il met en œuvre ce qu'on appelle la *compétence pragmatique,* soit une compétence réunissant la capacité de gérer des actes linguistiques

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[4] "Les documents authentiques sont des documents *bruts*, élaborés par des francophones pour des francophones à des fin de communication". (Cuq J.-P., Gruca I. 2005, p. 431).

(compétence illocutoire) et de choisir les unités lexicales bien adaptés au contexte (compétence sociolinguistique). Ainsi, un étudiant de niveau B1

> Peut produire des textes suivis non complexes sur une gamme étendue de sujets relatifs à son domaine en liant une série d'éléments discrets en une séquence linéaire. […] Montre une bonne maîtrise du vocabulaire élémentaire mais des erreurs sérieuses se produisent encore quand il s'agit d'exprimer une pensée plus complexe ou de traiter des sujets de situations inhabituels. (Volume complémentaire du CECR de 2021, p. 70 et p. 139).

Et au niveau B2

> Peut composer des textes clairs et détaillés sur une gamme étendue de sujets relatifs à son domaine d'intérêt en faisant la synthèse et l'évaluation d'informations et d'arguments empruntés à des sources diverses. […] L'exactitude du vocabulaire est généralement élevée bien que des confusions et le choix de mots incorrects se produisent sans gêner la communication. (Volume complémentaire du CECR de 2021, p. 70 et p. 138).

Quoiqu'il existe des différences entre les deux niveaux, le normolecteur, devant créer un discours en L2, procède dans son travail à travers la planification du discours, la compensation lexicale ou des structures linguistiques, le contrôle et la correction de ce qu'il a écrit. C'est justement sur l'étape de compensation que notre recherche se focalisera plus loin, lorsque nous présenterons l'analyse de cas, sachant que, au niveau B1, l'étudiant

> Peut définir les caractéristiques de quelque chose de concret dont le mot/le signe lui échappe.
> Peut exprimer le sens d'un mot/un signe en en donnant un autre, signifiant quelque chose de semblable (par exemple, "un camion pour voyageurs" pour "un bus").
> Peut utiliser un mot/un signe simple signifiant quelque chose de semblable au concept recherché et solliciter une "correction".
> Peut franciser un mot/un signe de sa langue maternelle et demander s'il (si elle) a été compris(e). (Conseil de l'Europe 2021, p. 74)

Et au niveau B2,

> Peut utiliser des périphrases et des paraphrases pour dissimuler des lacunes lexicales et structurales. (Conseil de l'Europe 2021, p. 74)

D'ailleurs, comme Dubois et Bahrambeiguy (2018) le dit, la langue écrite présente un vocabulaire et des structures plus complexes par rapport à la langue orale, bien qu'il s'agisse dans les deux cas d'un acte langagier réalisant une intention de communication. Il faudra évaluer l'efficacité pragmatique de la production écrite: le normolecteur se fait-il comprendre? Ses réponses au

questionnaire après-lecture sont-elles pertinentes? Manifeste-t-il la capacité d'employer un lexique correct?

3. Les cas d'étude

3.1. Présentation du corpus et de la méthodologie

Notre corpus est formé de 106 travaux universitaires qui portent sur la compréhension d'un texte écrit en langue française développant un thème lié à l'économie: les entreprises, le commerce et le tourisme. Les destinataires sont nos étudiants en deuxième année de Licence en Économie devant travailler sur les articles de presse suivants:

- *La contrefaçon sur Internet, un fléau européen*[5]
- *Avec Kinder et Nutella, Ferrero renforce sa position de leader en France*[6]
- *Le tourisme humanitaire: la vraie fausse pitié*[7]

Il s'agit de textes qui, pour leur complexité et pour le type d'activité proposé se situeraient au niveau B1 du CECR. Cela revient à dire que l'on pourrait y trouver des termes techniques, ou bien des expressions typiques du français de l'économie, qui ont été normalement rencontrés par les étudiants tout au long du cours, mais également des néologismes, des mots du français familier et des expressions figées. En ce sens, il est utile de préciser que notre choix de ne pas manipuler les textes dépend du fait qu'ils s'adressent à des lecteurs ayant commencé leurs études en français au lycée et qui en poursuivent la connaissance à travers un cours universitaire, dont l'objectif est celui de donner tous les outils nécessaires pour bien s'insérer dans le monde du travail français ou francophone et, certes, pour prendre conscience de sa structure et de ses mécanismes.

Les textes faisant l'objet de nos analyses sont suivis de questions "oui-non", questions ouvertes ou à choix multiple. C'est justement la réponse donnée par l'étudiant à la question ouverte qui a retenu notre attention et que nous prenons en compte pour évaluer l'efficacité pragmatique du discours en L2, formulé par un normolecteur.

Dans le but de mieux orienter notre recherche ainsi que d'obtenir des résultats conformes à la réalité, nous avons également demandé à nos étudiants

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[5] L'article est tiré de *Le Figaro*, publié le 3 octobre 2010 - https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2010/10/03/01016-20101003ARTFIG00249-la-contrefacon-sur-internet-un-fleau-europeen.php (20.09.22).

[6] L'article est tiré de *Les Échos*, publié le 7 mars 2012. https://www.lesechos.fr/2012/03/avec-kinder-et-nutella-ferrero-renforce-sa-position-de-leader-en-france-352789 (20.09.22).

[7] L'article est tiré de *Libération*, publié le 15 août 2016. https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2016/08/15/tourisme-humanitaire-la-vraie-fausse-pitie_1472579/ (20.09.22).

de remplir un questionnaire rapide, un fois le travail de compréhension terminé. Le questionnaire a été rédigé en italien pour éviter tout obstacle linguistique et se compose de cinq questions portant sur les difficultés de compréhension, la modalité de repérage d'informations à l'intérieur du texte et la production des réponses. Les résultats ont mis en évidence des problèmes dans la compréhension du lexique (60%), dus à une faible connaissance des termes présentés dans l'article (73,3%), 13,3% d'étudiants manifestant leur difficulté à repérer les mots dans le dictionnaire. Ainsi, parmi les obstacles, nous retrouvons:

- des verbes: *endiguer* ce déferlement / la contrefaçon *a* depuis quelques années *gangrené* tous les secteurs de l'économie (*Le Figaro*) / l'entreprise familiale d'Alba *caracole* (*Les Échos*);
- des locutions ou des expressions figées: *travailler de concert* / stopper cette fraude *tient* parfois *de la gageure* (*Le Figaro*)/ les œufs Kinder Surprise *ont fait un bond* de 25 % (*Les Échos*);
- des expressions faisant partie d'un registre familier: La *Toile* (*Le Figaro*) / une hippie qui a "fait *grave* du baby-sitting" et "*kiffe* l'Afrique" (*Libération*);
- des néologismes: un service *Cyberdouane* (*Le Figaro*) / c'est le tourisme humanitaire, ou *volontourisme* (*Libération*);
- des termes techniques: son *chiffre d'affaires* a progressé (*Les Échos*)

Concernant la production écrite et les stratégies mises en place pour avancer dans le travail après lecture, 60% des étudiants affirment procéder par étapes: lecture globale de l'article, lecture et compréhension des questions, deuxième lecture des parties censées inclure la réponse correcte. Ainsi, dans le repérage, ils agissent selon le principe de "*écrémer* et *balayer*", dont nous parlions plus haut, et bien qu'ils soient plongés dans un discours en français L2, plus de la moitié des étudiants (66,7%) formulent d'abord la réponse en italien, puis ils traduisent leur phrase en français. S'agit-il d'une bonne stratégie? Les réponses données s'avèrent-elles être efficaces du point de vue pragmatique?

3.2. Analyses et résultats

Selon Balboni (2012) la communication demande la mise en place de trois compétences: linguistique, pragmalinguistique et socio-culturelle. La compétence linguistique, point de départ pour toute communication correcte, s'accompagne d'une compétence pragmalinguistique, déterminant la production d'un échange efficace. Ces deux s'ajoutent à la compétence socio-culturelle ou interculturelle qui permet de construire un discours approprié. Il s'agit dans les trois cas de compétences mentales se transformant en action communicative dans le monde, à travers l'emploi d'un *savoir-faire:* la production de textes oraux ou écrits. C'est l'idée de *performance* qui résume

de manière claire l'échange individu-monde dont Balboni parle: les compétences mentales trouvent leur place dans le monde et, à l'envers, elles changent en fonction des *inputs* pragmatiques, sociaux et culturels envoyés par le monde; d'où l'émergence de problèmes interculturels et communicatifs, liés à la dimension verbale et non-verbale de la langue.

C'est justement sur le terme *performance* qu'il faut s'arrêter pour examiner à fond la notion d'*efficacité pragmatique*. Comme Girelli (2020) le dit, la communication efficace est pragmatique. Cependant, quand nous parlons, notre attention se focalise sur ce que nous disons et sur la manière dans laquelle nous accomplissons l'acte; autrement dit, ce qui nous intéresse le plus est l'efficience communicative, orientée vers nous-même, plus que l'efficacité communicative, orientée vers l'interlocuteur, d'où la question posée à nos étudiants à l'intérieur du questionnaire sous-mentionné: comment avez-vous rendu la réponse efficace? 53,3% affirment que dans la formulation de leurs discours en français L2, ils ont pris en compte le destinataire et 46,7% n'ont focalisé leur attention que sur le contenu de la réponse. Il en est que, dans les deux cas, la production écrite en L2 met en évidence le processus du normolecteur et permet de relever les deux situations suivantes, classées en utilisant des étiquettes.

- *Verbatim*: la réponse (a, b, c, d, e) reprend presque complètement le texte ou les termes utilisés dans la question, l'apprenant n'apportant aucune modification significative. Il construit son discours en utilisant les structures qu'il identifie comme marquantes, manifestant ainsi une certaine fidélité au texte. Sa réponse ne s'avère pas toujours complète.
- *Authenticité*: l'apprenant produit une réponse personnelle (f, g, h, i, l, m, n, o), il reprend le contenu du texte, bien qu'il utilise son propre lexique ainsi que les structures linguistiques qu'il maitrise. Des erreurs se produisent, mais la construction des réponses est plus complexe et exhaustive par rapport au cas du *verbatim*.

Or, ce dernier cas est, d'après notre point de vue, le plus satisfaisant puisque, au-delà des erreurs, le normolecteur active toutes les compétences dont il dispose pour créer un discours authentique en L2: il s'écarte du texte pour donner forme à son idée. Cependant, c'est le premier cas qui l'emporte et, quoiqu'il en soit, dans la formulation mentale des phrases, la langue première s'impose, engendrant des calques ou des structures peu idiomatiques en français.

Les lignes suivantes proposent l'étude des cas les plus pertinents pour nos analyses; nous y présentons le paragraphe de l'article et la question posée ainsi que les réponses produites par les normolecteurs, sans en modifier les erreurs et, par souci de lisibilité, en soulignant les phrases qui nous intéressent.

3.2.1. Cas n. 1: Verbatim

Texte de départ: "Dans l'Hexagone, la lutte contre ces transactions sur le Web s'est intensifiée. En février 2009, un service Cyberdouane a été créé au sein de la Direction nationale du renseignement et des enquêtes douanières. *Les quinze enquêteurs qui la composent traquent les sites en ligne illicites. En parallèle, les fonctionnaires de cette administration sont de plus en plus présents dans les centres de tri postaux et de fret express*".

Question posée: "Comment les enquêteurs dépistent-ils ces fraudes?"

Réponses:

(1)   A travers la mise en place d'un cyber douane, <u>les quinze enquêteurs qui la composent traquent les sites en ligne illicites</u>. Ils sont <u>de plus en plus présent dans les centres de tri postaux et de fret express</u>.

(2)   Pour dépister ces fraudes <u>a été créé un service de Cybeurdouane</u> qui contrôle la Toile et, <u>en parallèle, les fonctionnaires</u> contrôle <u>le centre de tri postaux et de fret express</u>.

Texte de départ: "Le groupe familial italien a continué d'augmenter ses parts de marché en France en 2011. En dépit de l'offensive de l'américain Kraft et malgré la crise. *Il se développe peu à peu en Amérique et en Asie, malgré des perspectives de croissance en Europe*."

Question posée: "Quels sont *les continents où Ferrero se développe*?"

Réponses:

(3)   Les continents où Ferrero se développe sont l'Amerique et l'Asie, mais il y a aussi des prospectives de croissances en Europe.

Texte de départ: "Si au départ la contrefaçon était associée aux marques de luxe, elle a depuis quelques années gangrenée tous les secteurs de l'économie, *de celui de la pièce détachée de véhicules à celui de l'informatique*, en passant par les produits de consommation courante. Autre secteur où le faux s'est répandu: *les médicaments*."

Question posée: "Selon le service des douanes, quels sont *les deux secteurs principaux mis en péril par* le phénomène de la contrefaçon? "

Réponses:

(4)   <u>Le deux secteurs mis en péril par la contrefaçon</u> <u>sont</u> celui des médicaments et celui des pièces détachées de véhicules.

(5)   Selon ce service, le secteur de l'économie et l'industrie pharmaceutique <u>sont les deux secteurs principaux mis en péril par ce phénomène</u>.

3.2.2. *Cas n. 2:* Authenticité

Texte de départ: "Tous produits confondus, y compris son indétrônable pâte à tartiner, l'italien a réalisé un chiffre d'affaires total de 1,2 milliard d'euros en France en hausse de 7,5 % en 2010-2011. Depuis septembre, le groupe continue à gagner du terrain en France, avec des ventes en hausse de 4,4 % dans un marché en croissance de seulement 1,6 %."

Question posée: "Quelle est la situation des ventes de Ferrero en France?"

Réponse:

(6)   Ferrero consolide de plus en plus sa position sur les marchés français ; l'entreprise a enregistré une augmentation de 4,4% de ses ventes, bien supérieure à la moyenne qui n'est que de 1,6%. Comme l'explique l'article, entre 2010 et 2011, Ferrero a enregistré un chiffre d'affaires total en France de 1,2 milliard d'euros, soit une augmentation de 7,5 % par rapport aux années précédentes.

Question posée: "Comment les enquêteurs dépistent-ils ces fraudes?"

Réponses:

(7)   Tous les Etast doivent imposer de lourdes sanctions pour bloquer ce marché. Un service a été créé : Cyberdouane pour suivre les sites sur Internet qui sont illégaux.
(8)   Pour vaincre ce phénomène a été activé un contrôle douanier rigide et précis des colins.

Question posée: "Selon le service des douanes, quels sont les deux secteurs principaux mis en péril par le phénomène de la contrefaçon?"

Réponses:

(9)   La douane a souligné en particulier les médicaments et les produits de luxe comme les deux secteurs plus vulnérables à la contrefaçon.
(10)   Les deux secteurs économiques dans lesquels la contrefaçon devient très répandue et dangereuse sont ceux de l'automobile et de l'informatique. Aussi les médicaments sont en danger de contrefaçon.
(11)   Les deux secteurs en péril sont celui du médicament (parce que on peut avoir dommages physiques graves à cause des doses sans prescription du médecin) et celui du pièces détachées de voitures (parce que leur qualité est très faible et il se peuvent casser de manière très facile, donc c'est un risque très élevé pour les automobilistes).
(12)   Le service des douanes a dit que le secteur qui sont été le plus exposé à ce phénomène ont été le secteur qui concerne la production de véhicules mais aussi le secteur informatique. On peut dire que la contrefaçons est très présente aussi dans le secteur dédié à la production des médicaments mais aussi la mis en place par des organisations

criminelles d'une administration qui traque le sites en ligne illicites pour un échange des informations.

Texte de départ: "'Nous continuons d'augmenter nos productions et de recruter des salariés dans l'usine de Villers-Ecalles en Normandie', se félicite Frédéric Thil, le directeur général de Ferrero France. Il prévoit 80 embauches sur l'année dans ce site, le plus grand des 18 de l'entreprise dans le monde".

Question posée: "Quelles sont les prévisions faites par son directeur général?"

Réponse:

(13) Frédéric Thil, qui est le directeur général de Ferrero France, prévoit d'augmenter le nombre de salariés dans l'usine Ferrero de Villers-Ecalles en Normandie. En effet 80 embauches sont prévues par le directeur sur l'année dans ce site, qui est le plus grand établissement de l'entreprise Ferrero dans le monde.

La première typologie de réponse collectée (*Verbatim*) met en évidence une certaine difficulté de la part des normolecteurs à s'éloigner du texte français. Bien que leur message arrive au destinataire, accomplissant l'acte communicatif demandé, le discours en L2 se construit souvent à travers un calque des structures italiennes[8] que l'on retrouve également dans le deuxième cas (*Authenticité*). Cela empêche une compréhension agile des réponses et nous permet d'affirmer que la langue première influence la lecture aussi bien que la production langagière. De plus, reprenant ce que nous avons écrit plus haut, c'est l'efficience communicative plus que l'efficacité pragmatique qui intéresse les normolecteurs: ils se focalisent sur le contenu, tout en négligeant la forme. Les procédés de compensation lexicale mentionnés dans le CECR laissent la place à un emploi très limité de synonymes, au profit d'une reprise des termes et des phrases présentés dans le texte ou dans la question de départ, surtout dans les cas *verbatim*. Il n'en est pas de même pour *authenticité*: bien que les interférences – telles que Debyser (1971)[9] les entend – et les difficultés au niveau de la syntaxe et de la morphosyntaxe n'y manquent pas, le discours en français L2 semblerait être plus exhaustif, satisfaisant davantage le critère d'efficacité pragmatique. Le destinataire peut y trouver plus de détails, plus d'informations, ce qui souligne la volonté du normolecteur d'orienter sa production à l'extérieur, vers l'interlocuteur.

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[8] Parmi les calques de l'italien les plus fréquents, nous collectons les suivants: *a été créé un service* de Cybeurdouane, *a été activé un contrôle* douanier rigide, *Aussi les médicaments* sont en danger de contrefaçon, *on peut avoir dommages* physiques graves, *il se peuvent casser* de manière très facile, le secteur qui *sont été* le plus exposé.

[9] L'interférence est un type particulier de faute que commet l'élève qui apprend une langue étrangère, sous l'effet des habitudes ou des structures de sa langue maternelle. On parle à ce propos de "déviations", de "glissements", de "transferts", de "parasites", etc. (Debyser 1971, p. 35).

Or, afin de renforcer l'efficacité pragmatique, peut-être faudrait-il solliciter l'apprenant à mieux explorer le texte, à l'interpréter, tout en surmontant les obstacles dus à la spécificité du contenu, ainsi qu'à formuler son discours directement en français. De plus, il ne devrait pas se passer du destinataire de son texte, car toute production – écrite ou orale – s'organise autour d'un auditoire. Reprenant les études sur l'argumentation rhétorique menées par Perelman et Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958), nous nous considérons comme des interlocuteurs à convaincre, par le biais de phrases claires et efficaces. Le choix, le plus répandu parmi nos étudiants, est celui de copier-coller des petits paragraphes; ce qui ne satisfait pas les attentes de l'enseignant-interlocuteur. Les lignes présentées ne répondant pas au critère de reformulation, qui est à la base de toute production écrite, le texte n'obtient pas l'adhésion de l'interlocuteur. En effet, comme Lahcen El Ghazi (2016, p. iii) le dit, les textes argumentativement efficaces sont

> les textes dont les marques linguistiques, énonciatives et rhétoriques permettent d'obtenir l'assentiment de l'auditeur.

L'auditeur doit recevoir et comprendre le message car c'est pour lui que le message lui-même a été créé et, dans une perspective didactique, pour atteindre des objectifs tels que la capacité à présenter des faits et des idées, à maitriser le vocabulaire et la structure des phrases, à construire un discours cohérent et cohésif.

4. Conclusion

Les premières observations faites sur la compréhension en langue étrangère nous ont obligé d'étendre le champ d'application de la recherche à la production langagière car, comme Cuq et Gruca (2005) l'affirment, il existe une corrélation étroite entre les deux compétences, et l'apprentissage de l'une favorise le développement de l'autre.

Ainsi, nous avons analysé un corpus d'examens, collectés au fil du temps, qui confirment l'influence remarquable de la langue première dans l'élaboration d'un discours en L2. Ce qui explique, du moins à l'écrit, un ancrage important au texte dans la production écrite au niveau B1 du CECR: l'apprenant, n'ayant encore atteint un bon degré d'autonomie dans la production langagière, a du mal à se détacher du texte proposé par l'enseignant. D'ailleurs, sa difficulté dépend souvent du fait qu'il ne comprend pas et, par conséquent, qu'il ne maitrise pas bien le vocabulaire, les expressions figées, les structures de la L2 des articles de presse soumis. Certes, cela remet en question la notion d'*efficacité pragmatique.* Ne s'agirait-il plutôt *d'efficience* pragmatique? Dans la plupart des cas, les discours produits par nos lecteurs donnent l'impression d'oublier le destinataire pour s'orienter vers le lecteur lui-

même, révélant ainsi une faible efficacité, d'où l'absence de synonymes, l'adaptation en français d'un discours précédemment formulé en italien, une très forte adhérence au texte de départ et le manque des stratégies de compensation dont nous parlions plus haut. Il faudrait donc une approche plus marquée et diversifiée avec la langue étrangère, qui pourrait avoir lieu suite à une prise de conscience majeure par l'étudiant des objectifs à atteindre: la compréhension d'un texte écrit peut être considérée comme accomplie lorsque le normolecteur s'empare du texte et est capable d'en présenter le contenu à son interlocuteur, modifiant les structures linguistiques du texte de départ. Pour ce faire, à un niveau B1 de langue, il doit agir d'abord sur sa langue première – l'italien, dans notre cas – car toute recherche de synonymes, toute reformulation en L2 passe par les compétences préalablement acquises en L1. À cela s'ajoute la capacité de gérer les outils disponibles: le temps, la relecture du discours formulé, sa correction, ainsi que l'emploi du dictionnaire aideraient l'étudiant à atteindre l'efficacité pragmatique. De plus, le renforcement, voire l'amélioration de ses compétences culturelles feraient tomber les barrières linguistiques qui lui rendent le texte étranger et augmenteraient forcément sa motivation, favorisant par conséquent l'activation de la compétence stratégique dont nous parlions plus haut et l'interaction totale entre le lecteur et le texte.

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DIFERENÇAS E SEMELHANÇAS NOS ASPECTOS DA COMPREENSÃO TEXTUAL DOS APRENDIZES ITALÓFONOS DE PORTUGUÊS LÍNGUA DE HERANÇA (PLH) E LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA (PLE)

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Abstract – The paper explores the reading comprehension performance of Italian-speaking university students learning Portuguese as a foreign language (PLE), to compare it with the reading comprehension of Italian-Portuguese bilingual young people who speak Portuguese as a heritage language (PLH). Our paper discusses the possibility of using the cloze test as a tool to assess reading comprehension and, more specifically, to understand the similarities and differences between these two categories of participants in relation to the pragmatics required for the correct understanding of a written text. The aim is to understand the sensitivity of the cloze test to verify syntactic and lexical proficiency, within the linguistic and non-linguistic variables.

Keywords: Portuguese as a heritage language (PLH); Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PLE); bilingualism; *cloze* test; language proficiency.

1. Introdução

O presente artigo deseja explorar o desempenho da compreensão leitora de alunos universitários, falantes italófonos que estudam o português como língua estrangeira (PLE), a fim de realizar um estudo comparado em relação à compreensão leitora de jovens bilíngues (italiano-português, que têm o português como língua de herança, PLH). A nossa proposta oferece uma discussão a respeito das possibilidades de utilizar o teste *cloze* como instrumento inicial para avaliar a compreensão leitora, além de compreender se há diferenças e semelhanças entre os perfis dos sujeitos analisados em relação à pragmática requerida para a correta compreensão do texto escrito. Deseja-se, dessa forma, compreender a sensibilidade desse teste para verificar proficiências relacionadas à gramática e ao léxico, dentro das variáveis linguísticas e não linguísticas.

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[1] Este artigo é o resultado de uma pesquisa conjunta. Ao escrever o texto, Monica Lupetti é autora dos parágrafos 2, 4, 5.2. e Ana Luiza Oliveira de Souza dos parágrafos 3, 5.1., 5.3. A introdução, o parágrafo 5.4. e as considerações finais são partilhadas.

Com respeito à metodologia, nossa análise conjuga elementos quantitativos e qualitativos na investigação linguística. Utilizamos o *cloze* como instrumento de avaliação de compreensão leitora, com três textos preparados seguindo esta técnica, além de um texto de gênero narrativo com perguntas abertas. A participação dos estudantes foi voluntária e a coleta de dados ocorreu de forma coletiva em dois momentos.

Antes de discutirmos o cerne de nossa pesquisa, a compreensão leitora dos dois perfis de estudantes de português (o perfil de PLH e de PLE), entraremos em contato com teorias que dão suporte a nossas hipóteses. Na próxima seção, trataremos brevemente de teorias que situam o bilinguismo dos falantes de língua estrangeira (LE) e de língua de herança (LH). Na terceira seção, contextualizando este estudo dentro dos aportes teóricos da Linguística Aplicada, discutimos acerca do conhecimento pragmático e a sua não dissociação do conceito de competência comunicativa. Trataremos brevemente sobre este conceito a fim de direcionar a investigação para a competência da compreensão leitora. Em seguida, na quarta e quinta seção, trataremos da investigação em si, oferecendo as discussões e os resultados ao realizar o teste *cloze* com aprendizes de PLE e falantes de PLH. Enfim, apresentaremos algumas considerações globais.

2. Compreendendo o bilinguismo dos falantes de PLH e dos aprendizes de PLE

No senso comum, por muito tempo se entendeu que ser bilíngue era ter a capacidade de dominar muito bem duas línguas, era como possuir o controle nativo de duas línguas (Bloomfield 1933, p. 56). É indiscutível que o histórico de vida do sujeito bilíngue desempenha um papel importante em termos de proficiência e uso funcional da linguagem, ou seja, a utilização das diferentes funções linguísticas que podem, ou não, envolver aspectos de interferência e transferência linguística.

Os aprendizes de PLH de nossa pesquisa tornaram-se bilíngues em casa, com a aquisição natural das línguas italiana e portuguesa, em contexto familiar. Ao aprenderem suas línguas sob uma condição diferente, eles podem apresentar traços diversificados nos níveis de competências e habilidades linguísticas (falar, ouvir, ler e escrever). Dessa forma, não podemos negar que as condições para a aquisição linguística bilíngue sejam associadas a fatores sociais dos mais variáveis, tais como: a) situações específicas nas quais as duas línguas são usadas, havendo uma proficiência linguística na língua dominante, ou seja, a língua da sociedade; b) o suporte da comunidade de fala no desenvolvimento e no sentimento de pertença das duas culturas; c) o nível de instrução da família; d) o grau e o papel da

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alfabetização em casa e na comunidade. Nesse sentido, Bialystok (2007, p. 7) afirma que a "constelação de circunstâncias sociais, econômicas e políticas da vida influenciam fortemente como as crianças se desenvolverão linguistica e cognitivamente" quanto ao seu bilinguismo. Para Bialystok (2007, 2013) esses níveis diferentes devem ser considerados como variáveis de experiências de aprendizagem bilíngue que envolve duas dimensões: as línguas em uso (o que chama de uso bilíngue) e a proficiência linguística.

Além disso, o conhecimento linguístico de uma LH pode refletir a classe social e a escolaridade de seus familiares nativos, indicando talvez a falta de acesso à variedade padrão da língua ao apresentar, em sua oralidade, padrão lexical limitado e estruturas dialetais muito informais. Evidentemente, a maioria desses aprendizes conhece muito bem as culturas representantes dessas línguas, pois o aspeto identitário-cultural é forte (García 2010). A partir das pesquisas de Valdés (2001) acerca do perfil dos falantes de herança espanhola em contexto norte-americano, perceberam-se os desafios dos professores no que concerne ao ensino formal do espanhol para esses falantes. A pesquisadora notou que muitas vezes esses falantes têm proficiência funcional da língua: "Funcionalmente, este falante de herança pode ser capaz de desenvolver conversação com termos cotidianos" (Valdés 2001, p. 47), mas com dificuldades na língua padrão.

Com relação ao ensino de uma língua estrangeira, e ao perfil desses falantes, importantes estudos de Grosjean sobre o bilinguismo (1985, 1996, 2018) levam em consideração o impacto que o conhecimento bicultural dos aprendizes oferece no processamento e no conhecimento linguístico das línguas e culturas em contato. Em um estudo de 1996, o linguista afirma que não importam o domínio e as competências linguísticas: uma vez que o indivíduo transita entre duas culturas, ele pode assumir uma identidade bicultural e bilíngue, ainda que não seja completamente proficiente. A respeito disso, o autor advoga:

> Vamos chamar bilíngues as pessoas que usam duas (ou mais) línguas (ou dialetos) em suas vidas diárias. Assim, nossa definição inclui pessoas que vão desde o trabalhador migrante que fala com alguma dificuldade o idioma do país anfitrião (e não pode ler e escrever) até o intérprete profissional que é totalmente fluente em duas línguas. Entre nós, encontramos o cônjuge estrangeiro que interage com amigos em sua primeira língua, o cientista que lê e escreve artigos em uma segunda língua (mas que raramente fala, *sic.*), o membro de uma minoria linguística que usa a língua minoritária apenas em casa e o idioma majoritário em todos os outros domínios da vida, a pessoa surda que usa a língua de sinais com seus amigos, mas uma forma sinalizada da língua falada com uma pessoa ouvinte, etc. (Grosjean 1996, p. 21, tradução nossa).

Nesse viés, o arcabouço teórico de Grosjean apoia a nossa investigação, pois vai além da simples definição do bilinguismo ideal. Além de compreender como os domínios de uso das línguas atuam no conhecimento linguístico e influenciam também as quatro habilidades que citamos anteriormente, sua teoria nos mostra que a característica da pessoa bilíngue tem a ver com a evolução do conhecimento linguístico que ocorre ao longo do tempo, nos diferentes ambientes que esta pessoa transita. Por isso, o histórico de vida é considerado relevante, como bem declara o estudioso:

> O histórico das línguas de um bilíngue revelará muitos recursos que terão um impacto no processo de aquisição linguística. Queremos saber quais línguas foram adquiridas, quando e como, se o contexto cultural era o mesmo ou diferente, qual era o padrão de proficiência e uso ao longo dos anos, qual língua passou por uma reestruturação sob a influência da outra língua mais forte, e se algumas línguas ficaram inativas ou entraram em atrito. Além disso, precisamos saber se o bilíngue está passando por um momento de estabilidade ou de mudança linguística em que uma língua pode, de maneira repentina, adquirir nova importância, enquanto a outra pode ter um papel menor a desempenhar. (Grosjean 2018, p.7 tradução nossa)

Os domínios e situações citados por Grosjean vêm da pesquisa de Mackey (1962, cit. in Grosjean 2018), em que a utilização das línguas em cada domínio da vida, tais como trabalho / estudos, casa, família, compras, lazer, assuntos administrativos, férias, roupas, esportes, transporte, saúde, política etc. opera na construção da aquisição linguística e na permanência, no aumento, na perda ou no desgaste deste conhecimento linguístico adquirido ao longo da vida. Este princípio tem impacto direto na proficiência, pois se uma língua é falada em um número reduzido de domínios e com um número limitado de pessoas, ela será desenvolvida de maneira diferente. São as necessidades de interação e o quanto essa língua é funcional que fazem com que o indivíuo aumente seu vocabulário em certos domínios, ou que as línguas que ele conhece tenham variedades estilísticas, apresentando regras discursivas e pragmáticas atinentes ao domínio. Esse princípio se aplica também às funções de uso que as diferentes habilidades têm na vida dos sujeitos, ou seja, de que maneira a leitura e a escrita nas duas línguas entram no quadro de suas necessidades cotidianas.

O que interessa para a nossa pesquisa é justamente esse caráter multifacetado no qual está inserido o sujeito bilíngue, pois dentro deste panorama incluem-se as dinâmicas da atitude linguística a nível individual como resultado de fatores de convivência cotidiana e de aprendizagem nos diferentes domínios linguísticos. Compreendemos, assim, que quando duas ou mais línguas estão em contato, pode haver ou não um estado de equilíbrio entre a produção linguística de cada uma, em cada domínio e em cada habilidade linguística (na modalidade oral e escrita).

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Se pensarmos no contexto de ensino de LE e de segunda língua (L2), considerando a diferenciação entre ambas a partir dos conceitos de Ellis (1994), compreende-se que o contexto de aquisição e aprendizagem da L2 contém mais estímulos pragmáticos, dado os ambientes de interações sociais nos quais o aprendiz se engaja fora da sala de aula. O aprendiz de LE, por outro lado, adquire o conhecimento pragmático a partir do ensino formal, conscientemente, com poucas possibilidades de situações comunicativas que ofereçam a urgência dessa competência. De certa forma, aqui está a primeira hipótese que envolve a nossa investigação. Existe de fato uma diferença de aquisição e aprendizagem que envolve os contextos de competências leitoras e que pode diferenciar os perfis de aprendizes de LE e de LH?

As distinções apresentadas a respeito da aquisição e aprendizagem (Ellis 1994; Larsen-Freeman, Long 1991, entre outros) colocam o conceito de aquisição na esfera do subconsciente, compreendendo que o aprendiz adquire uma língua através de situações naturais e informais, diferenciando-se, assim, do conceito de aprendizagem como um processo consciente que requer uma instrução formal com espaço de ensino apropriado. A maior parte das teorias acerca do ensino-aprendizagem de línguas aborda esses conceitos dentro do ambiente de ensino de L2 e LE. Por isso mesmo, a fim de aplicar esses conceitos, precisamos distinguir LE de LH, a partir dos estudos mais recentes que diferenciam estas nomenclaturas.

De forma sintética, como falante de PLE entende-se o sujeito que aprende (ou adquire e aprende) o português no ambiente instrucional fora do ambiente natural e informal (nação) em que essa língua é falada oficialmente e utilizada como língua de socialização e escolarização. No caso específico de nosso estudo, este sujeito aprendeu o português em uma instituição de ensino superior italiana. Isto quer dizer que o aprendiz desenvolveu ou não uma competência comunicativa e uma compreensão leitora, com base, grosso modo, em estímulos específicos no ambiente de ensino-aprendizagem, ensino formal e institucional, ou ainda buscando recursos didáticos extras, através da internet e de momentos de contato com falantes de português.

Definimos os falantes de PLH nos termos de Mendes (2012, p. 21), como os aprendizes que se encontram nos "contextos em que o português e sua cultura são ensinados a filhos de luso-falantes imigrados, em diferentes partes do mundo, e representantes de diferentes línguas-culturas em português". Compreende-se que o falante apreende, ou não, uma identidade híbrida com a língua e cultura de herança, ao mesmo tempo que reconhece a cultura italiana como parte da sua própria identidade. Pelo que concerne o panorama italiano, estudos recentes têm contribuído para traçar de maneira ainda mais significativa e pormenorizada o perfil do aprendiz de PLH, graças a vários estudos de caso. Vejam-se, entre outros, Casseb-Galvão e De Rosa

(2022), Chulata (2015, 2021); Chulata e Casseb-Galvão (2018, 2021); Lupetti e Guidi (2021); Migliorelli (2021, 2022); Souza (2018, 2020 e 2021).

No ensejo de realizar uma releitura da abordagem que distinguimos há pouco, será de especial relevância identificar a compreensão leitora de um falante que desenvolve na sua língua, quer como LE quer como LH, revelando o envolvimento, ou não, de uma competência comunicativa que tenha sido, aos poucos, adquirida ou aprendida. Para isso, é necessário compreender se a aquisição ou a aprendizagem do conhecimento pragmático seria o diferencial para o desenvolvimento desta competência, entendendo também qual o papel do reconhecimento das habilidades de compreensão leitora nesse sentido.

3. Competência comunicativa: o papel do conhecimento pragmático nas habilidades de compreensão leitora

O foco da aquisição e aprendizagem de uma língua estrangeira leva em consideração a competência comunicativa. Seguindo o Quadro de Referência para o Ensino Português (QUAREPE),[2] tal como o Quadro Europeu Comum de Referências, nas universidades italianas são elaboradas, no quadro das disciplinas de "Língua e Tradução", algumas linhas gerais de orientação curricular, pensando nos materiais didáticos, bem como nos instrumentos de avaliação e certificação. No caso do português, além de frequentarem as cadeiras de Linguística e Tradução Portuguesa e Brasileira e os cursos de Leitorado de português europeu (PE) e de português brasileiro (PB), os(as) estudantes têm a possibilidade de obterem, em algumas universidades (Pisa, Siena-Unistrasi, Roma-Unint, Torino, Tuscia), a certificação de português europeu como Língua Estrangeira (emitida pelo CAPLE – Centro de Avaliação e Certificação de Português Lingua Estrangeira, unidade orgânica da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa). Também está encaminhada, na Universidade de Pisa e na Universidade de Bolonha, a possibilidade de conseguirem a certificação de português brasileiro (Celpe-Bras – Certificação de Proficiência em Língua Portuguesa, emitida pelo Inep, o Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira). Nesse contexto de ensino integrado, são discriminadas quatro habilidades necessárias para o desenvolvimento da aprendizagem/aquisição do PLE envolvendo quatro processos: dois de produção (escrita e oral), e dois de

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[2] O Quadro de Referência para o Ensino Português no Estrangeiro é o resultado do estudo dos públicos e contextos do Ensino Português no Estrangeiro. https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/EEstrangeiro/2012_quarepe_docorientador.pdf (5.01.2022).

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recepção: leitura e compreensão escrita, e compreensão oral. Estes processos são compreendidos, dentro da Linguística Aplicada, como primordiais para a comunicação e interação na língua alvo, pois estão mais atrelados aos processos que envolvem uma competência linguística comunicativa.

No bojo dessas considerações, a semântica e a pragmática, sendo uma a interface da outra, não são entendidas como domínios dicotômicos e separados no ensino de línguas. Compreende-se, de acordo com o funcionalismo, que esses domínios da linguagem dialogam com a competência comunicativa (conceito apresentado por Dell Hymes em 1972 e posteriormente reformulado por diferentes autores), pois entende-se que para produzir linguagem é necessário que o aprendiz de LE tenha conhecimento da língua, e portanto, dos significados que envolvem as estruturas sintáticas e o ambiente discursivo.

Por isso mesmo, enxergamos a competência comunicativa (CC) alinhada aos modelos reformulados por Bachman (1990 e 1997),[3] e que seguem a concepção ampliada de proficiência linguística, a partir do suporte das teorias de Hymes (1972) sobre os fatores socioculturais de uma língua, além do suporte no funcionalismo de Halliday (1973), ancorado às questões das funções da linguagem, do discurso textual e relações ilocucionárias, situando texto e contexto. Neste sentido, o autor elenca três áreas sobre as quais as habilidades linguísticas interagem com a habilidade geral do conhecimento que uma pessoa tem. O arcabouço teórico proposto por Bachman (1990) inclui três componentes:

- a competência linguística, isto é o conhecimento que é usado na comunicação através da linguagem;
- a competência estratégica, ou seja, a capacidade mental de praticar a linguagem em um contexto comunicativo;
- os mecanismos psicofisiológicos, isto é, os processos neurológicos e psicológicos envolvidos na produção da linguagem como um fenômeno físico.

Abaixo, podemos visualizar o modelo postulado em detalhes por Lyle Bachman para a competência linguística:

[3] O texto de Bachman (1997) aborda de maneira aprofundada cada uma das partes que integram a competência comunicativa.
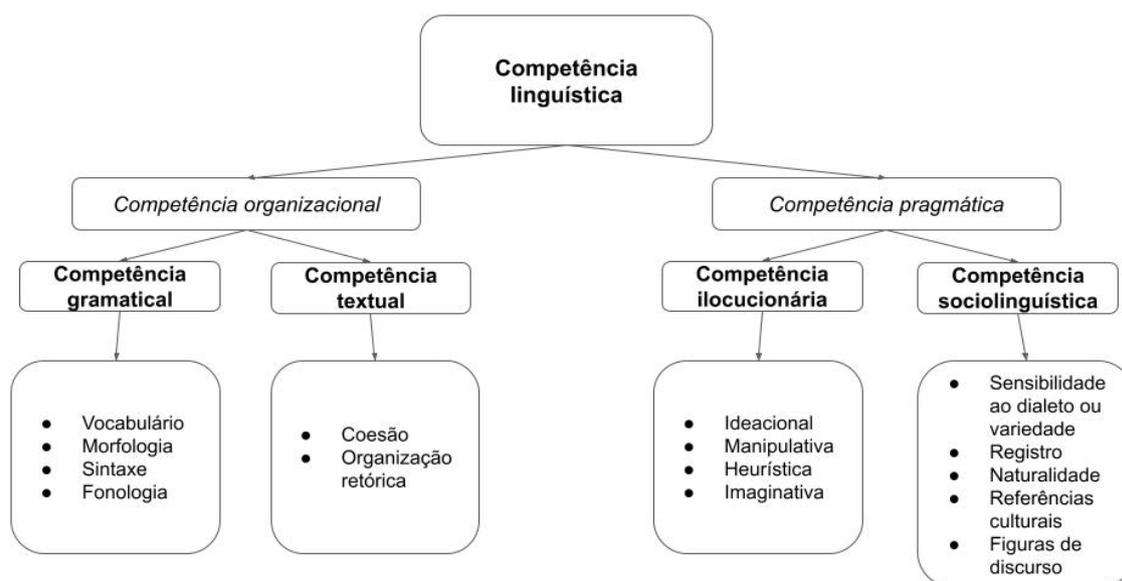
Figura 1
A competência linguística no modelo de habilidade linguística comunicativa
de Lyle Bachman (adaptado).

Na Figura 1 acima, entre o modelo elaborado pela estudiosa, dentro do quadro da competência linguística encontram-se duas grandes habilidades categóricas: a competência organizacional que, por sua vez é subdividida em competência gramatical e textual, e a competência pragmática, que compreende a competência ilocucionária e a sociolinguística. A primeira, que engaja habilidades organizacionais, consideradas competências produtivas, subdivididas em duas categorias independentes, inclui competências em áreas relativas à estrutura formal da linguagem, ou seja, a capacidade de produzir frases gramaticalmente corretas, compreender o conteúdo e organizar pensamentos e frases em textos orais e escritos. A segunda habilidade – a competência pragmática – relacionada às relações entre os enunciados produzidos por um falante e as características do contexto onde esses enunciados ocorrem. Temos, então, a competência ilocucionária (característica ideativa, manipulativa, heurística e imaginativa), que é, por assim dizer, diferente da competência sociolinguística, que abrange a sensibilidade do indivíduo em reconhecer o contexto cultural e social, como diferenças de dialeto, registro, expressões idiomáticas, naturalidade de expressão e a capacidade de compreender referências culturais ou figuras de retórica.

Inúmeras tentativas de validar empiricamente diferentes componentes da competência linguística não são conclusivas até os dias atuais. Dessa forma, desejamos explorar em nossa pesquisa a técnica do teste *cloze* por reconhecermos que, para alcançar autonomia com vocabulário adequado em situações diversificadas, o aprendiz precisa estar pronto para manipular

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qualquer tipo de interação em PLE, seja ela na modalidade oral ou escrita, em diferentes gêneros textuais: contos ou poemas, reportagens de telejornal ou de rádio, jornal, revista, podcast, outdoor, panfletos, textos teatrais e até mesmo cômicos etc. Reconhecemos, ainda, que as relações entre os enunciados e as atitudes e funções linguísticas nas quais os falantes (ou escritores) desejam concretizar sua interação são os pontos que mais interessam à pragmática, conforme afirma Bachman (1990, 2003). Citando Van Dijk (1977, p. 189-90):

> À pragmática deve ser atribuído um domínio empírico que consiste em regras linguísticas convencionais e manifestações dessas regras na produção e interpretação de enunciados. Em particular, deveria oferecer uma contribuição à análise das condições que tornam os enunciados aceitáveis em algumas situações para os falantes da língua. (Tradução nossa)

Por isso mesmo, ao realizar o teste *cloze*, o aprendiz e falante de PLE ou PLH poderá, talvez, reconhecer a interação dinâmica existente entre o contexto e o discurso escrito. Com relação à competência de compreensão leitora, Mary Kato (1985) postula que, primeiramente, os aprendizes podem não escrever corretamente numa determinada lingua materna ou estrangeira, pois o ato de escrever exige maior reflexão metalinguística, e portanto, mais tempo para a produção. Porém, a leitura pode ser mais fluida. O leitor é capaz de possuir um glossário mental e visual, que possibilitaria o reconhecimento instantâneo tanto da forma quanto do conteúdo textual, constituindo assim dois tipos básicos do processamento da informação: *bottom-up* e *top-down*. O primeiro processo age como uma abordagem da leitura mais ascendente que analisa as informações por unidades menores, palavra por palavra, do micro para o macro. Dentro dessas condições de leitura, exige-se também uma operação analítico-sintética onde é requisitada a memória temporária. No segundo processo, numa abordagem *top-down*, a informação visual é convencionalizada, não existe uma operação de análise-síntese, os sentidos das palavras já foram registrados na memória permanente. No caso da compreensão leitora de uma LE ou LH, podemos compreender que o material linguístico pode ser reconhecido e registrado automaticamente na memória, e requisitado no momento da leitura.

4. O teste *cloze*

A compreensão leitora está relacionada à decodificação de símbolos gráficos e à atribuição de significado a eles dentro de um contexto (frase, parágrafo ou texto). Caracteriza-se ainda pela capacidade dos aprendizes e dos falantes de acessar a informação codificando-a. Para tanto, é necessário que o código

linguístico seja reconhecido, decodificado e interpretado (Flanagan *et al.* 2002).

A técnica tradicional do teste *cloze* tem sido aplicada como tipo de avaliação primordial da habilidade da leitura e, ao longo dos anos, tem demonstrado alta aceitação e relevância no apoio aos professores no ensino-aprendizagem de línguas (Jonhston e Costello 2005). Trata-se de uma técnica desenvolvida por Taylor (1953) que consiste na organização de um texto em que alguns vocábulos são omitidos, pedindo assim aos leitores que preencham as lacunas com as palavras que melhor completem o sentido do texto. Ao longo dos anos, inúmeras publicações que postulam diferentes possibilidades de utilização deste recurso – vejam-se os estudos realizados por Bensoussan (1990), Cohen (1975), Kletzien (1991), para avaliar a compreensão leitora em língua materna; ou os estudos de Pinto *et al.* (1997), de Santos (1991) e de Vicentelli (1999) a respeito da compreensão leitora de universitários, e ainda os estudos de Angeli dos Santos e Pierotti dos Santos (2005) sobre a compreensão leitora de estudantes de espanhol como LE.

Com a preocupação de investigar a produção científica que centralizava o teste *cloze* como instrumento de avaliação da compreensão leitora, Suehiro (2013) destacou em seus estudos que essas produções são realizadas, sobretudo, nas áreas de educação e psicologia. Ao investigar os trabalhos científicos entre os anos de 2002 e 2012, segundo a autora: " [...] os resultados apontaram também a predominância de pesquisas no contexto educacional e com universitários, baseadas no emprego da técnica tradicional, com a supressão de todo quinto vocábulo do texto e correção literal" (Suehiro 2013, p. 223).

Segundo Bormuth (1968, cit. em Santos 2004), o percentual de acerto dos estudantes no teste *cloze* que corresponde ao nível de frustração é de até 40%, ao passo que o nível instrucional vai de 41 a 56%, e acima de 57% o estudante é considerado em um nível independente. Esta técnica é considerada como um recurso de procedimento simples e flexível, sem intermediários entre o leitor e o texto, sendo que o teste e a sua preparação seguem regras em função dos seus objetivos. Em nosso estudo, realizamos a omissão de dois tipos de palavras: as palavras lexicais e as palavras gramaticais.[4]

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[4] As classes lexicais incluem nomes, verbos e adjetivos. São classes abertas, isto é, contêm um número indefinidamente grande de elementos. Do ponto de vista formal, as suas palavras são autónomas, livres, não dependem morfológica ou fonologicamente de outras entidades do léxico (como acontece, pelo contrário, com os afixos ou clíticos. Apresentam marcas de flexão veiculadas por afixos flexionais, que constituem uma classe gramatical. Do ponto de vista semântico, os membros das classes lexicais representam a realidade extralinguistica, em toda a sua riqueza ontológica, com especializações típicas de cada uma das classes: os nomes denotam entidades, os verbos denotam situações, os adjetivos denotam propriedades. O sentido dos itens

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5. Metodologia de pesquisa

Em nossa pesquisa experimental, primeiramente pediu-se para que o(a) participante respondesse a um questionário de caracterização, com itens referentes à identificação e informações sobre seus hábitos, identificando em quais domínios o(a) informante pratica com frequência a língua portuguesa (casa, trabalho, esporte, igreja etc.). Além disso, perguntamos se ele(a) reconhecesse algumas dificuldades nas modalidades oral e escrita, leitura e compreensão. Pediu-se, enfim, para que o(a) participante revelasse de que maneira a leitura e a escrita nas duas línguas entram no quadro de suas necessidades cotidianas.

A pesquisa foi realizada na primeira e na segunda semana do mês de junho de 2022, na modalidade *online* e em grupo com 12 informantes.

5.1. Participantes

Participaram dessa pesquisa doze estudantes, jovens universitários; levamos em consideração a competência da expressão oral da língua portuguesa, avaliada entre os níveis B2 e C1 do QUAREP (Quadro de Referência para o Ensino Português no Estrangeiro).

Os(as) estudantes foram divididos(as) em dois grupos: no grupo PLE havia seis, dos quais cinco do gênero feminino e um do gênero masculino. Tais participantes eram alunos e alunas da Universidade de Pisa do Departamento de Filologia, Literatura e Linguística, estudantes de língua portuguesa como língua estrangeira, inscritos(as) no terceiro ano da graduação em Línguas e Literaturas Estrangeiras, e no primeiro e segundo ano do mestrado em Linguística e Tradução deste(a) mesmo(a) departamento/universidade.

Em contrapartida, dos(as) seis informantes do grupo de PLH, cinco de gênero feminino e um de gênero masculino, somente quatro já eram graduadas(o): uma com mestrado em Línguas e Tradução (estudos da língua e da literatura portuguesa) pela Universidade de Bolonha; duas concluíram a graduação na Universidade de Florença: uma informante é graduada em

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desta classe é descritivo, podendo ser consultado num dicionário ou numa enciclopédia. Trata-se de classes que sofrem de alterações frequentes, através da criação de novas palavras (refletindo novas ideias, novas tecnologias e a mudança social em geral) e do progressivo desuso de outras. As classses de palavras gramaticais constituem, por sua vez, conjuntos restritos de elementos linguísticos, que se renovam lentamente e formam classes fechadas, que não são regularmente enriquecidas com neologismos pelos falantes. Do ponto de vista formal, os seus membros tendem a ser morfológica ou fonologicamente dependentes, isto é, são clíticos ou afixos, embora também possam ser palavras autónomas como as conjunções, as preposições e os verbos auxiliares e semiauxiliares. Não apresentam marca de flexão, já que tendem a ser invariáveis. (Veja-se Paiva Raposo *et al.* 2013, pp. 255-260, mas veja-se também pp. 332-334).

Línguas (Espanhol e Português), tendo Economia do Turismo como pós-graduação; a outra, em Ciências Políticas (Relações Internacionais e Estudos Europeus), tendo estudado um semestre de língua portuguesa. Outras duas informantes ainda estão no início da graduação: uma delas em Línguas, incluindo estudos da língua e literatura portuguesa na Universidade de Pisa, e a outra informante estuda Designer de Moda na Universidade de Florença, mas não estuda língua portuguesa. Enfim, o informante do gênero masculino graduou-se em Línguas e Literaturas Estrangeiras na Universidade de Pisa, mas não incluía em seu curso a disciplina língua portuguesa. Ressaltamos que, para este último grupo foi mais difícil encontrar informantes universitários estudantes de língua portuguesa. Sendo este um primeiro estudo comparativo que pesquisa a compreensão da leitura de falantes de línguas com perfil PLH e PLE, pelo seu caráter experimental, aceitamos essas condições de diferenças entre os participantes quanto aos conhecimentos da língua portuguesa. Dessa forma, para iniciar as pesquisas era suficiente o conhecimento linguístico da expressão oral da língua, pois através do estudo comparativo poderíamos reconhecer as diferenças nas habilidades dos perfis, fossem eles estudantes de língua portuguesa ou não.

Com relação ao questionário realizado com todos(as) os(as) doze informantes, entre os(as) 6 aprendizes de PLE, a metade deles(as) respondeu que possui hábitos de leitura e que costuma escutar músicas em português; além disso, os únicos ambientes em que utilizam a língua portuguesa são a faculdade e as viagens ao exterior. Para todos(as) os(as) seis, o português é a língua estudada há cerca de três anos ou mais na Itália. Todos(as) nasceram na Itália e foram alfabetizados nesse país, sendo filhos(as) de pais italianos. Em contrapartida, todos(as) os(as) seis falantes de PLH responderam que utilizam a língua portuguesa com os parentes quando visitam o país de origem da mãe brasileira, utilizando essa língua mais em casa com a mãe, em viagens, ou ouvindo músicas; somente duas sinalizaram que leem livros ou outros materiais redigidos em português. Dois dos participantes da pesquisa nasceram no Brasil, transferindo-se para a Itália ainda muito jovens, na idade da alfabetização, confirmando, portanto, que a primeira língua de escolarização e dominante foi, durante esse percurso, a língua italiana.

5.2. Instrumentos de pesquisa

Foram utilizados quatro textos estruturados em diferentes modalidades da técnica de *cloze* um com respostas abertas. Como *cloze* foi um dos instrumentos de avaliação utilizado, procurou-se omitir os vocábulos a cada cinco palavras, fossem eles termos gramaticais ou lexicais. No último texto, somente as palavras lexicais foram omitidas. O primeiro texto, um gênero

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discursivo informativo *Como planejar um mochilão: guia completo*,[5] continha 250 palavras e 49 lacunas a serem preenchidas. As palavras lexicais e gramaticais foram omitidas e inseridas em um quadro ao lado de cada parágrafo do texto. Já no segundo texto, de gênero discursivo narrativo *Lenda da Vitória-Régia*,[6] com 400 palavras, foram omitidas as palavras lexicais e gramaticais, e elencadas aleatoriamente em uma única coluna, sem a separação por parágrafos. As lacunas a serem preenchidas correspondiam a 56 vocábulos. O terceiro texto, *A foto*, de Luiz Fernando Veríssimo, foi adaptado de forma a reduzir-se a 350 palavras, o gênero textual também era narrativo e somente palavras lexicais foram omitidas, no total de 43 vocábulos; estas, porém, não foram inseridas em um quadro: os(as) participantes da pesquisa deveriam inseri-las de acordo com a compreensão da leitura e com o seu repertório lexical.

Para completar o teste sobre a habilidade de compreensão leitora, utilizamos também outro texto do gênero narrativo, em que a análise foi realizada através da resposta livre às perguntas elaboradas pelas pesquisadoras. O texto de Jorge Amado *O gato malhado e a andorinha sinhá: uma história de amor*, continha 340 palavras acompanhadas de 6 perguntas, duas das quais pediam para que os alunos explicassem o significado de certas expressões (ou seja, o uso de sinônimos), uma pergunta era relacionada ao aspecto sintático-semântico de um termo e as outras três perguntas eram relacionadas ao texto em si. Os quatro textos foram escolhidos seguindo o nível de competência linguística dos participantes da pesquisa, isto é, seguindo o nível B2 e C1 do QUAREPE (Quadro de Referência para o Ensino Português no Estrangeiro).

5.3. Hipóteses

O teste *cloze* tem sido utilizado há muitos anos para avaliar e intervir na compreensão de leitura de aprendizes de línguas, sendo um instrumento confiável de avaliação. Embora muitos estudiosos da Didática das línguas, entre eles Mota e Santos (2014), afirmem que as avaliações de compreensão de leitura do tipo *cloze* são mais eficientes do que os testes de compreensão textual em formato de perguntas sobre o texto, acreditamos, a partir de nossas experiências, que o teste com perguntas também pode auxiliar essa avaliação, para testar somente a compreensão de leitura e não a produção escrita. Conforme afirmam vários estudiosos, o bom desempenho nas atividades de

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[5] O texto foi retirado da internet e adaptado de modo a reduzir o número de palavras. https://janelasabertas.com/2021/04/01/como-planejar-um-mochilao (1.6.2022).

[6] Lenda da Região Norte do Brasil, do estado de Amazonas: https://www.ufmg.br/cienciaparatodos/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/leituraparatodos/Textos-Leitura-Etapa-3-e-4/e34_60-lendadavitoriaregia.pdf (1.6.2022).

perguntas e respostas não está ligado à boa compreensão, mas a uma boa técnica para responder de forma exata às questões. Por isso mesmo, levamos em consideração essa perspectiva metodológica de análise a fim de confirmar essa hipótese de avaliação.

Outra hipótese vai na direção dos perfis diferenciados dos falantes, principalmente daqueles que têm o português como LH, mas não aprofundaram sistematicamente seus conhecimentos linguísticos através da aprendizagem formal da língua. Hipotetizamos que eles possam obter um bom desempenho no teste, mas há a possibilidade de apresentarem dificuldades, devido a alguns fatores, tais como a experiência com a leitura em português. Esses falantes, uma vez que não completaram um percurso de aprendizagem linguística de leitura e escrita em português, podem apresentar mais desvios do que os aprendizes de PLH. Com relação aos aprendizes de PLE, hipotetizamos que eles possam encontrar dificuldades no preenchimento das lacunas, principalmente daquelas que não têm o apoio do vocabulário omitido, por falta de vocabulário mais amplo em português.

Hipotetizamos, enfim, que os perfis PLE e PLH possam apresentar resultados semelhantes para os três textos empregados no teste *cloze*.

5.4. Discussão dos resultados

Ao aplicar os testes *cloze* para pesquisas que pretendem diagnosticar a compreensão em leitura, ressaltamos que é possível identificar a relação que existe entre a comprensão verbal dos enunciados e a resistência à distração da própria leitura, pois o(a) leitor(a) necessita identificar palavras com precisão e rapidez, acionando a sua memória linguística para preencher as lacunas. Nesse sentido, ele(a) utiliza-se de estratégias cognitivas para mapear as palavras escritas de forma automática em seu repertório. Nos dois primeiros testes, em que os vocábulos omitidos eram elencados aleatoriamente ao lado do texto, nota-se que os(as) participantes da pesquisa operaram uma leitura mais rápida do que no terceiro teste, para o qual deveriam recuperar de sua própria memória palavras lexicais que preenchessem semanticamente a narrativa do texto. Notamos, nesse sentido, que duas informantes do perfil PLH sobrecarregaram a sua memória operacional, não obtendo sucesso no mapeamento linguístico, dificultando, assim, a compreensão de leitura. Essas alunas não conseguiram extrair as ideias principais dos três textos. Dito isso, os resultados que aqui expomos foram analisados de maneira gradual, ou seja, de forma a não interferir no diagnóstico de compreensão de leitura do grupo como un todo.

Primeiramente, com relação ao percentual de acerto dos estudantes no teste *cloze*, efetuamos as análises de cada texto respondido, elencando os níveis de compreensão segundo Bormuth (1968, cit. in Santos 2004), ou seja, o nível 1 de "frustração" (até 40% de acertos), nível 2 "instrucional" (de 41%

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a 56% de acertos) e o nível 3 "independente" (a partir de 57% de acertos) para cada um dos(as) participantes da pesquisa. O gráfico 1 mostra os níveis de compreensão para cada grupo de participantes da pesquisa.
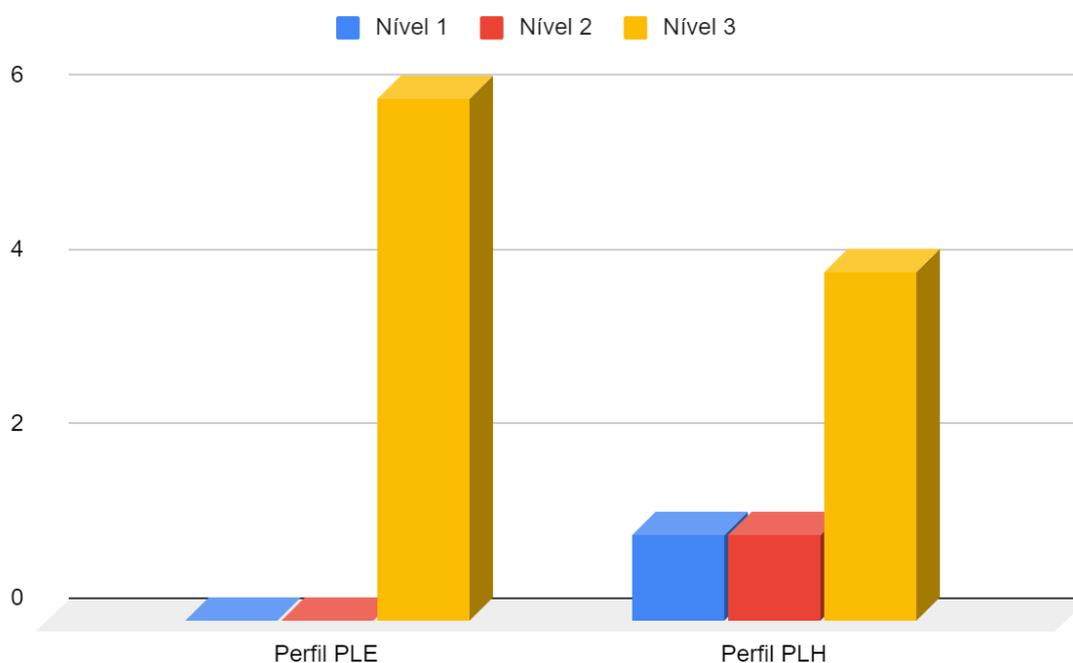

Gráfico 1
Distribuição dos níveis de compreensão de leitura.

O gráfico acima representa os acertos dos três testes *cloze* realizados. Para compreender os dados, ressalta-se que foram calculados os acertos e sinônimos aplicando pontuações; porém, não receberam pontuação os desvios-padrão e os espaços vazios deixados nos testes. Dos 6 participantes com o perfil PLH, 4 estão no nível independente, um encontra-se no nível de frustração e outro no nível instrucional. Todos(as) os(as) 6 informantes do grupo de PLE estão no nível independente. Os dados revelam, ainda, que no nível de independência os(as) participantes dos dois grupos que estão no nível independente obtiveram uma percentagem acima de 86%, chegando a 98% de acertos.

Ao iniciarmos o teste com um texto mais curto, desejávamos treinar a mente operacional e a resistência à distração dos participantes. Sendo assim, o texto *Como planejar um mochilão: guia completo*, com 250 palavras e 49 lacunas a serem preenchidas, poderia permitir inicialmente maior atenção aos detalhes do texto e encorajaria estratégias de processamento palavra por palavra. Pela nossa experiência, notamos que, em comparação aos textos curtos, a leitura de textos longos pode oferecer uma maior dificuldade de concentração, além do desempenho comprometido. Dessa forma, o segundo texto *Lenda da Vitória-Régia*, com 400 palavras e 56 vocábulos omitidos, foi

dado em um segundo momento. A decisão, então, de aplicar um texto narrativo vinha ao encontro da necessidade de fornecer mais conteúdo, a fim de facilitar a concentração. O conteúdo narrativo poderia apoiar a leitura e a compreensão, mesmo sendo um texto mais longo. Para o teste com esses dois textos, as palavras omitidas estavam aleatoriamente inseridas em um quadro à parte. O gráfico abaixo apresenta os indicadores de compreensão leitora no que concerne ao preenchimento das lacunas. O tipo de correção utilizada foi a literal e a de sinonímia.
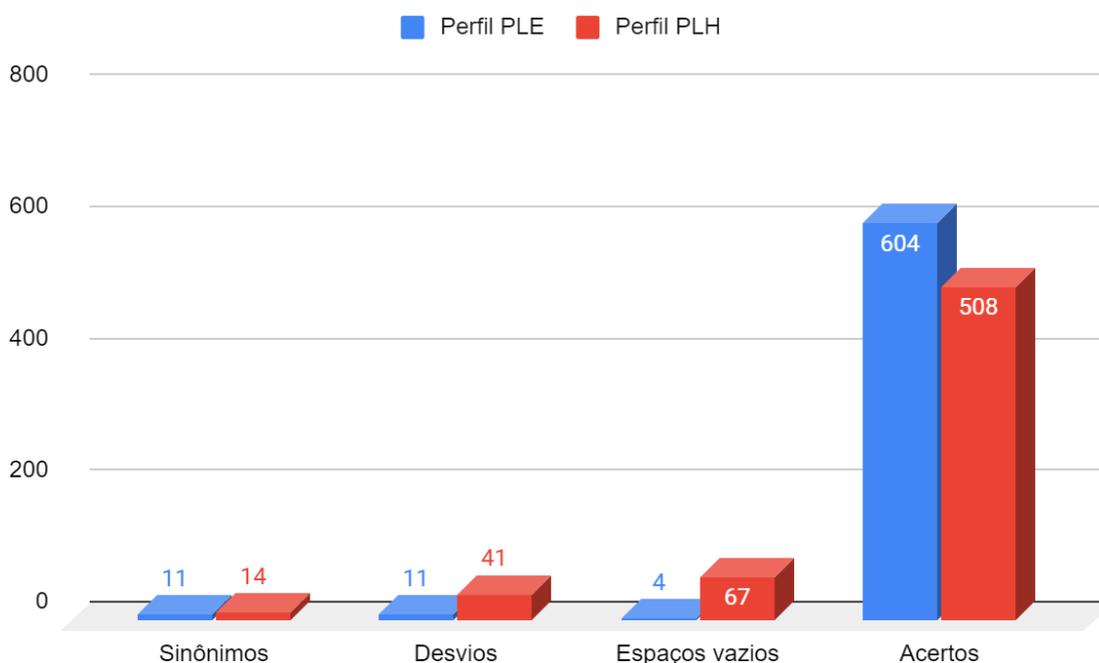
Gráfico 2
Compreensão da leitura dos textos 1 e 2.

Os acertos foram considerados como inserções literais; os sinônimos inseridos são aqueles que semanticamente completavam os enunciados de forma satisfatória, sem ambiguidades para o entendimento total do texto. Dessa forma, ao somar os acertos e os sinônimos dos três textos, para os 12 informantes, temos 522 lacunas preenchidas corretamente pelo perfil PLH e 615 palavras preenchidas corretamente pelo perfil PLE. Como exemplo de inserção no texto 1, abaixo apresentamos alguns enunciados em que percebemos que os informantes de ambos os perfis tiveram dúvidas quanto à melhor palavra a ser inserida na lacuna.

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(1)   "[...] desde conselhos que eu *gostaria*[7] de ter recebido antes de começar a viajar a *aprendizados* que acumulei em dezenas de *mochilões ...*".
(2)   "Pesquisar sobre as *questões* práticas que você vai *enfrentar*[8] na viagem pode ser *útil*".
(3)   "Por outro lado, uma *parte* essencial do planejamento é *estar* pronto pra adaptá-lo quando *necessário*".

Retirados do texto original, os excertos 1, 2 e 3 apresentam as palavras em itálico que foram trocadas por outras palavras. No excerto 1, tem-se 'aprendizados' e 'mochilões' como substantivos escolhidos para preencher as lacunas vazias, de forma aleatória. No excerto 2, tem-se o preenchimento com os vocábulos 'questões' e 'útil', respectivamente. Da mesma maneira, no excerto 3, as lacunas foram preenchidas pelas palavras 'parte', 'estar' e 'necessário', respectivamente.

Por outro lado, no texto 2, temos mais espaços deixados vazios do que no primeiro texto, uma vez que a grande maioria dos vocábulos era de tipo gramatical. Esses espaços vazios, em sua maioria, foram deixados por duas informantes do perfil PLH. Apresentam-se também, nos textos de ambos os perfis, algumas dificuldades predominantes com o não preenchimento dos vocábulos gramaticais e lexicais, tais como os exemplos dos excertos abaixo:

(4)   *De* tanto ser ignorada por Jaci, a moça começou a *definhar*.
(5)   "[...] *já* quase de manhãzinha, saía *correndo* em sentido oposto ao *sol*
        para tentar alcançar a *Lua*".

Nos dados em 4, a preposição 'de' assim como a palavra 'definhar' não foram preenchidas pela maioria dos(as) informantes do perfil PLH. Um exemplo de troca de substantivos aparece no excerto 5, cuja expressão "sentido oposto ao sol" foi preenchida pelos itens 'Igarapé', 'luar' e 'sol'. Nota-se que, entre as escolhas do grupo PLH, essas expressões eram as mais inseridas. Ainda que a inserção desses vocábulos faça sentido, reconhece-se que uma leitura mais atenta poderia auxiliar a correta inserção. Por outro lado, os(as) aprendizes de PLE demonstraram-se mais criteriosos(as) ao escolherem o léxico mais específico, de acordo com a leitura do texto. De maneira geral, notou-se, neste grupo, mais atenção e critérios em relação às escolhas e menos distração na leitura dos textos.

Com relação ao texto 3, *A foto* de Luiz Fernando Veríssimo, com 350 palavras e 43 lacunas, podemos analisar a compreensão de leitura dos dois grupos de acordo com o Gráfico 3.

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[7] Essa forma verbal foi preenchida com sucesso por todos os participantes da pesquisa. Todas as palavras em itálico são as palavras omitidas nos testes.
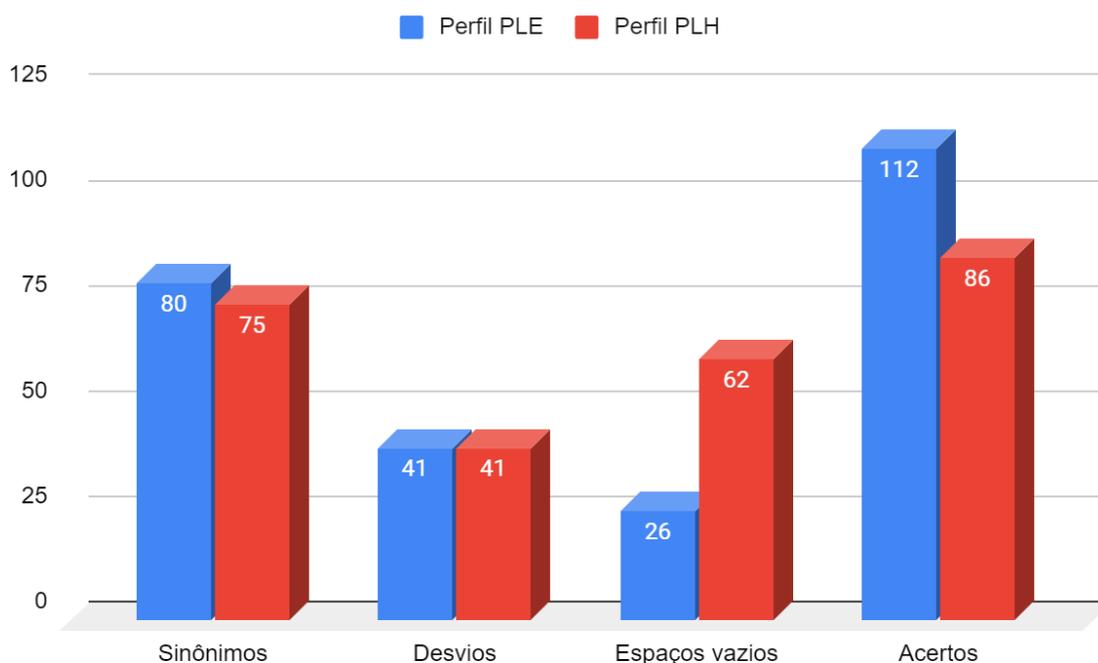[8] Também essa forma verbal foi preenchida sem dificuldades.

Gráfico 3
Compreensão da leitura do texto 3.

O gráfico acima revela os dados com o número de acertos e sinônimos inseridos pelos dois grupos. Podemos perceber que a inserção de sinônimos foi predominante nessa tipologia de teste *cloze*, no qual as palavras omitidas deveriam ser inseridas a partir da compreensão da leitura com base nos domínios sintático, semântico, pragmático e discursivo da narrativa. Nesse teste não havia o apoio das palavras listadas ao lado do texto, logo, os(as) informantes deveriam ativar a memória do repertório linguístico em português para realizar satisfatoriamente o exercício.

Nesse sentido, mostramos alguns exemplos dos sinônimos empregados no texto original dos excertos abaixo:

1. A bisa e o *bisa* sentados, filhos, filhas, noras, *genros* e netos em volta, *bisnetos* na frente, esparramados pelo *chão*.
2. Havia uma certa *resistência* ao marido da Bitinha na família.
3. Havia a *suspeita* nunca claramente anunciada, de que não fosse *filho* do Luiz Olavo.
4. O Dudu se *prontificou* a tirar a fotografia, mas a Andradina segurou o filho. – Só *faltava* essa, o Dudu não sair.
5. E antes que houvesse mais *protestos*, acionou a câmara, tirou a foto e foi *dormir*.

No excerto 6, a primeira lacuna foi preenchida com as expressões 'bisavô' e 'vô', enquanto a segunda e terceira lacunas foram preenchidas com outro léxico do ambiente familiar, tais como 'sobrinhos', 'netas', 'bisnetos'.

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Interessante notar que informantes dos dois grupos inseriram 'sentados na frente', em vez de 'bisnetos na frente'; além disso, no lugar da palavra 'chão', outras palavras foram inseridas, tais como 'piso' e 'momento'. No excerto 7, a palavra 'resistência' não foi preenchida por nenhum dos(as) informantes, sendo substituída pelas palavras 'hostilidade', 'fofoca', 'história', 'ideia'; além disso três informantes do grupo de PLE não inseriram nenhuma palavra nessa lacuna. Já no excerto 8, a palavra 'suspeita' foi substituída por 'fama', 'fofoca', 'ideia'. Assim também ocorreu com o excerto 9: a forma verbal não foi preenchida conforme o texto original, sendo inseridas as seguintes formas verbais: 'encaminhou', 'pôs', 'ofereceu', 'levantou', 'convenceu'. No caso do exemplo do excerto 9, a frase "Só faltava essa", foi preenchida por 4 informantes do grupo de PLH, e dois de PLE. Para este último exemplo, uma explicação que damos é que, tratando-se de uma expressão idiomática, os falantes de PLH podem ter tido mais contato na oralidade. As estudantes de PLE que preencheram com sucesso essa lacuna tinham mais de três anos de estudo da língua portuguesa, estando no 2° ano do mestrado. Por outro lado, no excerto 10, a primeira lacuna foi preenchida pelas palavras 'polêmicas', 'dúvidas' e 'tempo' e, na segunda lacuna, a maioria dos(as) informantes inseriu 'foi embora' e duas de PLE a expressão 'foi morto'.

Essas análises dos testes *cloze* demonstraram que o grupo de informantes de PLH tem características heterogêneas quanto à compreensão leitora, enquanto o grupo de aprendizes de PLE tem um perfil mais homogêneo de competências linguísticas nesta habilidade. Com relação às análises dos dados do teste 4, com perguntas abertas, todos(as) os(as) informantes tiveram sucesso nas respostas, compreendendo bem o texto em suas nuances mais pragmáticas. Se nossa avaliação tivesse sido realizada somente a partir de testes com perguntas abertas, talvez não pudéssemos identificar dificuldades e desvios de compreensão, como aquelas encontradas com os três testes *cloze* dos dois grupos.

Os dados revelam, nos gráficos 2 e 3, que os acertos dos três testes *cloze* são mais numerosos no grupo PLE; porém, se olharmos individualmente para cada componente do grupo PLH, notaremos que os acertos foram parecidos para 4 componentes desse grupo. Além disso, os desvios e espaços em branco foram deixados, em sua maioria, por duas informantes de PLH, fazendo-nos acreditar que é necessário analisar as circunstâncias individuais dos falantes, não somente com base no questionário aplicado, mas também nas circunstâncias do momento do teste.

6. Considerações finais

Em nossa investigação buscou-se integrar duas tipologias de testes para analisar as habilidades de compreensão leitora de dois grupos, aprendizes de

PLE e falantes de PLH, jovens universitários. Considerou-se que os(as) 12 participantes possuíam o nível B2 e C1 de compreensão e produção oral conforme o QUAREPE. Não havia a intenção de analisar as competências orais e escritas, porém, o objetivo principal era obter uma visão global da proficiência leitora, pensando na linguagem funcional numa abordagem comunicativa. Dessa forma, aplicamos duas baterias de testes, sendo a primeira bateria com três testes do tipo *cloze*, sendo que em dois testes as palavras omitidas eram elencadas aleatoriamente ao lado em uma coluna, e o outro sem o apoio das palavras; a segunda bateria com um teste de perguntas abertas sobre um texto narrativo.

Inicialmente, foi feita uma análise descritiva geral dos três testes *cloze*, aplicando pontuação para acertos literais e sinônimos, indicando também os números de desvios e lacunas deixadas em branco. Ressaltamos que algumas diferenças entre os grupos foram identificadas no que concerne à inserção das palavras. À diferença do perfil PLH, o grupo PLE mostrou-se mais atento aos preenchimentos das lacunas, com concentração de atenção mais alta, pois as lacunas não preenchidas eram em número menor em comparação ao outro grupo. Esse fato pode ser explicado a partir da experiência desse grupo com o estudo frequente da língua portuguesa, com atenção às formas gramaticais. Conforme os estudos sobre as competências formais em LH (Valdés 2001, García 2010, e outros), o perfil PLH de nossa pesquisa também apresentou dificuldades, principalmente com respeito às informantes que não tiveram um percurso de ensino formal da língua. Nos três testes *cloze*, os dois grupos seguiram as pistas gramaticais e semânticas com sucesso, e a maioria dos participantes demonstrou um prévio conhecimento linguístico do léxico e da gramática dos três textos. Poucas vezes constatou-se a leitura fragmentada: seja o falante de PLH, seja o aprendiz de PLE, como leitores(as), empregaram o seu repertório de conhecimentos da língua portuguesa, acrescentando o léxico nas lacunas sem prejudicar a semântica textual.

Os resultados obtidos com o uso do *cloze* confirmam a eficácia da técnica. De acordo com nossas análises, por ser essa uma pequena amostra de participantes, o desempenho inferior, no nível de frustração, de uma componente do grupo PLH, pode ter sido idiossincrático nessa subamostra, permitindo-nos refletir sobre as condições em que foram aplicados os testes, ou mesmo, refletir sobre os sujeitos escolhidos, com base no questionário respondido. Contudo, consideramos que existem diferenças de compreensão leitora entre os dois perfis investigados e que essas diferenças estão relacionadas aos conhecimentos linguísticos prévios advindos da prática leitora que aprimoram o conhecimento da escrita e das normas da língua portuguesa. Esses conhecimentos também gramaticais, por parte de algum componente do perfil PLH, podem não ter sido suficientes.

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READING COMPREHENSION IN YOUNG ADULT LEARNERS OF ENGLISH WITH AND WITHOUT DYSLEXIA

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Abstract – Reading comprehension skills are essential for academic success and social inclusion. Although word-level decoding difficulties are the distinctive marker of dyslexia at all ages, issues with text understanding are considered a common secondary consequence of the primary deficit. The study investigates such issues in young adult learners of English. More specifically it explores whether, given their characteristic cognitive and communicative profile, the type of questions (i.e., factual vs. inferential questions) and the language of the text (i.e., L1 vs. English as a foreign language) may be factors of increased difficulty for learners with this condition and may consequently result in reduced accuracy. Data point to significant differences between the focus and the control group with respect to inferential processing of texts. Neurotypical learners were found to systematically outperform their dyslexic peers in accurately answering questions relying on either local or global coherence inferencing, and their performance was less influenced by reading in a foreign language. Pedagogical implications are discussed, and suggestions for future research are made.

Keywords: developmental dyslexia; reading comprehension; English as a foreign language; inference making; pragmatic processing.

1. Introduction

Dyslexia is a specific learning disorder that primarily impacts the acquisition of literacy skills even when appropriate learning opportunities are provided. It manifests itself with a variety of symptoms ranging both in quality and severity. It causes difficulties in acquiring accurate and fluent word-level decoding and reduced graphemic competence (Ramus *et al.* 2003). It has a neurobiological origin (Sand, Bolger 2019) and a growing body of research has shown cognitive and behavioural correlates (Moll *et al.* 2014; Snowling *et al.* 2020a). Although the most affected domain seems to be the phonological component of language, a multidimensional and multifactorial view of dyslexia has emerged over the past decade: differences in people with this disorder have been identified in several domains, including but not limited to working memory functioning, verbal short-term memory, rapid automatized naming, and executive functions (Araújo, Faísca 2019; Araújo *et*

al. 2020; Lonergan *et al.* 2019; Meisinger *et al.* 2021; Smith-Spark *et al.* 2003, 2016; Smith-Spark, Fisk 2007). Moreover, direct and indirect effects can emerge at all levels of the linguistic system (Cappelli, Noccetti 2022).

Although dyslexia is a lifelong condition, its manifestations in adulthood may be more varied than in childhood. Some dyslexic people in fact manage to compensate for the difficulties in reading accuracy, but fluency and speed tend to remain impaired, as do spelling and non-word reading (Fidler, Everatt 2012).

The present article focuses on reading comprehension, which is one of the disorder's "secondary consequences" according to the International Dyslexia Association (2002). It investigates the ability of Italian-speaking university students with and without this condition to understand a set of texts in their L1 and in English as a foreign language (EFL) and explores their inference making skills.

Reading is a dynamic process in which several systems and components interact (Perfetti, Stafura 2014). Inferential abilities are central to this process as they are needed to recover implicit information, derive the meaning of unfamiliar lexical items, connect parts of the text to the readers' background knowledge as well as building a coherent mental model of the text by creating meaningful links between its parts (Kendeou *et al.* 2014; Perfetti, Stafura 2014). Reading comprehension tasks, including those that are part of standardized tests (e.g., IELTS, Cambridge Assessment English B2 First, etc.), typically involve inferential questions focusing on cause-effect relations, general topic recognition, and lexical inferences (Hamouda, Tarlochan 2015). These are known to pose challenges to L2 readers and to be cognitively demanding, especially in a foreign language (Horiba 1996, 2000; Jang 2009; Samiei, Ebadi 2021). Recent studies have shown that when texts are modified to reflect L2 readers' culture and when they are simplified to meet their proficiency level, pragmatic processing is supported and therefore, reading is more successful (Alptekin 2006; Khataee, Davoudi 2018).

Others have found that people with dyslexia are less efficient in processing pragmatic meanings than their neurotypical peers (Cappelli *et al.* 2018, 2022; Cardillo *et al.* 2018; Ferrara *et al.* 2020; Griffiths 2007). They are also known to struggle with foreign language learning (Downey *et al.* 2000; Ganshow, Sparks 2001; Kormos 2020; Nijakowska 2020; Schneider, Crombie 2012). For this reason, it is plausible to assume that reading in a foreign language may pose additional obstacles to pragmatic processing in this population (Cappelli 2019). This may have severe repercussions on dyslexic learners' academic success, since reading in a foreign language, especially in English, plays a major role in the globalized academic life.

Although the development of literacy in dyslexic children is a widely researched topic (Morken *et al.* 2017), literacy abilities in dyslexic adults have only recently started to be thoroughly explored (Fidler, Everatt 2012;

Gagliano *et al.* 2015; Santulli, Scagnelli 2017, 2022; Scagnelli *et al.* 2018). Yet, since they are crucial for their educational and professional success, understanding the role of dyslexia both in decoding and in comprehending L1 and foreign language texts at all ages is necessary to ensure appropriate support is provided to those who still struggle in higher education and in the work environment.

2. Reading comprehension and dyslexia

2.1. Reading comprehension as a complex task

Reading is a complex task, whose ultimate goal is not merely converting graphemes into phonemes, but rather extracting and building meaning from text (Grabe 2014; Perfetti, Stafura 2014). The two processes are of course connected: adequate word decoding is essential for understanding text. However, reading involves many other linguistic and cognitive abilities, whose coordination is essential for successful comprehension (Cain, Oakhill 2012; Oakhill *et al.* 2015; Perfetti, Adolf 2012;).

The Simple View of Reading (Gough, Tunmer 1986) sees word reading and language comprehension skills as equally necessary but independent abilities to construe a meaningful "mental model" (Johnson-Laird 1983; Oakhill *et al.* 2015) or "situational model" (Kintsch 1998) of the text. Despite the differences between the conceptualisations of such a model in the literature, studies agree that the result of good reading comprehension is "a mental representation that is created from information in the real, or an imagined, world – i.e., a gist representation of what the comprehender has read" (Oakhill *et al.* 2015, p. 1) which goes beyond the literal information encoded in the text (Kendeou *et al.* 2014).

Both lower-level and higher-level processes are at play in reading comprehension. Lower-level processes include fast and automatic word decoding (Perfetti 1985), lexico-semantic processing and semantic parsing of the immediate cotext to identify main propositional units. The ability to perform these operations must be developed by beginning readers, so that they can efficiently and effectively establish links between forms and sounds and develop the necessary word recognition skills (Grabe 2014). The latter, together with structural knowledge of the language (i.e., morphological and syntactic competence), has a direct impact on reading comprehension.

2.1.1. The role of vocabulary and inference making

The correlation between vocabulary knowledge and good reading abilities in both the L1 and the L2 is probably one of the most extensively investigated

topics (Droop, Verhoeven 2003; Grabe, Stroller 2011; Perfetti, Stafura 2014). Perfetti and Stafura's (2014) Reading System Framework poses word-to-text integration at the centre of the whole process. Word decoding is only one of the important factors for successful reading comprehension: in their model the word identification system mediates the interaction between form and meaning. If word meanings are unknown or cannot be properly activated, the understanding of a text will be quite difficult (Oakhill *et al.* 2015).

The amount of vocabulary each reader knows is considered a predictor of reading comprehension success (Li, Clariana 2019). It grows with extensive exposure to texts (Stanovich 2000) and keeps growing over time. Vocabulary breadth (i.e., the number of words in the lexical database) is not sufficient for good reading comprehension, though: vocabulary depth (i.e., how much one knows about each word in the lexical database) is also very important (Perfetti, Stafura 2014). Vocabulary depth allows readers to create meaningful associations in the text, to draw inferences, and to build a good mental model of the text, because different aspects of word meaning become more or less relevant when words are combined into phrases and sentences (Oakhill *et al.* 2015). Of course, readers do not necessarily need to know all the words in a text to understand it. The meaning of a few unfamiliar items can normally be inferentially derived from the context. Morphological competence can support word recognition and meaning retrieval in the L1 (Wagner *et al.* 2007), and the same positive effect has been observed for syntactic awareness (Perfetti, Adlof 2012). The latter has also been found to play a significant role in L2 reading (Grabe 2009).

Extracting pieces of propositional information from a text is, however, not enough to understand it properly. They need to be organized and added to a network which will form the basis for a richer and coherent mental model of the text, which will be stored in the reader's memory (Kintsch 2012; Oakhill *et al.* 2015). In its most basic form, this integration requires that sentences be properly linked, for instance by correctly processing connectives. This operation involves both lower-level vocabulary skills and higher-level inferential abilities to understand the logical relation between propositional units. To form a coherent model of the text, in fact, the information extracted from it needs to be supported and complemented by the reader's background knowledge, inferences and attitudes, and choices must be made as to what is relevant and useful (Grabe 2014; Kintsch 2012; Oakhill *et al.* 2015). Higher-level processes such as inference making, executive functions and attention-allocation abilities are therefore also essential for reading comprehension (Kendeou *et al.* 2014).

The ability to generate inferences is quite crucial for the whole process, first and foremost, because it allows readers to establish such meaningful links (Ahmed *et al.* 2016; Oakhill *et al.* 2003, 2017). Inferences are in fact triggered by textual elements but go beyond what is explicitly asserted. This

ability is not limited to the written text and develops over time from the pre-literacy years. Indeed, good listening comprehension is a strong predictor of good reading comprehension, since the higher-level processes involved are the same (Catts *et al.* 2005).

Potentially unlimited inferences can be derived from a text. However, not all of them are equally necessary to build a mental model. Some inferences are necessary, and others enrich the model but, although sometimes helpful, are not essential for understanding (i.e., elaborative inferences). Fundamental connecting inferences are local cohesion inferences, e.g., pronominal and lexical inferences that help readers with anaphora resolution, and global coherence inferences, which allow readers to create a coherent model by linking it with different parts of the text. Oakhill *et al.* (2017) point out that, whereas the former type is always necessary, the relevance of the latter depends on the nature of the text and the reading purpose. Thus, for example, while readers tend to always draw inferences about causality relations, those about character motivations might only be required when reading narrative materials.

Likewise, elaborative inferences may not be essential for understanding. They draw on the background knowledge of the reader and "embellish" the mental model. Thus, a sentence like "The woman threw a stone at the boy" may come with the elaborative inference that she actually hit him with the stone, that she hurt him badly, that he bled, that he died, etc. None of these scenarios, though, may in fact be the case. However, if the text continues "The scar remained visible even in his old age", the reader will need to draw the inference that the stone and the scar are causally connected, and the elaborative inference that the woman actually hit the boy with it will be necessary to build the mental model. Nevertheless, this type of inference "is made backwards, not elaboratively or predictively" (Oakhill *et al.* 2015, p. 39).

Different types of inferences come with different processing costs. Local cohesion inferences are usually automatic and, in typical readers, they require few resources. Global coherence inferences may be more taxing on memory and attention. Finally, elaborative inferences greatly depend on the ability of readers to connect textual information to their background knowledge, including knowledge of discursive conventions and text structures (Duke 2004). In other words, inferential processes take place "in real time", that is, while reading, but they may consume time and cognitive resources (Oakhill *et al.* 2015).

Inferential abilities are supported by memory skills (especially working memory) and vocabulary knowledge, and for this reason, they develop over time. Barnes *et al.* (1996) observe that the ability to remember explicit facts and details in a text correlates with the ability to draw necessary inferences in

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children. Better memory skills help readers build more accurate and coherent models, thus facilitating inferential processes (Oakhill *et al.* 2015). Vocabulary depth and background knowledge – whose acquisition and development also depend on memory skills – are critical for facilitating inference making too, as is the speed of access to such information (Barnes *et al.* 1996).

It should be pointed out that, in a complex activity such as reading comprehension, there is a reciprocal relationship among these skills. Memory, inferential and attention-allocation resources are fundamental for acquiring vocabulary and background knowledge, which in turn support inference making (Oakhill, Cain 2012; Prior *et al.* 2014). Vocabulary development and reading comprehension are also codependent: readers with limited lexical resources will likely be poor comprehenders and this will hinder vocabulary gain (cf. the "Matthew Effect"; Stanovich 1986).

Another higher-level process that is inextricably related to inferential and lexical abilities is comprehension monitoring, i.e., the ability to check understanding and repair errors. Typical instances of faulty comprehension happen when unfamiliar words are involved or where incorrect inferences are derived. Good comprehenders can control their understanding while reading and strategically solve comprehension errors right away. Of course, in order to do this, they must be able to retain a sufficient memory representation of the text to notice conflicts and resolve them, while suppressing irrelevant information. This means they must have efficient executive functions (e.g., working memory and inhibition; Diamond 2013; Raudzus *et al.* 2017) and cognitive flexibility, which improves with age and practice (Cartwright 2009).

2.2. *L2 reading comprehension*

There is general agreement that many of the abilities needed for L1 and L2 reading comprehension are the same and that "the reading construct is very similar in terms of underlying cognitive and linguistic components" (Grabe 2014, p. 11). This is especially true for the higher-level processes, which relate to comprehension ability in a general way. However, when it comes to lower-level processes, reading in a foreign language differs from reading in one's mother tongue in some important respects.

L2 readers do not have the same linguistic and cultural competence as L1 readers: their lexical and syntactic resources are usually more limited than those of native speakers, as may be their L2 culture-specific background knowledge and social and cultural assumptions, which may be difficult to understand or accept. This is due, at least in part, to the fact that they rarely have the same reading experience and practice in the foreign language as in their L1. Reduced exposure to (authentic) L2 texts thus results in what could

be called "an L2 Matthew effect": limited encounters with L2 materials will have as a consequence limited L2 vocabulary and background knowledge growth, which in turn might discourage readers from approaching texts of growing difficulty and complexity.

The differences in knowledge of the language may hamper word-to-text integration processes (Jeon, Yamashita 2014; Perfetti, Stafura 2014). L2 vocabulary, in fact, may not only be smaller, but also poorer in terms of semantic representations and more difficult to retrieve (Li, Clariana 2019; Raudszus *et al.* 2018; van den Bosch 2020).

Reading in a foreign language also poses a higher demand on our limited cognitive resources in attention, memory and control (Li, Clariana 2019; Perfetti, Stafura 2014; Raudszus *et al.* 2018). Readers must operate in two different linguistic systems (e.g., accessing their bilingual lexicon; Koda 2005) and might experience both lower and higher-level transfer effects (Grabe 2014), which have both the potential of facilitating and hindering reading comprehension via interference from the L1 (Grabe 2014; Koda 2005).

The proficiency level in the L2 seems to make a difference (Li, Clariana 2019). If the reading skills of more proficient readers have been found to be similar to those of L1 readers, the same is not true for beginners and intermediate learners (Genesee *et al.* 2006; Grabe 2014; Koda 2005). The typological distance between languages can also potentially complicate the reading comprehension process, but this effect appears to be mitigated by proficiency. These findings are compatible with the view that the cognitive processes which support reading comprehension are the same in the L1 and in the L2 (Verhoeven, van Leeuwe 2012), but that linguistic limitations (e.g., in vocabulary knowledge) will deplete resources and reduce the efficiency of the L2 reading process (cf. In'nami *et al.*'s [2021] meta-analysis of the relationship between working memory efficiency and L2 reading). When the learners' proficiency grows, more resources will be available for the reading process and reading in a foreign language will become increasingly similar to L1 reading (Grabe 2014).

2.3. Reading comprehension and dyslexia

Individual differences in all components of the reading process are known to impact the outcome of reading comprehension. Difficulties in understanding a text are not a distinctive manifestation of dyslexia per se (Snowling *et al.* 2020b), but most people with this condition have been found to perform worse than neurotypical peers in reading comprehension tasks (Reis *et al.* 2020). The simple view of reading discussed above predicts this as the result of their characteristic deficit in lower-level processes, namely, poor phonological skills and consequent poor word-level decoding. This is also

compatible with Perfetti and Stafura's (2014) hypothesis that word-text integration relies on limited resources, and issues in decoding would exhaust those otherwise necessary for meaning integration, thus resulting in poor or inaccurate comprehension. Indeed, the multifactorial picture emerging in recent studies points to such a complex interplay of factors.

Children with dyslexia struggle with learning to read, and their word reading is neither accurate nor fluent. Such difficulties are a lifelong condition, although the behavioural manifestations of the disorder change over time (Miller-Shaul 2005; Swanson, Hsieh 2009). Adult dyslexia has started to be systematically investigated only recently, sometimes with conflicting results, since many adults with a childhood diagnosis manage to compensate for their deficits and develop sufficiently good reading skills, whereas others do not (Cavalli *et al.* 2017; Eloranta *et al.* 2019). The compensatory mechanisms are not fully known yet, but it is believed that some people come to rely on intact abilities (e.g., morphological knowledge) to compensate for their phonological impairment.

Reis *et al.*'s (2020) metanalytical overview of studies on adults' reading abilities has revealed that the most persistent markers of dyslexia are poor reading fluency and spelling. Even though most of the studies included in their analysis focus on highly functional and possibly well compensated adults (i.e., higher education students), they still point to significant differences from typically developed peers in many respects beyond decoding, including reading comprehension measures and related cognitive skills (e.g., phonological awareness, verbal working memory, rapid automatised naming and vocabulary), as well as some general cognitive skills (e.g., processing speed). However, the authors observe that behavioural symptoms remain "more severe for reading and writing abilities [...] than for the cognitive processing skills associated with literacy" (p. 359). They also report that the difference in vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension outcomes without time constraints are small, although generalized (see also Swanson, Hsieh 2009). This may be explained by the choice of participants in the studies (i.e., compensated adults) or by the possibility that in adulthood reading is less dependent on the cognitive processing abilities that support it in childhood and is supported instead by the improved lexical resources developed through exposure to the printed text over the years. The latter also appears to mitigate accuracy issues over time, whereas speed and fluency remain impaired (Eloranta *et al.* 2019).

Reis *et al.* (2020) also found orthographic transparency to be a relevant factor in this regard: whereas accuracy seems to improve with age in transparent orthographies, fluency remains "a major problem in adult dyslexia across orthographies" (p.360). Somewhat counterintuitively if we assume the validity of the simple view of reading, comprehension accuracy does not seem to be impacted by orthographic opaqueness in adults. This may

be because they have learnt to rely more on print-to-meaning connections and phonological awareness may play a smaller role in more experienced readers.

Processing and lexical retrieval speed remain impaired in adults regardless of the type of orthography, and the severity of the deficit correlates with differences in compensation. A severe deficit in rapid naming endures in adults with persisting poor reading fluency and, under time constraints, it is also associated with reduced comprehension accuracy (Araújo *et al.* 2015; Eloranta *et al.* 2019). Overall, although there is no consensus as to whether vocabulary skills are impacted by dyslexia (Cappelli 2022; Cavalli *et al.* 2016), metanalyses evidence that lexical knowledge in the dyslexic population is reduced compared to that of neurotypical individuals (Reis *et al.* 2020; Swanson, Hsieh 2009) and that vocabulary knowledge and retrieval might be a major factor in reading comprehension difficulties in both children and adults, as slow access to a smaller vocabulary repertoire potentially hinders inference making. This hypothesis is compatible with Perfetti and Stafura's (2014) model of reading comprehension, which sees in vocabulary the crucial pressure point in the system.

To sum up, as far as L1 reading is concerned, adults with dyslexia appear to be less fluent than neurotypical peers, but might reach good levels of compensation, thanks to their experience with texts (Santulli, Scagnelli 2022). Nevertheless, they are generally outperformed by readers without dyslexia in comprehension tasks. This may depend on the fact that deficits in lower-level processes (e.g., decoding and vocabulary knowledge) exhaust the limited resources available for higher-level processes (e.g., attention and working memory) necessary for the creation of a mental model of the text (Perfetti, Hart 2002). Difficulties with vocabulary and general background knowledge could also limit the generation of necessary inferences, which in turns leads to the construction "of impoverished representation of the text [...]" (Kendeou *et al.* 2014) and consequently failure to thoroughly understand it. Another potential source of poor reading comprehension may reside in primary executive function deficits, especially working memory and inhibition (Cain *et al.* 2004a, 2004b). Weaknesses in these areas can also be detrimental to inference making, as well as to comprehension monitoring (Eason *et al.* 2012; Kendeou *et al.* 2014). Finally, the depletion of cognitive resources due to issues in one or more of these areas may limit attention (Kendeou *et al.* 2013).

It should be noted that not all adults with dyslexia exhibit the same reading comprehension behaviour. The high variability is explained by the fact that diverse patterns of deficits can be found in both lower and higher processes, and the cognitive and linguistic profile of dyslexic individuals influences greatly their literacy development and performance, including reading comprehension (Cain, Oakhill 2006; Oakhill *et al.* 2015). Differences

in the results reported in the literature may also be the consequence of insufficiently fine-grained selection of the participants. Most studies, in fact, do not distinguish between participants with dyslexia and participants with dyslexia and associated developmental language disorder. Snowling *et al.* (2020b) have indeed found that reading comprehension difficulties are more common in the case of comorbidity and that, although children with "pure" dyslexia show mild deficits in text understanding, their global performance was still within the normal range if comprehension was assessed orally. Written questions may produce a wider gap between readers with and without dyslexia as observed in some of the studies included in Reis *et al.*'s (2020) metanalysis and in Keenan *et al.* (2008). The differences between dyslexic and typically developing comprehenders could therefore be ascribed to decoding difficulties and lower levels of vocabulary, rather than qualifying them as poor comprehenders proper.

2.3.1. Reading in English

Given the demands posed by reading in a foreign language described in section 2.2 and the characteristics of learners with dyslexia, it is reasonable to assume that L2 reading comprehension might be at least as challenging as L1 reading comprehension for adults with dyslexia, and possibly more. This is compatible with Sparks and Ganschow's (1993) Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis stating that L2 development and proficiency is dependent on abilities in the L1. In other words, deficits in the L1 will have repercussions on L2 development (Sparks 2013).

Research has especially focused on children with dyslexia, who have been found to struggle with foreign language learning, including reading comprehension (Bonifacci *et al.* 2017; Downey *et al.* 2000; Simon 2000; Suárez-Coalla *et al.* 2020). Bonifacci *et al.* (2017) have observed that Italian primary school learners underperform their typically developing peers in English reading comprehension tasks (although not in the L1). There is no consensus on whether adults face the same challenges, but it seems that, even given appropriate instruction, only well compensated individuals may overcome the main difficulties and reach adequate levels of L2 proficiency (Cappelli, Noccetti 2016; Elbro *et al.* 2012; Noccetti, Cappelli 2018; Soroli *et al.* 2010). However, most of them may struggle to attain the same results of neurotypical peers (Ganschow, Sparks 2001; Łockiewicz, Jaskuulska 2016; Nijakowska 2020; Sparks *et al.* 2006), especially in specific L2 tasks requiring fast phonological processing and lexical retrieval (Ramus, Szenkovits 2008) or inferential processing (Simi 2021).

English and Italian differ in terms of orthographic transparency. Contrary to the latter, the former is an opaque language and therefore especially challenging for readers with dyslexia (Caravolas *et al.* 2013;

Łockiewicz, Jaskuulska; 2016). Decoding deficits are therefore potentially even more detrimental to L2 than to L1 reading comprehension in these learners, even though some studies have found "an English advantage" in some readers and have explained it with a preference for direct lexical access to word reading rather than a phonological route (Miller-Guron, Lundberg 2000). This of course can only happen if the L2 vocabulary is sufficiently broad and deep, which is not always the case (Cappelli 2022). Recent studies have shown that L2 vocabulary acquisition is not an easy task for learners with this condition unless dedicated and appropriate instruction is provided (Noccetti 2022). For this reason, they may not be able to rely on the support of linguistic knowledge as in the L1, and their inference making abilities may be hindered. The strain placed on executive functions might also represent a source of additional difficulty.

In conclusion, it is fair to assume that the deficits associated with dyslexia will be reflected in the outcome of reading comprehension tasks in both L1 and L2 (cf. Landerl *et al.* 1997; Łockiewicz, Jaskuulska 2016; Oren, Breznitz 2004). However, foreign languages are likely to represent a further factor of difficulty when it comes to understanding texts and answering inferential questions. This can be especially expected when the L1 and the L2 differ significantly in orthographic transparency, and the resources necessary for word-to-text integration are depleted by poor decoding skills and deficient executive, inferential and attentional abilities, with no other linguistic resources to support the creation of a coherent model of the text.

3. Research questions and methodology

3.1. Research questions

To the best of our knowledge, the way in which dyslexia affects the performance of adult learners in EFL reading comprehension tasks has not been extensively explored. Most studies have focused on children (cf. Bonifacci *et al.* 2017; Helland, Morken 2016; Kim 2012; Snowling *et al.* 2020b), although several articles have recently appeared discussing older participants (Awada, Gutiérrez-Colón Plana 2018; Łockiewicz, Jaskuulskaa 2016).

The present investigation had a behavioural and pedagogical focus. Given the deficits associated with dyslexia, including difficulties in processing pragmatic meaning, and the processing demands which supposedly come with reading in a foreign language, the study wanted to verify how dyslexic and neurotypical readers compare in terms of a) global accuracy in understanding simple short narrative texts, b) their ability to

answer correctly factual and inferential questions and c) their performance in the foreign language compared with the L1.

The study was not conducted with the intention of contributing to defining distinctive features of the reading disorder in the young adult population, it did not include experimental measures of verbal and non-verbal abilities to correlate with the data collected and, therefore, it makes no claims of psycholinguistic generalisability. The final goal of this investigation was instead to identify the role of individual learning differences and discuss their pedagogical implications for common EFL reading tasks, with the intent of supporting and encouraging inclusive teaching in the foreign language classroom.

3.2. Participants

The data for the analysis were obtained from 22 young adults (11 F) who had been diagnosed with developmental dyslexia within the previous 3 years and 22 controls (14 F). The dyslexia group (DYS) had a mean age of 21 years, and the control group (CG) had a mean age of 22. All participants were Italian speaking students at the University of Pisa from different degree programmes, namely Political Sciences, Tourism Sciences, Humanities, Biology, History and Engineering. These undergraduate programmes require students to pass an English exam attesting the CEFR B1 proficiency level (intermediate). All had attained this level at the time of the experiment. The participants with dyslexia had successfully completed a specifically designed course offered to all students with this condition by the University. The participants without dyslexia had fulfilled the foreign language credit requirements for their degree programme.

It was not possible to make fine-grained distinctions between participants with dyslexia and participants with dyslexia plus co-occurring developmental language disorder, since most diagnoses did not report this information. All members of the DYS group had at least a co-occurring specific learning difficulty (e.g., dysgraphia and dyscalculia). Three participants were excluded from this group because they had a history of language delay, which was taken as a possible indicator of developmental language disorder. Two participants were excluded from the control group because they were bilingual (i.e., Italian – Arabic and Italian – Albanian).

Although the diagnosis is indeed an important factor in determining the exact source of specific difficulties (Snowling *et al.* 2020b), establishing causal links was not the main intent of our research. The exact cognitive and linguistic profile of learners is rarely known to EFL teachers at the university level and given the essentially pedagogical focus of the study, a diagnosis of developmental dyslexia was taken as a sufficient criterion for inclusion regardless of comorbidities.

3.3. Materials

The participants' English proficiency level was assessed through the locally-developed entry test in use at the Language Centre of the University of Pisa. A vocabulary knowledge test measuring both vocabulary breadth and depth was specifically designed to verify if the key English lexical items in the texts included in the experiment were known to the learners. The test was modelled on Read's (1998) Word Associates Test and focused especially on the lexical items necessary for inference making.

The reading test included 8 short narrative texts (average length: 110 words), four in Italian and four in English. The English texts were adaptations of short passages found on a reading instruction website (www.ereadingworksheets.com) in the section dedicated to teaching inferencing to English speaking children (grade 3-5). The Italian texts were adapted translations of texts from the same site which did not include references that were specific to the Anglophone world. The texts were modified to include vocabulary typically known to intermediate learners of English and to make the length and the readability measures comparable in the two languages. Table 1 shows some of the parameters that were controlled in choosing and preparing the texts.

	Sentences	Words	Sentence length	Syllables per sentence
TEXTS EN	9.25	107.25	11.77	15.49
TEXTS IT	10	129	12.87	19.86

Table 1
Average number of sentences and words, average sentence length and average number of syllables per sentence in the English and Italian texts.

As for vocabulary measures, lexical density was verified for the Italian texts (M = 76,35%) through *DyLan TextTools v2.1.9*,[1] an online text readability analyser developed by the Dynamics of Language unit of the Italian National Research Centre in Pisa. Lexical diversity (M = 59.05) was measured for the English texts with *Text Inspector*,[2] an online tool developed by the Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment (CRELLA) at the University of Bedfordshire. Both indicators are typical of easily readable texts. The English texts were also assessed in terms of CEFR vocabulary levels, to ensure that most lexical items were accessible to intermediate learners (97%). General indexes of readability were calculated for both languages. The average Flesch Reading Ease score for the English texts was

[1] http://www.ilc.cnr.it/dylanlab/apps/texttools/ (25.8.2022).
[2] https://textinspector.com/ (25.8.2022)

83.2, whereas the equivalent average Flesch-Vacca Reading Ease score for Italian was 79.75. This means that all texts could be classified as "easy" and were considered suitable for readers over 14 years old. We additionally confirmed the readability level of the Italian texts with a measure specifically developed for this language (GULPEASE; $M = 69.75$).

3.4. Methodology

The proficiency test and the vocabulary test were administered six weeks prior to the experimental session. All participants who demonstrated poor understanding of relevant lexical items received specific instruction so they could learn the unfamiliar words and their acquisition was verified 10 days prior to the reading comprehension test. These steps were meant to reduce differences in the participants' EFL proficiency and in their relevant vocabulary knowledge as much as possible.

Participants were asked to take the reading test in the computer laboratory of the University of Pisa Language Centre. The task consisted in reading each text and answering questions on a computer. No time limits were imposed. Audio recordings of the texts were available to learners with dyslexia in both languages, so as to reduce the impact of decoding difficulties. However, none of the participants chose to listen to them.

The questions had different formats: some were multiple choice questions and others were open questions. In order to answer them, participants had to identify factual information or to draw either local coherence inferences (e.g., anaphoric resolution and lexical inferences) or global coherence inferences (e.g., inferences which required the integration of information from various parts of the text or resort to general background knowledge).

Multiple choice questions were attributed 1 point for each correct answer and 0 points for errors or missing answers. Open questions were given 1 point for a complete correct answer, 0.5 points for partially correct answers (e.g., if participants did not draw all the required inferences) and 0 points for incorrect (e.g., wrong or no inference or answers that reported part of the text) or missing answers. In order to reduce bias in evaluating open answers and to increase the reliability of point attribution, the assessment procedure was carried out independently by the author and two graduate students in English linguistics, who also helped in the data collection. Results were consistent across evaluators (overall Intraclass Correlation Coefficient 0.88). Language mistakes were not considered, and participants were allowed to answer in Italian questions about the English texts if they so wished, since the focus was on their understanding and not their EFL writing skills.

Results as to the accuracy in retrieving factual information, and in local and global inference making were analysed both quantitatively, and

qualitatively for each group and the performance of the two groups was compared. The statistical significance of the differences between factual information understanding and local and global inferencing in each group was assessed through *t*-tests, whereas the differences between groups and conditions were assessed through two-way ANOVA tests. The answers to each question were then qualitatively assessed in order to identify potential sources of significant differences.

4. Results and Discussion

Results showed differences between the performance of the DYS group and that of the Control Group. It did not differ significantly in terms of average completion time ($p = .886074$), although greater intragroup variation was observed in DYS (s = 9' 7" vs. 7' 41") than in CG. The same variance was observed in global accuracy scores, in which, however, the difference between groups was statistically significant ($p < .00001$). The control group outperformed the participants with dyslexia, thus pointing towards probable difficulties in inferential processing of texts in the latter population (Table 2).

	M time	*Sd*	*M* total score	*Sd*
DYS	28' 57"	9' 7"	31.68	5.98
CG	28' 36"	7' 41"	43.45	1.23

Table 2
Average times and total scores for the two groups.

The minimal difference in average completion times was unexpected, given the deficit in reading fluency and processing speed associated with dyslexia in adulthood. The larger standard deviation confirmed instead the typical intragroup variability found in most studies on people with the disorder.

A qualitative analysis of the individual times and scores was carried out to verify whether the score might indicate high levels of compensation in the participants of the DYS group. The lowest completion times in DYS were however found in association with the lowest scores and the highest number of unanswered questions, whereas the opposite was true for the control group. It appears therefore that, as far as the focus group is concerned, low average times cannot be taken as a measure of compensation and reading fluency, but rather as the sign that at least some participants with dyslexia struggled to answer certain questions and decided to skip them altogether.

Data were then analysed to identify differences in factual information retrieval and local coherence and global coherence inference making accuracy. Both groups were very accurate in answering factual questions in

both languages (Table 3), and the language of the text appears to make no significant statistical difference for either group (DYS p = .572 vs. CG p = .393). A two-way ANOVA was performed to analyse the effect of condition on group. It revealed that there was no statistically significant interaction between the effects of condition and group (p > 0.5) and no significant difference between groups (p > 0.5).

	M Factual info	M Factual ^{IT}	M Factual ^{EN}
DYS	0.92	0.93	0.91
CG	0.97	0.98	0.97

Table 3
Average score for reading comprehension accuracy in factual questions.

A qualitative assessment confirmed that all participants were comparably accurate in answering factual questions both in Italian and in English, even though the dyslexic readers were less correct when the information to retrieve appeared in complex sentences or relied on vocabulary knowledge (e.g., synonymy). This is in line with the issues reported for some people with dyslexia in lower-level processes (i.e., structural and lexical knowledge) and working memory.

Learners with dyslexia were systematically outperformed by the control group in both types of inferential questions (Table 4). Furthermore, whereas no statistically significant difference was observed in the control group in terms of accuracy in factual vs. inferential questions (p = .550), this was not the case for the DYS group (p < .01). In this case, a two-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant interaction between the effects of condition (e.g., factual vs. inferential questions) and group (F(1, 84) = 35,58, p <.001). A simple main effects analysis showed a significant difference between groups (F(1, 84) = 89,36, p <.001). In other words, neurotypical learners were equally accurate in answering factual and inferential questions. On the other hand, learners with dyslexia were better at answering factual rather than inferential questions and were less accurate than controls in this task.

These observations provide support to the hypothesis that young adults with dyslexia are not impaired in retrieving explicit information in texts. Rather, their primary deficit in decoding and inefficiency in several higher-level processes supporting reading comprehension may reduce their ability to construe a proper mental model when processing demands are higher. This explains why this effect is most evident in inferential questions, and global coherence inferences in particular (Table 4).

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	M Local	*M* Global	*M* Local [IT]	*M* Global [IT]	*M* Local [EN]	*M* Global [EN]
DYS	0.81	0.65	0.89	0.74	0.71	0.55
CG	0.98	0.96	0.96	0.98	0.99	0.94

Table 4
Mean scores for total local and global inferencing and for local and global inferencing in English and Italian.

Local and global coherence inference making was then compared and contrasted infralinguistically and crosslinguistically. The data in Table 3 show that the DYS group was less accurate in answering questions relying on global coherence inferences ($M = 0.65$; $s = 0.207$) than those requiring local coherence inferences ($M = 0.81$; $s = 0.187$), $p = .002$. No statistically significant difference was found in the controls' scores for local coherence ($M = 0.98$; $s = 0.043$) and global coherence inferences ($M = 0.96$; $s = 0.057$), $p = .411469$. This is compatible with the cognitive profile associated with dyslexia discussed in the literature, and, more specifically, with the deficits in working memory and executive functions, whether inherent or resulting from the depletion of cognitive resources due to difficulties in decoding. Global coherence inferences require, in fact, being able to understand and keep in memory different pieces of information found in the text and integrating them in the mental model to update the existing one in real time. This also requires good attentional skills and the ability to inhibit non-relevant information. Most local coherence inferences, on the other hand, could be made just by identifying relevant lexical items or by assigning anaphoric reference correctly. Sufficient vocabulary knowledge might have provided support for this type of question. Some of the global coherence inference questions entailed, instead, resorting to general background knowledge (i.e., extra-textual information) to answer correctly. Besides sufficient vocabulary and general knowledge, participants therefore needed efficient higher-level processing. The difference between the performance of the two groups and between the two types of inference was therefore not unexpected.

Data were then analysed to investigate the role of the text language in inferential reading comprehension accuracy. The accuracy of the control group in deriving local coherence and global coherence inferences did not differ significantly intralinguistically. The score obtained in questions relying on local inferences ($M = 0.96$; $s = 0.034$) and in those relying on global inference ($M = 0.98$; $s = 0.055$) in the Italian texts did not differ in a relevant way ($p = .153$). The same was found for the difference in local ($M = 0.99$; $s = 0.048$) and global ($M = 0.94$; $s = 0.053$) inferences in English ($p = .339$). In contrast, participants with dyslexia showed reduced accuracy in global coherence inference making in both Italian ($p = .034$) and in English ($p =$

.046). A two-way ANOVA was performed to analyse the effect of condition on group for both English and Italian. It revealed that there was a statistically significant interaction between the effects of condition (type of inference in English) and group $(F(1, 84) = 8,257, p < 0.01)$. Simple main effects analysis showed that there is a significant difference between groups $(F(1, 84) = 105,941, p < 0.001)$. The same was done for the two types of inference in Italian, and in this case too the two-way ANOVA revealed that a statistically significant (although smaller) interaction between the effects of condition (types of inference in Italian) and group $(F(1, 84) = 5,822, p < 0.05)$, and a significant difference between groups $(F(1, 84) = 81,99, p < 0.001)$. This means that for neurotypical learners the type of inference made no difference in either Italian or English. On the other hand, learners with dyslexia were consistently better at deriving local coherence rather than global coherence inferences in both languages. The discrepancy between groups in Italian partially contrasts with the findings of Bonifacci *et al.* (2017). Although DYS and CG diverged less in reading comprehension in their L1 than in English, the latter still outperformed the former, in contrast with what was observed in children. It is possible that growing up, the gap between inferential reading comprehension accuracy in dyslexic and neurotypical adults widens because the disparity in vocabulary and general background knowledge increases. Further research is necessary to confirm and possibly explain this emerging picture.

The crosslinguistic comparison of local and global coherence inferencing in Italian and in English revealed instead a significant effect of the language in both groups, although smaller in the controls' scores. The latter were less accurate in answering questions based on local coherence inferences in English than in Italian ($p = .038$) and the same happened with the questions involving global coherence inferences ($p = .035$). The same, but larger effect was observed in the DYS group's scores ($Local^{IT}$ vs. $Local^{EN}$ $p = .009$; $Global^{IT}$ vs. $Global^{EN}$ $p = .011$). The language of the text seems, therefore, to impact the accuracy of all readers, although the effect on people with dyslexia appears greater.

5. Concluding remarks

This study hopes to contribute to the debate about reading comprehension abilities and developmental dyslexia in young adult learners of English. Reading skills in the native language as well as in a foreign language are a very important factor in academic success as well as in social inclusion. Developmental dyslexia may hinder or significantly slow down their acquisition, and this may in turn result in negative attitudes towards foreign language learning (Dimililer, Istek 2018), and, most importantly, provoke

feelings of inadequacy and even result in early school leaving (Daniel *et al.* 2006; Donato *et al.* 2021; Livingston *et al.* 2018.

Most EFL learners with dyslexia in higher education are presumably well compensated individuals, and therefore, the data resulting from their testing may return only a partial picture of the impact of the disorder on reading comprehension abilities. Nevertheless, the research did not aim at defining the distinctive features of young adult dyslexia. The design of the behavioural experiment described in the previous sections was planned to highlight the role of different types of questions (i.e., factual, local coherence and global coherence inferential questions) and of the language of the text (e.g., L2 vs. L1) in the comprehension of learners with dyslexia. Although the focus was on reading in English, the participants were also tested in Italian to verify whether reduced accuracy may be ascribed to individual differences or to proficiency issues in the foreign language. The final aim was therefore to investigate whether, given the deficits associated with this specific learning difficulty, including the limitations observed in vocabulary knowledge (Cappelli 2022), pragmatic inefficiency (Cappelli *et al.* 2018, 2022) and difficulties in foreign language learning (Kormos 2020), the demands of reading comprehension tasks – commonly used in the EFL classroom – would make them as accessible for these learners as for their neurotypical peers.

Results revealed significant differences in accuracy between groups. Although learners with the disorder were as fast as their typically developed peers in completing the test, low completion times corresponded to accurate and fluent processing of the text only for the control group. The participants with dyslexia who finished quickly simply ended up skipping the most challenging questions. The type of question did not make any relevant difference for neurotypical readers: they were equally accurate in answering factual and inferential questions, both involving local and global coherence inferences. Readers with dyslexia, instead, showed better understanding of factual rather than inferential information, and were more accurate in deriving local inferences than global inferences. Overall, inferential reading comprehension seems therefore a more challenging task for dyslexic than for neurotypical readers, especially when questions require combining several pieces of textual and extra-textual information into an increasingly complex model of the text. However, the fact that no significant differences were observed between the focus and the control group in answering factual questions supports the hypothesis that poor understanding of texts is indeed a secondary consequence of dyslexia, since they were efficient and accurate in answering questions focusing on explicit information. It is reasonable to conclude that comprehension difficulties may emerge in some dyslexic

readers as a result of their primary deficit in decoding and of inefficiency in several higher-level processes supporting reading comprehension.

As to the role of the language of the text, both dyslexic and non-dyslexic participants were better at deriving inferences in Italian (i.e., their L1) than in English. This is compatible with the hypothesis that L2 reading is more taxing on executive functions than L1 reading (Prehn *et al.* 2018), since readers must compensate for lower proficiency, including more shallow vocabulary knowledge (Raudszus *et al.* 2018). Interestingly, though, this effect of the L2 was more marked in the scores of readers with dyslexia, providing support to the idea that the disorder adds to the intrinsic demands imposed by reading in a foreign language.

The study has no pretence of exhaustivity. The small number of participants and the fact that no fine-grained distinctions in their diagnoses was possible are limitations. Repeating the testing on a larger sample of participants with no comorbidities may offer a different picture. A larger sample would also allow for the effects of the individual differences in L2 language proficiency to be surmounted. Although the general competence was assessed and vocabulary knowledge was controlled, all studies focusing on L2 abilities are inevitably influenced by the uniqueness of the path followed in language development by each learner, which are presumably more influential in smaller focus groups.

Nevertheless, the results offer some interesting insights on the impact of dyslexia in reading comprehension tasks beyond the well-known decoding deficits. Too often, the only adjustment offered to these learners in the language classroom, both during teaching and testing, is providing extra time or resorting to multiple choice questions. If this is certainly helpful, it is per se not sufficient. Competent EFL teachers must be able to analyse and evaluate the complexity of reading comprehension materials with the awareness that highly inferential texts or questions may pose additional obstacles to learners with dyslexia. From a pedagogical point of view, a distinction should be made between reading comprehension tasks carried out as a learning activity and those included in testing. The ability to process texts inferentially is a fundamental skill that all learners must acquire. Therefore, inclusive teaching should not exclude this type of question from reading activities. Rather, it is important that reading comprehension lessons include instruction moments focusing on the development of inferential abilities and on the strategies that can help all learners, including those with special needs, to make the necessary connections between parts of the text and between the text and their background knowledge. Some adjustments may still be necessary in reading comprehension assessment tests. Again, teachers must be clear on the goal of testing and possibly avoid formats that are very demanding on higher-level processing resources and require efficient pragmatic abilities (e.g., open questions on global cohesion inferences relying

on general knowledge, local cohesion questions relying on interpretation of idioms, polysemous words or very distant coreferent, etc.). Further research should expand on these preliminary observations and investigate the most inclusive format for reading comprehension testing. Different types of questions (e.g., multiple choice questions, true-false questions, matching questions, etc.) may have different outcomes in terms of the pragmatic processing of texts. The ordering of the questions may also be a factor: does mixing types of questions make the task more difficult? Should factual questions always precede inferential questions? Can this help readers with memory issues? Should questions be ordered according to their inferential load? These are all aspects that deserve further investigation and can make a difference in the design of truly inclusive teaching and testing materials (including international standardised proficiency assessment procedures) and ensure equal opportunities for all learners in the EFL classroom.

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DYSLEXIA AND VOCABULARY DEPTH IN EFL TEXT COMPREHENSION

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Abstract – The study offers a retrospective analysis of data collected from reading comprehension activities of two groups of English foreign language (EFL) learners, one with and one without dyslexia. The aim of the investigation was to verify whether vocabulary depth corresponds to greater accuracy in answering factual and inferential questions in the two groups. The hypothesis was that depth would be associated with better comprehension even in dyslexic readers' performance, which was generally poorer than that of the control group. In fact, this was only confirmed for high-range focus words, that is, words that were more deeply known to the participants according to an adapted Word Associates Test. Variable outcomes were observed for mid- and low-range words. A qualitative analysis of the unexpected results was carried out which led to the identification of several factors hindering text comprehension by dyslexic readers. These include a difficulty in selecting the relevant sense of focus words in contexts in which competing elements coexist and a negative interaction between lexical and pragmatic-inferential processing.

Keywords: dyslexia; English as a Foreign Language; inferential reading; reading comprehension; vocabulary depth.

1. Introduction

It is now widely recognized that dyslexia can be seen as a multidimensional and multifactorial disorder. Although primarily hindering the acquisition of efficient reading and writing skills even when appropriate learning opportunities are provided, it manifests with a variety of difficulties that go beyond inefficient word-level decoding and reduced graphemic competence (Ramus *et al.* 2003). Dyslexia has been linked to impairment of different severity in working memory functioning, verbal short-term memory, rapid automatized naming, and executive functions (Araújo, Faísca 2019; Araújo *et al.* 2020; Lonergan *et al.* 2019; Meisinger *et al.* 2021; Smith-Spark *et al.* 2003, 2016; Smith-Spark, Fisk 2007) and, although, its effects differ both in

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[1] The article is the result of joint research. Section 1, 5 and 6 were written jointly by the authors. Sections 2 and 3 were written by Gloria Cappelli. Section 4 was written by Sabrina Noccetti.

quality and severity, they can be variously reflected in the linguistic behaviour of people with the disorder (Cappelli, Noccetti 2022).

There is no universal agreement as to whether reading comprehension is impaired by dyslexia or whether the difficulties observed in some individuals are to be considered secondary consequences (cf. Cappelli this volume). However, since in our world, much information and knowledge are passed via written texts, exploring the way in which dyslexia is associated with difficulties in understanding such texts (both in L1 and foreign language contexts) seems to be of paramount importance.

This article discusses the qualitative investigation of opportunistic data collected from reading comprehension activities presented to a group of learners of English (EFL) with and without dyslexia. It is meant as a retrospective and preliminary follow up to the study on inferential reading in this population discussed in Cappelli (this volume) and aims to explore the role of vocabulary depth in such process. More specifically, it tries to verify whether vocabulary depth corresponds to greater accuracy in answering factual and inferential questions in the two groups, and it does so by comparing the effect of having to process words classified as "high-range", "mid-range" and "low-range" according to the depth of knowledge determined through an adapted Word Associates Test. Given the nature of the data, the results of the discussion cannot be generalised, but they can hopefully contribute to the debate on the role of lexical knowledge in reading comprehension and prompt further research on the matter.

2. Reading comprehension and dyslexia

Understanding the written text is more than an act of decoding: it involves the creation of a coherent mental model of the text that emerges from the creation of meaningful links between its individual components and the readers' knowledge of the language and of the world (Kendeou *et al*. 2014). Reading comprehension is a complex process to which both lower-level and higher-level operations equally contribute (Kendeou *et al.* 2014; Perfetti, Stafura 2014). Word decoding, vocabulary knowledge, semantic processing, and morphological and syntactic abilities are as essential to the successful construction of text meaning as inferential skills, good executive functions and attention-allocating abilities as well as efficient memory and comprehension monitoring skills (Cain, Oakhill 2012; Oakhill *et al.* 2015; Perfetti, Adolf 2012). Moreover, these "components" of the reading process interact in inextricable ways. Thus, good memory skills are necessary to develop vocabulary and background knowledge, and good vocabulary knowledge and efficient working memory support inferential processes (Barnes *et al.* 1996; Oakhill *et al.* 2015). At the same time, efficient

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inferential and attention-allocation abilities are important for lexical development (Oakhill, Cain 2012; Prior *et al.* 2014).

It is believed that there is no significant difference in the cognitive components and higher-level processes involved in L1 and L2 reading (Grabe 2014). Lower-level processes, however, may be significantly impacted by the language of the text. Relevant differences in orthographic transparency (e.g., Italian shallow orthography vs. English deep orthography) may impact on word decoding. Limited (and possibly poorer) vocabulary and general background knowledge in the L2 may pose an obstacle to successful word-to-text integration processes (Jeon, Yamashita 2014; Li, Clariana 2019; Perfetti, Stafura 2014; Raudszus *et al.* 2018). A low proficiency level in the L2 may lead to situations of language transfer, which are neither necessarily nor always helpful for the outcome of reading comprehension tasks (Grabe 2014). Moreover, poor control of the L2 is associated with a greater depletion of the cognitive resources necessary for such tasks (In'nami *et al.* 2021).

Given the complexity of the reading comprehension process and the cognitive and linguistic characteristics of readers with dyslexia, it is far from surprising that studies have found differences in text understanding accuracy in these individuals (Cappelli this volume; Georgiou *et al.* 2022; Reis *et al.* 2020; Simi, this volume). Moreover, since specific learning disorders are associated with difficulties in foreign language learning (Ganschow, Sparks 2001; Kormos 2020; Nijakowska 2010; Schneider, Crombie 2012), it is fair to assume that reading in a foreign language (FL) may pose additional challenges to dyslexic readers, in line with Sparks and Ganschow's (1993) Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis, which sees L2 development trajectory as dependent on the L1 linguistic and cognitive abilities.

Recent studies have found that, although increasing the exposure to the written text favours compensatory processes (Santulli, Scagnelli 2017, 2022), people with dyslexia remain less fluent than their neurotypical peers in L1 reading even into adulthood. They are also less accurate in comprehension tasks (Cappelli, this volume; Georgiou *et al.* 2022; Reis *et al.* 2020; Simi, this volume). This may be due to the deficits in lower-level processes (e.g., decoding) as well as in primary executive functions (e.g., working memory and inhibition), which deplete the limited available resources that support the higher-level processes involved in inference making and in comprehension monitoring. In other words, comprehension difficulties might not be a direct effect of dyslexia, but the result of the exhaustion of the cognitive resources necessary for creating the mental model of the text (Cain *et al.* 2004a, 2004b; Eason *et al.* 2012; Kendeou *et al.* 2014; Perfetti, Hart 2002). Deficits in oral language skills, including at the lexical level, have also been found to contribute (Georgiou *et al.* 2022). Georgiou *et al.*'s (2022) metanalysis found a significant effect of orthographic consistency and of vocabulary knowledge

and reinforced the conclusion of previous studies that "children with dyslexia may experience deficits in broader language skills" (p. 221; cf. Cappelli, Noccetti 2022).

Because very diverse patterns of deficits can be found in people with dyslexia, both in lower- and higher-processes, great variance is found in data on accuracy in comprehension (Cain, Oakhill 2006; Georgiou *et al.* 2022; Oakhill *et al.* 2015). Discrepancies in the literature may also be due to an insufficiently fine-grained selection of the participants enrolled in the studies. Snowling *et al.* (2020) have indeed found that reading comprehension difficulties are more common in the case of comorbidity with other developmental language disorders, and that children with "pure" dyslexia only have mild deficits in text understanding, whereas their global performance remains within the normal range if assessed orally. However, most studies (including the present one) do not distinguish between participants with dyslexia and participants with dyslexia and comorbidities. This might return a picture of reading comprehension skills as more severely impacted by dyslexia specifically than they really are if compared to the reading comprehension skills of typically developed individuals. However, Georgiou *et al.* (2022) found that "individuals with dyslexia experience large difficulties in reading comprehension" (p. 221) even when vocabulary knowledge and orthographic transparency are controlled, although matching participants in the experiments according to their reading level rather than their age seems to reduce the gap. The format of questions (e.g., written vs. oral) may also produce a larger gap between readers with and without dyslexia (cf. Georgiou *et al.*'s (2022) and Reis *et al.*'s (2020) metanalyses and Keenan *et al.* (2008) for a discussion).

From a behavioural and applied point of view, however, regardless of the underlying causes, identifying differences in learners with a diagnosis of dyslexia (whether with or without associated difficulties) is of interest to people working with them in education and rehabilitation settings. Further research is necessary to clarify whether, rather than being inherently poor comprehenders, the differences observed in reading comprehension accuracy with respect to normotypical learners could ultimately be the secondary result of decoding difficulties and poorer language skills. Nevertheless, we believe that understanding the elements of the linguistic cotext and context potentially capable of influencing the reading behaviour of learners with dyslexia can advance our knowledge of their communicative profile and provide some useful insights for inclusive education.

3. Inferential reading and vocabulary

Cappelli (this volume) investigated reading comprehension accuracy in

Italian L1 and English FL in two groups of 22 young adults with and without dyslexia. The author tested accuracy in understanding simple short narrative texts and compared the performance of the two groups in answering factual, local inference and global inference questions in the two languages. EFL proficiency and knowledge of relevant vocabulary items in the texts were controlled to make sure there were no great disparities in this regard among the participants. The test included open and multiple-choice questions which required them to identify factual information, or derive local coherence (e.g., lexical inferences) and global coherence inferences (e.g., inferences that relied on the integration between textual and extra-textual information). Data were analysed both between and within groups and languages. Typically developed participants systematically outperformed dyslexic peers, although both groups were comparably accurate in answering factual questions in both languages. There was no significant statistical difference in accuracy between types of questions in the control group data, whereas dyslexic readers were less accurate in global coherence questions than in local coherence questions, and in the latter compared to the factual questions. The language of the text had a significant effect on inferential questions in both groups, although this significance was much larger for dyslexic learners.

Overall, data seem to show that dyslexic readers are not impaired in understanding explicitly communicated information in texts once vocabulary knowledge is controlled, but they are not efficient when it comes to deriving the inferences necessary to build a coherent model of the text. This is in line with the pragmatic inefficiency observed in dyslexic children and young adults (Cappelli *et al.*, 2018, 2022; Cardillo *et al.* 2018; Griffiths 2007; Simi this volume), as well as with the hypothesis that inferential reading (both in L1 and L2) is particularly taxing on impaired cognitive resources such as working memory, executive functions and on attention.

Cappelli's (this volume) results contrast with Bonifacci *et al.*'s (2017), who found that typically developing children were better comprehenders than their dyslexic peers in EFL, but not in their first language. This discrepancy might indicate that, while dyslexic adult readers become more accurate in decoding (although remaining slower and less fluent than neurotypical adults), the gap in inferential comprehension might widen over time. A possible explanation is that the disparity in vocabulary and general background knowledge increases over the years as a consequence of the so-called "Matthew effect" (Stanovich 1986): the more one reads, the more one gains in terms of lexical and encyclopaedic knowledge. If exposure to the written page is reduced due to the issues caused by dyslexia, such gain is smaller, and this will favour a progressive decrease in the exposure to the written text, when the complexity of the materials in scholastic and extra-scholastic contexts increases and difficulties become harder to overcome.

This will cause dyslexic young readers to fail to keep pace with their neurotypical peers. Thus, although controlling vocabulary appears to moderate the effects of dyslexia in reading comprehension tasks (Georgiou *et al.* 2022), differences remain in experiments carried out with age-matched participants. In Cappelli's (this volume) study, issues with vocabulary knowledge may have stretched beyond the knowledge of the lexical items specifically tested, and poorer global lexical competence and general background knowledge may have contributed to limiting the generation of inferences, which in turn might have led to the construction of an "impoverished representation of the text" (Kendeou *et al.* 2014) and consequently to a failure to thoroughly understand the narrative texts presented.

Conflicting results such as those discussed above prompt reflection on the role of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension, including the type of knowledge that influences the outcome of any reading comprehension task. There is a strong correlation between vocabulary knowledge and good reading abilities in both the L1 and the L2 (Cain, Oakhill 2014; Daugaard *et al.* 2017; Droop, Verhoeven 2003; Grabe, Stroller 2011; Oslund *et al.* 2018; Perfetti, Stafura 2014; Prior *et al.* 2014; Quinn *et al.* 2015, 2019; Suggate *et al.* 2018). Indeed, Perfetti and Stafura's (2014) Reading System Framework claims that word-to-text integration is central in the whole process. In their model, the word identification system mediates the interaction between form and meaning, and if lexical meanings cannot be properly activated, comprehension fails (Oakhill *et al.* 2015). This is supported by the fact that a larger vocabulary database has been found to be a reliable predictor of reading comprehension success (Cain, Oakhill 2014; Carroll 1993; Li, Clariana 2019). This view is compatible with the hypothesis that reduced lexical skills in readers with dyslexia is one of the causes of comprehension difficulties that become more evident over time, since failing to being extensively exposed to texts hampers vocabulary development and growth (Stanovich 2000). Of course, knowing all the words in a text is not necessary since context contributes to deriving the meaning of a few unfamiliar items. Morphological competence and syntactic awareness also support word recognition and meaning retrieval in the L1 (Perfetti, Adlof 2012; Wagner *et al.* 2007) and in the L2 (Grabe 2009).

Perfetti and Stafura (2014) also stress the role of the quality of lexical representations: better quality representations result in faster word retrieval and integrative processes. Thus, both vocabulary breadth (i.e., the number of words in the lexical database) and vocabulary depth (i.e., how much one knows about each word in the lexical database) contribute to understanding a text successfully (Cain, Oakhill 2014; Ouellette, 2006; Tannenbaum *et al.* 2006). However, Cain and Oakhill (2014) found that their impact is not the

same on all aspects of reading. Vocabulary knowledge is more important for inferential processes than for the recall of factual details in the text and, more specifically, it influences global coherence inference derivation more than local cohesion inferences (Cain, Oakhill 2014). The authors also found that vocabulary depth is responsible for greater variance in readers' performance than vocabulary breadth. Indeed, vocabulary depth allows readers to create meaningful associations in the text and to construe a good mental model, since different facets of word meaning become more or less significant when words are combined into phrases and sentences (Oakhill *et al.* 2015). Moreover, "having rich, detailed and precise semantic representations of words makes it more likely that thematically-related inferences will be made to establish coherence" (Cain, Oakhill 2014, p. 651). Vocabulary breadth, on the other hand, has been found to correlate significantly with decoding abilities (Ouellette 2006), but not with inference derivation. In line with this observation, Quinn *et al.*'s (2019) longitudinal study on children with and without learning disabilities reports that vocabulary development was a significant indicator of change in reading comprehension, and that the latter was a leading indicator of change in vocabulary size for neurotypical children. However, the same was not true for children with a learning disorder: for them "there were no significant cross-lagged pathways, indicating that although these constructs have correlated growth, there are no direct, instrumental relations between vocabulary and reading comprehension" (p. 626). The authors explain these observations with the possibility that readers with learning disabilities such as dyslexia rely less on vocabulary knowledge for text comprehension tasks. This view of the role of measures of vocabulary size is compatible with the hypothesis that dyslexic readers might indeed have a smaller vocabulary due to decoding issues (Cappelli 2022; Swanborn, Glopper 2002), and that it is the latter, rather than vocabulary size per se, that contributes to depleting the resources required for other (higher-level) reading-related processes. This complex interaction of factors (i.e., smaller vocabulary and poorer lexical representations, poor memory and executive functions, impaired attention, and monitoring skills) would ultimately emerge as reading comprehension difficulties in dyslexic individuals.

Most of the studies mentioned above have focused on the L1. Contrary to Quinn *et al.* (2019), Li and Kirby (2014) found that both vocabulary breadth and depth correlate significantly with L2 reading comprehension accuracy and Li *et al.* (2021) stressed the role of receptive vocabulary size. A possible explanation might be that, when reading in a foreign language (and of a foreign culture), readers will have to rely on their knowledge of the individual lexical items in the text more than native speakers, who can find support for text interpretation in other levels of the linguistic system as well

(e.g., syntactic and morphological awareness). Word frequency is another factor that appears to influence reading comprehension in a foreign language (Nation 2006; Schmitt *et al.* 2011). Masrai (2019) has found that high-frequency and mid-frequency word ranges have the most significant impact, whereas low-frequency vocabulary does not have a significant effect on reading comprehension. The author also observed that, for low-proficiency learners, only high-frequency words explain variance in L2 reading comprehension. Mid-frequency words, on the other hand, make a difference for high-proficiency L2 readers. The important role of vocabulary depth is confirmed in L2 reading comprehension too. Prior *et al.* (2014) point out that even readers with a beginner proficiency level are better at lexical inferencing if they have more precise and efficient lexical representations, because vocabulary depth is associated with "increased automatization of word reading, which frees up resources for higher level processing" (p. 1467).

4. The study

4.1. Research question

Cappelli (this volume) found that readers with dyslexia struggle to comprehend texts, especially when inferences and integrations of literal meaning with prior knowledge (both lexical and encyclopaedic) are required. Building on these observations, we carried out an explorative qualitative analysis of the results of a reading comprehension task given to two groups of English foreign language learners, one with and one without dyslexia (henceforth referred to as focus group or DYS and control group or CG). We hypothesised that, in the case of L2 reading, poor lexical knowledge and the presence of ambiguous, vague or polysemic vocabulary may result in difficulties for the comprehension process. The question we intended to explore was, therefore, whether the differences observed in dyslexic and non-dyslexic readers' accuracy in answering factual, local inference and global inference questions may be traced back to differences in lexical competence or rather to a pre-existing deficit in the processing and integration of textual and extra-textual information. Our hypothesis was that learners who had a deeper knowledge of certain words would answer questions more accurately.

4.2. Participants

The data for this study were obtained from 36 students of the University of Pisa: 18 young adults (Nmale=9; Nfemale=9) with a diagnosis of developmental dyslexia and 18 controls (Nmale=9; Nfemale=9). The mean age of the focus group (DYS) was 21;7 and that of the control group (CG)

was 20;5. The students (from different degree programmes) were Italian native speakers, and all had attained the CEFR B1 level (intermediate) in English, which was one of the requirements of their undergraduate programmes when the experiment took place.

The cognitive profile of the DYS group was not homogeneous. Indeed, the level of severity of their condition ranged from severe to moderate and almost all the members of the DYS group had been diagnosed with a co-occurring deficit, mostly dyscalculia and/or dysgraphia. Despite the differences, the DYS participants were not divided into subgroups in consideration of the fact that their diagnoses of dyslexia were issued by different health services and reported different tests that would not allow for an equal comparison between the participants. Moreover, although the correlation of the DYS group's cognitive profiles to the test results would better account for the differences in their answers and possibly explain the causes of the difficulties they had in understanding the texts, the relatively small number of the participants would not allow for statistically significant interpretations. Furthermore, despite research having posited a correlation between dyscalculia and grammatical processing (cf. Carreiras *et al.* 2010), attention, cognitive flexibility and processing speed (Agostini *et al.* 2022), the way the comorbidities interfere with text comprehension and inference making is not clear and their correlation to the data of this study would be mere speculation. Therefore, this study should be understood as a behavioural investigation that aims to compare text comprehension skills between a group of subjects with developmental dyslexia (with or without comorbidity) and a group of typically developed individuals of the same age, educational level, and EFL proficiency level (CEFR B1).

4.3. Materials and methodology

The data discussed in the following sections come from the retrospective investigation of the accuracy in answering questions relative to four very short texts in English. The questions analysed relied on the knowledge of seven target lexical items: *bank*, *beautiful*, *curious*, *date*, *drink*, *flat*, and *write*. The criteria for this choice are discussed in sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2. The texts were part of a reading comprehension task which had been used in class at the end of a course designed for dyslexic EFL learners at the Language Centre of the University of Pisa. The task was not experimental: it was part of a progress assessment test, which aimed at verifying whether, after dedicated instruction, the participants in the course could successfully read short narrative passages, as is expected of learners who have reached an intermediate proficiency level (CEFR B1) in the foreign language.

The texts were created by the authors in collaboration with native English-speaking teachers to include a range of syntactic structures and

lexical items that, by the end of the course, should have been familiar to the students and varied in length, ranging between 65 and 108 words. We used *Text Inspector*,[2] an online tool developed by the Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment (CRELLA) at the University of Bedfordshire, to control readability level, lexical CEFR level and diversity and the use of metadiscursive elements (e.g., attitude markers and logical connectives). The same texts were subsequently presented to a control group of learners without specific learning disorders[3].

Since one of the known weaknesses of FL learners with dyslexia lies in the acquisition of vocabulary (Cappelli 2022), the course was designed to include multimodal vocabulary instruction (Cappelli, Noccetti 2016), and the texts were prepared to assess whether the knowledge of specific B1 level vocabulary items would result in successful reading comprehension. To this aim, different types of questions were proposed which required the learners to recall factual information or to derive local and global inferences. We assumed that this would only be possible if they knew the specific focus words in the text.

Before the reading comprehension task, participants with and without dyslexia were tested for vocabulary knowledge with an adapted version of Nation and Beglar's *Vocabulary Size Test* (VST; Nation, Beglar 2007) and with an adapted version of Read's *Word Associates Test* (WAT; Read 1993). The 18 participants without dyslexia which formed the control group were selected from a larger group of learners (N= 64) to specifically match the results of the members of the DYS group in the two vocabulary tests. The data obtained from these tests were first used for didactic purposes: the VST data were used to select lexical items to include in the test and the WAT data were used to verify the depth of knowledge of a selection of lexical items which learners had encountered in the lessons. Later, the data obtained from the WAT were compared to the results of the reading task, in the attempt to identify possible correlations between the participants' vocabulary depth and the accuracy in answering different types of questions in the two groups. A detailed description of the tests used to collect data is presented in sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 below.

4.3.1. The Adapted Vocabulary Size Test

In order to select words for the test, the DYS group and the CG took a vocabulary test adapted from Nation and Beglar's vocabulary size test.

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[2] https://textinspector.com/ (25.8.2022).

[3] Due to the limits imposed by the nature of the present publication, only the passages and the questions that are relevant for the illustration of the results are presented in the sections dedicated to their discussion.

Nation and Beglar's test, in its online format[4], requires the participant to recognize the meaning of 140 words. The words are presented one at the time, on successive slides, without the possibility of going back. For each word, an example sentence and five options to choose from are given: four definitions or synonyms of the test word and a 'I do not know' option.

The adaptation of Nation and Beglar's test consisted of the translation into Italian of the five multiple-choice options to avoid errors due to poor understanding of the latter rather than of the test words. The results were meant to show the vocabulary breadth of the participants in terms of the number of word families they knew. However, the results of the test were only used for didactic purposes, and more specifically, to create a list of words known to all learners which we could include in the reading comprehension texts. After a careful comparison of the dyslexic learners' test results, 21 polysemous words known to all of them and appropriate for the CEFR B1 proficiency level were selected: *ball*, *bank*, *beautiful*, *case*, *complex*, *curious*, *date*, *drink*, *fast*, *flat*, *fresh*, *game*, *general*, *jam*, *mind*, *press*, *rock*, *run*, *season*, *trip*, and *write*. These words were used to create an adapted version of Read's (1993, 1998) *Word Associates Test* to determine how deep the learners' knowledge of these items actually was.

4.3.2. The Adapted Word Associates Test

The *Word Associates Test* (Read 1993, 1998) attempts to assess the quality of the participants' lexical knowledge. Understanding vocabulary depth is useful because it gives information on how efficiently and appropriately a speaker can use a lexical item both receptively and productively. Measuring this dimension of vocabulary knowledge, though, is not easy and there is no universal agreement on the reliability of the available tests (cf. Schmitt *et al.* 2011). For the purpose of this study, we chose to adapt Read's (1993,1998) WAT, since its format easily allows the tester to assess the participants' familiarity with the meaning of specific focus words. The test presents the focus word followed by eight other lexical items, four of which are associated with the target word in terms of either synonymy or collocations. From this list, participants must select the four words which they believe are associated with the focus words. In order to do this, however, they must be able to imagine a context of use for the latter, and the more precise they can be, the better they are said to know the word. For example, in the original test the word *sudden* comes with the options *beautiful*, *quick*, *surprising*, *thirsty* and *change*, *doctor*, *noise*, and *school* (Read 1993). The associated words are *quick*, *surprising* as synonyms and *change* and *noise* as collocates. Although

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[4] https://my.vocabularysize.com/session/evstxx (25.8.2022).

the test has some limitations, such as being susceptible to guessing, lacking rigorous validation and being less reliable for scores in the middle of the scoring scale than for the values at the extremes (Schmitt *et al.* 2011), it has been extremely popular and widely used both for research and didactic purposes for over two decades (Qian, Schedl 2004).

We created questions for the lexical items not included in the original test following the model. This revealed that not all the 21 words were known equally well. We selected two words from the top (i.e., *drink* and *write*), two from the middle (i.e., *beautiful* and *curious*) and three from the bottom of the scoring scale (i.e., *bank*, *date* and *flat*) and we analysed qualitatively the accuracy in answering questions that required knowledge of these lexical items.

5. Results and discussion

Two different analyses were carried out on the data collected from the reading comprehension task. Firstly, we analysed the answers of DYS and CG to questions demanding different degrees of both inferential processing and memory engagement to verify whether the trend was the same observed by Cappelli (this volume). Secondly, in order to observe the impact of lexical knowledge on text comprehension accuracy, we carried out a qualitative investigation of the answer given to questions which involved knowledge of the focus words selected through the WAT. Sections 5.1 and 5.2 discuss the results of the two analyses.

5.1. Accuracy in answering the different types of questions

Figure 1 and figure 2 show the percentages of correct answers per question category (i.e., recall, factual, local inference and global inference questions) in DYS and CG respectively.
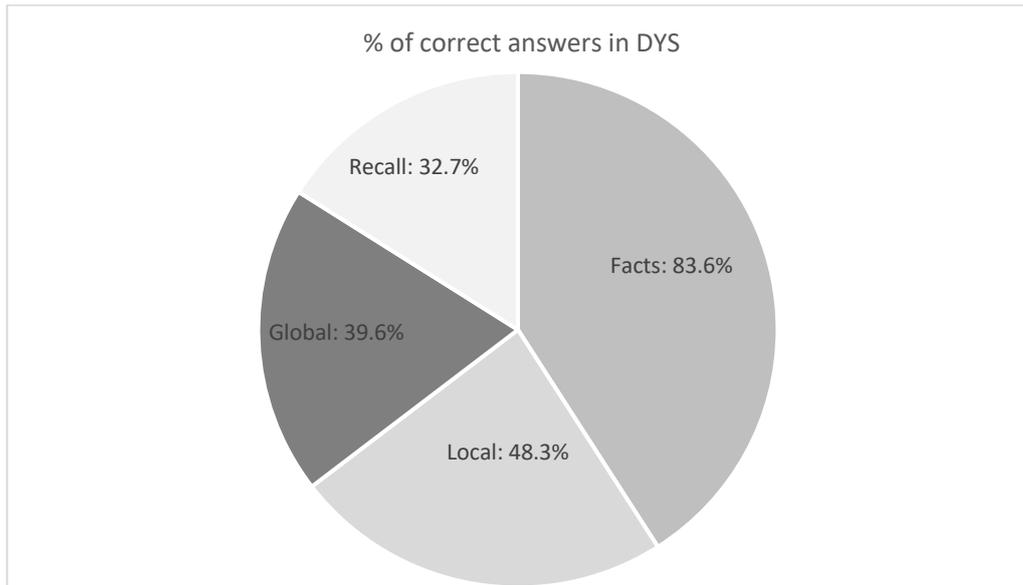
Figure 1
Percentage of correct answers for each type of questions for the DYS group.
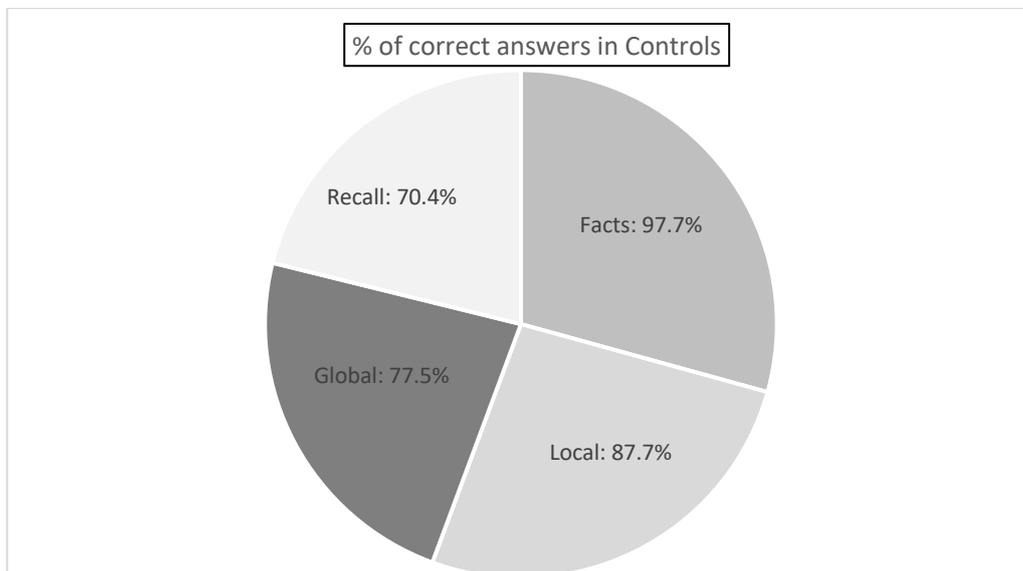

Figure 2
Percentage of correct answers for each type of questions for the CG.

In terms of accuracy, the CG outperformed the DYS group in every category of questions, in line with the results described in Cappelli (this volume). Factual questions returned more correct answers in both groups, namely 83.6% for the DYS group and 97.7% for the CG. This is not surprising given that this type of question does not depend on short-term nor working memory but relies on facts stated in the text explicitly and always available for reference.

Interestingly, data show a larger intra-group difference between accuracy in answering factual questions compared to other types of questions. For instance, whereas in the CG's data the difference in the percentage of correct answers given to factual questions (97.7%) and to questions involving local inferences (87.7%) is only 10%, the same values in DYS's results show a 35.3% gap (i.e., 83.6% accuracy vs. 48.3% accuracy). The same disparity is observed when comparing accuracy in answering factual questions and recall questions in the two groups, with a 50.9% difference in DYS's accuracy (i.e., 83.6% vs. 32.7%) and a 17.3% difference in CG's accuracy (i.e., 97.7% vs. 27.3%).

We interpret these data as a confirmation of Cappelli's (this volume) conclusions that people with dyslexia struggle more than controls when they need to process information that is not directly available in texts. Their difficulty is also shown by the scores obtained in the other types of questions, with a similar trend to that described in Cappelli's (this volume) study. More specifically, readers with dyslexia seem to answer factual questions better than local inference questions, which in turn are answered more accurately than global inference questions. This is compatible with the hypothesis that questions involving local inferential processes are also characterised by a relatively low engagement of memory systems, given that the necessary information can still be found in the text (Cain, Oakhill 2014). Nevertheless, if we observe inter-group values, the difference in inferential question accuracy is much greater than in factual question accuracy. Whereas the CG answered local inference questions correctly 87.7% of the time, the DYS group only gave 48.3% correct answers. Such a difference indicates that making inferences is somewhat costly for the DYS group, even when the necessary information is at their disposal in the text. Therefore, inferential questions require a greater processing effort than factual questions. Inefficiency in the integration of different types of information necessary to recover the intended meaning is very likely the main source of such difficulty. Indeed, combining several, diverse facts implies committing them to memory for the time necessary for their processing and for finding a logical pattern that is compatible with what one knows about the world so as to create a coherent mental model of the text (Kendeou *et al.* 2014). Although the short-term memory system is probably less engaged in these than in other types of inferences (e.g., global inferences, see below), due to the recoverability of the information from the cotext, the processing of local inferences still requires considering several possible interpretations and the ability to inhibit the data that are not pertinent to the expected scenario. This overload of plausible competing data and scenarios is likely to cause slow processing and errors (Cain *et al.* 2004a, 2004b; Kendeou *et al.* 2014; Perfetti, Hart 2002).

A similar demand of cognitive resources is involved in processing global inference questions (Cain, Oakhill 2014), which ranked third in accuracy percentages, with 39.6% correct answers in the DYS group's tests and 77.5% correct answers tests by the CG. In these types of questions, text comprehension is mostly based on extra-textual (world) knowledge that is crucial for integrating what is stated and what is not explicitly said in the text. This process requires the support of an efficient working memory system and, of course, a vast range of background knowledge. In addition, all data need to be processed synthetically, in order to create a reliable mental model of the text. Notoriously, people with dyslexia are poor readers lacking metacognitive skills (Santulli, Scagnelli 2022) and visual selective attention due to a deficit in orienting and focusing (Facoetti *et al.* 2000). The inefficiency of these abilities leads to difficulties in taking on a more general and global perspective of the written text. As a consequence, this might hinder the selection of all the information needed to interpret the text and correctly build a coherent model of the text itself.

Finally, participants with dyslexia were most inaccurate when answering questions based on fact recalling. They gave 32.7% correct answers vs. 70.4% correct answers by the controls. The DYS group's answers, more than those of the CG, reveal a generalised difficulty in focussing and isolating the facts in the texts. Although answering recall questions needs to be sustained by memory systems, it is likely that the poor results obtained by the DYS group also depend on their analytical way of processing data and, therefore, on missing (or underestimating) the information that is most relevant in the texts in order to answer the questions. A paired *t*-test was carried out on the means of the correct answers for each group of questions of DYS (M=51, SD=22.6) and CG (M=83.3, SD=11.9). Results indicate a large difference between the groups, *t*(3)=5.3, *p*<.05. The analysis confirms previous studies (Cain, Oakhill 2014; Oakhill, Cain 2012; Perfetti, Adolf 2012) on DYS people that highlight difficulties in making inferences when they are necessary for understanding text.

5.2. Accuracy and vocabulary depth

Even if the ability to draw inferences mostly depends on cognitive efficiency, such as working memory and attentional skills, some linguistic features of the text and the readers' vocabulary knowledge contribute to increasing the difficulty of the task (Cain, Oakhill 2014; Oakhill *et al.* 2015). For this reason, we carried out a qualitative analysis of the answers in which the participants obtained the worst results to verify whether vocabulary knowledge played a role in such outcomes or whether other factors may explain them. In particular, we tried to verify whether the WAT data were linked to greater accuracy in answering inferential comprehension questions.

We did not include recall answers in our analysis. The trend in accuracy apparently matched what was observed in factual and inferential questions, but there was no reliable way to verify whether the target lexical items (i.e., *write*, *drink*, *beautiful*, *curious*, *bank*, *flat* and *date*) contributed to remembering textual information. The participants could, in fact, choose to relate the content of the text both in English and Italian as well as the words to express it. Although it is reasonable to think that readers tend to remember what they understand best (and indeed high-range focus words were associated with better recall), many factors contribute to making information memorable, and, as the test was not planned as an experiment in advance, it seemed that no sound conclusions could be drawn by any such analysis. On the contrary, the factual and inferential questions were designed with target lexical items in mind, so the impact of those selected for the retrospective analysis was more easily explored.

First, we tried to verify whether the percentages of correct answers to questions which required understanding of the selected target words matched differences in vocabulary depth. In other words, we expected that the participants would be more accurate in answering questions relying on the knowledge of *write* and *drink*, than in those relying on the understanding of *beautiful* and *curious*, and that they would be even less accurate in answering questions relying on their knowledge of the meaning of *bank*, *date* and *flat*. This turned out not to be the case, for either group. More specifically, although both the DYS group (87.65%) and the CG (98.61%) were better at answering factual questions involving high-range words than lower-range words, they gave more correct answers in questions involving low-range words (79.61% and 97.45%) than mid-range ones (61.08% and 90.02%). The same trend was observed for both groups in local inference questions and in the DYS group in global inference questions too. For the CG, our initial hypothesis was confirmed in global inference questions, since the accuracy percentage was 68.26% for the high-range words, 56.86% for the mid-range words and 36.11% for the low-range words. Interestingly, the percentage of correct answers relying on the knowledge of high-range words was above average for both groups in all three types of questions (i.e., factual, local inference and global inference; cf. values above and fig. 1 and fig. 2). The accuracy scores of answers relying on the knowledge of mid- and low-range words, on the other hand, were generally lower than the average scores for all types of questions in both groups, with the sole exception of low-range words in the CG's answers to local inference questions (96.87% vs. 87.7%).

Since the data did not confirm our initial hypothesis, we carried out an analytical qualitative investigation of the individual answers to the three types of questions. Sections 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 discuss some unexpected results in factual, local inference and global inference questions and propose

possible explanations.

5.2.1. Factual questions

Figure 3 shows the performance of the two groups in the individual factual questions with percentages of accuracy.
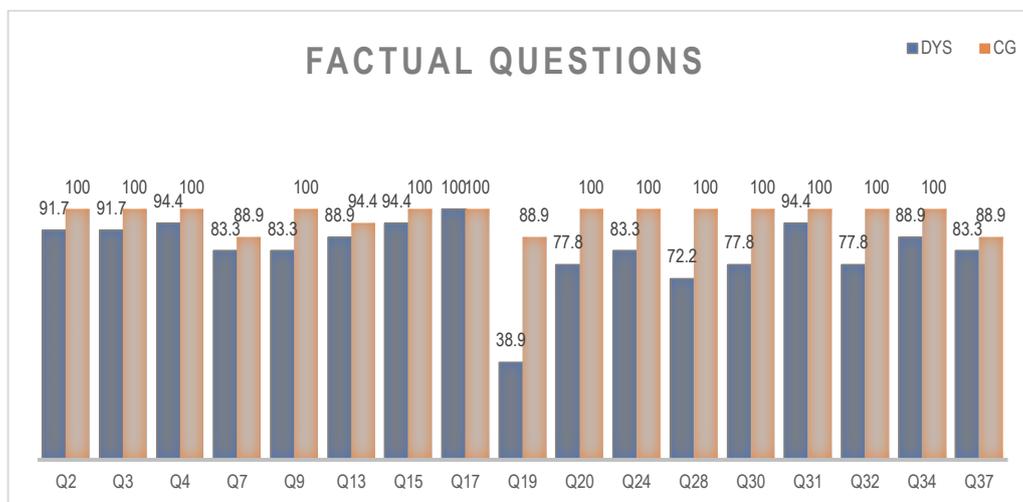

Figure 3
Percentages of correct answers to factual questions in the two groups.

As already mentioned, DYS obtained good scores when answering factual questions and their results did not deviate much from those of the CG. However, when assessed individually, fig. 3 shows that some questions were answered less accurately than others.

One such question was Q19, which received 38.9% correct answers from the DYS group, whereas 88.9% of the CG answered it correctly: a value which, although not a ceiling performance, remains in line with the scores obtained in other factual questions. The question relies on the interpretation of the adjective *beautiful*, that is, a mid-scale item according to the WAT's results. It follows a text about a person who "is a beautiful woman but only wears ugly man's clothes, smokes a cigar and she never combs her hair". The question asked whether the woman is good-looking ("Marta is a good-looking woman, true or false?"). The correct answer was of course 'yes', but the fact that the woman is also described with features that can take on negative connotations (e.g., cigar smoker, wearing masculine clothes and not taking good care of one's hair), together with the co-occuring word *ugly*, might have induced the participants to choose the wrong option. This might in fact be the result of the inferential processing of this information which led readers to give a subjective and evaluative reading of the passage. Participants were also asked to motivate their answers. Interestingly, the dyslexic participants reported some of these features as the reason for their

answer, thus showing a strong effect of contextual elements in their interpretation. This hypothesis seems to be supported by the percentages of correct answers (72%) given when the adjective *beautiful* is used with the meaning of "nice/generous" (e.g., in Q28, fig. 3) in contexts that are more consistent with this sense, that is, when text interpretation does not require the inhibition of features that contrast with the sense in which the adjective is used.

> […] He was very uncomfortable. There was a vending machine in the corridor, but he had forgotten his wallet in the hotel. The teacher offered him some coins. That was so nice of her! She was such a *beautiful* person. [our emphasis]
>
> What does it mean that the teacher was a beautiful person? Select one:
> a. she was nice [correct answer]
> b. she was elegant
> c. she was good-looking

Although some of the participants in the CG group were also influenced by their subjective reading of the passage, overall, most of them answered strategically according to what was actually stated in the description. This result is in line with other studies that show that people with dyslexia tend to rely on their personal experience when interpreting written texts, as they lack more effective reading strategies (Cappelli 2019; Santulli, Scagnelli 2022).

5.2.2. Local inference questions

The participants in the DYS group were generally less accurate than the CG in answering questions involving local inferences (see fig. 4).
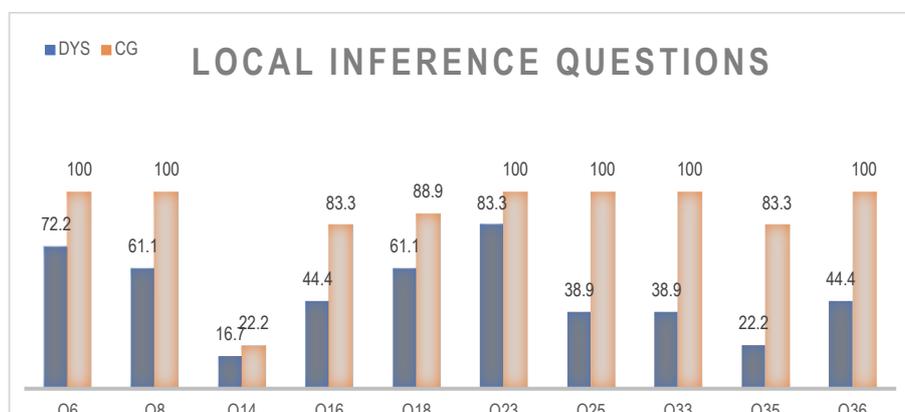

Figure 4
Percentages of correct answers to local inferential questions in DYS and CG.

Our retrospective analysis of the participants' answers showed that readers

with dyslexia were most accurate in answering Q6 and Q23, both of which relied on the comprehension of two focus words (i.e., *flat* and *drink* respectively). The accuracy in answering Q23 matched our initial hypothesis, since *drink* was one of the two high-range words selected. However, the percentage of correct answers to Q6 with respect to those obtained in other questions (e.g., Q35 and Q36, relying on knowledge of *beautiful*, a mid-range word) was unexpected, because *flat* was one of the low-range words selected.

A thorough qualitative exploration of the performance of the DYS group showed that participants with dyslexia gave more correct answers to questions in which all the words were used in their denotative most common senses. In addition, we noticed that in these, as well as in other questions which were answered accurately (e.g., Q8 and Q18), the portion of the text to which the questions referred contained all the information required to make the inference and did not include descriptions that might confuse the reader, as in the case of Q19 discussed in section 5.2.1. By way of example, Q23 (fig. 4) refers to a passage that describes a man, Luke, who went running and drank from his bottle because he was thirsty. The question asked whether Luke had too much alcohol and got drunk, thus requiring the reader to disambiguate the sense of *drink* in the context.

> Luke had a very busy morning. He had some tea, wrote some postcards to friends back home and then went to run in the park. It was very hot, and he *drank* [our emphasis] a lot from his bottle. […]
>
> Luke drank too much alcohol and went to class drunk.
> - True
> - False [correct answer]

The situation described is familiar and the inference can be easily drawn by integrating the linguistic information found in the cotext and the reader's general knowledge, which favours the construal of a coherent model of the text. The same seems to be the case for all the other questions that obtained over 60% correct answers in the tests by the DYS group.

In contrast, both the DYS and CG participants were the least accurate in questions which could not be answered by referring to one's experiential background, but required linguistic analysis, careful reading, as well as logical thinking in order to draw the local inference. An example is provided by Q14 and Q16, which elicited many wrong answers from both groups (i.e., DYS 16.7% vs. CG 22.2% and DYS 44.4% vs. CG 83.3% correct answers respectively). They referred to the same text about a woman, Martha, who is defined as "a very *curious* person" because of the way in which she dresses and behaves. One of her peculiarities is that her apartment "is full of books, but they all have pink covers and green covers". Q14 asked whether the woman "likes discovering and learning new things". This question proved to

be tricky for both groups, probably because they were misled by the reference to the "many books" in the following sentence, which prompted them to interpret *curious* (a mid-range word) as 'eager to learn' rather than 'bizarre'. Q16 asked whether Martha read "all sorts of books". In this case, the question did not rely on any focus word *per se*, but on the statement that she owns only books with pink and green covers. The question cannot be answered by resorting to one's own life experience or subjective judgment but requires a linguistic analysis of the text. A possible explanation is that the participants were influenced by the answer given to Q14, and hence by the misinterpretation of *curious* as 'eager to learn' rather than as the less frequent sense in which it was used in the text of 'not ordinary/uncommon'. Interference with the Italian *curioso* might also have played a role in the outcome of the test. C*urious* has two possible translations into Italian: *curioso*, 'eager to know', and *strano*, 'uncommon/bizarre' (although *curioso* can also be used in this sense, as in English, but it is not as common). Negative semantic transfer might be partially responsible for the high percentages of wrong answers by all participants in Q14, and a 'cascading effect' might have resulted in poorer accuracy in both groups in Q16 too, although the CG was remarkably more accurate than the DYS group in answering the latter question.

Dyslexic readers might have struggled more with Q16 because of their reduced cognitive flexibility, which makes comprehension monitoring and reanalysis more difficult than for typically-developing peers (Raudzus *et al.* 2017). Moreover, the adjective is used in a paragraph which is distant from the part of the text that is the focus of the question, hindering information retrieval.

Overall, it appears that processing local inferences is simpler if the information is easily retrievable, if the meaning of focus words is not ambiguous, and if their interpretation can rely also on scenarios compatible with familiar situations. If these conditions are not met, the chance of comprehension difficulties is greater. By way of example, we can consider the accuracy in answering Q35 and Q36, both focusing on the mid-range focus word *beautiful*. The text spoke of a singer who "sings beautifully" and who is going to sing at her banker's wedding if things go well with the business that she helped her establish. Q35 asked whether the singer is beautiful when she sings and Q36 asked whether she is good at what she does. Both groups were less accurate in interpreting *beautifully* in its sense of 'well', although this proved especially challenging for the DYS participants. All the readers in the CG answered Q36 correctly, whereas the DYS group's answers were only correct 44.4% of the time. A possible explanation is that both groups answered the question by drawing a global inference rather than a local lexical one, basing their conclusion on the experience that if

somebody sings professionally and is hired to sing at a wedding, they must be good at what they do. The participants with dyslexia might have been less accurate than the participants in the control group because they are generally less efficient in drawing global inferences or because they had more difficulties in inhibiting the 'good-looking' reading of *beautiful* and were influenced by the faulty interpretation of the word *beautifully* that had been compelled by the previous question. Although the data do not allow one to draw any certain conclusion, they point towards the fact that vocabulary knowledge can either facilitate or hinder inferential processing.

5.2.3. Global inference questions

The combined effect of lexical and inferential skills might also explain participants with dyslexia's above average accuracy in answering the global inference question Q26. As discussed in section 5.1, the DYS group was not very accurate in answers to global inference questions (fig. 5).
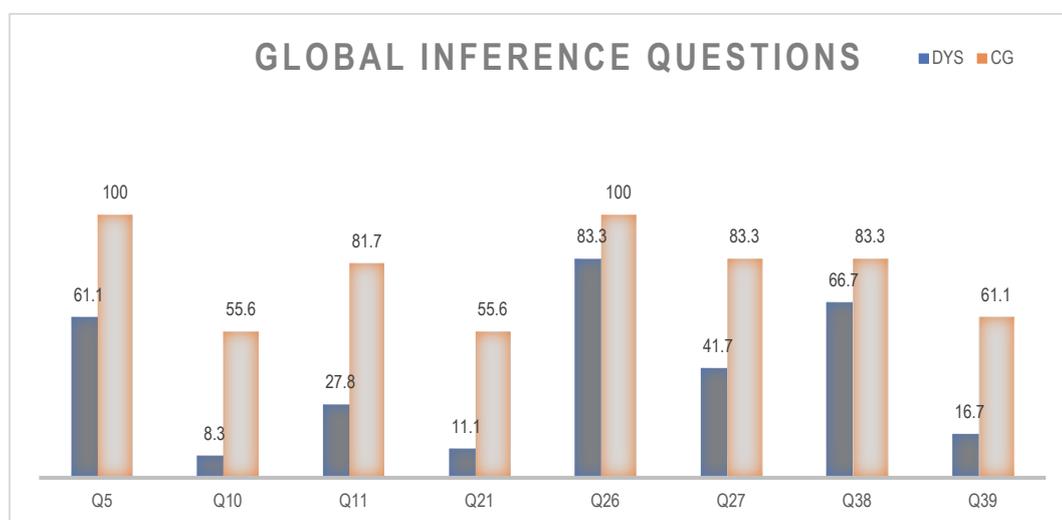

Figure 5
Percentages of correct answers to global inferential questions in DYS and CG.

However, Q26 obtained 83.3% correct answers. The question relied on the interpretation of *drink* (i.e., a high-range focus word) in its most basic sense of 'consuming a liquid substance', and no participant had much trouble answering the question correctly, similarly to Q23 discussed in section 5.2.2. Nevertheless, both Q10 and Q11, which also relied on the correct understanding of the word *drink*, were answered incorrectly by the vast majority of the participants with dyslexia (91.7% and 72.2%) and by many participants in the CG (44.4% and 18.3%). *Drink* was here used in its narrower sense of 'having alcoholic beverages'. These differences seem to indicate that when *drink* is used in its primary and more generic meaning

(e.g., Q23 in fig. 4 and Q26 in fig. 5), both local and global inferences are made easily by most readers with and without dyslexia. In contrast, when the word is used in its narrower sense (e.g., in Q10 and Q11 in fig. 5), the efficiency in drawing global inferences appears to decrease, with a dramatic drop in accuracy. Interestingly, the same effect can be observed in Q21, which relies on the understanding of the adjective *curious* in its secondary sense of 'unusual/uncommon' like in Q14 (cf. 5.2.2). In this case, the DYS group answered correctly only 11.1% of the time and the CG gave 55.6% correct answers.

In addition to lexical disambiguation, answering global inference questions requires great pragmatic effort. To answer Q10 and Q11, besides selecting the correct sense of *drink*, readers must gather information which is scattered throughout the text and integrate it with extra-textual knowledge (e.g., numerous bottles on the floor can be a sign of excessive drinking, drunkenness may cause embarrassment) so as to build a coherent model of the test. The answers to Q10 and Q11, thus, depend on the ability to focus on the relevant aspects of the text, which is generally a strategy acquired by the skilled reader, on deep knowledge of the meaning of *drink*, and on the ability to imagine a scenario that is compatible with the information gathered and the knowledge acquired, which is a function of the working memory. It seems reasonable to conclude that the processing demands of lexical and inferential operations combine and, in so doing, contribute to depleting the limited resources available for text comprehension, thus resulting in less efficient reading.

6. Concluding remarks

The study aimed to explore whether the difficulties observed in the reading comprehension accuracy of most readers with dyslexia when answering inferential questions (cf. Cappelli this volume; Simi this volume) could be traced back to vocabulary depth or if they were rather ascribable to pragmatic processing deficits. Our hypothesis was that vocabulary depth would be associated with greater accuracy in all types of questions. This turned out not to be the case, with the sole exception of the answers given to global inference questions by the CG.

The unexpected results for each question relying on high-, mid- and low-range focus words (in terms of vocabulary depth knowledge) were qualitatively analysed. Overall, we observed that, although high-range words seem to correspond to greater accuracy, low-range words led often to more correct interpretations than mid-range words. Even high-range words, however, did not always correspond to correct answers. In some cases, more basic (and likely more frequently encountered) senses of the focus words

(e.g., *drink* as 'drinking liquids') seemed to compete with and prevail over their narrower or less common senses (e.g., *drink* as 'drinking alcoholic beverages'), thus leading to wrong interpretations. In such contexts, readers with dyslexia appear to resort to subjective evaluation or personal experience to answer questions, which may result in misinterpretations of the text. Indeed, they succeed better in interpreting the text when the sense of the words fit nicely in the context, without the need for reanalysis, when finding information in the text was quite simple and when the situation described could be interpreted using one's own experience and beliefs. This strategy can be rather unsuccessful, because text interpretation does not rely on shared general background knowledge but on individual experience, which may or may not match the writer's intentions. The control group differed in this respect. Participants without dyslexia were more strategic readers and managed to self-correct better than their dyslexic peers.

Difficulty in selecting the correct sense of relevant words, especially if it is a secondary or less common one, and if the context includes competing elements, seems to correspond to reduced efficiency in drawing global inferences. Indeed, inferences place a heavy burden on memory systems and especially on working memory, which must be efficient to allow for the integration of textual and extra-textual information. This is a well-known problem for individuals with dyslexia (cf., Männel *et al.* 2015; Menghini *et al.* 2011), who are notoriously unsupported by an effective mnestic system (cf., Gupta 2015; Hatcher, Snowling 2002; Kormos, Smith 2012; Speciale *et al.* 2004). Further investigation should be carried out to cast more light on the relation of vocabulary breadth and depth and pragmatic-inferential skills and the effect of their interaction in foreign language reading comprehension tasks.

The limitation of this investigation is that the data discussed were not collected following a rigorous experimental design. Although comparable data were gathered from a control group in order to control the specific learning disorder variable, the original ones were opportunistically retrieved retrospectively from materials originally designed for foreign language learning testing and used as part of a final assessment protocol within an English course for learners with dyslexia. Therefore, the observations made in Section 5 cannot be considered conclusive and have no pretence of generalizability.

Nonetheless, the behavioural patterns emerging from the investigation of different types of questions and the obvious differences with the CG's performance offer a starting point for a more controlled experimental design and provide suggestions for language teachers. These preliminary observations are in line with Perfetti and Stafura's Lexical Quality Hypothesis, and should they be confirmed in foreign language learning too,

the depth of vocabulary knowledge (i.e., the quality of the lexical representation), as well as text structure should be considered as two fundamental and interdependent variables impacting the ability of making successful inferences, both local and global. This has as a logical consequence that, despite their cognitive characteristics, readers with dyslexia should succeed in drawing the inferences required to correctly interpret textual information, if supported in the acquisition of the necessary lexical knowledge and if properly trained to find relevant information in the text and to inhibit the unnecessary one.

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Abstract – English newspaper headlines use non-standard morpho-syntactical and lexical features rendering meaning opaque or ambiguous, even for native speakers (Montcomble 2018). Steeped in culturemes and ideological stances, news discourse is constructed in specific socio-cultural contexts and therefore needs considerable cognitive effort and lingua-cultural competence for the non-native speaker to fully understand. Using online newspapers in the L2 classroom is thus a double-edged sword: on the one hand, students are exposed to authentic, situated language that reports on current affairs and socio-cultural issues, thus enriching their learning experience; on the other, the teacher has the onerous task of unravelling the obscurities intrinsic to the language of newspapers. This contribution reports on action research carried out in an L2 classroom of a post-graduate International Studies programme at the University of Pisa. The classroom practice aimed to encourage students to critically engage with news texts, focusing on three learning objectives: 1. to unpack and infer meanings from news headlines; 2. to apply a critical discourse analysis tool kit (Machin and Mayr 2012) to the construal of news discourse; 3. to reflect critically on and discuss the content of selected news articles presented in class. The dataset includes transcriptions of extracts from the classes streamed and recorded on Microsoft TEAMS, and survey feedback from the students who participated on the successes and failures of the classroom practice.

Keywords: critical literacy; critical discourse analysis; EFL teaching; cross-cultural pragmatics; news discourse.

1. Introduction

The defining feature of the Information Age (Castells 1996/2010) is the nexus between power and access to information. English is the major linguistic hegemonic force through which knowledge and information is disseminated across the globe. Considering these two unassailable facts, it is hardly surprising that the international labour market seeks graduates who are proficient in English, especially those possessing "a *higher reading faculty*" (my emphasis) (Park 2011, p. 25). Yet, notions of what "a higher reading faculty" might entail have radically changed since the dawning of the internet. Reading and understanding a digital text requires skills that go beyond mere word recognition and linguistic decoding. The combined effects of globalisation and digitalisation bring non-native speakers into daily contact

with online resources such as news websites, streaming platforms and social media whose comprehension entails not only second language (L2) semantic competence but also multimodal literacy, L2 pragmatic proficiency, and crucially, *critical* reading skills. Park (2011) has argued that critical reading should be an essential part of teaching English as a second language. In her view, L2 critical literacy "should involve meaningful practice that shifts the goal from rote learning to the development of individuals who are able to use cultural as well as text-based linguistic resources to personally generate a number of possible meanings" (p. 24). L2 teaching practice needs to facilitate students' comprehension of underlying suppositions, ideological slanting, and cultural references that can be hidden from a non-native speaker and impede holistic understanding. This article argues that these tenets are particularly relevant in the circulation of international news. Furthermore, developing critical reading skills promotes student engagement with intercultural and socio-cultural issues while encouraging a critical reflection on the themes ensuing from the news text.

Building on Park's (2011) empirical account of teaching critical literacy skills in the EFL classroom at a South Korean university, this contribution reports on a small-scale project of action research carried out on a class of mainly Italian postgraduates completing an International Studies programme at the University of Pisa. The main objectives of the module were to cultivate the students' critical reading of online news discourse and raise their awareness to the ideologically loaded language of the various online anglophone news brands.[1] The data was gathered during a 42-hour (6 ECT credits) module in "English Language" held during the second semester of the academic year 2020-21. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the lessons were streamed on the Microsoft TEAMS platform, and recorded. The entire corpus consists of 42 hours of teaching time.

The first half of the teaching module was specifically designed as a critical literacy course that focused on news discourse. Bearing in mind that the students were not specialists in foreign languages or linguistics as such, a broad-brush introduction to tenets from multimodal critical discourse studies, media and journalism studies and cross-cultural pragmatics formed the basis for the opening lectures. A simplified CDA tool kit adapted from Machin and Mayr's (2012) *How to do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction* was also illustrated. These theoretical and methodological approaches were then applied to the analysis of a series of online news texts carried out during task-based open discussion lessons. For their final evaluation, students were asked to deliver a short presentation on their analysis

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[1] The term "news brands" has to a large extent supplanted the word "newspaper" since it incorporates both online and traditional newspaper formats. The term "brand" also lends weight to Fowler's (1991, see Section 3) posit that a news text is a cultural product.

of a news text or texts of their choice and write a short essay on one of the social issues discussed in class. The module therefore attempted a more sophisticated and "critical" version of the presentation, practice, production (PPP) approach to instructional design.

Outcomes indicate that, when guided towards a critical reading of a text, these EFL students were able to apply the analytical tools that CDA affords in order to reveal implicit meanings in news discourse. Furthermore, they were able to recycle lexical resources from the texts discussed and draw on their own cultural and personal experience to support their ideas and raise questions in both written and oral production. In accordance with Park's (2011) findings and in contrast with the view that language learners tend to be passive readers of information, the students in the current study actively voiced their opinions through discussion and response papers. The results from the study indicate that online news articles provide a valuable springboard from which critical thinking in the EFL reading classroom can be stimulated.

The article is divided into five sections. The following section (2) outlines the theoretical approaches underpinning the action research described. Section three provides details of the methods adopted, while Section four discusses a sample of the data and reflects on the outcomes. For the purposes of this contribution, selected excerpts from the lessons are presented in the form of transcribed video recordings of classroom interaction. Other forms of data include the results of a sample survey on student evaluation of the course. The article concludes (Section five) with a reflection on the pros and limitations of the study and directions for future research.

2. Critical points

The term "critical thinking" has many delineations but here it is used with the acceptation of a "reflective social practice" that questions or even challenges conventional attitudes and norms instead of "unwittingly accepting the status quo" (Gieve 1998, p. 124). From this overarching concept, a more refined definition of critical literacy can be carved out as "the ability to engage critically and analytically with ways in which knowledge, and ways of thinking about and valuing this knowledge, are constructed in and through written texts" (Hammond, Macken-Horarik 1999, p. 529). In educational settings, the revised descriptors for the "Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area" (2018)[2] clearly indicate that critical thinking is a fundamental skill required in every academic field at postgraduate level. According to the framework, by the end of this second cycle of higher education, students should

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[2] http://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/EHEAParis2018_Communique
   _AppendixIII_952778.pdf.

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be able to "integrate knowledge, handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information that requires *analysis and interpretation*" while "*reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements*" (my emphasis). This becomes a highly complex issue in the context of EFL. As Park (2011, p. 24) points out, "English has become one of the most important tools for global communication" via texts of various types, and English as foreign language (EFL) students "now encounter information in English through the traditional media, websites, e-journals, and advertisements". From a multimodal perspective, these digital formats also require a broader definition of the term "literacy" to include other semiotic modes that need unravelling beyond the strictly linguistic in order to grasp the full meaning-making potential of a text. *The Common Framework of Reference for Intercultural Digital Literacies* (CFRIDiL) (Sindoni *et al.* 2019) aims to promote the development of multimodal literacy skills in students precisely because:

> everyday communication and interaction in online and digital environments involves a complex and intertwined set of abilities, given that artefacts, texts and interactions (1) involve more than language, as they always combine a wide range of auditory and visual meaningmaking resources (such as still and moving images, music and sounds, fonts, layout and colour, gesture etc.), and (2) take place in multiple interconnected spaces and platforms with potential for transnational circulation and reach, thus requiring intercultural sensitivity and awareness in shaping one's own communications and in making meaning out of those produced by others intended to integrate digital literacies and proficiency in English for international communication that are essential requirements for graduates' access to today's European job market

While the project does not explicitly refer to critical literacy, from the above description of the "complex and intertwined abilities" necessary today for effective communication it is nevertheless clear that discernment, awareness, and critical thinking play a fundamental role.

Yet, with regards to developing criticality, Gómez Jiménez and Gutiérrez (2019, p. 92) observe that in ESL contexts "learners are just taught to communicate in the target language (L2) without questioning the underlying messages and power ideologies conveyed through the L2". Engaging with the critical analysis of texts to grasp their explicit and implicit meanings entails great commitment on the part of both instructor and students. Particularly if, as in the action research discussed here, students are presented with a set of analytical tools with which to enhance their understanding of the online texts under examination and exercise their social agency using the target language. Before explaining a little more in detail the approach to this question, first a few words on the role of cross-cultural pragmatics in the negotiation of meaning in L2 contexts.

2.1. Intercultural pragmatics in L2 reading skills: understanding the news

The focus of this contribution is the development of L2 learner's critical reading skills with specific regard to the newspaper genre. The rationale for the study was related to the curriculum of the students who were postgraduates in the department of political science following an international studies programme. It therefore seemed imperative to me that they were guided in how to critically read anglophone news discourse because as mentioned in the introduction, English is the predominant language in global communication. However, journalistic texts are steeped in cultural references and ideological positionings that are largely aimed at a specific news brand's domestic audience. On a pragmatic level, the implicit meanings and presuppositions are interwoven and construed within a specific socio-cultural context. In the case of intracultural communication these assumptions "are typically taken for granted" (Culpeper, Haugh 2014, p. 55) and can be deciphered by an L1 speaker but for L2 students they often impede understanding. As Kecskés (2014, p. 2) points out, "What standard pragmatics assumes about how things work in communication depends on there being commonalities and conventions between speakers and hearers that can hardly be counted on cross-culturally". In other words, news texts containing culturally or ideologically specific information whose presuppositional triggers are easily interpreted by the native speaker will often elude the foreign language student. Grundy's (2007) study on the evolution of pragmatic inference in intercultural communication reflects on the extent to which the focus in second language teaching, particularly at the more advanced levels, should "be so strongly on language and semantic meaning rather than on context and pragmatic meaning" (2007, p. 234). He argues that teaching pragmatic inference should be an integral part of the L2 curricula introduced in four stages that are based on the students' level of L2 competency. Stage 3 corresponds to an intermediate level (CEFLC B2), the same level as the English module that is object of this study. At B2 level, Grundy proposes a methodology of second language instruction whereby

> learners are encouraged to recognize that form, meaning and context are not necessarily in an invariant relationship, that particular contexts license different interpretations of the same form and that different forms may have the same communicative value

In order to unpack the implicit meanings embedded in news texts, alongside the hermeneutical tenets of intercultural pragmatics, I adopted the tools of critical discourse analysis as proposed in Machin and Mayr (2012). Although their simplified approach to CDA is tacitly aimed at an L1 audience, I adapted

their frameworks, streamlining them further for L2 learners of English who are not language students. What follows is a brief outline of the general aims and scope of what is now broadly defined as critical discourse studies.

2.2. Critical Discourse Analysis in the L2 classroom

In his seminal work, Fowler (1991) argued that news is not immutable fact but rather it is socially constructed. The selection of events that are reported in newspapers is not a reflection of their intrinsic importance: the filtering processes adopted are in fact a "complex and artificial set of criteria for selection" (1991, p. 2) in which linguistic choice plays a crucial role. According to Fowler (1991, p 1), news producers manipulate language in order to form ideas and beliefs, affirming that, "Language is not neutral but a highly constructive mediator". In other words, ideological perspectives influence the (de)selection of information and choice of words that represent reality in a certain way to a given audience. Written over thirty years ago, Fowler's posits remain the cornerstones of critical discourse studies, alongside Fairclough (1995), van Dijk (2007), and Wodak (1989). Since then, news production has undergone radical changes due to digitalisation and globalisation, nevertheless the issues surrounding the instrumental (multimodal) representation of events in the news media is just as, if not more, relevant today (cf. Filmer 2021).

Van Dijk (2007) has also described critical discourse studies as the study of implicit or indirect meanings alluded to without being explicitly expressed. Providing a wide spectrum of methodologies and theoretical perspectives,[3] CDS offer a series of viewpoints from which to analyse the way discourse is presented, consciously or unconsciously, through linguistic choices. What is common to all critical discourse theory is the aim of revealing ideological manipulation and the power dynamics involved in the propagation of knowledge. While such aims may seem beyond the scope of an L2 language class, on a very practical level, CDA can simply be conceived as a 'set of tools' with which to carry out an analysis of language (Fairclough 1995; Kress 1986; Machin, Mayr 2012; Van Dijk 1991; Van Leeuwen, 1996; Wodak 1989). As Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 2) explain, "CDA helps to understand how speakers and authors use language and grammatical features to create meaning, to persuade people to think about events in a particular way, sometimes even seek to manipulate them while at the same time concealing their communicative intentions". In L1 educational settings, Hammond and Macken-Horarik (1999) point out that the discussion of linguistic choices on text construction and the development of students' metalanguage creates awareness of the ways in which text can be analysed, deconstructed, compared,

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[3] https://www.edisoportal.org/debate/115-cda-not-method-critical-discourse-analysis.

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critiqued and ultimately reconstructed. They go on to state that "Awareness of what writers have chosen to include, as well as what they have chosen to exclude, assists students in focusing on the kinds of assumptions that writers make and how, as readers, they are positioned by these assumptions" (p. 531). Despite its relevance in contemporary societies, critical literacy is rarely taught across lingua-cultures and research into the possible outcomes of its adoption in the L2 classroom is very much lacking. Predictably, none of the students involved in this study had previously experienced reading English through a critical discourse analysis perspective. Their past encounters with reading in L2 learning environments had focused on comprehension, translation of words and sentences, and the memorization of vocabulary. By encouraging L2 students to examine some of the linguistic features of newspaper articles, they begin to appreciate that language contributes to the ways in which meaning is constructed and to discern between fact and opinion, the boundaries of which are extremely blurred in news discourse.

2.3. Why newspapers?

Fostering an interest in current affairs, developing a critical reading of media discourse, and promoting awareness to the power of language are crucially important aspects to formation of the next generation (Alvermann, Phelps 2005; Park 2011). From a pedagogic perspective, it has long been recognised in the EFL classroom that (digital) newspapers represent an invaluable source of cultural information as they "reflect the culture through language they contain" (Sanderson 1999, p.2-3). Apart from providing original raw material for creating grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension practice (Elmadwi 2014) they also provide a useful way to initiate and develop critical conversations because they offer authentic, meaningful texts through which to explore different cultural and personal interpretations. The advantages of using online newsbrands for instructional purposes can be summed up into two main points. First, they are easily available online, they are multimodal often containing video clips that can be exploited as listening practice. Secondly, they stimulate class debate if chosen strategically to arouse the students' interest.

From an intercultural perspective, as Park (2011, p. 27) points out, "Students bring their own cultural assumptions and experiences to interpreting the L2 text, news articles can enable students to build on and question their own cultural meanings and uses of literacy". Sanderson (1999, p. 2-3) highlights the rich source of cultural meanings embedded in newspaper articles, stating,

> They provide cultural information at a much deeper level. This is achieved through the cultural associations of words, and the shared experiences,

knowledge, values, beliefs, emotions and attitudes that a writer assumes. Newspapers are an invaluable source of such information, and the more widely students read, the greater understanding of this socio-cultural meaning this would be.

What Sanderson (1999) does not mention is the tribalisation (Orengo 2005) process that news undergoes when it is produced for different news brands "whose readership is positioned in relation to their political orientation" (Orengo 2005, p. 176). In other words, the "framing of international news and events is tailored to different newspaper audiences within a language community, thus addressing different social groups and different ideological slants" (Filmer 2021, p. 18-19). This requires, then, a double level of effort on the part of the student, firstly to grasp the English and the overall meaning of the text and then decipher the ideological and political imprinting of the news bias. This is where a critical reading approach comes to the fore. Having awareness of why and what the writer is presenting is the foundation to understanding. Before attempting a reading of the body of the news article, however, the first hurdle is to grasp the meaning of the headline.

2.4. Making sense of headlines

Headlines play a central role in the comprehension of news texts (van Dijk 1988). According to Molek-Kozakowska (2013, p. 185), "headlines are primary semantic framing devices. This means that their lexical choices and syntactic patterning are instrumental to how [the] subsequent text is to be comprehended and evaluated". Considered one of the most creative areas of journalistic writing (Crystal 1987, p. 388), and a form of text macrostructure (van Dijk 1988, p. 77), headlines aim to orient reader's attention and guide perception during the reading process. They are, however, notoriously cryptic. Linguistically, "headlinese" employs non-standard morpho-syntax and lexical choice in such a way as to create ambiguity and render meaning opaque, even for an anglophone audience (Montcomble 2018). The obscure cultural references, puns, and the "distinctive telegraphic syntax" (Bell 1989, p.185) render their understanding particularly challenging for foreign students. However, their persuasive function is paramount, and consequently from a linguistic point of view are valuable resources in the classroom. For this reason, considerable time was devoted to decoding the meanings interwoven in the headlines of the texts analysed in class so as to reap the full meaning making affordances. Students were first introduced to the posits of critical discourse analysis, and then guided in the comprehension of headlines through examining the strategies adopted by news producers; noun strings, deviant syntax, ellipsis, nominalisation, alliteration, metaphor, verb forms used in headlines, etc.

3. Research methodology – data and setting

The main aims of the module were for the students to gain ownership of what they read and to develop a critical approach to reading news texts written in English. The course was designed as an ESP module for a postgraduate programme in International Studies. Lectures were not obligatory as is the norm in Italian Universities but a consolidated group of approximately twenty-five students regularly attended lessons. The course was held remotely in accordance with the emergency measures in place at the time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The lectures were streamed on the Microsoft Platform, TEAMS and recorded. The corpus of classroom interaction consists in 21 lectures for a total of 42 hours. For space constraints and for the ends of this qualitative study, examples of exchanges have been extracted from particularly productive lessons focusing on the students' participation and comments. Alongside the video recordings, an online survey of students' feedback, plus their written essays allow for a triangulation data sources. As explained in Section 1, the course began with a series of framing theoretical lectures to situate the analyses that were to follow.

The following critical discourse analysis tools (Machin, Mayr 2012) were explained and illustrated with authentic examples drawn from recent newspaper articles:

1. How lexical choice influences meaning-making;

2. Language and identity: representational strategies such as the classification of social actors; nomination versus functionalisation (van Leeuwen 1996); suppression; "us" versus "them" divisions;

3. The art of persuasion: metaphor and rhetoric;

4. Committing and evading: truth, modality and hedging in news reporting;

5. Representing what people say, quoting verbs, reported speech, and translated quotes of foreign elites in news discourse;

6. Nominalisation and presupposition

Subsequently, an overview was provided of the different genres and ideological stances of the most important British and American news brands. Having established the foundations and aims of the course, the second part of the module was devoted to open class discussions in which students were guided in the application of the critical discourse frameworks they had studied to an ad hoc selection of news texts on social issues and themes that were represented from different ideological perspectives. During the discussions, I performed two functions: conversation facilitator and intervener. As conversation facilitator, I listened, took notes, and asked questions to prompt students to elaborate their ideas. As intervener, I asked the students to examine certain assumptions they had made further. I also openly shared my own cultural assumptions to make them aware of the fact that we are all susceptible

to cultural filters. In this way, teaching critical thinking is "neither an unguided free-for-all nor a didactic lecture but a balance between extended student contributions and gentle challenges by the teacher" (Benesch 1999, p. 578).

Finally, the evaluation of learning outcomes was based on three aspects: the students' participation in class debates; a PowerPoint presentation prepared and delivered on the critical analysis of a news text (or texts) of the student's choice applying the CDA tools that had been discussed and illustrated during the lectures; a short discursive essay (approx 500 words). As a pre-oral exam filter (those not reaching the pass mark on the essay could not accede to the final oral exam), four essay titles were given on themes that reflected the module contents:

1. The human right to live…and to die? Discuss with reference to abortion, euthanasia, culture and religion.

2. Globalisation: what are the positive and negative aspects of this socio-cultural, political, and economic phenomenon?

3. Defamation and the freedom of speech: how far can we go? Discuss with examples and reference to new media, social media and the traditional press.

4. Crime and Punishment: is there ever any justification for the death penalty?

The four topics were amply debated during the classes through a carefully selected range of online news texts from different sources that dealt with the chosen themes from different ideological and newspaper genre perspectives. The texts were first skimmed in order to get the gist of the contents and overall meaning and then examined using CDA tools, focussing on headlines, choice of language, and representational strategies. Students were encouraged to voice their opinions and discuss not only the language but also the ideological implications of the way news is presented.

In accordance with Benesch (1999), the present study affirms that ESL instruction in higher educational settings can be enhanced through a dialogical approach to critical thinking. English language needs and the development of social and political awareness can and should be approached simultaneously, especially in the educational context in which this study was carried out, the Department of Political Science. As Benesch (1999, p. 576) explains, "Teaching critical thinking dialogically allows students to articulate their unstated assumptions and consider a variety of views. The goal is not just to exchange ideas but also to promote social justice". Soliciting non-native speakers to articulate sometimes complex ideological positions in halting, less than fluent English may be viewed as counterproductive in the foreign language classroom. It is argued here, however, that students often make a special effort to communicate their ideas and beliefs, despite linguistic limitations, precisely when they hold views on potentially controversial and

sensitive issues. This study falls within the domain of action research, which is teacher-initiated and entails a reflexive approach towards classroom practice with the aim of improving teaching methods and enhancing the quality of student learning (Edge 2001). As Clark et al. (2020, p.7) affirm, action research offers a path to more "deliberate, substantial and critical reflection that can be documented". What follows are some qualitative samples and analytical comments that exemplify classroom interaction and provide cues for further investigation.

4. Findings and discussion: the data

This section presents some examples of responses and reactions to the news texts discussed with the students during lessons, highlighting their critical engagement with textual and cultural practices portrayed in the articles. Discussion questions helped students compare and contrast opinions. The guided analyses were designed to prime the students for the presentations they were expected to prepare as part of their final evaluation.

The articles to be discussed in class were uploaded on the course webpage before each lesson so that the students could read them beforehand. They were asked to focus on the linguistic choices and make notes in order to exchange ideas in class. For space constraints, I have sampled and commented on one class debate and analysis to illustrate the approaches adopted in the classroom. The news texts selected demonstrate the socio-cultural stereotyping embedded in anglophone news discourse (Conboy 2006), and the very different ways that the same news is represented in two ideologically opposed news brands.

4.1. Discussion and recycling of lexicon from the texts

Two articles on domestic news dealing with related discursive events were compared and analysed from a CDA perspective in the classroom. The first digital news text entitled "Pharmacist refused to give morning after pill on a Sunday 'for personal reasons'" was taken from *Metro* (Olsen 2019),[4] a free tabloid distributed in most urban centres across the UK. The second dealt with a very similar incident that took place a year later and was reported in the left-wing quality news brand, the *Guardian* (Blackall 2020),[5] under the headline "Lloyds Pharmacy apologises again for emergency contraception refusal". This type of exercise aimed to highlight the ways in which language can be

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[4] 18 June 2019, *Metro*. https://metro.co.uk/2019/06/18/pharmacist-refused-give-morning-pill-sunday-personal-reasons-9972138/.

[5] 7 October 2020, the *Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/oct/07/lloyds-pharmacy-apologises-again-for-emergency-contraception-refusal.

manipulated in news reporting to construct reality according to different ideological perspectives. I selected these texts as material for analysis and class debate because the themes dovetailed with essay title number one on the ethical issues surrounding women's right to choose regarding their bodies. The articles bring into sharp relief issues of interculturality, ethics, and the right to access emergency contraception, or so-called 'morning after pill'.[6]

For EFL students, dealing with such culturally embedded discourse presents enormous challenges. The difficulty does not lie in the "translation" of individual lexemes, but in the cognitive effort required to "fill in the cultural gaps", and at the same time decode the implicit message transmitted via journalistic discourse.

Focusing on critical discourse analytical tools such as nomination, nominalization, representational strategies and presupposition, we began by unpacking the explicit linguistic coding and the implicit meanings contained in *Metro*'s headline and lead, below. The italics are mine and indicate where the students demonstrate the ability to use analytical terminology and recycle vocabulary acquired during the course.

> **Pharmacist refused to give morning after pill on a Sunday 'for personal reasons'**
> A mum was told she couldn't have emergency contraception because it went against the beliefs of the only pharmacist working that Sunday. Siani, 41, visited her local Lloyds Pharmacy at Sainsbury's on Lewes Road, Brighton, when a female member of staff refused to give her the morning after pill for 'personal reasons'.
>
> Instructor: What do you notice from the headline regarding these themes: nomination, nominalization, representational strategies and presupposition?
>
> S1: "Well, the agent is clear, the pharmacist, so there is no *nominalization* and the verb is a very *strong reporting verb*."
>
> I: "why do you think the newspaper has chosen to focus on this particular agent?
>
> S1: "The newspaper is trying to *spark outrage* because we have one person, that is the pharmacist, a figure that everyone relates to, and when we read "pharmacist refuses" something the first instinct is to be angry about it. Why would a pharmacist refuse anything? Then, we see what it is he refused and everything gets worse, basically.

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[6] A cultural note: in the UK, emergency contraception is available over the counter in any chemist's without a prescription. At the time of the event, Lloyd's Pharmacy apologised for the 'distress and frustration caused by the experience', to the customer in question but said they adhere General Pharmaceutical Council guidelines which 'allow pharmacists to refuse to dispense medication that goes against their personal beliefs *if there is adequate alternative care available for the patient*' [my emphasis].

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A couple of points here are worth noting. Firstly, the student recycles the expression "spark outrage" found in an article we had previously analysed and appropriates it for their own discourse. Secondly, on a gender issue, the student makes the lingua-cultural assumption that the pharmacist is a "he". It was in fact a woman. On the question of cultural assumptions, I then tried to elicit why "On a Sunday" was an important piece of information.

> I: So here we have quite a lot of information in the headline. "On a Sunday" why is this relevant do you think? Why is it in the headline?
>
> S2: Well I don't know if this fits, but Sunday is after "Saturday night", so maybe it's a kind of judgement on the woman's behaviour"…?
>
> S3: I think it's because on Sunday many pharmacists' are closed

Student 2 makes a very interesting observation regarding the possibly evaluative condemnation of women's sexual activity on a Saturday night. My interpretation was more related to access to medical treatment. Student 3 had understood this inference. I explained that the information "on a Sunday" could be an attempt to arouse indignation in the reader and legitimize the newspaper's negative stance towards the pharmacist's behaviour, given that most pharmacies in the UK are closed on a Sunday. Moving on to the final phrase on the headline, S1 contrasts the way information is interpreted differently in the *Guardian* and *Metro*:

> S1: Then here in *Metro* we have 'for personal reasons', comparing with the other article [the *Guardian*], which specifies 'for religious reasons', we might think that it was just for the Pharmacists volition, without real motivation
>
> S1: …and I have a last observation: the use of morning after pill in the headline instead of emergency contraceptive…and it is to make the article more relatable to people and more easy [sic.] to understand
>
> I: Moving on to the first paragraph, S2, what struck you?
>
> S2: At first glance there is the agent, the mum, so someone who is respectable.
>
> I: In CDA what are we looking at here?
>
> S2: *Anonymization*? No, *functionalization*, representing people, the impact of a mum…because mums are generally considered to be respectable, it is generally accepted that a mum is a figure of respect. We use "mum" in this context because it's informal and the paper is a tabloid.
>
> I: How does this information affect the information in the text?

S3: When we call this person a mum, we, we *create tension* when we see a mum asking for emergency contraception. Of course, a mum can ask for emergency reception but I think it's a weird *lexical choice*. I would like to specify that it was about the lexical choice. She is a woman, not just a mum.
I think it was written in that way to create empathy it wasn't a man who refused but a female, a woman, who should show more sympathy – this is the message".

We went on to discuss the question of empathy, sympathy, apathy.

S4: She is called mum to gain the sympathy of the reader, maybe she's a mum who already has many children and is poor

S5: I agree with you [S3] that [being] a mum doesn't mean that she can't have emergency contraception. I think that of course the term is *filtered by the culture* but not because the mum cannot have a morning after pill but because I cannot understand why they need to say she is a mum. It's a use of lexis to create these two poles, these two positions, the poor mum against the cruel pharmacist.

We then compared the above with the *Guardian* headline. First, I elicited a linguistic unraveling of the telescopic adjectival phrase, "emergency contraception refusal" – a refusal to provide emergency contraception – before moving on to the pragmatic and CD analyses.

Lloyds Pharmacy apologises *again* for emergency contraception refusal
Firm says sorry after pharmacist would not dispense product 'for religious reasons'

S3: So, first we have the personalisation of Lloyds pharmacy. A pharmacy cannot apologise. This may be because we don't know exactly who apologised. Then we have "again", because this is something that happened after so there is an element of *presupposition*, that we know about the previous episode…

S2: ...when we read "emergency contraception refusal" we tend to think of a more generic thing, not a specific event, maybe a fact that repeats over and over again

I: Exactly, so you are explaining to me the effect that the linguistic choices have, which is good, but I'd like you to explain to me how they are achieved linguistically and why.

The students discussed this point but were not quite able to explain the "why". I offered my interpretation: as a left-wing news brand, the *Guardian* was less likely to point an accusing finger at the woman pharmacist, who was probably Muslim. By using the noun "refusal" instead of the verb "refuse", the news producer adopts a strategy of nominalization, which avoids agency, shifting emphasis away from individual responsibility of the pharmacist towards accountability on the part of the company.

S2: so if we compare 'for personal reasons' with 'for religious reasons', I think it's different. Religious reasons sounds more reliable...erm not reliable...er like more justifiable?

I: so we could say legitimization?

S2: Yes, because religion is like an institution, not for personal reasons which could be I hate you, I don't like the colour of your hair, or something stupid like that.

S2: Then, in the Guardian we have the subject of the story which is just 'a woman' [as opposed to a mum], and I found it interesting, quite a vague way to introduces an agent.

S6: then 'a woman was refused', this indicate[s] passivity, concealing the agent.

S2: They could have used refused, but they used would not dispense, perhaps because they want to be more formal? It sounds more objective rather than refuse

S4: *Metro* is saying mum and emergency contraception while in the *Guardian*, the similar story has 'a woman' aged 41 but no mention of children.

Moving on to the contents of the text, I asked the students to make a supposition and suggest what religion the pharmacist might be, that would have caused her to refuse emergency contraception over the counter. I asked this based on my own culturally informed suppositions and was curious to compare. The first response was "Catholic", and three other students agreed with this. One student replied, "we simply don't know, it could be any religion". I confessed to the students that I had made the huge supposition that the pharmacist was a Muslim, mainly based on my own cultural knowledge and background, i.e., that a large number of pharmacists in the UK are of Pakistani origin and therefore Muslim. I used this personal example in order to explain how supposition works on a subliminal level triggering feelings and attitudes in and towards news texts. Furthermore, the lexical choices in the *Metro* article worked to support the "mum" Siana against the "offending" pharmacist. In contrast, the *Guardian*'s representation of reality used linguistic strategies to cloak the agency and identity of the pharmacist, thus shielding her. From this premise, I asked the students about their perception of bias in the two news stories:

I: I have a question for you. If we were trying to give an unbiased account of reality around this event, what is missing from both news stories?

S5: I think the opinion of the pharmacist

That succinct response was in fact the point. This shows the student's heightened awareness to what an unbiased account would look like and where information is suppressed. While this example was a small and perhaps oversimplified one, if applied to larger, broader international news, what is important is the ability to discern when there is one-sidedness in a debate.

Following the analysis of the texts, the class then discussed the broader social issues brought to the fore: the right to access emergency contraception over the counter; the ethical, cultural, and religious conflicts implicit in questions of sexual and reproductive healthcare in a multicultural context; and media bias in representing such dilemmas. From this dual perspective, the articles acted as linguistic resources as well as facilitators for debate. Personal and cultural experiences could be compared with those of the social actors represented in the news texts.

4.2. The survey

The survey was devised so as not to be too complex or time consuming. It comprised only eight questions in total, three of which were open-ended and five on a Likert scale from 1-5. The questionnaire aimed to elicit students' attitudes to the course content, structure, and methods and attempted to ascertain how useful they felt the course was to them as English language learners. From a critical studies perspective, the survey sought to determine whether the students thought the course had contributed to developing critical awareness of the language and its role in the construction of reality. Of the 25 students who regularly attended the classes, 10 completed the survey.

Students were asked to help with this research by taking part in the survey once they had completed their final exam. I stipulated this time restriction because even though the survey was anonymous, they might be tempted to give positive responses if they answered the questions before sitting the final exam. By contrast, it could equally be reasoned that students who had obtained good marks at the end of the course might be more inclined to respond positively to the questions. The latter hypothesis appears to be the case in point. Of the ten respondents, only one gave unfavourable evaluations, which appeared on Google Form immediately after I had awarded a student a low mark at the exam. Unfortunately, methodological considerations such as these might appear to invalidate the data to some extent but there is no fool proof way of obtaining unbiased opinions from participants in this kind of survey. With such a small sample, it is difficult to draw any concrete conclusions, nevertheless the data discussed below provides a starting point for more in-depth studies in future research projects on this theme.

4.3. Survey results – open ended questions

A sample of the responses to the open-ended questions and a summary of three of the Likert scale questions are reported here. Overall, the survey revealed a very high level of student satisfaction. The vast majority found the contents of English module extremely or very relevant to their degree programme, scoring 4 or 5 on the Likert scale. The question "do you think the course has helped you improve your reading skills in English?" encouragingly also elicited scores of 4 or 5, with only one student answering with a 1. The critical reading of newspapers was deemed not only useful for English acquisition but also extremely useful for the students' general knowledge and life-skills. Finally, students found that preparing and delivering a presentation was a productive activity that enhanced their English learning experience.[7]

The subsequent open-ended questions intended to gain more detailed insight on student perception of the course. The first question aimed at understanding what the students felt they had gained form the course:

What have you learned from the course?

CDA, improved my English, the English legal system

I have understood how to be a conscious and critical reader. Moreover it has been also useful to learn lots of terminology and think about the importance of language and comunication [sic.] in our digital society

I improved the understanding of a newspaper article (and also which are the English newspapers and which bias they have). I also improved my presentation skills by talking about current events

From these comments, it appears that the student has developed various skills, not only those directly linked to the English language but also presentation skills, debating current affairs, specialised terminology in the field of international studies and international legal English, and a broad understanding of critical discourse analysis applied to anglophone news media. These abilities would fall within the remit of the Dublin agenda, which, as mentioned earlier, aims to promote the development of students' critical awareness.

What did you like or dislike about the course?

This question sought to identify weak or strong points in course design from the students' point of view. The following responses indicate that encouraging involvement and participation on the part of the students and attempting to stimulate discussion to the point of being provocative in the (virtual) classroom

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[7] See appendix for the results of the Likert scale questions in graphic format.

was welcomed. The students also appreciated the fact that their course work constituted a major part of their final mark.

> I like the involvement of students during the lessons and the possibility to have partially examination during the course

> I really enjoy the content of the course, especially the part related to CDA. I also appreciate the capacity to create and encourage debates among students during the lessons

> I liked the structure of the course, which encourages the active participation of students. The discussion in the classroom allows you to better understand the concepts of the course.

However, when asked to make any final suggestions, two of the students highlighted the fact that class participation was difficult for those with a lower level of English and that greater effort should have been made to motivate participation from students with a lower level of English.

> **Any comments on the course?**

> I only hope that next year the course will be in presence. By the way, even if I personally don't like very much the distance learning, I want to say that the teacher managed to create the atmosphere of a "real" class, and I appreciate it very much

> For those who have a lower level of English, the participation in the class debate is difficult. I think it would be better to stimulate their participation more

> It would be better to involve students with a low level of English more in class debates

This last criticism is one that I certainly acknowledge. When students are reluctant to speak it is sometimes easier for the instructor to rely on those who are always willing to contribute. However, in a virtual environment, ensuring that less loquacious or less confident learners have equal floor space becomes even more of an issue. Online platforms allow students to hide behind an icon as they are not obliged to switch on their video cameras. There is no face-to-face dialogue. In traditional classroom situations, encouraging participation from students of all levels of ability and controlling turn-taking opportunities becomes easier.

On a more positive note, one student observed:

> Ho apprezzato moltissimo il corso, soprattutto la parte relativa al CDA. La docente è stata sempre disponibile, attenta e paziente creando un'atmosfera molto piacevole durante le lezioni, nonostante la didattica a distanza. [I really enjoyed the course, particularly the part on CDA. The instructor was always

willing to help, attentive and patient with the students, creating a very pleasant atmosphere during the lessons, despite the fact that they were online.]

Dear Pr. Filmer, thanks for your wonderful course. It has covered not only General English, but also Legal English and Critical Discourse Analysis. I liked your approach very much.

5. Conclusions

This contribution has described the implementation of critical reading practices during an ESP module on a postgraduate international studies programme at the University of Pisa. The module content was specifically designed to reflect contemporary shifts in teaching literacy as merely traditional reading and writing skills to the recognition that these abilities are rooted in a broader scope to develop (cross-cultural) pragmatic competence, effective communication skills, and make (critical) sense of the world. Building on Park's (2011) study on using news articles to promote critical literary in the L2 classroom, the research reported sought to raise student awareness to the ways in which news producers shape knowledge through the strategic use of language. In tandem with this aim was the intent to encourage reflection and debate on a range of social themes, through written and oral production. As prospective game changers in global affairs, I felt it was particularly relevant for students of international studies to be cognisant of the ways in which linguistic strategies are employed in journalistic discourse when representing social actors in world events. This also meant drawing their attention to possible ideological skewing in the translation of foreign politicians' discourse.

The aims of the teaching module were achieved through a dialogic approach. A simplified critical discourse analysis framework was introduced to the students and then applied to the examination of anglophone news texts drawn from digital newspapers across the ideological spectrum, which was carried out together during lessons. Students were encouraged to find their own readings of the use of language with supporting evidence, which did not necessarily align with the instructor's view, but which often provided valuable insights, especially where cultural filters are concerned. Student evaluation at the end of the module entailed two summative assessments: the first, a written essay on one of the social issues covered in class; the second, a seven-minute PowerPoint presentation with slides illustrating a CDA analysis of a newspaper article of their choice. These two very different tasks tested their L2 reading comprehension, oral and written production, and crucially, their pragmatic ability to make inferences to reveal how meaning is constructed through linguistic strategies and lexical choice as outlined in Machin and Mayr's CDA toolbox. By drawing attention to implicit meanings created through the use of

language, and by cultivating the capacity to make inferences from the texts through the guided CDA approach, all of the attending students by the end of the course were able to successfully produce and present a short critical discourse analysis of a news text.

Feedback from the students indicates that although I carried out the research during the Covid-19 pandemic, when a remote learning environment was enforced, the participants enjoyed the opportunity to express their ideas in English and experience foreign language learning from a different perspective that did not focus on traditional yardsticks. The survey also highlighted certain limitations of the course. As two of the comments suggest, students with more advanced spoken English were inevitably advantaged in class debates. However, learning how to draw inference from a text could prove to be a more inclusive activity. Those students whose spoken English sometimes impeded their ability to contribute fluently to discussions were nevertheless able to contribute with their interpretations. Furthermore, these learning practices could be fruitfully expanded to a project-based approach. Students could work in small groups to perform a comparative analysis of how a particular event is represented in online news discourse across the ideological spectrum. For space constraints, here I have not delved into a discussion on the role of multimodality in reading comprehension. Nevertheless, indications suggest that students who may not always successfully apply pragmatic principles to making sense of a news report find support through the multimodal features of digital news texts and the collaboration of their peers in a less threatening learning context than one to one teacher-student dynamics. This could be a fertile line of research for future study into developing reading competence in L2 speakers.

What can be asserted is that by participating in class debates, by learning through doing preparing and delivering presentations, and by understanding language as a powerful tool that can influence public opinion, the students have improved their English competence while gaining useful transversal skills. Although the teaching practice involved a scaffolding process that brought learners out of their linguistic comfort zone, in the end the students adapted to the challenge and appreciated this new learning experience.

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dilemma (2012), and *Italy's Politicians in the News. Journalistic Translation and Cultural Representation* (2021). She is on the editorial board of *Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice* and *Cambridge Scholars*. She also serves as reviewer for several international journals.

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Annexes

Survey results - Likert scale questions

How relevant would you say the English course was for your course of studies on a scale of 1-5? (5 would be extremely relevant)
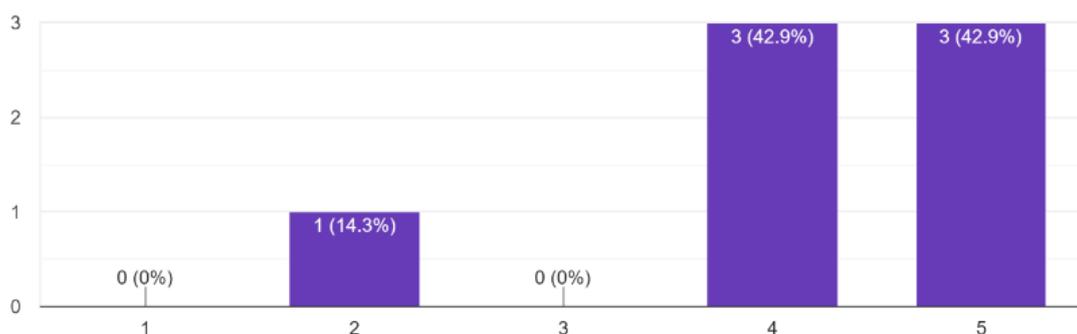
7 responses

Table 1

Results of the question: how relevant was the English course for the type of degree programme you were following?

Do you think the course has helped you to improve your reading skills in English? (5 would mean yes, very much)
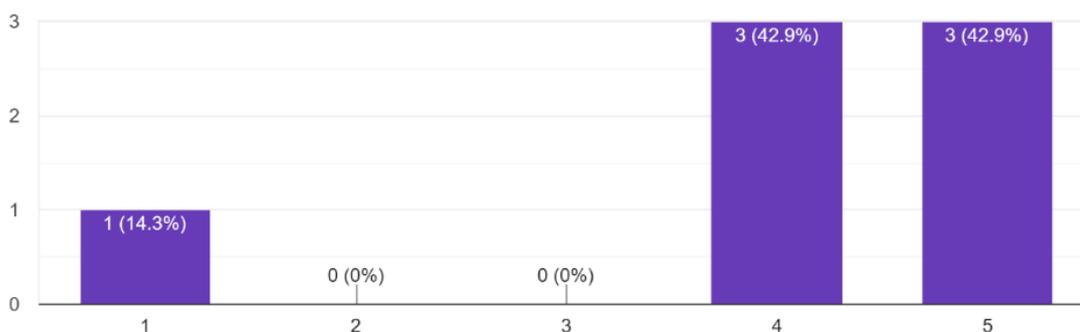
7 responses

Table 2

Results of the question: do you think the course has helped you improve your reading skills in English?

How useful would you say the English course was for your general knowledge and life-skills? (5 would be extremely useful)
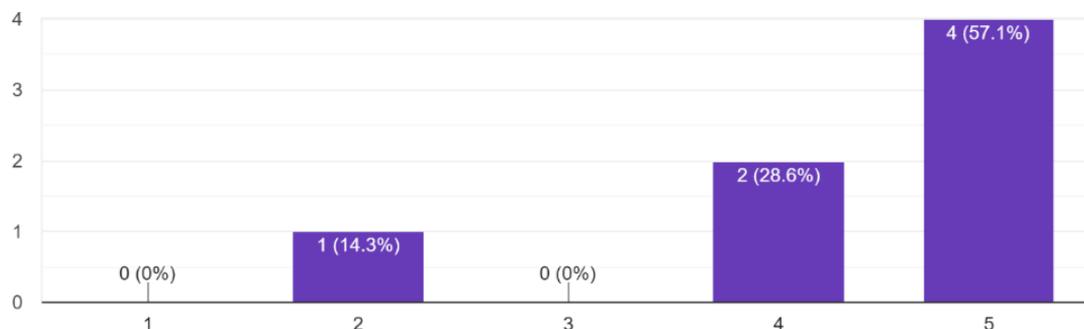
7 responses

Table 3
Results to the question: How useful would you say the English course was for your general knowledge and life-skills?

Did you find preparing a presentation a useful way to learn English in the classroom (5 means very)?
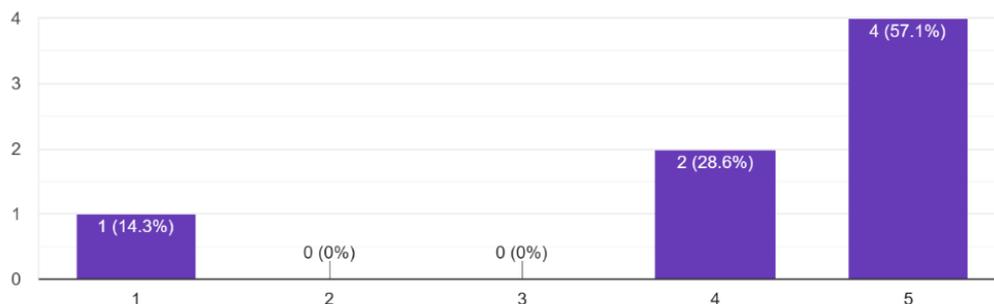
7 responses

Table 4
Results to the question: did you find preparing a presentation a useful way to learn English in the classroom?

DIDATTICA E INFERENZE
Uno sguardo alle attività di comprensione della lettura nei manuali di PLE[1]

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Abstract – The present study is part of the wide-ranging interdisciplinary linguistic research committed to investigating the cognitive and metacognitive strategies involved in text comprehension processes, both written and oral, by foreign language learners. This article analyses some reading comprehension activities proposed by PFL (Portuguese as a foreign language) teaching coursebooks, and specifically their promotion of inferential processes, and the way in which they can foster higher quality reading skills. The aim of the research is, therefore, the unveiling of the cognitive processes involved in the interaction between learner and the text. To this end, psycholinguistic notions of reading and its teaching are adopted. Six PFL teaching coursebooks (competence level C1) are examined from this theoretical perspective, and textual interpretation activities are discussed qualitatively. The reference research model is that proposed by Applegate *et al.* (2002), which suggests a change of perspective in the elaboration of reading proposals and sets new goals that would lead readers to a profound reflection on what they are reading and on the use of the information in the text to reach their interpretation.

Keywords: inferences; teaching manuals; reading comprehension; PLE.

1. Introduzione

Attualmente i manuali didattici di LS adottati negli istituti scolastici superiori e nelle università tenderebbero, almeno sulla carta, a presentare attività testuali improntate sostanzialmente sull'analisi del contenuto anziché sulla forma;[2] questa tendenza, caratteristica degli ultimi vent'anni, sorge come risposta alla necessità di adattare il materiale didattico alle nuove teorie in campo linguistico e glottodidattico, nella fattispecie quelle relative al cognitivismo e ai processi inferenziali legati alla lettura. La maggior parte degli studiosi concorda sul fatto che al momento di incontro tra testo e lettore, quest'ultimo riviva esperienze e in lui affiorino ricordi, sensazioni e concetti culturali personali e

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[1] PLE = *Português língua estrangeira* (portoghese lingua straniera). Di seguito introduco tutte le sigle che verranno usate nel corso dell'articolo: PLM = *Português língua materna* (portoghese lingua materna); LM = lingua materna; LS = lingua straniera; QECR = Quadro Europeo Comune di Riferimento, PE = portoghese europeo; PB = portoghese brasiliano.

[2] Oltre a sondare le competenze grammaticali degli studenti.

pregressi; tale articolato intreccio di sistemi permetterebbe l'elaborazione del significato del testo, andando oltre il mero riconoscimento delle singole parole. Di fatto, diversi studi (Dell'Isola 2001; Escudero Domínguez 2010; Marcuschi 2009; Oakhill, Garnham 1988) considerano il generare inferenze come una delle prime e fondamentali attività per lo sviluppo dei processi di lettura e di comprensione, dove il lettore diventa soggetto attivo nella pratica di costruzione dei significati.

Tuttavia, alcune analisi qualitative e quantitative svolte su manuali didattici di PLM e PLE in contesto scolastico brasiliano (Fulgêncio, Liberato 1996; Marcuschi 1996) indicavano un approccio alla lettura e alla comprensione del testo in parte fossilizzato sul livello letterale, inadatto a promuove una vera differenziazione di significati che una lettura interattiva può invece offrire.[3] Tale limite spinge lo studente a sottostimare il potenziale della lettura, ridotta così a semplice operazione meccanica mirata alla selezione di informazioni rintracciabili al livello superficiale del testo, e a compromettere i processi cognitivi che lo renderebbero capace di agire, inferire e gestire il suo processo di comprensione.

> Diversi studi nel campo della didattica delle lingue materne e straniere si sono concentrati sulla lettura come un processo comunicativo di interazione tra il testo e il lettore, che partecipa attivamente utilizzando strategie, aspettative o motivazioni per identificare e selezionare informazioni rilevanti, valutare, stabilire connessioni tra le nuove informazioni e le conoscenze precedenti, fare inferenze, trarre conclusioni e riflettere sui significati di un testo al fine di autoregolare questo processo. (Quesada *et al.* 2021, p. 2)[4]

Il manuale didattico è considerato una delle risorse più significative e utilizzate dai docenti di lingue: spesso unico mezzo per operare sulla competenza della lettura,[5] facilita il contatto tra apprendente e testo. In ottica cognitivista, il materiale didattico è inteso come un prodotto semiotico in grado di fornire, guidare e rafforzare comportamenti cognitivi che portano benefici all'intero processo di apprendimento. Avendo chiaro il ruolo centrale del manuale nella programmazione didattica e ritenendo i processi inferenziali tra le strategie cognitive più efficaci per lo sviluppo di un'interpretazione testuale che vada oltre la lettura decodificante, l'obiettivo di questo studio è quello di ricercare nelle attività di comprensione testuale proposte da alcuni libri di PLE un incentivo alla pratica e alla successiva elaborazione delle inferenze.

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[3] Con il termine lettura interattiva, estrapolata dal lavoro di Vargas (2012, p. 130), intendiamo una lettura dove lettore e testo agiscono su un piano di parità per la costruzione condivisa e negoziata dei significati.

[4] Traduzione dell'autore. A proseguire, le citazioni da opere straniere seguiranno tale criterio.

[5] Secondo Perini (1988), il testo didattico detiene una doppia funzione: da un lato, trasmette uno specifico contenuto mentre, dall'altro, allena il lettore allo sviluppo delle inferenze.

2. Leggere, comprendere e fare inferenze nella didattica delle lingue

Sebbene per molti studiosi, docenti e studenti lo scopo principale della lettura sia quello di comprendere, di ricavare un significato dal testo, il suo raggiungimento richiede una combinazione di circostanze e strategie perfettamente adeguate; tale necessità, nell'ottica della psicolinguistica, permette di considerare la lettura come un'integrazione di processi e non un prodotto che il lettore deve sapere riconoscere (Vargas 2012, p. 128). Durante questa operazione, lo studente innesca automatismi che gli permettono di ricorrere alle conoscenze previe del suo repertorio linguistico, ossia, riesce a trarre informazioni da diversi livelli delle lingue - di tipo lessicale, semantico e sintattico - al fine di costruire il significato globale del testo (Quesada *et al.* 2021, p. 4). All'interno del suddetto meccanismo vengono attivate strategie cognitive che arricchiscono l'oggetto di studio con il sapere ottenuto dalle esperienze pregresse; quelle metacognitive richiedono al lettore un certo grado di consapevolezza e controllo in merito ai propri processi e lo indirizzano verso un approfondimento dei propri pensieri, mentre quelle socioaffettive, legate al posizionamento emotivo dell'individuo in relazione all'iter del suo apprendimento, agiscono di contorno (Quesada *et al.* 2021 p. 4).

Secondo una visione ormai datata, la comprensione del testo era ritenuta un procedimento di astrazione del significato; oggigiorno, grazie agli studi psicolinguistici di Smith (2004), la lettura non viene più considerata come un'operazione passiva bensì come il processo interattivo tra il lettore e il testo, nella misura in cui l'agente (il lettore) è capace di avviare e dirigere i propri processi cognitivi necessari alla comprensione del testo, articolata su più livelli[6]. La lettura interattiva è una complessa e continua relazione tra gli input che il testo offre e le esperienze previe e i concetti linguistico-culturali del lettore; il processo, che si dipana tra le due ipotesi basilari di elaborazione delle informazioni (*top-down* e *bottom-up*), va oltre la decodifica del testo, coniugando le informazioni visive, captate dagli occhi durante la lettura, e quelle non visive, registrate nella memoria.[7]

> Anche se sappiamo poco in merito alla complessità della comprensione dei testi, emerge già un consenso fondamentale, cioè che la conoscenza individuale influisce in modo decisivo sulla comprensione, per cui il significato non risiede nel testo. Così, anche se il testo rimane il punto di partenza per l'interpretazione,

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[6] Si veda Perfetti *et al.* 2005.

[7] Vale la pena sottolineare la funzione catalizzatrice della memoria nell'elaborazione degli schemi mentali; di fatto, gli studi di Rumelhart e Ortony (1977) e di Rumelhart (1980) rilevarono come la conoscenza generica o quella sul mondo, sia organizzata nella memoria del lettore e come questa influenzi il processo di comprensione del testo scritto. Per una sintesi in merito alle teorie sulla memoria in ambito cognitivo più rilevanti si consulti il testo di Marcuschi (2009, pp. 96-98).

diventerà un'unità di significato solo nell'interazione con il lettore. (Marcuschi 2009, p. 96)

A questa interazione tra contenuto visivo e contenuto mnemonico partecipa anche una terza categoria di informazioni generata da processi cognitivi: le inferenze. Tradizionalmente, fare inferenza designava una strategia della lettura per la quale il soggetto rilevava specifiche informazioni non esplicite, generate linguisticamente o dal contesto: di conseguenza, le inferenze venivano categorizzate come contestuali (extra-testuali), quelle che si radicano nelle esperienze e conoscenze del soggetto su uno o più sistemi linguistico-culturali e sul mondo, e cotestuali (intra-testuali), quelle invece basate sul contenuto superficiale del testo. Tale visione risultava però limitata e riduttiva. Le inferenze, spesso associate al processo di "lettura tra le righe", non devono essere catalogate come strategie di riempimento di lacune di senso; la loro genesi non è il risultato di un processo casuale, bensì di un'operazione cognitiva. In quest'ottica, l'idea di inferenza sembra essere tuttora cristallizzata nell'atto di elaborare l'informazione che parte dal testo, o meglio, dalle sue parti (implicite ed esplicite), in direzione del lettore (*bottom-up*) e non in una costruzione e negoziazione di significati data dall'interazione sullo stesso piano tra questi due elementi.

Generare inferenze è, secondo l'approccio cognitivista (Perfetti *et al.* 2005; Escudero Domínguez 2010), un processo mentale essenziale di significato che appare in ogni processo di lettura e che permette al lettore di costruirsi percorsi idonei al raggiungimento dell'obiettivo, ovvero, alla costituzione del senso del testo. Secondo Fulgêncio e Liberato (2003, p. 29), l'inferenza è l'esito di un *processo di elaborazione attiva di saperi, a partire da relazioni che stabiliamo tra ciò che è detto e ciò che è noto previamente*. In questo modo l'inferenza permette al lettore di non dipendere dalle informazioni lineari che il testo racchiude, bensì di integrarne altre, generando significati a partire da piste contestuali per la sua comprensione; è di fatto compito della pragmatica mostrare come si elaborano le inferenze necessarie per giungere al significato degli enunciati. Per questo carattere generativo dell'inferenza, Marcuschi (2002, p. 134) la colloca tra i processi umani basilari che permettono all'uomo di riflettere e di analizzare; integrare informazioni contestuali e riflettere sugli stati mentali sono l'esito di competenze pragmatiche, in chiave comunicativa, che il lettore acquisisce. In conclusione, la lettura interattiva che gli studi cognitivi offrono si contrappone al modello scolastico centrato soltanto sulla decodifica.

> […] Il testo è il punto di partenza per la generazione di inferenze, ma non è ciò che definisce esclusivamente il processo. Le inferenze sono sempre presentate come il risultato della comprensione da parte del lettore di informazioni non esplicite nel testo. In questo modo, la nuova informazione semantica è generata dalla integrazione di due o più informazioni semantiche precedenti, presentate

in un determinato contesto e questo diventa un segno importante per la verifica delle inferenze fatte dagli studenti. (Vargas 2012, p. 134)

Nonostante l'universalità dei meccanismi inferenziali cognitivi che soggiacciono alle competenze pragmatiche, ogni individuo riscontra diversi percorsi e ostacoli nell'inferire, a seconda delle differenze linguistico-culturali tra la LM e la LS; questo aspetto è da tenere in considerazione quando si lavora nell'insegnamento delle lingue straniere, specialmente nella comprensione della lettura.[8] L'insegnamento linguistico spesso ignora le potenzialità d'uso del piano inferenziale per la lettura, fossilizzandosi sul suo livello superficiale, richiedendo allo studente, non consapevole delle sue azioni inferenziali, solamente l'attivazione delle conoscenze pregresse, evitando così una reale interazione con il testo. Di fatto, risultano ancora carenti gli studi mirati all'applicazione di tali nozioni per le attività didattiche, soprattutto in contesto editoriale di lingua straniera, sebbene esista a livello teorico e metodologico una fiorente letteratura.[9]

> Quando al soggetto-lettore si permette di interagire con il testo, riempiendo i vuoti[10] con la sua storia, scambiando esperienze con l'altro, allora emerge un nuovo testo, ha luogo una nuova produzione e avviene la reale lettura. Il testo permette una molteplicità di tante letture quanti sono i lettori, poiché ognuno genera inferenze secondo la sua conoscenza del mondo. La conoscenza del mondo include componenti emotive, socioculturali, politiche ed economiche e questo è stato disatteso dalla scuola o, peggio, è stato "punito" dal sistema, attraverso la figura dell'insegnante che non permette il viaggio attraverso il testo. (Dell'Isola 1997)

3. Metodologia di analisi

Per l'analisi delle attività di lettura dei materiali didattici abbiamo optato per la griglia presentata da Applegate *et al.* (2002). Nonostante esista una difficoltà di categorizzazione tassonomica dei diversi input adottati dalle attività di comprensione testuale, il paradigma costruito dagli autori americani risulta a nostro avviso stimolante poiché si focalizza sull'orientamento alla lettura che le serie di domande inducono. Nel dettaglio, Applegate *et al.* (2002) hanno interrogato otto inventari di lettura informali (IRI) commerciali, per ognuno dei quali hanno selezionato casualmente due brani narrativi[11] e le relative domande di comprensione. La tecnica di insegnamento basata sulle domande,

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[8] Risulta essere una delle competenze dove gli apprendenti riscontrano maggiore difficoltà (Quesada *et. al.* 2021).

[9] Si consulti lo schema generale delle inferenze elaborato da Marcuschi (2009, p. 103).

[10] L'autrice considerava le inferenze come uno strumento funzionale al riempimento delle lacune.

[11] La selezione di questa tipologia testuale è data dal fatto che risulta più probabile rintracciarvi un numero più consiste di quesiti basati su un livello inferenziale superiore.

nota come metodo socratico, è una delle più usate e preferite dagli insegnanti per valutare la comprensione della lettura degli studenti. Di seguito riportiamo la divisione proposta dagli autori, in parte riformulata, e che fungerà da metodo per questa ricerca (Applegate *et al.* 2002, p. 176):

1. *Items* di livello letterale. Le risposte a tali quesiti sono esplicite nel testo: al lettore si richiede solamente di ricordarle o ricercarle nel testo. Esempio: il testo riporta "La casa dove i nonni di Giovanni vivevano è molto piccola ma graziosa" e la domanda è "Quali caratteristiche ha la casa dove vivevano i nonni di Giovanni?".

2. *Items* di basso livello inferenziale. Le domande afferenti a tale classe portano il lettore a ricercare nel testo le risposte che non sono testualmente visibili ma che possono essere così vicine al significato letterale da diventare ovvie; tale processo richiede che lo studente tragga conclusioni sulla base del testo ma anche, in misura molto ridotta, dalle proprie esperienze pregresse e dalle personali conoscenze previe del mondo. Alcuni esempi di quesiti di basso livello inferenziale sono: a) quelli che conducono al riconoscimento di informazioni a partire da parole diverse da quelle presenti nel testo (operazione traduttologica); b) quelli che richiedono l'identificazione all'interno del testo di relazioni che non sono apertamente esplicitate per mezzo di marche grammaticali (es. gli interrogativi come *quando, perché, come,* ecc…); c) quelli legati al rilevamento di elementi marginali al significato centrale del testo e d) quelli che portano il lettore ad attingere esclusivamente alla propria conoscenza di base o a speculare sulle azioni dei personaggi, senza beneficiare delle informazioni del testo. Esempio: il testo narra "la signora Rossi ha preso il tram delle 07:00 ed è andata al lavoro" e il quesito è "Come ha raggiunto il luogo di lavoro la signora Rossi?".

3. *Items* di alto livello inferenziale. Si tratta di quesiti che stimolano il lettore a intrecciare la propria esperienza al testo e di ricavarne delle conclusioni logiche. Il raziocinio soggiacente a tali input è più complesso rispetto a quello delle domande di basso livello inferenziale e può essere incentivato attraverso diverse tipologie di quesiti: a) formulare una soluzione plausibile e alternativa rispetto a quella offerta dal testo; b) ipotizzare un motivo scatenante diverso da quello proposto dall'autore; c) proporre una spiegazione o un'evoluzione di una situazione dissimile da quella del brano; d) prevedere uno svolgimento futuro ed e) caratterizzare un personaggio secondo gli eventi della storia, qualora tale descrizione risulti assente. Esempio: il testo parla di un litigio di coppia e la domanda è "come è andata a concludersi la discussione tra i due personaggi?".

4. *Response items*. Tali input chiedono al lettore di esprimere e difendere un'idea relativa alle azioni dei personaggi o all'esito degli eventi. I *response items* divergono dalle domande di alto livello inferenziale in

quanto solitamente sono dirette verso idee più ampie o tematiche soggiacenti al significato del brano; mentre le seconde mirano a un elemento specifico o a un problema nel brano, i primi spingono il lettore a discutere e reagire al significato implicito complessivo del testo. I *response items* possono essere formulati per mezzo a) di descrizione di una morale che i personaggi hanno appreso dalla vicenda in cui sono coinvolti; b) di reggenza e/o difesa di azioni intraprese, di giudizi o di soluzioni adottate dai personaggi; c) di risposte di valore qualitativo personali (positivo o negativo) su un personaggio secondo una valutazione logica delle sue azioni o dei suoi tratti. Esempio: il testo descrive le arringhe di due imputati e la domanda è "Se tu fossi il giudice, quale dei due imputati riterresti innocente e perché".

Secondo questa classificazione, le strategie inferenziali si attivano quando il lettore scava nel testo alla ricerca di informazioni celate a una lettura superficiale e queste diventano il trampolino per lo sviluppo del livello interpretativo, il quale rende il lettore in grado di associare le proprie conoscenze previe con i contenuti del testo (alto livello inferenziale e *response items*). Di fatto, Applegate *et al.* (2002, p. 174) dichiarano che numerose valutazioni in merito alle attività di comprensione testuale hanno fotografato un graduale slittamento degli *items* da tipologie improntate all'oggettività, ovvero, alla comprensione letterale o quasi letterale del significato di un testo, verso quesiti che prevedono invece risposte più aperte e ad ampio raggio. La selezione di quest'ultima tipologia di input permetterebbe al lettore di elaborare il proprio pensiero con una riuscita finale maggiore. È chiaro dunque che i quesiti di livello letterale puntano alla valutazione linguistica del lettore, mentre quelli di alto livello inferenziale prendono parte attiva allo sviluppo di processi cognitivi superiori: in sintesi, le domande di livello inferenziale si caratterizzano per il fatto di non prestarsi a un'unica corretta interpretazione, ma incoraggiano la discussione e il riconoscimento di diversi punti di vista, e le loro risposte devono essere giustificate logicamente dai lettori (Applegate *et al.* 2006, p. 48).

Per questo studio, che fonda il suo impianto metodologico sul modello appena proposto, abbiamo preso un'ulteriore decisione: gli *items* esclusivamente mirati all'arricchimento lessicale e all'analisi semantica (esercizi sul vocabolario) sono stati esclusi, considerato che non è possibile essere certi del fatto che al momento della lettura i soggetti stiano utilizzando indizi contestuali per giungere alla definizione. Al contrario, le domande che chiedevano di interpretare un'espressione in funzione del suo contesto sono incluse nell'analisi.

4. Analisi dei materiali didattici

I criteri adottati per la costituzione del corpus[12] sono i seguenti:

- i manuali devono essere destinati a un pubblico eterogeneo di adulti stranieri (no PLM), con un'età maggiore di 20 anni;
- devono raggiungere almeno il livello di competenza linguistica C1 in accordo con le direttive fornite dal QECR, quando possibile;[13]
- devono poter essere utilizzati sia in regime scolastico sia da autodidatta;
- devono essere stati prodotti dall'anno 2000 in poi.[14]

La selezione è stata un'operazione laboriosa, che ha suscitato molti quesiti e spunti di riflessione sul mondo dell'editoria di PLE. È da premettere che, a oggi, i libri che si prefiggono il raggiungimento dei livelli avanzati sono un numero ridotto rispetto a quelli dei livelli inferiori; basti pensare ai libri preparatori per le certificazioni linguistiche di PE e di PB che non presentano volumi per i livelli avanzati.[15] La medesima situazione è stata riscontrata in più serie di manuali, come *Falar…Ler…Escrever…Português*, destinato esclusivamente a un pubblico principiante, *Português XXI* e *Passaporte para português* che, con le loro trilogie arrivano al livello B1, e *Aprender português* e *Na onda do português* che invece affrontano il livello B2 nei loro terzi libri[16]. Similmente, *Muito prazer* raggiunge, con un unico volume, il livello B1.

È necessario distinguere ulteriormente i manuali in base alla metodologia adottata per la creazione delle attività di comprensione testuale. Non tutti i libri di livello C1/C2 includono esercizi legati alla lettura, come i secondi volumi di *Vamos lá continuar*, *Gramática aplicada*, *Gramática ativa*, *Português outra vez* e *Português atual*. Quest'ultimo, per esempio, ritaglia uno spazio esiguo, occupato solo dalla didascalia *Agora leia* in riferimento al testo

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[12] La seguente cernita non pretende di essere esaustiva di tutti i materiali in circolazione.

[13] Alcuni manuali, specialmente quelli creati fuori Europa, non seguono i criteri del QECR: è tuttavia possibile determinarne il livello linguistico osservando i contenuti e l'orientamento e comparandoli con gli indicatori del modello europeo.

[14] La scelta di tale limite è dovuta a due fattori: il primo rimanda all'attuale uso e circolazione dei testi e alla loro compatibilità con le tematiche odierne, mentre il secondo rimette alla diffusione di criteri, metodi e strategie della moderna glottodidattica (come le inferenze ma anche i criteri stabiliti dal QECR) e alle loro adozioni da parte degli autori.

[15] Per quanto riguarda le certificazioni di PE, è sul mercato la collezione LIDEL-EPFOL-Série SEIA, che presenta due soli libri; uno per i livelli A2-B1 (CIPLE-DEPLE) e uno per il livello B2 (DIPLE) (Pascoal e Oliveira 2013; 2012). La realtà brasiliana delle certificazioni è, rispetto a quella europea, più recente e i libri di preparazione per l'esame Celpe-Bras raggiungono un livello intermedio (Bizon e Fontão 2017; Schrägle e Mendes 2019).

[16] Materiali degli ultimi 6 anni portano l'apprendente a un livello B2, come *Na crista da onda 4*, *Nova avenida Brasil 3* e *Cidades do mar*, altri al livello B1 come *Português para estrangeiros* oppure al livello A2, come *Dialogar em português*, *Nota10*, *Samba!* e *Tirando de letra* (tutti composti da un unico volume) e *Novo português sem fronteiras* che si compone invece di due volumi.

scritto (che è incluso però nell'attività di comprensione orale), senza presentare domande di comprensione testuale. Esistono inoltre altri materiali che propongono attività di comprensione testuale esclusivamente legate a una conoscenza prettamente semantica del lessico o di espressioni idiomatiche, le quali, come dichiarato in precedenza, richiedono al lettore uno sforzo ridotto sul piano inferenziale: per tale ragione, libri come *Hoje em dia…* e *E agora em português*[17] sono stati esclusi dalla ricerca. Infine, dato che il modello proposto da Applegate *et al.* (2002) è applicabile a domande aperte, durante la selezione del corpus non sono state prese in considerazione le comprensioni testuali basate su domande chiuse o a scelta multipla, come quelle in *Português económico: manual para alunos de PLE*[18] e *Português ao vivo*;[19] di fatto, in tali attività la casualità è una variabile considerevole che non permette una totale veridicità dell'analisi delle risposte.

A seguito di tale cernita, i materiali didattici selezionati per costituire il corpus sono: *Português em foco 4*, *A actualidade em português*, *Histórias de bolso*, *Português via Brasil*, *Português para todos 4* e *Brasil intercultural - ciclo avançado*. Tali manuali sono distribuiti in modo equilibrato lungo l'arco temporale scelto, ovvero, riescono a coprire equamente diversi anni, dal 2000 a oggi, permettendoci di osservare l'evoluzione dell'editoria didattica del PLE e delle prospettive teoriche e pratiche relative ai suoi prodotti. Tutti i libri, inoltre, sono prodotti da diversi autori e autrici e quasi tutti appartengono a distinte case editrici, fattori che attribuiscono al corpus una certa varietà, sia nelle metodologie adottate che nella selezione delle attività; infine, a titolo informativo come caratteristica non determinante per lo studio, quattro materiali seguono la norma PE e tre quella PB.

Il corpus si compone di un totale di 162 attività di lettura. Nessuno dei sei manuali sostiene esplicitamente il ricorso a strategie interpretative del piano inferenziale, sebbene se ne osservi in ogni libro un impiego diffuso, in misura e modalità differenti. La ricerca ha adottato un'analisi teorica quantitativa e qualitativa, cercando, con dovizia di particolari e attenzione, di spiegare come il libro didattico induca lo studente a dedurre dai testi, sulla base delle domande di comprensione proposte, il significato che sottintende; in altre parole, questo studio esplorativo cerca di misurare la qualità dei quesiti per valutare se essi portano lo studente a pensare e a riflettere sulla lettura e non solo a ricopiare le risposte contenute nel testo. Per ragioni di spazio, mostreremo solo alcuni

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[17] Sebbene tale materiale per italo-parlanti presenti tre brevi esercizi di comprensione del testo (uno di livello letterale, uno di basso livello inferenziale e uno di alto livello inferenziale), a causa della poca rappresentatività è stato rimosso dal corpus.

[18] Si tratta di un manuale di portoghese specialistico che presenta, predominantemente, attività di comprensione testuale basate su quesiti vero/falso e, in numero molto ridotto, domande aperte connesse al vocabolario o, comunque, fossilizzate sul livello letterale: per la poca rappresentatività, il materiale non è stato selezionato.

[19] Nel primo volume invece le domande di comprensione del testo sono di tipologia aperta.

esempi di ogni manuale; l'ordine di analisi segue quello cronologico di stampa dei singoli libri.

Português para todos 4 (2002) è il quarto e ultimo libro di una collana di PLE, norma europea, rivolta principalmente a ispano-parlanti. Sebbene non venga specificato il livello di competenza linguistica, il manuale presenta aree grammaticali e temi di dibattito specifici per un apprendimento di livello avanzato.[20] Consta di 15 unità, ognuna con attività fisse quali comprensione del testo, esercizi di fonetica, ortografia, semantica, grammatica e traduzione (sempre e solo dallo spagnolo), e altre variabili, come test sulle espressioni idiomatiche, sugli aspetti culturali e sul lessico di specialità, (settore commerciale). Le proposte di comprensione della lettura del manuale sono 24; il numero totale dei testi è maggiore ma molti di essi risultano legati ad attività orali e, di conseguenza in linea con i criteri dello studio, sono stati esclusi dall'analisi. *Português para todos 4* è tra tutti i manuali del corpus quello maggiormente marcato da domande di livello letterale e di basso livello inferenziale; di fatto, si riscontrano solo quattro[21] quesiti *response items* e due di alto livello inferenziale.[22] Osserviamo le domande di comprensione di pagina 176, che includono i primi tre livelli di analisi del piano inferenziale:

(1)   *O autor da carta escreve versos de vez em quando, mas não os publica. Porquê?*
       (L'autore della lettera ogni tanto scrive versi, ma non li pubblica. Perché?)

(2)   *Como é que ele faz a sua própria caracterização?*
       (Come fa la sua stessa caratterizzazione?)

(3)   *Quais as vantagens da sua nova companhia sobre a anterior?*
       (Quali sono i vantaggi della sua nuova compagnia rispetto alla precedente)

(4)   *E qual a desvantagem?*
       (E qual è lo svantaggio?)

(5)   *Que episódios tristes são referidos pelo autor, embora não o tivessem afectado?*
       (Quali episodi tristi vengono menzionati dall'autore, pur non avendolo colpito?)

(6)   *Descreva a pessoa que o autor encontra a entrar para o carro.*
       (Descrivi la persona che l'autore incontra quando entra in auto.)

(7)   *Transcreva do texto uma frase através da qual percebemos que o autor é um homem.*

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[20] Il manuale punta a trasmettere le espressioni idiomatiche, i proverbi, la stilistica e regole sintattiche complesse.

[21] Esempio: *Qual a sua opinião sobre a impossibilidade de o Presidente da República cumprir mais de dois mandatos consecutivos?* (Qual è la sua opinione riguardo l'interdizione per il Presidente della Repubblica di svolgere più di due mandati consecutivi?) (p. 68). *Quais as vantagens e desvantagens de efectuar compras ou "visitar" um museu através da Net?* (Quali sono i vantaggi e gli svantaggi di comprare o "visitare" un museo online?) (p. 125).

[22] Quest'ultima tipologia è comunque presente, in quantità ridotta, nell'inventario delle attività legate alla lettura, sotto forma di domande implicite.

(Trascrivi una frase del testo attraverso la quale capiamo che l'autore è un uomo.)

(8)   *Porque é que o autor não falou ao amigo da Maria Irene?*

(Perché l'autore non ha parlato di Maria Irene all'amico?)

(9)   *Imagine a relação que houve entre o autor e a Maria Irene, atendendo aos elementos fornecidos pelo texto.*

(Immagina il rapporto che c'è stato tra l'autore e Maria Irene, utilizzando gli elementi forniti dal testo.)

(10)   *Que possíveis causas poderão ter determinado esta ruptura?*

(Quali possibili cause possono aver determinato questa rottura?)

(11)   *Imagine o último diálogo travado entre os dois protagonistas, na pastelaria, no momento da despedida, considerando que souberam dominar muito bem os seus impulsos.*

(Immagina l'ultimo dialogo intercorso tra i due protagonisti, in pasticceria, al momento dell'addio, considerando che hanno saputo dominare molto bene i loro impulsi.)

(12)   *Escreva uma carta a uma pessoa que não vê há muito tempo (5/6 anos) e conte-lhe algumas das passagens da sua vida que considere relevantes.*

(Scrivi una lettera a una persona che non vedi da molto tempo (5/6 anni) e raccontale alcune parti della tua vita che consideri rilevanti.)

(13)   *Explique as expressões "A gente cuida que enterrou os sentimentos e enterrou uma ova", e "Você não deu por mim".*

(Spiega le espressioni "Si pensa di aver sotterrato i sentimenti e invece non si è sotterrato un cavolo" e "Non mi hai degnato di uno sguardo".)

Le domande 2, 3, 4 e 5 e la domanda implicita 6 richiedono al lettore solo di selezionare le informazioni esplicite nel testo, rimanendo così sul livello letterale della lettura; mentre i quesiti 1 e 8 sono classificabili di basso livello inferenziale, poiché puntano alla ripetizione di informazioni non evidenti nel testo ma molto vicine a livello di ovvietà, spingendo lo studente a una lettura approssimata. La domanda 10 invece è di alto livello inferenziale, in quanto porta il lettore a impegnare una conoscenza pregressa e a formulare ipotesi, così come lo sono i punti 9 e 11, nonostante siano domande implicite. Non sono presenti *response items* e i punti 7, 12 e 13 non possono essere presi in esame dalla nostra analisi in quanto esercizi di produzione scritta o quesiti indiretti di riconoscimento semantico; inoltre, tranne per l'esercizio 7, gli altri due risultano sconnessi dallo specifico testo, affrontando la generalità del tema soggiacente.

Le attività di comprensione della lettura di *Português para todos 4*, vista anche la sua datazione, non comprovano l'intento degli autori di sviluppare nel lettore una profonda capacità di inferire, bensì appaiono ancorate a un modello di interpretazione testuale circoscritto alla lettura decodificante. Presentiamo ora un grafico relativo alla quantità e alla tipologia delle domande (Grafico 1);

la colonna *altro* raggruppa una serie di quesiti o stimoli di riflessione che non si inquadrano nei criteri della griglia di Applegate *et al.* (2002), come le domande di opinione su temi generici, attività di interpretazione di espressioni linguistiche ed esercizi extra-testuali.
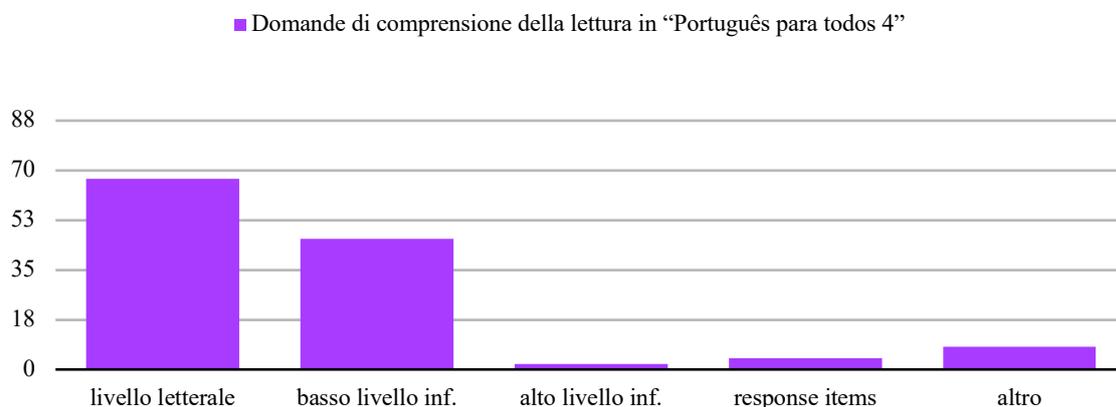
Domande di comprensione della lettura in "Português para todos 4"

Grafico 1
Grafico a barre che rappresenta sull'ordinata la somma del numero di quesiti per ogni tipologia riportata sull'ascissa.

A actualidade em português (2004), a differenza di tutti gli altri manuali analizzati, con eccezione di *Histórias de bolso*, è un materiale di supporto all'attività didattica; di fatto, non ha una struttura suddivisa per competenze o per aree grammaticali ordinate in sequenza crescente secondo lo sviluppo dell'apprendimento, ma fornisce attività, esercizi e fonti da integrare a quelle del manuale canonico. Prodotto dalla casa editrice LIDEL, si compone di 15 unità che affrontano vari temi socioculturali attuali e universali, adottando uno sguardo non esclusivo sulla realtà portoghese. Ogni unità si compone di un piccolo glossario, di un esercizio fonetico, morfologico o di semantica lessicale e di uno grammaticale, una comprensione testuale con domande aperte e un'attività di produzione e/o interazione orale. Non appaiono i criteri disposti dal QECR per indicare il suo livello linguistico ma nell'introduzione le autrici dichiarano che il libro è destinato a studenti che possiedono un livello avanzato di portoghese, norma europea. Le letture analizzate sono 15 e sono tutte autentiche, ovvero estratte da articoli di giornali o riviste esistenti.

Come *Português para todos 4*, anche le attività di comprensione della lettura di questo manuale sono a maggioranza di livello letterale e di basso livello inferenziale; tuttavia, a differenza del precedente, il numero di domande che stimolano inferenze di alto livello o *response items* è numericamente superiore.[23] Esiste inoltre un solo quesito, in forma di domanda implicita, che opera sull'ironia, atto linguistico interpretabile correttamente solo grazie a un

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[23] A tal proposito, il materiale presenta due attività (pp. 127-131 e 149-154) che non espongono il lettore a domande di livello letterale o simile.

processo inferenziale tra contesto e conoscenze linguistico-culturali previe.[24] Osserviamo un esempio (pp. 25-26):

(1) *Porque é que os portugueses se consideram, apesar de tudo, felizes, mesmo quando admitem ter uma vida cheia de preocupações?*

(Perché i portoghesi si considerano, nonostante tutto, felici, anche se ammettono di avere una vita piena di preoccupazioni?)

(2) *Qual a justificação que acha mais provável para que as mulheres sejam as que mais se preocupam com a vida e as que menos confiam no futuro?*

(Qual è la giustificazione che trovi più probabile perché le donne sono quelle che più si preoccupano della vita e che credono di meno nel futuro?)

(3) *Concorda que o dinheiro, o nível de instrução e a idade sejam factores que influenciem a opinião dos portugueses? De que modo?*

(Concordi sul fatto che il denaro, il livello di istruzione e l'età siano fattori che influenzano l'opinione dei portoghesi? In che modo?)

(4) *De um modo geral, segundo o inquérito, quais são as actividades que mais prazer proporcionam aos portugueses e, por outro lado, as que eles consideram mais aborrecidas? E para si?*

(In generale, secondo il sondaggio, quali sono le attività che sono più piacevoli per i portoghesi e, invece, quelle che considerano più noiose? E per te?)

(5) *De acordo com o inquérito, a saúde é o elemento central da felicidade para os portugueses, sem qualquer tipo de distinção? Qual a sua justificação para os resultados do inquérito em relação a este aspecto?*

(Secondo il sondaggio, la salute è l'elemento chiave della felicità per i portoghesi, indipendentemente dal resto? Come giustifichi i risultati del sondaggio relativamente a questo aspetto?)

(6) *Segundo o texto, o "núcleo duro" da felicidade dos portugueses é formado por:*
   • *saúde;*
   • *vida conjugal;*
   • *dinheiro suficiente.*
   Qual seriam os factores que corresponderiam a este "núcleo duro", caso um inquérito, deste tipo, fosse feito no seu país? Porquê?

(Secondo il testo, il "nucleo duro" della felicità dei portoghesi è formato da: salute; vita di coppia; denaro a sufficienza. Quali sarebbero i fattori corrispondenti al "nucleo duro" nel caso in cui un sondaggio del genere venisse fatto nel tuo paese? Perché?)

Il primo quesito, domanda di basso livello inferenziale, richiede al lettore di evidenziare la relazione di causa ed effetto dei fatti esposti, la cui risposta è celata nel testo. Il quarto e il quinto quesito non scalfiscono la superficie del testo e richiedono uno sforzo di riconoscimento senza alcun processo inferenziale; ciononostante, tali domande sono state in parte ampliate dalle

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[24] Nessun altro materiale del corpus affronta tale atto linguistico.

autrici, che hanno deciso di incorporarvi quesiti che invitano il lettore ad adattare le informazioni del testo al proprio contesto di vita. In questo caso specifico, la seconda domanda del punto 4 si allontana dal letterale ma concede comunque la possibilità di sfruttare le informazioni immagazzinate dalla lettura e intrecciarle con le conoscenze pregresse del lettore. La seconda domanda del punto 5 invece porta a riflettere sui possibili motivi che soggiacciono a un evento, ovvero si sottomette lo studente a elaborare un pensiero inferenziale di alto livello. Alla stessa categoria appartengono i quesiti 2 e 6 che, come la seconda domanda del punto 4, hanno delle dipendenze dirette con la realtà del lettore. Infine, il quesito numero 3 sottopone il testo al giudizio personale dello studente, stimolandolo a formare il significato implicito del testo.

La metodologia adottata dalle autrici in merito all'ibridazione delle domande è molto comune nei manuali didattici poiché rende meno sterili le domande di livello letterale che generano così punti d'incontro tra la realtà del testo e quella del soggetto, attivando una lettura interattiva: inoltre, in quanto articoli giornalistici e di opinione, è la stessa tipologia di testo che incentiva tale dialogo. In sintesi, come il grafico dimostra, le domande letterali e di basso livello inferenziale continuano a occupare gran parte delle attività di comprensione, bilanciate però da un aumento, in confronto al libro precedente, di input di alto livello inferenziale e di *response items*: tale andamento, che si osserverà negli altri campioni, è motivato anche dall'aggiornamento dei materiali con le teorie pedagogiche e linguistiche recenti. Di seguito proponiamo il grafico (Grafico 2) dell'analisi sopraccitata.
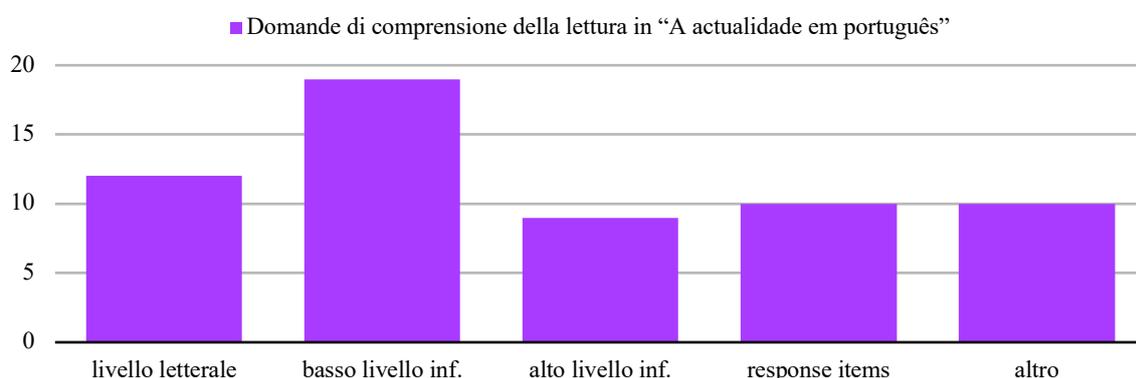
Grafico 2
Grafico a barre che rappresenta sull'ordinata la somma del numero di quesiti per ogni tipologia riportata sull'ascissa.

A differenza dei primi due libri, *Português via Brasil* (2005), la casa editrice EPU, si dedica all'insegnamento del portoghese norma brasiliana e, in parallelo, alla divulgazione dell'ampia ed eterogenea cultura del Brasile. Si rivolge a studenti che possiedono già un livello pre-avanzato e che, alla fine

del processo didattico, raggiungeranno un alto livello di competenza linguistica, come testimonia il sottotitolo *um curso avançado para estrangeiros*. Si articola in 10 unità suddivise nel seguente ordine: *texto inicial, gramática em revisão, cotidiano brasileiro, linguagem coloquial, gramática nova (I), pausa, gramática nova (II), pontos de vista e linguagem formal*. La proposta nasce dalla volontà di sviluppare tutte e cinque le competenze linguistiche, affiancandole ad attività legate a input socioculturali e stilistici. La comprensione della lettura non è confinata soltanto alla sezione iniziale di ogni unità, bensì è un esercizio molto ricorrente all'interno del manuale. *Português via Brasil* raccoglie inoltre un numero elevato di attività di comprensione della lettura in forma di domande implicite o esercizi di altra natura, come quelle mirate al riconoscimento semantico-culturale di espressioni linguistiche, al rilevamento di esempi e all'interazione orale, che sono state escluse dall'indagine.

I risultati dell'analisi di *Português via Brasil* non si discostano di molto da quelli ottenuti da *Português para todos 4*. Di fatto, le attività di lettura contenute nel manuale brasiliano ricalcano il modello tradizionale didattico a oggi ampiamente diffuso, il cui focus risiede nella comprensione testuale di livello superficiale e contenutistico, tralasciando l'esplorazione dei processi cognitivi. Le proposte si fossilizzano così sul piano letterale, o quasi letterale, affrontando minimamente quello inferenziale. A differenza però di *Português para todos 4,* il manuale brasiliano offre un numero leggermente inferiore di domande di livello letterale rispetto a quelle di basso livello inferenziale, mentre risultano poco più numerosi gli input di alto livello inferenziale e di *response items*, che comunque restano sempre in parametri quantitativi bassi. Ciononostante, queste ultime due categorie sono rappresentate da domande di diversa tipologia che attivano diversi processi cognitivi. Vediamo nel dettaglio alcuni quesiti, iniziando con le domande di alto livello inferenziale e procedendo poi con i *response items*.

Você sabe por que a quaresmeira tem esse nome? (Sai perché la quaresmeira si chiama così?) (p. 8): il quesito motiva il lettore a recuperare la propria conoscenza previa e lo spinge a elaborare ipotesi. Il processo di costruzione del significato implicito del testo, con base in deduzioni scaturite dalla lettura interattiva, viene attivato anche da altri due quesiti, *A que conclusão chega o autor do texto, diante de tantas irregularidades?* (A quale conclusione giunge l'autore del testo, in presenza di così tante irregolarità?) (p. 37) e *Tente interpretar a figura da máquina. Com que intenção o autor escreveu esse conto? (Trata-se de uma crítica aos tempos modernos, à credulidade dos homens, a seu vazio interior? Qual é sua interpretação pessoal?)* (Prova a interpretare la figura della macchina. Con quale intenzione l'autore ha scritto questo racconto? (Si tratta di una critica alla modernità, alla crudeltà degli uomini, al loro vuoto interiore? Qual è la tua interpretazione

personale?)) (p. 204), che richiedono però di riflettere sui motivi e i pensieri dell'autore, non sul testo o sui suoi elementi. Esistono inoltre due domande che stimolano la capacità di inferire descrizioni non esplicite nel testo: *Como você imagina a paisagem do Pantanal Mato-Grossense?* (Come ti immagini il paesaggio del Pantanal del Mato Grosso?) (p. 97) e *Baseado no texto, você poderia dizer como deveriam ser as estações citadas?* (Stando al testo, riusciresti a dire come dovrebbero essere le stagioni menzionate?) (p. 37); mentre la prima permette al lettore di astrarsi dal testo, elaborando una personale interpretazione, la seconda invece risulta vincolata dalle informazioni del brano. Infine, ci sono tre domande che portano il lettore a immedesimarsi in una situazione analoga a quella del libro: *Se a vida de alguém de sua família dependesse de um transplante, que atitude você teria?* (Se la vita di un qualche tuo parente dipendesse da un trapianto, come ti comporteresti?) (2a, p. 17), *Se pudesse escolher, por qual dessas formas você optaria?* (Se potessi scegliere, per quale di queste modalità opteresti?) e *Navegar pelos rios da bacia amazônica será realmente tão simples quanto o texto diz? Discuta* (Navigare sui fiumi del bacino amazzonico è così semplice come dice il testo? Discutine) (2 e 3, p. 120).

I *response items* del manuale possono portare lo studente a dare un giudizio morale e/o valutativo di eventi o situazioni del testo, come la domanda 4 di pagina 28 (*A posição de pessoas como Pelé e tantos outros esportistas e artistas negros dentro da sociedade brasileira não é, em si, uma prova da ausência de preconceito racial entre os brasileiros?* Discuta - La posizione di personalità come Pelé e di molti altri sportivi e artisti neri all'interno della società brasiliana non è, in sé, una prova dell'esistenza di un pregiudizio razziale fra i brasiliani?), la prima di pagina 17 (*Você acha que a ausência ou ineficiência de uma medicina social justifica a não realização de transplantes?* - Credi che l'assenza o l'inefficienza di un medicina sociale giustifichi il fatto che non si facciano trapianti?) e il quesito 1 di pagina 36 (*Você concorda com a opinião expressa neste texto? Discuta* - Concordi con l'opinione espressa in questo testo? Discutine.). Si chiede infine, con il quesito 10 di pagina 111, di trovare la morale del testo (*Na sua opinião, qual é a moral da história?* - Secondo te, qual è la morale della storia?). Inseriamo il grafico (Grafico 3) relativo.
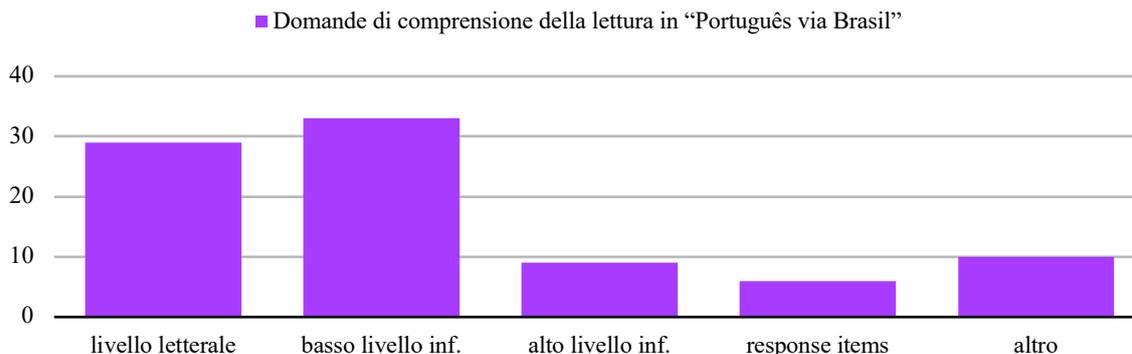
Domande di comprensione della lettura in "Português via Brasil"

Grafico 3
Grafico a barre che rappresenta sull'ordinata la somma del numero di quesiti per ogni tipologia riportata sull'ascissa.

Brasil intercultural - ciclo avançado níveis 5 e 6 (2014) è un libro didattico di PB, di livello avanzato (come attesta il sottotitolo), edito in Argentina da Casa do Brasil. La collana *Brasil intercultural* si compone di quattro moduli, chiamati *ciclo* (*básico*, *intermediário*, *avançado* e *avançado superior*[25]), non classificati secondo i criteri e i livelli del QECR. Il fulcro metodologico di questa serie didattica è l'insegnamento di aspetti socioculturali tipici del Brasile che il lettore può associare a quelli del proprio background;[26]

> le 8 unità sono organizzate intorno a temi contemporanei, che cercano di sviluppare non solo la formazione linguistica ma anche quella culturale e umana dello studente, poiché affrontano diversi aspetti che rivelano elementi sociali, storici e politici che caratterizzano la diversità culturale brasiliana. (Schrägle e Mendes 2014, p. 2)

All'interno delle unità non esiste un modello ricorrente, né dei contenuti né dell'organizzazione didattica; la comprensione della lettura è presentata per mezzo di diverse tipologie di testi, alcuni delle quali poco frequenti nella produzione pedagogico-linguistica, come pittogrammi, grafici, trafiletti pubblicitari e citazioni. In totale, i testi per la comprensione della lettura estratti dal manuale sono 47 e alcune attività rimandano a più testi.

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[25] Non è stato possibile consultare per intero l'ultimo manuale perché non ancora disponibile sul mercato europeo, nemmeno in formato digitale; tuttavia, dall'introduzione del libro, accessibile online dal sito della casa editrice, si è potuto comprovare che si tratta di un materiale di rinforzo e approfondimento per il terzo livello, quello avanzato. *Il Ciclo Avanzato Superiore* […] *ha l'obiettivo generale di migliorare le abilità comunicative e di interazione a un livello avanzato, nella produzione e ricezione di generi orali, scritti e multimodali di elevata complessità, come nel Ciclo Avanzato, ma ampliando i contesti di interazione per includere domini discorsivi più specializzati*. […] *L'attenzione agli aspetti formali della lingua rappresenta una ripresa dei contenuti già appresi nei Cicli e Livelli precedenti ed è sempre legata a situazioni linguistiche di uso* (http://brasilintercultural.com.ar/c_avanzadosuperior_estudio.php).

[26] I libri della serie però non specificano il pubblico target, rendendo tale comparazione approssimativa e generica.

Tra la data di edizione dell'ultimo manuale analizzato e quella di *Brasil intercultural - ciclo avançado* intercorrono quasi 10 anni, arco temporale in cui le nuove ricerche in campo linguistico-cognitivo hanno avuto modo di diffondersi, consolidarsi e, eventualmente, condizionare la produzione pedagogico-didattica. Nello specifico, notiamo che il manuale rompe con la tradizione metodologica relativa alla comprensione della lettura osservata finora, riducendo le domande di richiamo di informazioni fattuali e prediligendo quesiti che operano sul piano inferenziale del lettore. Infatti, le domande di alto livello inferenziale sono molte, 45, mentre le altre tre categorie più o meno si bilanciano. Così come *A actualidade em português*, anche questo materiale elabora input unendo tra loro quesiti di diversa tipologia, integrando le conoscenze pregresse dello studente e le informazioni visive del testo. Di fatto, sebbene ci siano domande di livello letterale, la maggior parte di esse appare come una tappa nel processo inferenziale: in questo modo, lo studente è portato a generare inferenze di qualità attraverso tale integrazione. Le domande sono presentate in modo graduale, seguono una logica di elaborazione che permette di esplicitare le inferenze generate durante la lettura e/o a generarne di nuove. Osserviamo l'attività di pagina 11:

(1)   *Segundo o narrador, o que aconteceu depois de1° de agosto de 1914? Em sua opinião por que ele usa este acontecimento como exemplo?*

       (Secondo il narratore, cosa successe dopo il 1° agosto 1914? Secondo te perché utilizza questo avvenimento come esempio?)

(2)   *Você consegue pensar em outros "mundo" não mencionados pelo autor que também já acabarem em nossa sociedade?*

       (Riesci a pensare ad altri "mondi" non menzionati dall'autore che si sono già conclusi nella nostra società?)

(3)   *Por que se afirma no fim da crônica que os astros é que devem ter medo de nós? O que você pensa sobre isso?*

       (Perché alla fine della cronaca si afferma che sono gli astri a dover aver paura i noi? Cosa ne pensi?)

(4)   *Há algum costume perdido que você sinta falta? Por quê?*

       (C'è una qualche tradizione ormai scomparsa di cui senti la mancanza? Perché?)

(5)   *Você tem percebido muitas mudanças em seu dia a dia?*

       (Hai notato molti cambiamenti nella tua quotidianità?)

(6)   *A que elementos de sua época você tem mais apego? E quais são os que não têm? Justifique.*

       (A quali elementi dei tuoi anni sei più affezionato? E a quali non lo sei? Giustifica.)

(7)   *O narrador contrasta duas formas "fim do mundo". Quais são elas? Neste sentido, qual seria o papel do cotidiano?*

       (Il narratore mette in contrasto due modalità di "fine del mondo". Quali? A questo proposito, quale sarebbe il ruolo della quotidianità?)

(8) *Retire da crônica, trechos em que está presente a memória do narrador. Como ela se relaciona com o resto do texto?*

(Prendi dalla cronaca dei brani in cui sono presenti i ricordi del narratore. Come si collegano al resto del testo?)

(9) *Por que ele afirma que não é possível medir o cometa em escala métrica? O que o astro representava em sua infância?*

(Perché afferma che non è possibile misurare la cometa su una scala metrica? Cosa rappresentava l'astro nella sua infanzia?)

Il quesito 1 si compone di una prima domanda di livello letterale e di un *response item*, che promuove il giudizio e l'esperienza del lettore. Similmente, la domanda 7 si divide in un quesito di livello letterale e in uno di alto livello inferenziale. Di alto livello inferenziale è la domanda numero 2, mentre la 3 presenta come quesito iniziale un input di basso livello inferenziale e, secondariamente, un *response item*. La domanda 9 è formata da un quesito di basso livello inferenziale, come la seconda parte della domanda 8,[27] e da uno di livello letterale. Infine, le domande 4, 5 e 6 non sono riconducibili a nessuna delle quattro categorie della griglia metodologica (sono extra-testuali - *altro*).

Le domande di opinione su temi sociali e culturali sottostanti i brani, come le tre appena soprammenzionate, offrono allo studente la possibilità di formare il proprio pensiero critico ma, allo stesso tempo, conducono esclusivamente all'attivazione delle proprie conoscenze pregresse, senza interagire con il testo specifico. Tali domande, etichettate sotto la voce *altro*, sono indipendenti dalla lettura del brano e sarebbero molto più appropriate in un momento di pre-lettura, perché non cercano l'integrazione tra ciò che lo studente già possiede e ciò che riceve dal testo. Vediamo come esempio l'attività a pagina 5, dove le domande 4, 5, 6 e 7 non integrano la relazione lettore-testo, mentre le prime tre sono di alto livello inferenziale, in quanto richiedono il coinvolgimento di conoscenze pregresse e il giudizio sul testo derivante dal loro uso.

(1) *Que mensagem o poema lhe passou?*
(Quale messaggio ti ha trasmesso la poesia?)

(2) *Que possibilidades de leitura o poema nos apresenta?*
(Quali possibili letture ci presenta la poesia?)

(3) *Que interpretações a palavra "mudo", ao final do poema, pode ter?*
(Quali interpretazioni può avere la parola"muto", alla fine della poesia?)

(4) *Você, alguma vez, já quis mudar tudo em sua vida? Por quê?*
(Hai mai voluto cambiare la tua vita? Perché?)

(5) *Que coisas você já mudou na sua vida e quais ainda gostaria de mudar?*

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[27] Il quesito si apre con un esercizio di riconoscimento visivo.

(Quali cose hai già cambiato nella tua vita e quali altre vorresti cambiare?)

(6)   *Há alguma coisa que você não mudaria jamais? Qual e por quê?*
       (C'è qualcosa che non cambieresti mai? Quale e perché?)

(7)   *Em sua opinião, as mudanças são necessárias? Em que contextos? Justifique.*
       (Secondo te i cambiamenti sono necessari? In quali contesti? Giustifica.)

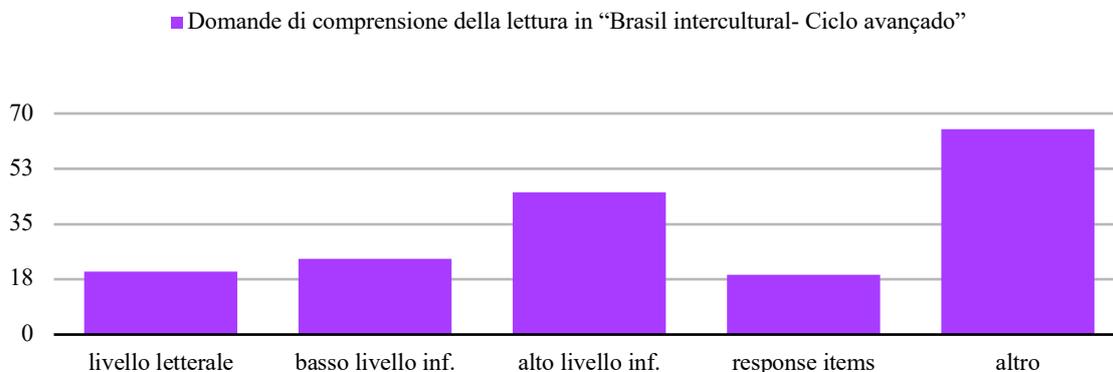Osserviamo il grafico (Grafico 4) rispetto a quest'ultima analisi.

Grafico 4
Grafico a barre che rappresenta sull'ordinata la somma del numero di quesiti per ogni tipologia riportata sull'ascissa.

Histórias de bolso (2016) è un materiale di PE di supporto della casa editrice LIDEL, fruibile sia in regime scolastico che autodidatta, specifico per la lettura di testi letterali di vari autori lusofoni e con regole grammaticali ed esercizi presentati alla fine del libro. Si sviluppa su un livello di competenza linguistica B2/C1 del QECR e raccoglie 22 testi connessi ad altrettanti *exercícios de compreensão*. Queste attività sono state escluse dall'analisi perché si compongono esclusivamente di domande chiuse di tipo vero/falso e scelta multipla; tuttavia, per la presente analisi è stata selezionata l'attività di comprensione della lettura nominata *tema de discussão*.

        Come osservato per il libro didattico precedente, anche in questo caso le domande letterali lasciano il posto a quesiti operativi sul piano inferenziale: notiamo, infatti, che esiste solo una domanda di livello letterale e 5 di basso livello inferenziale, mentre le domande di alto livello raggiungono quota 15 e i *response items* arrivano a 6. Tale risultato può essere dedotto dal fatto che gli *exercícios de compreensão* espletano la funzione di codifica, riempimento e riconoscimento visivo; di conseguenza, l'inclusione di quesiti di tale tipologia nell'attività *tema de discussão* risulterebbe ridondante e poco attinente. Inoltre, l'obiettivo dell'attività è fornire spunti di riflessione atti a innescare un ragionamento, un dialogo: per questa caratteristica intrinseca dell'esercizio, sono presenti 11 quesiti di opinione che non dipendono dal testo ma solo dal

tema soggiacente, come si è osservato per il caso di *Brasil intercultural*. Vediamo due esempi:

(1)   *Qual é, na sua opinião, o alcance metafórico deste conto?*
       (Secondo te, qual è la portata metaforica di questo racconto?)
(2)   *Modos de consumo responsável nas sociedades contemporâneas.*
       (Metodi di consumo responsabile nelle società contemporanee.)
(3)   *Os danos provocados pela ação humana são irreversíveis?*
       (I danni provocati dall'azione umana sono irreversibili?)

L'attività illustrata (p. 26) mette il lettore di fronte alla necessità di recuperare le proprie conoscenze ed esperienze del mondo: di fatto, il primo quesito, un *response items*, porta a una riflessione di tipo morale relativa al testo, senza condizionare il processo inferenziale dello studente. Similmente, la terza richiesta, stimola il pensiero critico del soggetto ma si allontana dal testo, diventando generica: non si discosta il secondo input che, sebbene escluso dall'analisi in quanto domanda implicita, rispecchia il focus dell'attività di produzione relativa a tematiche attuali non socialmente e culturalmente marcate dal contesto geopolitico portoghese.

Gli esempi seguenti (p. 20), invece riportano una domanda letterale (1), la cui risposta si palesa nel testo; una seconda (2), di alto livello inferenziale che ammette una risposta inferita su una possibile causa per tale evento o situazione e, infine, una terza (3), extra-testuale, che continua a interagire con il processo inferenziale e di espressione personale del lettore.

(1)   *Quais eram as intenções na celebração do 10 de junho?*
       (Quali erano le intenzioni delle celebrazioni del 10 giugno?)
(2)   *Porque é que a língua do tradutor era "amarga para uns e doce para outros"?*
       (Perché la lingua del traduttore era "amara per alcuni e dolce per altri"?)
(3)   *O contexto pode justificar uma tradução infiel. Concorda ou discorda?*
       (Il contesto può giustificare una traduzione infedele. Concordi o discordi?)

L'analisi di *Histórias de bolso* mette in evidenza un distinto approccio verso le attività di lettura, divergente rispetto a quello notato nel resto del corpus. Notiamo infatti una diminuzione delle domande di riconoscimento visivo di singoli elementi o relazioni che, gradualmente, lasciano il posto a quesiti innescanti processi inferenziali di alta qualità. È altresì vero che i manuali più recenti separano in distinti esercizi gli input letterali da quelli inferenziali, collocando i primi in attività chiuse (vero/falso e scelta multipla) che la nostra analisi non ha preso in esame. Proponiamo ora il grafico (Grafico 5) dell'analisi.
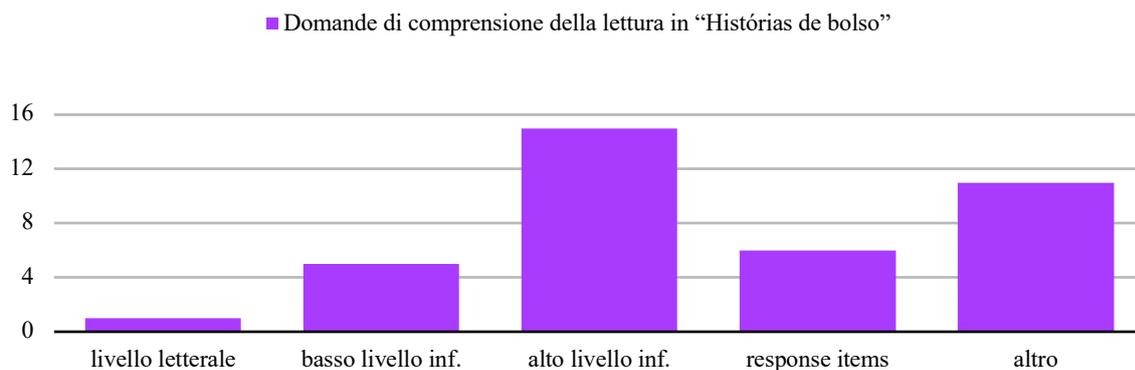
■ Domande di comprensione della lettura in "Histórias de bolso"

Grafico 5
Grafico a barre che rappresenta sull'ordinata la somma del numero di quesiti per ogni tipologia riportata sull'ascissa.

Português em foco 4 (2019) è l'ultimo volume della collana iniziata nel 2015 dalla casa editrice LIDEL: contiene 12 unità ricche di contenuti sociopragmatici[28] relativi alla cultura, agli usi e ai costumi portoghesi, dando spazio ad alcuni autori della letteratura lusofona. Ogni unità è equilibrata nelle sue parti: le cinque competenze linguistiche del QECR sono presenti in ugual misura e le regole grammaticali sono esposte in modo chiaro e conciso, per mezzo di tabelle e schemi. Si noti anche una presenza notevole ma mai eccessiva di illustrazioni e foto, che permettono al lettore di inferire e trarre informazioni, collaborando alla formazione del significato implicito del testo o dell'esercizio. Il manuale nella sua interezza contiene 63 testi di cui la metà mirati alla comprensione della lettura. Non tutti però riportano domande aperte: di fatto, a undici brani sono associate attività di comprensione semantica o rilevamento di relazioni semantiche che, per tale motivo, sono stati esclusi dall'analisi. Altri input e domande non incluse in questo studio operano a livello del significato di frasi o espressioni; sebbene il lettore per rispondere a tali esercizi debba attivare un processo inferenziale che lo porta a riflettere sul testo e in funzione del testo, questi prevedono soltanto il recupero della conoscenza lessicale e grammaticale della lingua. Altre domande invece entrano a far parte della tipologia di alto livello inferenziale perché non si limitano al mero atto traduttivo, ma richiedono invece un'interpretazione di tipo inferenziale.

Le domande di livello letterale o di basso livello inferenziale delle attività di lettura di *Português em foco 4* raggiungono, rispettivamente, quota 23 e 18; a seguire, solo 12 sono i quesiti di alto livello inferenziale e soltanto 8 i *response items*. Come osservato nei due manuali precedenti, anche in questo caso, sebbene in percentuale molto ridotta, compaiono input legati

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[28] Come prevedibile per un livello avanzato, il manuale investe molto sulle espressioni idiomatiche e sui proverbi. Anche gli altri manuali di uguale livello presentano tale focus.

all'elaborazione di opinioni relativi a temi attuali ma dissociati dal testo specifico. Vediamo due esempi di attività:

(1) *Identifique as quatro fases da imigração em Angola.*
      (Identifica le quattro fasi dell'immigrazione in Angola.)

(2) *No início do texto, o autor usa os verbos exportar e importar. Qual sentido pretende o autor dar a estes verbos?*
      (All'inizio del testo l'autore usa i verbi esportare e importare. Quale significato vuole dare a questi verbi?)

(3) *De acordo com o texto, em 1974, Angola passou a exportar outros "produtos". A que produtos se refere o texto?*
      (Secondo il testo, nel 1974 l'Angola iniziò a esportare altri "prodotti". A quali prodotti si riferisce il testo)

(4) *De acordo com o texto, atualmente quem está a regressar a Angola?*
      (Secondo il testo, ai giorni d'oggi chi sta ritornando in Angola?)

(5) *Interprete as palavras do autor na frase "...vem também muito Chico Esperto a tentar aldrabar o patrício, já não com missangas, mas com projetos de obras faraónicas".*
      (Interpreta le parole dell'autore nella frase: "…vengono anche molti furbetti a cercare di fregare il riccone, non più con braccialetti di perline, ma con progetti di cantieri faraonici".)

(6) *Para o autor, Angola é, decididamente, um país de imigração. Na perspetiva do autor, isso é positivo ou negativo? Justifique com excertos do texto.*
      (Secondo l'autore, l'Angola è decisamente un paese di immigrazione. Dal punto di vista dell'autore, è positivo o negativo? Giustifica con brani del testo.)

(7) *Segundo o autor, que tipo de mão de obra entra em Angola? Dê exemplos do texto.*
      (Secondo l'autore, che tipo di mano d'opera entra in Angola? Fornisci esempi dal testo.)

(8) *No final do texto, o autor apresenta a sua perspetiva relativamente ao modo como a imigração deve ser encarada no seu país. Faça referência a essa ideia defendida pelo autor e diga se concorda ou não com ele.*
      (Alla fine del testo, l'autore presenta il suo punto di vista su come dovrebbe essere affrontata l'immigrazione nel suo paese. Fai dei riferimenti a questa idea portata avanti dall'autore e dì se concordi o meno con lui.)

L'attività presentata nelle pagine 127-128 si compone di tutte e quattro le tipologie di domande. Come appare evidente la prima e l'ultima sono domande implicite, perciò non rientrano nel conteggio: è comunque possibile ricondurle a delle categorie, ovvero, la prima è di livello letterale e l'ultimo un *response item*. Anche il quesito 6 appartiene a tale tipologia, in quanto stimola il lettore a elaborare un giudizio sulle posizioni esplicite dell'autore; ciò non permetterebbe però la genesi di un pensiero personale e autentico dell'apprendente, limitato dal dover giustificare la sua risposta in base alle

informazioni del testo. Similmente, i quesiti 3 e 4 di livello letterale e il 7 di basso livello inferenziale presentano tale rimando, ridondante, al brano, attraverso le formule *de acordo com o texto* o *dê exemplos do texto*. Infine, le domande 2 e 5 sono di alto livello inferenziale, basate sul processo di formazione di ipotesi inferite dalla lettura. Passiamo alla proposta delle pagine 144-145:

(1) *Por que motivo se afirma que é praticamente impossível traçar com exatidão a biografia de Luís Vaz de Camões? Justifique a sua resposta fazendo referência ao Texto B.*

     (Per quale motivo si afferma che è praticamente impossibile delineare con esattezza la biografia di Luís Vaz de Camões? Giustifica la tua risposta facendo riferimento al Testo B.)

(2) *Identifique expressões do Texto B que indiquem incerteza relativamente ao que está a ser relatado.*

     (Identifica espressioni del Testo B che indichino incertezza rispetto a ciò di cui si parla.)

(3) *Caracterize a família de Luís Vaz de Camões.*

     (Descrivi la famiglia di Luís Vaz de Camões.)

(4) *De acordo com o Texto B, por que motivo Camões foi desterrado para Constância?*

     (Secondo il Testo B, per quale motivo Camões è stato esiliato a Constância?)

(5) *Por que motivo se diz que Camões não terá sido muito feliz na sua passagem pela Ásia? Justifique a sua resposta fazendo referência ao Texto B.*

     (Per quale motivo si dice che Camões non fu molto felice nel suo viaggio in Asia? Giustifica la tua risposta facendo riferimento al Testo B.)

(6) *O que podemos dizer sobre os últimos anos de vida de Camões?*

     (Cosa possiamo dire degli ultimi anni di vita di Camões?)

(7) *Por que motivo ainda hoje celebramos o dia 10 de junho em Portugal e nas comunidades lusófonas espalhadas pelo mundo?*

     (Per quale motivo ancora oggi festeggiamo il 10 giugno in Portogallo e nelle comunità lusofone sparse per il mondo?)

(8) *Em Macau, ainda hoje se celebra o dia 10 de junho. Fale um pouco sobre esta e outras festividades e de que modo contribuem para a promoço da língua portuguesa.*

     (A Macau ancora oggi si festeggia la ricorrenza del 10 giugno. Parla un po' di questa e di altre festività e del modo in cui contribuiscono alla divulgazione della lingua portoghese.)

Anche in questa attività si ritrovano input (8) e domande implicite che possono essere categorizzate come di livello letterale (2, 3), così come i quesiti 5 e 6. La domanda 7 è l'unica di alto livello inferenziale mentre le altre (1 e 4)

appartengono alla categoria di basso livello inferenziale: si noti il continuo e ridondante rimando al testo. Esponiamo infine l'ultimo grafico (Grafico 6).

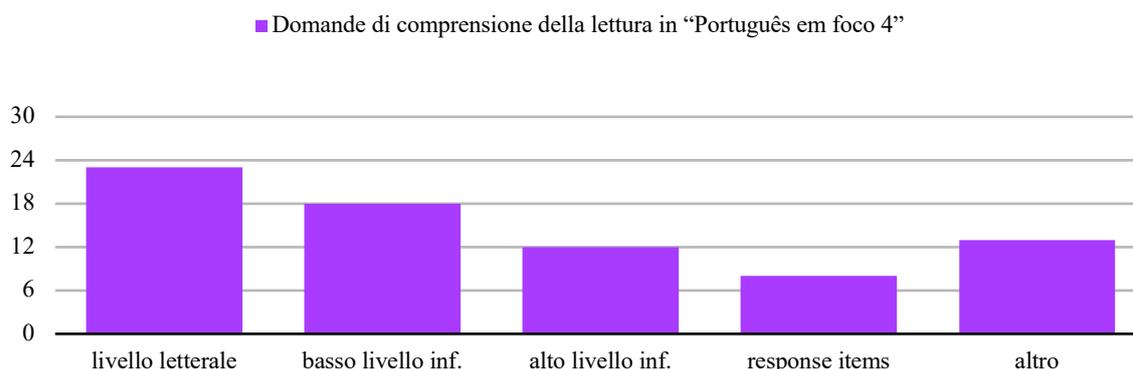■ Domande di comprensione della lettura in "Português em foco 4"

Grafico 6
Grafico a barre che rappresenta sull'ordinata la somma del numero di quesiti per ogni tipologia riportata sull'ascissa.

Sebbene *Português em foco 4* sia l'esemplare del corpus più recente, non prosegue il *continuum* evolutivo delle attività di lettura che abbiamo potuto osservare per gli altri manuali, e, a differenza di *Brasil intercultural* e *Histórias de bolso*, la sua creazione pare non considerare sufficientemente l'impatto educativo delle inferenze. Di fatto, questo materiale cerca un equilibrio tra le varie tipologie di testi e attività, pur mostrando una leggera predominanza di quesiti che agiscono sul piano superficiale. I continui rimandi al testo e i diversi input mirati al vocabolario non fanno altro che consolidare la tesi secondo cui le attività di lettura del manuale sono state elaborate come strumento di potenziamento di aspetti grammaticali e lessicali della lingua e, solo in un secondo momento, come mezzo di azione per stabilire una lettura interattiva tra testo e lettore.

5. Conclusioni

Come rivelano i dati, non esisterebbe, nell'asse diacronico di questo ristretto corpus, uno sviluppo omogeneo e condiviso delle attività di lettura propenso all'incremento di input di alto livello inferenziale e di *response items*, ovvero verso una lettura più profonda rispetto alla semplice comprensione letterale del testo. Sebbene alcuni manuali riportino un numero maggiore di proposte didattiche che attivano processi inferenziali rispetto a quelle di livello letterale o quasi,[29] altre continuano a fossilizzarsi sul riconoscimento visivo e meccanico delle informazioni superficiali racchiuse nei testi: in questi casi, il ruolo che l'apprendente assume è di soggetto passivo, incaricato soltanto di

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[29] Come riportato, quest'ultime, in alcuni casi, fungono da input per domande inferenziali.

riprodurre i significati generati dalla lettura. Quando vengono presentate domande che attivano processi cognitivi superiori alla mera individuazione di elementi visibili nel testo, esse non sempre guidano lo studente nel processo inferenziale e non tengono conto delle sue conoscenze pregresse. Il testo è percepito dunque come un prodotto di cui il lettore deve coglierne il significato superficiale.

Lo scarto temporale fisiologico tra ricerca scientifica e produzione di materiali didattici aggiornati è uno dei fattori che spiegherebbe, come nel caso di questo specifico corpus, un'organizzazione dell'insegnamento della lettura come processo che mira, solo in parte, allo sviluppo delle competenze inferenziali. È di fatto opportuno rilevare la distanza e la saltuaria interazione tra mondo accademico e quello dell'editoria: i libri didattici consultati operano sulla lettura in modo totalmente, o parzialmente, asistematico, nonostante le ricerche abbiano dimostrato che è possibile sistematizzare e organizzare didatticamente le proposte in modo da essere loro stesse materia di studio. Il libro di testo cerca quindi il controllo e il condizionamento sul lettore e continua a essere una guida di processi cognitivi passivi e non promotore di comportamenti che elevano lo studente al ruolo di soggetto attivo, capace di interagire con il testo e con le sue conoscenze pregresse, specialmente a un livello linguistico avanzato.

In conclusione, l'analisi, sebbene circoscritta a un piccolo corpus, ha messo in luce l'esigenza di modificare gli obiettivi delle domande di lettura affinché lo studente possa riflettere sul testo e rispondere ai suoi quesiti, e per mezzo del testo stesso giustificare le proprie inferenze. A questo proposito, anche la visione del libro didattico deve essere ripensata e le sue finalità ristrutturate nell'ottica di attività di lettura che tengano conto delle inferenze generate dagli studenti. Pertanto, è fondamentale riaffermare il ruolo centrale del processo inferenziale per la comprensione di testi, dentro e fuori il contesto di apprendimento, poiché l'inferenza permette al lettore di attribuire un significato, evocando informazioni che devono essere aggiunte a quelle fornite sulla superficie testuale: in altre parole, fare inferenze genera una lettura interattiva, la quale permette al soggetto attivo di completare sia a livello morfologico, sintattico, semantico e pragmatico, il messaggio globale del testo.

I futuri svolgimenti di questa ricerca cercheranno di osservare la relazione tra i processi inferenziali e le tipologie testuali, includendo i relativi quesiti di comprensione. Secondo Quesada *et al.* (2021, p. 7), l'elaborazione delle inferenze è dipesa anche dalla tipologia di testo[30] e dal grado di familiarità

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[30] Dell'Isola (2004) ha realizzato uno studio sulla comprensione del testo narrativo attraverso domande che richiedevano risposte visibili nel testo e quesiti inferenziali, dimostrando che, nonostante statisticamente non ci fosse una differenza significativa tra le due tipologie di risposte, si riscontrava una maggiore divergenza nelle *performance* di comprensione degli studenti che hanno risposto alle domande inferenziali.

che il lettore possiede con essa, cioè con le sue esperienze pregresse relative alle peculiarità contestuali e alle piste interpretative che una categoria testuale offre. Di fatto, osservando il nostro corpus e riconoscendo una selezione minuziosa di testi autentici e completi da parte degli autori, non è stata rilevata una differenziazione saliente tra le tipologie di domande esposte. I quesiti sono presentati allo stesso modo, fattore che impedisce all'apprendente di riconoscere quando un input presuppone per il suo svolgimento un processo inferenziale, o il recupero mediante la memoria visiva di informazioni manifeste nel testo.

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ESTRATEGIAS EVIDENCIALES MEDIANTE FORMAS VERBALES EN ESPAÑOL EUROPEO
Reflexiones en torno a su didáctica en ELE

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Abstract – This paper aims to offer a reflection on the importance of teaching evidential mechanisms in intermediate and advanced levels of Spanish as a foreign language, with the aim of improving the understanding of the non-prototypical meanings conveyed by three verb tenses in European Spanish: the past imperfect, the future and the conditional, both in simple and compound forms. The *Nueva gramática de la lengua española* (2009) and the *Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes* (2006) propose interpretations related to epistemic modality for these secondary uses; however, we believe that evidential interpretation would facilitate comprehension by learners of Spanish. Finally, an observation will be made of how these contents are presented in the teaching materials and some suggestions will be made for their didactics.

Keywords: evidentiality; text comprehension; Spanish as foreign language.

1. Introducción

En las últimas décadas, el propósito principal de los programas de ELE ha sido desarrollar la competencia comunicativa con el fin de que los aprendientes sean capaces de actuar de manera eficaz y adecuada en situaciones reales de comunicación e interacción.[1] Como consecuencia de este planteamiento, los contenidos gramaticales han quedado supeditados a su uso en las funciones comunicativas o en las tareas que se proponen y, por supuesto, la reflexión explícita sobre los mecanismos lingüísticos ha estado ausente en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras. Sin embargo, consideramos que la reflexión metalingüística es una herramienta muy útil en niveles intermedios y avanzados para perfeccionar las destrezas escritas u orales. Emplear la reflexión en vez de la intuición puede revelarse un método muy beneficioso para lograr la completa comprensión de los engranajes que subyacen en un texto.

Esta perspectiva resulta de gran utilidad cuando se tratan significados lingüísticos presentes tanto en la L1 como en la L2, cuya codificación y distribución funcional difiere entre ambas lenguas, como es el caso de las

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[1] Véanse el PCIC y el MCER

funciones evidenciales que poseen los tiempos verbales que tratamos en este trabajo. El peligro de transferencia de L1 podría evitarse empleando la reflexión explícita sobre unidades análogas en las dos lenguas que, sin embargo, despliegan significados diferentes.

El objetivo de este trabajo es mostrar los significados no prototípicos de carácter evidencial de tres tiempos de Indicativo en español europeo: el pretérito imperfecto, el futuro y el condicional, comprobar si los resultados de la investigación lingüística sobre la evidencialidad han logrado tener cabida en algunos de los manuales de enseñanza de ELE más utilizados y, al mismo tiempo, proponer que se refuercen las actividades de reflexión en el aula para que los aprendientes alcancen una completa comprensión discursiva.

Según los objetivos expuestos, comenzaré en la sección 2 repasando el concepto de evidencialidad; en la sección 3 llevaré a cabo la presentación de los significados no prototípicos de los tiempos verbales objeto de este estudio; en la 4, presentaré su tratamiento en el PCIC y en algunos de los manuales más acreditados y recientes. La sección 5 presenta algunas reflexiones como cierre del trabajo.

2. El concepto de evidencialidad

La evidencialidad es una categoría semántica que comprende los mecanismos lingüísticos que indican la fuente de información del contenido proposicional de un determinado enunciado. Puede ser que el hablante base su aserción en un conocimiento directo de los hechos, que haya deducido lo que afirma o que alguien se lo haya transmitido:

(1)   Las dos carpetas incluyen recortes con poemas y breves ensayos. Uno de los poemas exalta a Kamal Ataturk, el fundador de la nueva Turquía. Observo los recortes y **veo** que todos proceden de la misma publicación, titulada y subtitulada en español. (CORPES. José Luis García Martín [2004]: "Tempestades y cataclismos". *La Razón.* Madrid: Grupo Planeta, 2004-03-04).

(2)   Para el jurado ha supuesto una gran satisfacción que haya sido elegido Barceló, primero porque realmente lo que pretendíamos es que se premiara a un artista español. No hablábamos de ninguna disciplina particular, peri sí de que fuera un creador nacional, y entre las interesantes propuestas se eligió por mayoría al pintor mallorquín. **Debe de** representar una gran satisfacción para cualquier artista plástico saber que esta disciplina ha sido premiada, algo que no ocurría en mucho tiempo. (CORPES. Rosina Gómez Baeza [2003]: "Respeto por un gran artista". *El País.com.* Madrid: elpais.com, 2003-06-17).

(3)   El tipo, que se presentó a las diez en el piso, en nada se parecía al que había abordado a Pedro en la puerta del metro, pues llegó bien trajeado y apestando a colonia. A la media hora de cena ya les había roto todos los esquemas: **por lo visto** mendigaba en cuatro esquinas muy buenas, disponía de atuendos adecuados para cada una de ellas y había diseñado una tabla de horarios según

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> los momentos en que, según sus cálculos, cada esquina tenía mayor trasiego de gente. (CORPES. Lucía Etxebarría [2001]: *De todo lo visible y lo invisible. Una novela sobre el amor y otras mentiras*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe).

En (1), el verbo de percepción *ver* añade la información de la testimonialidad directa del hablante y del empleo del medio de percepción visual en que se basa su aserción de que todos los textos a los que se refiere proceden de una misma publicación. En cambio, en (2) y (3), el hablante, mediante un verbo modal y una locución adverbial respectivamente, indica que el contenido proposicional de su enunciado deriva en el segundo ejemplo, de una fuente indirecta, una inferencia del propio emisor, mientras que en el último ejemplo, lo que enuncia se basa en el discurso de terceros, de "otros". En los tres casos, el hablante declara la modalidad de acceso al conocimiento y lo justifica con la fuente.

En los estudios lingüísticos, la definición de la evidencialidad es una cuestión muy debatida porque algunos autores, entre ellos Willett (1988) y Aikhenvald (2004),[2] consideran que solo podemos hablar de categoría gramatical en una lengua si esta posee un paradigma morfológico gramaticalizado con un significado primario que indique la fuente de conocimiento, como ocurre en algunas lenguas amerindias, australianas y balcánicas, entre otras (González Vázquez 2006: 31). Sin embargo, otros autores defienden que, desde una perspectiva amplia, la fuente de información se puede expresar o estar implícita en todas las lenguas, no solo en aquellas que la codifican morfológicamente. De hecho, en los últimos años, la categoría de la evidencialidad ha sido aplicada a las lenguas románicas,[3] es decir, a lenguas que no poseen morfemas especializados con esa labor, pero sí tienen, en cambio, significados gramaticales y léxicos que ejercen esa función. Así pues, en este trabajo asumimos la concepción amplia de evidencialidad: es decir, una categoría funcional vehiculada mediante significados lingüísticos diferentes, cuyo objetivo es indicar la fuente de información del contenido que se transmite. Como afirma Plungian:

> While semantics is universal and largely language-indipendent, the difference between gramatical and lexical expression is highly language-specific and is determined by formal rather than semantic criteria (such as obligatoriness, paradigmaticity, etc.). Obviously, the same semantic elements may have grammatical expression in one language and lexical expression in another (and may even have both kinds of expression in a single language); more important is that som semantic elements appear not to be grammaticalized in any language. Those which are suitable for grammaticalization (i.e. are grammaticalized in at

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[2] Numerosos trabajos se han ocupado de clasificar el dominio de la evidencialidad: Cornillie *et al.* (2015), De Haan (1999), Diewald and Smirnova (2010), Marín Arrese (2015), Plungian (2001), Willet (1988).

[3] Veánse, por ejemplo, Cornillie (2007), Hennemann (2013), Squartini (2001, 2004).

least one language) form a privileged semantic area called 'universal grammatical space'. (Plungian 2001, p. 350)

De este modo, en lenguas que no codifican morfológicamente la evidencialidad, la información sobre la fuente de información corre a cargo de significados secundarios que ciertos elementos lingüísticos han desarrollado para vehicular la lectura evidencial. En español son varios los elementos que proporcionan indicaciones sobre las fuentes. Este es el caso de ciertos verbos auxiliares, algunos tiempos verbales, adverbios oracionales, conjunciones y locuciones consecutivas.[4]

En los trabajos clásicos sobre este tema, se suelen catalogar los evidenciales teniendo en cuenta si el hablante ha sido testigo presencial a través de alguno de los sentidos o no. Willett (1988, p. 57) proporciona una de las clasificaciones más utilizadas en los trabajos sobre evidencialidad:

Tipos de evidencialidad

Directa		Indirecta inferencial	Indirecta transmitida
Visual		Pruebas observables	Segunda mano
Auditiva		Razonamiento	Tercera mano
Otros sentidos			Folclore[5]

Tabla 1
Tipos de evidencialidad según Willett (1988).

Existen otras clasificaciones, aunque básicamente, podemos sintetizar el fenómeno así: cuando el hablante ha experimentado el contenido que transmite, estamos ante evidencialidad directa. Se habla, en cambio, de evidencialidad indirecta cuando el hablante ha obtenido la información bien a través de procesos cognitivos propios, o bien mediante un proceso comunicativo, concretamente a partir del discurso de otros.

2.1. Evidencialidad y modalidad epistémica

En uno de los primeros estudios de lingüística española en el que se trataba el tema de la evidencialidad, su autora, Graciela Reyes, asociaba el concepto a la actitud epistémica del hablante respecto a su enunciado:

Se llama *evidencial* (por préstamo del inglés *evidential*) a un tipo de significado transmitido, en determinados contextos, por ciertas formas del verbo y por algunas construcciones adverbiales. Este significado se produce cuando el

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[4] En el panorama de la lingüística española hemos asistido a un gran interés por el estudio de la evidencialidad desde varios puntos de vista: Cornillie (2007, 2009, 2010), Leonetti y Escandell 2003, Rodríguez Ramalle (2007, 2008), Squartini (2008).

[5] Para Willett (1988), el folclore forma parte del conocimiento tradicional que se transmite de generación en generación.

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hablante tiene la intención de expresar algún escrúpulo acerca del conocimiento de lo que afirma, especialmente cuando quiere indicar que es algo que ha inferido o que le han contado. (Reyes 1994, p. 25)

En las lenguas que no presentan la evidencialidad gramaticalizada, es decir, que no muestran un sistema regular de afijos gramaticales que indiquen la fuente y el modo de acceso a la información que se transmite sino que solo poseen estrategias evidenciales (Aikhenvald 2004, pp. 18-20), la relación semántica entre esta categoría y modalidad epistémica es una de las principales cuestiones que contribuyen a la complejidad del fenómeno, dado que la coexistencia de dos funciones en la misma forma hace difícil establecer los límites de cada una de ellas.

La modalidad epistémica expresa los diferentes grados de compromiso del hablante con la verdad de la proposición y, para algunos autores, como Chafe y Nichols (1986) y Willett (1988), al señalar la fuente de información el hablante expone su grado de compromiso con la certeza de lo que afirma y esto comporta una evaluación subjetiva sobre la fiabilidad de dicha fuente. Otros autores, como Biber y Finegan (1989) consideran que la modalidad pertenece al dominio de la evidencialidad. Por último, una tercera corriente, postula que se trata de categorías independientes, aunque interaccionen entre ellas, porque la fuente de información no implica la actitud del emisor (Cornillie 2007, 2009, 2016; De Haan 1999, 2001, 2005; González Vázquez 2016; Lazard 1999, 2001).[6]

En nuestra opinión, la mayor o menor distancia del hablante respecto a lo comunicado es un efecto discursivo, es decir, depende de la combinación del significado lingüístico con otros elementos contextuales. Prueba de ello es la imposibilidad de atribuir a cada elemento evidencial una interpretación unívoca y estable de compromiso epistémico:

> Evidentials do not have an intrinsic epistemic component. Any epistemic value comes from the contextual interaction with the hearer (reader). Note that this is different from real epistemic modals, because there the epistemic value is determined by the speaker (and the hearer can still disagree with that value). (De Haan 2005, p. 384)

3. Tiempos verbales de Indicativo con significado evidencial

Este trabajo se centra en la observación de algunos usos y valores no centrales de tres tiempos verbales, el pretérito imperfecto, el futuro y el condicional, y

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[6] Sobre el estado de la cuestión véanse Dendale y Tasmowski (2001, pp. 340-343) y González Ruiz, Izquierdo Alegría y Loureda Lamas (2016, pp. 13-20).

en su tratamiento en algunos de los manuales más utilizados para la enseñanza de ELE.

Las funciones evindenciales que destacamos son rasgos secundarios, *evidentiality strategies,* (Aikhenvald 2004) que se añaden al significado básico temporal de estas unidades. El nexo común de los tiempos aquí estudiados es la no testimonialidad del hablante respecto a la información que transmite.

En lo que sigue, ofreceremos una explicación del carácter evidencial, que luego puede interpretarse en términos de modalidad epistémica. Intentaremos demostrar por qué es más útil separar ambas categorías, a pesar de que en la NGLE (2009) considera la evidencialidad como una "noción que designa el compromiso personal del hablante con la veracidad de la información transmitida o con la fuente de la que procede" (§22.11h)

Nos proponemos demostrar que las definiciones de tipo modal son interpretaciones discursivas y, precisamente por esto, no son estables ni unívocas. Sí lo es, en cambio la lectura evidencial. Como ya advertía Comrie (1985, p. 28): "(…) the failure to distinguish between meaning and implicature is one of the main problems in working out an adequate characterization of tenses". Así pues, desde nuestro punto de vista, sería de gran utilidad separar los significados de las formas verbales de las diferentes lecturas o interpretaciones que puedan producir en entornos diferentes. Sin olvidar la importancia de la gradualidad en el aprendizaje de una lengua, nos parece que introducir el concepto de evidencialidad paralelamente al significado temporal de estos tiempos, facilitaría la comprensión y la producción de construcciones que poseen una alta frecuencia en la lengua. Asimismo, distinguir entre significado básico e interpretación pragmática nos parece una herramienta sumamente útil en el proceso de aprendizaje de la L2.

3.1. Pretérito imperfecto

Algunos usos del imperfecto, como en (4b), parecen no respetar el principio de incompatibilidad de un tiempo pretérito con un predicado prospectivo[7] y, sin embargo, el significado para los hablantes está claro. En este caso, el hablante que emite b sabe de la cita de María y cuándo tendrá lugar. Lo que transmite es una información cuya fuente es atribuible a "otros", al discurso de terceros.

(4)   a. ¿Sabes cómo está María?
       b. Tenía cita con el médico mañana.

La NGLE (2009), para explicar lo que denomina "usos modales del pretérito imperfecto", recurre a la noción de un dominio o un marco anterior al momento del habla en el que se sitúa el evento de referencia.

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[7] Para un análisis detallado y exhaustivo de las supuestas incompatibilidades véase Leonetti y Escandell Vidal (2003).

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> Tal entorno se presenta unas veces como situación pretérita, otras como escenario, como espacio mental paralelo o como plano inactual, entre otras denominaciones introducidas en varios sistemas terminológicos. En estos análisis, el pretérito imperfecto no ha de poseer un pretérito como antecedente temporal (…). En su lugar, la situación pasada ha de suponerse que es abstracta y ha de ser evocada por el hablante aunque no esté verbalizada." (NGLE, §23.11.a).

La noción de marco o escenario que evoca el pretérito imperfecto subyace, según la *Nueva Gramática*, en los usos modales de este tiempo como el imperfecto lúdico, de cortesía y el evidencial o citativo:

> El imperfecto que se llama a veces citativo de cita puede tener igualmente cabida en los desarrollos del copretérito (…). El que pregunta "Tú jugabas al fútbol, ¿no es cierto? Puede querer saber si cierta persona tuvo en el pasado la afición que se menciona, pero también puede querer confirmar determinada información, relativa al presente, que posee acerca de ese individuo. En esta segunda interpretación la oración significa, aproximadamente, '¿Es cierta la información (conocida) según la cual tú juegas al fútbol? En lugar de 'conocida' podría entenderse aquí 'oída', 'leída', 'recibida', entre otros participios que pueden parafrasear el hecho de que la información ha sido emitida por un tercero". (NGLE, §23.11h)

Así pues, parece claro que uno de los usos no prototípicos del imperfecto es el evidencial citativo, es decir, indica que la fuente de información es indirecta. Gutiérrez Araus (199, p. 177) sostiene que mediante el empleo de estos 'valores secundarios', el hablante muestra incertidumbre "por estar implícito un discurso anterior en que al hablante se le informa de algo y luego él no asume la certeza de dicha información" (Gutiérrez Araus 1995, p. 180). Respecto a la indicación de disociación, o de un cierto distanciamiento, por parte del hablante, consideramos que se trata de un efecto discursivo al que contribuyen de manera decisiva diversos elementos contextuales. Es cierto, sin embargo, que, como señalan Böhm y Henneman (2014) el imperfecto se emplea frecuentemente en los textos periodísticos:

> In terms of evidentiality, [the imperfecto] is used with reportive function to indicate that the transmitted information comes from foreign sources, i.e. sources external from the journalist. In such a case, the journalist implicitly shows dissociation from his utterance. The modal value of the imperfect is also to be considered when it refers to its reportive use: when being told about something, one has no direct evidence (knowledge) of a certain state of affairs. Thus it is highly likely to show distance or dissociation from the state of affairs, expressing a lower degree of assertiveness. (Böhm, Henneman 2014, p. 198)

De nuevo creemos que se trata de un efecto discursivo desarrollado en un género textual concreto, como es el caso de los textos periodísticos, en el cual

al significado de fuente de información indirecta puede ir asociado el distanciamiento por parte del hablante. Es decir, el hablante, en calidad de periodista, se disocia en mayor o menor medida de lo que transmite. En cualquier caso, se trata de un efecto pragmático que se obtiene a partir del significado evidencial del tiempo verbal, el género textual y el rol del emisor del enunciado, en este caso periodista.

3.2. Futuro simple y compuesto

De la misma manera que el pretérito imperfecto, también el futuro simple y el compuesto en español peninsular poseen valores secundarios respecto al significado básico prospectivo. La NGLE (2009) denomina "futuro de conjetura, futuro de probabilidad o futuro epistémico el que introduce alguna suposición del hablante relativa la presente, como en *Serán las ocho* en el sentido de 'Probablemente son las ocho' o 'Deben de ser las ocho'" (§23.14h). Según la *Nueva gramática*, al elegir el futuro, el hablante manifiesta un juicio más especulativo que el que obtendría utilizando, por ejemplo, verbos modales. Así, en (5), la respuesta con el verbo modal debería interpretarse como más probable que la del verbo en futuro.

(5)   a. ¿Quién es esa señora?
         b. Será la directora.
         c. Debe de ser directora.

Para Squartini (2001, p. 306), sin embargo, el futuro en algunas lenguas románicas, entre ellas el español, presenta la información como producto de inferencia, mientras que la construcción modal <*deber de*+infinitivo> se emplea cuando lo que se transmite se basa en una deducción lógica. Es decir, cuando la inferencia se lleva a cabo a partir de la intuición y no de una deducción lógica. Si en el enunciado se explicitan los elementos del razonamiento que conduce a la conclusión, los hablantes nativos no escogen el futuro, sino la construcción modal:

(6)   a. Las luces del salón están encendidas.
         b. #Puesto que las luces del salón están encendidas, estará en casa.
         c. Puesto que las luces del salón están encendidas, debe de estar en casa.

El futuro codifica una instrucción procedimental que guía al destinatario en la representación de un evento cuya fuente es un proceso interno del hablante (Escandell 2010, p. 22).[8] A partir del significado básico del futuro como evidencial basado en procesos internos propios del emisor se pueden explicar los diferentes empleos modales como desarrollos pragmáticos. El hablante usa

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[8] La descripción semántica que ofrece Escandell (2010) permite una mejor comprensión de fenómenos como el futuro persuasivo, concesivo y mirativo.

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el futuro para comunicar su propia inferencia porque no tiene una fuente mejor para referirse a hechos que están en otro tiempo o en otro lugar. El significado único y constante del futuro es de tipo evidencial inferencial. Las distintas interpretaciones dependerán de la combinación de su significado básico con otros elementos contextuales.

A nuestro juicio, la propuesta de Escandell (2010) de atribuir al futuro un valor procedimental estable de carácter evidencial es la explicación que mejor simplifica los diferentes usos de este tiempo verbal y, por consiguiente, creemos que es la más rentable desde el punto de vista didáctico. Los enfoques modales que relacionan el futuro con la probabilidad no consiguen, en nuestra opinión, ofrecer significados estables y unívocos y esto produce incertidumbre en los aprendientes.

La NGLE extiende también al futuro compuesto la interpretación del futuro de conjetura. En (7) la probabilidad de que 'hayan salido" depende de una multiplicidad de elementos contextuales extremadamente variables: i) la hora en que se pronuncia el enunciado porque podría ser que fuera tarde y los habitantes de la casa estuvieran durmiendo; ii) el conocimiento que tiene el hablante de las costumbres de quienes viven en esa casa, etc.

(7)   a. No hay luz en las ventanas.
        b. Habrán salido.

En síntesis, para calcular el grado de probabilidad de la aserción realizada con el futuro compuesto, el destinatario debe contar con otras informaciones contextuales. Por este motivo el nivel de probabilidad no es un parámetro constante.

3.3. Condicional simple y compuesto

Uno de los usos más comunes del condicional simple es denominado "condicional de conjetura (también llamado condicional de probabilidad y condicional epistémico" (NGLE: §23.15j). Se emplea en los mismos casos en los que se utilizaría el futuro, pero para referirse al pasado en vez de al presente.

(8)   a. María no viene a la fiesta.
        b. Estará cansada. (ahora)
        c. Estaría cansada. (entonces)

La *Nueva Gramática* considera que los enunciados de (8) son equivalentes a los que se obtienen utilizando el adverbio *probablemente* in (9b y 9c):

(9)   a. María no viene a la fiesta.
        b. Probablemente está cansada.
        c. Probablemente estaría cansada.

De nuevo, como hemos comentado anteriormente para el futuro, la probabilidad es un concepto muy variable que depende de factores contextuales como, por ejemplo, el grado de conocimiento que el hablante posee sobre María y sus circunstancias. Estamos ante un uso idéntico al del futuro que hemos visto en el apartado anterior, así que, aquí también, creemos que la explicación más rentable didácticamente es la del significado evidencial inferencial. La información que se transmite debe ser procesada por el destinatario como fruto de una inferencia del hablante, la fuente de información es un mecanismo cognitivo del emisor. La probabilidad es un efecto discursivo.

En (10) y (11) podemos observar los usos, tanto del condicional simple como del compuesto, denominado condicional de rumor en la NGLE (§23.15m), es decir, "la variante del condicional de conjetura que se usa a menudo en el lenguaje periodístico[9] para presentar las informaciones de forma cautelosa o dar noticias no suficientemente contrastadas".[10]

(10) Son las calles las que al parecer **se llevarían** la mayor parte de la inversión, ya que la cantidad apuntada, unos 18.000.000 de euros, **estarían** destinados a jardines. (CORPES. Alberto Domingo [2001]: "Manuel Portela". *El Norte de Castilla*. Valladolid: nortedecastilla.es, 2001-02-04)

(11) La DPGN aseguró en un comunicado que el relato de ETA, según el cual los agentes **habrían disparado** primero contra uno de los etarras "neutralizado" en el suelo, es "falso" y entra en "contradicción con los elementos de la investigación". (CORPES [2010]: "La policía gala dice que la versión de ETA es falsa". *El Mundo*. Madrid: elmundo.es, 2010-04-04)

En estos casos, tanto con el condicional simple como con el compuesto, la información que transmite el enunciado se basa en el discurso de terceros, es decir, posee una función citativa (Squartini 2001; Vatrican 2010).[11]

Así pues, en el condicional simple y compuesto en español se reúnen dos categorías de la evidencialidad indirecta: la inferencial y la citativa. La probabilidad o la distancia respecto al enunciado por parte del hablante son efectos discursivos.

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[9] Maldonado González (1999, p. 3553), por su parte, considera que mediante el uso del condicional, "sólo el contexto nos dice si ese discurso es de otro, aunque el hablante lo haya asumido como propio. Un uso muy frecuente de este recurso se da en los titulares periodísticos, en los que la presencia de un condicional sirve para que el emisor (el periodista, en este caso) se apropie de una opinión, una noticia o un mensaje ajenos y los reformule como propios, sin comprometerse del todo con la verdad de la enunciación".

[10] Este uso del condicional aparece a menudo censurado en los libros de estilo de algunos periódicos hispanohablantes, no porque la construcción sea incorrecta, sino porque "el rumor no debe ser presentado como noticia. (NGLE: §23.15m). Aun así, el uso del condicional para indicar información reportada es abundante en los géneros periodísticos. Véase Böhm & Hennemann (2014)

[11] Vatrican (2010) considera que existen dos tipos del condicional epistémico en español: el "condicional de rumor" que expresa evidencialidad reportativa y el "condicional de probabilidad", vinculado a la modalidad epistémica.

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4. Los tiempos verbales evidenciales en el *PCIC* y en los manuales de ELE

El *Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes* (*PCIC*), siguiendo un principio de progresión ampliamente consolidado en la didáctica de las lenguas extranjeras, propone la enseñanza de valores no prototípicos de las formas verbales que aquí analizamos a partir del nivel umbral para lo que cataloga como 'futuro de probabilidad' (B1), 'futuro de probabilidad en el pasado (B2), condicional simple con 'valor de probabilidad en el pasado' y condicional compuesto con 'valor de condicional de probabilidad en el pasado con valor de anterioridad respecto de otra acción'. En lo que respecta a los niveles avanzados, propone la enseñanza del pretérito imperfecto en el nivel C1 para elaborar el estilo indirecto implícito, con marcador temporal de presente o futuro', denominado 'imperfecto de distanciamiento'. Los valores no temporales del condicional simple y compuesto aparecen solo en el nivel C2, especificando su uso en los textos periodísticos y los efectos discursivos de mitigación de responsabilidad que derivan de su empleo.

A continuación, presentamos un cuadro que sintetiza la presencia en el *PCIC* de los usos no prototípicos de los tiempos verbales que aquí estamos analizando.[12]

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[12] En el cuadro se transcriben literalmente las descripciones y los ejemplos presentes en el *PCIC*.

Pretérito imperfecto	
Estilo indirecto implícito, con marcador temporal de presente o futuro: *María se casaba esta mañana.* **(C1)** Imperfecto de distanciamiento: *Al parecer hoy la veía el médico.* **(C1)**	
Futuro simple	**Futuro perfecto**
Futuro de probabilidad: *Serán las once.* (**B1**)	Futuro de probabilidad en el pasado: *Habrían salido de casa.* (**B2**)
Condicional simple	**Condicional compuesto**
Valor de probabilidad en el pasado: *Serían las doce* (**B1**)	Probabilidad en el pasado con valor de anterioridad respecto a otra acción: *Habrían salido de casa* (**B2**)
Condicional periodístico (citas encubiertas). Mitigador de responsabilidad: *Según el comunicado los paros serían inminentes.* **(C2)**	Condicional periodístico (citas encubiertas). Significado de anterioridad. Mitigador de responsabilidad: *Según el comunicado los atentados se habrían producido entre las dos y las tres.* **(C2)**

Tabla 2.
Descripciones de los usos no prototípicos de los tiempos verbales en el *PCIC*.

Los efectos de distanciamiento o de mitigación están en nuestra opinión en el mismo plano que la probabilidad que transmite el uso de una forma verbal u otra. Reiteramos que son efectos contextuales.

Respecto a la secuenciación de contenidos que propone el *PCIC*, quizás deberíamos plantearnos incluir los valores secundarios de los tiempos verbales ya desde niveles intermedios, si tenemos en cuenta la frecuencia de uso. Cualquier aprendiente de español que lea la prensa se va a encontrar con el empleo del condicional para citar palabras de terceros, por ejemplo. La frecuencia de uso justifica su enseñanza. Además, creemos que se simplifica la cuestión si se presentan como operaciones evidenciales, siendo conscientes de que las cuestiones de probabilidad, posibilidad, etc. son efectos discursivos que dependen de muchas variables contextuales.

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Para comprobar la recepción de las indicaciones del *PCIC* respecto a los usos secundarios de los tiempos verbales objeto de este estudio y su tratamiento en los materiales de enseñanza de español como lengua extranjera, hemos examinado un total de doce manuales, publicados por algunas de las principales editoriales del sector, pensados para un público adulto:

- *Aula internacional 3 (B1), 4 (B2.1) y 5 (B2.2)*
- *Nuevo Prisma B1, B2, C1 y C2*
- *Nuevo Español en marcha B1 y B2*
- *C de C1*
- *Bitácora nueva edición 3 (B1) y 4 (B2)*

Nuestra intención no es realizar aquí una crítica a estos manuales o una comparación entre ellos que, por otra parte, consideramos plenamente válidos, sino simplemente constatar la presencia o ausencia de los usos evidenciales de los tiempos verbales objeto de nuestro estudio y observar cómo se insertan en las propuestas didácticas que ofrecen.

El tiempo futuro, tanto simple como compuesto, se presenta como recurso gramatical para formular hipótesis o suposiciones, relativas al presente o al pasado, cuya función es indicar la probabilidad (*Aula 3 Internacional. B1*, p. 142; *C de C1*, pp. 175-178; *Bitácora 4*. B2, p. 76; *Nuevo Español en marcha 4. B2*, p. 21; *Nuevo prisma. B1*, p. 105).

Resulta muy llamativo que los empleos citativos del imperfecto y del condicional no estén presentes en los manuales que hemos consultado para este estudio, a pesar de su alta frecuencia de uso.

5. Reflexiones finales

Como conclusión de este breve estudio, nos gustaría insistir en la utilidad didáctica de un estudio explícito de los valores semánticos no prototípicos de los tiempos verbales en la clase de ELE. Como bien sabemos los hablantes nativos, no se trata de usos marginales, sino que tienen, en la mayoría de los casos, una alta frecuencia de uso.

Creemos que abordar el aprendizaje de las cuestiones tratadas en este trabajo desde la perspectiva de la evidencialidad, facilitaría la comprensión por parte de los aprendientes de español y, dado que la distribución de esta categoría no coincide por completo ni siquiera entre lenguas tipológicamente cercanas, la reflexión explícita permitiría evitar el calco de patrones de la L1 a la L2.

Asimismo, esperamos haber mostrado argumentos suficientes para considerar que el grado de implicación o de disociación del hablante respecto a la veracidad de lo que transmite mediante el uso de las estrategias

evidenciales que aquí hemos analizado es, en nuestra opinión, un efecto pragmático y, por tanto, sujeto a la variabilidad de los parámetros contextuales.

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